Play, politics and public space: An analysis of cultural and biopolitical concerns in the design for urban play in Copenhagen

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyzes the design of five contemporary playgrounds in the city of Copenhagen, Denmark, to understand what cultural- and biopolitical values and concerns are reflected in the design of equipment and spaces for play, and how design aims to govern and shape both play and players. The analysis points to three central tendencies in the design of playgrounds: First, that play design stages play as a spectacle that works to evoke notions of creativity, leisure and liveliness, which then become associated with the city. Second, that the playgrounds work to produce a sense of place that reflects local and national identities. Third, that the mere availability of child-friendly sites for play, as well as the design of individual equipment function to nudge for health behavior change in players by privileging and staging equipment that require full-body use.

Keywords

Playgrounds, design, politics of urban design, childhood, body-politics

INTRODUCTION

Throughout modernity play has been a concern of philosophers, educators, health practitioners and legislators who have both warned against its supposed immoral qualities and praised its assumed potential to support cognitive and physical development, to function as an instrument for physical and moral disciplining, and to produce both creative and virtuous citizens.

Today, play has become a highly commercialized sphere of design (McKendric et al. 2000), with ever more novel toys and products that are pushed on the market for consumption in both the domestic and public spheres by children as well as adults. The shifting politics and ideologies of the day have been tightly coupled with this commodification of play and its spaces and practices, as games, toys and equipment for play is branded and sold as means of achieving the good life (c.f. Lange 2018).

This raises questions about how cultural- and biopolitical concerns and values are reflected in contemporary design for play. Design for play denotes an extensive set of designed artifacts and services to be used in a variety of contexts by a diverse group of users and players. For the purpose of narrowing down the analysis, this paper focuses on the design of outdoors playgrounds in a single city of Denmark, namely its capital, Copenhagen.

Outdoor playgrounds constitute an interesting site of analysis as the design of urban space has been suggested to be key in the state apparatus' biopolitical effort to shape the lives of citizens (Hutchinson 2017). Here the playgrounds have historically fulfilled shifting needs, from controlling the whereabouts and behavior of children to shaping them into democratic citizens (de Coninck-Smith 2022), as it will be further discussed in the next section. At the same time, urban space is also shaped by profit driven interests, as the continuous development of urban space is often the result of public and private partnerships (Swyngedouw, Moulaert & Rodriguez 2002). Today, playground design is a thriving business that is far from straightforward. Designers on the one hand strive to meet the expectations, demands and preferences of the players (who are often young children), while on the other keeping an eye to the expectations, values and needs of their customers (be it municipalities and other public institutions or private companies, or parent and other care-takers).

This paper analyzes how cultural- and biopolitical concerns and values are reflected in the design of five playgrounds located in the city of Copenhagen. The analyzed playgrounds represent a broad spectrum of what the city offers in terms of urban play. Three of the parks are completely open to the public, whereas the remaining two have restricted access. One of the two is part of a school and only accessible when the school is open. The other playground resides within a commercial amusement park and is accessible only for paying visitors. Two of the three public playgrounds are located in residential areas, whereas the last is located in a large recreational park. The analysis presented in this paper is concerned with the designed equipment and spaces of the playgrounds and the intentions and values that underlie their design, rather than on the play practices and cultures that takes place there.

BACKGROUND

As argued by Sicart (2022), to play is to be materially entangled with the world, shaping and being shaped by the materialites that surround us. However, throughout western modernity the material entanglements of play has increasingly become a target of commercial design. Design scholar Alexandra Lange (2018) for example offers an extensive analysis of how the design of playthings shape children to the extent that we might even talk about the design of childhood itself. A crucial point in her book is that what characterizes the way that commercial design has targeted play is, that it endows play with values that exceeds the immediate meanings that emerge during play itself. In other words, the design of toys and artifacts for play is backed by promises of educational, cognitive, social or health-inducing benefits. This resonates well with Sutton-Smith's (2009) discussion of seven ideological rhetorics of play, of which several of them (such as play as progress, play as identity, play as the imaginary) are reflected in the promises that accompanies modern design for play.

