

THE CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND, THE GREAT FORGOTTEN

Final Degree Project
Degree in Architectural Studies

GERARD GUILLÉN GONZÁLEZ

Line | Urbanism and Landscape

Tutor | Francesc Peremiquel

Court | Jordi Franquesa

**THE CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND,
THE GREAT FORGOTTEN**

GERARD GUILLÉN GONZÁLEZ

INDEX

1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. OBJECTIVES	6
3. HYPOTHESIS	6
4. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND SPACES	7
4.1. IT'S NOT THE SAME TO TALK ABOUT PARKS AS IT'S ABOUT CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND AREAS	8
4.2. ORIGIN BASED ON NEEDS AND CONDITIONS	9
4.3. THE CITY, THE CHILDREN AND THE PLAYING AREA	10
4.3.1. THE CITY	10
4.3.2. THE CHILDREN	12
4.3.3. THE PLAYING AREA	13
5. STUDY AND ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT MODEL OF CHILDREN'S PLAY AREA IN BARCELONA	14
5.1. URBAN DISTRIBUTION	15
5.2. HOW ARE CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUNDS?	16
<i>High density, Gràcia</i>	17
<i>Medium density, Les Corts</i>	18
<i>Low density, Sarrià - Sant Gervasi</i>	19
5.3. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES	20
5.4. WHAT SHOULD CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUNDS LOOK LIKE?	21
5.4.1. ACCORDING TO THE REGULATIONS	21
5.4.2. ACCORDING TO THE EXPERIENCE OF TWO COMPANIES DEDICATED TO THE SECTOR	22
5.4.3. ACCORDING TO THE NEEDS AND PREFERENCES OF USERS	23
5.4.4. ACCORDING TO THE PROPOSAL OF THE CITY OF BARCELONA	24
5.4.5. IMPORTANCE OF SPACE	25
5.4.6. FUTURE CONTEXT	26
6. CONCLUSIONS	27
BIBLIOGRAPHY	28
ANNEX	

INTRODUCTION

Children's playing spaces have traditionally been treated as a minor issue or an everyday issue. Since its inception about 150 years ago, these areas have been designed by adults for boys and girls, and most of the time, regardless of their opinion or wishes. It is an area that has received little attention over the years and it seems that lately architects, urban planners and institutions are beginning to become aware of the importance of creating quality spaces for children.



Pau faus. Happy Búnker, Figueres. 2011

It is said that a picture is worth a thousand words and that is exactly what happened to me. Pau Faus's critical work in Figueres has been the inspiration for choosing this subject. This shows us a children's play area that is closed, as if it was a prison. Faced with possible interpretations and wanting to know more, I was able to get in touch with him.

“El projecte feia referència a la sobreprotecció de la infància, però -al ser inaccessible- per mi afegia una nova capa de significat sobre la bunkerització dels espais de privilegi respecte al seu entorn (ja siguin països sencers o mansions de rics). Avui, 9 anys després, aquesta segona reflexió és la que més m'interessa. La idea perversa que sense exclusió no hi ha privilegi.”

“Tot i que en realitat la cosa venia de més lluny. L'encàrrec 'Happy Bunker' neix d'un projecte anterior fet amb altres col·lectius a Buenos Aires. [...] Et poso el link del projecte de Buenos Aires. És un treball que s'ajusta més al tipus de projectes que feia. Dóna-li una ullada, a veure què et sembla. <https://paufaus.net/portfolio/taller-de-juegos/?lang=ca>”

Games Workshop



Treballs de dibuix per imaginar el joc

'Taller de Juegos' es va plantejar com una oportunitat per crear un nou espai de trobada al barri. L'objectiu era interpretar les idees generades durant la primera setmana de treball i construir-les. A dia d'avui el joc segueix existint. Ens consta que ha sofert nombroses modificacions per adaptar-se millor al context local.

The conclusions that I was able to draw were different from what I imagined but, in any case, positive. Children need to be able to create their own play space.

At this point, what I intend to analyze is the idea of limit in children's playing spaces. I think that the good design of a playground for children should not imply a boundary fence for parents to be calm. Currently the design is given by a regulation that puts 'order' and a company that includes 'the game' with prefabricated and repeated pieces that are inserted in these areas, without thinking about the benefit, learning and imagination of young people. Therefore, we must recover the essence of playgrounds, from the first design proposals and study the cases that have worked and why throughout history.

Playing is our first way of learning, and providing good play opportunities is about educating. Through play, children generate, create and explore, live experiences and learn how to resolve situations or overcome fears. Designing spaces for children does not only benefit them, it benefits the whole society, as children are an indicator of the quality of life in a city.

Keywords: playground, city, children, playing area, space, urban, regulations, Barcelona.

OBJECTIVES

- To know the historical evolution of children's play areas and their link with the city and the children
- To analyse the current model of the urban distribution of children's playing areas in the city of Barcelona
- To study the current state of children's playing areas, from areas such as regulations, the point of view of companies in the sector or users of these spaces.
- To defend the importance of the space as a generating element in the design of children's playing areas

HYPOTHESIS

Nowadays, the criteria used to design children's play areas in public spaces are standardized. It is possible that the established safety measures can be implemented in another way, offering more benefits to children's development and a more profitable game. Finally, it must be analyzed whether this process is the right one, as a strong commitment to this sector can be very beneficial for everyone, not only for the boys and girls, but also for a city.

«Se deberían tener pocos juguetes pero buenos. Un juguete bueno es aquel que sin ser nada concreto puede ser todo»

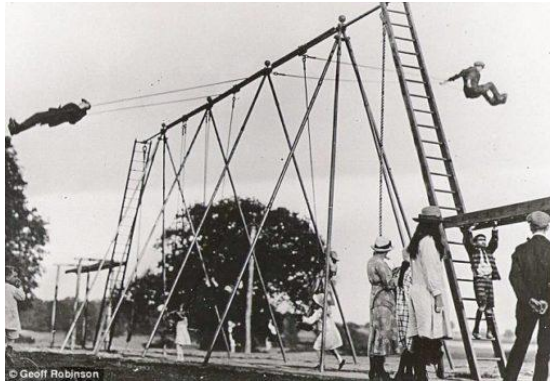
“El verbo jugar sólo se puede conjugar con el verbo dejar”

Francesco Tonucci

4. HISTORICAL EVOLUTION OF CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND SPACES

Children's playing areas have not always existed, nor have they been designed in the same way as they do today, which is why in order to be able to approach the subject correctly, it is necessary to understand the evolution they have taken. In the past, children played in the street and squares. There were no defined playing areas and the public road, wider and more peaceful than the current one, was used for the leisure of the youngest.

