

Adults Know What is Best For Children, Do They?; Policy-makers' vs. children's opinion on play areas

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WAGENINGENUR
For quality of life

*It should be noted that children
at play are not merely playing;
Their games should be seen as
their most serious actions.*

Michel de Montaigne
1533-1592

Adults Know What is Best For Children, Do They?;

Policy-makers' vs. children's opinion

on play areas

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PREFACE

As part of the master Landscape Architecture and Planning with the specialisation 'Cultural Geography' at the University of Wageningen this dissertation has been written. The purpose of this research is to gain knowledge about the production of play landscapes for children and the way these affect children's play behaviour and the extent to which children should be involved in the planning process.

Readers who are especially interested in the main findings of this research can read this in chapter 7 Discussion and Conclusion. For additional information about the results chapter 3 to 6 offers deeper information about data that is received from the research methods including the data analyses.

I am very grateful for being given the opportunity to do this research. I would like to thank Hamzah Bin Muzaini from Wageningen University for giving all the support needed to build up this research. I would like to thank the head teachers of the Maliebaan School, Ariensschool, Da Costaschool, and Notenboom School for offering the opportunity for doing my research in the classes 7 and 8 and I would also like to thank the children who have participated in this research in the questionnaire and interviews to build up this thesis.

Wageningen, 24 October 2013

Liesbeth Koen



TABLE OF CONTENT

Preface	5		
Table of Figures	8		
Table of Tables	8		
Summary	9		
1. Introduction	10		
2. Literature review	15		
2.1 Intro	15		
2.2 The Children	15		
2.3 Children's Play	15		
2.4 Play Areas	16		
2.5 Playground	17		
2.5.1 Production	18		
2.5.2 Consumption	21		
2.6 Participation	23		
2.7 Conceptual Framework	25		
3. Case Study	29		
3.1 Policy; Children's play areas in Utrecht	30		
4. Methodology	35		
4.1 Research Design	35		
4.2 Methods of Data Collection	37		
4.3 Data Analyses	39		
4.3.1 Questionnaire	39		
4.3.2 Interviews	41		
4.3.3 Ethnographic Research	44		
4.4 Sampling	45		
4.5 Ethical Issues	48		
		4.6 Limitations	49
		4.7 Reflexivity	49
		5. Analysis Play Areas	51
		6. Analysis Formal Play Areas	59
		6.1 Formal Play Areas	59
		6.1.1 Playgrounds	59
		6.1.2 School Playgrounds	71
		7. Analysis Informal Play Areas	77
		7.1 Informal Play Areas	77
		7.1.1 Green Areas	77
		7.1.2 The Street	81
		7.1.3 Local Shopping Areas	85
		8. Analysis Participation	89
		8.1 Children's Involvement Formal Play areas	89
		8.1.1 Designers of Play Areas	89
		8.1.2 Landscape Changes through Involvement	91
		8.1.3 Earlier Involvement in Planning Process	92
		8.2 Children's Involvement Informal Play Areas	93
		9. Discussion and Conclusion	97
		References	101
		Annex:	107
		Annex 1: Jantje Beton Norm	107
		Annex 2: Questionnaire	107
		Annex 3: Data Analysis of the Questionnaire Results	111

TABLE OF FIGURES & TABLES

Figure 1: 'Children places' in relation to 'places (designed) for children'	22	Figure 29: Spot in Bloesem where supervisor sit, as parents and the supervisor	70
Figure 2: Conceptual Framework Based on Lefebvre's Theory Social Space	26	Figure 30: Abstederdijk, experienced as cosy (gezellig) and is favoured	70
Figure 3: Position of Utrecht in the Netherlands	29	Figure 31: Design of the Da Costaschool and Ariensschool experienced as not	72
Figure 4: Research Design	36	diverse	
Figure 5: Methods of Data Collection	37	Figure 32: Design of the Notenboom School experienced as not diverse	72
Figure 6: Triangulation Methods	38	Figure 33: Selfmade path through bushes	78
Figure 7: Location of the Ariensschool and The Da Costa School	46	Figure 34: Big green are in Wilhelmina park	78
Figure 8: Location of the Notenboom School	46	Figure 35: Local Shopping Area - Smaragdplein	86
Figure 9: Location of the Maliebaan School	47	Figure 36: Local Shopping Area, children hanging around	86
Figure 10: Map of Observed Play Areas	54	Figure 37: Shallow pool - Rijnesteinhof (safety norm for depth)	90
Figure 11: Impression 't Goylaan	56	Figure 38: Simple equipment, movement options limited	90
Figure 12: Impression Hamersplantsoen	56		
Figure 13: Impression Rijnesteinhof	56	Table 1: Characters of the respondents who participated the questionnaire	48
Figure 14: Impression Cruyff Court	56	Table 2: Characters of the respondents who participated the interviews	48
Figure 15: Impression Bloesem	57		
Figure 16: Impression Abstederdijk	57		
Figure 17: Impression Playground in front of the Maliebaan School	57		
Figure 18: Impression Wilhelmina Park - Playground in Park	57		
Figure 19: Fence	60		
Figure 20: Sand Surface in the Formal Playground	60		
Figure 21: Blotenvoetenpad (bare foot path)- Griftpark	60		
Figure 22: Soccer and Basketbal Field - Bloesem	60		
Figure 23: A low climbing frames, experienced as childish	64		
Figure 24: Construction play for smaller children - Bloesem	64		
Figure 25: Opportunities for movement play - Hamersplantsoen	66		
Figure 26: Littered grass field	66		
Figure 27: Fence of the Supervised Playground The Bloesem	68		
Figure 28: Fence of the Supervised Playground The Abstederdijk/ Oost	68		

SUMMARY

In this research the question is asked if adults such as planners and parents do know what is best for children in relation to play areas, through examining the policy document of planners on play areas in the city Utrecht.

It is seen that children experience the formal playgrounds, which are designed for children, as less challenging and too simple. Children primarily base their judgements on the playgrounds close to their homes which are mainly designed for younger children. The bigger playgrounds designed in neighbourhoods are perceived as their favourite playgrounds, however, the distance towards these playgrounds are experienced as (too) far. This causes that children often play in playgrounds that are designed for younger children or they play on the street where they take the conflict with cars for granted.

The planners have also highlighted that they wanted to expand the play facilities for children by opening the school playgrounds after school time, but opening the school playground does not guarantee that children will use these playgrounds. Children experience the school playgrounds as a playground with no attractive play equipment, a longer distance from home compared to other facilities, teachers presence, which they experience as unpleasant because of the rules and the feeling of being at school in their spare time.

In general, the current playground design is based on adult's desires such as ordered, fixed, and uncluttered, to guarantee a safe playing environment, which causes that these places often have no meaning to the children. Children highlight that they prefer more diverse and challenging play environments that are less fixed and offers more risks, as higher equipment and more adventurous. They also refer to a more cluttered play landscape with loose parts to play with and a place where they can hide and create their own play area. Those places often have a special meaning to the children, named as children's places. Currently, children use green areas to have these (mentioned above) play opportunities, which are mentioned and recognised by planners as informal play areas. However, the general perception of adults living in the neighbourhoods and the green

maintenance worker does not always take children play activities in for example green areas into account. Children have to justify their play behaviour in the green areas in parks, for example towards older people passing-by, which is not always experienced as pleasant by children or gives them a feeling of exclusion.

The involvement of children during planning processes of formal play areas is also examined in this research. Since it is perceived that children's needs and preferences are not the main focus and the fact that children generally experience the playgrounds as childish, it would be desirable to involve children in the planning process. It is perceived that a mix between adults' and children's opinions is most desirable, because children still need the permission of their parents to play somewhere. Besides the fact that children are in that case able to have a vote, it is also assumed that it increases children's use of the play areas. The reasons for the increase in children's spatial practice in the play areas are that they would like to equipment, their feeling of pride, and because of the sense of responsibility.

To overcome the fact that places for children, as formal playgrounds, do not meet the needs and preferences of children of the age of 10 to 12, children should be involved. Children's involvement would offer a stimulation to focus more on children's desires in designing and offers a possibility to see children as a citizen, which adds to their well-being in terms of their sense of belonging.

01



1. INTRODUCTION

A small but growing interest of social geographies in research on children is experienced by several geographers, including Matthews & Limb (1999) whom wrote a critical article on the current position of the children and the limited development in social studies about 'children as a neglected social grouping undergoing various forms of socio-spatial marginalization' (1999: 62). Children do not only have received more attention in social studies, but also by organisations as Unicef¹ and in cities all over the world has the concept of child friendliness been introduced which is related to a liveable city² where standards, needs, and rights of children are taken into account.

Besides the limited but growing interest, a shift is taking place wherein children are regarded as a social actor and citizens, with rights. In these social studies children are not seen as little adults or less-than-adults, which indicates that children do not have equal rights compared to adults, but as social actors who are a different group (Valentine, 1997; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Devine, 2002). It is shown in several researches that children and adults have different opinions about aesthetics and preferences, such as for play areas, schools, and streets (Parsons, 1976; Matthews 1995; Humpel *et al.* 2002). Although, I have experienced that there is a long way to go, to change the premise that adults know best in combination with their attitude that children are less capable of participating in urban developments, this social issue has caught my attention and interest in the last couple of years. This has created a challenge for me to illustrate that children are able to show what they want and what they prefer, by giving them tools and a stage to speak. This is done through the examination of children's play and associated spaces, especially the playground. The aim is to exemplify that play areas are contested in relation to children's use and experience, and the way adults attempt to steer and control it.

This discussion involves playing, perceived as having fun in combination with children's development for physical, social, and cognitive skills (Matthews, 1995; Herrington & Studtmann, 1998; Pellegrini & Smith, 1998; Barbour, 1999; Sallis *et al.* 2000; Tranter & Pawson, 2001; Pate *et al.* 2006; Ellaway *et al.* 2007; and Yantzi *et al.* 2010). Landscapes that are often examined in social studies while debating this subject are

formal and informal play landscapes. The formal play areas include school playgrounds (Thomson, 2005), the public playground (Hayward *et al.* 1974, Ferré *et al.* 2006) and the informal play areas include the street (Thomson and Philo, 2004; Veitch *et al.* 2006; Veitch *et al.* 2008), and green areas (Fjortoft, 2000). In this study the main focus is on the public playground, as a landscape which offers opportunities for functions like fun, social interactions, education, skill development, and political ideology. However, these places can also be interpreted as landscapes by which children are steered in order to keep children away from adult's activities instead of the general adults' perception as a place for the benefit of the children and their safety' (Thomson, 2005).

The production of playgrounds is mainly done by work of planners, the structure (Giddens, 1979; Lefebvre, 1991), who steer and control the designs of the formal playground (institutionalised places), through hegemonic planning (Gesler, 1992). This generally results in a traditional playground design that meets the desires of adults as fixed playground equipment (like a slide) and controlled and ordered landscape (Hayward *et al.* 1974; Brown & Burger, 1984; Francis, 1988; Hart, 1992; Matthews, 1995; Valentine, 1997; Barbour, 1999; Rasmussen, 2004; Thomson, 2005; Roe, 2006; Veitch *et al.* 2006).

On the other side is the consumption of the children, the agency (Giddens, 1979; Lefebvre, 1991), who has the power to reject (as work) the formal playgrounds (Foucault 1980) and also have the opportunity use (spatial practice) informal play areas that offers loose parts, more cluttered landscape, and diversity. It is argued that children have different preferences and needs compared to adults (Hayward *et al.* 1974; Fjortoft, 2000; Kong, 2000; Evans, 2006) whereby children are searching for challenge, complexity, and novelty (Callecod; 1974) and risk taking (Rasmussen, 2004; Ferré *et al.* 2006) and adults try to minimize the risk-taking of children in play landscapes (Francis, 1988; Matthews, 1995; Roe, 2006). Therefore the main problem is that the production of play areas for children and children's consumption of play areas are not aligned. It is believed that adults should stop thinking for children and should see the children as a citizen and social actor and start participating with them, which is children's right (Francis, 1988; Hart, 1992; Devine, 2002; Holt, 2004; Jans, 2004). Commonly, children are not involved in decision-making, neither for

1 <http://childfriendlycities.org/overview/what-is-a-child-friendly-city/>

2 <http://wildsingaporenews.blogspot.nl/2010/07/want-liveable-city-make-it-child.html>



1. INTRODUCTION

places for children (play areas) because adults think they know what is best and that children are less capable of participating in decision-making (Rasmussen, 2004; Knowles-Yanes, 2005). Given that the playgrounds currently do not offer the preferences and needs of children it is assumed desirable that children have a voice to create playgrounds that are more child-centred, which can lead to more physical practice and adds to children's well-being (Hart, 1992) and their feeling of belonging instead of a feeling of exclusion in an adults' designed world (Matthews, 1995).

Currently the design of play areas in the Netherlands is created by planners without children's involvement and generally results in traditional playgrounds with fixed play equipment as seesaw, slide, and swing etc. Generally, the locations and size are based on the Jantje Beton Norm which indicates small playgrounds for younger children close to the homes and bigger playgrounds for older children on central points in neighbourhoods.

Given, that the amount of children who are becoming obese is growing (Wang & Lobstein, 2006; Sallis & Glanz, 2006), in the Netherlands, it can therefore be questioned if the full control of adults as planners about 'places for children' is desired and if it will be essential to give more power to the children during the planning process.

Utrecht is the Dutch city where this research is done. Utrecht has a new policy since 2009 called 'Geef Jeugd de Ruimte!' (Give Space to the Youth) in which they mention that they want to create and expand the play environment for children through cooperation with children. This gives the opportunity to ask children their opinion about their experiences in relation to the expanded play areas and the level of involvement. Furthermore, it is argued that Utrecht is a positive exception compared to other big cities in the Netherlands with regard to the child-friendliness

based on statistical social data. This makes Utrecht an interesting city to examine and to discover if this opinion is also shared by the children who are living in Utrecht. This all leads us to the main research question of this research:

To what extent do the objectives about play areas for children, of the age of 10 to 12, of the planners of Utrecht fit the needs and preference of the children aged 10 to 12 living in Utrecht?

Sub Research Questions;

- *What are the main objectives of the policy documents about play areas in Utrecht?*
- *What are children, living in Utrecht, their needs and preferences for a play area and do they coincide with the policy document?*
- *To what extent should children be involved in the development of play areas?*

This thesis starts with a review of the related literature, Chapter 1, which discusses the empirical researches and scientific objectives that are related to children's play, play areas as formal and informal, the production and consumption of the playgrounds and children involvement in the planning process. In last section of Chapter 1, the Conceptual Framework is explained. In Chapter 2, the Case study of Utrecht is discussed including the objectives of planners about play areas. The methodology of this research and the related methods for the data collection are discussed in chapter 3. Chapter 4 contains the analysis of the play areas in general and chapter 5 and 6 focus on the analysis of the formal and informal play areas. In chapter 7, the participation of children in the planning process of play areas is analysed and in the last chapter, chapter 8, the conclusion is given and the main findings are discussed.

02



2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Intro

Multiple concepts and theories are elaborated in this chapter to provide the foundation for this research. Since the main topic of this research is children's play areas, the concept of children is firstly discussed from a social scientific point of view, where it is argued that children are generally perceived by adults as little adults (to be directed in their development) rather than different social actors than adults, which would have enabled the understanding of children's needs in the present instead of just their futures, and gives rise to the discussion in the next section that the preferences of children in relation to play behaviour are not merely means to enhance the children's physical, social and cognitive skills. With respect to play areas, the conception of adults as planners leads to the distinction of 'places for children' and 'children's places', where the former refers to formal spaces of play as designed, steered and controlled by planners and the municipality based on what they think is good for children. The latter (children's places) refers to spaces of play that children prefer which are often less controlled or sometimes even noticed by adults. The discussion in this chapter then continues with a focus on play landscapes designed by adults for children, focusing particularly on their production and its' consumption. In this section, the playgrounds – as informed by theories drawn from the works of Lefebvre, Giddens and Foucault – are highlighted as contested landscapes that reflect a mismatch between what children want and preferences of adults based on the premise that they know what is best for children. The section participation focusses on the benefits for children's development as well as the benefits for the municipality if children were more involved in the planning process of play areas. Finally, the conceptual framework is elaborated based on Lefebvre's theory, the production of space. Throughout the chapter, gaps in the literature are highlighted that this research plugs into.

2.2 The Children

In last decades, interest for doing research towards children has grown among social scientists, Holloway & Valentine (2000) argue that this can be understood by changes in the way children have been approached. In the past, children were approached as subjects who still have to reach biological and social maturity (also seen as small or 'miniature adults' [Aries 1996, quoted in Holloway & Valentine, 2000) which made them less interesting to study compared to adults and adult's practices. In the last 30 to 40 years however, social scientists began to see children in a different light, children are seen as subjects in their own right and the insight that their practices do matter, leading to the growing interest for studying children (Holloway and Valentine 2000). Yet, it may be argued that there still exists a lack of knowledge and a lot of research to do on children within the fields of children's geography, cultural geography, sociology and other social sciences. This research adds to the knowledge about children's social practice playing and their social spaces play areas.

2.3 Children's Play

According to Holloway and Valentine (2000), children's play is perceived as a social practice, which can also be approached from the concept of 'work' by Lefebvre (1991). Work is here perceived as an everyday social practice that produces and transforms landscapes (Mitchell, 1996). Children's play is thus, based on this approach, perceived as not just fun- or children-centred but also contributes towards representations of the material world (Lefebvre, 1991; Mitchell, 1995; Hanna, *et al.* 2004) as play areas.

Besides play as work, this study also refers to play as a set of activities with spontaneity in physical, social, cognitive functioning, manifest joy, and sense of humour (Lieberman, 1966). Although this definition is one of the first formulated definitions of the social practice play, many scientists as Hayward *et al.* (1974), Matthews (1995), Herrington & Studtmann (1998) and Yantzi *et al.* (2010) agree upon this definition based on their

research that recognises the physical, social and cognitive functioning during play.

Several researches have been done on playing to identify play types. According to Lieberman (1966), play can be categorized in four different play behaviours: as exploratory¹, variation-seeking², competence³, and copying behaviour⁴. This research, however, specifically adopts the division of play types given by Pellegrini & Smith (1998), where the following three types can cover the majority of playing behaviour: locomotor play, fantasy play, and construction play. 'Locomotor play' relates to play behaviour that is mainly a physical activity such as climbing, running, jumping, etc. Also team games such as football are included in locomotor play. The second type, 'fantasy play', refers to children who use, during their play, their imagination and fantasy for role play like copying the adult world and playing, for example, teacher and school kid (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998). Thirdly, 'construction play' is explained as playing behaviour whereby children are building and using several elements as sand, wood, stones, water, or blocks, etc. to construct something. Furthermore, those three play type are also closely related to the concepts in definition of play in which the physical developments are recognised in the play type locomotor play, the social developments in fantasia play, and cognitive developments in construction play.

2.4 Play Areas

The play types mentioned in the last section take place in multiple landscapes, those landscapes can also be transformed by children's work through playing and gives a different purpose to a planner's design. This concept landscape refers to the combination of physical features and the imprint of human occupation, the

1 Exploratory refer to exploring environment and body.

2 Variation-seeking refer to looking for new or different challenges.

3 Competences were children are searching for new challenge to develop themselves.

4 Coping behaviour that refer to child who copy behaviour they have seen this can be from adults but as well as of peers.

result of an ever-changing interplay between human activity and the physical environment (Gesler, 1992: 736). As argued by Lefebvre (1991: 26) space is a social product. Mitchell (1996: 6) elaborated on Lefebvre's theory that 'landscape is a 'work' – a work of art, and worked land, in which landscape is an always transforming product through changing human activities, meaning of spaces, and physical resources. Lefebvre (1991: 26) perceives landscape as not natural at all but as socially constructed. 'It is a produced space. In the most general terms it is part of the 'human conditions' that we continually produce and transform landscapes.'

Based on above discussion, the landscapes as play areas have become play areas because of the human occupation. Play areas are created by the work of planners through designing physical resources including the results of hegemonic processes (Hanna, et al. 2004) for desired play behaviour. Play areas are also influenced by the work of the actors on the ground as children, parents, and teachers through their own conduct. These concepts and relations are discussed wider in a later section, conceptual framework, based on Lefebvre's (1991) theory the production of space.

Research done about children's play and play areas within the social sciences commonly divides them into two different kinds of landscapes: the formal and the informal (Rasmussen, 2004). The formal play areas are defined as institutionalised places that are steered and controlled by adults not only physically but also with the intention of steering and controlling children's play behaviour, thinking about places as school yards and recreational places as playgrounds and parks (Rasmussen, 2004). On the other hand, the informal play areas refer to places that are created by the children themselves and are less controlled or steered by adults. Those spaces are often unnoticed by adults, such as children's paths and places in long grass that are high in enough for children to hide in (Roe, 2006). Informal play areas mentioned in other researches are play areas as the street (Noschis, 1992), near shops (Matthews, 1995), the bushes (Fjortoft, 2000), gardens (Veitch et al. 2006), and natural areas (Fjortoft, 2000). Those informal play areas are on the first place not designed for children to play in and are generally designed for different purposes, as for cars, shopping

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

activities or for aesthetical reasons. The main difference between the two landscapes formal and informal is the level of control and authority (Thomson & Philo, 2004).

Interesting for this research is the differences between the two play area types and why children would choose informal over formal play areas, but before focussing on the play areas, attention is paid to the different opinions and preferences between adults and children. In the Mediterranean cities Ferré *et al.* (2006: 181) studied formal playgrounds in relation to adults' and children's opinion, the results showed that adults prioritise safety and hygiene in the playground compared to children who desire enjoyment and risk. Especially, children's preference risk-taking is often mentioned by scientists as one of the main dilemmas for designing play areas while taking adult's desires into account. Children prefer the challenge (Callecod, 1974) and adults try to protect the children for risks. This contestation is strengthened by the research of Francis (1988), who studied the negotiation between adults' and children's design values, in which adults prefer designs that can be overlooked easily through an orderly design. However on the other hand, children seem to prefer loose parts (e.g. tires, wood, tools, paint, plants, seeds, etc.) that causes a more chaotic and dynamic design (changeable).

Informal places that are often mentioned in researches by children are streets (Veitch *et al.* 2008), school yard (Hume *et al.* 2005), shopping areas (Hume *et al.* 2005), and local grass spaces (Morrow, 2001). The arguments of children for playing on the street are generally more elaborated and are mentioned in researches that examined formal and informal play areas compared to formal play areas as the designed playgrounds.

With the knowledge that a lot of children are playing and even prefer the landscape of the street to play on, which are not designed for children, it is important to get an understanding what children prefer and probability triggers them to play on the street rather than playing on designed play areas.

In addition to this discussion Valentine (1996, 1997) argued in her study about children's outdoor play that parental fear as fear for strangers and traffic also influences the spatial range and the play areas for children a lot. This is also confirmed by other researchers after analysing the arguments of children who play on the street. Many of them are not allowed to go further from home and hence play on the street in front of their homes (Tandy, 1999). Although, a group of children do play on the street because they have no other choice, there also is a group who prefer playing on the street. They perceive the street as a place where something is going on by referring to the people who are passing by (Lieshout & Aarts, 2008) in contrast to formal play areas in which they experience a lack of this. These movements in neighbourhoods attracts children whereas the street functions as a meeting place to meet peers (Tandy, 1999) where you can hang around (Morrow, 2001; Lieshout & Aarts, 2008) in contrast to the formal playgrounds.

It can be assumed that the preference for play area design differ between children and adults through their different desires. Adults prefer a protected and controlled landscape and on the opposite side children are searching for risk-taking, challenge and a meeting place. To gain a deeper understanding of the impact and effects of the different desires and preferences between adults and children there will be focussed on a formal play area, the playground. The formal playground is primarily designed by adults for children (Rasmussen, 2004), which brings us to the core of this research.

2.5 Playgrounds

The formal play area the playground is a play area designed by adults for children, these sites are purposefully built and aimed at attaining specific objectives based on what adults think is best for children. As Yantzi *et al.* (2010: 65) describe, 'playground activities can promote physical and emotional health and social well-being. They elaborate that playgrounds provide opportunities for the developments and maintenances of: fine and gross motor physical skills,

physical stamina, and social interactions'. Furthermore, playgrounds, according to Yantzi *et al.* (2010: 65), 'constitute spaces where children learn to share, work collaboratively, be empathetic to others, and take responsibility for their actions'. Within play behaviour and 'through active trial and error of the children, they also develop cognitive, creative sensory, problem solving and perceptual skills'. In addition to this conception Gagen (Quoted in Yantzi *et al.* 2010: 66) also mentions that playgrounds are also 'learning environments through which children also become aware of and begin producing social identities that circulate through broader social space'. To attain these objectives, playgrounds are thus produced in particular ways so as to not only allow children to develop in ways that adults feel are best but also to ensure that children are able to accept these as natural sites in which the act of play should take place. In the next sections attention is paid to the production of the formal play areas as the playgrounds, followed by children's consumption of these formal play areas and the additional play areas that are consumed and used for play (Lefebvre, 1991).

2.5.1 Production

Before elaborating more on the current production of the playground it is interesting to gain more knowledge about the emergence of playgrounds. As Lefebvre (1991; 116) mentions 'every space has a history and changes through time', it is believed that these changes and signs of history make places the places they have become.

Before the 20th century there were no specific places designed for children. As believed by Iona Opie and Peter Opie (quoted in Blackford, 2004: 230) the creation of the car gave rise to the development of playgrounds. It is argued by Iona Opie and Peter Opie (quoted in Blackford, 2004: 230), that children playing on the street became annoying to adults. The politicians agreed that the situation became unsafe, because children were interfering in adult's places with adult's activities. Those places were designed as spaces surrounded by fences (Blackford, 2004), meant to keep, as Blackford (2004) and Matthews (1995) argue,

the adult's places safe from children. They argue that the priority for designing playground was initially not for the children to have their own safe place to play. The priority was to separate children's activities from adult's activities (traffic) and exclude children for better circumstances in the adult's world (Matthews, 1995).

After the first playgrounds were designed new intentions were created for the playgrounds, during the mid-20th century. In America, the playground became controlled and steered by the American Playground Movement and the Playground Association of America (PAA). As discussed by Stansell (quoted in Blackford, 2004: 230), playgrounds became highly institutionalized places to correct and control children who were on the street or were involved with juvenile crime. The playground became one of the institutionalized places, like schools, where children were taught how to behave in public spaces and in society. At this point in time the municipality and playground associations had, compared to children, way more power. Playgrounds are thus used to attain the objectives of adults and where children did not have much to say.

