Playful Public Spaces

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Table of Contents

Preface

In the end phases of an urban design course that was oriented towards children, it dawned on me: the shocking realization that we are talking about play as something that is only significant for children. How could it be that we are talking about playgrounds that adults have no business in. Not that children don't require specific attention, seeing that they are the future of our world, but what I experienced was quite the epiphany.

I started wondering why playfulness isn't discussed in our studies as a quality? Why isn't play an important activity of adult life? Personally, all I do in my free time is play. I do all the things I don't like doing for the sake of play. I play board games, computer games, football. I am exremely playful when I hang out with my friends as I joke around and talk about unserious matters. When I walk in the city I play with it. I do not walk for health reasons, I walk because I like walking for walking's sake. I watch people for watching's sake and I have coffee for the sake of a nice conversation. Such a big part of our lives deserves some attention, I thought.

I started looking into urban design studies and found almost none that brought up play. As I was reading more, cities started looking alarmingly similar and serious. Public spaces, the areas in our cities that have the potential to be the adult playgrounds, began to feel more and more deserted.

Slowly, I got increasingly convinced that play as a subject was worth studying. However, it quickly seemed like a difficult angle to approach public space design. Its definition was tricky and people I talked to associated it with children at the first chance. Regardless, in hopes of gaining a fresh perspective, something I felt the field of urban design sorely needed, I foolishly pushed onwards. The result is a short introduction to playful urban design – a merger between play-theory and urban studies.

introduction

Playful public spa...what?

Play is a serious matter. Discussions on urban futures, that have in recent years been dominated by topics such as environmental sustainability, creativity and identity, have seen the emergence of a new interesting perspective that is play. The word is on the verge of entering into the conceptual frameworks of urban thinkers, planners and designers alike.

The number of people advocating for playful urban environments is growing and awards are given to cities and individuals that come up with great playful solutions and ideas (Playable city 2015). The fuss here is not exclusively about child's play but a holistic change, a playful turn, to how we treat design our cities.

With this new movement comes a danger. The danger relates to the fact that play is prone to oversimplification. It is time to realize that play constitutes much of our lives, that it is a slippery concept and cannot be reduced to purely games.

There are many possible explanations to the emergence of playfulness, some of which will be identified in chapter 1.3., The playable city movement – established in Bristol, UK – for one, sees itself as a response to the anonymity and coldness of the urban environments. Others claim that playfulness is an expression of discontent with the way that top-down urban planning and design have failed to account for certain urban problems (Baggini 2014).

Many people all over the world are experiencing a certain loss of ownership over the city's spaces and a powerlessness over their future. This anguish is depicted poignantly by Guardian journalist Ian Martin in his humorous text about privatization in London where he describes the city's newest skyscraper:

Its architect, Renzo Piano, calls it a "vertical city"? Really? It's not Milton bloody Keynes is it? A city must contain members of the public. That's basic. Well, there aren't many members of the public in the Shard, and they're easily identifiable. They're either there for drinks and dinner or they're there for a meeting. They've either got a table reservation or they're wearing a lanyard. Cities don't have guest lists. The Shard is not a city. Where's the school, the hospital, the weird newsagent's that sells tinned pies? Where's the social housing, the dodgy pub, the library? Come on. (Martin, 2015)

People are feeling that their "right to the city" is being impeded upon by alienating urban spaces. This has inspired some people to take matters into their own hands advocating playful solutions as warm, collective, unserious and irrational counterweights to contemporary urban design and planning. Brazilian Urban planner and policy-maker Claudio Marinho puts into words what many urbanites seem to be thinking about: "there is a need for an affectionate re-appropriation of public places to get back city-centre life from our bunker-high-rise isolation." (Baggini 2014)

This paper sees the emergence of play as a completely logical development in those parts of the world that are ever more gamified, that have seen the failures of the participatory approach and that have experienced the city-life-hollowing effects of rationalist planning, gentrification and

privatization. Play seems to be connected to a larger identity crisis where urban environments that were largely designed to support the productivity and efficiency-centric rationale of fordist societies are failing to adapt to a society where new kinds of highly specialized jobs and technologies that require an entirely new kind of creative thinking.

Since play has been claimed to have strong linkages to creativity, innovation and inspiration, it has become an interesting concept for post-fordist societies where these traits are desperately sought-after. In addition to the popular discourses on creativity and innovation, play can prove to be an interesting new perspective into other contemporary urban issues.

Many of the most prominent urban thinkers talk about issues inseparably linked to playfulness without mentioning the word. Where Jan Gehl is concerned about the life between buildings, Jane Jacobs would perhaps have been worried about the disappearance of the "sidewalk ballet".

Play, as is argued later, seems to be rather incompatible with the contemporary urban form and the mindset that has produced it. Not only is the urban material form so inflexible that it does not allow for alternative thinking but the cultures of productivity, efficiency and seriousness, relics of the industrial revolution, also permeate the workplaces and social lives of people.

The instrumental world-view born out of the aforementioned cultures is proving to be rather detrimental to play. This is exemplified by the recent trend of gamification that more often than not seeks to instrumentalize play. The "just add points" mentality fails to recognize that just by making something play-like does not automatically make it fun or meaningful. Play is a social *need* and has to be recognized as such. It is an end in itself, not a means towards more fitness, increased consumption or efficient meetings.

Instrumentalized play, I argue, will not help us in reaching the urban public spaces we are longing for. However, this paper claims that a design approach which aims to prioritize playfulness as a virtue and goal in itself has tremendous potential. Playfulness is, after all, a common factor in many of the most popular cities and urban design features.

How, then could the city's public spaces be transformed into something more playful, something that is more meaningful for its inhabitants and reflective of their needs? As its main research question this study asks: ***what kind of urban design methodology emerges from prioritizing the experience of play in public spaces?***

The study at hand draws from urban theory and theory of play and attempts to approach a definition of urban playfulness as it pertains to the design of public spaces. The acquired lens is then used to look at a specific public space in the city of Lund, Sweden with fresh eyes.

Dissecting urban play - A design perspective

In essence, this study will be an exploration of the "play-concept" in the urban environment. It can be called an exploration since our understanding of the concept is far from perfect. The study builds largely on the work of Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois, authors who have worked with the concept of play on a deeper level.

Play as a concept has been thoroughly explored when it comes to children's development and learning (Davies et al. 2013), as well as artistic practices (Prager 2013), but its connections to the city and urban life remain relatively untouched. Now that the concept is at the verge of fame, it is in danger of becoming either too difficult to comprehend or too simplistic to have any meaning. The study aims to keep play in the realm of the graspable.

Because of the rising interest in playful design, this study aims to offer a toolkit for understanding the pitfalls and potentials of play as a central design concept. A holistic overview of play in design is given in four ways:

- First the study attempts to display play's significance for urban planning and design by explaining how the emergence of play relates to some of the most popular urban discourses of the past decades (chapter 1).

- Secondly, by defining play in a way that is relevant in the urban context (chapter 2).

- The third part of the study looks for some real-life examples of unconventional urban design that exhibit a clear element of playfulness (chapter 3).

- Lastly, using the gained understanding, the final chapter attempts develop a methodology for working with playfulness in urban public spaces (chapter 4).

Due to the multivocal nature of play, the study benefits from a mixed-methods approach that avoids quantification. Most of the work is conducted as a literature review where formerly unconnected fields of literature are brought together in order to bring new perspectives to the fore.

A purely philosophical discussion will not be able to capture the entirety of urban playfulness, nor will a study that employs only social scientific methods. This is why the theoretical understanding paves way for the last parts of the study where a more phenomenological and experiential approach is taken.

A small-scale case study will bring insight to a single location in Sweden (Mårtenstorget, Lund) and is complemented by visual elements. Here the site and the case is viewed as an instance of its own and the study distances itself from the scientific method and embraces subjectivity of experience.

It shall be clarified here that this study constrains its attention on the urban outdoor environment and more specifically those areas that are public from a property rights perspective. This is not done in rejection to the fact that social life & play happens everywhere in the city but for reasons of spatial delimitation in a tightly scheduled project.

Also, it should be noted, that the study is markedly biased towards Europe and the nordic countries, since the author has lived most of his life in these parts of the world. Since the approach of the study is reminiscent of a social scientific study, the end result may be stylistically different from usual studies committed in a faculty of landscape architecture. If that is the case, the author hopes that the text will be a pleasant and refreshing change.

The increasing significance of play
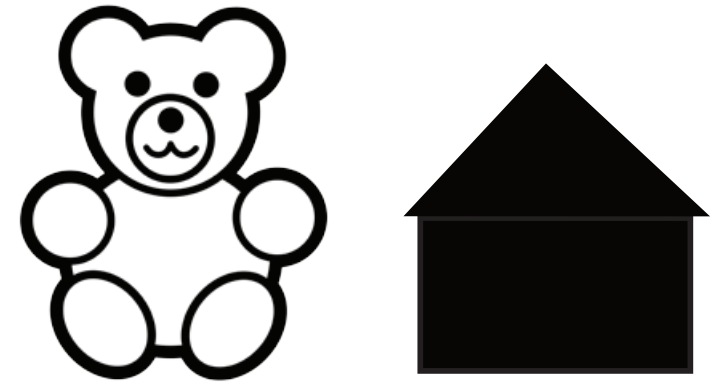
Play, in the contemporary urban discourse, did not emerge out of nothing, but is rather a natural continuation of some of the most dominant themes of the past century. This chapter will contextualize the play-concept amidst these themes and provides a basic framework for understanding a few of the underlying forces that have helped pave the way for the ideas of playable cities and playful urban design. In order to be able to understand where we might be going with playful spaces, we need to understand where the trend is coming from.

The Human Dimension Of Planning And Design

The trend in the field of urban planning and design that has perhaps proved most useful for the emergence of playfulness is the shift of focus from the physical environment to the social realm. This trend can be said to have started somewhere in the mid 20th century.

Perhaps the single most influential person that can be attributed with the emergence of the human dimension in planning and design is Jane Jacobs. In her most influential work The *Death And Life Of Great American Cities* (1961), she nostalgically depicts the street life in the city of Boston and critiques the rationalist planning movement. She contends that the main issue of modern planning lies in its inability to grasp the layered complexity and seeming chaos of social life.

This particular book has not only paved the way for modern placemaking but has also made it possible for play, with all of its irrationality, to emerge into the discussions of a profession that has formerly been associated with an engineerly level of technical focus. Today, the saint-like status of Jane Jacobs means that the contemporary planner will be well advised to look further into issues of the social realm in his/her plans.

Another superstar of human-oriented design, Jan Gehl, is well known for his efforts on revitalizing public spaces in cities around the

world. He has been a frontrunner of a design approach that pays attention to the use of space as opposed to pure functionality. He advocates for a shifting of focus from the form of buildings to the spaces in between (Gehl 2010). Thus, with his approach, the areas of interest in cities become its negative spaces, the open spaces, the opposites of built up. As will be argued later, these are the areas of the city that are crucial for play. In fact, what Gehl calls "optional activities" (2010), that is, the activities one pursues after necessary needs have been met, can often be considered play.

Somewhat similarly, Sharon Zukin, another significant thinker of the urban social, attributes the failures of recent planning to the aesthetic focus (2009). She describes this phenomenon as a tendency to focus on the material world in situations where the underlying problems actually have social roots.

