

The characteristics of playgrounds from the perspective of architectural planning

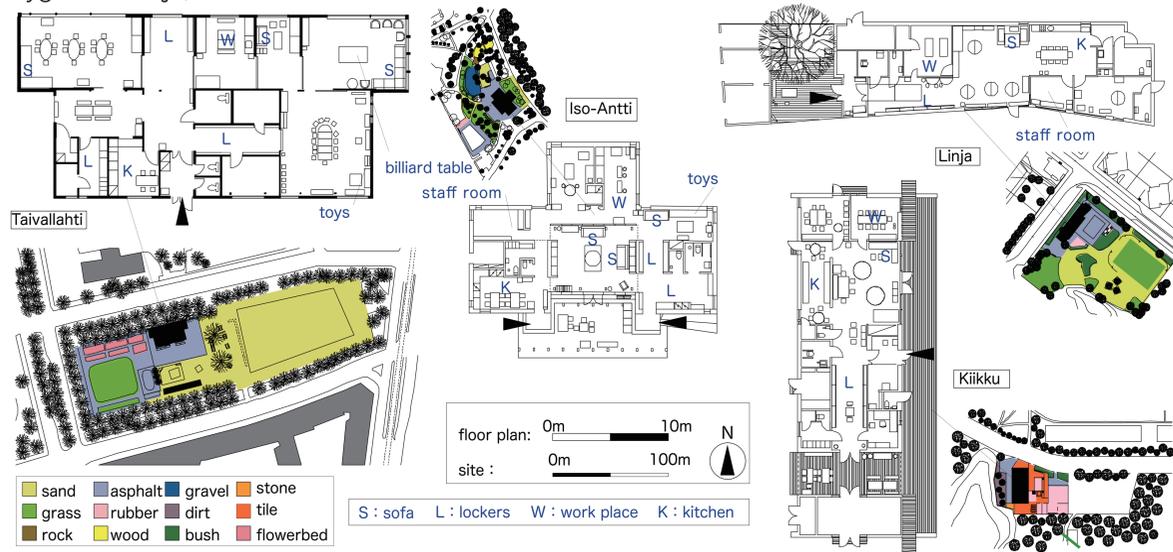
A case study of Helsinki City playgrounds

Yukari Tsukada (Aalto University, Finland), Yoshinori Kakino (Tokyo University of Science, Japan)