While continuing on this power relationship between adults and children, there is made use of Giddens' Social Theory (1979), playgrounds can be seen as the result of structural impositions upon children, where the agency of the latter is compromised. These social relationships as power relationships are based on interrelated dichotomies, referring to the dichotomies as structure (planners, policy document) and agency (children). The power relationship is perceived as a top down - bottom up relationship, in which the concept 'structure' is affecting the concept play areas from above, as through policy and the 'agency' from below, as on the ground. This demonstrates the power relationship between the different social actors producing and consuming the landscape, the play area. Giddens (1979: 55) explains the agency as 'a continuous flow of conduct', which is in this research mainly focuses on the conduct of children on the ground. On the other hand, the structure is defined as 'a 'pattern' of social relationships which operate as a system based on rules and resources' (Giddens, 1979: 61). The structure can be understood as the social norms on the ground, for example parents, neighbours and friends

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

but as well as the policy for playgrounds and the rules of behaviour on the ground created by planners and architects in objects. Planners and architects have power by design which refers to the resources. A clear example of this power by design is the fences, as resources, around the playgrounds. Those physical resources are linked to the phenomenon of territoriality by designing spatial manifestations of hegemony (Gesler, 1992; 741), as work of planners on the landscape (Lefebvre, 1991; Mitchell, 1996; Hanna et al. 2004). Hegemony is perceived as framing⁵, whereby planners try to legitimize their expected behaviour. Planners, also perceived as the dominant group, would like to see that their expectations and desires become 'common sense' for the agency, the children (Gesler, 1992). To be able to dominate the conduct of the children (agency) an asymmetry of resources is needed that gives the dominate group (hegemonic group), the planners, the power to affect children's conduct (Giddens, 1979: 100) in where, what and how they play. Those resources, such as the structural component that are used by planners, are seen by Giddens (1979: 91) as 'key one in the treatment of power', referring to power as 'the transformative capacity'⁶ of conduct and as 'domination'⁷ of the structural components which depends upon the utilisation of resources (Giddens, 1979: 92). Those resources can be divided into two structures of domination, namely 'authorisation'⁸, as the power by the authority through the policy documents on the play areas and children's play possibilities and 'allocation'⁹, as property owners or the play equipment that is designed in playgrounds and affect children's behaviour.

In the first designs of playgrounds, the control and steering by design and structure can be recognised by its' fixed play equipment, examples of fixed play equipment are swings, slides, climbing bars, and seesaws. Characteristics of fixed play equipment are that the rules of how to play with it are already created. Besides the rules that are made how to use the equipment, there also is a limitation of movement for children because of the immobility of the equipment. This also causes limited variability for using the equipment in the playground (Ferré et al., 2006). An example of fixed

equipment is the slide; the rules of the slide are to climb the stairs attached to the slide and not the slide itself. The way to go off is via the slide. Almost no variation is possible and adults tell, especially young children, not to climb it the other way around, based on what has been structurally decided. This effects children play behaviour, given that their physical activity is limited and no cognitive stimulation is created. Children are not triggered to think about problem-solving and the play behaviour is mainly focussed on the individual and less on cooperating with peers which is a loss in the design of the fixed equipment. The playgrounds designed with fixed equipment are also called the ordinary playground (Power *et al.* 2005) or traditional playground (Hayward *et al.* 1974). Those traditional playgrounds are characteristic for western playgrounds and are often located in neighbourhoods, in neighbourhood parks, or in the yards of schools (Hayward *et al.* 1974).

However through time, the production of other playground designs, aside from the traditional ones, began to emerge, such as, as Hayward *et al.* (1974) highlight, the contemporary playground¹⁰, and the adventure playground¹¹ to stimulate and promote the social and cognitive skills of children. These differ from each other and from the traditional playgrounds not only in terms of their materials, designs and emplacements but also in the level of control and steering by adults which offers more space for children to discover and develop themselves. The traditional playground, which is explained above, controls children's play behaviour the most by fixed equipment. Like the traditional playground, the contemporary playground is also a playground where the equipment is not possible to move. However, the rules for using the equipment are less rigid. Children should be creative to be able to play with it, such as with a tunnel, which is big and robust and does not tell the children how to use it. Hereby the rules are less prescribed which stimulates children cognitive and social developments by designing a game and by team play. The least controlled and steered playground is the adventure playground, with a design of loose parts, as branches, stones, and sand that are offered to the children. This leads that they are able to construct their own design whereby their cognitive skills are stimulated and they have to design their own rules for their behaviour by working together with peers (Barbour, 1999; Nicholson, 1972).

5 Using physical objects and designs to send messages for certain behaviour

6 Transformative capacity in the conduct of the agency

7 Domination is seen as the main focus upon power as a structural quality

8 Authorisation' refers to capabilities which generate command over persons (Giddens, 1979: 100)

9 Allocations', refers to capabilities which generate command over objects or other material phenomena' (Giddens, 1979: 100)

10 With fixed elements like a wall, tunnel, in combination with sand, tree houses

11 With materials to play and plan and re-plan the area

Other factors that affect the production of formal playgrounds are topics as safety, gender, cultural, and economical issues. Firstly the effects of safety issues are mentioned, in which multiple researches investigated the opinion of adults about children's play and the playground and showed that safety is leading for their desires. All researches showed that adults would like to see a play area as a fixed, ordered, predictable, open and uncluttered landscape, because it is perceived as safer for children (Brown & Burger, 1984; Francis, 1988; Hart, 1992; Matthews, 1995; Valentine, 1997; Barbour, 1999; Rasmussen, 2004; Thomson, 2005; Roe, 2006; Veitch et al. 2006). Safety is for adults the most important factor for judging a playground and remarkable the preference or needs of children are less important factors. This has resulted that commonly designed playgrounds have fixed equipment and are surrounded by a fence (Matthews, 1995) to control children's behaviour (Sibley, 1991). This is all under the guise of child's safety and their well-being (Matthews, 1995; Tandy, 1999; Morrow, 2001; Salvadori, 2001; Rasmussen, 2004).

Secondly, the production of playgrounds is also used to send messages about cultural expectations as gender differences. Children of different sexes, boys and girls, are expected to show different behaviour (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998) in the playground. These expectations per sex are socially constructed by society as gender norms. Socially constructed differences between boys and girls are for example symbolised by the colours blue and pink (Hart, 1992), but also within toys as a ball for boys and a doll for girls (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998), including the expected behaviour from children in their play. Playgrounds are also often produced in the light of what boys and girls are believed by adults to like. For example, it is expected from boys to do more vigorous play compared to girls (Pellegrini & Smith, 1998) which is confirmed by Karsten (2003) that girls show less physical play compared to boys. However, adults also expect from boys to show more vigorous play, as argued by Fargot (1974), adults believe that girls are having more risks during their play. Fargot studied the behaviour of the teachers during the school breaks in which teachers watched the girls more closely compared to the boys, believing that girls are having more risks during play. However, it is not mentioned that girls really have more risks during play. This protection of girls is also found in the comparison of boys and girls

their spatial range¹², in their freedom to explore, and general parental restrictions whereby girls are more obstructed compared to boys in their play behaviour (Fargot, 1974; Valentine, 1997; Matthews & Limb, 1999; Spencer & Woolley 2000; Thomson & Philo, 2004). Based on this knowledge it can be said that differences between boys and girls are expected in their playing behaviour which is reflected in the production of play areas and rules. However, as Fargot (1974) has shown, these stereotypes do not always turn out to be true, which may then lead to a mismatch in terms of what children want and what adults believe they want and what is best for children.

Besides the social message of gender differences, the design of a playground is also used by politicians and planners to show and teach children about their culture by designing play equipment in the shape of specific animals or related figures as clocks, the alphabet or numbers (Goodway & Branta, 2002) to bring children in contact with their culture at a young age in a playful manner. The advantage of using playgrounds for cultural education is that those places generally play a central role in neighbourhoods and are commonly seen as meeting places, especially for children and mothers (Blackford, 2004).

Finally, the production of commercial playgrounds has emerged as discussed by Blackford (2004) who highlights the 'PlayPlace' of McDonald. An interesting conclusion of Blackford is that the commercial sector has created the perception that 'free play' can be purchased by anyone for a small price for fast-food, in which 'free play' refers to the missing gaze of parents. This company has produced a playground that is only accessible via a small tube and then the children are able to play in a cage with tubes and slides which creates the situation that they are free from their parental gaze. The architects of 'PlayPlace' designed this landscape in which children have more power compared to traditional playground because of the small entrance and the missing gaze of parents, which allows children to create their own rules for play and conduct (Blackford: 229). Although, on the other side the physical design of the playground does highly steer and control the behaviour of children through fixed equipment and the cage as enclosure.

¹² The distance they are allowed to go.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The landscape of the playground has developed through time in which the design is affected by several issues as safety, gender, culture, and the commercial as discussed above. However, as this section of the playgrounds started, adults as parents, teachers, and planners often see the playground as children's places in which adults give the interpretation that they know what is best for children. By keeping safety issues in mind in combination with risk-taking, they assume to know what children need for playing that causes that playgrounds are generally designed by planners. Although, knowledge of adults as planners and parents should not be underestimated, Knowles-Yanez (2005) mentions it is not said that adults do not know what is best for children in cases like bed-time, going to school and raising a child. However, it should not be the case that through designs of adults, 'places for children' as the formal playground would not be used because the preferences and needs of children are not included from a child's perspective. To gain more knowledge for this discussion the next section focusses on (the agency) the children and their consumption during play.

2.5.2 Consumption

This section focusses on the ways in which playgrounds are actually consumed by children, particularly in terms of how adults' ideas for what is best for children, as promoted through playgrounds are not always accepted by the children themselves, hence making playgrounds potentially contested spaces. As mentioned above, children's play behaviour is often affected by social norms (rules) as dictated by adults, as planners, parents, and teachers, through the manipulation of formal playgrounds (Giddens, 1979; Devine, 2002). However, as Foucault (1977) highlights power between structure (design and social rules) and the agency (children) is perceived as bi-directional, such that children too have the power to resist (Scott, 2008). Additional to Foucault, Giddens (1979) also highlights in the social theory that the conduct of the agency, as the behaviour of the children, also affects the structure by creating their own informal play areas, such as the street. So the agency is not represented as powerless. Concepts related to the power of the agency are 'conflict', as the struggle between the actors by defining the social practices

(Giddens, 1979: 100), like children can have a conflict with adults who expect them to act differently, and 'contradiction' as an error of the structural principles of system organisation (Giddens, 1979: 100), like landscapes as the parking lots where children can play on with a ball shows a contradiction with the designed structure. This is what potentially may lead to the contested nature of play areas or the end result of these play areas not meeting the demands as set out for them by structural players such as those of the planners. The contradiction can also be interpreted as a form of resistance in the form of practicing certain play behaviour in a space that is not designed for that specific practice. By this explanation about the power of the agency, the landscape becomes a less abstract concept, because it is not just the place where spatial practice takes place and hegemonic designs are applied to steer the agency. But it is also a place, on the ground, where the agency, as the individual (Bevir, 1999; 350), can make decisions for behaving in the way it does and choosing therefore its own space. This formulation of Foucault about power of the agency, as children, is found in children's play behaviour in informal play areas. Children show resistance by choosing their own play area and they have the power to play in these areas, as the street and green areas. Although, power is also reflected in children's moderated use of formal playgrounds, as those places are perceived by children as contested.

This contestation of the landscape, the playground, is also argued by Rasmussen (2004) by creating the distinction between 'places for children' and 'children's places'. By 'places for children' is referred to places that are institutionalized to the extent that architects and planners intend them to be 'special' places for children (Rasmussen, 2004: 157), as work from the planners (Mitchell, 1996). With children's places Rasmussen (2004; 166) means 'the places including places for children to which children are physically connected with, this physical sensation gives children the ability to encode a place with meaning as special emotions arise and knowledge of place is generated', as work by children (Lefebvre, 1991; Mitchell, 1996). This does not mean that playgrounds cannot be children's places but children's places do not have to be per se playgrounds in which children have the power to do so through consumption, as visualised in figure 1 by the overlap of the two circles.

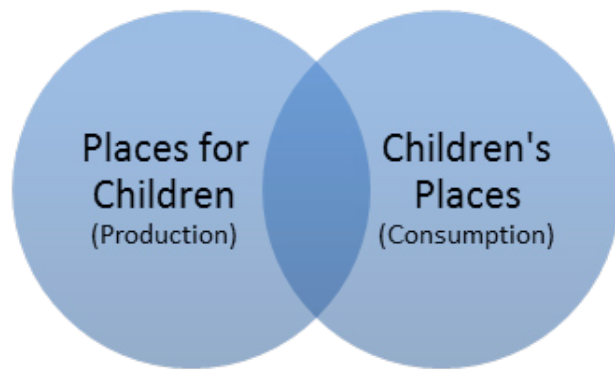


Figure 1: 'Children places' in relation to 'places (designed) for children'

Furthermore, Rasmussen (2004: 166) highlights that 'the concept of children's places is also closely related to the idea of children as actors of their lives. This should lead to respect for the attribution of meaning by children to the specific sites that they pick out, use, create and define'. In this research, more attention is paid to the distinction between 'places for children' and 'children's places' (as space production as a result of social superstructures of society) by focussing on the production of playgrounds and children's consumption (Lefebvre, 1991).

This section continues about places designed for children only from child's perspective, in which it is believed that the design afforded by the traditional playground takes away the challenge for children during their play. As Callecod (1974) highlights, children prefer a certain level of complexity in their play behaviour which is lacking in the traditional playgrounds caused by fixed designs (see also Veitch *et al.* 2006). Roe (2006: 175) also echoes this point when she mentioned that 'children highly valued the areas with potential danger, climbing, potential for observation, out of bounds from parents, and finally areas unmanaged by adults and untidy and wild spaces', which goes against the structured and inflexible ways in which traditional playgrounds have been designed.

Another element of the formal playground that children prefer less is the immobility of its material landscape of the traditional playground design and its' absence of 'loose parts'¹³ as in the way it has been designed. Children tend to prefer 'loose parts' at a playground which would allow them to have more freedom in designing their play area and determining their rules for play (social developments). It is even mentioned that the use of loose parts during play is beneficial for children cognitive development and problem-solving thinking (Yantzi *et al.* 2010). In the adventure playground design, the preferences of children can be recognised based on the loose parts which are offered in the playground (Hayward *et al.* 1974; Barbour, 1999). However this playground type is not the general designed type, the common playground design in Western societies is the traditional playground, which fits the preference of children least (Hayward *et al.* 1974). Yet, this has been seen as the play type based on adults' preferences. Adults prefer an ordered and uncluttered play area with equipment that offers minimal risk-taking (Francis, 1988; Matthews, 1995; Rasmussen, 2004; Roe, 2006). Unfortunately, traditional playgrounds offered by planners, criticised for their low diversity of possible movements and usually bounded to a relative small area (Tandy, 1999; Veitch *et al.* 2006, Holt *et al.*, 2008), are not what children want.

However, as highlighted by Giddens and Foucault children's play cannot be forced to only include the formal playgrounds, by showing resistance children have the opportunity to reject the formal playground in case it is contested and start playing in the informal play areas (Mitchell, 1996) as children's places when their needs or preferences are met there. Children's places that are often studied are mainly the informal play areas as the street and green areas. Children who choose informal play areas as the street above the formal playgrounds highlight the points that they prefer the movements that are taking place on the street. Thomson and Philo (2004) also highlight the elements of 'being able to see' and 'to be seen' as well as 'a place where children can meet their friends'. For children these social factors are important arguments for being and playing on the street (Lieshout, Aarts, 2008) instead of in the playground as well as the material situation whereby loose

¹³ Loose parts e.g. tires, wood, tools, paint, plants, seeds, etc.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

parts and alternative play objects (e.g., tunnels, walls, etc.) that can be found in the street. This offers the opportunity for children to be able to create their own design and their own rules for their play behaviour (Hayward et al. 1974; Barbour, 1999; Nicholson, 1972). Children's behaviour is also less steered and controlled by adults based on the material design in informal play areas as the street. Besides the streets, the green areas (e.g. bushes, trees, grass fields etc.) are also regularly mentioned in studies about children's informal play areas. A similar argument for the preference of children about the street are the loose parts which can also be found in informal play areas as green areas (Fjortoft, 2000), whereas the formal playgrounds generally fail to meet this preference of children in its' design. The contestation of formal playgrounds with children preferences and needs in combination with the increase of children that show sedentary behaviour should make the planners more aware of the importance of children opinions. It is believed that a decrease in the physical activity of children can be found (Reilly *et al.*, 2004), because of playgrounds that are perceived as boring places by children (McKenzie et al. 1997) in combination with the possibilities for inside-play as the computer and television that stimulates the sedentary behaviour of children (Brodersen *et al.*, 2005). Although this increase in sedentary behaviour does not have the priority in this research it is important to recognise the development. On the other hand, the related decrease in the amount of physical activity affected by environmental or social factors has the main attention in this research, this decrease in activity also effects children's well-being and lead inter alia to the social issue obesity. Especially, the last two decades the amount of children who have become obese or have overweight has rapidly grown (Wang & Lobstein, 2006; Sallis & Glanz, 2006). According to Ellaway *et al.* (2007), this is caused by an imbalance between the energy intake and children's energy expenditure as by play. All western societies, including the Netherlands¹⁴, see an increase over the last couple of years in the amount of children whom well-being has become critical (Sallis & Glanz, 2006). Besides concerns about children well-being in relation to their physical activity, it is

14 In the Netherlands, 11% of youngsters between 4 and 20 years have overweight (BMI; body mass index 25 – 30) and 2.5% have obesity (BMI above 30). This numbers can be compared to 80s at that moment of time 7% of the youngsters between 4 and 20 years had overweight (source; CBS).

also argued that children well-being is affected by the feeling of exclusion by adults' designs. The mismatch between adults' and children's perception about children's play and playground design can also lead to 'otherness of children' (Jones, 2000), a feeling of exclusion (Matthews, 1995), and alienation (Beazley, 2000) where children do not feel that they belong or that their needs are being taken care of. This feeling of exclusion by children in an adult constructed world (Matthews, 1995) is confirmed by the signs, with the texts 'No Ball Games', which children have to face on local grass fields and are often placed on request of neighbours, who believe children should not play on or interfere with adults spaces, because they perceive it as annoying or undesirable (Matthews, 1995; Morrow, 2001; Alvarez-Dardet, 2003). In relation to this Hart (1992) also argues that such feelings of non-belonging (linked to the fact that children often perceive themselves to be overprotected and not taken serious) can cause difficulties in the development of children for a competent human being and part of a community on which is further elaborated in the next section about children participation during the planning process of playgrounds.

2.6 Participation

As urban and rural developments take place, children's environments may also be affected, those changes that directly impact upon children's everyday lives give them the right as citizens to participate and be involved in the planning process. However, what is meant by being a citizen and citizenship? As mentioned by Lister (2007), citizenship is more than a term for legal rights; rather, it is argued to be a social process through which individuals and social groups claim, expand or lose their rights. Additionally, Werbner and Yuval-Davis (1997, quoted in Lister (2007)) added how citizenship may be seen as indicators of identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices, and sense of belonging. With respect to children who are often perceived to occupy a lower social positioning compared to adults who are seen as knowing what is best for children, the failure of formal playgrounds (as 'places for children') to meet the needs of children (and become 'children's places') thus may have the effect of inculcating a sense of belonging among children (see

Werbner and Yuval-Davis 1997; Jans 2004). As discussed in the last section about the production and consumption of play areas as the formal playgrounds designed by adults, several mismatches can be perceived. For example, the desires of children for loose play parts and an uncluttered environment clashes at first sight with the desires of adults, who prefer play areas to be uncluttered and ordered. In these situations, Francis and Lorenzo (2002) believe that a pro-active approach to designing play areas (in cooperation with children) may be the way forward. However, before planners and adults are ready to cooperate with children, children should be recognised as social actors and citizens rather than as little versions of adults perceived as less powerful and with less knowledge. Most importantly, adults should avoid the 'they know best' mentality and be further trained in how to interact with children (Hart, 1992; Francis, 1999; Frank, 2006). This does not, however, mean that, as Knowles-Yanez (2005) mentions, adults do not sometimes know what is best for children. Still, there should be an acknowledged separation between topics in which adults do know best, as raising children (school-time, bed-time, safety issues, etc.) and that they cannot always predict or not know what is best for children, as for example designing children everyday environments (Knowles-Yanes, 2005: 12). Hereby, the children should also be given the opportunity to express and identify themselves. When children do not have the identity of a social actor or children's sense of belonging is perceived as less important, children will not be able to participate as a citizen. However, if children are given the ability to give their opinion about institutionalised practices which influences and modify their everyday lives, they can then reject the feeling of alienation and exclusion (Devine, 2002), and can adapt more easily a sense of belonging (Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 1997, quoted in Lister, 2007) that would add to children's well-being.

Further, it is highly recommended for planners to embrace the ideas of cooperating with citizens, like children for other reasons. As Hart (1992) suggests, participating in planning processes enables individuals to be more competent and confident with the members of the society. This feeling of being a member of a society adds value to the organisation and functioning of a community. It is also seen beneficial for reducing delinquency and vandalism by having young

people involved in projects, because it gives them a sense of responsibility for the place and equipment (Jantje Beton, 2013). Another benefit for the municipality is that the involvement of children and youth increases the maintenance as well as the use of a place and equipment, because of the attachment and feeling of responsibility (Francis & Lorenzo, 2002; Barker & Weller, 2003; Roe, 2006).

In addition to benefits for the municipality, Hart (1992) also argues that when children are involved in planning projects, they may have conversations with other people (other children, youths, and adults) that would stimulate their development of social cooperation and personal development. Furthermore, the children can also develop their critical reflections on other people's opinion adding to a self-realization of children and democratization of society (Hart 1992; 36). Being taken seriously also makes children feel themselves as a social actor, a citizen, and a member of the society. Even so, it is not recommended to let the planning done by just children especially if this may not be accepted by other adults, especially parents. As highlighted by Francis (1988: 69), in East Cambridge a playground design was completely based on children's preference on which the parents responded negatively and children were not allowed to play there and eventually the playground had to be removed. Thus, it is desirable to have a mix of actors, with different perspectives, to create the best environment for the whole community and to overcome the critique that formal playgrounds are currently seen as contested play areas with regard to children's play preferences and needs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.7 Conceptual Framework

This research is conducted to question the production of formal landscapes of play in Utrecht by planners and how these landscapes are perceived by the children themselves as well as how they consider their role in the planning, particularly as these influences their sense of well-being and citizenship. It is assumed that children's demands are neglected through adults' assumptions who claim to know what is best for children. This research seeks evidence for this through the analysis of playgrounds in Utrecht (see methodology chapter 4). Conceptually, it is based on the theory of the production of space as provided by Henri Lefebvre (1991) to which this section now turns.

By seeing play areas as a produced social space (Lefebvre, 1991), they are the 'work' of different actors, including planners, parents, teachers, and children, as visualised by three pillars: 'spaces of representation', 'representational spaces' and 'spatial activities'. 'Representations of Space' refers to the physical spatial designs (Lefebvre, 1991; 11) or 'the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic sub dividers and social engineers, as of certain type of artist with a scientific bent. This is the dominant space in any society (or mode of production). Conceptions of space tend, with certain exceptions towards a system of verbal (and therefore intellectually worked out) signs (Lefebvre, 1991; 38).' In this research this pertains to the play areas as designed by planners with signals for use from an adults' perspective.

'Representational Spaces', on the other hand, are the people's perceptions of the spaces (Lefebvre, 1991; 11) or 'space as directly lived through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants'. ... 'This is the dominated – and hence passively experienced – physical space, making symbolic use of its objects. Thus representational spaces may be said, through again with certain exceptions, to tend towards more or less coherent systems of non-verbal symbols and signs (Lefebvre, 1991: 39).' Here, representational spaces point to the perception of the children.

Thirdly, 'Spatial Practices', as human behaviour (Lefebvre, 1991; 11) in the social space. 'The spatial practice of a society secretes that society's space; it propounds

and presupposes it, in a dialectical interaction; it produces it slowly and surely as it masters and appropriates it. From the analytic standpoint, the spatial practice of a society is revealed through the deciphering of its space.' These spatial practices embody a close association between daily reality (daily routine) and urban reality (the routes and networks which link up the places set aside for work, 'private' life and leisure).' Furthermore, Lefebvre (1991) argues that spatial practice must have a certain cohesiveness, but this does not imply that it is coherent (in the sense of intellectually worked out or logically conceived). In this research it is perceived as humans activities on the ground associated with acceptance and resistance in formal and the creation of informal play areas.

The combination of the three pillars produces the landscapes as how they are designed and used as well as produced and consumed (Lefebvre, 1991; 85). The three pillars are also believed to be not mutually exclusive. People's perception of the play areas affects people's practice, which can also affect the physical environment. On the other hand the physical environment does also affect the perception of people on spaces that affects their practices. The combination of those three pillars creates as believed the landscape, as play areas, that is based on human work and interactions, as discussed by Lefebvre (1991) and Mitchell (1996). Those three dimensions (Lefebvre, 1991) lead to the production of spaces as visualised in figure 2.

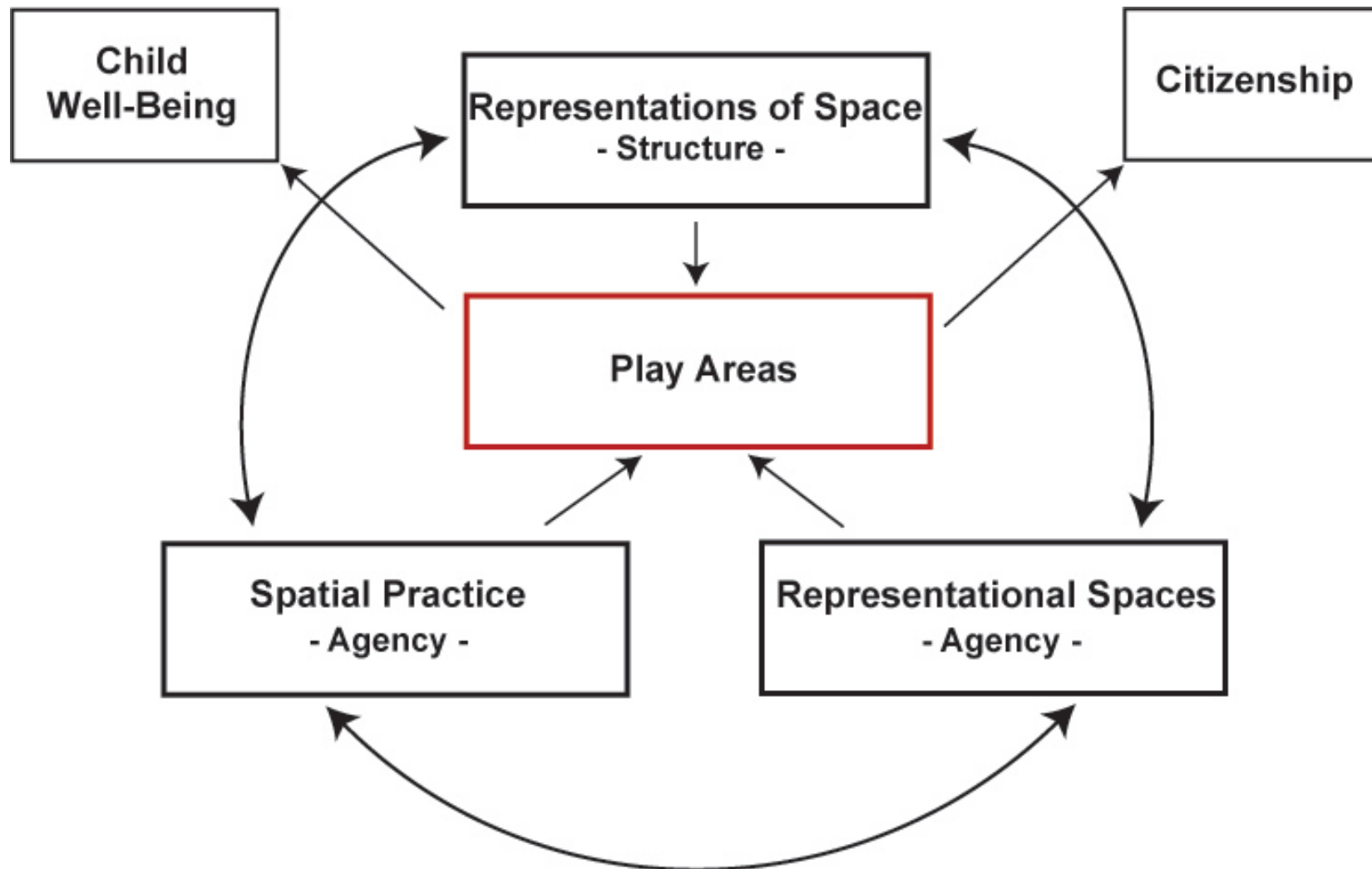


Figure 2: Conceptual Framework Based on Lefebvre's Theory Social Space

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In figure 2 are also included the two concepts of child well-being¹⁵ and citizenship¹⁶, which are broadly discussed in the literature review (chapter 2.5 and 2.6), by taken into account the consideration of children in the production of formal play areas. Since, it is believed that the planning process of formal landscape, such as the play areas, affects children's well-being and citizenship, attention is paid to children's opinion about the planning process of play areas. Having explained the conceptual framework and the related concepts and theories, it brings us to the research questions of this rapport to examine the production process of play areas in relation to children's perception of being recognised in their needs and preferences and for being a citizen who is allowed to participate;

To what extent do the objectives about play areas for children, of the age of 10 to 12, of the planners of Utrecht fit the needs and preference of the children aged 10 to 12 living in Utrecht?