She also offers an eloquent explanation as to why the urban *soul* is being lost and why so many people are looking for it. In her work she proposes that the concept of authenticity perhaps lies in the core of the issue, both in good and bad.

Zukin introduces the reader to the crisis of authenticity, a reaction to a visible and undesirable homogenization of cities. Due to global scale interdependencies and projects, urban areas have started looking increasingly similar and begun to display an alarming lack of social diversity. The upscaling and gentrification of neighborhoods has lead people with the most mobility (see Florida's creative class) scrambling after the genuine & authentic urban experience. She traces the trend historically and sees it reoccurring from time to time during the past century in times of property-boom. Cities "losing their soul" is, after all, a widely understood phenomenon.

Zukin argues that as people search for the soul of the city they often start from the wrong end. Traditional housing is bought by the wealthy in search of the "village life", more benches are installed and more "meeting places" are planned. What is oftentimes forgotten is that authenticity stems from people and not the material world.

She claims that authenticity has much more to do with a historical rootedness in place, as well as the right to live and work in it, than the ingredients in Parmigiano cheese or the precise structural form of renaissance architecture. She argues that our focus on aesthetics, a belief reinforced by media that the authentic city experience can be achieved by enhancing the city in a superficial and materialistic fashion, does little to solve the issue. Considerations of just and diverse cities are commonly not involved in the discussions on authenticity.

In Sweden (and many other countries) it is not uncommon to hear complaints about a certain lack of vibrancy and community in urban environments. It is not unusual to hear people reminisce about times when "children used to play on the streets". This longing for "authentic city life" has introduced to the country's urban design practice an obsession over meeting places and open spaces as many urbanites long for vibrant city-life reminiscent of romanticized southern-european piazza-life. This longing is very comparable to what Zukin calls the crisis of authenticity.

Playfulness is but the latest addition

into a field of literature that is concerned about the human dimension of the city. Not only is it something that can be considered an important part of an authentic city experience, but it is also an aspect of public life that can be largely independent from the material (aesthetic) form of the city.

Life between buildings and the sidewalk ballets are the part that designers and planners missed in the 70's and 80's. By doing that they also missed play and the "soft" values of our cities outside the realm of seriousness and rationality. It would seem, however, that things are changing.

The Creative City Movement

In the beginning of the 21st century, playfulness-thinking received an unlikely boost in the form of Richard Florida's book *The Rise Of The Creative Class* (2002). In it Florida argues that creativity is becoming the most valuable resource of post-fordist societies. Following the years of the book's publication, his thoughts became so popular that many urban policymakers and planners started implementing changes according to the "Florida-Model" of creative development (Long 2010).

In Florida's theory, he identifies a group of people, constituting roughly 38% of the American workforce, that he calls the creative class. He argues that this group is becoming the driving force of the economy and that certain cities and businesses have done a better job than others in attracting them. He points out that some of the most successful and popular businesses in the world, such as Google, go to tremendous lengths to provide their workers with a relaxed atmosphere, more flexibility, more open work environments and more fun. He extends his argument by claiming that cities such as Pittsburgh and Seattle have driven similarly oriented public policies that encourage technology, talent and tolerance, leading to urban environments that are particularly liveable whilst attracting investment and growth.

Florida also claims that what is common amongst members of the creative class is the preference of experience over material wealth. Amassing "authentic" experiences is the favourite pastime of the creative class, allegedly contributing to a larger library of thoughts where novel ideas can be created from. In other words, people have become more attracted to playing rather than just toys.

However, Florida's writings have also become highly controversial in academic circles, especially for downplaying the externalities of pursuing a creativity-inducing policies (Long 2010). Gentrification, for example, is considered a major issue that can be related to the "Florida-Model". In a study of the famously forward-thinking city of Austin, Texas (a posterchild of Florida's) Joshua Long (2010) accuses Florida of ignoring the role of the city's population in fostering the creative ethos through grassroots initiatives. According to him Florida instead credits the planners, as if the city's successes were a part of some well-thought out plan.

It is not a stretch to claim that Florida's work has played a significant role in the genesis of playful urbanism. Following Florida's claims that

creativity can be the instrument for competitive advantage, cities are now talking about learning, tolerance, play, diversity, flexibility and openness more than ever before. Cool, novel and playful experiences, in the form temporary installments or festivals, are also very much on the agenda of urban policymakers. Attracting the creative class has become an end in itself and play is sometimes seen as the means.

The fact that playfulness is seeing increasing interest is perhaps a side-product of the hunt for creativity. Encouraged by a significant body of literature underscoring play's connection to creativity, learning, relaxation and inspiration (West 2013, Amabile 1996, Huizinga 1985, Caillois 2001, Davies et al. 2013) more and more people are ready to embrace it as a matter worth looking into. Perhaps it is precisely these linkages that have brought the topic into the field of urban studies.

Participatory Planning

In the latter half of the 20th century public participation experienced a boom in multiple disciplines as the failures of top down governance and the limits of rationality were becoming more apparent.

Perhaps initially born out of the shortcomings of development aid programmes, the key thought behind the approach was to recognize that people have the capacity to understand their own situation and should thus have the ability to influence it. The UN-HABITAT document *Building bridges Through Participatory Planning* (2001) identifies PRA (participatory research and action) as the forerunner of the participatory methodologies that emerged in the decades following the 1950's and identifies planners such as Patrick Geddes, Lewis Mumford and development thinkers Paulo Freire and Kurt Lewin as potential forefathers of the approach.

To many in the urban planning context the mid 70's fall of the Pruitt-Igoe social housing complex in St. Louis served as a watershed – a symbolic end to modernism. As it became more and more clear that the complexities of urban life were not manageable by the designer/planner alone, the top-down paradigm of planning started to be questioned. The following shift towards bottom-up methods of planning happened alongside the increasing focus on the urban social realm outlined previously.

Participation today remains a hotly debated and popular topic in the urban planning field but it has experienced a number of obstacles. Token participation, public apathy and the fact that power always remains in the hands of the planner are commonly seen as problematic issues for the wider application of the approach (UN-HABITAT 2001).

Even in this context, playfulness has seen an increasing interest. In contemporary urban contexts play has suddenly emerged as a potential way for people to take matters into their own hands. Play and games are now occasionally being used as forms of collective & non-discriminatory action, as a direct counterweight to technocratic top down solutions (Baggini 2014).

In line with Jane McGonigal's (2011) arguments, a number of people are hopeful about the role of play and games as a community engagement tool. Games such as Minecraft are seen by some as a potential solution to engaging communities in designing the public spaces of the future (The Independent 2015). Additionally, organizations such as Play The City (www.

playthecity.nl), an Amsterdam based initiative, have proposed a variety of games as new ways to design urban environments. One of their games invites a group of people to play a boardgame of sorts, consisting of a myriad of small piece-buildings and an intricate set of rules, in order to come with suitable designs.

Gamification

As shown by authors such as Caillois (1961) and Huizinga (1970), games, an inseparable part of play, have been a significant part of human life throughout history. However, even this duo would perhaps be surprised by the recent successes of virtual gaming that have followed in the wake of the triumphs of visual media. Some of the most popular games of the last decades have amassed player-bases counted in the tens of millions. In United States alone it is estimated that 183 million people are "active" gamers, that is, people who on average spend 13 hours a week on playing (McGonigal 2011).

One of the most pivotal works that tends to be linked to gamification is Jane McGonigal's Reality is Broken (2011), which brought gamification to the lips of many who were previously uninterested in the field. In her book and its related TED-talk she highlights the potential of games as tools for marketing and community engagement. She emphasizes how important games have become in the lives of millions around the world.

According to McGonigal, games have become so popular because they offer possibilities for creativity, feelings of purpose, sensations of community and reward that are found nowhere in the real world. Reality, unlike games, is not designed from the bottom up to make us happy.

Whereas McGonigal talks about the potential of intrinsically motivating games that can solve problems in a real life context. Zichermann & Cunningham (2011) have had the largest impact on how we understand gamification today. They view games from an instrumental perspective (as the planning aplications shown in the previous chapter) and define gamification as the application of game mechanics and design in non-game contexts. In this way games are used to pursue ends such as advertising or alteration of behaviour. The business community has been quick to catch on to the tips outlined in their work.

In the last few years gamification has hit a stride. Described by CNN in 2011 as the "New Wild West", the gamification bandwagon has hit a perfect timing with the emergence of the "quantified self" movement (Fuchs et al. 2014). Point and reward systems have become standard in almost all businesses. The games that have become most popular are the simple stimulus-response kind that reinforce desired behaviors in an almost pavlovian fashion – rewarding people with badges, points and discounts.

The recent trends in gamification have lead to a large amount of criticism from game designers and theorists that the trend undermines the fact that games can be rewarding in themselves. Some are also critical of the fact that games are being used to alter behaviour, exploit customers and sugarcoat unethical processes (Fuchs et al. 2014) . The narrow understanding of games does not leave room for intricate ways of storytelling and is too simplistic for artistic or political statements (Fuchs et al. 2014).

Playable cities and the emergence of the play-concept in urban discussions certainly

might have a lot to thank for the gamification trend. Playful urban interventions are often very similar to their virtual counterparts and are subject to the same criticisms.

A beautiful example of the contradictions inherent in the motivations behind playful urban interventions and gamification is Volkswagens marketing campaign labeled "thefuntheory.com". In one particularly famous episode the VW team turned a staircase leading into a subway station in Stockholm into piano keys in hopes of encouraging people to be more active. A video of the installation brilliantly shows how a small intervention can produce a legion of smiles. It is also apparent that it succeeded in making people choose the stairs instead of the escalator.
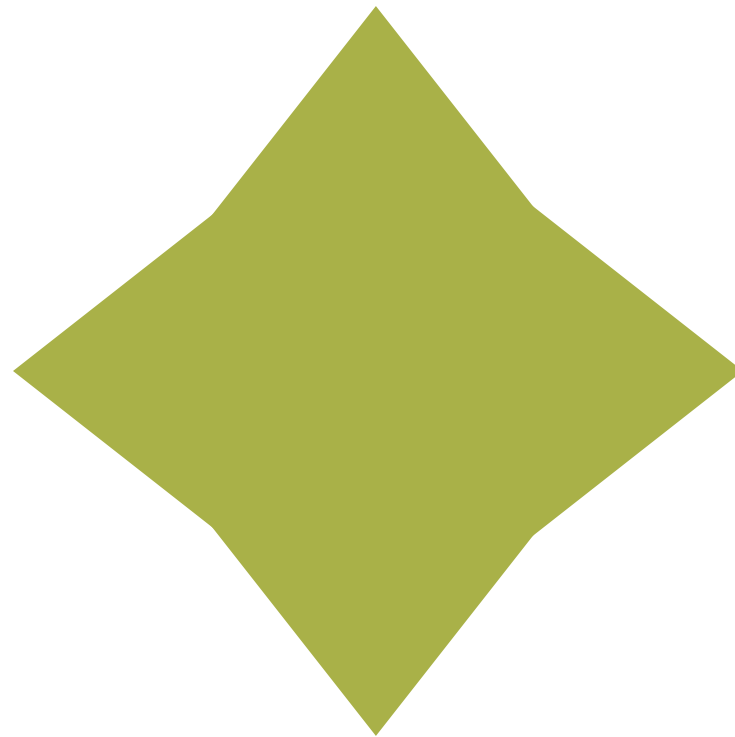
After giving it some thought, it is impossible not to see the irony in the VW campaign. The piano-stairs are a perfect example of "a spoonful of sugar makes the medicine go down". In this case it is highly doubtful that the medicine is living a more active life, since driving less is probably not on the agenda of VW. Acknowledging the power of playfulness is of course good, but the Volkswagen example sets the tone for the underlying problems and potentials of playful urban design.