In regards to the playground specifically, historians and cultural scholars (de Coninck-Smith 1990, 2022; Druker 2019; Gutman and de Coninck-Smith 2007; Jouhki 2023; Mobily 2018; Winder 2022;) have discussed the moral and political projects

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underpinning the construction of public playgrounds in the twentieth century, from the early American playground movement, over the junk- and adventure playgrounds of post-war Europe to the design of abstract, artistic sculptures for play. As these studies show, the construction of playgrounds have been motivated by shifting aims to either control and discipline children or enable them to release their full potential. Winder (2023) observes that the equipped playground of today remain firmly rooted in political, industrial and social conceptions of what constitutes the ideal site for play, and that this hinders the development of more child-friendly urban spaces.

What is most significant about playgrounds and what distinguishes them from other artifacts and environments for play, such as toys and digital games, is that they are unarguably place-bound. Therefore, the design of playgrounds must be understood in relation to the design and development of the surrounding urban space (de Arche 2018). In regards to Copenhagen, Hansen, Andersen and Clark (2001) identified three overarching tendencies in the capital's urban policies from the 1990's and onwards, namely a move towards an agenda of growth rather than redistribution, a shift in perspective from an inwards to an outwards looking approach, and finally a move towards the inclusion of private enterprises into decision making while the public sector in turn embraced more entrepreneurial forms of organization and operation (c.f. Swyngedouw, Moulaert & Rodriguez 2002). According to the authors these tendencies all work towards establishing an image of Copenhagen as a so-called *creative city* (c.f. Bayliss 2007), echoing Florida's (2005) notion of the creative class. This creative city agenda, which can be found across the globe, have far-reaching implications for the development of urban space. These implications include the construction of prestigious iconic architecture that works towards branding the city internationally (Strange 2016), which at worst actively marginalizes parts of the population (Hansen, Andersen and Clark 2010), and at best fails to cater to the needs and preferences of these marginalized residents. As an example of the latter, Stanfield and van Riemsdijk (2019) discusses how different ideas about who belong to and have the right to shape public space was negotiated in the construction of two public parks and playgrounds in a dense, multicultural area in Copenhagen.

Finally the role of play itself should not be overlooked in the creative city agenda. Here Leorke (2020) distinguishes between three ways that play and games feed into the notion of creative city. The first concerns the fact that the design of various forms of (often digitally mediated) play occupies a central position in the very creative industries that this agenda caters to, and thus itself figures as a motivating factor in the development of urban space. The next concerns the role of play and playfulness to the branding of the city, which according to Leorke happens through the design of "invigorating spaces" as well as through the support and funding of various leisure activities throughout the city. The third way concerns how play feeds into the creative city agenda by instilling a creative ethos into the city's residents through top-down attempts to apply games and other participatory playful events such as hackathons to involve residents in the planning and management of the city. Finally, and as an addendum to Leorke's points, it should be noted that the very design of urban space itself may also takes cues from play, such as in the design of Copenhill, a waste-to-energy plant that is endowed with a ski slope, a hiking trail and a bouldering wall, which neatly packs a piece of large-scale urban infrastructure into an arena of virtuous and healthy recreation (Vickery 2022) .

METHOD

For the purpose of this analysis five playgrounds were selected for analysis based on the principles of convenience sampling. All the playgrounds, except for one, was withing walking distance of each other and could be visited during a single field trip around the northern part of Copenhagen. The last playground (located in the Tivoli Garden) was visited on a separate field trip. However, all the playgrounds were well-known to the researcher before this study began. While the playgrounds were selected upon convenience, the aim was nevertheless that the visited sites differed in terms of its aesthetics, its location and whether access to the playground was restricted or not. The sample however is not representative of all types of playgrounds in Copenhagen, and other sites could have been chosen. However, the inclusion of additional playgrounds was not deemed possible due to the limited scope of a single article.

During the field trip the five playgrounds were documented via photos, notes and drawings, by the researcher on site. The documentation focused upon the design of the equipment and space and how it was situated in the surrounding area. The play activities that took place during the field trip was largely ignored apart from simple demographic information such as the age of playground visitors. After the field trip was concluded additional information about the playgrounds was obtained through an online search, including the age and ownership of the site as well as the design and architectural companies responsible for the design.