Sub Research Questions;

- *What are the main objectives of the policy documents about play areas in Utrecht?*
- *What are children, living in Utrecht, their needs and preferences for a play area and do they coincide with the policy document?*
- *To what extent should children be involved in the development of play areas?*

In this chapter the literature is reviewed, on which this research builds upon and contributes towards gaining knowledge about the production and the consumption of formal playgrounds in relation to children's play. The next chapter will proceed to highlight the methodology adopted in this research to be able to answer the research questions.

¹⁵ Child well-being can be affected by how children are perceived, in case children are perceived as a citizen they are able and allowed to participate, which can lead to acceptance and recognition of children's needs and preferences in play landscapes. Additionally, stimulating physical activity and social and cognitive developments by play areas also adds to children's well-being.

¹⁶ Citizenship refers to a total relationship modified by identity, social positioning, cultural assumptions, institutional practices, and sense of belonging (Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 1997, quoted in Lister, 2007), which is also related to the extent of involvement of children in the planning process of formal play areas.

03



3. CASE STUDY

This research is done in the city Utrecht in the Netherlands which provides an ideal context for this research that is elaborated in this chapter. Utrecht is located in the middle of the Netherlands as shown in figure 3 and has a population of 295.000 whereof 55.000 people are 18 years or younger in 2008. It is predicted that this amount will increase in the coming 10 years by 10% to more than 70.000 (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 8). This increase of children gives more pressure on the existing play areas. Therefore, expanding the amount of play areas is included in the policy document.

Utrecht has a new policy document about play areas since 2009 called 'Geef Jeugd de Ruimte!' (Give Space to the Youth). The aim of the policy document is to improve the public space which includes increasing the play areas. They highlight to develop new and current areas through including youth and working in groups per district. The main motivations for composing this policy document are the growing amount of children in the city who ask for improvements and the expanding of the public spaces and play areas. Given that the policy document is only recently written, it provides an actual conception of planners on play areas and their vision within Utrecht. This offers a valuable opportunity to ask children their opinions and perceptions about their play environments to examine the differences or similarities and to find out if the policy document fits the needs and preferences of the children.

Another point that makes Utrecht an interesting city to study is that Utrecht is reported to be a child-friendly city. 'Kinderen in Tel'¹ (2006) compared multiple places including Utrecht and the other three big cities in the Netherlands, namely Amsterdam, Rotterdam, and Den Haag. Based on their quantitative study, they reported that Utrecht is a positive exception with respect to the aspect of child-friendliness. Topics that were measured are, juvenile crime, youth unemployment, children in institutions, children living in disadvantage neighbourhoods, children in families receiving benefits, number of child abuse, disadvantaged students, and number of playgrounds. Based on statistical data, Utrecht showed to offer a more child-

¹ A workgroup of foundations that look after the children's well-being, formed by Verwey Jonker Institute, Stichting Kinderpostzegels, Jantje Beton, Unicef, and Defence for Children



Figure 3: Position of Utrecht in the Netherlands

friendly environment by having less social problems compared to other big cities on juvenile crime, children living in disadvantaged neighbourhoods, and disadvantaged children. The numbers of playgrounds were comparable with the other cities. Given that this research is based on only statistical numbers, it gives insight in the amount of play areas and percentage of social youth issues collected by several institutions, such as WODC², CBS³, CWI⁴, GBA⁵, SCP⁶, CFI⁷, and AMK⁸, but it does not give insight in the way children perceive their city and if their city is child-friendly based on children's perception. Those numbers are collected by adults to calculate the child-friendliness of a city based on certain standards of measurement, but it can be questioned if children themselves would apply the same standards for measuring the child-friendliness of the city. Although the results of the research of Kinderen in Tel (2006) about social youth issues and environment are not included in the policy document for play areas, it is still interesting for this research, to create an idea how Utrecht is generally perceived by adults and planners from different institutions based on statistical data. This research is also published in the Dutch newspaper Algemeen Dagblad (25-02-2006).

Finally, the municipality of Utrecht also organises a Children Board Meeting (Kinderraad vergadering) twice a year whereof one Board meeting is visited during this research. The idea is that all schools send delegates to this meeting. Children from different schools in a neighbourhood cooperate as groups and each group is supervised by social welfare organisations. They design a plan for their neighbourhood to make it more peaceful ('vreedzaam'), with the meaning of giving children a voice. Although, questions can be placed by the language which was used such as the word 'vreedzaam' (peaceful), the leading role of social welfare organisations, and the adult setting. The project has potential, but the way it is currently used raises questions

2 Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek en Documentatie Centrum

3 Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek

4 Centrum voor Werk en Inkomen

5 Gemeentelijke Basis Administratie

6 Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau

7 Centrale Financiële instellingen

8 Advies en Meldpunt Kindermishandeling

and critics on the approach, since it is done in an adults' world setting which adds to the idea adults know what is best for children instead of designing an approach on children's level.

Through these initiatives (the new policy document, the research of 'Kinderen in Tel', and the Children Board Meeting), Utrecht presents itself as a suitable site for this research. Given the policy document and how it seeks to speak for the desires and needs of the children, and even seems to project an image of incorporating the opinions and participations of children themselves, it provides an ideal context in which to examine if these have indeed been achieved, especially from the perspectives of the children whose voices the document claims to represent.

3.1 Policy; Children's play areas in Utrecht

This section highlights the objectives of the policy document about play areas of the municipality Utrecht (2009) that focusses on the needs of children from the planners' perspective, developing measurements and design proposals for play areas.

Play areas

In the policy document is indicated that children play everywhere and it does not matter much if these play areas are formal or informal. In the past, less attention was given to informal play areas by the municipality of Utrecht. The main focus was on the formal play areas as public playgrounds, Cruyff courts⁹, and Kraijcek playgrounds¹⁰ (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 7). In the policy document of 2009 they sought to combine the green structures and traffic- and transport plans with play areas and children's play behaviour, due to the awareness that children do use these informal spaces as play areas and so there is the need to ensure they are managed, by making them safer and more accessible as well (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 7).

9 A Dutch foundation that designs soccer fields of artificial grass in disadvantage neighbourhoods to stimulate physical movement and bring youth and children together.

10 A Dutch foundation that designs playgrounds and sport facilities in disadvantage neighbourhoods to stimulate physical movement and pursue a social safe environment

3. CASE STUDY

Objective Jantje Beton Norm

In the policy document is mentioned that the municipality would like to create more and/or better play facilities, and planners see opportunities in connecting this with other regeneration efforts in neighbourhoods and as part of the green structure plans (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 5). One of the measurements that the planners use to determine the sufficiency of the amount of play areas in the city and neighbourhoods is through the 'Jantje Beton Norm'. This norm is selected as the minimum numbers and square meters of formal play areas. The norm implies that 3% of the build surface (including buildings, gardens, and infrastructure but excluding pavements and municipal green areas) is intended for play areas and as meeting areas (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 14). This norm is not included as part of the Dutch law but still is advised by the ministry to be included in the policies of all municipalities. In annex 1 is explained how this 3% norm is designed. This norm also raises questions as, how local needs are taken into consideration, and what is the quality of the spaces highlighted as play area. Furthermore, they highlighted an arbitrary designation in terms of the range and square meters of playgrounds that are believed to reflect the different needs of different age groups (see Annex 1; Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 14). However, no argumentations have been provided as justification for the designations of play areas and their sizes in the document for Utrecht.

Objective Play Types

The policy document also highlights multiple play types (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009; 14). Those play types are divided into four types by the planners, namely movement play¹¹, construction games¹², fantasy games¹³, and hanging out¹⁴. Each play type, according to the planners' reasoning, stimulates different types of development of children. Movement play stimulates children to get to know themselves and the world around them. Construction games stimulate developments, as mental processes of thinking and problem solving. The fantasy games are aimed

11 Movement play refers to being able to be physically active.

12 Construction games are those which allow children to build objects with loose tools (e.g. wood and sand).

13 The fantasy games refer to role play and acting by copying behaviour.

14 Hanging around refers to children and youngsters who use a spot for meeting and chatting.

at children to learn to play together and for their social developments. Finally, the type hanging around is mentioned for social development whereby children and youngsters meet and chat (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 14). The play types mentioned by the planners highly correspond with studies from Pellegrini & Smith (1998) and Lieshout & Aarts (2008) which are elaborated in the literature review.

Objective Qualities for Play Areas

The policy document also mentions how the quality of play areas should be enhanced. Environmental elements agreed by planners to accomplish this are, through adding greens (as natural area), reducing traffic flows in these areas, and providing broader pavements (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 14). In the policy document is not precisely specified what green includes but they elaborated that play areas should include green structures so as to allow children to partake from the benefits which include bringing rest, facilitating movements and meetings, aside from the immediate effects on health (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 6). A document published in 2007 about the green structure plan is used in this policy document to connect green areas to sport facilities, because it is assumed that these are often intensively used as sportive play areas which give the ambition for the municipality to respond to this use and demand (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 16). The measurements for the traffic flows are indicated by the density of the traffic on a road (not further elaborated in the document) and the speed in which 50km/h roads are indicated as dangerous for children (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 14). Norms for the pavements are also designed and include a pavement of 3 to 5 meter broad and is preferred on the sun side (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 34). This 3 to 5 meter is copied by the municipality from the researches in Rotterdam, to ensure children have safe walking routes and are able to play on the pavements, in terms of playable living environments. Those three environmental elements are indicated by the planners as aspects that increase the quality of play areas.



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3. CASE STUDY

Objective Safety

Another issue mentioned in the policy document is safety. Planners argue that safety issues for children are: traffic, presence of water bodies, and safety requirements for play facilities and design. Furthermore, the presence of youth (gangs) is indicated as a social safety issue (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 12). The importance for this is explained by the example of Overvecht where the presence of green and play areas is highlighted, but parents perceive the neighbourhood as not safe enough, because the social safety is compromised, and therefore prefer to keep their children inside, resulting in these green areas not used by the children. In the policy document is also mentioned that more supervision should be needed in these disadvantages neighbourhoods to offer a feeling of safety and more social control.

The municipality wants to increase the social safety through more supervision and social control in the neighbourhood. While what is meant by social control is not further elaborated in the document, it is mentioned that neighbourhoods with high rise buildings are more difficult to have social control (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 12). Based on this it can be assumed that planners see social control as, eyes on the street (of neighbours) to watch children and the practices that take place in formal play areas. Furthermore, in the document is mentioned that the play equipment should meet the technical requirements (those are not specifically mentioned in the document) (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 14).

Objective School Playgrounds, Neighbourhood Activities and Shared Use

The planners also see more opportunities for expanding the square meters of play areas, by opening more school playgrounds in neighbourhoods that have the greatest shortages of play areas, through the shared use of playgrounds and sports facilities, and by offering activities in other public spaces (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 10 & 16). The suggestion for expanding play facilities by opening more school playgrounds is something that has been requested by the board of governors. Based on the information in the document it is shown that all stakeholders as parents and teachers are included; however children are not mentioned in the document. It seems that there has been no contact with children

to decide whether or not the school playground should be opened after school time.

Other facilities mentioned for share use are the supervised play facilities, according to the planners, each neighbourhood responding to the demand should offer activities, as sports in public spaces to stimulate active use of public spaces, such as parks (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 17).

Those six key objectives from the policy document form the planners' perspective which this research builds upon, to examine if they fit the needs and preferences of children living in Utrecht.

04



4. METHOD

This chapter discusses how the research is designed and highlights methodologies adopted in order to answer the research questions set out in the previous chapter. Furthermore, this chapter explains what kind of the data is collected and analysed through the different methods, as well as descriptions of matters pertaining to sampling. Finally, the limitations of this research, particularly as it relates to ethical issues in relation to working with children, and reflexivity on the research that was done are elaborated.

4.1 Research Design

Within a variety of disciplines such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, and geography, different methodologies and methods have been used to examine children's perception with regard to playing and play areas (Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin & Robinson, 2010). More important, there has been a recent shift where the approach of doing 'research on' children has changed from merely doing 'research for' to doing 'research with' children (Punch, 2002; Darbyshire, MacDougall & Schiller, 2005; Fargas-Malet, et al. 2010). As a result, research on children has moved away from 'ignoring the view of children as active agents', and where researchers tend to privilege their own interpretations and those of other adults like teachers and parents to considering children as 'key informants in matters pertaining to their own health and wellbeing' (Darbyshire et al. 2005: 419). Here, research has become where children are directly approached and perceived as active agents and social actors that are the experts of their own lives (Barker & Weller, 2003; Fargas-Malet, 2010: 175), however in cases where planning and design influences children's lives and environments, they have the right to participate and be involved in planning (Francis and Lorenzo, 2002). This research represents this approach towards children where their views are directly sought pertaining to their experiences of places.

While elaborating on the use of methodology for this research Darbyshire et al. (2005: 420) argue there is a growing awareness that the quantitative survey is vital but cannot provide all the information and insight required to gain children's

experiences. In turn, this the methodological toolkit for such research has now been broadened to also include qualitative research with use of methods such as in-depth interviews, focus groups, mapping, photography, and drawings so as to get better into the world of the children and to provide information and insights into children's everyday experiences and perceptions (Punch, 2002; Barker & Weller, 2003). In addition to this discussion, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) highlight that quantitative¹ and qualitative² have been for a long time two different schools. Despite the differences in the two schools, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004: 15) also argued that the mix of methods should be the future, because the mix should not replace one or the other but should be able to strengthen and minimize the weaknesses of both research studies. Whereby patterns, differences, and frequencies (Livingstone, 2003: 157) can be obtained by quantitative research and insight and in-depth understanding by qualitative research, on which this research is built upon.

To use the two methodologies optimally, firstly a case study is done to examine the view of the adults as planners on children's issues. Here, attention is paid to the conception of the planners of children's play areas, primarily based on policy documents. This is then followed by the use of a quantitative method, a questionnaire, to gain results about general differences and similarities between what the planners and children see as ideal forms of play areas. Finally, qualitative methods, interviews and ethnography, are utilised to expand upon the understanding and opinions of the children. This research design is presented in figure 4.

1 Quantitative purists argue that social science is to be seen as objective and time- and context-free generalisations, such that outcomes should be determined on validity and reliability.

2 Qualitative purists 'rejects singularity' (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004: 14). They believe that social science is not 'simply there to generate clarity, precision and reduce uncertainty and ambiguity in our understanding of the world'... but to 'help enact the real in different situations'.

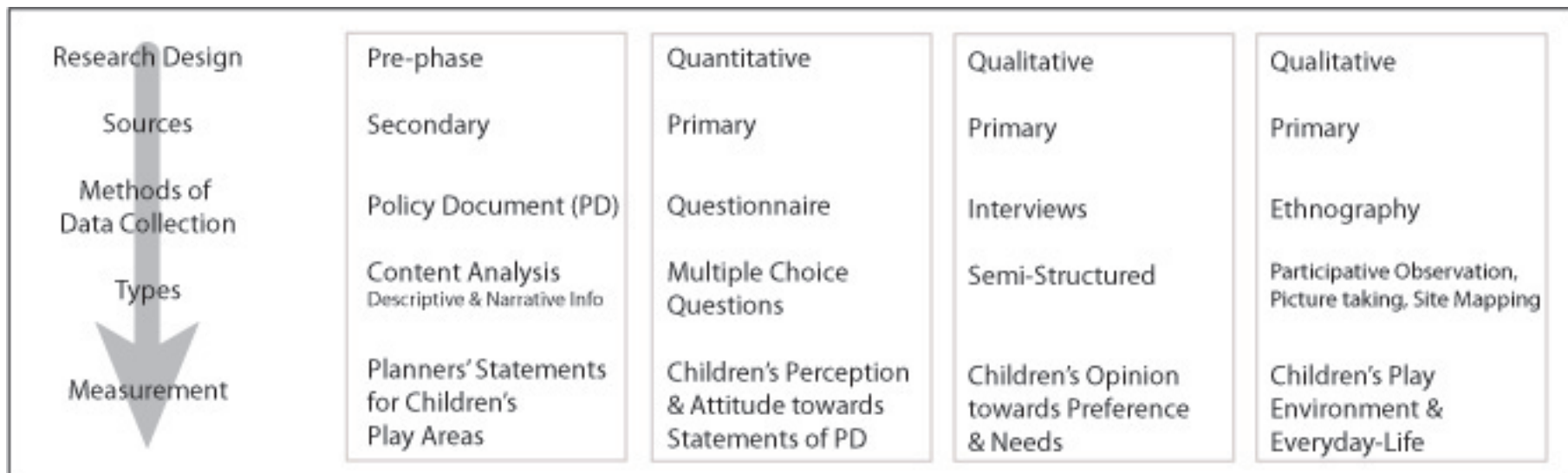


Figure 4: Research Design

This overall research is classified as a cross-sectional study, through collecting the data per study (questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic research) at one moment in time. The questionnaire was administered at the end of January to the beginning of February 2013. At the end of February 2013 selected children were interviewed, who also participated in the questionnaire. The ethnographic research took place at the end of June. Through examining at one moment in time an overall picture is obtained about the complete study (Kumar, 2011: 107), with as result a study that contributes to the actuality of this issue and how it currently is perceived and experienced by children on the ground. These different phases are examined in more detail below.

4. METHOD

4.2 Methods of Data Collection

This research adopts a multi-method approach of the following: content analysis of policy documents³, questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and ethnographic research (which includes participative observation and site mapping) (see figure 5). Each is now discussed in turn.

First, to identify planners' perceptions pertaining to play areas for children, policy documents are examined through a content analysis (Chapter 3). Based on this method, the objectives of the planners which they demonstrate (through publication of the policy) to their citizens are selected. A limitation of this method is that the used norms in the policy document designed by other organisations are difficult assessable since those are generally copied. Therefore it can also be questioned if the norms and the plans that are included in the policy document by planners fit the needs and desires of children for play areas since those are generally not designed for a selected target group.

For examining children's opinion about the policy document the method of the questionnaire is used. The questionnaire is an interesting and manageable method for asking children their attitude about several issues. The method also provides strong opportunities for analysing the frequency, differences between gender and schools, the patterns of answering the questions, and relationship

³ With regard to chapter 3, the case study

between different variables. Finally, the main analysis for examining the differences between the perception of planners and children towards play areas (Livingstone, 2003). Therefore, this method offers a strong basis for further research to expand the knowledge about the way children currently perceive their play areas and the match or miss-match with the perception of planners on play areas. For further insight knowledge the in-depth interview method is selected to expand the view of the children on play areas. This method offers the opportunity that each child can expand on the topics he or she finds important or has meaning to him or her. The main topics are selected from the questionnaire results, based on differences between the perception of planners and the children on the topics.

Data about children's places receiving from the interviews gains no complete image or is not completely contextualised. Therefore, an ethnographic research is done in addition to the data that is received from the interviews. Play areas and school playground that are discussed by the children during the interviews are visited afterwards, to observe the places, contextualise the data, and to provide a deeper understanding of the children's world. The places that are highlighted by the children are drawn on a site map, so locations that mean something special to children are presented on a map of their neighbourhoods. While walking on the ground, pictures of those play areas are added to this research to get an impression how those play areas work through the use, design and symbols. Based on this combination of methods a full range of data is collected to be able to answer the research questions.

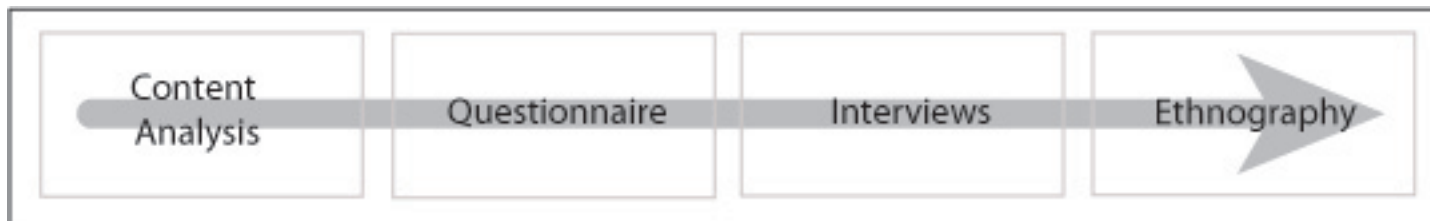


Figure 5: Methods of Data Collection



Figure 6: Triangulation Methods

Besides these methods there could potentially other ways in which the research could have done for example focus groups, drawing, mapping, taking pictures by children. In which a focus group could gain interesting data about the view of children, however disadvantages are this method is less desirable for talking about children's place⁴ without influencing and putting pressure on each other and logistics issues as for one person it is more difficult to manage a focus group (Darbyshire *et al.* 2005), and arrange a group of children for a longer time.

Other potential methods could have been drawing, photographing, and mapping (Morrow, 2001), to gain knowledge about children's world and perception. However, the difficulties are found in coding (readable and understandable) the drawings, photographs, and maps which can cause a lack of knowledge or missing data. Solutions for this problem are mentioned by Fargas-Malet *et al.* (2010: 183) that children tell what they have drawn in an interview. Given that this research focusses on children's opinion about the objectives of planner's drawings or pictures from children of play areas would be too limited for answering the research questions.

Based on the above argumentation there is made use in this research of the four methods; content analysis, questionnaire, interview, and ethnographic research. On the basis of this multi-method approach, it enables to answer the research questions and it is seen most valuable which is further elaborated in the next section.

In this research, multi-method approach is used, which involves a questionnaire, in-depth interviews, and ethnography (in terms of participant observations and site mapping and photography). Hereby, the content analysis, using the secondary resources of the policy document about play areas of the municipality of Utrecht, firstly created a basis to build upon this research. By using and combining different kinds of data sets in a methodological triangulation (as shown in figure 6) as a means of confirming information and to analyse whether the results are reliable (Verschuren, Doorewaard, Poper, and Mellion, 2010). All the different methods

⁴ Places with meaning for the individual

4. METHOD

overlap with each other and support from different angles which increases the representativeness (Kumar, 2011). On basis of the data that is received for providing an understanding of the perceptions of the children in terms of play areas and for examining a (mis)match between them and the planners' perspective.

This research has the aim to create a full understanding of the influence of the planners of Utrecht on the everyday life and the play environment of children of the age of 10 to 12 living in Utrecht and not to generalize about children of all different ages. It is also important to recognise the different needs of children of different age groups. Therefore the preference and needs of children between 10 and 12 years cannot be applied to preference and needs for all children. Since the case study has focussed on Utrecht, generalizing for other cities in the Netherlands or abroad will be difficult, although lessons can be learned and the research can be applied to other cities. To be able to generalize, it is needed to do also field work in multiple cities in the Netherlands or abroad and with children of different age groups, since there are time and capacity limitations this is not included in this research. However, as mentioned above lessons can be learned from this research in the way children are approached and the results that are received from this research.

For the validity of the research the aim of the research including the research questions needs to be properly formulated before collecting the data. Therefore a test panel is also used in this research. So that, the information received from the different methods suit the aim of the research and ensure that the research questions can be answered. The following section is an elaboration of how the different stages of fieldwork (questionnaires, interviews and ethnography) were carried out.

4.3 Data Analyses

4.3.1 Questionnaire

The aim of the questionnaire is to measure and examine if the planners' objectives for play areas do match children's perception of play areas, through statistical analyses.

With respect to collecting the data, the questionnaire is taken into the class room of the children between the ages of 10 to 12 (inclusive) during school time, so that the purpose and relevance of the questionnaire could be explained and children who needed more clarification could ask me (Kumar, 2011). A limitation of doing the questionnaire in the class room, however, is that a minority of the children may feel forced to participate or sees it as school work and therefore would only contribute minimally (Fargas-Malet, *et al.* 2010: 178). To overcome this problem, it is highlighted before offering the questionnaire that these were meant to gather their opinions and that therefore there are no right or wrong answers (Punch, 2002: 328). To deal with children their feeling of freedom for answering, the questionnaires were kept closed and anonymous (Barker & Weller, 2003: 214).

Before the actual questionnaire was administered, a pilot test was done on 19-10-2012. This was to ensure that the children would be able to understand the questions, accept the length of the questionnaire, and also to measure the average time needed to complete the questionnaire. Based on the pilot test, some words were changed and certain questions were reformulated.

The questionnaire consisted of 42 closed questions that took the children about 10 minutes to complete. The first 36 questions were designed in a 5-point scale categorical polytomous (e.g. like a lot, like, do not like/do not dislike, dislike, and do not like at all). Question 37 to 40 consists of a 5-point scale categorical constant (categories for hours or days playing outside or in the playground). Finally, question 41 and 42 covered the topics gender (categorical dichotomous) and age (continuous). By designing the questions and the layout, it is kept in



mind that children of the age of 10 to 12 would fill in the questionnaire. Therefore, colours and smiles were used to offer a clearer distinction between the answer options (A) (Punch, 2002; Fargas-Malet, *et al.* 2010). On questions where children did not have to judge (as age, and gender questions) the smiles were offered with the same colour, namely yellow (B). These use of colour makes it easier for children to read and understand the differences between the answer options, also because of the social constructed meaning of the two opposite colours green and red (as show in row A), as green is generally seen as positive and red as negative. Furthermore, the faces made the questionnaire look more playful to which children could relate better, especially compared to bullets points or letters.

Questionnaire questions

Chapter 2 Case Study highlights the main objectives of planners (with regards to play areas in Utrecht) included in the policy document which provide the basis for the questionnaires. Briefly, these include children's perceptions of (a) range and size; (b) safety; (c) play types; (d) qualities of play areas; (e) safety issues and (f) other play facilities. Per issue is explained how the questions are formulated (see annex 2 for the full questionnaire).