As will be shown in chapter 2, it is almost impossible to talk about games without play or the other way around. On this premise, gamification and playable cities then are also inseparably linked. Gamification has helped in bringing the realm of play and games into other disciplines, but this transfer has not come without its problems.

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In the aforementioned contemporary urban discourses play seems to fit in as means to an end, as an instrument for something else. This leaves us wondering if play has any value in itself. Article 24 in the UN human rights declaration, the right to rest and leisure, indicates that it does. If one desires to see play as more than just a tool, then it is important to ask: what is play and how is it a valuable part of our lives?

2. understanding play

What is play?

Concepts such as play that are difficult to pinpoint, but that are recognized by everyone as extremely real, often end up being vastly simplified or completely avoided. Since playfulness has the potential to become an empty buzzword similar to the likes of "sustainability", it becomes vital to dig deeper into our understanding of the word. This chapter builds a framework for understanding the elusive concept of play from a theoretical perspective whilst pointing out it's connections to the fields of urban design and planning.

Psychologist and ethologists have for ages been trying to decipher the evolutionary and biological significance of play. Behavioural

scientists have, with relative certainty, ascertained that animals such as dolphins, do play (Paulos 2010). At the same time, we have also amassed an abundance of different theories for play's significance on children's development. Many of these studies suggest play's has an important role in the development of cognitive & language skills (Fromberg & Gullo 1992, Frost 1992, Piaget 1962).

Nonetheless, in the end we remain unconclusive about the purpose of play itself. The inconvenient issue of adult play also rarely comes into consideration even though we all know that it happens. For these reasons, and for the sake

of designing better cities, it becomes interesting to leave the purely biological perspective, where studies take the utility value of play for granted, and investigate the socio-cultural significance of play (Huizinga 1939).

Defining play is a gargantuan task and should not be taken lightly. This chapter provides merely a gentle scratch of the surface of all our gathered understandings of play.

Play á la Huizinga & Caillois

Much of the existing social theory on play and games relies heavily on the work on two thinkers: Johan Huizinga and Roger Caillois. Both of these authors are especially known for their contributions to the understanding of play.

Johan Huizinga was a Dutch historian who is considered by some as one of the fathers of modern cultural history (Otterspeer, 2001). Through his work *Homo Ludens* (1939) he made many re-evaluate the significance of play. In this work he identified play as an omnipresent and formative element of human culture.

Roger Caillois, on the other hand was, a French sociologist, who, by building on Huizinga's work, became most known for his classification of games. In his influential work *Man, Play and Games* (2001, originally published in 1961) he makes a convincing case for understanding many forms of contemporary culture as elaborate games and much behaviour as play.

Play-Element of Culture

Huizinga (1939) claims it necessary to understand play as more than a biological phenomenon. Even if the biological and evolutionary aspects of play can perhaps be studied scientifically, it is the irrational aspect of play, the *fun* involved in the act, that eludes all quantification. When looked at from a socio-historical perspective, he claims, one starts to see the pervasiveness and significance of play in our society.

In *Homo Ludens* (1939) Huizinga points out with relative ease the presence of playfulness in many of the fundamental aspects of social life. Poetry, dance and the spirit of competition all have their roots in play. In fact, most of the forms of culture that we now call civilization are, in their earliest stages, played. To Huizinga, culture arises in the form of play.

Even if play is pervasive throughout our history, it is sometimes hard to imagine the playful origins of modern culture. Huizinga argues that all forms of play, tend to move towards instutionalization and the sacred. What this means is that the original forms of play quickly become hidden behind forms of formalized culture (as when playful imitation turns into theatre). Something as absurd as the rules of warfare, he claims, are actually based on play-patterns. Whereas culture is just a term that our historical judgment attaches to a specific instance, play is an identifiable & universal thing. Even those activities that are aimed to satisfy immediate needs, such as hunting, exhibit playfulness right from the beginning.

Even if the mentioned institutionalization of play is a normal process, Huizinga expresses

a concern over the developments in the 19th century. During this time he saw the expansion of organized sport, with ever stricter and more elaborate rules. When sports were being taken more and more seriously, something of the pure play-quality was being lost. This could be seen, for example, as the differentiation between amateurs and professionals. Play, then became more regimented, more time-constrained, and something that was only accepted as leisure of the select few.

Huizinga also reminds us that even if play shows a certain universality throughout cultures and species. this does not mean that the concept is immune to alternative interpretations. Translations of the word play are, in fact, far from straightforward (Caillois 2001). Also, what complicates issues further, is the subjectivity of play-experience. A playful situation is not playful for everyone, what is a beloved and voluntary activity in one culture can be forced and unplayful in another.

Now that we have placed play in relation to what we call society and culture we may turn our gaze towards its border conditions.

Play Is Free

Huizinga sees freedom as the most important prerequisite for play to emerge. In fact, he argues that play, in a sense, is freedom. One plays only out of free will and if one is forced to do so it becomes merely pretending. He claims that play serves no clear functional purpose and is never more necessary than the need for its enjoyment. It can never be mandatory for physical nor moral reasons and can suspended at any point.

Nowadays it is not unusual to see professional "players" in, for example, sports. Even such a playful activity as a football game, can quickly turn into stressful work, if one's livelihood depends on it. The activities that are not intrinsically motivating, cannot be concidered play. When an activity stops being voluntary, it often also stops being fun. Perhaps here lies the reason why it is not too uncommon to see people quit a hobby because it "got too serious".

The fact that play is free also means that it is difficult to control, thus making play-planning a difficult task. Some would say that the drive to maintain self-control is impossible to completely extinguish. As Michel de Certeau discusses in his book *The Practice Of Everyday* Life (1984) we spend much of our lives "poaching", that is, using other's territory for our own purposes. We wilfully disregard rules, misuse designs, and make irrational choices in order to make our lives more tolerable.

We urbanites take a shortcuts through the lawn in a park with paths, and take the sightseeing route instead of the highway. Sometimes we listen to concerts on street corners, utterly blocking pedestrian flow. If the task of the urban designer is to solely inhibit such behaviour, then it is also to inhibit playfulness.

Play Is Wasteful & Irrational

"Play is an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often money… creating neither goods, nor wealth, nor new elements of any kind" (Caillois 2001, p.125)

"Animals play, so they must be more than merely mechanical things. We play and know that we play, so we must be more than merely rational beings, for play is irrational."
(Huizinga 1939, p.4)

The above quotes give us one possible explanation as to why play has not hit it big in the field of urban design. They do not entail that play is meaningless or without benefit to us, but rather that the value of play is immeasurable, thus going against our rationally tuned brains.

According to Riikonen (2013) a big obstacle for a wider adoption of playfulness-thinking has been the post-industrial-revolution dominance of rationalism. The glorification of the scientific method and the dominance of the assembly-line productivity have caused our cities to conform to these 20th century priorities. This era also saw the expansion of massive systems of control such as bureaucracy and urban planning. It can be argued that during this time many western societies slowly became relatively ill-equipped for play since it requires a certain detachment from absolute rationality and seriousness (Florida 2001, Riikonen 2013).

Play is Separate

ex·traor·di·nar·y

very unusual or remarkable.

late Middle English: from Latin extraordinarius, from extra ordinem 'outside the normal course of events.'

(Google 2015)

Playfulness requires a certain separation from the ordinary. This separation can happen in three ways – spatially, temporally and in relation to rules (Huizinga 1939, Caillois 2001). The separate reality that is created by play-situations is commonly referred to as the "magic circle".

According to Huizinga play always has its spatial delimitations. Every player designates a 'playground', the size and vagueness of which can vary significantly. More often than not, this playground disregards the urban planners conceptions of where play ought to happen.

The temporal separation of play implies that all play activity has a beginning and an end. Sometimes fixed time limits are set while in other occasions the player raises his hands up and says "I give up", thus ending the play-situation.

Play is separate from the surrounding society also in the way in which it creates an alternative "make-believe" reality or by replacing ordinary laws and rules with new ones. What this means is that play is often also free from from ethical, moral and risk-related considerations – therefore giving it the capacity to be a safe space for experimentation.

Overt seriousness, bringing up risks, threats or other aspects pertaining to the "cold hard reality" can be considered as destruction

of any kind of play situation (Caillois 2001). A person who does this could be consiered a spoil-sport or a tosikko (see description below) in Finnish. Rationality and seriousness can sometimes be the easiest ways to dispel the enchanted environment that is created by people who engage in play.

According to Riikonen (2013) the capacity of play to maintain multiple realities simultaneously make it an interesting and stark contrast to any simplistic or unambiguous views of reality. This is why the word is often being connected to critical thinking and open-mindedness, whereas a simplistic worldview is something that is commonly attributed to fear, seriousness and worry.

Tosikkous

In his quest to find an antithesis for play Huizinga found seriousness to be the most satisfying opposite. However, he was not completely happy with the term as play can sometimes be performed with complete seriousness. The Finnish language, however, has a word that I believe is a strong contender for being the opposite of play.

In Finnish, a person can be described as a tosikko. A tosikko is more than a spoil-sport. He is a person who is serious, lacks a certain sense of humour, simplistically refuses to accept alternative truths or solutions, lacks imagination and thinks rationally. A person who is a tosikko is the opposite of a playful, he is no fun to be around and ruins every party he/she attends. The ultimate tosikko might even refuse to play games, as he/she sees them as meaningless. To my knowledge the english language lacks an equivalent word. I claim that tosikkous, is the most dominant and problematic characteristic of many contemporary public spaces.

Much of contemporary planning & design is focused on the "cold hard reality" where costs, safety concerns and regulations reign supreme. It is not a great surprise, then, that abiding by these priorities has produced similar (cold) environments again and again. Does this mean that the "realities" should be ignored by disregarding the context, the slippery surfaces or the sharp edges? No it doesn't, but it does raise concerns about the future of playful design (one endangered species being the art of sketching). The peak of rational design was reached in the 70's and 80's and many of the products of this period have become symbolic of the failures of urban planning and design. Is this a cause for concern?

Play is Non-Instrumental

According to Quentin Stevens (2007), play can be understood as non-instrumentality. It stands in opposition to seriousness, morality and productive work. The spontaneity and creativity of play is often considered the opposite of instrumental labour.

In an instrumental world where everything is tailored to increase productivity or efficiency, play can be easily understood as a "waste of time". However, when you consider

Intrinsically motivated dog (Wikimedia 2015)

the significance and importance of "free time" for most people and the effort that many go through in order to be able to play, it becomes clear that play is "not time wasted but time filled with profound and rich experience"(Clark and Holquist 1984: 303). Play is not a means to an end but an end in itself, or a in Lefebvre's (1996) words, a social need.

To the utilitarian this conclusion poses a tricky situation, wasting time on play does not make sense from a rational standpoint but denying possibilities for it could prove disastrous.

James C. Scott (1998) illustrates the problematic of the utilitarian rationale by making a clever comparison between 18th century fiscal forestry in Prussia with the tax collection methods of the latest centuries.