It is approximately from the middle of the 19th century when, in an embryonic way, the first play spaces appeared, without being explicitly designed for children, but with the same purpose as today: to keep young people away from the dangers of the streets and create specific areas where they could be monitored. Over the following decades, this idea of spaces spread throughout Europe and in the early twentieth century came to the United States, where elements known as swings or slides were introduced, ignoring safety and with a very dangerous design.



Geoff Robinson. Playing space EEUU, 1920.

It is not until after World War II, when children's play spaces begin to experience changes. Since the middle of the twentieth century, aspects related to the needs and safety of children have become relevant. After numerous lawsuits for injuries, concentrated in New York, new ones are designed according to the conditions and spaces of the neighborhood, less dangerous materials are used for children's games and the activities and games that are proposed help to develop aspects such as coordination, motor skills or imagination.

In the last decades of the twentieth century, playgrounds are moving towards what we know nowadays. The big change came in the late 1970s with the tightening of regulations. Psychopedagogues, urban planners and architects work together to design these areas. Today, many other factors are taken into account: the diversification of spaces according to age and the design of attractive spaces for children, for example.

4.1. IT'S NOT THE SAME TO TALK ABOUT PARKS AS IT'S ABOUT CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUND AREAS

Children's playgrounds are usually called parks. We must be careful when differentiating these two concepts as they do not refer to the same idea. The word park has very broad meanings and refers to all kinds of open spaces, delimited or not, which have natural elements and are usually dedicated mainly to human recreation. We could consider playground as a sub-meaning, that is, a nuance of playground.

The children's play area is therefore the space of the children, their comfort zone. It must not have to be located inside a park, as we can also find them in squares, gardens, schools, etc.

We see this distinction very clearly when we talk about a big city like Barcelona. In denser cities, parks are located on the margins and this implies a problem of accessibility, especially if there is little time, as it is often necessary to move important distances to get there. This is why play spaces, which do not have to have surfaces as large as parks, are so important in big cities.



Location of the parks in Barcelona.

A very important architect in the development of these two concepts in the city of Barcelona was Nicolau Maria Rubió i Tudurí. From the second decade of the 20th century, together with Forestier, Rubió and Tudurí promoted the construction of parks and gardens distributed throughout the city. He was one of the first architects and urban planners to emphasize the importance of thinking about youngest boys and girls when designing public parks and gardens. He fully believed in the great relevance of children's play areas, due to their social action, allocating areas exclusively for children and games for young people.

The fact of taking into account the pavement as another element of the project, allowed Rubió and Tudurí the creation of different environments in the same garden, through the combination of materials. In this way, in a period of 10 years, the area allocated to parks and children's play areas was doubled. These areas received special attention, with Rubió i Tudurí already as director of Parks and Gardens of Barcelona City Council.

4.2. ORIGIN BASED ON NEEDS AND CONDITIONS

The play is a substantial and necessary activity in the daily lives of every child. To understand the problem which is raised we have to be able to answer some initial questions. First of all, to differentiate the place where we are located. In less populated towns or cities, you can access easily to natural open spaces, play in parks closer to the residence, and even be able to play in certain spaces on the street. The traffic is not so abundant and, as a result, the danger is smaller. We could say, therefore, that the location is the first important factor to consider.

The next point to consider is the environment. Depending on its location within the city, it must be designed as a result of how we reach to the play area. The suitability of the location of the spaces within the city will be determined to the ease of access. It is interesting to locate these areas close to schools or kindergarten, as the displacement and influx will be optimal. If this is not the case, it is necessary to know if the access way to this area is the right one, if you can access walking and if are located in areas of heavy traffic, with the handicap, a level of safety, that this fact can behave, especially in winter when there are fewer hours of sunshine and it gets dark the night before. Increasingly, you should consider public transport and be able to make sure that public transportation stops are separated by less than 100 meters.

Also, it is essential to be aware of the space we have. Again, it is more difficult to find spaces of opportunity and wide spaces in a big city. But it's important to be generous with children's playing areas, as in this way they will be able to have greater diversity. Most of the times are reduced, obligatorily, to the minimum spaces, fact that makes the game monotonous and the limit much more obvious.

Then, security and accessibility should be highlighted as key elements, as well as the gameplay, expanding, improving and diversifying the play opportunities in the parks. Most of the interventions in recent years have been aimed at adapting playgrounds to current regulations, as well as -ensuring that children with a physical, mental or sensory disability can access public spaces and recreational areas, removing architectural barriers-.

According to Law 14/2010, of 27 May, on rights and opportunities in children and adolescents

Finally, it should be noted that the complementary equipment of the play area is starting to become very important lately if auxiliary elements - such as fountains, game tables, etc. - are installed in the play areas adapted to wheelchairs. Not to mention all the equipment that has traditionally been used, such as benches or trees, which can help protect children from excessive solar radiation.

4.3. THE CITY, THE CHILDREN AND THE PLAYING AREA

To understand the current context of children's play spaces, we need to take a temporal, but also spatial, review. Moreover, to learn about the change that cities have undergone in recent years, how these changes have affected children and their role in the urban context and, finally, how all these factors have influenced the design and conception of play spaces.

4.3.1. THE CITY

For many centuries, streets, squares and public spaces have formed the social, cultural, economic and political nucleus of cities. These spaces are one of the main factors in defining the quality of a city. *Ciudades para la gente*, by Jan Gehl, is a book that helps us to understand the importance of these elements within the city and its transformation in recent years.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, the form of urban planning has changed markedly. Initially, it was assumed that cities were designed by the people, but due to the great urban growth of recent decades, this goal has been distorted. It is true that, in recent years, most of the big cities have made an effort to correct this dynamic, with urban projects and strategies aimed at benefiting people.

The role of people in cities has been reduced, in favor of other factors such as the presence of the private vehicle. Despite urban barriers, pollution, declining public space, or the danger of accidents, people inevitably continue using the public space. Also relevant is the influence of architectural trends from the recent past, which had set aside common spaces to focus on individual buildings, creating isolated processes.

***The human dimension -
neglected, eliminated,
ignored***

The predominant modernist movement in the 1960s rejected the planning of metropolises and urban spaces, placing special emphasis on buildings without any commitment to the city. These principles continue, even today, to be the guideline for planning new urban areas, due to the efficiency of the method. Again, in recent decades, many cities have focused their efforts on revitalizing urban life and improving pedestrian mobility conditions, by prioritizing it over the movement of motor vehicles.