Questionnaire questions – Play Types & Other Facilities

The first topics elaborated of the questionnaire are the different play types, school playground, and activities in the public space. The children are asked about those issues by three different types of questions based on the production of space mentioned in the conceptual framework, namely questions about accessibility, attitude, and practice. The question about accessibility is related to the physical and designed environment as representation of spaces that should offer the children the possibility to access play areas and ability to different play types. Furthermore, children's attitude toward those places is asked and finally they are asked about their actual use (practice).

Questionnaire questions – Size & Distance

The norm about size and distance was the most concrete norm of the policy document, based on Jantje Beton norm of 3%. In the questionnaire, therefore, children are asked for their perceptions with regards to this. To simplify this for the children's distinction is made between children's nearest and favourite playgrounds. Based on this Norm, it is likely that the nearest playgrounds are designed for children of the age of 0 to 6 (see annex 1). It is also likely that the playground for the age group in this research (10 to 12) is further away and bigger. In the questionnaire is not only asked about the perception of the children but there is also asked about their amount of practice in the nearest and favourite playground. This is asked to gain information about children's spatial practice in formal playgrounds.

Questionnaire questions – Qualities for Play Areas

The children are asked about their opinions on the quality elements mentioned in the policy document as green provisions and broader pavements, particular in terms of whether these are seen as enhancing play areas. There is not asked for the practice in green area and on pavements, because playing on informal play areas could be perceived by children not as play. This is examined in the interviews (see below).

Questionnaire questions – Safety Issues

Furthermore, the children are asked about safety issues and if they perceive those issues in their living environment and if those bother them. Safety topics derived from the policy document that are included are cars, gangs, litter, and maintenance of play equipment.

Questionnaire questions – children's background

Finally, children are asked about their amount of time playing outside and in the playground. To gain general information about the amount of hours and days they play outside. Furthermore, a distinction is made between formal and informal play by asking for the amount of time/days playing outside and in the playground. In the last two questions the children are asked about their gender and age. Information about their class and school is gathered by arranging the questionnaires by class and school after they were done.

4. METHOD

Questionnaire analysis

For analysing the data collected by the questionnaire, descriptive analysis, correlation analysis and one-way ANOVA were used. All data collected about the play types, size & distance, design qualities, safety, other play facilities, and formal and informal play area use are firstly descriptively analysed. Hereby, an overview of the average response is received by the mean. The mean could have a range from 2 plus to minus 2 and expresses the average of the opinions of the children. 2 represents a highly positive response and -2 a highly negative one. Furthermore, the standard deviation (st. dev.) shows the variation from the average. The smaller the standard deviation the closer the data point is to the mean whereby a results of 1 or lower shows that the children are giving a common opinion. A result of a standard deviation higher than 1 shows that the variation in response is bigger. Those two statistical numbers give an understanding about the way the participants have responded.

Secondly, a correlation analysis is done between 'accessibility, attitude, and practice' and 'perception and attitude' to analyse if relationships can be found between the different questions on one topic. So, an understanding can be created about the ways in which the questions are answered by the children. Hereby, within the correlation analysis Pearson's r is analysed in combination with the significance. There can be spoken of significant relationship when the p -value is ≤ 0.05 ; otherwise there no statistical relationship. Through Pearson's r , the strength of the relationship is shown in which two variables affect each other in case the Pearson's r is above 0.700 it shows a very strong positive relationship and the variables do affect each other strongly, between 0.400 and 0.699 a strong positive relationship is perceived, between 0.300 and 0.399 a moderate relationship, between 0.200 and 0.299 a weak positive relationship, and between 0.010 and 0.199 no or negligible relationship which indicate that a change in one variable is not correlated with the changes in the other variable. The way in which the two variables can influence each other can also be perceived based on the Pearson's r . The direction in which two variables influence each other can be seen by a positive or negative Pearson's r . A positive Pearson's r means that when variable x increase y will also increase. A negative Pearson's r demonstrates that when variable x increase variable y would decrease.

Finally, the results are analysed by a one-way ANOVA. Hereby the results per topic are analysed to see if there can be found differences in the way of responding between gender and between schools. A statistical difference can be found through examining the mean in combination with the significance. By a significance of ≤ 0.05 (p -value) statistical differences are found in the way of responding between genders or schools. In case the p -value is higher there cannot be found any statistical differences between genders or between schools, and the response is statically perceived similar.

Furthermore, there is chosen to analyse differences between schools, because it is believed that children often go to a school in their neighbourhood. A national research in the Netherlands (Herweijer en Vogels 2004) shows that accessibility is most key when parents choose a primary school for their children, where schools within walkable distances are preferred (2004: 84). Furthermore, through analysing differences between schools general points of the policy document can be related to different neighbourhoods. This could provide insights in local differences. Based on the questionnaire; frequencies, differences, and patterns are analysed that gives insight in the match or mismatch between the planners' and children's conceptions about play areas. Furthermore, the results of the questionnaire give input for the interviews.

4.3.2 Interviews

The goals of the interview are to overcome the limitations of the questionnaire by asking the children for clarification and elaboration on the results that are received by the questionnaire. Questions are also included about topics that were not included in the format of the questionnaire as asking for descriptions and meanings of places.

The interviews were held on the same four schools as the questionnaire. Before the interviews were taken, all the parents received a letter with the purpose of the research and they had the possibility to refuse the participation of their child. However, none of the children were refused participation by the parents. Besides the permission of

the parents, the children were also given the freedom to refuse participation. From each class three volunteers were asked to participate whereby the interviews were conducted one-to-one. In each school there was the possibility to hold the interviews in a separate room without the supervision of teachers (Fargas-Malet *et al.* 2010: 176). This created a sphere where children could speak freely with the researcher. The setting in these rooms was more informal compared to the classroom. The position of interviewee and the researcher was also more informal by sitting not on the opposite of the table with respect to each other but along the two sites of one corner of the table, and comfortable chairs were used (Cameron, 2005). Hereby, the researcher and the child were positioned more on the same level and less influenced by the power-relation as in the pupil-teacher relation, in which the teacher sits in front of the children (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998). This was done so as to increase the trust and comfort of the children and to let them speak more open and freely.

During the interviews a memo recorder is used to give more time for the researcher to focus on the answers that the interviewees gave. Before the recorder started, it was explained to the children what the purpose of the recorder was, just to be able to listen to everything back later for the writing of the report and that more attention could be given to them instead of writing. This was clear for all of the children and none of the children refused to participate because of the memo recorder.

The interview itself is designed as a semi-structured interview with open questions (Waterman *et al.* 2001), whereby the topics are based on the results obtained from the questionnaire. Waterman *et al.* (2001) state that children who receive closed questions which are unanswerable for them (based on their knowledge) the majority of the children will feel they have to answer and will give an (wrong) answer. This is experienced differently by the wh-questions (what, where, who). By open questions children cannot easily provide a wrong answer and therefore they will be more honest in their responses. Therefore open questions provide a more reliable insight in the perception of the children.

The interview included 10 topics that are discussed per interviewee. The time which is spent per topic depends on the information the children gave. Hereby, some topics are more elaborated by one child compared to the other. This is done to receive a broad understanding about the topics that are meaningful to the children in terms of their experiences and how they perceive the different topics. To stimulate the children in their talking, attention is paid to the use of non-verbal behaviour such as eye contact (Cameron, 2005) and verbal prompts such as ‘tell me more about’ or ‘can you explain what you mean by’ to indicate to the interviewee that the researcher is listening (Fargas-Malet *et al.* 2010). Follow up questions were also designed to ensure that interesting responses are pursued.

Topics that were included in the interviews are about topics in which the results did not match with the planners’ conception, results that showed different patterns than were assumed by planners, and results that needed the meaning of the children to understand. Besides the topics of the questionnaire, the concepts of the conceptual framework are used for understanding the production of the landscape of play areas from the perspectives of the children as the topics are linked to representations of space (materially), representational spaces (meaning), and spatial practice (use). While talking with the children about the topics, attention is also paid to the different effects on children’s behaviour created by parents or teachers, their own interests, and environmental factors, such as parental rules, their preferences, or physical barriers (busy roads).

Play Areas, Favourite Playground, and Informal Play Areas

Several facets of play areas are asked to the children, like a general play areas, their favourite play area, and informal play areas in relation to how children describe a play area in terms of what it looks like. During the interview the children are also challenged to think out of the box to examine in material matters to them, by asking if a play area that is designed with carpet, a material normally not to be found in a play area, is still a play area. Furthermore, to expand the knowledge they are asked about who should be allowed to enter the play area and who should not, to see what kinds of people the children perceive as desired users of

4. METHOD

the play areas. Finally, the children are asked who should be the best designers of a play area so that their opinion about children involvement could be examined. Through these questions, children's attitude towards the current play designs by planners is acquired.

The second topic relates to their favourite playgrounds where they are asked about their personal preferences and why this playground is preferred. The children are asked to describe the playground they favour and to elaborate on this by asking for meanings children associate with them. Finally, their most important reason is asked for pointing that playground as their favourite playground. Based on these questions information is gained about the place that is favoured and how this is designed, who also plays there, and according to them the most important reason for their choice.

Finally, the interviews also probe into children's thoughts on informal play areas. Hereby, the children are asked if they also play at places other than the formal playgrounds. Without any probing, children were encouraged to think about different places in which they have played or can see themselves playing. Besides the description of these places and who plays there, children are also asked if they are indeed allowed to play at the (informal) places they mentioned, given that informal play areas are not in the first place designed specifically for playing. Children are also questioned about the meanings and the most important reason for wanting to play at these (sometimes out of bounds) spaces.

School Playground

After the results of the questionnaire, the interview gained a better understanding about the perceptions of children about the school playground. The children are asked if they would like to play on the school playground after school time and the reasons why or why not, as well as what meanings they associate with these spaces. Within these questions there is focussed on what kind of motivation the children based their opinion as the material elements, people, or the meaning and symbols of the school playground.

Playability

Additionally, the playability is questioned of the space of play areas and the facilities on these areas. They are asked what they like to do there, linked to the four play types presented in the policy document and mentioned in the questionnaire.

Distance from home

Given that the policy document highlights norms in terms of ideal distances to play areas, the children are asked about the distances they are allowed to go to reach a playground. Followed by the question whether they are able to come to places they prefer to go to (and if not, why) and who usually decides (e.g. planners, parents, etc.) where they are allowed to go to and if they do agree on this. This question is related to the assumption that adults know best and if this is perceived and experienced by them or that they are able to participate and discuss these lines together or alone.

Being bothered during play

The results of the questionnaire showed different perceptions on the safety topics cars, litter, and maintenance. In the interview, rather than providing suggestions, children are asked to come up themselves with factors that they felt could potentially bother them during play. This to examine if safety issues as highlighted by the adults planners are also issues that the children themselves see as important.

Being bothered by people during play

Besides physical safety issues, children are also asked if they are bothered by people during play. This is in relation to the mentioned topic (in the policy document) such as social control and gangs by planners. This question is also asked to examine if this problem is only perceived by planners and parents (as mentioned in the policy document that the parents did not let their children play outside in the district of Overvecht in Utrecht) or that children experience this social issue of gangs as well.

Participation

In this interview the children are also asked if they are ever asked before about their opinion for play and play areas. In both cases yes or no they are asked how they experience this and how they think about that. In case children responded positively and thus were asked before, they are further asked what they thought about that, and what it did to them. In that case is also asked about what they were able to speak about and if their ideas and plans were used. In case the plans were used they are asked if they were using this place more often than before. By asking if the involvement in planning playgrounds has stimulated the use of this place this may give important insights for the future of designing and developing playgrounds.

Participation and a situation as new play areas designing

In addition, children are also asked if they would prefer and would be willing to participate in case a new play area will be designed in their area and what they should change if they were able to do. This question is asked to receive insight in the attitude of the children towards participating in planning and designing play areas, if they think it is needed and if they feel they are capable of doing. Besides it also provides an understanding about objects or practices in their environment which they would prefer differently.

On the basis of the interview, in-depth knowledge is gained about play, play areas, school playground, children's range, safety issues, and children participation. These results add and clarify parts of the results of the questionnaire, and allows for a better understanding about children's perception towards planning practices and policy topics associated with play areas.

Interview analysis

For analysing the data of the interview the topics are used as guides. The information received per topic is coded in themes and categories for children with same attitudes, experiences, or perceptions. As mentioned by Burnard (1991) during categorisation the researcher should be aware of the accuracy and reasonability to compare one person with another. Within the topics, the analysis is guided by the answers that are provided by the children. Firstly, within a topic a distinction is made between the different attitudes as positive or negative, agree or disagree. Secondly, within this division the argumentation is coded (Burnard, 1991). Based on these argumentations, categories are designed for gaining an understanding of how children perceive certain topics. The results received from the interviews offers data and knowledge for research on the ground for broader clarification how children's perception looks like and how this is perceived in the everyday life.

4.3.3 Ethnographic Research – Participative Observation, Picture Taking, Site Mapping

The goal of ethnographic research is to be able to describe, by taking notes, pictures and site mapping, the play environments and children's play behaviour especially as these have emerged from the interviews. Such ethnographic research is valuable for contextualising the results of the interviews and to provide a better idea of the landscapes by becoming clearer and start to speak to the research (Yin, 2003) that are inter alia discussed in the policy document. Places receive an image and the information received by the interviews can be better understood. Participant observation refers to participating in the everyday-life of the research subjects (Soenen & Blokland; 2004) by walking around and visiting the specific places for observing the behaviours, interactions, and social relations of children (Maso & Smaling, 1998) gives an understanding about points that are mentioned in the interviews. By observing the interactions of the children, attention is paid that the children are not bothered in their activities or steered

4. METHOD

in their behaviour by the researcher. In case the children notice that they are observed it can cause that they change their act (Maso & Smaling, 1998, Fargas-Malet, 2010). During the observations small notes are written and pictures are taken to gain knowledge about how the environment is used by children and what place and designs means something to children also through the pictures it is possible to visualise the places that are named by the children. Through ethnographic research the knowledge on playing behaviour of the children and their playing environment is expanded and provides additional information for understanding children's perception to play areas and their attitude towards the planner's conceptions.

Analysis of Ethnographic data

The data as notes, pictures, and maps received from the ethnographic research are analysed to support and clarify the results of the questionnaire and mainly the interviews. Hereby, all results received from the three different methods provide knowledge about particular spaces and landscapes as well as expand the researchers' understanding of the contextual bases of the children's responses. At the same time, it also provides better visualisations of objects and situations highlighted during the interviews. However, because of time limitation expanded observations are not made and there is chosen to focus on supportive data for clarification instead of expanding the understanding of playing and children's playing environment generally.

4.4 Sampling

The target group for this research are the children of the age of 10 to 12 living in Utrecht. While taken into account the cognitive development stages of children, it is shown that children of the ages of 10 to 12 can look from more than one viewpoint (themselves), which means that they are aware that the world is not only focussed on them and that they become aware of the feelings and thinking of other people, as Hart (1992) argues children becomes capable of putting her or himself 'in the other person's shoes'. Besides this awareness, the older children start to develop abstract thinking that adds to problem solving thinking (Piaget, 1964). This is valuable for the questionnaire and interviews, so children will talk about their preferences, needs and general opinion with taken into account they are not the only one. This specific age group is chosen because of the following reasons. One functional reason is the fact that this age group is capable to read and complete a questionnaire. Another reason is that this group has the age of when you start to explore your neighbourhood as well as the world around yourself (Matthews 1995). Besides that, the children at this certain age choose where they are going to play mostly by themselves. Another functional argument for the selection of the ages for the target group is that children till the age of 12 are still going to the primary school. Thus, by covering the ages 10 to 12 the highest two classes of the primary school are involved and for contact there is made use of the teachers of the primary schools in Utrecht. In total four different schools participated in this research. All the school are located in Utrecht which are visualised on the maps (The Ariensschool and The Da Costaschool, figure 7; the Notenboom, figure 8; and the Maliebaan School, figure 9).

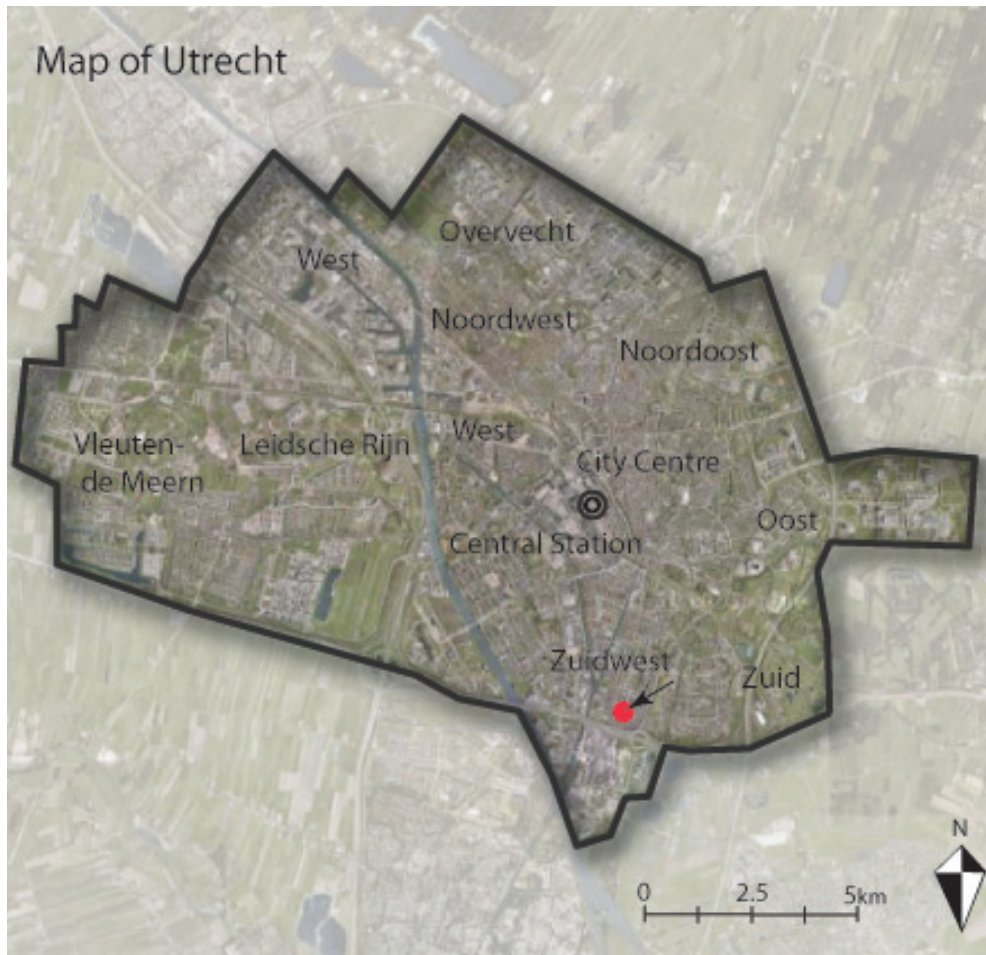


Figure 7: Location of the Ariensschool and The Da Costa School

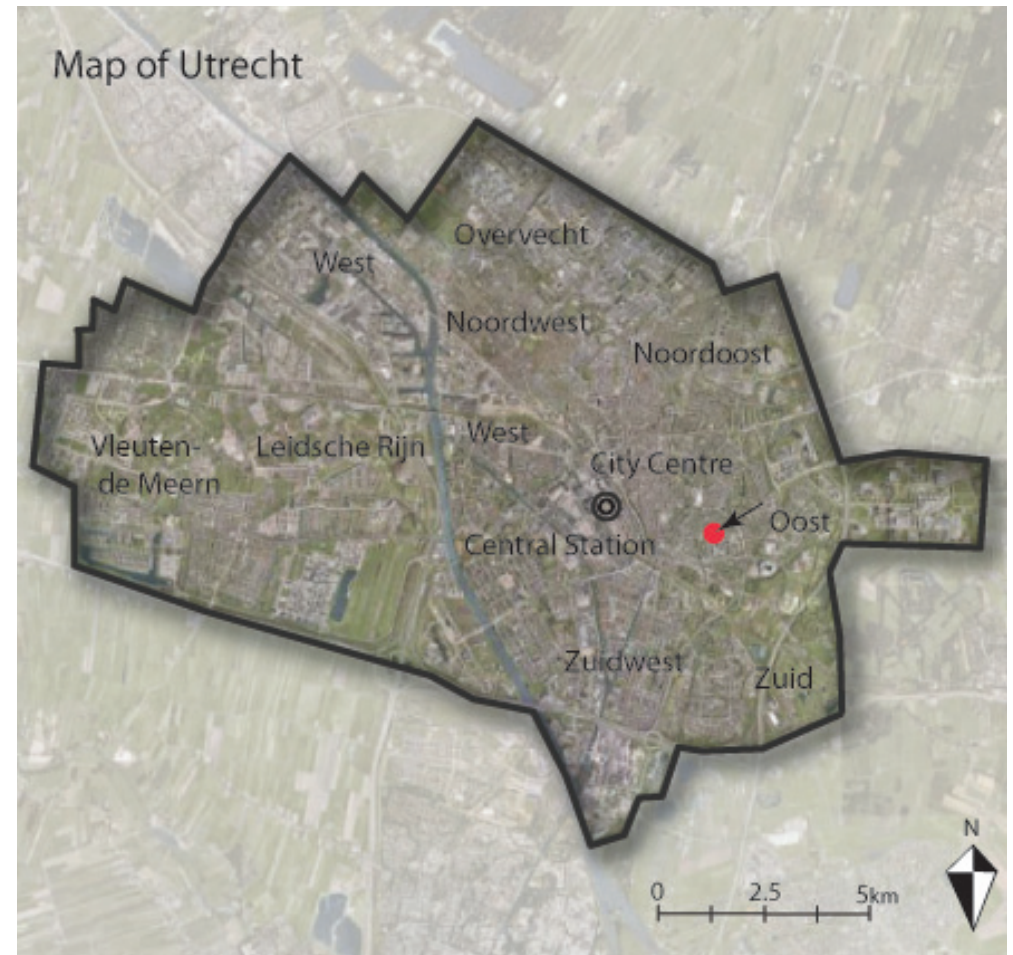


Figure 8: Location of the Notenboom School

4. METHOD

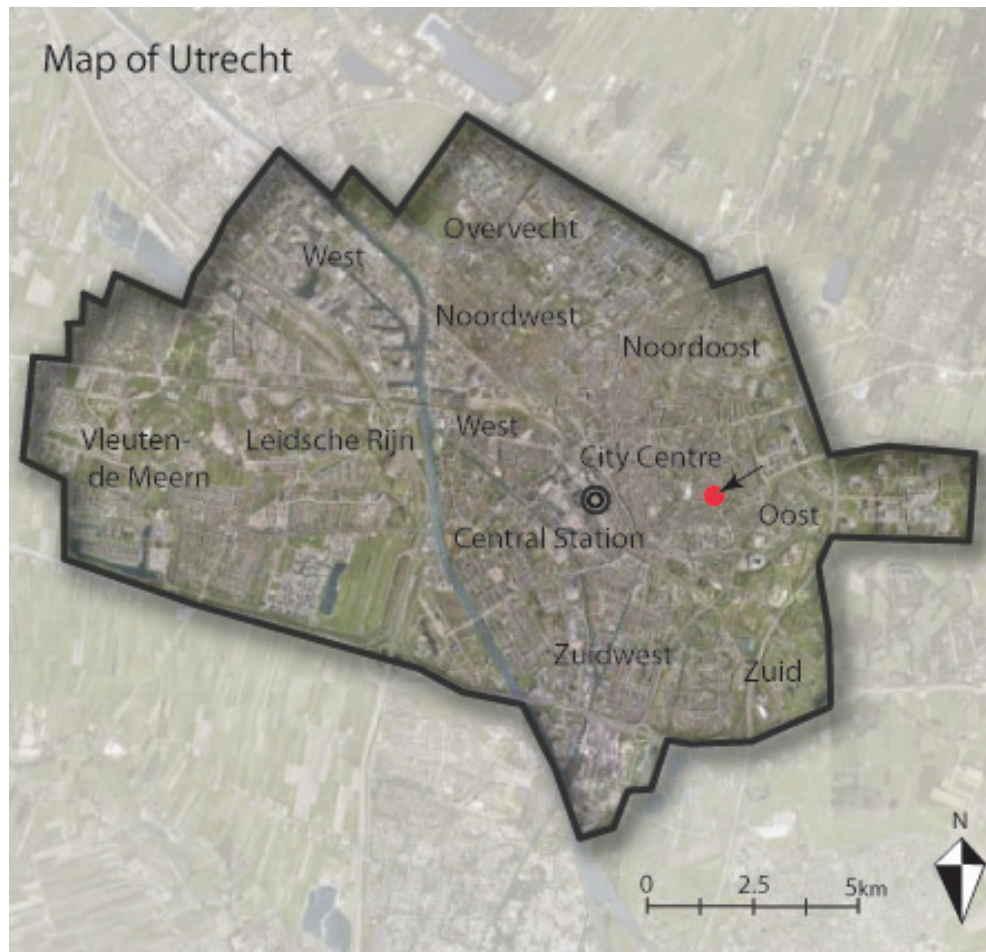


Figure 9: Location of the Maliebaan School

The four schools are located in two neighbourhoods, Ariensschool and Da Costaschool in the neighbourhood Utrecht Zuidwest these schools are also located along the same school playground. The Notenboom School and Maliebaan School are both located in the neighbourhood Utrecht Oost. There has been a lot of contact with several schools all around Utrecht to ask for participation in this research. Unfortunately, a lot of schools were not able to participate in this research because of rehousing, the pressure of the CITO tests⁵, or too many other projects and researches. Especially, the head teachers of schools in Overvecht, a neighbourhood also characterised as deprived neighbourhood, mentioned that the children of their school are involved in a lot of other researches and projects and therefore were not able to participate in this research. Through the combination of full school programs, other projects and researches and time limitations this research has therefore focussed on the four schools in the two neighbourhoods which made time for two meetings. In each school there is hold first the questionnaire and followed by the interviews. The questionnaire is taken in classes 7 and 8 (the two highest classes) from the schools Notenboom, Maliebaan, and Da Costa School the complete classes participated in the questionnaire. From the Ariensschool only 3 children participated in the questionnaire. They choose specifically for those three children, since those children also participated in the 'Children Board Meeting'.

In total 111 children participated in the questionnaire whereby the missing values are negligible (with a maximum of two missing value at one question). The division of gender and schools of the respondents are presented in table 1. The amount of boys and girls is almost similar which offers a clear insight of the differences or similarities between both genders. Furthermore, the age of 11 is the average age of all children. Finally, the Maliebaan School had by far the most children in the classes 7 and 8. Those were separated over three different groups and teachers.