The analysis itself is based on a comparative approach that seeks to bring forth similarities and differences between the five playgrounds in order to identify patterns in the overarching issues and concerns that guide the design of the space and equipment for play.

ANALYSIS

The following analysis opens with a description of each of the five playground sites followed by a discussion of common patterns concerning the cultural and biopolitical concerns that underlie the design of the analyzed playgrounds.

Playground descriptions

The tower playground

The tower playground (Tårnlegepladsen) is a public playground located in the periphery of a larger urban park in the Copenhagen bridge quarters. The playground opened in 2011 in connection to a larger renovation of the public park in which it is located. The construction of the park, including the playground was financed in part by the municipality of Copenhagen and in part through a large grant from a Danish philanthropic commercial foundation. The design of the playground itself was realized through a collaboration between GHB landscape architects (now LYTT), MLRP architects, Monstrum (playground designer) and Playalive. The opening of the renovated park and playground was covered by a several local and national newspapers.

Figure 1: Four areas of the Tower playground. The top-left picture shows a sandpit and play area for smaller children. The bottom-left picture shows a system of climbing structures. The top-right picture shows an sensor-enhanced play zone. The bottom-right picture shows a more traditional play area characterized by the use of raw wood.

The playground (figure 1) is surrounded by large trees on all side with an opening towards the park on one of the sides. In addition to the trees, the area is demarcated from the rest of the park with a low fence. The playground area itself consists of roughly four zones. The *tower-zone* is the first zone that one passes by when entering the playground from the park. Behind the tower zone is a *garden zone* with a number of plant containers on the right, and a *sports zone* containing a small basketball court and a ball pit. Finally on the left part of the area and demarcated from the tower zone by a big mirror-covered shed is a the *nature playground zone*. The *tower-zone* is characterized by a set of figurative wooden play structures representing different iconic towers of Copenhagen, which are all painted in a vivid green mimicking the oxidated copper roofing of the Copenhagen towers. This zone can again be divided into three sub-areas. In one area three relatively tall towers makes up a play-structure for older kids. Each tower consists of a staircase (positioned either inside or outside of the tower) leading upwards, and a pathway leading downwards, either in the form

of a slide, a fireman's pole or similar. The three towers are connected to each other by a walking bridge and steel bars, and the ground below the towers are made up of a soft rubber material. The next area consist of lower structures that sits in a large sandpit. The structures include a low hill on top of which two small slides makes up a pathway down, as well as a wooden structure in the shape of a church dome. The inside of the dome makes up a small enclosed hiding space, whereas the outside surface is covered in climbing handles and perforated with peep holes. The last part of the tower zone is made up of a series of low structures representing rooftops that are scattered around another climbing-tower. All structures sits on a concrete surface. Sensors are placed on the rooftops and can be activated by the touch of a hand or foot, thus initiating various games, such as a game where players compete to deactivate (by touching) as many flashing sensors as possible in a short amount of time.

Finally, the *natural playground zone* rests in the shadow of several large trees, and the ground is covered in grass. The playground itself consists of fairly traditional equipment: two swings and couple of play huts, in addition to four large tree trunks that are spread out on the ground. The middle of the area holds a fire pitch. The natural playground zone is characterized by a very different atmosphere than the tower zone. Although the playground equipment in both zones are made from wood, the equipment in the natural playground zone is made up of raw wooden planks that are left unpainted. Play structures are located on a surface of grass and soil. Due to their materiality and archetypical design, the play structures do not catch the eyes of the spectator, but blend in with the natural surroundings of the zone. In contrast, the tower-zone and the mirror covered sheds immediately attracts attention and can be viewed from afar by visitors of the park, and is arguably the most iconic parts of the whole playground (hence its name name). This iconic part of the playground have been featured in international architectural magazines and won design awards.

Udbygade playground

The playground on Udbygade is a relatively small public playground in a quiet residential area. It is owned by the municipality and was re-opened after a renovation in 2010, but it have not been possible to find information about architects and playground designers in charge of the renovation.