In renaissance Prussia the utilitarian state would categorize vegetation for it economic value, labeling some of the trees as profitable whereas the undergrowth was, more often than not, considered as weed or waste. The state could not "see the real, existing forest for the (commercial) trees" (Scott 1998, p.13). This lead to a situation where the species diversity decreased to a point where disease could, and eventually did, strike. The forest of the fiscal forester was not the one of the nature conservationist.

Similarly, the tax collector of late has not been concerned with the realistic depiction of the social realm but merely the mapping of taxable land, thus we have become adept at ignoring the social complexity of our cities.

Economic utilitarianism has contributed to more and more abstractions and simplifications of the social life of cities. Play is one of the most important social aspects that has escaped the gaze of the administrator because of it's seemingly low utility value. Play is a case in point for Lefebvre's argument that the practices of everyday life are far more complicated than any rational thinker could hope to explain. Rarely is the playground of the administrator the playground of the citizen.

It should be noted here that play situations can be, and have been, harnessed for ends other than play itself. However, the main challenge is, as many scholars of play have agreed, that play needs to be *intrinsically motivating* (McGonigal 2011, Huizinga 1939, Caillois 2001, Fuchs 2014, Stevens 2007). In other words, the goal of play has to make sense, or be enjoyable, for the participant, not for someone else.

With the instrumental purpose of eradicating diseases, the protein folding game Foldit is a case in point. It proved challenging enough as a puzzle game whilst simultaneously

resulting in potential medical benefits for all humanity.

Consider this. If people would have known that the piano-staircase in Stockholm (see ch. 1) was ultimately a gimmick for increasing the profits of Volkswagen, would the results have been the same? I believe so. I would argue that many would take the stairs regardless because it is so fun in itself, not because of a healthier lifestyle or the benefit of VW.

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At this point we have established that play is an activity that happens outside the ordinary. It is a historically and culturally significant phenomenon. It is free, you cannot be ordered to play. It has an end and a beginning, both spatially and temporally. It takes place in a separate reality that is completely make-believe or governed by rules that differ from the normal. Furthermore, in material terms one cannot hope to gain anything from play.

Next we address the differences between unstructured and structured play.

Play as Paidia & Ludus – From turbulence to rules and back to turbulence

Here, I feel it necessary that the vast spectrum of what can be considered play be discussed. Caillois (2001) claims that there exists a continuum between more formalized types of play (ludus) and the less structured spontaneous kinds (paidia). His dichotomy is highly similar to the well known distinction between Dionysian and Apollonian in western philosphy, contrasting the chaotic with the rational.

Paidia, derived from the ancient greek word connected to children, amusement and play, is what he calls the primary power of improvisation and joy. It is the kind of play that is characterised by frivolity, spontaneity and disregard for rules. Paidia is often associated with child- and animal-like behaviour – jumping, skipping, running around or kite-flying.

With the passing of time, however, Paidia tends to become more structured and rules are attached to it. This is when play moves on the spectrum towards ludus, which is a latin word relating to play, training and games. The transformation he describes is the equivalent of casual ball games turning into football.

As argued by Stevens (2007) Caillois' concepts of paidia and ludus show that it is possible to avoid instrumentality, the bane of play, either by resisting rules or by observing and accepting different rules.

The differentiation between paidic and ludic play is of specific interest when considering the trends in contemporary urban discourse. Ludus, the more formalized games are often the

Ancient greek vase depicting a paidic activity – hoop rolling.
(Wikimedia 2015)

Engraving of the Colosseum. An ancient site for ludus.
(Wikimedia 2015)
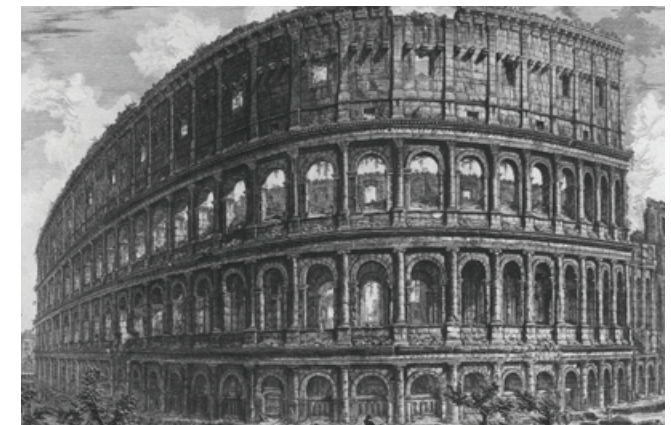
focus of any play-related discussions since they are easier to grasp and can be readily herded to serve different societal goals (as football can be considered a team-building effort in a business). However, its more elusive counterpart, paidia, is often forgotten.

Our fixation on ludus is understandable. As was mentioned earlier, play is by its definition unproductive – nothing physical accumulates when one is taking part in any kind of play. For the industrialist/instrumentalist/urban planner the wastefulness of play is easier to forgive when it comes to ludus as it supports values that are crucial for the sustainability of the system such as adherence to rules or competition. Play as ludus encourages order and continuity, thus fitting relatively well with the rationality of contemporary everyday life (Stevens 2007).

However, the unpredictability of rule-breaking paidia is best avoided for those who wish to maintain the status quo. In many modern societies a part of becoming adult is learning the "rules of the game" and repressing the "childish" and irrational. However, I argue that it is precisely paidia that is the target of longing for most contemporary urbanists.

Based on our background review in chapter 1, a hypothetical placemaker of the 21st century could say something like this:

"Humourless, cold, generic spaces need to be 'affectionately' reappropriated. We miss our optional activities, the life between buildings and the spontaneous meetings. Our ideas of what is good urban design need to be re-evaluated on a case-to-case basis."

I claim that this kind of utterances are a call for a more paidic city. A city that breaks the conventions of urban design, critiques questions of publicness and ownership. Unsatisfied with the current state of things it reverses the movement from ludus to paidia, from rules back to turbulence.

The movement between turbulence and rules can also be understood through Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) concepts of centrifugal & centripetal forces in language. He argues that these forces work constantly against each other in language and culture. Centripetal forces work to draw everything towards one central point in order to produce one 'official' language as in the verses of poetry that encourage similarity. Centrifugal forces, on the other hand, push the elements of language away from the central point and produce diversity. He claims that the novel has this power in the field of literature, that it exists to draw authoritative and 'official' into question.

By this line of thinking the emergence of play can be seen as a centrifugal critique of our contemporary systems of planning and design.

Paidia & Ludus in video games

The paidia-ludus continuum has also been explored in the field of video-game design. The extremely high player counts of some arguably paidic games has not gone unnoticed. Open world-games such as World Of Warcraft have been topping the lists in most sold games for

a long time. What is more, there seems to be an apparent lack of rules in some of the most popular titles such as Minecraft (Jensen 2013). It is worth noting that the much-loved activity of browsing the internet's infinite selection of distracting cat-videos and unserious websites seems like one of the most paidic pastimes of modern day adults.

In many ways the designers of virtual environments can be more sensitive to the needs and desires of consumers than urban planners as their businesses live and die by the happiness and satisfaction of the users.

When talking about play in an urban design context it is important to remember that it does not restrict itself to formalized games. The longing for playful urban spaces does not necessarily have to do with the lack of opportunities for football but it can also mean that there is a lack of the surprise element, the different, the spontaneous or the informal. The most institutionalized forms of play are the easiest to see and the easiest to plan for, and they also sometimes have a perceivable "civilizing" function which makes them more attractive to the utilitarian. However, it is becoming clear that when it comes to cities we have an appetite for unruliness that is impossible to provide with purely rational thinking.

Play Is Communicated

A crucial characteristic of play, especially for the designer, is that it is communicated.

According to Bateson (1972) play is a form of meta-communication, that is, a communication of communication. What this means is that in order to be playful a player needs to communicate to the other player(s) that his or her actions (communications) are not serious. The crucial thing is to make the participant realize that not everything is as it seems. This can of course be done in many ways. Sensory cues imbued in body language and utterances will often reveal the playfulness of the player.

As many other animals, humans are adept at picking up sensory cues that indicate the presence of play (Mitchell 1991). A smile or an unusual wording will most often do the trick. In the urban environment, visual signals such as bright colors or round shapes are uncommon, thus sometimes indicating a friendlier and more playful environment. Sounds and smells are of course potential signals as well.

To be able to signal unseriousness and extraordinariness one must think outside the conventions. This is maybe why playful urban design has in the past been a part of the realm of the artist more than the designer.

It should also be noted that the communication of play can require leadership. The person who goes first always makes it easier for the rest. People are terrified by an empty space and often need to be encouraged by others to start a movement (Sivers 2010).

What is it, I wonder, that makes university towns seem more alive than their un-educational brethren? Its as if there was something hopeful in the air itself. Perhaps the answer lies in their paidic character, the way in which many young university students are taught to think critically and to look for new ways of doing things. University students are still undomesticated, ready to take the world by storm, just like the child that is let out in the garden.

Photo: Boothie
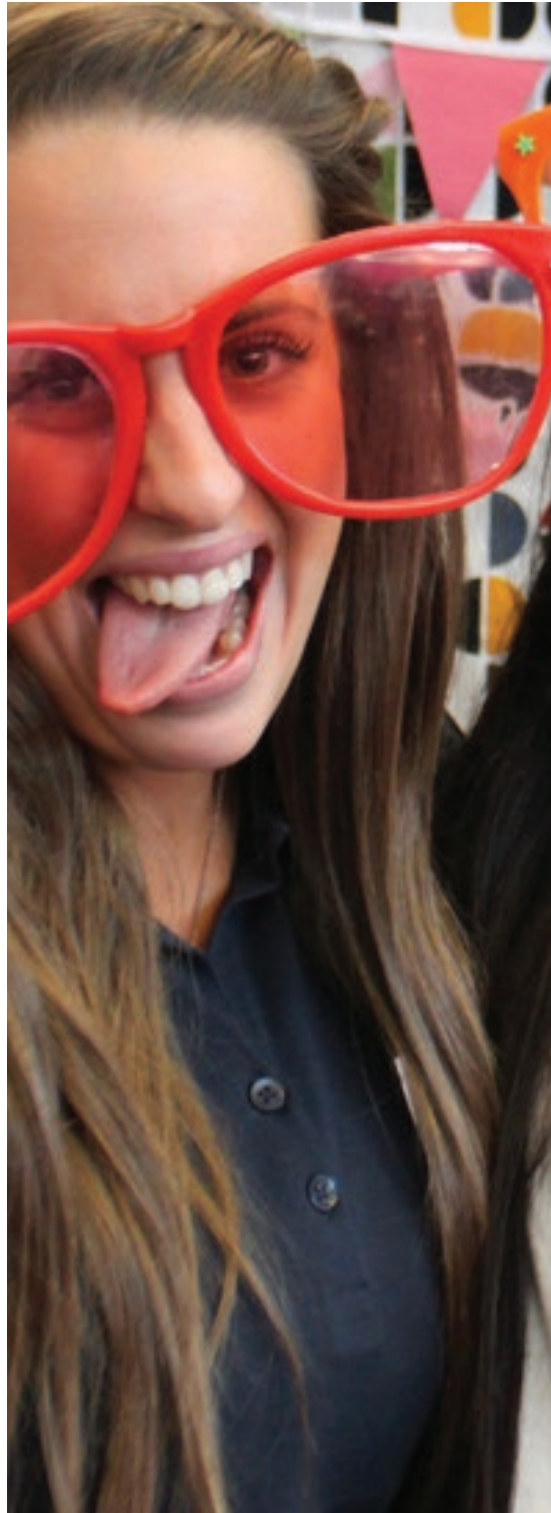
How about the photobooth? My girlfriends' business offers a mobile photobooth that can be installed at events to take pictures of the participants. People are given funny props as well as an artistic backdrop for the picture. Stepping in front of the camera with a pair of oversized sunglasses makes even the most properly dressed businessman turn into a child. The more formal the event, the more joyous is the informal safe space that is offered by the booth. Even with no clear walls, the booth is a world apart, a separate space where one can truly be oneself.