More roads, more traffic - less streets, less traffic

The automobile invaded cities during the mid-20th century, beginning a process that would eventually erode the way urban life was conceived. The damage done by this phenomenon has been very great, devaluing the quality of life in cities. Currently, there is great interest in reversing this situation, reducing facilities for private vehicles and betting on public and/or sustainable transport. However, these improvements are mainly observed in the richer urban centers.

At the beginning of the 21st century, there was an attempt to improve the well-being of pedestrians and cyclists, thus trying to improve the vitality, sustainability, safety and health of cities. The importance of having varied and rich spaces, generating opportunities for social gatherings, and the movement of people through public space with different services available, is directly proportional to a vital and safe city. Similarly, sustainable mobility and public transport will increase safety and comfort in urban spaces, and their health benefits from daily activities.

4.3.2. THE CHILDREN

Developing what has already been introduced, talking about children as an important and valuable group for our society becomes relevant. Modern urbanism has focused on the adult man appropriate to the profile of the values of capitalist society and has often left out social groups such as childhood, women, or the elderly.

This fact is analyzed and criticized by Francesco Tonucci in the book *When children say enough!*. In numerous publications and conferences he has made his position clear, arguing that a city suitable for children is an optimal city for all. Along the same lines, Colin Ward, in writings such as *The Child in the City*, exposes the importance of designing cities that are favorable to children and make it easier for them to live with other generations.

Traditionally, the street has been a children's playground and a learning laboratory in different fields. Based on the theories of Yi-Fu Tuan, a geographer who focuses on space and place, the urban planner Kevin Lynch and Jean Piaget, a psychologist specialized in play and learning, it is shown that by improving the lives of children in the city, it will also benefit adults.

The child's play is often marked by the impositions of adults. For example the place, the duration or the characteristics of the playing space. Children want a real space, without boundaries, not being separated from adults and in spaces that can grow with them. That's why the playground in a city is the city itself. Children, however, experience city traffic and have limited mobility, as urban planning prioritizes vehicles.

One of the first actions that can be taken is to let the little ones be the protagonists. Children consider that the city belongs to everyone: children, adults, grandparents, the disabled or foreigners. They are also concerned about issues that adults often do not take into account. We must listen to them, understand them and have the will to really pay attention to what the children consider important, not just for them, but for everyone.

Being able to let children help in designing real spaces in the city, with the supervision of technicians such as architects, urban planners or psychologists, would be a great benefit. This fact does not mean that children are responsible for the project, but that their imagination and sensitivity can help create better spaces for the city.

Tonucci is right when he says that the game has a lot to do with pleasure, and that pleasure is very badly combined with control and vigilance. If we see children playing in the city it means that the city is healthy; on the other hand, if we do not find children, it means that the city is sick.

4.3.3. THE PLAYING AREA

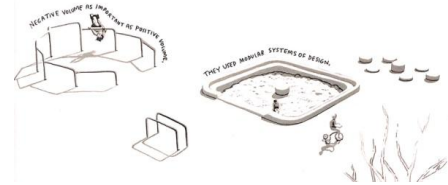
"We live in an era in which there are not many carefully constructed playgrounds. We don't like what we see. Have we— city decision makers, architects, designers, parents, friends — forgotten to be critical?" *Van Lingen i Kollarova 2016, Aldo Van Eyck Seventeen Playgrounds*

Gradually, children's play areas have been limited to specialized areas that are considered safe, such as schools or extracurricular and regulated activities. But experiences are also needed in open and random places, both convenient and interesting, such as sidewalks, streets, neighborhood or parks, among others.

There are many architects and artists who have shown over the years that a play space can be more than an aggregate of randomly placed plastic structures, from the choice of games to catalog pages. One of the first to do that effort was Aldo Van Eyck. During the second half of the twentieth century he could design more than 700 children's play areas.

Van Eyck turned residual spaces offered by the city into intimate play spaces where the place itself fostered interaction. In this way he was able to transform the urban and social environment in the neighborhoods of Amsterdam. The design of each park he did was different, with no pre-designed elements as can be found today.

The playgrounds proposed by Van Eyck created a rhythm within the city and raised the possibility for children to play freely and experiment. In these interventions, simple elements are proposed, geometric volumes raised in different shapes and components that challenge and stimulate children. These encouraged creativity from the different spaces.



The compositions of these play areas combined different elements and activities such as sandboxes in different geometric shapes, volumes at different levels, scalable obstacles, stone jumps or the railings themselves for the purpose of creating balance games. Van Eyck did not propose delimiting fences, thus avoiding the separation with the context of the street and the city. Instead, he created human barriers, from the placement of benches, to prevent children from leaving their playground.

Materials are also very important. Van Eyck considered important that the playground was related to its environment and that is why he used materials such as concrete, metal or wood, for certain elements. Today, this would be more complicated, as the materials must abide the strong safety requirements.

Maybe it is because of the use of brightly colored plastic for the modern play equipment, that playgrounds today are mainly seen as separate spaces in the city, rather than as part of the street. (*2016, Aldo Van Eyck Seventeen Playgrounds*)

5. STUDY AND ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT MODEL OF CHILDREN'S PLAY AREA IN BARCELONA

If we had to do generalization of the model of children's playing area in the city of Barcelona, it would be almost impossible. The City is rich in variety and the diversity between its districts is evident. In order to be able to carry out a specific study on play spaces, three types of urban tissue are selected, in order to be able to draw conclusions separately, taking into account the differences between each of them.

Area and density of districts and neighborhoods. 2018

Districts / Neighborhoods	Population January 1, 2018 (1)	Surface (ha) (2)	Net density (hab./ha)	Number of playgrounds per neighbor.	Inhabitants / play area (hab.)	Surface per play space (ha)
BARCELONA	1.620.343	10.135,3	590	517	3133	19,53
1. Ciutat Vella	100.714	411,1	777	20	5.035	20,55
2. Eixample	264.874	746,4	712	57	4.650	13,08
3. Sants- Montjuïc	181.303	2.267,6	721	45	4.022	50,37
4. Les Corts	81.755	601,7	459	26	3.146	23,07
5. Sarrià- Sant Gervasi	149.112	1.990,9	244	43	3.465	46,51
6. Gràcia	121.005	418,8	601	27	4.481	15,55
7. Hort - Guinardó	169.520	1.195,7	582	66	2.575	18,18
8. Nou Barris	167.868	805,1	721	69	2.435	11,59
9. Sant Andreu	148.232	659,3	777	57	2.600	11,57
10. Sant Martí	235.960	1.038,7	816	107	2.205	9,70

Department of Statistics and Data Dissemination. Council of Barcelona.