Figure 2: A view of all the archetypical equipment at the small Udbygade playground.

The playground (figure 2) is surrounded on all sides by lightly trafficked streets and fenced off with a low picket fence, which on the inside is lined by two rows of alder trees. Benches and tables surrounds but remain demarcated from the central play area. The play area is spatially separated from the rest of the area with a low concrete brim. The playground equipment is built on a substrate of sand and consist of traditional archetypical play structures: a swing, a four-way spring rocker, an enclosed sandpit with a playhouse and a couple of small tables, and finally a climbing structure that is divided into a lower part that leads through a tunnel to a platform with a short slide, and a taller platform, which by two high rising beams is attached to a second platform from which the user can exit through a long slide. The platforms can be accessed several ways, either by means of a staircase, an arched ladder or a rope net.

The playground equipment is made by wooden and metal beams as well as laminated panels that are brightly colored in red, blue and green, which makes the play structures noticeable from the street despite the rows of trees. The bright colors, together with the archetypical equipment clearly communicate that this is a playground, and one that is meant for children. Unsurprisingly at the time of visit, the playground was populated by children and their care-takers. For the children and their accompanying adult care-takers it is immediately obvious how the different equipment is supposed to be used.

Rådmandsgade school playground

Rådmandsgade school playground is located in the courtyard of a public school in a residential area of Copenhagen. The courtyard consist of two separate playground areas. The biggest area re-opened in 2022 after having been renovated and re-furnished with new equipmen. Most of the equipment is designed by the playground

company Hags. Although the school area is fenced off, the big playground is visible from the street through a large gate that remain open during the opening hours of the school, and as such, the playground is in principle accessible to local kids during this time.

Figure 3: Two close-up shots of the climbing structure at Rådmandsgades school.

The play area (figure 3) sits centrally in the courtyard and is visually demarcated from the rest of the area, with a dark gray rubber surface on which yellow dots are strategically positioned to highlight certain equipment. All the equipment is kept in black and grey colors, with a few occasional, red and green colored elements. The equipment itself mostly consists of a big and complex structure, across which the player may move in varied ways and using various elements such as ropes, ladders, climbing holds, tires and so forth, and with several different exits from the structure, including a big tube slide, and sliding poles. There is no single pathway through the structure, and this, together with the size and complexity of the structure allows for many players to use the structure simultaneously. Next to the central structure four spinners are placed, and a pathway of low balance beams and stepping stones follow the edge around the dark grey rubber surface. Due to its dark color scheme, the playground does not attract much attention from afar, even though it is visible from the street. However, upon closer inspection the central complex structure is highly

intriguing as it, when standing on ground-level, obscures how players are to move through it, thus affording repeated use by inviting players to explore different possible pathways.

Figure 4: Two close-up shots of the climbing structure at Rådmandsgades school.

Behind the big playground structure, a smaller area is hidden behind some bushes. This play area consist of a figurative wooden sculpture (figure 4) that represents the cart of Thor, which is pulled by two goats - a motif from the Norse mythology. This choice of motif situates the structure in the local area of the school which is known as the mythological district as most streets are named after different gods and objects in the Nordic mythology. The structure is made of raw crooked tree trunks that are carved to add details to the sculpture. The sculpture also includes a metal grid for climbing and a plastic surface representing a sail. The cart constitutes the biggest part of the structure and invites the player to climb through the wooden beams. Underneath one part of the structure is a cave that is partly shielded by wooden planks. Finally, two wooden figures of goats are positioned in the front of the cart, each just under one meter in height.

Guldbergs plads playground

The playground on Guldbergs plads is located in the same residential area of Udbygade playground, but is part of a larger recreational space that also includes a ball pit and an agility course for dogs.The playground is owned by the municipality and opened in 2015. It was realized through by 1:1 landscape architects in collaboration with Keingart space activators and funded by the municipality of Copenhagen.

Figure 5: Three views at the equipment at Guldbergs plads playground. The left picture shows a park-like area filled with blue metal poles. The two pictures on the right shows parts of a demarcated area with both traditional and gym-like play equipment.