3. playful urban design

An affordance of Lund cathedral: heat storing walls

What is playful urban design?

Urban design is commonly understood as the discipline that unites knowledge from all the professions of the built environment in order to shape sustainable cities.

Playfulness in urban design is something that is easily associated with what are designated in urban planning documents as "playgrounds". Traditionally an urban designer concerned with play deals with the equipment with which children can play. While different age groups certainly have different needs and require specialized knowledge, it is interesting that the need for play-environments seems to disappear at a certain age, while play never does. Teenagers, for example, often have no designated environments in our cities, but are instead commonly seen as "infringing" on adult property rights (Herrington 2011). There seems to be a slight air of taboo surrounding the word play when talking about anything but children.

If a designer sees play as more than an interaction between a player and equipment, which is hopefully the case at this point of the thesis, then the he or she has to be concerned with much more than "toys".

Sharon Zukin's (2009) critique of the aesthetic focus, the common design efforts that attempt to solve deeper societal issues with superficial material solutions, is a spirit that is reflected in this chapter.

Playful design is not the same as playable design. Playability assumes the existence of the unplayable environment, which one is hard pressed to find. It is also easily associated with the physical realm and implies that the playability of some "thing" is a question of form. Playable design is thus more concerned with the end result, which might never yield a change in the way of thinking. Playful design, then, shifts the emphasis more towards the design process. This is a desirable focus for the purposes of this thesis as it seeks to reprioritize play as an important end-goal of the design process.

Because the design process is necessarily reflected in the end result, then playful design can be understood as design *for* play. Design with play as a priority. Because play can exist relatively independent of form, the designer has to have new tools at his disposal in order to encourage it.

To provide the basis for such a toolkit, then, is the task of this chapter. It does this by synthesizing our theoretical knowledge with contemporary examples of playful urbanism.

Designers who are interested in playful urban environments can hopefully find novel ideas and expand their frames of reference. The examples in this chapter can be considered , by some, as unconventional or even completely outside the field of urban design. However, this thesis calls for an evolution, not a revolution, in the practice. I argue that if play is to be prioritized in our urban spaces, then unconventional is the only way to go.

It has to be mentioned that the below examples should not be treated as an exhaustive list of solutions or "best practice" but more as a collection of ideas.

Playful and unconventional use of public space in Lund (left) and Berlin (right)

Play is free – public (open) space design

As discussed in chapter two, one plays only out of free will and for this reason play avoids control like the plague. Since the urban planner's task often is to control behaviour in a desired direction by imposing functions on spaces, we then turn our gaze here towards the spaces where no distinct function is set. We look for urban spaces that offer affordances, a multitude of meaningful choices. We look for spaces where ones mobility is least constrained and where one is allowed to be oneself and express oneself freely.

Public open spaces are one of the foremost components of cities that one connects with the aforementioned traits. They are also one of the main focus areas of urban design. In our urban environments, these are the areas one usually connects with playfulness and freedom. Where else but the parks, squares and sidewalks would one go for a picnic, to watch a parade or play sports?

The sheer number of open public spaces in cities areound the world is mind-boggling and many of them are used in meaningful ways and loved by citizens. However, not all of them are created, or born, equal(ly open). It is a curious thing, why does one piece of unbuilt, open land attract thousands and another remains just that, a piece of unbuilt, open land.

Even if public spaces are frequently discussed in discourses of urban theory, rarely are they accurately defined. Most often a public space is defined by what it is not: privately owned. With this understanding one quickly runs into problems since land ownership alone does not determine how the land is used. A private front lawn may quickly transform itself into a highly public space, as is demonstrated by Crawford's (2011) study of garage sales in Los Angeles. Furthermore, this definition does not help us in determining what areas among the publicly owned lands are more worthy of our attention than others. Land ownership is perhaps the easiest way to identify "public space" and perhaps this is why it has become the most common way of understanding it. For the purposes of play, however, it is more interesting to consider the "openness" of urban space.

Open space as freedom

Categorizing space by its openness is by no means easier. The most common association of openness relates to the physical characteristics of a space. In an urban context open space is often understood as a break from dense surroundings where the "canopy" of buildings opens up, thus forming a clearing. In this sense, open space is the opposite of built-up.

This kind of understanding is fine until the physical openness of space becomes connected to social life by equating things such as "sky-view factor" (common tool used to measure amount of sky visible in public spaces), or large flat surfaces, with vibrant urban life. Perhaps as a result of the aesthetic focus (described earlier in the paper) it is not uncommon to run into discussions on the need for more "meeting places" or "open spaces" that use terms such as open space -per-inhabitant. This is to objectify public space into something that is purely material.

However what makes openness interesting is that it can also refer to the amount

Finalized	Open-Ended	Out Of Bounds	Open Access

Photo: Wikimedia

Photo: Brenden

Photo: Carl Drougge

Photo: Rachelle Lacharité

of freedom experienced by people using it (Lynch 1995). Thus, it can be seen as the ability of a space to accommodate and adapt to a variety of uses (open-ended) and users (open-access). A space that is truly open is visibly open in the sense that it has space for you, it looks like something you are allowed to enter, and is also open in terms of rules, insofar as it allows you to be yourself and do as you please.

An open-ended space is one that allows for flexibility. It is in a sense unfinished. In the case of public seating this flexibility could range from being allowed to bring your own chairs, to movable multifunctional chairs, to chairs that are bolted to the ground. It is of course obvious that such flexibility comes as much from legislation and regulation as it does from the physical design of a space.

In an open-ended space one can pursue one's own aspirations with as few constraints as possible. Simply put, the more open-ended the space, the less its uses and functions are controlled and thus the more freedom there is for play – the creature that avoids control and judgement.

However, this does not mean that play doesn't exist in spaces that are pre-determined and controlled. In fact, playful activities often take place in this kind of locations as a form of resistance (Stevens 2007). However, when the risks of breaking rules become too high then play becomes difficult.

Accessibility is another kind of freedom. An open access space, is one that does not discriminate and where everyone has equal opportunity to enter, leave, and participate in building the future of the space. Such a space is

almost necessarily a utopia but the idea of it lies at the core of a just city. A simple conversion of a road with sidewalks to a shared space can be a move towards a more equal and playful city as it deprioritizes the car as a mode of transport over other less expensive modes. Such a space gives equal access to the pedestrian and the driver, increasing the mobility of the less privileged.

Open Space As Contrast

It was asserted earlier that play gains much of its value by being a contrast to the seriousness of ordinary life. Without comparison it is actually an extremely hard thing to define at all. Play is refreshing in the sense that it cannot be controlled or predicted. It is liberating because it is free from risk-related and moral considerations. Sometimes we also enjoy playfulness as it stands in contrast to univocality, utilitarian logic and rationality.

Taking the contrast-approach to the field of urban design yields interesting results. Open spaces, in the physical realm of the city, bear many of the characteristics of playfulness.

According to Lynch (1995) much of the value of open space relates to contrasts. Where urban environments are often finished, static, and instrumental, public open space is often more adaptable and fluid. Where buildings are often for work or duties, open space is for relaxing. Where urban streets are crammed and tight, open spaces are light and airy. Where most doors in the city are closed or off bounds, the open space welcomes everyone. Where worklives are intensely organized and rule-controlled, open space offers a sense of chaos. If the city would be considered a ludic rule-ridden game then its open spaces are valuable as a paidic counterweight. In a serious city, the open spaces often *are the playfulness.*

If, as with play, much of the value of public open space lies in its relation to its surroundings, its contrast to the context, then there might be a need to rethink the way we design and place them. After all, what does a physically open space provide in an already open landscape? What is the value of an open-ended environment in the midst of other functionally flexible environments?

Extreme Contrasts - Central Park in New York (Photo: Wikimedia)

Case: Tempelhofer Freiheit, Berlin

Berlin is known for its playful public spaces and its alternative street life, but the former Tempelhof airport sets it apart from the rest. It is a truly awe-inspiring site, the scale and uniqueness of which are unrivaled.

As the location for the famous WW2 Berlin airlift, the site is considered a historical symbol of freedom and independence. Located in the midst of the densely populated neighborhoods of Kreuzberg and Neukölln, the openness of the area stands in stark contrast to its surroundings.

The airport was closed for traffic in 2008 but was reopened for the public in 2010 (THF 2015). Since then, its runways and fields have not been filled with airplanes but with people. Pioneering temporary installments of art and small-scale gardening efforts have emerged all over the site. On a nice day people fly kites and have picnics in this vast open space of more than 400 hectares.

Rollerskaters on the runways and barbeques on the lawns, rarely can one pursue these activities with such freedom as in Tempelhof.

The scale and separation of the location provides a situation where youre not stepping on anyones toe's with your actions. Discrimination is also alien to this place as it is not designed with a specific user group in mind.

The pressure of redevelopment is less in Berlin than many other cities due to the surplus of available open spaces and the tradition of temporary use (Overmeyer 2007). Nonetheless, the sheer "wastefulness" of such a space must be incomprehensible to a developer. This amount of centrally located, perfectly suitable land for construction would not be left untouched in many western cities.

What is remarkable in the case of Tempelhof is that once the location came under pressure for redevelopment the citizens mobilized in large enough numbers to produce the ThF-act protecting the area legally from redevelopment (THF 2015). In order to justify the protection of the area, arguments relating to the contrast with the surroundings were used in addition to ecological and culture-historical ones.

The case of Tempelhof is extreme in both, its absolute, and relative openness. The overflowing freedom of the space and the resultant playful activities remind us that playfulness does not need to be planned for, but can in fact result from un-planning. The lack of existing functions can be seen as an opportunity for play. As Tempelhof was opened to the public again in 2010, it was a deinstrumentalized space the likes of which are not seen commonly in our cities.

Tempelhof strengthens the claim that one of the key for playful public spaces lies in contrasts. Openness, itself meaningless without a contrast, is most definitely a core value of the old airfield. The contrasts talked about here are not only between the physical form of things, but between the creative, free, spontanous and the "guidelines of 'serious' life", as Lynch puts it (1995).

Evening at Tempelhofer freiheit

Play is separate and wasteful –"soft" and temporal design

Separateness from the realm of the usual and the instrumental is crucial for play. Called the "magic circle" by some, the separation that is required by play can be spatial, temporal or rule-related. As with scientific experiments, a play situation is separate from the surrounding society so that experimentation is made possible.

It is possible to separate oneself from the surroundings in almost any circumstance. The act of listening to an mp3 creates a "world apart" for the listener, perhaps leading to a few dance-like steps and some singing, or a full-out performance. What makes a more extravagant performance possible is if the listener perceives that he/she is safe from judgement or punishment. Football fields, on the other hand, spatially enclose the act of play. Anything goes in a football game but after leaving the fields there should be no grudge between the teams.