Source: (1) National Institute of Statistics. Official population figures as of January 1, 2018.

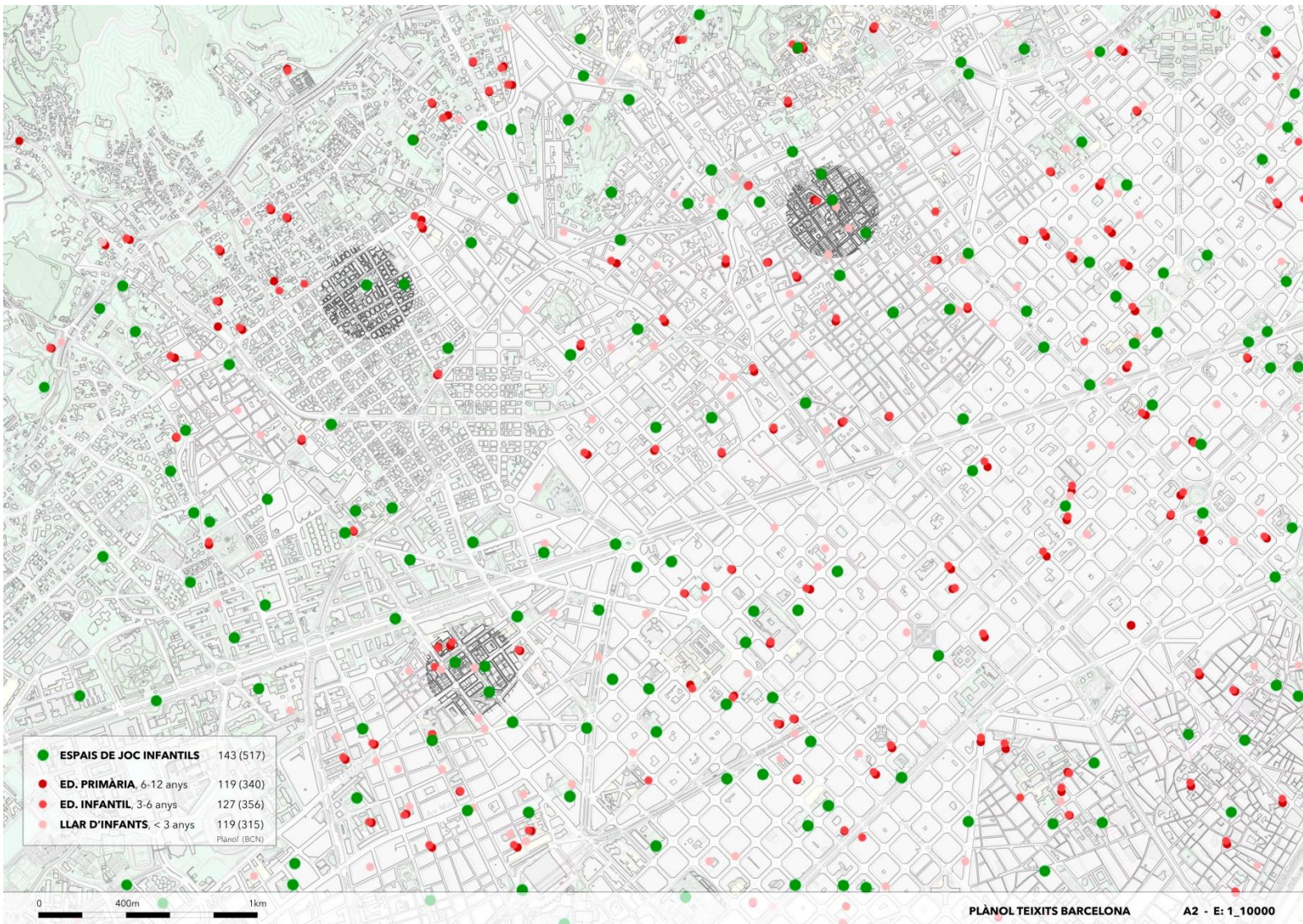
(2) Barcelona City Council. Department of City Plan.

According to the official data obtained from the website of the city of Barcelona, a selection of three districts is made: Gràcia, Les Corts and Sarrià-Sant Gervasi. These represent the three different tissue types according to the population density factor. Crossing data with the number of play spaces in each neighborhood, the following conclusions can be drawn: first, that the inhabitants per play space are around the average of Barcelona, except for the neighborhood of Gràcia which would have more; second, that the amount of surface belonging to each playing space is inversely proportional to the density.

These data, therefore, allow us to make an objective study of them and generalize them to the other neighborhoods or districts of the city.

5.1. URBAN DISTRIBUTION

One of the fundamental premises of play spaces is that they are relatively close to the boys and girls who will use them. The following map, which brings together the three tissues selected above, shows the location of kindergartens and infant and primary schools, and their relationship with playgrounds.



The legend shows that per each school or kindergartens there is, at least, one children's play area, within the plan analyzed. In the case of the city of Barcelona this proportion grows, having approximately 1.5 play areas per each school.

It can be understood, then, that the distribution of these play areas within the city of Barcelona is, in general, correct. In the table above it is also visible that a larger area corresponds to a bigger number of play spaces and is further accentuated in the densest districts, as is the case of Sant Martí, with 107 of the 517 total.

5.2. HOW ARE CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUNDS?

To answer this question, a guideline should be set. Barcelona City Council marks five fundamental questions, around which it structures the information, to try to achieve inclusive and accessible children's play areas:

LOCATION AND ENVIRONMENT. How do you get there?

THE SITE. How is it arranged inside the space?

SPACE AND LIMITS. How is it?

SECURITY AND ACCESSIBILITY. What can you play?

COMPLEMENTARY EQUIPMENT FOR THE CHILDREN'S PLAY AREA. What is the real play space in the square?

From the graphic material (16x16cm) on a scale of 1-1000 of what would represent 160m² in reality, you can objectively analyze each of the three fabrics and the corresponding selected play spaces, answering the 5 basic questions. In this way, and with the graphic representation itself, the discourse is elaborated.