The playground (figure 5) is divided into two areas. A path leads through one area which is characterized by small grass hills on which different trees and bright blue metal poles are scattered. The metal poles appear in various configurations. Some of the poles are connected by blue beams near the ground that function as walking beams, whereas other are connected by high-positioned beams that function like monkey bars. Finally, on some of these beams gym rings are hung. The green park-like area is interrupted by a large sandpit on which four or five swings are located. The swings are made by the same bright blue material that can be found in the rest of the area. Finally in one end of the area, a hill covered in gray soft rubber material rises above the rest of the park. A dense 'forest' of blue metal poles cover this hill. Tightly tied around each of the poles are rope knots that allow players to climb around in the poles.

Next to the pole forest a more conventional playground area is demarcated from the rest of the park by a fence. This area is mostly covered by a concrete surface, whereas the playground equipment rests on either a sand pit or a red soft rubbery surface. The

playground equipment includes a swing, a hammock, two hexagonal climbing structures, a small playhouse, as well as gym-like equipment, including a balance beam, jumping pods in different heights and 'over-and under bars'. All the playground equipment is minimalistic, kept in subtle colors and mostly made up of metal. The gym-like atmosphere of the playground is emphasized by brightly colored spots on the concrete ground, that prompt the visitor to engage in workout activities such as squats, arm swings and pull-ups. As there is no tall structures (above 1,5 meters) in the fenced-off playground, it is not visible from afar when pedestrians approach the playground from the street. Instead, it is the brightly colored metal poles that rises high above street level, that attract the attention of people passing by. The bright blue color makes the metal poles stand out from the grass and trees in the park, as well as from the surrounding housing complexes.

The Rasmus Klump Playground at Tivoli

Figure 6: Three different areas of the Rasmus Klump playground at Tivoli Gardens. The left picture shows a system of towers connected with suspension bridges. The top-right picture shows the central boat-like climbing structure, while the bottom-right picture shows an area for smaller children.

The last playground is located in the amusement park Tivoli, which is located in central Copenhagen. Although the amusement park as such may in many ways be considered a playground, this analysis focuses on a specific play area within the park. This area has been chosen because it blends traditional playground equipment with the mechanized rides typical of the amusement park. As such it highlights the similarities and differences between these two structures for play. The Rasmus Klump playground opened in 2010 and is designed by the playground company Monstrum in collaboration with Tivoli architect Jonathan Wright and theme park architect Jumana J. Brodersen from JCO.

The area (figure 6), which is elevated from the rest of the Tivoli gardens can be divided into three parts. The first is characterized by its brightly colored rubber flooring, on which can be found a small trampoline, a see-saw, a small bridge and a group of low standalone climbing platforms and a short tunnel. Next to this, a hill rises above the rest of the playground. A boat sits on the side of the hill, and functions like a multi-level climbing structure which can be accessed from the ground via a rope-net and a system of wooden beams. From the top level two different slides leads downwards. Finally, the last part is characterized by four tall towers that are connected via a system of suspension bridges. Several slides and metal climbing cages and nets lead down where a path leads back to the main part of the playground. A staircase and a ramp connects the elevated playground area with the surrounding garden. Immediately below the playground area a mechanized carrousel can be found, which is thematically linked to the playground (figure 7).

Figure 7: The mechanized carrousel that sits at the bottom of the playground. Behind the carrousel several climbing towers can be spotted.

The carrousel, a so-called flyer variant, consists of five small vehicles each attached to an arm that is again attached to a central post. During the ride the vehicles moves

with a constant slow pace, whereas the rider can control the height of the vehicle. While access to the playground is unrestricted to visitors that have paid the entrance fee to the Tivoli garden, visitors will have to pay an additional fee to access the carrousel. In the midst of the vibrant and dense decorations of the Tivoli gardens and its many spectacular amusement rides, the Rasmus Klump playground does not attract the attention of the visitor from afar. In fact, as the playground is elevated from the ground-level and rests on the back of a house shaped like a giant whale, it is almost invisible to people passing by. Although the whale is visible from the ground-level, it is difficult for people passing by to discern the actual playground equipment, with the exception of the mechanized carrousel. Users of the carrousel however, gets a clear look into the playground area, when taking their vehicle to its highest position. While the playground is thus unnoticeable for visitors within the Tivoli garden, it is clearly visible for people passing by the streets outside of the garden, as the playground itself is located right next to the street, and only demarcated from the it by a tall fence.