For a child our urban environments have been stripped of magic circles, one of the few environments where children can taste a slice of freedom are the playgrounds. Even there they are often under the watchful eye of parents and playing with equipment that have clearly designated functions. In fact, according to Herrington (2001), the playground as a concept was developed to remove children from the streets. For safety reasons, it is becoming more common for parents to bring their children to school and take them home (Fotel & Thomsen 2004). Home, then becomes the only "safe" environment for experimentation, the last magic circle.

It can be argued that the situation is even worse for adults. Constrained by moral considerations there are barely any magic circles in the urban environment. Perhaps here lies the reason for the popularity of virtual environments.

Some public open spaces have the potential to be the magic circles outside our homes. But too often they are dominated by the same restricting morals, rules and utilitarian logic. The one urban design element that is perhaps most significantly separate from the constraints of serious life is the city park. Even if the motivation behind a park would be the increased productivity or health of the citizen, they are one of the few urban areas that are designed purely for the enjoyment of the user. In this sense they are the video-games of urban design.

An aspect of separation that is rarely explored in the field of urban design is temporality. The separation of play can also become clear through time-constraints. Temporary installments, carnivals and other events often completely reshape the city but, for some reason, remain outside urban design.

Even if temporality is lacking the attention it deserves, it is beginning to emerge as a trend in urban design. According to Bishop & Williams (2012) what we know as the fourth dimension will and should attract more attention in the face of economic and environmental uncertainty. There is also reason to encourage temporary design from the perspective of playfulness. It can be argued that a temporary intervention is almost necessarily more playful than a "permanent" solution. The reason for this lies in the emphasis we put on risk and predictability.

Risk minimization is an essential part of any modern construction or design. The relatively

permanent solutions are often more expensive to establish, thus encouraging approaches that are tried and true. Experimentality is often not afforded in completely rational projects.

The long-lastingness of any design has for long been considered a virtue (think pyramids of Giza). We all know however, that ultimately permanence is an illusion. Even concrete does decay. Our fixation on long lasting urban design has come at the cost of flexibility, interactiveness and playfulness. Whereas it is of course extremely important that buildings don't collapse on their inhabitants and that plumbing doesnt crack every year or so, permanence of the urban form isn't important for a lively public scene.

Play as we defined it earlier, has a beginning and an end. We also asserted that ridiculing and shooting down novel ideas with rationality is potent poison for killing play. So, in a way, accepting the ultimate impermanence of our urban fabric and the need for experimentality is to embrace playfulness.

It is also mportant to remember that the temporary interventions that change our urban landscape do not necessarily need to be material One does not need toys to play. Different kinds of events, as mentioned before, can completely change the dynamics of space. City marathons, with the rerouting of entire networks of traffic, are a good example of this. An urban design profession that is limited to the material world can never hope to be playful.

Even if there now are indications of a movement towards "soft" design, the temporary and unserious kinds of urban interventions, the arts have already been there, done that. Urban designers would be well advised to learn from artists as their installations and art exhibitions are much needed as temporary and playful interventions that keep our urban spaces dynamic by critiqueing and experimenting with them.

As all play, experimental art has the capacity to institutionalize into something widely appreciated. What was ridiculed yesterday, can sometimes become a given the next day. Seriousness is sometimes the only aspect separating urban design from art. For the sake of playfulness, creativity and vibrant urban spaces this border will hopefully be blurred in the future.

If we are to consider that not *every* aspect or product of urban design has to have utility value more than the enjoyment of the user then suddenly we see our design opportunities increase wildly.

To say that fun and play is a basic human need is not to ignore other basic human needs. It is possible to design for play without punishing the provision of basic infrastructure, for example. Instead of expensive material interventions, extending a simple invitation for play is often enough.

Case: European City-Beaches

An interesting phenomenon that has been emerging in some European cities is the city-beach. What began as an experiment at Strandbar Mitte in Berlin has now become a set of beaches along the river Spree. These beaches have become institutionalized to the point where they are seen as a inseparable part of the city. The quirk has now also spread at least to Paris and Amsterdam and does not seem to be leaving anytime soon.

Interestingly, the beaches are not primarily about swimming but rather about all the other things one associates with beaches. They provide a relaxed atmosphere, fun activities and refreshments. Temporariness is a major feature of the beaches, the furniture are usually as loose as the sand beneath peoples feet and come winter, everything is taken away.

Stevens & Ambler (2007) label the city-beach phenomena as a form of post-fordist placemaking. The adaptability of the designs, as well as the focus on "soft" content, programme, themes, atmosphere, is a stark contrast to the inflexible built form. These characteristics, according to the authors, enables rapid innovation. It makes it possible for the spaces to conform quickly to the users needs.

The beaches in all of the three capitals cities emerged as temporary uses for areas where major reinvestment projects were lacking. The projects, largely driven by entrepreneurs in collaboration with a wide array of authorities, have been adept at taking advantage of the short warm season by keeping their materials flexible and their costs low. They also make sure to tempt people with a varying and interesting programme (Stevens & Ambler 2007).

Interestingly, as far as the author is aware, there has been no new development plans for the areas in question. This unexpected "permanence" of the sites yet again points in the direction of a playful and experimental situation that is moving towards institutionalization. Perhaps, in a few years to come, the urban beaches have become so integral to the cities in question that they will be fiercely protected against redevelopment.

Soft content and temporality, as illustrated by Stevens & Ambler's study on city beaches (2007), can be strong factors in the success of a public space.

Paris Plage (Photo: Wikimedia)

Case: Lundakarneval

What is a temporary occasion that requires a good year of planning and work? That involves thousands of voluntary workers who work for weeks without any other salary than the reward of participation? That requires collaboration of people with artistic and technical expertise and that changes an entire city into a landscape of happiness.

Such an event is Lundakarneval, a festival held every fourth year in the city of Lund, Sweden. With roughly 5000 voluntary workers it (Lundkarnevalen 2014) is one of world's largest voluntary-driven festivals and truly a game changer for the city.

During one week, the festivities bring roughly 400 000 visitors (Lundkarnevalen 2014) to a city around 100 000 inhabitants. Even if the festival is clearly a student organized event, status, age and occupation suddenly lose importance in the city. Things are turned on their heads for the sake of merriment as the most formal & academic part of the city, the old park of Lundagård, goes into a craze.

What happens outside the slightly exclusive festival area of Lundagård is even more interesting from the perspective of play. People sit in places previously unsat-on. Every street in the centre of town is taken over by pedestrians and one is more likely to encounter a smile than during any other occasion.

Events such as Lundakarneval are, in my opinion, an urban design question. In many ways they bring out the kind of city we dream of. The carneval-city is more equal, pedestrian friendly, and happy. What is interesting is that, aside from some externalities, it doesnt actually cost anything to the city. The event is purely student-driven and, in addition to drawing thousands of people from outside Lund to the city, also occasionally reaps a profit which goes towards improving the student life of the city. People are willing to work for achieving a good carneval with the mere compensation of free participation.

The considerations on the separation of play and the example of Lundakarneval tell us that play situations do not have to be separated, as is the norm in design thinking, only by spatial means. We realize that an installation, a temporary change in rules, or a sudden musical backdrop can create a playful twist on any ordinary situation.

Spirit of The Carneval (Photo: Gunnar Menander, coutesy of Lund University)

Urban play is communicated - signaling play and being the example

Given that it is possible to disagree with most things I have said about the role of the designer in relation to urban play, I would still think that most designers would agree that they carry a responsibility for communicating playfulness in those urban spaces where playfulness is due. Whether that is a single playground or the entirety of a city's public spaces is another question.

Urban design is a practice that is much about communication. It is a language centered around form and reflects our varying priorities. If playfulness is not a part of this language, then we truly are losing something. After all, what would our language be like without word-play, jokes or humour.

If playful spaces are on the agenda of the planner/designer, then it has to be acknowledged that play doesn't always happen automatically. As Jan Gehl gospels about extending the invitation to pedestrians (2010), playful designers have to consider the possibility that an invitation has to be extended for play. What this invitation looks like is the interesting challenge.

In the material world one can work with contrasts, unusual colors, forms and textures. Sounds and smells can also inform people that they are entering a place where play is A-OK. However, due to the fact that seriousness is so ingrained in our collective consciousness we sometimes need an inspiration, or a brave leader in order to take that leap. In terms of playful design the challenge can sometimes be to foster a separate culture of friendliness and open-mindedness. Too often we have to feel afraid of judgment and hostility in public spaces. It is crucial to remember that much of our play involves an interaction between people, not just an interaction between a person and an object.

Spelling It Out - Play Me I'm Yours (Photo: Wikimedia)

Case: Antanas Mockus – Ex-Mayor of Bogotá

The Colombian capital has become somewhat of a celebrity in the field of urban planning for its progressive policies. The city has in the past two decades come a long way from its dystopian history of inequality and drug wars.

In the case of Bogotá there is no undermining the legacy of two charismatic mayors: Enrique Penalosa and Antanas Mockus. During their respective periods in office between 1995 and 2007 they focused on reasserting the citizens right to the city by focusing on *lo publico* (the public). They believed that the key to the metamorphosis of the city lies in the material structuring of the city and the ways in which its inhabitants might relearn how to relate to each other (Berney 2011). Their novel approach was later labeled by Rachel Berney (2011) as pedagogical urbanism.

Antanas Mockus's efforts are often overshadowed by the megaprojects that were carried out under the leadership of Penalosa as his methods were on a much smaller scale. Mockus focused his efforts on directing behaviour through example and humour. The man would dress up as a supercitizen and shamelessly show people what is possible in public space and what is expected of them.

Mockus also came up with the idea of hiring a horde of mimes in the city for a period of time to make fun of traffic violators. This initiative was based on his belief that Colombians fear ridicule more than being fined (Marsh 2013).

His eccentric approach which proactively questioned the current state of the city was so popular that he managed on one occasion to get 69,000 people to pay a voluntary tax. In fact, during his tenure he managed to bring the city's tax revenues to a level triple of that in 1990 (Caballero 2014).

Mockus's unconventional policies managed to promote a spirit of humorous playfulness in Bogotá. This ethos of experimantion, often ignored by research and media, was possibly a factor in the city reinventing itself. The city was in need of a bottom up restructuring, to which Mockus invited the people through pedagogic example. The successes that we are seeing now are perhaps the institutionalized versions of play situations. In Bogotá, paidia has turned into ludus.

Mockus's traffic mimes at work (Photo: Office Of Antanas Mockus)

Case: Giant Patchwork Quilt – Helsinki

On the first of October 2011 a giant patchwork quilt was spread on the stairs of Helsinki cathedral. 35x60 meters in size, the quilt surpassed the previous Guinness world record by a clear margin (Novita 2011).

A project led by the Martta-organization, Novita OY and the Association Of Crafts Teachers, the blankets were to be gifted to families with babies afterwards. The stunt's official purposes were also to educate young Finns in traditional handicrafts as well as to promote sense of community (Novita 2011).