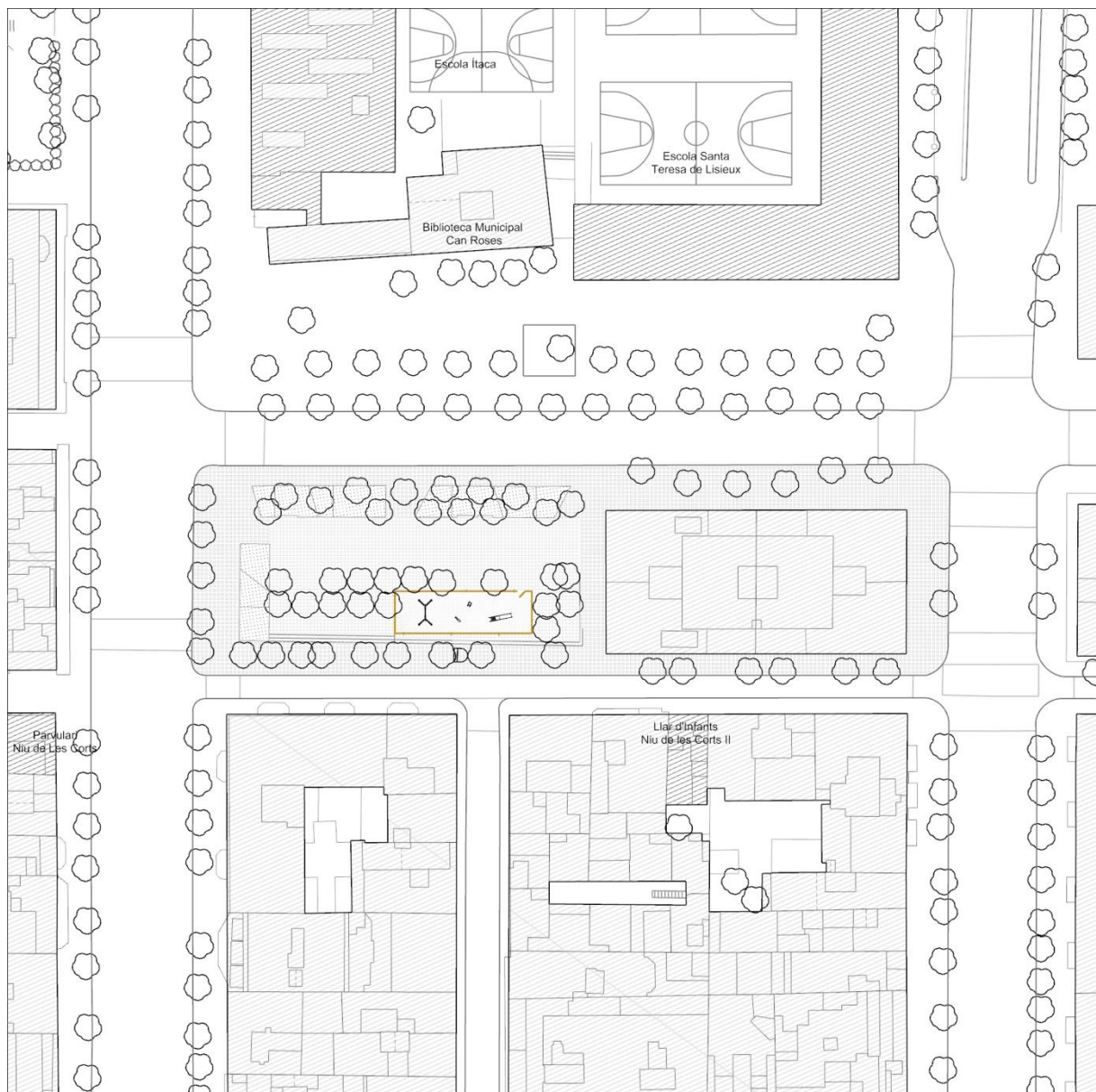
High density: Plaça del Nord, Gràcia.

Plaça del Nord in Gràcia is located in the heart of the neighborhood and 700m from Plaça Lesseps, as a reference. It is located in an area with a clear desire to be pedestrian, but it is not. The most common is for users to arrive on foot, either from the school or kindergarten next door, or for users to be neighbors. It is a very small play area with little use of the surrounding square. On three of the four sides it is surrounded by a road, which, despite being a single lane and with little traffic, can create some insecurity. At the time of leaving school, the play area is full of children, as well as parents and grandparents who accompany them. According to the voice of the neighbors themselves, the children play in the pre-set activities, but also many play outside their space and take advantage of the square to run and play ball. If it were possible to eliminate the car on the perimeter roads, surely this space would get a more pleasant feeling and the play space could be extended to the rest of the square, thus introducing different areas that young people could discover and resort.



Medium density: Plaça de Can Roses, Les Corts

Can Roses Square is located south of Diagonal Avenue, just over 100m from *l'illa Diagonal*. As Les Corts is a residential neighborhood, this area of Can Roses is full of neighbors at the exit of the school, who arrive on foot, and you can also often find users arriving from the shopping centre, possibly after parking their vehicle inside. It is a space that has a lot to do with the schools that we find on the sidewalk in front and that is reminiscent of what happens in Plaça de Gràcia, as it makes almost more use of the wide sidewalk of the schools or the area around the square of the play area, than the enclosed space itself. That's why most kids play outside of their areas, inventing more imaginative play or activities. In order to really take the most of the space, the play area needs to open up to the square, as it has enough surface, vegetation and areas to create a richer environment for children.



Low density: Doctor Roig i Raventós Gardens, Les Tres Torres, Sarrià - Sant Gervasi.

The last space to be analyzed is in the upper part of the city, in front of the Official College of Doctors, just over 700m from the nearest school and 1km from the Jesuits of Sarrià, as a reference. Despite finding bigger distances with respect to the schools in its area than in the previous locations analyzed, in this area of lower density it is acceptable to be able to compare it with the spaces already mentioned. However, talking with people in this sector, the few users who use it are not children, but workers of the Medical Association or some neighbors walking their dogs. The play space is again reduced, delimited by a wooden fence with horizontal slats, which makes it scalable and therefore could pose a new risk. In any case, the existence of gardens with enough surfaces to establish different playing areas spaces and challenges for children, and where the regulations do not require the existence of an enclosed space, the play area should be more permissive. Maybe, in this way, would enjoy of more influx of children.