Cultural and biopolitical concerns

Having now described the five playgrounds the question remains what cultural and biopolitical concerns and values are reflected in their design. In the following, I will present three themes that emerged in the comparative analysis of the five playgrounds.

The spectacle of play

A significant finding of the analysis concerns the spectacular and iconic quality of playground design. This is especially the case in regards to the *Tower playground*, *Guldbergs plads playground* and the *Rasmus Klump playground* in Tivoli. These playgrounds all feature brightly colored structures that rise high above and stand out from the rest of the urban landscape, so that they form a curious spectacle that can be viewed from afar by people passing by. These playgrounds do not only afford play, but also communicate playfulness by their very design. This is obviously a matter of catching the attention of potential users and luring them into the playground. In the case of Tivoli, this is vital as the park depends on paying visitors. Therefore, the whole amusement park appear as a Foucauldian heterotopia (Foucault 2008), which is both integrated into and demarcated from the surrounding urban landscape, which houses several 'serious' institutions, such as a big industry lobby organization, the city hall, and a museum for fine arts to name a few.

However, especially in relation to the public playgrounds such as the *Tower playground* and *Guldbergs plads playground*, the spectacular staging of play serves the additional purpose to signify playfulness in a broader sense, as a key virtue of the very urban space and its residents. These two playgrounds exemplifies a broader trend in urban spatial development which Leorke (2019) has described as *the playful city. In* the playful city, signifying playfulness becomes a central means to brand the city as a lively, progressive and creative place to live and work, but also works to instill these values in its residents. As such, it is not enough that the playgrounds provide the means for – especially – children to play, the design of the whole area works to make the playgrounds appear as landmarks in the urban landscape that clearly communicate that this is a city that values play with all its positive connotations of creativity, freedom, fun, and wellbeing. In the two playgrounds this is achieved with the use of fun and vivid colors and bold curious shapes which makes the playgrounds

structures stand out as highly remarkable and recognizable elements in the urban landscape, which in turn attracts to the site not only children and their care-takers, but also speaks to architecture enthusiasts, tourists, and local residents of all ages. At the same time, the two playgrounds tucks away the more traditional play structures so that the sites first and foremost appear as artistic and imaginative spaces and only upon closer inspection reveal themselves to be the more typified space of a playground.

The spectacular, iconic and even theatrical quality of several of the analyzed playgrounds and their ability to signify 'playfulness' as a quality or characteristic of a space, rather than just 'play' as a type of intended use of this space becomes especially clear when compared to the more conform design of *Udbygades playground* and the abstract minimalism of *Rådmandsgade school playground*. Both playgrounds primarily communicate play as an intended use of the space to potential users, in the case of the former, young children and their care-takers, who may easily decode the site as a playground due to its familiar and traditional equipment that appear as readily playable. In the case of the latter, the playground communicates to older children, for whom the complex structure are easily decoded as an invitation to playful exploration. Compared to the wide-ranging ethos of playfulness and creativity promoted by the *Tower playground* and the *playground at Guldbergs plads*, *Udbygades playground* and *Rådmandsgade school playground* signifies play in a more narrow sense, that is, as a site that affords play.

Sense of place and identity.

Related to the observation that the playgrounds contribute to the urban landscape by adding a sense of undefined playfulness, several of the analyzed playgrounds also participated in the construction of a sense of place, and more broadly, to the local or national identity. This is most obviously the case with the *Tower playground*, where the form and color scheme of the playground equipment refer to some of the most iconic and well-known towers of Copenhagen, thus directly connecting the playground to the city's architectural landmarks and urban history. The five referenced towers are part of buildings constructed between the 17th to early 20th century, and are associated with central institutions of the city and nation: the city parliament, the church, the stock exchange and the monarchy (in the form of an observatory tower built by the Danish king Christian IV). By mimicking these towers, the playground does not only reference local architectural landmarks that are well-known to city residents as well as tourists, but also participate in the construction of an ideologically loaded national identity centered around these four powerful institutions. But at the same time, the power associated with these institutions are undermined in the playground design, as they are transformed into structures for child-friendly play, which importantly also speaks to another aspect of the constructed national identity of Denmark, in which the more recent developments of the welfare state, and particularly the inclusion of children as subjects of the welfare state have played a crucial role.