Such a record-breaking stunt can easily be considered a waste of time and money. But it sends a clear message: do not take this space too seriously. The most prominent, beautiful and daunting building in Helsinki commands respect and sitting on its stairs can make you feel somewhat misplaced. Placing a giant patchwork rug on the stairs signals to the passerby that he or she is welcome to stay and sit. The beautiful artpiece in all of its playfulness suddenly serves the functional purpose of reappropriating a space that is otherwise too daunting.

The equivalent of putting on a funny hat – the play-signal of the quilt was an invitation to come an experiment with a space that usually is relatively immune to change. A healthy thing to do for any city wishing to explore the full potential of their urban spaces.

Isoäidinneliöillä maailman suurin tilkkupeitto - The world's largest quilt with grandma's squares – 2011

4. playful lens

Hieatalahti Square – Helsinki
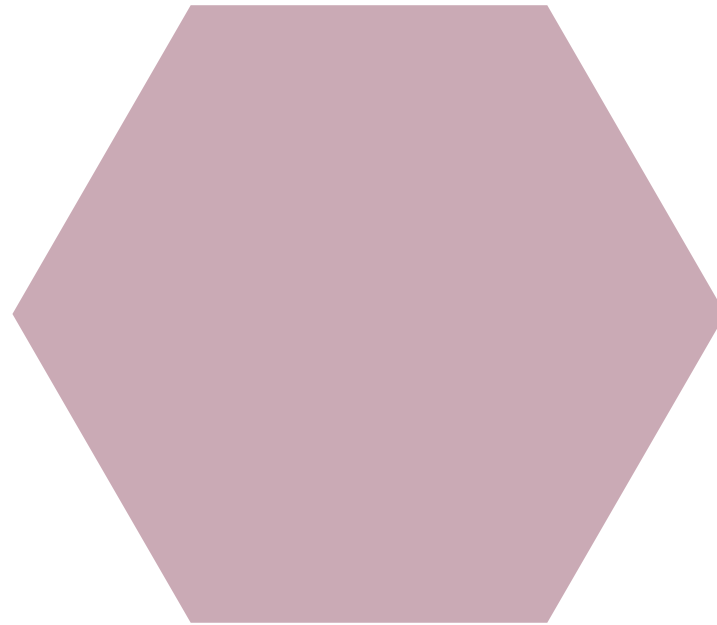
Towards a new design methodology – The playful lens

At this point this thesis has asserted that playfulness is emerging in the field of urban design. It has questioned the simplistic and instrumental understandings of play and highlighted its significance for our social life and urban environments. Turning to design it has presented the reader with visions of what playful urban design might look like. Many of these visions can be considered unconventional as they include diverse actors as well as qualities of temporality and immateriality.

In order to increase the practicality of claims put forward by the thesis I feel it necessary to summarize those issues that seem to be important for playfulness in our urban enviornments:

Separation By Spatial Character

This paper claims that play is best understood by contrasting it. For us to understand the value of play it is necessary to juxtapose it with seriousness, instrumentality and the ordinary. Play is valuable as a refreshing change from what we know as the usual. Without the disruptive and centrifugal properties of play our lives would perhaps be void of change and creativity.

In the realm of urban design there are many ways to create environments that are separate from the ordinary. A good way is to think in contrasts. In a dense environment, we appreciate an open space. In inflexble surroundings we appreciate being able to have adaptable places. After a noisy streetscape we feel good in a calm landscape. If there is few inhabitants in an area, a meeting place won't do much for us.

Similar contrast-thinking can apply to smaller design choices such as material or color. A change in the materiality of a space can have a big impact on its playfulness.

Separation By Rules

A space that is governed by out-of-the-ordinary rules seems to be more likely to attract a playful crowd. In a park it is not just the greenery that attracts people but also the more lenient rules.

Separation from the rules of everyday life can help create "safe spaces" where experimentation and creativity is made easier as fear of judgment is lessened and the burden of moral considerations is lifted.

Separation By Temporality

Play does not require permanence, a large part of any play-situation is acknowledging that it will ultimately end. Temporary design has many strengths in contemporary society where adaptability to rapidly changing needs is a virtue. Embracing temporality in design is to embrace multifunctionality and flexibility. Our cities are full of underutilized spaces that could be used for playful purposes during interim periods between developments.

Designing environments that can be changed at a whim encourages experimentation. Such environments include the city-beaches described earlier and the immaterial spaces created by events. This kind of "soft content" is the opposite of rigid inflexible form that dominates our cities.

Non-instrumentality

If one is to pursue playful public spaces it is worth noting that play does not conform well with instrumentality. Harnessing play for other ends than the enjoyment of the act itself can be very difficult. Since play is voluntary, it has to be intrinsically motivating.

Consciously leaving areas open in terms of functionality or utility is not shameful. The needs of contemporary urbanites are so varied that it is necessary to provide open-endedness. Some cities have seen the value of providing free WIFI, an open-ended amenity, even if most people would use it for apparently unproductive purposes. In my eyes this is one way of moving towards unconditional and non-instrumental public spaces.

It is important to admit that fun and play is a social need and worthy of the attention of urban designers. As argued by the likes of Richard Florida (2001), playful and creative cities can be extremely attractive places to live in.

Invitation/Communication

Playful environments are so rare in our cities that they do not need to yell to be noticed. Hostile design and defensive architecture (fences, spikes etc.) needs to be kept to a minimum in places that aim to be playful. Parks signal their playful park-ness with the unsual sight of abundant greenery, but other spaces that aim to incorporate play may need to be able to communicate it by other means. Part of the invitation to play is related to sensory cues such as unique materials, sounds, colors & textures. The other part relates to actually inviting people to play by arranging activities or just by being an encouraging example.

. . . .

It is clear that there is significant overlap between the different dimensions of the playful lens. This is not necessarily a problem since it highlights the interrelationship of the many factors that contribute to playfulness.

The above summary is a condensed understanding of how play relates to urban design, a simplified lens, through which it is possible to analyze the urban fabric. This lens should be treated for what it is, an abstract construction, not a checklist. Ticking a single box, or all of them, does not guarantee a playful urban space, it is up to the people to do that and oftentimes it is up to the designer to relinquish some power to them. As can be seen from previous examples of playful urbanism, playfulness is rarely a result of deterministic design.

Nonetheless, the lens is meant to help the designer in the current state of affairs where they are the ones often left with the responsibility for the way our urban environments are organized.

The simplified view of the lens is not constructed in ignorance of the vast complexity of play and social life but in acceptance of the reality of design and planning where time is often of the essence. Since the 5 dimensions of the lens are issues that are widely ignored in contemporary urban design, I argue that even working with just one of them can help in creating more playful urban spaces

Mårtenstorget, Lund

Mårtenstorget, Lund: Applying the playful lens

Approaching the end of the thesis it is appropriate to test how the analytical toolbox that has been put forward could work in a real life situation. This chapter will test the playful lens on a more detailed level. Here we zoom our view further. Landing under the magnifying glass is the public square of Mårtenstorget in Lund, Sweden.

The square is reflected separately against each dimension of the lens, identifying problems and potentials.

Due to time constraints, the following assessment is not a deep insight, but remains on a relatively superficial level. Understanding the status of the square would naturally require more devoted time for investigating the socio-cultural and material context.

During my time living in Lund the square of Mårtenstorget has always mystified me. Located in the southeastern parts of the city-core it is central enough to attract a good amount of people. It also boasts a number of attractions, such as the Saluhall (market-hall), the daytime markets, the Konsthall (public art museum), as well as a number cafes and stores. Nonetheless, most of the time the square remains either relatively empty or full of cars.

The relative emptiness of the square is exacerbated by the sheer size of the space. Being one of the largest market squares in Sweden (Bengtsson 2002), the space is surprisingly big for a city of roughly 82,000 inhabitants.

To me, Mårtenstorget it is an extremely underutilized space that has the potential to be one of the top "playgrounds" of the city. The space does not necessarily need more "utility" (one could say its extremely useful for car-owners) but needs to tempt people by other means.

Mårtenstorget distinguishes itself from its surroundings mainly by its visual openness. A quality that is appreciated in the midst of the old, narrow and winding streets of Lund. It is not uncommon to see sunbathers on the northern edge of the square, enjoying the unobstructed access to sunshine.

Being a medieval town, Lund has a relative abundance of squares. Mårtenstorget happens to be located in the vicinity of the most central square, Stortorget, which has developed more of a living room status. Perhaps the need for an enjoyable public space isn't considered so dire because of this.

Materially the square does not noticeably separate itself from the urban form. Dominated by hard surfaces of stone and concrete it is a continuation of a stereotypical, unforgiving, hard and inflexible urban materiality. Two double rows of trees make for a refreshing change but are lost in the vast scale of the square. The same happens to a tiny water-fountain that is barely visible from a distance.

Spatial separation could be encouraged by emplyoing a variety of materials. Wood, stone and gravel would all give a distinct character to the area. Or, alternatively, would anything be lost by designing islands of vegetation to the square? The use of more "soft" and flexible materials would contribute to an oasis-sensation, a feeling of separation from the hard reality of the urban.

Contrasting visual openness on street level

google maps

Vegetation – Contrasting Materiality

google maps

An epitome of visual openness - Mårtenstorget

The square of Mårtenstorget is unique in Lund in terms of rules. During weekdays it is a world apart as anyone is allowed to rent a space of the square to sell goods. It is an exception to the law of order in Sweden that prohibits people from selling goods in zoned public space.

During market hours the area is markedly vibrant with its temporary stalls and scurrying pedestrians. After the market closes at 14:00 the square turns into a parking lot, a de facto part of the street network. At this time it becomes an area where traffic rules apply, rules that disencourage any activity on the square (if not inside the cars).

The much loved market is a good example of the power of separation by rules. The smallest of exemptions for what can be done in normal public spaces makes for a more lively square during the market. Similarly, the exemption to the generally strict parking rules in the city makes the evening-parking makes the square a popular place to leave your car. However, the car-centric rules make it so that pedestrians have no business on Mårtenstorget the majority of the time.

It is completely possible to liberalize the current policies of who gets to use the square when in support of a more playful square. If spaces are designated for selling, why not for performances, speeches, art, or barbequeing?

A more lenient bring-your-own-culture, for example, would allow for indoor-enclosed high-rise urban lives to spill out onto the square. Such a space is what many people dream public spaces could be, the spaces outside our home where one can be free. In order for a public space to be playful, and truly open, it needs a set of rules that is different from the constricting ones that are dominant in most of our public spaces (e.g. traffic rules).

Rules of traffic - Incompatible with play

Separation By Temporality

The uses and appearances of Mårtenstorget change daily and with the seasons. Every weekday and Saturday a small but delightful market pops up on the square, turning it into a peoples place. However, the square is programmed in a way that a normal Lundian will see changes mostly in the amount of cars parked.

On an ordinary day there are two or three food-trucks parked on the eastern side of the square reminding us that temporary use of the square is possible. On warmer days the cafes and restaurants bring their tables and chairs to designated outdoor patios for their customers. These brave entrepreneurs have spent vast amounts of time and money to acquire rights to the square. Many people use and love this kind of temporary interventions but lack the ability to do the same themselves. The normal person does not have the money, time or patience.

Events other than the market are so rare on the square thay they are almost insignificant for a single individual. More frequent and well designed events could completely change the relevance of the square for the city. If the city's resources are stretched thin, maybe it would be possible to encourage entrepreneurial initiatives on the square. The current administrative process of arranging events through the municipality's channels and employees could certainly be made easier. A truly public square could perhaps be rented out through a web-portal or something of the like.