For the interviews, a total of 22 children participated and about three children

⁵ A Dutch national test to measure the education level of the children for the intake at the secondary schools

Table 1; Characters of the respondents participated the questionnaires

Schools	Gender		Age (yrs.)				Groups			Total
	Girls	Boys	10	11	12	13	6	7	8	
Da Costa School	20	10	7	10	12	1	0	16	14	30
Ariensschool	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Notenboom Sch.	9	13	7	8	7	0	5	9	8	22
Maliebaan School	21	35	12	30	14	0	0	22	16	56
Total	52	59	27	49	34	1	5	49	57	111

Table 2; Characters of the respondents who participated the interviews

Schools	Gender		Age				Groups			Total
	Girls	Boys	10 yrs.	11 yrs.	12 yrs.	13 yrs.	6	7	8	
Da Costa School	4	1	1	2	2	0	0	3	2	5
Ariensschool	2	1	1	1	1	0	0	2	1	3
Notenboom Sch.	3	3	0	2	3	1	0	3	3	6
Maliebaan School	4	5	1	4	4	0	0	1	8	9
Total	13	10	3	9	10	1	0	9	14	22

per class were selected to be interviewed. The characteristics of the children who participated in the interviews are presented in table 2. On the Ariensschool two children from class 7 and one from class 8 were interviewed and at the Da Costaschool in class 8 only two children were selected because of disorder ⁶ Furthermore, in the classes 8 on the Maliebaan School was compared to class 7 more time available for doing the interviews therefore more children are interviewed from the two classes 8 compared to the class 7 on that school.

In total enough children participated during the questionnaire so statistical analysis were reliable and valid to do. Based on the 22 children that were interviewed a broad set of knowledge was gained which covered all the topics and gave insight in the conception and perception about play environments and their playing behaviour in relation to the planner's conception and gave rise to the ethnographic research.

4.5 Ethical Issues

Research which is done with children should take ethical issues into account. In the literature the key issues that are described are: asking for consent, protection of the subject, confidentiality, different ways of communication, understanding and experience, and the main point mentioned in other literature is the awareness of the power-relation between researcher and child which is related to all of the above points (Thomas & O'Kane, 1998).

To avoid ethical issues and problems with supervisors of the children consent is asked for the interviews firstly formally by the parents. Secondly, for the interviews, only those who were willing to participate were selected. On the other hand, for the questionnaire only informal consent was asked.

The second key issue for ethics is protection of the subject as topics that are sensitive for children are taken into account. By topics like bullying or troubles at home or

⁶ Elaborated in the reflexion sub-chapter.

4. METHOD

with friends, the researcher has to be aware of the impact on children and that children may talk about it against their will (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998) therefore it is not included in the questions and there only spoken about when a child mentioned it and spoke open about it during probing the impact was still taken into account.

Furthermore, the information that children tell during the interviews were handled confidentially. Also, the children were made aware and clear that the information they gave is for a research and that their personal information will be handled confidentially, this is done by keeping them anonymous (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998).

For doing research with children the main attention for ethics was on the power-relation which should in no case be wrongly used (Thomas & O’Kane, 1998). Children are not forced to participate or say things they would not like to say to exclude researcher bias. Therefore, especially on the schools the situations were created in a sphere where children felt comfortable and freely to speak without feeling pressure of the researcher.

4.6 Limitations

During the research some limitations were recognised. In this research the content analysis method is selected since this offers a clear analysis of the policy document, however not all arguments for their objectives were included, to overcome this limitation there could have been an interview with a planners. Given that this research is mainly focus is on the children and their opinions this limitation is minimised and perceived as acceptable for answering the research questions.

Another point of attention is the selection of schools in Utrecht. The preference for this research was to select school spread over Utrecht for broader opportunity in comparing the results per district. Although, the results do not directly speak for all the children of Utrecht, still lessons can be learned from this research for the municipality of Utrecht. Therefore it is perceived as legitimated to do the research in two districts.

Final point of attention, the ethnographic research is seen valuable for this research to include and to connect the results received from the interviews with the everyday-life. However, because of time-pressure the ethnographic research is done with the focus mainly on the places mentioned by the children and other places in the area are not included. Therefore the ethnographic research is used to support and add to the results of the interviews instead of being an expanded research on itself.

4.7 Reflexivity

While reflecting on the research, it is assumed that while doing research it is beneficial that I am a woman. In schools the vast majority of the teachers are women. Children are in school settings used to woman this could have, especially during the interviews, created a setting that children felt more comfortable with. This was confirmed by the experiences while walking in the corridors, several children on different schools have said ‘hallo juf’ (Hello teacher).

Furthermore, evaluating the process of the data collection, in class 8 of the Da Costaschool something different happened compared to other classes. At the time of the interviews the actual teacher of this class was not present therefore another teacher was present which causes chaos. The class was unmanageable and it lead to the situation that I had just two children willing to participate instead of three as planned, since I asked for silence and attention and the children were not amused by me at that moment. To overcome this problem I should have asked the teacher to create order, so I should not have to go in the teacher role given that they have to do me a favour.

Having argued the methods used for the data collection, in the next chapters the results of data collections are elaborated starting with the analysis of play areas generally.

05



5. ANALYSIS PLAY AREAS

Based on the data that is collected by the three different methods; questionnaire, interviews, and ethnographic research as discussed in the previous chapter, this chapter elaborates on the analysis of play areas generally followed by the chapters about formal and informal play areas and finally the chapter about participation.

Children's play takes place in all different types of play areas. Those places are mainly divided into two types in the literature, namely formal and informal play areas. This distinction is also made in the policy document of Utrecht (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009). Formal play areas are according to the planners of Utrecht areas with the design purpose to offer space for children to play at which includes public playgrounds such as Cruyff court¹, and Kraijcek playgrounds² (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009). Informal play areas are indicated by the planners as places which are not indicated as play areas but recognised as places at which children still play, such as green spaces, traffic-calmed areas, shopping centres, allotment gardens and private areas like the gardens, whereby planners mention to improve the playability of these areas (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009).

Wide research has been done on children's play in formal and informal play areas with as main focus the differences in terms of the level of control by adults. Formal play areas, as institutionalised places, are steered and controlled by adults in terms of design and rules for children's play behaviour. Main examples for these kind of play areas are the school playground, and recreational places as playgrounds and parks which are to a high degree designed and designated by adults for children, named by Rasmussen (2004) as 'places for children'. Rasmussen's (2005) research argues that children spend most of their everyday time in 'places for children' as at school and recreational places.

1 The Cruyff courts are designed by the Dutch Cruyff foundation in cooperation with the municipality that designs soccer fields with artificial grass in disadvantage neighbourhoods to stimulate physical movement and bring youth and children together. (<http://www.cruyff-foundation.org/>)

2 The Kraijcek playgrounds are designed by a Dutch Kraijcek foundation in cooperation with the municipality that designs playgrounds and different sport facilities also in disadvantage neighbourhoods to stimulate physical movement and pursue a social safe environment. (<http://www.kraijcek.nl/>)

The informal places on the other hand are explained as places that are created by the children themselves and are less controlled or steered by adults and even are often unnoticed by adults, such as mentioned by Roe (2006), places in long grass where children can hide and play, named by Rasmussen (2004) as 'children's places'.

The formal play areas are perceived as 'places for children' hereby it is not guaranteed that these designed places by adults become meaningful for children and thus not guaranteed that these becomes 'children's places' (Rasmussen; 2004). Children's places are places to which the children are attached and are meaningful. However, on the other hand 'places for children' that addresses the needs and preferences of children and to which the children are attached can thus also become a 'children's place'. The level of attachment and having a meaning to children makes the difference if a play area formal or informal becomes a 'children's place' whereby it is believed that meeting children's needs and preference is key.

This chapter explores what children perceive as play areas and whether these are in line with what planners see it. During this research, the children expressed different elements in their perception that according to them refers to a play area, they mentioned; material elements such as design and equipment, social elements such as how others should be included and excluded from children's places, and finally emotional meaning which they have towards a play area. When children express their perception about the design of a play area the vast majority refers to a traditional playground (Hayward *et al.* 1974) as an ordered play area with all fixed play equipment and bounded areas in many cases fenced. The physical resources that are common sense to the majority of the children are the play equipment such as, a soccer cage, swing, slide, and climbing frame³, as mentioned in the next quoted:

3 The equipment is traditional play equipment mainly focussed on movement play and physical activities.

Boy 12 years old: *'A play area is a place where you can play safely, therefore this place also needs to have a fence. It also has play equipment as climbing frames and football field and it is a place where a lot of other people can come.'*

Although there are multiple playground types as the contemporary and adventure playground (Hayward *et al.* 1974), based on the observation it is understandable that children describe mainly a traditional playground design given that the vast majority of the formal play areas is design with fixed equipment. It can be assumed that this result is created by framing, since research shows that children prefer the other two types, contemporary and adventure, more compared to the traditional design (Hayward *et al.* 1974). However, the children are not used to contemporary and adventure playgrounds hence it can be assumed as an explanation why the vast majority children did not refer to these types in the first place while expressing their image of a playground.

Referring to their play behaviour, children mentioned that the play area is also places where they want to be sportive and can move, as in the play type movement play⁴, expressed in the quotes below:

Boy 11 years old; *'A play area is a place where you can play with other children and alone and it also is a place where you can make movements and do what you like.'*

Boy 11 years old; *'It is an open field for soccer and a basketball field and a swing for the little ones. It also is a place where you can be sportive and can move.'*

⁴ Movement play refers to being able to be physically active, so children get to know themselves and the world around them (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009; 14).

According to the planners, children's play behaviour can be interpreted in four different play types, namely movement play, fantasy play⁵, construction play⁶, and hanging around⁷. From the perception of children three out of four play types are recognised. Fantasy play is not mentioned in first instance by the children while talking about the general perception of a play area. Thus based on children's first perception, this play type is less related to the play areas compared to the other three play types.

Even as children have identified traditional playgrounds as the typical form of formal play areas, some also identified other play areas which refer to the informal play areas, such as green areas, with trees, bushes, grass, and/or water, as this girls and boy:

Girl 11 years old; *'A play area has a big open space with swings and a small forest path where you can play. Also nature can be a play area, there you can build huts. Thus all areas where you can play well are a play area.'*

Boy 10 years old; *'A play area needs play equipment or grass.'*

It can be assumed that it is more difficult for children to describe the design of green areas, as they are perceived as an informal play area, which is only a children's place or play area when children are actually playing there or have experiences with playing in that area. Still, according to the children a grass field with the combination of trees can also make a play area. This is also included in the policy document by

⁵ The fantasy games are the role play and acting by copying behaviour, according to the planners to develop cooperation play and social developments (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009; 14).

⁶ Construction games are the games by which children are able to build objects with loose tools as e.g. wood and sand, to stimulate development for observing and for a mental process as thinking and problem solving (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009; 14).

⁷ The play type hanging around refers to children and youngsters who are on a spot and meet and chat there, which highlighted by planners as an important need of children and the youth (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009; 14).

5. ANALYSIS PLAY AREAS

the planners on which is elaborated more in the chapter about informal play areas.

Social elements that children mention as important for a play area are other children and especially their friends. For children, the presence of other children is very important, not only for being in a place but also for they play, generally as demonstrated by those girls:

Girl 12 years old; *'A place where you can play, meet other children and can talk, hang around and sit there with friends.'*

Girl 12 years old; *'A place where you are with friends and it is a social place to talk about holiday and make jokes, thus a meeting place.'*

The play behaviour that the children mentioned firstly is related to friends, as meeting, playing and talking with friends. Thus the social relations are important to the children to have on a play area, in formal as well as in informal play areas.

Aside from the material and social aspects of a play area, they also associate play areas with emotional and symbolic elements. The children perceive a play area as a place that is nice, fun, where you can go crazy, safe, no bully or problems and they also refer to a place where you can be free and feel at home. The children refer to all different types of emotions, in which they express a feeling of happiness and a safe feeling. The boy (below) who refers to a play area as a place where you feel at home, very strongly express the idea of children's places of Rasmussen (2004) as well as the expression of the girl. Children's places as a place that has a meaning to children instead of a play area that is a dime a dozen.

Boy 10 years old; *'A play area is a place where you feel home. Where you meet your friends and can play.'*

Girl 12 years old; *'A place where you not feel sad, thus no children who take your ball. A place where children can play together, without having big problems.'*

Children show the needs for safe places here, where children are not bullied. As the planners refer to in the policy document to social control on the youth is a response on the demand of the children. Furthermore, the emotional feeling of the children is rather complex as the expression of 'having a feeling of home'. Hereby multiple needs and preference of the children on material, as some fixed equipment (climbing frame, soccer goals) and looser bounds for more freedom in their play as an open space like a grass field and the social elements, as friends that are there and where bullying is excluded, should be included in a play area, to offer a place to children that appeal to these kinds of emotions.

The next chapter elaborates on children's perceptions and opinions about formal play areas and followed by a chapter on children's perceptions and opinions about informal play areas. Ultimately, the discussion shows that there is a mismatch between formal areas of play (places for children) vs. children's places of play. Before that however, a description of the places that are referred to for discussion on formal play areas is given.

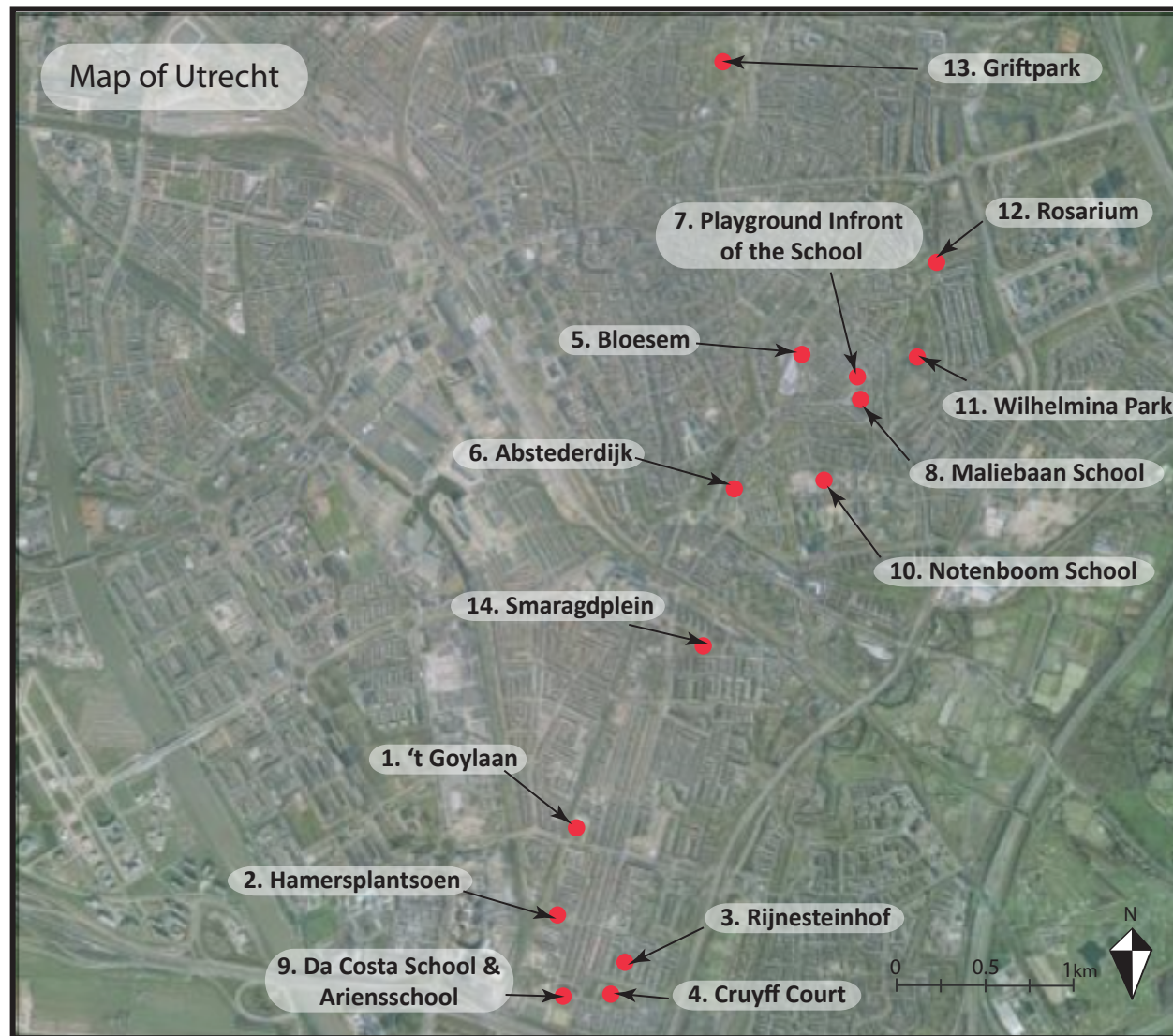


Figure 10: map of Observed Play Areas

5. ANALYSIS PLAY AREAS

The play areas that are highlighted by the children are visited and are located in the districts Utrecht Noordoost (North-East), Utrecht Oost (East), and Utrecht Zuid (South) (figure 7-9), the specific locations are also shown in figures 10. Between the selected playgrounds a distinction is made between local play areas, supervised play areas, semi-public play areas, and private play areas. The local playgrounds are always open and without a fence or managed control. Those are accessible for everybody and at every moment of the day, these include;

- Play area 1; 't Goylaan (local play area) (figure 11)
- Play area 2; Hamersplantsoen (local play area) (figure 12)
- Play area 3; Rijnesteinhof (local play area) (figure 13)
- Play area 4; Cruyff Court – Kastelenplantsoen (local play area) (figure 14)

The supervised play areas are only accessible during opening hours when the supervisor is present, who controls over children's play behaviour and who is included and excluded from the play areas.

- Play area 5; Bloesem (Supervised local play area) (figure 15)
- Play area 6; Abstederdijk playground/ Playground Oost (Supervised local play area) (figure 16)

Another play area mentioned by the children is a semi-public play area, which is owned by a person who lives in the neighbourhood and has designed a playground in cooperation with the municipality.

- Play area 7; Playground in front of the Maliebaan School (private management in combination with the municipality) (figure 17)

The school playgrounds are also visited and elaborated in chapter formal play areas.

- Play area 8; School playground of the Maliebaan School
- Play area 9; School playground of the Ariensschool and Da Costa School
- Play area 10; School playground of the Notenboom School

Children have also referred to parks as play areas, hereby the bounded and designed playgrounds are included in the chapter formal playground and the rest the area of the park indicated as informal play area and included in that chapter.

- Play area 11; Wilhelmina Park (figure 18)
- Play area 12; Rosarium (Flower garden)
- Play area 13; Grift Park

Aside from observation of formal areas, there is also tried to observe some of the informal landscapes (that are spaces that have not been dedicated for use as children's play areas). This includes the shopping centre and the parks as mentioned above (especially the parts not dedicated as a playground). However, these observations includes not the street and places in nature because of various reasons; ethical reasons with children's privacy and areas that are untraceable without the children's presents (Roe, 2006) since most of the informal places can be everywhere.

- Play area 14; Smaragdplein (Shopping area)

In total 14 different play areas, formal and informal, are observed that were mentioned by the children. Those different play areas are divided into the next two different chapters and elaborated on mismatch between the 'places designed for children' and 'children's places' that includes the needs and preferences of children.



Figure 11: Impression 't Goylaan



Figure 12: Impression Hamersplantsoen



Figure 13: Impression Rijnesteynhof



Figure 14: Impression Cruyff Court

5. ANALYSIS PLAY AREAS



Figure 15: Impression Bloesem



Figure 16: Impression Abstederdijk



Figure 17: Impression Playground in front of the Maliebaan School



Figure 18: Impression Wilhelmina Park - Playground in Park

06



6. ANALYSIS FORMAL PLAY AREAS

'In this chapter, attention is paid to the extent to which formal play areas (as 'places for children') as elaborated upon in the policy document drawn up for Utrecht have become or been accepted by children within the city as their own spaces (or children's spaces). Formal play areas are described in the literature as institutionalised play areas. Rasmussen (2004) believes that there are three main institutionalised areas for children, where they spend most of their everyday time, which make up the institutionalised triangle: the home arena, the school arena, and the recreational facilities. This chapter is focussed on these spaces as they exist in the public sphere; therefore recreational facilities such as parks and playgrounds and the school playgrounds. In the following sections is discussed the production of the play areas that are examined on the physical, social, and symbolic aspects of the landscapes and if those fit the needs and preferences of children for their play behaviour.

6.1 Formal Play Areas

The first section of this chapter focuses on local and supervised playgrounds, followed by the section about the children's opinion on school playgrounds. In doing so, it seeks to identify if the views of planners and children coincide or clashes with respect to what is perceived as ideal play areas in the city.

6.1.1 Playgrounds

The emphasis in this section is on the ways in which formal playgrounds in the public sphere (as landscapes) are conceived and designed in relation to physical elements (such as equipment, size, distance, and maintenance), social elements (such as issues to do with appropriate people and behaviour within these spaces, and levels of supervision, as well as symbolic elements pertaining to, for example, safety and freedom. The opinions as provided by the children on these topics are generally compared to those of the planners so as to examine if the current playgrounds and future playgrounds provided by planners match the needs and preferences of children on the ground.

Physical Landscape of the Playground

Playground Design

During the interviews, children's description of a playground is generally a space with play equipment and a fence. When they were asked to describe the equipment that may be found in a formal playground, they refer mainly to fixed elements such as soccer goal posts, swings, slides, climbing bars, and seesaws. As one 12-year old girl puts it: Girl 12 years; *'These places have a swing, slide, climbing frame and a soccer field, grass field'*. In this regard, what the children define as a playground coincides with the traditional playground, as described by Hayward *et al.* (1974). In this section different material elements of the formal playground are discussed in relation to children's needs and preferences and what can be experienced on the ground and found in the policy document.

An interesting material element which is generally mentioned by children as part of a formal playground is the fence (figure 19). Planners often use fences as a means of bounding particular territories that are exclusive to particular uses. This is meant to hegemonically define how a particular activity is to take place within the space and not outside of it (Gesler, 1992). Although, Matthews (1995) argues that the fence steers children in their behaviour by keeping them on one spot, this has not become common sense to the children. Even as children seem to accept the fence as a means of security and safety in related to exclusion of older children and bullies in supervised playgrounds and the protection of younger children by ball games. As such children have learnt to accept the fence as serving important functions with respect to the playground. The following quotes reflect this:

Boy 12 years old; *'The main reason for me to play there is because of the soccer cage which has a fence and a net which is handy with little children around.'*

Girl 11 years old; *'Only it would be better to play soccer in place where there is a fence to stop the little ones, otherwise they can get a ball in their face.'*

Boy 11 years old; *'In the Bloesem, when somebody beat of bully somebody, that person is not allowed to enter the Bloesem for two weeks and when it is very bad or that person is too old he or she is not allowed to enter the playground anymore.'*



Figure 19: Fence



Figure 20: Sand Surface in the Formal Playground



Figure 21: Blotevoetenpad (bare foot path) - Griftpark



Figure 22: Soccer and Basketbal Field - Bloesem

6. ANALYSIS FORMAL PLAY AREAS

Children's motives for accepting the representation of the fence and the perception on the ground differ to the motives of planners, as argued by Matthews (1995), for designing them to keep children on one spot, which causes that no resistance is expressed by the children.

The design of the surface of the playground does match the needs of children, generally. Based on the discussion about the use of different materials (also asked about uncommon materials like carpet and metal), children mentioned to prefer the current used materials for the surface like stones, grass, sand (figure 20), and wooden flakes, as shown:

Boy 12 years old; *'I do not like carpet, better would be grass, stones or nature.'*

Girl 10 years old; *'I would like to have a park with a big space with sand.'*

Boy 11 years old; *'In case the material is changed to carpet, it can still be a play area because you can still sit on it, but metal is more difficult because it can hurt and can cause pain and that should not be in a play area.'*

The preferred materials mentioned by the children are all observed in their play areas. They reflected in their response to their common image of used surface material of the playgrounds, whereby they also argue that the surface should be soft to minimise risks which contradicts with Rasmussen (2004) who argues that children are searching for risks and challenge. Based on the results of this research it can be said that children see the surface of the playground as something that has to minimise risks for hurting themselves, and this match the idea of planners and the design on the ground.

The vision of planners that green areas should be connecting with the formal playgrounds also matches the preferences of children. Children highlight to prefer a natural surrounding around and in the playground, as the garden

and path named blotevoetenpad (bare foot path)¹ in Griftpark (figure 21), as this girl of 12 years old shows: *'The Griftpark playground is favoured by me there is a lot of nature. The most important reason for me to play there is, because it is funny there like blotevoetenpad (bare foot path).'*

With respect to the play equipment in the playground, the girls especially highlighted how the equipment tended to cater to the needs of boys rather than girls, experienced by many play areas that are focussed on soccer (figure 22) as reflected by this girl of 12 years old; *'I think there is not enough thought about children who are older and especially the girls. I think that older girls who do not prefer soccer miss a play area the most'*. This shows that the planners have failed to design for both genders play equipment on the ground. Furthermore, extra attention is not given on this lack in the policy document which is experienced by girls. This indicates a mismatch between in the needs of girls and the designs of planners for play equipment in playgrounds.

Besides the concerns for girls, the children of the age of 10 to 12 are generally also not really excited about the play equipment because they miss the challenge, as they perceive the play equipment as not high enough or not adventurous enough. This confirms the results of Callecod (1974) that children prefer, challenges, complexity, and novelty, which is recognised in children's expression about more adventurous play equipment in the following quotes:

Boy 11 years old; *'If I give my opinion ... I would like to see more nice climbing frames and play equipment in his neighbourhood. That has to be high, with soft tiles and firm frame.'*

Girl 11 years old; *'I have in my neighbourhood not much space ... I would like to play on a climbing frame and have an adventure or a swing or play soccer. I find myself not difficult but there should not only be childish equipment.'*

¹ Here, children can walk through flowers and bushes on sand and stones, in this a part of the Griftpark playground can children easily experience nature in a structured way.

Children experience many playgrounds as 'childish' which is related to the Jantje Beton norm² that the children experience on the ground and highlighted in the following quotes:

Girl 12 years old; *'I think the play areas are designed fine, but some are too childish.'*

Girl 10 years old; *'No there is not enough play space, because there is in my area is no tumble bar, climbing frame, or other nice equipment. I would like a slide and climbing frame etc. Sometimes they design very boring things as benches and low tumble bars.'*

Girl 12 years old; *'A play area is an area that is big with nice things for younger and older children.'*

Although the children are aware of younger children and aware of the fact that there should be a difference between equipment for older and younger children, it is still experienced by the children that many playgrounds have childish equipment, it causes that they experience a lack of challenging play equipment for themselves. It is believed that there can be spoken about a mismatch on the ground since children perceive playgrounds through this norm generally as childish caused by many playgrounds near their houses that are designed for younger children, examples of these play equipment are shown in figure 23, 24.

Besides the challenge, children also prefer a high level of diversity of play equipment in playgrounds, which they do not experience in the smaller playgrounds. But they experience this diversity in the bigger playgrounds with organised supervision, as Bloesem, Abstederdijk and the playground in Griftpark, as these children mention:

2 Jantje Beton norm pursue many small playgrounds for children of the age of 0 to 6 years old generally near children's homes and less but bigger playgrounds for children of the age 6 to 12 years old generally further away from children's homes.