A similar point can be made about the play sculpture representing the cart of Thor at *Rådmandsgade school playground*. With its placement in a public school, the sculpture becomes endowed with educational potential. The theme of the sculpture not only situates it in the local area which is known for its streets names that references to Nordic Mythology, but also produces a sense of place, reminding the child users of the playground of the sanctioned local identity of their neighborhood.

However it is not only these municipality-owned playgrounds that references and contributes to the local and national identity. This is also the case of the *Rasmus Klump playground* at Tivoli. Rasmus Klump is a Danish comic strip universe first created in the 1950's, which features a group of anthropomorphic animals on their naval journeys to far-away places where they make friends with a variety of animals and creatures. In Denmark, Rasmus Klump has since become a symbol of friendliness and peaceful exploration. The use of Ramus Klump - a peaceful cosmopolitan who in the end always returns home to be served a stack of pancakes - as the playground theme in Tivoli resonates well with the 'Danish orientalism' that characterizes the rest of the garden, which since the garden opened in 1843 have played an important part in the definition of Danishness by offering a cosmopolitan lens though which Danes could see their relation to the rest of the world (Oxfeldt 2005). However, today, while the Danish orientalism of Tivoli have also been subject to postcolonial critique, the Rasmus Klump universe, including its materialization in the Tivoli playground still reproduce the myth of a friendly and tolerant Danish cosmopolitanism.

Moving or being moved

As a third point, the analyzed playgrounds also participate in the governing and nudging of the bodily lives of residents in Copenhagen on both a macro- and a microlevel. On a macrolevel, the construction of designated spaces for play backs the city's population policies and its aims of influencing the fertility-related decisions of individual women. Here the playground works to attract and keep within the city families with children, to prevent assumed negative consequences of population-ageing. While the analyzed playgrounds, as mentioned earlier, signifies playfulness and creativity, when considered in light of city's population policies and recurring fertility campaigns, the creative and playful ethos of the playgrounds comes to connote the creation of life itself.

To explore, on a microlevel, the biopolitical interventions of the designed sites for play, it is necessary to look closely at the equipment of the individual playgrounds and how it aims to regulate the behavior of its players. Here, a rough distinction can be made between equipment that requires the player to actively move her body, and the equipment that does the moving of the player's body. The analysis of the five playgrounds reveals an overarching privileging of equipment that requires the user to activate their full body to climb, crawl, walk or otherwise move across passages that very often takes the player above ground-level, making it necessary for the player to follow pre-defined paths in order to exit the structure through designated routes such as a slide or a fireman's pole. That said, as described earlier, several playgrounds also included a few installations that in different ways moves the player, who in turn remains a more or less passive recipient of the exhilarating experience. Examples includes the highly conventionalized swing, but also the spinners found on several of the analyzed playgrounds. While these are also accepted types of equipment, it is noticeable in the analysis of the five playgrounds, that these were pushed to the periphery of the play space, and marginalized in favor of the more bodily activating climbing structures that was almost all cases given the center-stage of the playground.

This establishes a hierarchy among the playground equipment that also speaks to prevailing ideas about the potential of play to regulate behavior. The full-body interactions required to navigate the privileged climbing structures frame this type of equipment as health promoting interventions in urban space, and thus grants them with a purpose that exceeds their immediate function to afford play. In extension, it

is also worth noting, that although there were variations in the equipment installed in the playground, the climbing structure seemed indispensable, as this was the only type of equipment that was present in all the analyzed playgrounds.