5.3. SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

All three have strong similarities and also certain differences that make this study interesting and enriching. First of all, the fact of choosing that spaces is due to their relationship with schools and, therefore, the influx of boys and girls and that are minimally representative of the neighborhood, according to some residents. They have in common, then, the desire to be a neighborhood space and to receive people nearby. Also, they share the placement inside the square or park, placed inside these spaces shyly, on the margins, almost as if they were disturbing. The desire to protect these play areas makes it possible to discuss whether they fulfill this function or are excluded from other activities.

Continuing with this analysis, we can discuss the current organization of the spaces and the possibility of being able to make them more useful. That is, the children's play area is reduced to a space delimited by a wooden fence, leaving around a large area of potential use for this use. This protection often becomes double or triple, if the plant filters of the parks or squares are considered as delimiting or separating spaces. The play area, really, is the whole square, as the children make use of the whole area, not just the delimited one and they have all three analyzed tissues in common, which the existing equipment expresses in this way, with urban furniture, such as benches, fountains, lighting or vegetation distributed throughout the large space of the square or park.

In this way, the size of the playing spaces could be considered to be relative to the total space. In other words, a percentage, similar to each zone, of space dedicated to children's play could be defined, always trying to be as large as possible. This does not work in this way, the size of the delimited area is always the same, standardized, which is repeated in all three tissues, and however the total area of the square or park varies depending on the space, deriving that one in the biggest notable difference.



Plaça del Nord, Gràcia



Square in Les Corts



Gardens in Sarrià

5.4. WHAT SHOULD CHILDREN'S PLAYGROUNDS LOOK LIKE?

Once it has been analyzed how the current play spaces are like, it is time to make an approach to what these spaces should be like, based on knowing the regulations, the opinion of the companies dedicated to the sector and that of the parents and children who will make use of them.

5.4.1. ACCORDING TO THE REGULATIONS

Currently, the European regulation EN 1176-1: 2009 ("Equipment for playgrounds: general safety requirements and test methods" of 14 January 2009) is the reference regulation in the construction of equipment for playing areas. It consists of eleven sections. The UNE-EN 1177 standard, which deals with the *Coatings of the surfaces of the impact-absorbing play areas*, must also be taken into account. Both define the formal, material and maintenance requirements of playgrounds.

In addition, the regulation UNE 147103 on safety and maintenance of outdoor play areas, in section 5 "Safety and maintenance", provide some guidelines on how to use the indications, accesses, elements accessories, plants and water areas, among others, of the play areas. However, it is not mandatory in Spain, adapting to a mode of technical recommendations according to the area.

The enclosures of the playgrounds are considered one more part of these facilities, although the application is voluntary as set out in EN 1176. The UNE 147102:2000 IN - 4. *Security management of the playing area* explains: "*it is recommended to carry out a fencing study of the area, if applicable, of the presence of children in it. In the event that a fence is carried out in the area, the requirements relating to safety distances and traps set out in Standard UNE-EN 1176-1 must be met.*"

Finally, some municipalities, as is the case of the Council of Mataró, regulate, with more accuracy, this European regulation indicating that: "*the playing areas will have to be duly delimited either with a physical fence or by means of a minimum distance of 30 m of wheeled traffic. They must be protected from the danger of their immediate access to the road. Preferably a wooden fence will be used*".

« Playing freely is repeating the same word twice, you can't play otherwise than freely»

Francesco Tonucci

5.4.2. ACCORDING TO THE EXPERIENCE OF TWO COMPANIES DEDICATED TO THE SECTOR

<https://urbadis.com/contacto/>
<https://www.mein.es/es/contacto>

What restrictions and limitations (regulations) do you face when carrying out a project?

What aspects of the place and the space do you consider at the beginning?

Who is proposing the construction of children's play areas or, in general, projects?

Do they give you some guidelines for the design of the spaces or the material or is it entirely up to you?

Have you carried out projects to improve or remodel spaces that do not comply with current regulations?

Are there more new construction or more improvement projects?

What is the line to follow for the future?

From MEIN, they cordially responded to me via email. Currently, the company focuses its activity on the manufacture of structures for exercise on public roads. With remarkable experience also in the children's games sector, Miquel Eliseu commented that all children's play structures must be approved and certified by the UNE-EN 1176 regulations. He placed special emphasis on the pavement against impacts and the safety area of two meters around each game object. He commented that there is a lot of improvement project and that the line to follow is towards the elements of ruby, a more ecological type of wood, which does not require any kind of treatment. It also focuses on the elements where children can balance and learn, leaving behind the typical structures with slides.

With URBADIS, on the other hand, I was able to talk to its director Josep Amor by phone. I was very kindly acknowledged that all the regulations relating to children's play areas are focus on UNE-EN 1176 and 1177, focusing on cushioning floors, that in Barcelona the regulations are twice as thick for safety, and in the game elements, which are certified by an approved company. The distances between game pieces, the precautions for traps and the anchors seen receive special attention. Regarding the issue of fences, he commented that there are no specific regulations. It is worth mentioning that the bulk of the company's work is focused on new construction and since last year, the City Council has commissioned a project, which includes the detailed proposal of spaces by the park and garden technician.

During the conversation, he opened the door to a very interesting topic related to this current moment of stalemate. They have not received orders since the beginning of the confinement and the playgrounds remained closed at all stages. He even raised the possibility of rethinking the current model of play space. The truth is that there has been nothing new about it. At the moment, there are no new instructions on playgrounds and he predicts that everything will be done as the situation progresses or recedes. Do not rule out that nothing special will end up and soon the playgrounds will work as before. He assures, finally, that in this subject there are many contradictions, in front of this situation that we are now living.

5.4.3. ACCORDING TO THE NEEDS AND PREFERENCES OF USERS

Surveys and questionnaires carried out on parents and children

Regarding to the design of playgrounds, it is very important to know the opinion of the users of these play areas. It is interesting to know the arguments of both adults and children, who are truly the ones who use them. About twenty witnesses were able to gather online.

Starting with the second ones, the answers and opinions of children in the age group between 4 and 10 are analyzed. It is mainly the social group that makes the most use of these play spaces and the different points of view between the youngest and the "oldest" are very useful to create a space with variety and that satisfies everyone.