Boy 12 years old; *'The Bloesem has a soccer cage, a cableway, a sandbox, and a climbing frame, so there is a lot and it is fun.'*

Girl 13 years old; *'My favourite playground is in Sterrenwijk (Abstederdijk), because there is a lot of equipment.'*

Besides children's preference for a high level of diversity of the play equipment they also highlight the big sizes of the playgrounds as desired which are also experienced in Bloesem, Abstederdijk and the playground in Griftpark by the children as the following quotes show:

Girl 12 years old; *'The Abstederdijk playground is big with nice equipment as trampoline and a big tire as swing. I favour this place because it is a big space.'*

Girl 12 years old; *'The Griftpark playground is favoured by me because it is big and you can do all different things and there is a lot of nature. The most important reason for me to play there is, because it is funny there like blotevoetenpad (bare foot path).'*

This diversity and the preferred size is experienced in the bigger designed playgrounds, however, it is examined that each district has only one playground that meet the needs of children in being diverse and big. This is also confirmed by the results of the questionnaire based on the questions about their favourite and closest playground on size and distance. Hereby, the results show that the closest playground of the children is small and close to home compared to their favourite playground that is big and further away from home (table 1.1 in annex 3). This also means that the Jantje Beton norm³ (presented in annex 1) is experienced on the ground by the children, what for some children is experienced as a barrier since those bigger playgrounds are further away and for some not accessible on their own, as for a 11 year old girl living in Utrecht Zuid where no big playground is designed. The further effects of this on children's play behaviour are further elaborated in the next section about children play behaviour.

3 The playground of children of the age of 6 to 12 are designed bigger and on longer distances compared to the playground for children of the age of 0 to 6 years which are smaller and designed on a shorter from each other.

6. ANALYSIS FORMAL PLAY AREAS

This section on playground design has elaborated matches between children's opinion and the planners but also mismatches as the lack of challenge that is experienced in the playground by older children, especially girls experience this lack of adventurous play equipment since boys do also highly prefer soccer posts which are designed in playgrounds. Furthermore the size of playgrounds is generally experienced by children as small, caused by the norm (designed by the planners) that lead to a design with many small playgrounds in neighbourhoods, which does not response to the needs of children of the age of 10 to 12 in their play by size and design.

The matches can be found for the bigger playgrounds that meet the needs of children in size and diversity, however the long distance causes that those are not accessible for all children all days which is perceived as a mismatch. In the next section the effects of the distance to playground on children's play behaviour is further elaborated.

Play behaviour affected by design

As discussed in the last section that there are perceived differences between the closest and their favourite playground in size, distance, and design, however, the results also show that the children practice and spend the same amount of time as well in the closest playground that is not designed for them as in the bigger playground that is designed for them (presented in table 1.1 annex 3), as this girls confirm:

Girl 12 years old; *'When I go outside, (what I not often do), then I go to a square in front of my home. There is slide, seesaw, swing, and artificial grass, a sandbox, and a little water bath. Mainly little children are coming to that square and not the older children because is childish. So, I just go there to talk. That place does not mean a lot to me because it is childish. But the main reason to come there is because of the swing or the water to have a water fight in the summer.'*

Girl 12 years old; *'I go sometimes to a square close to my home with stepping stones, etc. I go there to talk with friends or with family. This square had no special meaning to me. I just use the benches'*

Based on the results of the questionnaire a correlation analysis is done which shows that both the size and the distance of the closest and the favourite playground does affect the use of a playground by children (table 1.2 annex 3) in which the distance shows a stronger relationship with children's spatial practice play compared to the size. It is perceived that the closest playgrounds are attractive for children to play in because of the short distance which is a stronger factor for they spatial practice than the small size of these playgrounds. For the favourite playground the big size is perceived attractive, however the long distance show a stronger negative effect on the children's spatial practice in these playgrounds. It is assumed that the longer distance for playgrounds designed for children of the age of 6 to 12 created by planners based on the Jantje Beton norm is a mismatch with the need and preference of a short distance.

This result is also comparable to the conclusion of Ellaway et al. (2007) in which they believe that distance as the accessibility is a key determinant for children to participate in physical activities or physically active play. It is also assumed, based on these results that the longer distance to the playground designed for children of their age group (mainly favourite playgrounds) causes that the children make also use of the playgrounds designed for children of the age of 0 to 6 as the closest playgrounds, which explains children's perception about playgrounds as childish and meaningless, as the equipment shown in figure 23.

An additional effect of this results is that children spend half of their time in a playground design with equipment for younger children, whereby it can be assumed that their developments will be less stimulated, since it is argued by Yantzi et al. (2010) that playgrounds add to children their developments (assuming a suitable design). As the quotes of the children above show, generally those play areas have no further meanings to the children which causes that they are just 'places for children'.

This does not fit in the idea of planners of offering access to playground designs for different play types and developments. In the policy document planners have highlighted that they want to provide different play types to children (which



Figure 23: A low climbing frames, experienced as childish



Figure 24: Construction play for smaller children - Bloesem

corresponds with different social, physical and cognitive skills planners hope to develop in children). They refer to four play types to which children should have access to, namely movement play⁴, construction play⁵, fantasy play⁶, and hanging around⁷ (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009). It is examined that children experience to have access to playgrounds that offer play opportunities for movement play and hanging around (present in table 2.1 annex 3). However, the two play types; fantasy play and construction play are not translated onto the ground according to the children given that they express that they have not much access to playgrounds that provide a landscape for those play types. Also during the observations it is confirmed that play equipment for constructing something (e.g. huts and bridges) with objects as blocks, boards, or natural objects as sand, water etc. is limited present in playgrounds. The equipment that is present in the playgrounds is of small scale and designed for smaller children (figure 24). It is assumed that the planners have failed to design construction play equipment for older children given the scale of the equipment and the lack experienced by children of the age of 10 to 12.

Those results about access are also reflected in children's perception about their own play behaviour. Namely spaces to which they have most access to are also more practiced, this influence is confirmed by the correlation analysis (presented in table 2.2 annex 3). Children mention to practice most the play type movement play, which is also mentioned often during the interviews like playing soccer, running, and climbing in a climbing frame, as this girl of 11 years old shows: *'I like to play with the swings, merry-go-round, or play soccer.'*

4 Movement play refers, according to the planners, to being physical active by being able to e.g. run, jump or climb. This play type is mentioned in the policy document as being important for children to develop their motor skills and to learn to cooperate with other children.

5 Construction play refers to constructing and creating objects with for example natural elements as sand and branches. It is discussed that the importance of this play type are for the cognitive developments of the children as problem solving thinking.

6 Fantasy play refers to imitation and role play for developing social skills and for young children to develop from solitary games to cooperative games.

7 Hanging around refers to places where children and youngsters should be able to meet each other outside for chatting, especially for children above 12 years old.

6. ANALYSIS FORMAL PLAY AREAS

Similar to the play type hanging around, to which children mention to have good possibilities for, however generally the children of the age of 10 to 12 do not practice this much (table 2.1, annex 3). Based on the results of the interview it is indicated that this is most often practiced by girl of the age of 12, as quoted:

Girl 12 years old; *'A play area is place where you can play and there are other children and talk with friends and hang around with friend and sit there.'*

Girl 12 years old; *'A place where you can be with friends and it is a social place where you can talk about holiday and make jokes, like a meeting place.'*

This is comparable to the policy document that includes children of the age of 12 and older for the play type hanging around. Based on these results it is seen that mainly the girls of the age of 12 hang around rather than the boys.

It is indicated that the children are steered in their play behaviour by the supply of playgrounds in design and access, based on the correlation analysis (presented in table 2.2 annex 3). However even as planners have well justified reasons for certain playground designs it is no necessary that the children will accept them; in Lefebvre's terms, examples of how representations of space are not necessarily representational spaces; and how this is reflected in spatial activities. Children have the power for accepting and rejecting certain spaces by choosing their own space for their spatial practice play (Foucault, 1980) which makes knowledge about children's preference for valuable.

In this research is also confirmed that children's preference towards forms of play does affect their practice even more (presented in table 2.2 annex 3) compared to access. Whereby children indicate that they prefer movement play the most (presented in table 2.1 annex 3), this is also observed during ethnographic research that children generally where running, climbing, and playing ball games. The other three play types; fantasy, construction, and hanging around are not highly preferred by the children of the age of 10 to 12 based on the results of the questionnaire.

On the other hand, the results of the interview show that the girl of the age of 12 do like to talk and meet in playgrounds and hang around, but this is not perceived as the general opinion of the children of the age of 10 to 12. Furthermore, the construction play is mentioned by some children (boys and girls and different ages) as their favourite play practice like building huts or bridges but these opportunities are lacking in formal playgrounds as these children refer generally to informal play areas with bushes and trees and the use of natural materials to be able to do construction play, as those two children show:

Boy 11 years old; *'My favourite play is searching for branches, building huts and bridges. I only needs for this branches and I do this with my friends.'*

Girl 11 years old; *'I play also in the nature where you can build huts.'*

Based on the correlation analysis it is seen that the different results on practice, preference, and accessibility are related to each other. A significant relationship is examined, hereby it is shown that the planners have to power to control and steer children play behaviour by offering access to playgrounds for different play types. However, given that there is experienced a lack by children for construction and fantasy play this causes that children are less able to practice this. Children only experience good access for movement play which is observed to be the main playground design in Utrecht, this results also in the highest practice of children by doing movement play (figure 25). Besides that planners influences children's play behaviour through design and creating accessibility, children themselves do influence their practice even more. Foucault (1980) mentions that the children have the power to choose their own places and their own behaviour. This is strengthened by the results that show that the preference of children towards play behaviour shows an even stronger relationship with their play practice than accessibility. It is even shown that children's attitude is not directly affected by the accessibility of a playground, since there is no significant relationship. This indicated that children's preferences are an important factor in children spatial practice. When children do not like something it is assumed that they will not do it often. Although



Figure 25: opportunities for movement play - Hamersplantsoen



Figure 26: Litter in a grass field

it can be also said that they will do it sometimes since the accessibility also affects children practice but not as strong as their own attitude towards a play type.

The main results of this chapter are that there is found a mismatch between the norm for the distance and the needs of children for a short distance. The distance to bigger playgrounds designed for children of the age of 10 to 12 is experienced as far and causes that children also play in playgrounds designed for children of the age of 0 to 6 years old, causing a lack of stimulation in children development cognitively and physically. Secondly planners has failed to design play equipment for children of the age of 10 to 12 for being able to do construction play and fantasy play as mentioned in the policy document. Finally, the results has shown that accessibility to play areas affects children play behaviour, however, children preference has shown an even stronger relationship with their spatial activities which will be further elaborated in data chapter participation. The next section discusses that maintenance and litter in play areas and how this affects children's perception of playgrounds.

Litter and Maintenance of playground

In the questionnaire the children are asked for their opinion about the amount of broken equipment and if they are suffering from poor maintenance of equipment or from the amount of litter since this is mentioned in the policy document under the topic of safety.

Firstly about the maintenance, generally children experience that the equipment is just sometimes broken but this does not seem to be something that presents too much of a problem for the children (presented in table 4.1, annex 3). However, during the observations in the Wilhelmina Park a person from the municipal was repairing play equipment, which was intentionally broken. He told a lady in the play area (who was watching her grandchildren) that it happens a lot and they work daily on it to keep all the equipment in the city maintained and playable. In his conversation he accused the youngsters (as older youth) for damaging the play equipment. It can

6. ANALYSIS FORMAL PLAY AREAS

be assumed, based on the municipal worker and the opinion of the children, that there are play equipment damaged but the municipality have managed it, to let the children experience that it is just sometimes poorly maintained and that it just bothers them little in their play behaviour. It is assumed that this is a match between the planners' opinion and children's given that it is bothers children sometimes.

Secondly under the topic safety, attention is also paid to the subject litter. Generally, litter as plastic bags or harmless waste is not mentioned by the children during the interviews, which confirms the results of the questionnaire. According to the children, they experience not much but also not less litter in their play areas (presented in table 4.1 annex 3). Children also express that they do not suffer much from litter at the playground (presented in table 4.1 annex 3). Although, according to Loukaitou-sideris (2003), places with more litter and commonly dirty areas are perceived by children as unsafe areas, while the children in this research do not specifically mention to have problems with the situation.

Based on the results of the interviews, it is understood that the children do not specially highlight the presence of harmless litter (as in figure 26), but litter related to drinking alcohol and the use of drugs is indicated by the children as not fitting in the environment of a play area. Based on these results, according to the children, drinking and drugs-use in the play areas are the main problem while talking about litter, as expressed by the girl of 12 years old: *'Younger and older children are allowed to come. According to her people who smoke or use drugs are not allowed to come in a play area. She gave an example about a play area near Tivoli and around a bench all small bags from weed lay there. She disliked it because it looked dirty and littered. Also she adds that children will see it and that is not right because drugs are bad.'*

These types of litter causes that children do not like specific play areas or parts of the playground. Even when the design of the playground is preferred the litter influences the perception of the children about the playground. On this topic the planners match the needs of children referring

to litter especially litter related to drugs-use and alcohol consumption. During this section on the material elements of the playground it can be assumed that some objectives of planners do match the needs and preferences of children as the design of the fence, the surface, play equipment as soccer posts, playground design for movement play (running, climbing, etc.), and the maintenance of play equipment and litter. However, based on the results it is also shown that some objectives do not match or that the needs and preferences of children are not met in the playground design, as the small amount of playgrounds with a high diversity of play equipment and a big size, the long distance to playgrounds designed for children of the age of 10 to 12, lack of challenge and adventure by the play equipment in the playground, lack of challenging play equipment for girls, and the lack of construction playground designs. Generally, it can be said that planners objective do match the needs and preferences of children referring to general material design of a play area, as a fence, surface, and movement play. However, it is also seen that the planners have failed to translate different play types (as movement, construction, hanging around, and fantasy play) in an accessible and challenging way on the ground. In the next section there is elaborated on social elements of the landscape the playground with topics like in- and exclusion and children's social relations.

Social Landscape of the Playground

The children are not only affected by the material design of the playground but also by the social landscape of the playground, such as in terms of being including or excluded from the playground, their social activities while at the playground.

Inclusion and Exclusion

Within the landscape of the playground children's first response is that 'everybody' should be able to enter a playground:

Boy 11 years old; *'I find that everybody should be allowed in the playground, nobody excluded.'*

Girl 10 years old; *'Everybody who lives in the neighbourhood should be able to play in a play area. The play area is not from one person, also from different cultures, ages, and genders.'*



Figure 27: Fence of the Supervised Playground The Bloesem



Figure 28: Fence of the Supervised Playground The Abstederdijk/ Oost

The responses of the children are interesting based on the different elements that they mentioned in which exclusion can be experienced, namely age, culture, and gender. Children argue in the first place that they do not want to exclude anybody. Some children did not use the word 'everybody' but specifically highlighted groups of people like children and adults who should be included. Hereby in the first place the children, as younger and older children, are perceived as a group who should be included in the playgrounds followed by the adults (who have to watch the younger children, according to the children), as mentioned by these children:

Girl 12 years old; *'Younger and older children are allowed to come.'*

Boy 11 years old; *'Children and parents should be able to access playgrounds.'*

However, when the children are specifically asked who should be excluded from the playground, according to them, they refer to the youth or youngsters (children above 12 years Gemeente Utrecht 2009: 7). They explain that they do not want to exclude the youth based on their age but based on their behaviour that the children express as making a mess, screaming, bullying, drinking, smoking, or using drugs. Children express this by making a distinction between youth who misbehaviour and the ones who do not, as a 12 year old girl said: *'Everybody should be allowed to come in a play area, but the youth is less fun but when they do not make a mess or they clean it, then it is no problem.'*

The children generally associate the youth with practice as hanging around, smoking, drinking, and drugs-use which they dislike, as the quotes show:

Girl 11 years old; *'In the playground children should be able to come and the youth that is hanging around or hobos should not be in a playground, because they could have a bad influence through drinking and smoking.'*

Boys 12 years old; *'Everybody who would like to play quietly is welcome in a play area. Boys who use the playground to smoke and to hang in around are not welcome, because it is bad for the lungs of the children.'*

6. ANALYSIS FORMAL PLAY AREAS

Based on the results of the interviews the attitude of the children toward the youth is thus indicated as generally negative, although it is not so much because of their age but what they tend to do and how they tend to act at the playgrounds. The children argue that the behaviour of the youth causes playgrounds to get dirty because of the litter they leave behind. The attitude of the children in the interview is a match with objective of the planners, who indicate the social problem of youth and groups of youth hanging around.

On the other hand, based on the results of the questionnaire this image of the youth is not confirmed. Here, the children responded that they experience not many youngsters and their attitude towards these groups of youngsters was positive. Namely, the children express that they are just a little bothered by youngsters (presented in table 4.1 annex 3). On the basis of the questionnaire results no major social problem were highlighted. It can be assumed that the results of the questionnaire are more a results of children's everyday lives in which children respond more generally about their experience with youngsters that are moderated. On the other hand, during the interviews the children could have had a situation in mind that has made a big impression on them but what does not happen every day. Assuming that based on the results of the questionnaire the children do not have to share the playground every day with the youth, it is still important to recognise the situations of children whereby they have had bad experiences with youth and how this effected their play behaviour, as elaborated below.

During the interviews the children also mentioned, besides the litter and drugs, drinking and smoking behaviour, the bullying and screaming behaviour of the youth. These types of behaviour affects the children even more directly, compared to the litter and youth's activities (drinking, smoking, using drugs). Children express these situations by having an unsafe feeling, since they experience that they are in that case not able to play there freely anymore and do they feel excluded from the playground. In the quotes the children highlight a bad experience with youth:

Girl 11 years old; *'I do not prefer to have youth hanging around in the play areas. Sometimes they watch you, or they occupy equipment and then you do not dare to ask, or they just do not want to leave.'*

Boy 10 years old; *'Sometimes there are older boys, who want my ball for themselves. Once they took my ball, and I went to my father and he took the ball back. The boys said to my dad that they did not know that I did not want it, which was not true. I find hanging youth not nice, I would like to see that the youth is on places where no little children are.'*

Girl 10 years old; *'I do not prefer to have youth hanging around in the playground, because they sometimes irritates and start pushing and yelling even you have not done anything.'*

When the youth is present in a playground the children express generally that they occupy the play equipment and the younger children do not dare to ask if they can also play with the equipment. Some children even mention situations where they were bullied by youngsters. They express that, when this happen, they generally leave the playground or ask their parents for help. Still, the general outcome is that children are no longer willing to play there and usually go somewhere else to play or to home. None of the children mention that they confronted the youths as they see no chance of competing with them in order to, for example, gets a chance to play with any particular play equipment. These experiences of children show the needs of more social control in playgrounds, as also argued in the policy document. However, the planners have not managed to solve the problem or to come up with a solution for this problem on the ground.

This confrontation with the youth causes inter alia that some children would prefer to see the playgrounds supervised (by social organisation). They also experience the benefits from the supervised playground, as Bloesem and Abstederdijk (figure 27 and 28), were youth is already excluded, as these children tell:



Figure 29: Spot in Bloesem where supervisor sit, as parents and the supervisor



Figure 30: Abstederdijk, experienced as cosy (gezellig) and is favoured

Girl 11 years old; *'The people who do not come there are big children from the secondary school and older people. Lies the supervisor take care of the people who should not be there as youth (Bloesem).'*

Boy 11 years old; *'I think in a playground should be a manager to see if everything goes alright. This should be somebody who knows about it, should be older, and should have first aid certification in case somebody has something.'*

Girl 13 years old; *'My favourite playground is in Sterrenwijk (Abstederdijk), ... There are also supervisors who watch mainly from inside ... The main reason for me to play there is because it is safe.'*

However, planners do not mentioned that more playgrounds should be supervised but they highlight the possibility of neighbourhood activities (as organised games) for children to play freely in neighbourhoods where youth is hanging around or on places that are normally not used by children because of the youth. Still, this does not directly meet the needs of children and it is even argued by Alexander a supervisor of the Bloesem (during the ethnographic research) that the municipality is considering, because of the budget cuts, to give neighbours the responsibility to open the gate on specific times and to check if the equipment stays maintained instead of a paid supervisor. This could cause that the supervisor of a playground will maybe disappear because of economic reasons. Based on multiple reasons as the safety feeling in a playground, it is indicated that children in the Utrecht feel the need for a playground with a supervisor, also keeping in mind that the majority of the children mentioned the Bloesem and Abstederdijk playground as their favourite playground which are both supervised. In case the municipality decided to take away the supervisors from the children it is assumed that their safety feeling in the playground will decrease based on the expressions of the children (as shown above), currently. In case the rumours that the supervisors will be whittled down becomes the truth, causes a big contradiction with the objective of the policy document solve the safety problem and a mismatch with the needs of children for a safe place to play, in figure 29 is the spot shown where supervisions as parents and the supervisor are while children are playing.

6. ANALYSIS FORMAL PLAY AREAS

Social Relations

As mentioned in the chapter analysis play areas, the presence of other children is an important factor to go to a specific playground. The playground is highlighted as a place where you will meet your friends and also new children, as this girl of 12 years old tells: *'My favourite play area is near Tivoli. For me the main reason to play there is because it is really fun and you can play with many different children.'*

Children prefer some playgrounds more than others not just through the material design but by its social elements of the landscape as the presence of children or their friends, as these children indicate:

Girl 12 years old; *'The main reason for me to play there is that nobody says you are not welcome. Everybody plays with each other.'*

Boy 12 years old; *'The Abstederdijk play area is my favourite play area, because there come nice boys for play or play soccer. The main reason for me to play there is because of my friends who go to that place.'*

Thirdly the children can also be connected to a playground emotionally, while experiencing a playground as a social and cosy place or as a place where you can go to when you feel sad or bored, as referred to in these quotes:

Boy 12 years old; *The meaning of the playground de Bloesem is; 'sociability (gezelligheid)'*

Girl 11 years old; *'My meaning of the Bloesem is that it is cosy.'*

Girl 12 years old; *'The playground means to me as a place where I go to when I feel sad or bored.'*

These quotes reflect how children's experience and satisfaction with a playground is not only determined by the material aspects of the playground but also the social and symbolic environment that characterises it through spatial activity playing, meeting people but also as a place where they can go to with their emotions of happiness and sadness. In the policy document is recognised the social issue of safety in relation with the youth and bullying. Furthermore it is examined that children feel safe in supervised playgrounds where they are watched and know that children who misbehave or are too old will be excluded. This causes by the children a feeling of safety but also adds it to their feeling of cosiness in the playground with the people who are included. Planners mention in the policy document that currently each district has at least one supervised playground (which is confirmed during the ethnographic research excluding Utrecht Zuid) although it is rumoured that those supervisors will be whittled down. In case that becomes reality this will be a serious mismatch that will affect many children's play behaviour by taking away children's feeling of safety in the currently supervised playgrounds, which is indicated as an important need of children. In the next sub-chapter, the school playgrounds of the schools that have participated in this research are elaborated, on its physical, social and symbolic elements of this play landscape.

6.1.2 School Playgrounds

In the policy document, the planners also mentioned to be willing to expand the amount of play areas, in neighbourhoods with a lack of play facilities, by opening the school playground after school time (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 16). For this idea they highlighted that they spoke with the school board and parents about those plans. In the policy document it is not highlighted that children were involved in the decision to open school playgrounds⁸ after school time. Based on the research of Thomson (2005) it is seen that school playgrounds are even more controlled by adults than local or playgrounds with organised supervision. As

⁸ School playgrounds are generally designed as a big square with some play equipment on it. Generally a school playground is bounded in different parts for children of different age groups/classes. Currently, school playground with fences generally close after school time or are only accessible for children from the after school care till the evening. Some school playgrounds do not have a fence of a low fence and are always accessible, as the Notenboom School.



Figure 31: Design of the Da Costaschool and Ariensschool experienced as not diverse



Figure 32: Design of the Notenboom School experienced as not diverse

Thomson believes (2005: 76) 'the general perception of the school playground is that it is not an adult space. However, it is a space conceived by adults to contain children at school'. The opinions of the children about the school playgrounds (and the decision to open them beyond school hours) are analysed, based on the physical (play equipment, size and distance), social (rules and regulation, teacher supervision), and symbolic (sense of the school playground) related responses.

Children's response for preferring playing on the school playground after school time is indicated as a slightly positive attitude (table 5.1 annex 3). Children do not indicate to highly prefer playing on the school playground after school time, with an exception of the Maliebaan School, (Notenboom School, Ariensschool, and Da Costaschool) in which the children like the school playground more (table 5.3 annex 3). During the observation it also is noticed that the playground of the Maliebaan School is bigger and offers more play equipment compared to the other school playgrounds. Still, the majority of the children indicate that the play equipment in the school playgrounds is not sufficient or diverse enough (figure 31 and 32) which causes that they are not willing to play in the school playground after school time, as these children highlight:

Girl 12 years old (Not)⁹; *'The school playground is always open, but I do not like it because there is not much. Mostly, when I go there I only sit on the climbing frame.'*

Boy 12 years old (Mal)¹⁰; *'Currently it is not possible to play in the school playground. But if I was possible to do, I would not want it because there is not much equipment.'*

Girl 12 years old (Da C)¹¹; *'No I would not like it to play here, because it is empty, what I dislike.'*

9 (Not) Notenboom School

10 (Mal) Maliebaan School

11 (Da C) Da Costaschool

6. ANALYSIS FORMAL PLAY AREAS

Besides the critics of the children on their school playground design, they also indicate other factors as the distance that is too long (to go from school to home and back to school) or they mention that they have other play facilities which they prefer more that are closer to home, causing that they are not willing to play in the school playground after school time, as these quotes show:

Boy 10 years old (Ari)¹²; *'I think I would not play here, because the school is a bit too far and then I will lose time.'*

Boy 11 years old (Mal); *'If the school playground would be open after school time I would like it, ... But I prefer the Griftpark more.'*

Boy 11 years old (Mal); *'If the school playground would be open after school time I do not know directly if I would like it, because I like to play soccer so I would go earlier to the Bloesem.' .. 'I would go earlier to another place than that I would go back again to the school playground to play there after school time.'*

On school playgrounds Thomson (2005) experiences during the research prescriptive patterns of usage. Thomson (2005: 76) believes that 'the children had to remain alert and conscious of all their actions in case they over stepped the line both literally and metaphorically. Therefore, it appeared that the children could not move as unconsciously and spontaneously as they wished'. It is argued that children have to remain alert to the rules and recognise spaces where entry is restricted/forbidden or embedded with rules. Those findings express a negative signal towards the practice of children and level of control on children at the school playgrounds. The rules and boundaries are also recognised by children, which has a negative impact on the willingness of children to play there after school time, as shown in the quotes:

12 (Ari) Ariensschool

Girl 12 years old (Da C); *'There should be no sandbox because we are not allowed to play in it, because it is for the younger children.'*

Girl 12 years old (Mal); *'The school playground is no good play option because I would like to play in the bushes but we are not allowed to play there. The neighbours of the school believe that children make too much noise and they would not like it when we play in the bushes.'*

Girl 11 years old (Mal); *'I would like to see the rules change for playing with the ball. I would prefer to play with the ball in the whole playground.'*

Girl 11 years old (Da C); *'Currently there are rules as children to class 5 are only allowed on the swings... I would like to have the rules changed.'*

Given that children are not refused from playing with the swings or strictly bounded with ball games to only on one part of the local playgrounds, makes these play areas more attractive than the school playground. Besides the rules, a slight majority children do also not prefer to play in the school playground after school time because of the presence of teachers (who designed the rules), as highlighted by this boy of 12 years old (Not): *'I do not like it to play in the school playground after school time, because than I have no business there. There are also still teachers and I do not always like that, teachers are also sometimes bothered that we are still playing here after school time.'*

Some children also indicate that besides the presence of teachers the meaning of the playground related to school does also affect their attitude in a negative way, as shown in these quotes:

Boy 11 years old (Mal); *'If the school playground would be open after school time I do not know directly if I would like it, because I think I would go earlier to another place than that I would go back again to the school playground to play there after school time.'*



6. ANALYSIS FORMAL PLAY AREAS

Girl 11 years old (Da C); *'I would not like it because I am not used to it. .. and playing next to a school, no thanks! Than you see all the books on the table. Than you are thinking about school again. Also, when you did not have finished your homework and you see your teacher through the window, he would say; come here you.'*

Boy 12 years old (Not); *'I do not like it to play in the school playground after school time, because than I have no business there ... It feels different to play in the school playground, because it feels as you are in school and not free and that you have just a break. In weekends I will not go there, because I would find it stupid to have the feeling of being on school during weekends.'*

After school time children mentioned that they do not want to experience the feeling of being at school. The meaning of the school playground causes that this playground is no option for them to play in after school time. It can be said that by just opening the school playgrounds after school time will not be sufficient to attract children to play there. It would have been more valuable when planners had focussed on the children and their willingness and opinion about playing in the school playground since that is the goal to achieve, instead of just focussing on the school board and parents for supervision and the fact that other people will also be able to enter the school playground by opening. Namely, based on the correlation analysis, accessibility does not affect the spatial practice or attitude of children (presented in table 5.2 annex 3). This expresses that by opening the school playground after school time, does not guarantee that the extra space for children will also be used by them. On the other hand, children's practice and attitude do affect each other. Hereby is assumed that in case children dislike the school playground they will not play there. Thus, children's attitude towards the school playground plays an important role for their spatial practice. It believed that changes will be needed in the equipment, rules, and supervision of teachers to make the school playgrounds more appealing to children to play there after school time. But in the way these playgrounds are designed currently, there perceived a mismatch between the planners' objective and children's needs and preferences.