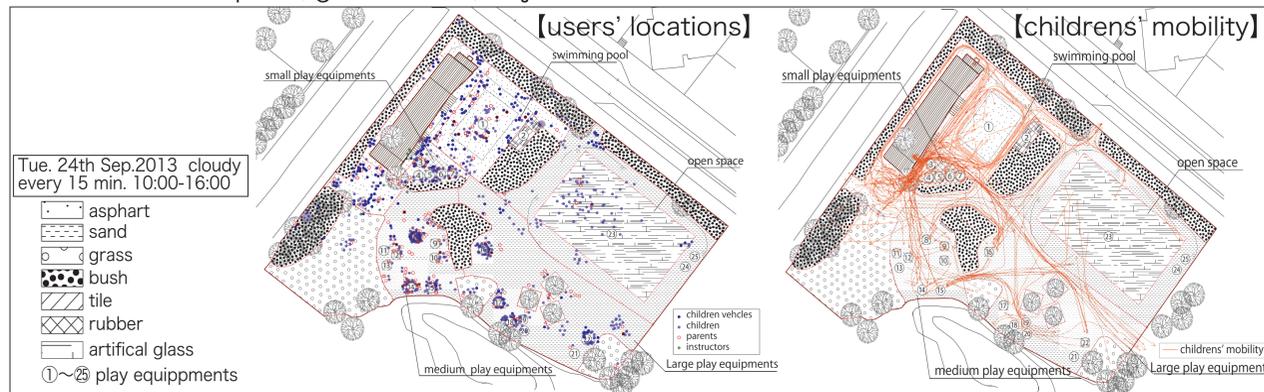
263



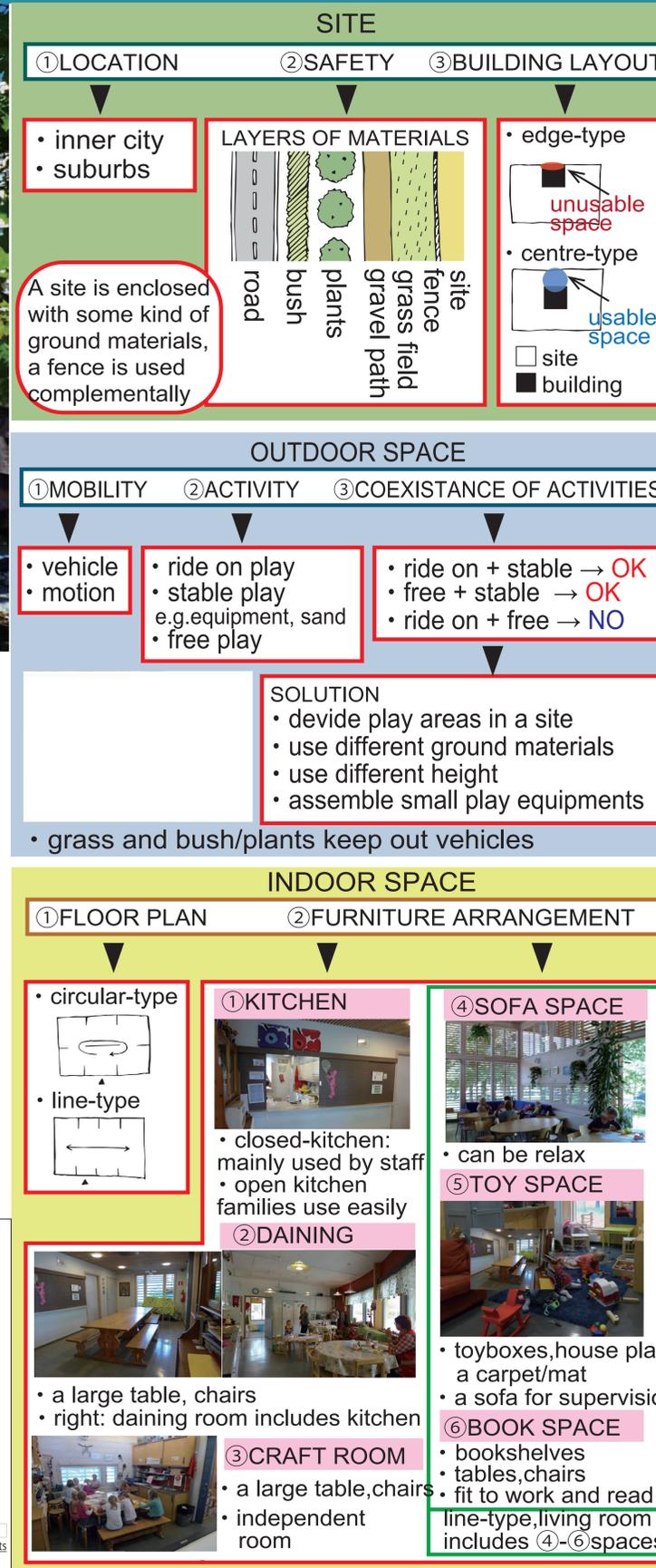
▲ Playground Linja, Helsinki.



▲ Sites and floor plans, ground floor, Linja



▲ Relations between ground materials and users' behavior, Linja



▲ Planning flow

【Background and purpose】

In the urban environment of the 21st century, families need playgrounds for their children to play safely and freely. One feasible model for a playground could be the 'leikkipuisto' (LP) concept, a public playground with indoor facilities and instructors in Helsinki, Finland. However, there has been little research into the principles underlying the architectural planning of an LP. This study focuses on the composition and usage of LP space based on four case studies conducted in 2013, including interviews with instructors and behavioural observations. The LPs were selected from the homepage of City of Helsinki, among the 68 LPs administered by the Department of Early Education.

【Results】

According to the findings, physical activity programs were started by PE teachers in 1914 to overcome the inactivity of families raising children at home as a part of Finnish early childhood education system. The LP provides not only a safe play space and some instructed programs for families and schoolchildren but also an urban amenity for the residents. The indoor facilities are open during weekdays for 7-8 hours a day and provide snacks for a charge on schooldays to registered schoolchildren. In the mornings, families and play groups visit the LP, where some of them have lunch, and schoolchildren come to the LP in the afternoons. In the summer, all LPs serve free-of-charge hotmeals to children under the age of 16.

A LP is composed of an outdoor space and buildings, enclosed with layered materials, such as plants, gravel paths and subsidiary fences to ensure safety. The environmental settings guide the children's activities with a variety of elements that divide the outdoor space into areas such as a playing field, a sandpit, a paddling pool, and a grass field. To prevent collisions between children engaged in dynamic activities, the two larger playgrounds were divided into clearly separate zones for different types of play. The two smaller LPs delineated the play areas with play equipment, variation of materials, and surfaces of different heights.

The inner facilities were composed of at least six functional spaces, such as a kitchen, a dining room/space, a craft room, a living room with sofas, a space with bookshelves, a space with toys, a common space with lockers and semi-outdoor spaces. These are mainly used by families and schoolchildren for cooking and eating, and static activities, such as reading play books, and instructed-activities.