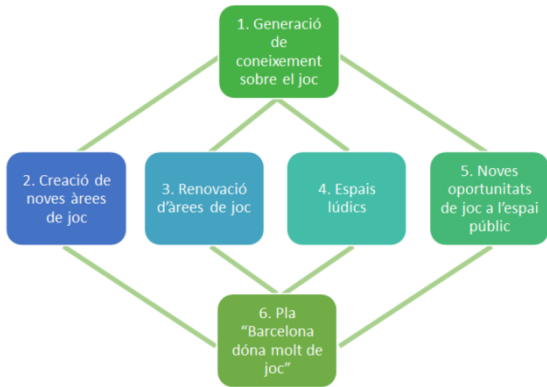
Broadly speaking, it must be said that most prefer to play rather in their air, that is, to invent more imaginative activities or games, rather than making use of traditional items such as the slide, swings, and so on. They value playing with nature and natural elements such as sand or water. They also choose to play sports in larger spaces. As for the issue of security fences, they are not very aware of it and therefore do not care. If it is true that in some cases they make reflections such as: *"if the play areas were large, fences may not be needed"*. Finally, they emphasize almost unanimously the importance of creating different spaces according to the ages; the little ones feel invaded by the older ones, while the latter need different elements of play.

As far as parents are concerned, opinions are more varied. We find cases that fluctuate from the most protective to the most open and concerned about the limits and freedom of play for their children. We also find those who are in the middle, as they understand the needs of children to play freely, but believe it is convenient to have safety fences or such a classic mechanisms.

Going into more detail, a large number of the interviewees found it difficult to understand the critique of Pau Faus, although for others it is a work that excites them and highlights some aspects that should be modified in the current system of children's play spaces. Almost all of them are happy to be able to play on the street or on the sidewalks, if it adapts to pedestrians or the appropriate safety measures are applied, thus being able to design a playable city, as proposed by Barcelona City Council. On the other hand, another issue on which they strongly agree is in the location of play areas, as they seek to be close to schools or at home and try to find places that have a relationship with natural spaces or surrounded by vegetation. Finally, many of them were in favor of the use of safety fences, although they expressed a desire to allow children to play more freely and were slightly concerned about being able to limit their imagination.

5.4.4. ACCORDING TO THE PROPOSAL OF THE CITY OF BARCELONA

In recent years, Barcelona has become one of the cities of reference if we talk about play areas within the city. The City Council has launched a strategy aimed at a policy of play in public space. Under the slogan *BARCELONA gives a lot of play*, a strong step is taken towards the defense of the right to play of children.



The process for carrying out this initiative is consistent and of great interest. Defending the idea that an inclusive, sustainable and healthy city must be playable, the current government is contemplating a first phase of knowledge of the game. An analysis phase where all the social groups involved are present, that is, children, parents, urban planners, technicians, etc.

From here, the proposal is aimed at creating new play areas, renovating many others and finding new play opportunities, both around the play areas or in the city itself. Whether in parks and gardens, squares or pedestrian streets. Also in the whole of the urban space not linked to the play areas or their surroundings where different activities are played and carried out in a more or less casual way.



An example of the latter possible case would be the 'superilles'. It is a project that has already been tested in more than one district of the city and can be a good solution, among other factors, to provide more play space on the streets of the city.

According to data from last year, it went from 813 play areas and playful spaces in 2018 to 902 in 2019. To achieve this, the City Council approved a budget of 20.17 million euros in the legislature from 2015 to 2019.

However, in some media such as *Europapress* it was pointed out that some of these new areas of play have various lacks of accessibility and that they are not located following any pattern, but are established arbitrarily. However, the game proposal dates back to 2030 and the city roadmap seems appropriate.



Proposal of new play spaces
MG_JocEspaisPublics_2018.pdf

5.4.5. IMPORTANCE OF SPACE

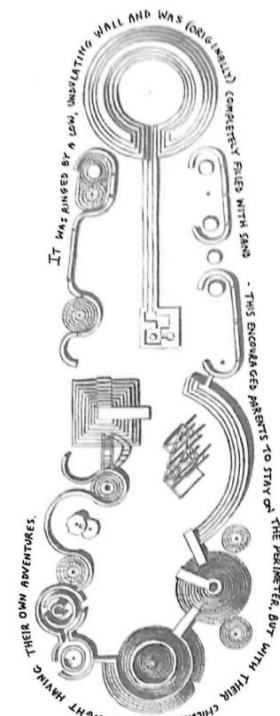
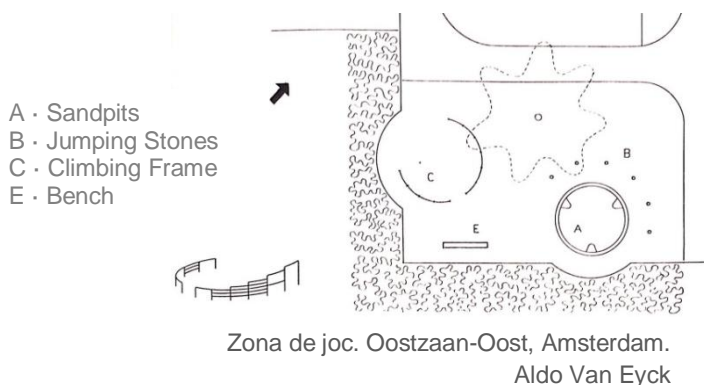
It is, therefore, a very interesting moment in terms of children's play areas. A moment where different aspects related to the game begin to be integrated and must be used to do it correctly. Until now, it was customary to place almost arbitrarily placed game elements extracted from a catalog in a delimited space of a few square meters. It is time, however, to generate different realities and spaces, and here is where the architect must resume the design of children's play areas, creating a safe world with a lot of freedom for children.

The design of these new areas should not follow the same pattern, but a common idea. The importance does not lie in the gaming device, but in the configuration and design of the space. Space as such is really important. As architects, we have a responsibility to ensure that we have the opportunity to play, explore and learn. The creation of articulated, innovative and inclusive spaces can take many forms and can even help to reconfigure urban areas.

Nowadays, children are told how to play: on the slide they have to slide seated, just like on a swing, on the mold they have to swing back and forth... The play area must be free. Spaces without flattening the floor, play on different levels and in contact with nature can form a more stimulating, interactive and multifunctional space. With the natural elements or relief of the site itself, a safe area can be created, without the need for a fence as such.

It is always advisable to locate the playground in a place free of disturbances or sources of pollution and minimizing the dangers. Adequate protection against wind and solar radiation will make it even more valued by the users themselves. If this playground is properly organized, the boys and girls will want to stay in this space or sum of several spaces related and connected to each other. It should be possible to include the necessary stimuli so that the little ones feel attracted to play there and do not feel the need to look for new places where, for safety, they do not belong.