This chapter has highlighted multiple topics about formal play areas, the playground and school playgrounds, whereby the matches and the mismatches are discussed between the planners' objectives and children's needs and preferences. Attention is also paid to problems that are recognised by the planners but in which they have failed to translate the solution on the ground. The next chapter elaborates on the informal play areas created by children themselves, as the street, green areas, and shopping areas and what needs and preferences these play areas offer to children and what the formal playgrounds cannot or just do not offer to them.

07



7. ANALYSIS INFORMAL PLAY AREAS

In the last chapter, the formal playgrounds and school playgrounds are discussed. The main finding is that children experience a lack of challenging play equipment and a long distance to playgrounds that are most attractive to them. This chapter will further discuss the way in which children's needs and preferences are answered in informal play areas in contrast to the supply of the formal play areas. The informal play areas refer to places that are created by the children themselves and are believed to be less controlled or steered by adults. Those spaces often remain unnoticed by adults, such as places in long grass where they can hide and play (Roe, 2006). Other informal play areas mentioned in other research are play areas such as, the street (Noschis, 1992), near shops (Matthews, 1995), the bushes (Fjortoft, 2000), and natural areas (Fjortoft, 2000). In the first place those informal play areas are not formally purposed to children to play in and are generally designed for different purposes, as shopping areas are for shopping instead of hanging around (Thomson & Philo, 2004). Although, the design purpose of these areas is in the first place for different functions, the municipality of Utrecht does recognise informal play behaviour of children in several areas which will be further discussed in this chapter. In this chapter informal play areas are examined, based on the results of the questionnaire, the interviews and the ethnographic research. Firstly, there is examined what these places offer in material, social and symbolical sense to the children, according to their own perceptions and how this addresses their needs and preferences. Secondly, it is examined to what extent this matches the perception of the planners based on the policy document and how this varies from the formal playgrounds.

7.1 Informal Play Areas

The informal play areas that are discussed in this section are places mentioned by the children themselves and that have not been identified or established as formal play areas by planners. Each place is examined in terms of, to what extent it meets the needs of children in material, social and symbolical sense based on children's perception. The places that are discussed are green areas, the street, and local shopping areas, those three types of play areas meet different needs of children and are perceived differently in design by children and differ to their behaviour.

7.1.1 Green Areas

One set of informal play areas mentioned by the children during the interviews may be grouped as natural or green areas, these include grass fields and parks that are designed for esthetical reasons but are also highlighted by planners as places where children's play is recognised and children like to play in, as the selfmade path shown in figure 33. Based on children's statements, the size of the green area where children speak about differs per child, some children talk about a specific tree and others speak about a bigger area with trees, bushes, grass and water, as shown by these quotes:

Girl 12 years old; *'I often play in a tree in my neighbourhood. This tree is positioned in a kind of flowerbox with a small path through it which is designed by people themselves.'*

Boy 11 years old; *'I also play in the bushes with small pathways and a lot of trees.'*

Girl 12 years old; *'I also play near a canal, where I sometimes throw stones in the water.'*

Although, several children spoke about green areas to play in, the results from the questionnaire showed that there is, according to the children, just an average amount of green near their play areas or as their play area (table 3.1, annex 3). The planners of Utrecht also intend to expand the green structure around play areas, by connecting green areas with each other and with formal play areas, to offer opportunities for informal play, but according to the children this is currently perceived as not much green. During the observations it is also perceived that the children living in the Utrecht Oost have more possibilities to play in big green areas, such as Wilhelmina Park (figure 34), and Griftpark, while children living in Utrecht Zuid have fewer possibilities to play in big green areas. Only one park is located in this district (Beatrix Park), however this park is almost 3 kilometres located from the schools Ariensschool and Da Costaschool and they would have to walk or cycle along a 50 km/h road. It is assumed that because of the location, this park is not mentioned by the children during the interviews. This lack of green in Utrecht Zuid is also



Figure 33: Selfmade path through bushes



Figure 34: Big green area in Wilhelmina park

confirmed by the different results between the different schools. The children of the Maliebaan School located in Utrecht Oost indicated to experience the presence of green areas more compared to the children from the other schools (table 3.2, annex 3).

Talking about green areas, especially trees are important according to children's perception about play areas. Many children mentioned in the description of their play area (also in formal play areas) the presence of trees, as this girl of 11 years old living in Utrecht Oost: *'I like to play in the forest near Bloeyendaal. There are trees everywhere, where you can play well hide and seek. In the forest, a lot of old people walk but there are also a lot of huts.'*

The children also stated that they like the presence of green in and around their play areas (mean of 0.83 out of range -2 to 2, table 3.1, annex 3). The planners mention that the presence of green is important to the children because green contributes to rest, movement, and meeting others (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 6). However, rest is barely mentioned by the children related to green. Only one girl (12 years old, Utrecht Zuid) has referred to the canal as play area to become calm while looking at the water: *'I also play near a canal, where she sometimes throws stones in the water. They also put their feet in the water in the summer. I come there with the people who are playing on the field. That place makes me quiet; when I am watching the small waves of the water it makes me calm.'*

Movements and meeting others is generally highlighted by the children. The perception of the planners that green areas offer rest seems to be created from an adults' perception instead of a children's perception. As mentioned by the children adults walk through the park (or forest as called by children), and children use it mainly for climbing, constructing, running, and playing hide and seek.

Furthermore, the design of the informal green play areas is not straight forward also not in the description of the children. The objects that are generally highlighted are just trees and bushes compared to formal play areas which were much easier for children to describe, as there is a swing, slide, etc. Even so, there are a few

7. ANALYSIS INFORMAL PLAY AREAS

differences between formal play areas (such as playgrounds) and green areas informally used by children as play spaces, one of the main differences between the formal play areas and the informal play areas is the accessibility. The children did not mention how they access the formal play area because it is assumed to be common known that you enter through a fence or via a pathway. However, as the first two quotes of this section show, children are often not able to enter their play area via a regular route, as the girl of 12 years old speaks about a path that is made by people themselves through a flowerbox. Other children often speak about a small path or a forest path through the bushes. While the children spoke about those paths, they were more excited about it, because not everybody knows their paths. Therefore, it is assumed to be also part of their play, as discovering (within movement play). They know the way to that specific place, which makes it more special to them as this girl of 12 years old tells: *'I favour Griftpark, because there are trees and stones and not a lot of people come in this place because they do not know about that place.'* (At the back in the park in the bushes)

Through this design of the informal play areas, such as places in the bushes, the children naturally exclude adults. As the children tell, the adults are walking around in the park on the regular paths, while the children are going through the bushes or climbing in trees to be able to enter their play areas. These play areas offer children unordered, and unsupervised areas, as children talk about their play in the trees or bushes with friends or their brothers and sisters compared to the formal play areas where it was mentioned sometimes that their mother or father was there. This is it not mentioned when they talked about their play in informal play areas. It is assumed that these are children's own places and that adults do not access these places generally, because they are not aware of these children's places (Rasmussen, 2004) or because of the indirect barrier, they have to go off the designed paths. This indicates that the children resist the designed border of the paths and construct their own path and play area. These possibilities of creating an own path and play area and also being away from adults supervision are characteristics that children prefer in the informal play areas and that they do not experience in formal play areas.

Having said this about the design of these informal play areas and the inclusion and exclusion through design by a poor accessibility, I will continue with the play behaviour of the children in green areas. When the children spoke about playing in the green areas they mentioned different types of play, such as climbing in trees, playing hide and seek, or constructing objects, as this boy 11 years old: *'My favourite play is searching for branches, building huts and bridges. I only need branches to do that and I do this with my friends.'*

Here, the boy described his preferred play activity in terms of being able to search for, and build things. This is something that green spaces are able to provide because there are opportunities in abundance and which lack in the formal play areas. This activity is named as construction play¹ by the planners, which stimulates the cognitive developments of the children as problem solving thinking (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009: 15). This play function is not mentioned during the play activities of the children in the formal play and even indicated as a lack for children of the age of 10 to 12 (based on the questionnaire results), as highlighted in the chapter formal play areas. This causes that construction play, according to the children, is more related to playing in the green areas and this is also based on the elements they mentioned such as branches as building material.

Currently many children indicated that they do not often play constructions games in formal or informal play areas. However, they also indicated to be moderately positive towards construction games (mean of 0.45 table 2.1 annex 3). Given that the practice of construction play has a significant relationship with accessibility as well as with attitude (table 2.2, annex 3), expanding the green areas the practice construction play can be stimulated. It can also be assumed that in case children are offered better opportunities for playing construction games, their preference towards this play function will increase. Planners can learn from the green areas as play areas by recognising the preference for unordered, no fix design, and spaces that offer unsupervised places where children are able to hide.

1 Construction play refers to constructing and creating objects with for example natural elements as sand and branches.

This child also mentioned that she prefers climbing trees, this play behaviour is called by the planners as movement play which is also described for the formal play areas. Climbing and playing hide and seek are play games that are often mentioned by the children to do in green areas, assuming that formal play areas are generally to open for hide and seek. This way of playing is also often perceived as more adventurous to the children, based on the way they come there (via self-made paths) and what they are able to do, such as climbing, swinging on branches, building huts or other objects, and as hiding places, as this girl: Girl 11 years old; *'I like to climb and have an adventure.'*

However, this play behaviour in the green areas is not always preferred by neighbours. This is reflected in the opinion of an 11 year old girl who mentioned that neighbours complain about the children who play in the bushes:

Girl 11 years old; *'Nowadays it is also not allowed to play in the bushes which I find stupid, because I like to climb in trees and hide in the bushes. The neighbours of the school complained and that is the reason why it is not allowed.'*

Not only the neighbours of the schools but also adults in the park and in the neighbourhoods often tell the children they are not allowed to play in the bushes or trees, as these boys tell:

Boy 11 years old; *'Some people do not want that we play in the nature, because we could scare away birds. But I am against this, because children should be able to move freely in nature. Mostly, it are older people who say this. When people say this to me, I go to them and explain what I do and mostly they understand it and then I stay playing there.'*

Boy 11 years old; *'Nowadays, I am not allowed to play in front of my house in the grass and with the flowers because the neighbours do not like it. However, I do not understand it because the flowers are there now for two years and nobody is doing something with it. But if I would be allowed I would like it, because it is in front of my house and it would also be possible for my little brothers to play with me. Also, my parents say it is fine, but my neighbours do not like it and therefore I am told not to play there.'*

These three situations also suggest that even in the case green is present along school playgrounds, in the neighbourhoods or in the parks some adults do not perceive it as a play area, which is also mentioned in other literature about play areas. Adults perceive a play area as orderly where on the other hand children prefer loose parts and alternative equipment (Francis, 1988; Matthews, 1995; Rasmussen, 2004; Roe, 2006). What the children mention about the opinion of adults about their play area supports the results of other research. However, these kind of situations in which adults do not prefer the children to play in front of their houses decreases the playing possibility's for children and makes it more difficult for children to play freely or even as mentioned by 'the boy of 11 years old' he is not allowed to play with his little brothers now, caused by the long distance to the playground. Another child mentioned a situation where her play area was destroyed through cutting work (trees) of the municipality. Since the workers probably did not perceive that area as a play area in first place:

Girl 11 years old; *'Yes, I have been bothered during my play, when we were often playing in a tree and the next day the tree was cut down. I felt sad about it! We wanted to protest and make banners, but we were too late. I believed that they would not do that suddenly, but that they would first ask the neighbourhood if they would mind. Now, they did not ask anybody. I wanted to give my opinion about it, because since I was born I have been playing in that tree. Now it is not possible anymore! I find it really sad, because we had placed shelves and a bench in the tree. That is all gone now!'*

Thus, besides neighbours, the municipality, through maintenance and redesigning, can also make it more difficult for the children to keep their informal play areas. It is also interesting to see, that this girl mentions that she would have expected from the municipality that they would ask them, as is often the case in formal designed areas. Although it is seen that this is not the same procedure for informal play areas, the feeling of this girl is the same. She feels like she had the right to give her opinion. This indicates that some specific green areas have become children's places and appears to mean more to the children than the municipality probably thinks. The children mentioned different reasons why the green areas mean something to them as not being bored and the diversity, some quotes are:

7. ANALYSIS INFORMAL PLAY AREAS

Girl 12 years old; *'The Griftpark is a nice place to be, I also played there a lot as a little child because you cannot be bored there.'*

Boy 12 years old; *'I prefer to play in Griftpark. This park means a lot to me, because you can run, build, and there are friends. The main reason for me to play there is because you can do everything you want.'*

Diversity is seen as important for the children in preferring the green areas as play area compared to the results of the formal play areas. The Griftpark in Utrecht offers great opportunities for diversity, also in the green areas. During the observations the green areas were observed and the variation, size, and density of the green indicates to be attractive to children. Other children also mentioned that playing in green areas is fun and that climbing in a tree is adventurous. The meaning of the informal green play areas do not differ much from the formal play areas, but an interesting remark is that some children see climbing in trees as an adventure, this word is not mentioned talking about the formal play areas. This relates to the children who ask for higher climbing frames which indicate that they are searching for more risk and challenge. Some children cannot wait for the higher climbing frames to come and have found the preferred risks and challenges in green play areas.

For children the green areas are preferred play areas, however the access and the presence of green areas is not well developed yet, according to the children. To access these areas children have to ignore or resist the designed border of the path and create their own paths, which is assumed to be a part of their playing. However, by breaking the rules, such as ignoring regular paths, it is not always accepted by adults for children to play there. The perception of adults towards these informal play areas should change to make it possible for children to play there freely. It is indicated that, for children's play in green areas the adults' do not seem to know what is best for children, by making it difficult for children to develop physically and cognitively, through climbing, construction and discovering in green areas. Finally, it is indicated that the play function construction play, as it is called by the planners, is only perceived by the children to be able to do in green areas. Construction play is not mentioned in relation to formal play areas.

This indicates that there seems to be barely space for construction play, which is indicated as important for children's cognitive development and problem-solving thinking. Although the planners pointed out in the policy document to support informal play in green areas and want to expand this. On the ground the children perceive many barriers, such as the lack of available green, and the social norm in which adults do not always allow children to play in green areas.

7.1.2 The Street

Another informal play area mentioned by the children and the planners is the street. While discussing the street there is also made a distinction between the street, as the car road and the pavement. When planners mention the street, they see it as the road where the cars drive, in contrast to children, who see the street sometimes as a combination of the road where the cars drive and the pavement. Children as well as the planners have different ideas about the street and the pavement. Firstly, the opinions of the children about the street are discussed and this is followed by their ideas about the pavement.

There are streets in all kind of different designs which is also experienced by the children. Some children live along a quiet road and other children have to deal with a lot of traffic. These differences indicate that some children perceive the street as a play area, other mention not to be able to play there, and some children do not mention it at all. These quotes show different situations:

Boy 12 years old; *'Besides play areas I also play on the street. My street is quiet, because there are not many people in the street, but there are a lot of parked cars. But it is no problem to play on the street, I play there with my little brother and sister and the boy next door.'*

Boy 12 years old; *'I live along a busy road (Maliebaan) thus I cannot play soccer in front of my house. But I can walk or cycle to the places where I can do what I want.'*

During the discussion about playing on the street the main topics were, the cars driving through the streets, and the parked cars in the streets. Since the street is an informal play area, the children understand that they have to share the street with the cars. The children also mentioned that although it is not nice that there are many cars, they understand that the cars still have to be there, as this girl of 12 years old: *'Cars bother me, than they drive on a square and then you have to stop. But I do not see a solution, because they also have to come there.'*

Generally, the children perceive that there is a moderated amount of cars present in their neighbourhood where they play (presented in table 4.1 annex 3). During the interviews half of the interviewees indicated to be bothered by cars but the other half did not mind them and perceived it as common knowledge that the cars use a big portion of the street. This is also the result of questionnaire in which children indicate to be barely bothered by the cars in the neighbourhood where they play (presented in table 4.1 annex 3). But, during the questionnaire the children seem to be milder in their opinion compared to the reaction of interviewees who experience difficulties with the cars. Two reactions could be found, one about the cars that drive through the street and one about the parked cars. The busy roads influence children's behaviour by creating a barrier in their spatial range. Especially, the children living in Utrecht Zuid mentioned 't Goylaan as a busy road that separates Utrecht Zuid for the children. However, based on the reactions of the children the majority of the children focus on a lower level namely the smaller streets where cars are parked.

Girl 11 years old; *'I don't have much space in my neighbourhood and in my street come a lot of cars and when you are playing you have to stop or watch out for cars. They have an island with parking lots and sometimes cars have to drive in a circle and then the car comes along twice. To solve that problem there should come private parking lots or bigger space or places for us to play without cars.'*

Many children who experienced the presence of the cars, mentioned the fact, that they have to watch out or stop their game several times for cars passing by to park, more than that they mention the busy roads which the planners have indicated

as barrier. Based on the interviews it is seen that children generally play close to home which increases the use of the street in front of their homes even though those are not ideal for play given the amount of cars that are passing by (comparable to the results of the closest playground in the previous chapter) which is elaborated further later this section.

Besides the cars, the people such as neighbours also bring difficulties for playing on the street. Some adults walk through children's game or tell the children to leave because of the noise. The reaction of some adults is comparable to their reaction on children playing in green areas. Many adults do not always perceive the street or green areas as a (informal) play area, but perceive the street mainly as a place for traffic. As this experience of a girl of 11 years old shows: *'Sometimes the ball goes against a car and then people start yelling at us. They did also take away the ball once!'*

Still, the street is mentioned by many children as a play area which is described as a paved area to play games on, such as curbs (stoepranden, then you try to hit the curbs with a ball on the other side of the street), hide and seek, and ball games like soccer.

Girl 11 years old; *'My favourite place to play is on the street. The street is quiet because it is one-way traffic, but there are also cars parked of the neighbours. The games we play are curbs, hide and seek, and soccer.'*

Girl 10 years old; *'I also play in the street in front of my house. My street is open with stones, and we play ball games there. I play there with my neighbours, brother, and friends.'*

The children who also play on the street mentioned a difference between the people whom they play with in the formal play areas compared to the street. While talking about the people they play with in the formal play areas they talk about their friends, as from school. However, when they talk about playing on the street, they mention the boy or girl next door. The smaller scale of playing in the street causes that the children also play with other children then they do in bigger play areas located in the neighbourhood.

7. ANALYSIS INFORMAL PLAY AREAS

The reason for children to play in the street is mainly because it is close to home, followed by the sociability, and diversity, as these children highlight:

Boy 12 years old; *'When I think of my street I think about the sociability. Although the main reason for me playing on the street is the distance, because it is very close to home.'*

Boy 12 years old; *'I am allowed to play (when he did not discuss it with his parents) on the street and places not very far, but when I say it to my parents that I go to the park with friends I am allowed to go. I play on the street, because my mother can watch me.'*

Girl 11 years old; *'The meaning of this place to me is that I find it nice. The street is also quieter than the small square and in the street we can do what we want.'*

Girls 10 years old; *'This place means an area which is quiet and where you can do everything. The main reason to play there is that it is open and you can easily play ball games.'*

In the last two quotes the girls also mention that their street is quiet, which gives them the opportunity to play there and play close to home, so parents can watch their children. As mentioned earlier the children who are bothered by the cars highlight the cars that drive in their street and for which they have to watch out or stop their games. The children, who tell about their play activities in the street, also show that they have a quiet street which gives them the opportunity to do so. It can be assumed that children desire a place close to home to play and the street offers a broad diversity in children's play. This diversity stimulates movement play as in formal play areas and in green informal play areas. Another play function mentioned by the planners is children and youth hanging around. Although in the literature is confirmed that the youth is hanging out in the street, which is interpreted as being somewhere, meeting others and searching for places without supervision (Lieshout, Aarts, 2008), the children who participated in this research do not specifically mention to hang out in the streets. The children also did not mention that older youth is hanging out in the street but more often they mentioned that

they experience the problem of older youth hanging around in the formal play areas, which makes the informal play areas more attracting to them to avoid trouble.

The street has, from a children's perspective, much space to offer for a diversity of games. A big advantage of the street compared to the formal playground (for their age group), is that this offers a play area close to home, if this is a quiet street. However, it would be more desirable that more children would have play areas close to home that offer the comparable type of space but are less unsafe as the confrontation with the cars that they have currently. It should be a point of attention for planners that two play areas in these report that are actually not designed for children are highly used by them caused by the long distance to their designed playgrounds, which confirms again the failure of the design based on the norm².

The next part of this section about the street focusses on the pavements in the street. In the policy document is mentioned that planners would like to expand the pavements to 3 to 5 meters with a preference of the sun side, to make these more playable for children and safer as walking routes through neighbourhoods. The perception of the children is that the pavement offers a place to play, but it is not indicated as much space (table 3.1, annex 3). On the other hand, the children did mention the pavement several times as a play area or expressed their critics on playing on the pavement during the interviews. According to the children, the width of the pavement and the maintenance are important factors for their play behaviour. The children who prefer to play on the pavement also experience a broad pavement in their neighbourhood. In the next quotes the experience of two girls with the pavement is highlighted:

Girl 10 years old; *'I sometimes play on the street. The street where I play is quiet, but there also is a broad pavement which I prefer.'*

Girl 11 years old; *'I also play on the pavement or cycle path but then you have to watch out for bikers. I skate on the cycle path, because of the holes in the pavement.'*

² Jantje Beton Norm for the distances and sizes of different playgrounds – per age group

Generally, the children currently do not perceive the pavement as a desired play area. According to the children, the pavement does not offer enough or not the right space for their play. The play function which is often mentioned by the children can be categorised as movement play (from policy document). Children, who often wave board³ or rollerblade, experience a lot of holes in the pavement and prefer the asphalt road or the cycling path, since those are straighter. Children also like to play soccer for which the pavement also does not provide enough space. These quotes show the opinions of two girls about the playability of the pavement:

Girl 11 years old; *'I like the cycling path more but sometimes I would like that the pavements were more straight or without holes, because with rollerblading or wave boarding they can get stuck and I can fall. It can also be dangerous on the cycle path but it is nice to play there, because when you fall you can always go home.'*

Girl 11 years old; *'There is a big asphalt road and I am not allowed to play there. My mother tells me that I should not play on the asphalt road, but for wave boarding the pavement is even more dangerous I think. To solve this problem, I searched for less busy asphalt roads but I am actually also not allowed to play on these roads.'*

Children bother less about the different types of roads, but search for their preferred type of surface while rollerblading or wave boarding which is also assumed the reason for children to play in the informal areas instead of the in formal play areas, taking into account the amount of space and the surface. Furthermore, it is assumed, based on these statements, that the everyday spaces are experienced as more attractive by the children compared to the ordered spaces of the formal play areas. The children will experience more challenge in the everyday space to go through traffic and obstacles compared to the fixed spaces.

Children also experience different perceptions of adults about playing on the pavement in their neighbourhoods, as highlighted in the quotes:

³ Wave boarding is similar to skateboarding. The board is created in a way, that can you move just by a twisting motion of hips and legs.

Boy 11 years old; *'When we play soccer on a place as the pavement where it is not allowed, people come to us. But I can understand that, because of cars that can pass and we also have the Bloesem to play soccer.'*

Girl 11 years old; *'Sometimes older people bother me, who tell me not to play there, because it is their garden, but it is just the pavement. Those people do not want the noise, I understand this 'but buy earplugs and you have no problems anymore'.'*

Just as the street, the pavement is a difficult informal play area. Children here also have to deal with adult's perception of play areas. It seems that some adults desire that children should play in formal play areas instead of in informal play areas. This creates the feeling of exclusion for some children, which can cause more emotional reactions, such as the girl of 11 years old mentioned. It would be desirable that planners know what children want and what they do on the pavement before just expanding pavements to 3 to 5 meters, because in case neighbours and children do not find a compromise between informal play areas and a space in front of somebodies home, it is likely that these spaces will be barely used.

Children often play on the pavement with family as fathers, (little) brothers and sisters and the children's comments about the use of the pavement are similar to the comments on the use of the street, since it is close to home. This short distance often causes that older children are able to play with their little brother and sister outside near their homes. On the other side, the pavement does not have a special meaning to children, the street generally has more meaning to the children compared to only the pavement, shown this girl of 10: *'The pavement does not mean a lot to me, because I do not come there often. The main reason for me to play there is that I can play there with my little sister, because it is close to home.'*

The general picture that is created about children's play behaviour in informal play areas as the pavement is that adults limit their freedom of playing there. Because of this it can be assumed that some children feel excluded from the pavement

7. ANALYSIS INFORMAL PLAY AREAS

and do not interpret it as their play area. However, the planners highlighted in their policy document that they prefer to design, within the range of 300 to 400 meters from children's homes, pavements with the width of 3 to 5 meters with the preference to design this on the sunny side for play purposes and safe walking routes (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009). It can be questioned if this is desired according to the children, since children mentioned the distance as main reason for playing on the pavement and the goals of planners of a broad pavement within 300 meters can still be in another street. Secondly, the children who have mentioned the pavement as play area often like to rollerblade or wave board wherefore they prefer the asphalt roads or straight/maintained pavements. In that case, the goal of the municipality should be to maintain the new designed broad pavements otherwise it is likely that it will be used less. On the other hand, it is also seen that children miss a space in formal play areas close to home where they play games as rollerblade or wave board, since the parks are not mentioned assuming that those are too far away. Finally, for expanding children play areas by creating broader pavements as written in the policy document it is needed that the perception of the neighbours should change by also recognizing the pavement as an informal play area for children. However, through increasing the size of the pavement it might support the change of adults' perception (however, further research should be necessary for better understanding), as children who mentioned that they already have a broad pavement also can play there nicely and mentioned less problems with neighbours. Although, it would be even more beneficial for planners and children, thinking about safety, when the need for a space close to home is created as a space that has a straight surface and offers space for a diversity of games, as the desires currently mentioned by the children about the street and pavement.