Temporary, lightweight interventions similar to the aforementioned city-beaches could help fill in some of the idle times and parts of the square. Experimental and playful interventions need a time and space in the city.

As mentioned earlier, the play-experience is all that counts for the player. If you consider Mårtenstorget a game that one spends a saturday evening playing, then it needs to be exceptionally fun for one to leave the comforts of the home for it. The "meeting place" function that people often connect to such public spaces will not be fulfilled if that function is not fun enough.

Cafés and shops around the square have a clear motivation to attract customers and keep them coming. The municipality on the other hand does not. In Mårtenstorget, it have provided some basic infrastructure such as benches, rubbish bins, pay toilets, rentable bikes and installed some public art. These could be seen as a means affect the "user experience" of the square for pedestrians and patrons. This experience could be improved by providing other elements, such as free public toilets, WIFI, and electrical outlets. Though they do not have any obvious direct economic benefits to the city, as they would on the local businesses, they will likely have a positive impact on the popularity of a space, brand of a city, and quality of life of residents and visitors.

Even if the city isn't able to invest heavily into the enjoyment of people in public spaces, it should let people fill in the gaps where its resources can't reach.

In terms of functionality the square moves between two extremes: one where the strict function of parking excludes all other uses and one where the extreme emptiness of the square paralyzes and intimidates. As discussed earlier, inflexible and excluding functions are not what we need in our cities. However, the opposite is not great either. Even though openness can be good for creativity and play, a blank sheet is daunting. Sometimes people need some sort of generative tools and encouragement to play. A completely open square would perhaps need sparks of action and small interventions to inspire future uses.

Temporary art installation could take over parts of the square from time-to-time. Events, challenges and competitions could be held in order to gain visions of a future square. These kind of interventions could foster a playful and experimental atmosphere with no significant costs for the city.

Non-instrumental amenities

Invitation

In Mårtenstorget there is not much in terms of the playful invitation. The dominance of parking contributes to a generally hostile atmosphere towards the pedestrian.

In a bigger, or more liberal, city you would expect small performances on a square like this. Perhaps a musician or a juggler making their living by entertaining, by providing people's lives with some added value of play. They would tempt the visitors with a playful invitation to observe whats going on. There is an absence of these activities today in Mårtenstorget.

Small abstract art-installations in the northwestern corner of the square attract a small amount of curiosity, especially amongst children. A water fountain, giving the impression of a broken water pipe, is an extremely small but interesting touch that invites you to come closer and see whats going on.

One child wants go walk through the water spouts, perhaps to test their wetness, but her father makes sure she doesnt go near. Water, such an unusual element in some cities, has the same mezmerizing power as a fireplace. It is a delightful contrast in hard urban environments and invites you stare and touch.

Water Fountain at Mårtenstorget (wikimedia)
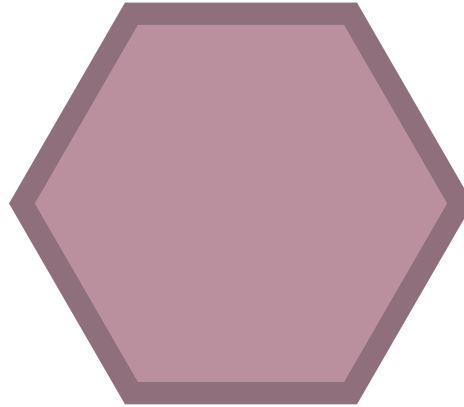
Play-issues at Mårtenstorget | *Play-potential at Mårtenstorget*

- Most of the time, the square is empty or filled with cars, meaning that it is either dangerous or a daunting blank sheet to pedestrians.
- No significant material contrast. All textures and surfaces are like everywhere else in the city: hard and inflexible.
- Most of the time the square stands still.
- In terms of rules, the only difference between the square and the rule-ridden centre of Lund, is the possibility for anyone to hold events and sell goods. However, using the square for entrepreneurial and pioneering purposes is made too difficult.
- Poor user experience with few enjoyable non-instrumental features and generative tools.

- Extremely large open-ended space with a lot of potential for temporary interventions.
- Openness is a remarkable contrast to crammed urban form – giving an oasis-sensation.
- The market is a nice temporal contrast to the static city.
- A platform for multifunctionality and flexible use is set by the marketplace.
- A lot of potential reasons to be in this central area of the city - meaning more potential users.

A proposal: Mårtenstorget urban design festival

Many of the issues with Mårtenstorget are not related to materiality. Thus any conventional design proposal would perhaps have problems addressing all the mentioned problems and potentials. Here in the spirit of playfulness, I propose an unconventional idea that aims to use the idea of the festival, a festivity for its own sake, as a design method. A carnevalistic urban design event could transform the square into a play-situation, a game where the end goal is a more fun Mårtenstorget.

A festival, by its very nature is about putting the existing order of things on their heads. A very fruitful premise for play, a thing that lives on contrasts. I propose a temporary occasion that involves little risk and doesn't need to have large costs. The design festival could be a part of new kind of design process. In this particular part people would have the power.

The idea here is to turn the area into a playground, a safe space of experimentation. Here fun and enjoyment are the priority, but this doesn't mean the event has to be without value to the municipality. Giving relative freedom over the activities on the space can reveal a whole lot about the desires of the citizens. Functions, services and traditions that could never have been anticipated can be formed during such events, serving to fill in the void that is contemporary Mårtenstorget. As mentioned earlier it is not uncommon for play-situations to become institutionalized.

By renting out parts of the square it is possible to tempt entrepreneurial spirits that genuinely seek to please or interest the visitors. By encouraging people to bring their own identities along, the goal is to gain a unique identity that is vastly different from the generic urban fabric, a genuine contrast.

I believe that true insight into playful public spaces, the meeting spaces we long for, can most easily be gained by playfully reframing the square into something where different rules apply – and cordially inviting people into it. Such an event is necessarily instrumental, but it is non-instrumental in the sense that it is mostly generated by the people themselves, through setting their own priorities. As the key to play is intrinsic motivation, then the event needs to be fun first, useful second.

Such an event could:

- Take advantage of all the times that the square is empty by encouraging pioneering and entrepreneurial uses
- Take advantage of underutilized parts of the square by renting spaces for performances, speeches, selling etc..
- Communicate playfulness by encouraging material, rule-related and temporal contrasts to everyday
- Investigate potentials, problems relating to a car free square
- Gain insight into how Lundians want to use the square
- Invest in the "user experience" of the square by providing enjoyable non-instrumental amenities and generative tools such as such as public restrooms, electricity, art and WIFI.
- Take advantage of flexible and temporary materials such as vegetation, sand & loose stones to contrast with hard surrounding and provide affordances
- Encourage the spilling out of identity to the square from surroundings by inviting people to "live" on the square

THE BIGGEST LIVING ROOM ON EARTH

The biggest Living Room On Earth is a challenge to the people of Lund to re-invent the square of Mårtenstorget! It is a week long festival that invites people to come and play outside their homes. We're not talking about only kids here, we welcome everyone to enjoy a public space au naturel, with no strings attached.

WHAT?

The festival removes cars from the square and transforms the area into the realm of the pedestrian. A series of low cost amenities is provided by the municipality such as electricity outlets, WIFI and public restrooms. However, the rest is up to the people. You will be your own entertainment! The municipality encourages visitors to bring their identity along to the square. Furniture, art & food are all welcome.

The square is accessible in its entirety to everyone, however some small spaces (the old parking slots) can be rented out through a web portal for temporary uses. Whether one wants to hold speeches, sell homemade food, display art or perform a show is up to the renter.

WHY?

Even with no costs or entrance fees the city benefits greatly from the event. While the festival is all about fun for its own sake, it will also be a testbed for creative ideas about the future of the square. Since the area is actively used by people only a fraction of the day the festival looks for pioneering solutions that could achieve wider popularity and reoccurence, or relative permanence.

The festival is thus also about closing the gap between the designer and the user. The knowledge gained from the festival will be used in order to design the future of the square. Some of the most memorable and popular features of the festival grounds will gain a protected status at least until the next festival. In contrast to typical participatory approaches the square is being designed as the festival takes place. New uses and structures take shape during the week and new traditions are formed.

Welcome! Join us as the future of Mårtenstorget is being played out!

RULES OF THE GAME

Electricity is provided for your speakers, laptops, lamps and teapots!

Bye cars! Rent your own parking lot for performances, speeches, art, selling stuff, or to guarantee a spot on the square!

Smile! Nobody wants a negative vibe in the living room.

WIFI is provided all over the square so feel free to surf the web-waves!

BYO LIFE

Bring a piece of you with you. Contribute to the living room with furniture, food, music or lifestyle. Diversity is what we aim for!

In conclusion

Play is an elusive part of our lives that has averted the eye of urban scholars for too long. It's linkages to creativity, innovation and learning should awaken the interest of anyone concerned with our living environments. The social significance of play seems to be greater than ever, yet it is still not treated as an important part of not just children's but everyone's life. It should be recognized as a powerfully motivating end in itself and not merely a tool for sugarcoating.

Playfulness seems to exist and thrive as a contrast to the serious and ordinary. In urban design it makes sense to talk about playful public spaces mostly in relation to unplayful ones. What makes a quirky sculpture playful in an empty public space does not have the same effect in a modern art museum.

A designer who wishes to incorporate play into his or her work can do this in a number of ways. Perhaps the most significant impact can be had by breaking free from conventions. Many of the border conditions of play such as temporality go against the traditional logic of the designer. Shifting the emphasis away from the material world, thus avoiding the pitfalls of the aesthetic focus, can be healthy from time to time. It should also be remembered that working together with other disciplines, including the "unserious" kinds, such as fine arts, can yield interesting results.

Even in the material world it is possible to add playful touches here and there. An unconventional choice of material or color can help in creating the separation required by play. In the rather homogenous urban environments of contemporary cities, any environment that differentiates itself from its surroundings is refreshing . However, spatial contrasts will never be enough by themselves. In order to encourage "magic circles" outside our homes we need to consider that we might have a need for spaces with an alternative set of rules. In spite of our organized and rational lives we do also have an appetite for the informal and the unruly.

Instead of playifying or gamifying urban design, that is, putting elements that are considered playful into designs, I propose, in Sebastian Deterding's words, "a playful reframing" of the design situation (2012). If one's goal is to make a playful public space then why not simulate playful situations in it. Instead of aiming for permanence from the get-go, why not experiment first? At worst what you end up with is new ideas and perspectives. At best you end with creative solutions that can institutionalize into irreplaceable symbols of the city.

Urban design can sometimes be very constrained by its conventions. In spite of everything that I have argued for in this thesis, when the time came to produce a purely conceptual and funny visualization of Mårtenstorget, the rationality that is so deeply engrained in my brain took hold again. The end-result was a semi-realistic cookie-cutter visualization that could have been done by any urban designer with a bit of photoshop experience (see next page). The image was neat and tidy, some would perhaps say much "prettier" than the one made for the festival, but it did not really communicate playfulness. Nothing was left up to the imagination, the place was set and finished. I had fallen into the serious-trap.

What I had wanted the image to say was: "Come! Stay for a while and play. Please feel at home. I know this all looks scary and strange, but this is no ordinary place. Here you can do pretty much what you want. Here not everything is as it seems."

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Images

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