The age of the children generates different play needs and this can be one of the factors that helps to define the possible spaces.



5.4.6. FUTURE CONTEXT

In a current situation of global pandemic, many aspects of daily life to which we were used to have changed or have been temporarily suspended. As anticipated by Josep Amor, director of URBADIS, the near future of children's play areas is uncertain and the competent institutions have not yet issued a statement, beyond closing these play areas.



The United States has already issued a prevention statement for these specific areas, with the help of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The benefits of physical activity in order to stay mentally and physically active, is a contrasting fact. That is why it is encouraged to visit parks and children's playgrounds, but always being informed, in order to protect oneself and also the rest of the citizens.

Broadly speaking, you should refuse to go to these spaces for 14 days if the subject in question has tested positive or if the area is very crowded and you cannot stay approximately 2 meters away. On the other hand, it is advisable to visit play areas close to your home, consult the situation of the playground in question in advance, keep a safe distance, take appropriate safety measures and help children to follow these guidelines.

Despite the initiative of the United States Department of Health, the information is not innovative nor concrete either, as most of these measures are already being implemented by society in their daily lives.



6. CONCLUSIONS

Looking at how the process of changing and growing gaming spaces has developed historically, it can be concluded that there has not always been a better one. When Aldo Van Eyck planned a children's play area, he didn't think about including a slide or a swing, he had in mind to create different spaces, related to each other, where children could imagine and invent their own game. No one told them how to play, on the contrary, it was a stimulus and a challenge for them. He also proposed a very good relationship between the city or the neighborhood and the playground for children and children.

As for the urban distribution of children's play areas in the city of Barcelona, it seems appropriate, although at certain specific points we should try to place them in a position closer to the schools. As for the future plan of the City Council in this area, it is to admire the will and the resources they are putting in place to improve the play spaces.

Talking about these specific children's play areas, you can see how they are very subject to the regulations. One of the clear improvements in these play areas is the regulation and progress in safety with regard to the ground, pieces and play elements are a major step forward. Businesses adapt to these requirements and parents seem calmer and more comfortable in this situation.

This point, maybe, is one that we should question, comfort. It seems that parents have forgotten what they learnt by playing without so many limitations, promoting the imagination and challenging the child to discover. Knee wounds and blows to the arms also make children grow and mature. In this sense, the regulations are always to help and make the areas safe, but architects, technicians and urban planners should seek to go one step further to avoid creating repetitive, monotonous playgrounds unrelated to the city or nature.

If there is one good thing we can draw from this current moment of uncertainty, it is the ability to contemplate what direction we want to take in the future. Defending the importance of space as a generating element in the design of children's play areas should be more than a challenge, an obligation for everyone. Despite finding ourselves in the age of technology, the need we have as a society to go out, relate us and enjoy has been demonstrated. And children even in a greater way. We need to be able to design play areas that are attractive and exciting enough that children would rather go out and play than be locked up at home with a console or a mobile phone in their hand.

«Children's play is an inexhaustible natural resource that remains within each person and will be at your disposal whenever you need it. However, it is a well that needs to be filled in a few years, and the quality of the game that is deposited will be what will feed that valuable resource for a lifetime.» Tina Bruce.

BIBLIOGRAFIA

Anna van Lingen, Denisa Kollarova. *Seventeen Playgrounds*. Amsterdam: Lecturis, 2016. ISBN 9789462261570.

Johan van de Beek. *Aldo v. Eyck. Projecten 1948-1961*. Groningen: Grafisch bedrijf Copyquick Offset, 1981. ISBN 050180872.

Julia Jacquette. *Playground of my Mind*. New York: Wellin Museum of Art and DelMonaco Books - Prestel, 2017. ISBN 9783791356501.

Tonucci, F. *Quan els infants diuen prou!*. Barcelona: EDITORIAL GRAO, 2004. ISBN 8478273220

Ezquiaga, J.M.. Reformadores ciudadanos Jan Gehl, Jaime Lerner. *Más ciudad. Futuros urbanos, futuros humanos*. Arquitectura Viva. Octubre 2018, no. 7, p. 40-44. ISSN 0214-1256

Capresi, V., & Pompe, B. *Learn move play ground*. [En línia] Berlin: Jovis Verlag GmbH, 2013. ISBN 9783868592245 [Consulta: 30 març 2020]. Disponible a: <jovis.de/en/books/product/learn-move-play-ground.html>.

Gehl, J. *Ciudades para la gente*. [En línia] Buenos Aires: Infinito, 2014. ISBN 9789879393802 [Consulta: 30 març 2020]. Disponible a: <slideshare.net/gracielamariani/ciudades-para-la-gente-de-gehl-jan-ediciones-infinito-buenos-aires-2014>.

Ward, C. *The child in the city*. [En línia] United Kingdom: Prickly Pear Pamphlets, 2000 ISBN 1891754122 [Consulta: 16 abril 2020]. Disponible a: <http://www.thememorybank.co.uk/pricklypear/13.pdf>.

(Rubió i Tudurí) Esparza, D. *Barcelona a ras de suelo*. [En línia] Barcelona: Edicions UB, 1982 ISBN 9788447540068 [Consulta: 23 maig 2020]. Disponible a: <https://books.google.es/books?id=jd1fDwAAQBAJ&pg=PA152&lpg=PA152&dq=rubio+i+tuduri+joc+infantil&source=bl&ots=D1A-FOvQQ5&sig=ACfU3U2yARGxzt5iVLx204mM52rIPuKTOg&hl=ca&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj2m--WvMfpAhXi6OAKHcb4CLoQ6AEwAnoECA0QAQ#v=onepage&q=rubio%20i%20tuduri%20joc%20infantil&f=false>.

MemorANDA. *Francesco Tonucci y la ciudad de los niños como espacio público para todos* [en línia]. YouTube, 24 d'agost 2016 [Consulta: 30 març 2020]. Disponible a: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cU7dYGwtX60>.

Baylina Ferré, M, Ortiz Guitart, A, Prats Ferret, M. *Geografía de la infancia: espacios de juego en ciudades medias de Cataluña* [en línea] Article, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona. Bellaterra. Departament de Geografia, 2006 [Consulta: 15 abril 2020]

Tomé González, A, Ruiz Maillo, R. *El espacio de juego: escenario de relaciones de poder* [en línea] Article, Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona. Grup de Recerca en Educació, Ciutadania i Societat, 1996 [Consulta: 15 abril 2020]

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention - Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/daily-life-coping/visitors.html>