The difference between equipment that activates or pacifies the physical body is nowhere as prominent as in the *Rasmus Klump playground* in Tivoli which is tucked between a large collection of mechanized rides that fixates the physical body in vehicles that transport this body in various directions and with differing speed. This difference between bodies moving or being moved also marks a subtle distinction between the amusement park, which is typically framed as a commodified site of entertainment and pure escapism, and the playground, which is endowed with the more serious purpose of promoting health, and therefore becomes a target of the political.

The aim to make the playground a site that activates the body not only applies to children. At several of the playgrounds seating arrangements were scarce or far-removed from the equipment, thus preventing care-takers to stay seated while the children would be playing. Instead the spatial design nudges adult care-takers to engage with the equipment together with the children. On the other hand, in several of the analyzed playgrounds, the design of the equipment would prevent adults use, as the bodies of adults would not fit to the playground equipment. This leaves adult visitors in an odd position, in which they are nudged to accompany the playing children and remain in motion to follow their movements across the structure, while confined to an observing role disengaged from play.

The *playground at Gulbergs plads* is a notable exception to the playgrounds that restrict adult interaction with the equipment. The equipment attached to the metal poles that were scattered across the park was hung in a height that privileges use by taller people, making it especially accessible for adults and older children. At the demarcated playground none of the equipment, except for a small but anonymous-looking play house, contained small openings or pathways that would restrict access by adult bodies. In connection to this, it is notable how the type of equipment that was found on the playground (such as gym rings and balance beams) and the aesthetics of the site and its equipment (minimalist and abstract rather than dressed in childish themes, and with written instructions urging the visitor to squats, arm swings etc.) seemed to connote exercise while also keeping a spectacular and playful atmosphere (as discussed earlier), compared to the more 'serious' typified space of the urban gym.

CONCLUSION

In game studies, not much attention has been given to the urban playground. Notable examples includes Wirman (2021) who have analyzed the many overlapping play practices that coincides in urban space; Nansen and Apperley (2020) who discusses the inclusion of digital technology in the traditional playground; and Back (2016) with his discussion of the design of urban play. However, disregarding its digital bias, games studies, with its tradition of critically analyzing the political concerns underlying the formal, aesthetic and representational dimensions of designed artifacts for play, and with its more recent interest also in the material dimension of play (c.f. Apperley and Jayemane 2017), may potentially offer a productive lens for critically engaging with designed sites for urban play.

This paper have taken steps in this direction. As this analysis have shown, the playgrounds of today are not just spaces where playground equipment are scattered across a dedicated site that contains child play and demarcates it from the surrounding city (although they continue to serve this purpose). Instead, playgrounds are entire designed spaces that makes up a careful staging of play as a total experience, which stands out from, but is at the same time tightly integrated into the urban landscape. With its connotations of fun, excitement, leisure, transformation and even self-realization, playgrounds increasingly occupy an important role in contemporary city branding, where they serve to signify and communicate ideas of the 'good life' in order to brand the city as livable, healthy, secure, and committed to the future. However the playground not only signifies livability. Under an ethos of care, the equipment and spatial design actively works to realize a soft biopolitical shaping of citizens, by privileging and staging equipment that requires full-body interaction, not only of child users, but also of the accompanying adults.

This analysis have focused on select playgrounds in the capital of Copenhagen, but likely, these are not representative of playgrounds across the nation. Therefore, this paper does not suggest that the findings identified in the analysis are typical of Danish playgrounds. A comparative analysis of playgrounds from urban as well as more rural areas would provide more knowledge about the relation between the commercially driven development of urban space and the design of sites and equipment for play.

However, the analysis suggest, that playgrounds may increasingly assume a central role in the shaping of citizens through urban spatial design. Lu (2023) argues that playfulness has become a central aesthetic quality in contemporary architecture. However, while prestigious architectural works, such as the Guggenheim Museum Bilbao, instill in visitors a sense of playful spatial exploration, as Lu describes, the playgrounds analyzed in this paper not only inspire playful attitudes but provides the actual means of realizing this attitude within a contemporary hegemonic cultural and biopolitical order. As such, contemporary playgrounds may very well be on the way of becoming in integral part of urban development in the neoliberal welfare state.

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