7.1.3 Local shopping area

The final informal play area discussed in the chapter is the local shopping area⁴. Some children mentioned to go to the supermarkets or local shopping areas to hang

⁴ A local shopping area is designed as a square where multiple shops are located, as supermarket and shops like Blokker, Hema, etc.

around (the fourth play function mentioned in the policy document). Areas that are mentioned by the children are the city centre, Smaragdplein (figure 35) and the Jumbo Supermarket near Notenboom School, as this girl of 11 years old mentions: *'I have no favourite play area. I am on multiple spots. Mainly, when I am with a friend I go to the Abstederdijk playground, the blue playground, or Smaragdplein to buy things.'*

The children also express going to the shops or the supermarket as a play function. They buy small things in the supermarket as gum and drinks and hang around the shops, as visualised in figure 36. They mentioned to hang around on the benches around Smaragdplein (there are a few benches under the trees that view over the parking lot and the entrances of some shops). There are also some benches positioned in the shopping street itself where people sit and observe the people shopping. During the observation some children were sitting on these benches and eating ice cream and watched the people in the street. It is assumed that children like to sit there because something is going on and they like to watch this, which they miss in the playgrounds (Gehl, 2010). In the quotes the girls tell about their activities around the shops:

Girl 12 years old; *'I sometimes go to Smaragdplein, we go there and talk.'*

Girl 13 years old; *'We (girls from her class) also go sometimes to the Jumbo Supermarket to buy something and then we sit on the benches there.'*
These areas are used by the children because of the facilities and for watching the movements that are going on in these areas, as these girls shows: 'The Jumbo and the benches is a place to which we almost go every day. In case the Jumbo was not there we would not come there.'

Girl 11 years old; *'It depends, when I am with my sister and friends, then I can go to Smaragdplein, but when I am alone I have to play close to home from my mom. When I go to Smaragdplein I go there to buy stuff.'*



Figure 35: Local Shopping Area - Smaragdplein



Figure 36: Local Shopping Area, children hanging around

7. ANALYSIS INFORMAL PLAY AREAS

However, Smaragdplein is also mentioned by some children from the Da Costa School and Ariensschool, located in Utrecht Zuid, as a place they are not allowed to go to. Thus, for parents the local shopping areas are not always perceived as safe or desired play areas for their children to go to. It is assumed that it is for children a prestige to show that you are allowed and go to the local shopping area, as an adventure in adult's space.

The statement of the planners of Utrecht that hanging around should also be offered to the children is confirmed by children's behaviour and expressions about it. Currently, children perceive besides the play areas, the shopping areas as a place to hang around and additionally buy small things. It is indicated that according to the children, going to these places is a part of growing up. When they speak about their behaviour in shopping areas, it is different compared to their behaviour expressed in formal and other informal play areas, namely more grown up.

Furthermore, based on the expression of the children when they talk about their play areas, the shopping areas are included in line with other play areas. This indicates that the shopping areas are also perceived as a play area to them. In the policy document, the shopping area is included in the row of informal play areas. However, the planners do not elaborate further on it. It can be assumed that this topic is also a delicate subject for the planners towards the shop owners. However, several children have mentioned the city centre and Smaragdplein as places they are not allowed to go to, but that they would like to go there. However, Simpson (1997) believes that local shopping areas should be planned with children's involvement, because children are often not able to reach these areas. It also seems the case that in Utrecht, since not all children are able to reach these areas or allowed to, while at the same time children believe they are ready for it. The children who are able to reach these places, like it and also develop social skills as buying stuff and watching this social practice in shopping areas. Given that the planners identify the shopping areas as informal play areas and find the development of social skills important it could be desirable to include children while designing local shopping areas, since these developments for growing up and becoming

known with the adult world is less stimulated in playgrounds. On the other hand, the arguments of children about sitting on the benches in the shopping areas, because more movements are going on in these areas is indicated to be a lack around playground that causes that it is less interesting and attractive for children of the age of 10 to 12 to be and hang around in the formal playgrounds.

In this chapter attention is paid to children's preference for green areas in which they can disappear from supervision, but where they can also design their own play area in contrast to the fixed formal playgrounds, where construction play and challenge (adventure) is lacking according to the children. Furthermore, in the sections about the play area it is indicated that the street including the pavement offers a play area that fit children's need for a play area close to home, this finding is comparable to a result in the chapter formal play areas. Based on these results it is assumed that there is mismatch between the distances of playgrounds and children's need for a short distance. Finally, a mismatch is found by the fact that green areas, the street, and the pavement is included in the policy document as informal play area, however, adults living in the neighbourhoods do often not recognise these spaces as play areas. This causes that children are sometimes in conflict with neighbours about their play or are just not able to play there at all. It is believed that it is beneficial that the planners recognise informal play areas, however for safety reasons and more freedom in children's play it would be even more beneficial to include the elements of these informal play areas that make these places attractive to children and meet their needs and preferences, as open spaces but also unordered spaces with green elements into formal playgrounds which are preferred to be closer to children their homes. In the next chapter is elaborated on the level of involvement of children in the planning process of play areas, including the discussion about the benefits of taking children's opinion into account.

08



8. ANALYSIS PARTICIPATION

In the last two chapters on formal and informal play areas, findings have shown how there is a mismatch between what adults feel is best for children and what the children themselves perceive as suitable spaces for their play. In this chapter, the focus now turns to children's opinions in terms of their involvement in the process of planning play areas in Utrecht, emphasising particularly some of the benefits and issues associated with giving children a voice in how play areas are shaped and planned in the city. This is especially pertinent given the inclusion in the policy document of Utrecht of the intention to facilitate cooperation between planners, children and society generally towards planning such areas (Gemeente Utrecht, 2009).

8.1 Children's Involvement Formal Play areas

8.1.1 Designers of play areas

When children are asked who should be the designers of the playgrounds the majority directly responses with 'children', as these quotes show:

Girl 10 years old; *'Children, because they play there more often than adults and they know what they like. But a little help is needed to build and design the play area that would be easier.'*

Girl 11 years old; *'Children, because they know what they like.'*

Boy 10 years old; *'Children themselves should design play areas, because children have a lot of fantasy.'*

The minority of the children mentioned 'adults' such as the municipality, builders or the teachers, although they still think that children needs to be considered as well, as this boy of 11 years old; *'The municipality, because they have the money. Children do not have that much money, but children should be involved in the thinking process. Because, what if they make something that we do not like or we cannot do what we like to do? Actually, children should be better planners, because they will come in the playground more often compared to the planners. But, adults are needed for the money and to build everything, thus children design the plans and they build it.'*

The children, who mentioned the adults, understand that it will not be possible for children to design a complete play area. The boy in the comment above mentions the issue of finance. Other children highlight that children will not be able to build it (lack of strength or use of machines), or think that adults are needed to preside over the feasibility of suggestions provided by the children. Because, otherwise a quarrel can arise when children do not agree with each other and adults will be able to overlook and mediate. However, children did not mention adult's involvement because they know best, which is an interesting point since adults design is generally without the involvement of children currently.

From the children who responded with adults, the vast majority added that children should also be involved in some capacity. Based on the results of the interview it can be assumed that, according to the children, it would be logical that children should be involved in the design process of play areas. Arguments from the children for this are:

Boy 12 years old; *'The best designers of play areas are children themselves, because they know what they like. I think adults know less about this, because in the past playing was differently, as they made less use of modern equipment and they had poorer play equipment.'*

Girl 12 years old; *'Children should design play areas, they know what they like and adults not. Adults do what they like and not what children like.'*

Many children argue that, given how they are the ones who will use the play areas compared to adults or planners, they will know better what they would like to see there and ultimately how these spaces should be designed. In the literature, it has been mentioned that the desires of children and adults differ, particular in terms of risk-taking and orderliness. With regards risk, it is found that adults would like to see risks reduced and believe that orderliness is concerned in play areas, studies have shown how this is translated into the traditional playground with fixed equipment in an ordered design that contradicts with children preference such as cluttered areas with loose materials as in an adventure playground (Hayward,



Figure 37: shallow pool - Rijnesteinhof (safety norm for depth)



Figure 38: simple equipment, movement options limited

1974; Francis, 1988; and Ferré *et al.* 2006). This study confirms these findings in children's opinion about the designers of play areas and that what adults generally implement on the ground gets interpreted by the children as the adults not really knowing what the children like in play areas, where 'places for children' thus fails to coincide with what Rasmussen (2004) defines as 'places for children' (Rasmussen, 2004), as this girl of 12 says: *'The children themselves should design play areas, because I think adults might have a different taste than children.'*

The minority of the children referred to the idea that adults and children probably have a different preference of a play area, as this girl above. The majority of the children think that adults just do not know what they like and that they have made mistakes.

Another argument which the children brought up in the interview is that they also have their right to give their opinion, which is also confirmed by Francis and Lorenzo (2002). Children argue that they should also be able to say what they want, because adults do not always know better, according to the children:

Boy 12 years old; *'I find it important to be involved, because everybody should have a chance to give his own opinion or do his own thing.'*

Girl 12 years old; *'Children themselves should design play areas, we will come there more often than adults. Furthermore, adults already tell a lot about what is best for children. But I would also like to think about things.'* When she is asked what she means by 'adults tell what is best for children' she gave the example; *'Children think that we(children) do not have to go to bed early, but the next day we are tired, so for some things adults do know better. But sometimes we can decide on our own, as how my room looks like and what kind of clothes I wear, and also for the school playground.'*

In this regard, the view of the 12 year old child above echoes what Knowles-Yanez (2005: 12) means when she said that 'children are just not often seen as citizens

8. ANALYSIS PARTICIPATION

with rights. And, for most matters within the family, adults often do know what is best for children — when it is time to go to bed, that they must go to school, and so forth. However, this does not always mean adults can predict what children most appreciate about their environment.’ The fact that adults cannot always predict children’s environmental appreciations speaks in the favour of the involvement of children. Therefore the children were also asked what they would like to change in their play landscape.

8.1.2 Landscape Changes through Involvement

On the question, if the children would like to be involved in case a new play area would be designed in the neighbourhood, all children expressed that they would like to be involved. Arguments provided by the children for wanting to participate were mainly with regards to changing the physical landscape, although in many cases, many also seek to be involved for shaping the meaning of the place and the spatial practice. This section highlights how things would have been done differently if they were allowed to be a part of the planning process for playgrounds and other play areas in Utrecht.

When children are asked what they would like to physically change in playgrounds, the play equipment is a general point. Children often mention that they would like to have more and higher play equipment, as already discussed in the formal play area chapter (Chapter 5). Additionally, the children also claimed that when they were involved in the planning process, they would make it more complex and challenging compared to the existing equipment which a 10 years old boy perceived as simple: *‘Children themselves should design play areas, because children have a lot of fantasy. When the municipality would do it, they would just make simple play equipment as a slide.’*

The expression of ‘simple’ here relates to the provision of adventure that children are missing in formal playgrounds especially for older children (figure 38), the movements that are possible to do or to vary in current play areas is often limited. However, it is also obvious that children find it difficult to think about what they would like to have at formal play areas in place of what are there now. This could be

due to the fact that they are not used to being questioned about their opinions on the physical aspects of play areas. Therefore, when asked this question, the children generally suggested only small changes. As one 11 year old boy says with respect to the playground at de Bloesem: *‘Like in the play area ‘de Bloesem’ it has a very small soccer cage and you can barely go in there with 10 children. Furthermore, there is a small swimming pool, cableway, but the cableway is not fun and the swimming pool is only 20 cm depth and when children would have designed it, it would have been at least 50 cm, now you cannot lie in the water.’ (This depth is design based on safety norms, figure 37)*

Besides the question about what they would like to change, they are also asked about their spatial practice and if they think this will be affected when they are involved in the planning process of a playground. All children expressed that they would use the playground more often when they would be involved. Arguments are generally that they will use it more because they will like equipment more, as these quotes show:

Girl 12 years old; *‘In case I am involved in the design process, I would play there more often, because it would have all things I like.’*

Girl 10 years old; *‘I think I would use the playground more often because then there will also be things I would like.’*

Not only the presence of different play equipment is a factor that children mentioned why they would use the playground more often but also their feeling of pride that they have helped with the playground design is mentioned by the children as reason to use the playground more often, as these children highlight:

Boy 11 years old; *‘When I am involved in the design process I would use it more often and would be proud. You can say that, look this is what I have made.’*

Girl 12 years old; *‘Yes I would like to participate. I think I would also use it more often, because it would be nice to play in since I would have helped with the design it would be more fun for me to play in it.’*

Girl 10 years old; *‘I think I would use the playground more often because the idea that you have helped is funny.’*

This feeling of pride does also add to meaning of a playground whereby these places can become 'children's places' instead of merely 'places for children' (Rasmussen, 2004)

Finally, children also highlighted that their use of the playground would be affected by the sense of responsibility to take care of the playground. This confirms Hart's (1992) results that when young people are involved in projects it adds to a feeling of responsibility for the place and equipment. It also highlights that children and youth involvement increases the quality (less vandalism) as well as the use of a place and equipment because of the attachment and responsibility (Francis & Lorenzo, 2002; Barker & Weller, 2003; Roe, 2006). This is confirmed by children's expressions during the interviews, as this boy (12) tells: *'I would make more use of the playground, because I have designed something in that case you also have to take care of it and that it is being used. Otherwise it has no point!'*

Based on the results of the interview it can be assumed that when children are involved and their desires and needs are addressed or the chosen design is properly communicated with the children, they will use the playgrounds more often based on the fact that they will like their equipment more, feeling of pride, and the sense of responsibility for the design. However, good communication is needed with the children which is further elaborated in the next section where children's experiences are discussed about being involved in the planning process.

8.1.3 Earlier Involvement in Planning Process

The children are questioned if they have been asked before about their opinion related to play areas. The majority of the children claimed that they have never been given the opportunity to be involved in the planning process for play areas. Even for the minority who said that they have been consulted before with regards to how they thought the (school) playground should be designed, many complained that it was merely to pay lip service. This is to say that their views ultimately not taken into consideration, which has created some frustration, as the boy of 11 years expresses:

'I was asked once about my opinion, in the play area where I was playing. It was a woman from Cumulus (Welfare Organisation). I liked it when I was asked, because usually you cannot give your opinion. She asked where we like to play. However, nothing is done with my opinion. I find that stupid, because first she asks my opinion and then she does nothing. That makes me angry. I was playing soccer, but she said there will be done something with it. But, nothing has changed thus it was a waste of my time.'

For the rest who felt their views were considered properly, many confirmed how proud they were and how this led to them using the playgrounds more often, because it was more challenging, according to them, as this girl (12) expresses: *'On our field we were asked what kind of equipment we wanted. We were also asked to design equipment. It was super and really nice, because sometimes they just design a slide which is not nice for the older children. When the equipment was designed it was really nice. Now, I make more use of the play area, because of one equipment and the trick in the climbing frame is really difficult and after 150 times trying I am finally able to do it!'*

In cases where children were involved, it seems to have a highly positive result on those children, given how proud they were about it and the increase in the amount of usage of the play areas. This result also confirms the children's expectation on preferring and usage when they would be involved in the planning process of a playground discussed in the section above.

These two situations of the 11 year old boy and the 12 year old girl show the importance not only of consulting the views of children, and involving them in the planning process, but also of ensuring that their opinions are taken seriously and implemented as much as possible, so as to avoid creating any sense of resentment between the children and the municipality and planners. This could create a better cooperation in the planning process of play areas with children. According to the children, they see opportunities to make the play area nicer and more fun, next to the stimulation in use of play areas which would be beneficial to increase the physical activity of children. Planners who design play areas on their own and ignore the opinion of the children, who are willing to talk, do also ignore children's

8. ANALYSIS PARTICIPATION

right to participate or is this based on the feeling that ‘they know what is best for the children?’, as this boy of 11 years old highlight: *‘I would give my opinion again, but only when my opinion is used otherwise not. When I would be involved by designing, I would make more use of the play area, because there will be nicer play equipment and I would have designed it myself. To be involved in the process would give me a nice feeling, because there will be listened to me. I find it important that there will be listened, because not only adults have something to say, or just everything to say. Also, adults do not always know best, they also make mistakes!’*

A lesson can be learned from earlier experiences in which it is mentioned by children that it is important for them that they are not just a lip service but that something will be done with it or at least that they are taken serious, otherwise children will create a sense of resentment against the planners and municipality which is not desired or assumed to be the intention. In the next sub-chapter attention is paid to the involvement of children in the informal play areas.

8.2 Children’s Involvement Informal Play Areas

Currently, children do not always experience that their needs are taken into account in the formal playgrounds which can stimulate the use of informal play areas. Children generally mention the informal play areas as the street and pavement, green areas, and local shopping areas. Children perception of informal play areas show different benefits compared to the formal playgrounds like the big size (like the whole street), the short distance (like in front of their homes), the loose parts (like branches, sand) and the high diversity but also disadvantages, like confrontations with cars in relation to safety and conflicts with neighbours (Giddens, 1979).

In the policy document the power of children to reject the formal playgrounds (Foucault, 1980) are noticed and the use of informal play areas is recognised. Still, this play behaviour in informal play areas causes that children are playing on places that are not designed for play practices which can also causes conflicts with other

users of the space who not always perceive the spaces as an (informal) play area like the car-owners in the street, the neighbours in the street and on the pavement, and the people in the park and green areas who tell children not to play there.

The children experienced that their play behaviour and their play areas are not always taken into account as for example in a green area. This causes that a girl lost her play area during the maintenance of the green areas, as a girl of 11 year highlights: *‘Yes, I have been bothered during my play, when we were often playing in a tree and the next day the tree was cut down. I felt sad about it! We wanted to protest and make banners, but we were too late. I believed that they would not do that suddenly, but that they would first ask the neighbourhood if they would mind. Now, they did not ask anybody. I wanted to give my opinion about it, because I played in that tree since I am born. Now it is not possible anymore! I find it really sad, because we had placed shelves and a bench in the tree. That is all gone, now!’*

Currently, planners mention in the policy document that they are aware of children’s play in green areas and recognise the importance of it, by suggesting to expand the green structure and to connect it with formal play areas. However, in some situation they have failed to take the children’s places into account and the awareness of children’s opinion and voice as demonstrated above, this incident does not show any recognition (mismatch) towards children’s places in informal play area.

In the first place informal play areas are interesting and beneficial additional play areas for children, by offering spaces where they can design their own play area and have possibilities that the formal playground do not offer. Still, it can be assumed that a formal playground that are in line with the preferences and needs of children is even more beneficial for both parties, the children and the planners, so dangerous situations with for example cars can be avoided. In that way children also gain more freedom in the play behaviour when they do not have to be alert all the time. However, the use of the informal play areas is causes since some needs and preferences of children are met in these spaces and not in the formal playgrounds, as diversity (confirmed by Fjortoft, 2000), challenge (confirmed by Callecod, 1974),



8. ANALYSIS PARTICIPATION

loose materials (confirmed by Nicholson, S., 1972; Francis, 1988; Fjortoft, 2000), and unsupervised areas or playgrounds close to home. Children experience also advantages of the informal landscape as freedom, by being able to do what they want and how their landscape looks like. Given the fact that children perceive different benefits in informal play areas compared to the formal play areas it is likely that many children will continue playing in informal play areas, therefore it is not just key to recognise this play behaviour but also to involve children in the planning process and maintenance of informal play areas, in relation to safety issues and avoiding a sense of resentment. But still, in the first place it would be most beneficial to have the children involved in the planning process of formal play areas since it is mentioned that adults do not know best, based on children's experiences, and to avoid conflicts and create safe and challenging play facilities with them that are not just 'places of children' but 'children's place' with a meaning that they are highly willing to use.

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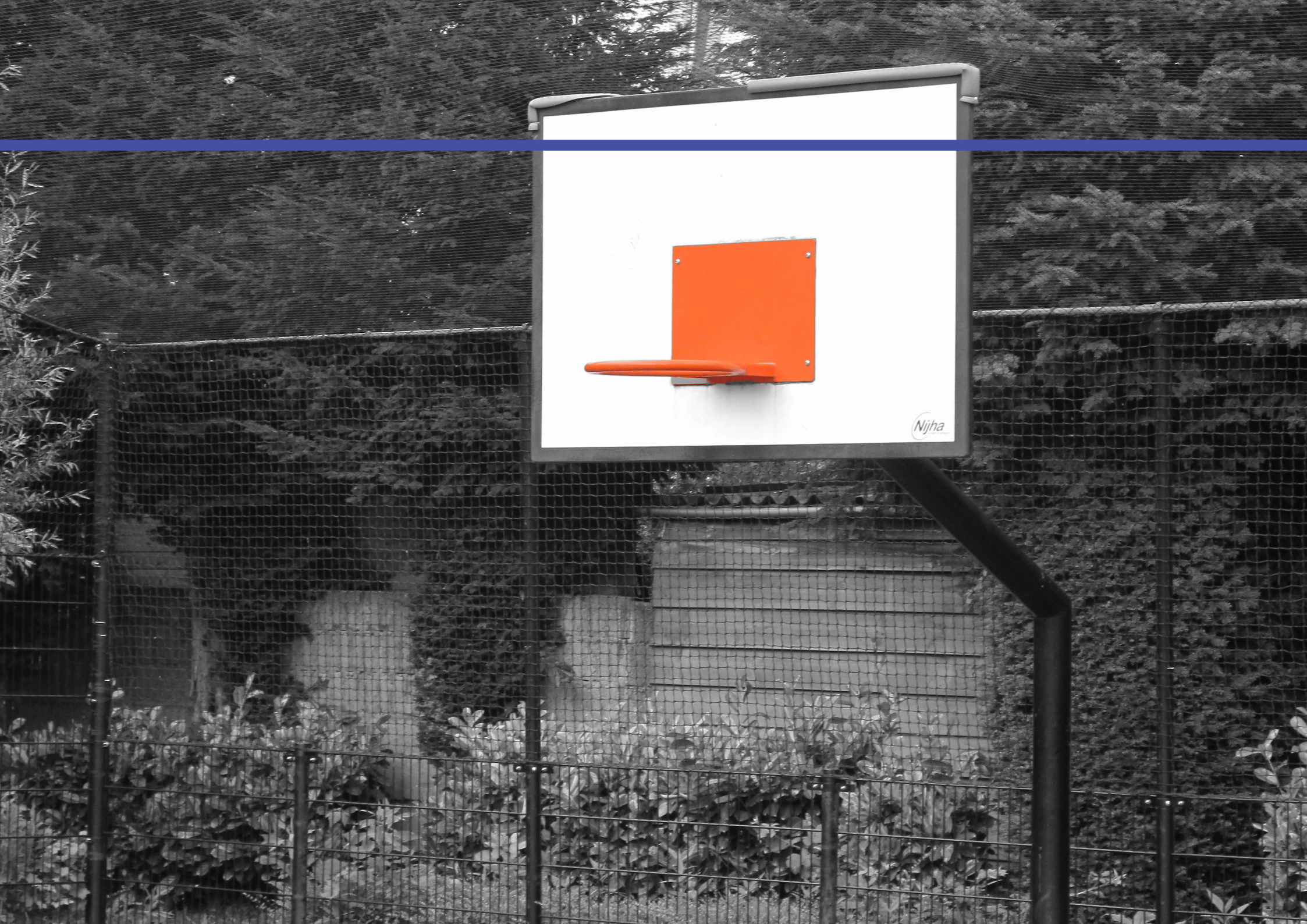
9. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Having discussed all the results and findings of this research in the last four chapters, this chapter provides the main findings based on the conceptual framework in relation to the research questions. As highlighted in the conceptual framework, landscapes are produced through work and influenced by the representation of a space, the representational spaces and the spatial practice that takes place in the landscape. Having said this, it is seen that the formal play areas are produced through the work (Mitchell, 1996) of adults/ planners, who assume that they know what is best for children. Through the production of representations of space, with physical resources (Lefebvre, 1991), the traditional playground is mainly designed, as perceived by the children in the interviews and observed during the ethnographic research. Those play areas are perceived by adults (representational space) as ordered, limited risk-taking, and therefore desired for places for children (Francis, 1988; Matthews, 1995; Rasmussen, 2004; Roe, 2006). On the other side these formal play areas are perceived by children as not challenging, lacking of adventure, and lacking of physical freedom through fixed play equipment as expressed in the interviews and this confirms the mismatch between the desires of adults and the preferences of children. This also causes that children are searching elsewhere for landscapes that address their needs and preferences, wherefore they have the power as agency (Foucault, 1980), through producing (by work, Mitchell, 1996) and choosing their own play areas as in informal play areas like green structures, the street, and near shopping areas, as highlighted in the interviews. This confirms that children also have the power to reject the formal play areas (Foucault, 1980). These informal landscapes generally offer more loose parts, diversity, challenges, and physical freedom as mentioned by children while referring to climbing in trees, building huts and bridges and space to run around and go crazy. However, these informal play areas do also have their disadvantages such as social confrontations with neighbours, who do not perceive children's informal play areas as a play area, and traffic that conflicts with children's play on the street. This also highlights children's needs for a formal playground in which they have more freedom in their in their spatial practice play. It is confirmed by children that they would like to play in playgrounds and what they would like to change in the design of the play equipment.

Based on the sub research question; *What are children, living in Utrecht, their needs and preferences for a play area and do they coincide with the policy document?* It can be said that children's needs and preferences are not addressed in the current playground design and they can find some alternatives in the informal play areas like the street and green areas which are recognised by the planners in the policy document. However those are not always recognised by people in their neighbourhood, or as elaborated in the chapter participation, in the spatial practice of the municipality as in their maintenance of green areas. Furthermore, the distance to play areas has also shown to be a key element in children's needs. The norm that is used by planners fails on the ground. The playgrounds that are preferred by children are experienced as (too) far away and causes children to play more on the street or in playgrounds close to home that are designed for younger children. It is assumed that planners have under estimated the effect of the longer distance to the bigger playground on children's play behaviour and it shows a mismatch with children's need - a play area close to home.

Additionally, planners have highlighted to expand the play facilities for children by opening the school playgrounds after school time, but opening the school playground does not guarantee that children will use these playgrounds. Children also experience the school playgrounds as a playground with no attractive play equipment, a longer distance from home compared to other facilities, teachers presence, which they experience as unpleasant because of the rules and the feeling of being at school in their spare time. These perceptions cause children to have a negative attitude towards playing in the school playground after school time and shows a mismatch with the objective of the planners.

Currently, the formal playgrounds are commonly designed without children's involvement in Utrecht. However, it is argued that children should have the right to participate since these developments affect children's environment. By children's involvement in planning process of play area it is argued that it is not desirable to include only children's needs and preference and exclude adults preferences, since children are mainly dependent on adults' (their parents) permission (Francis, 1988)



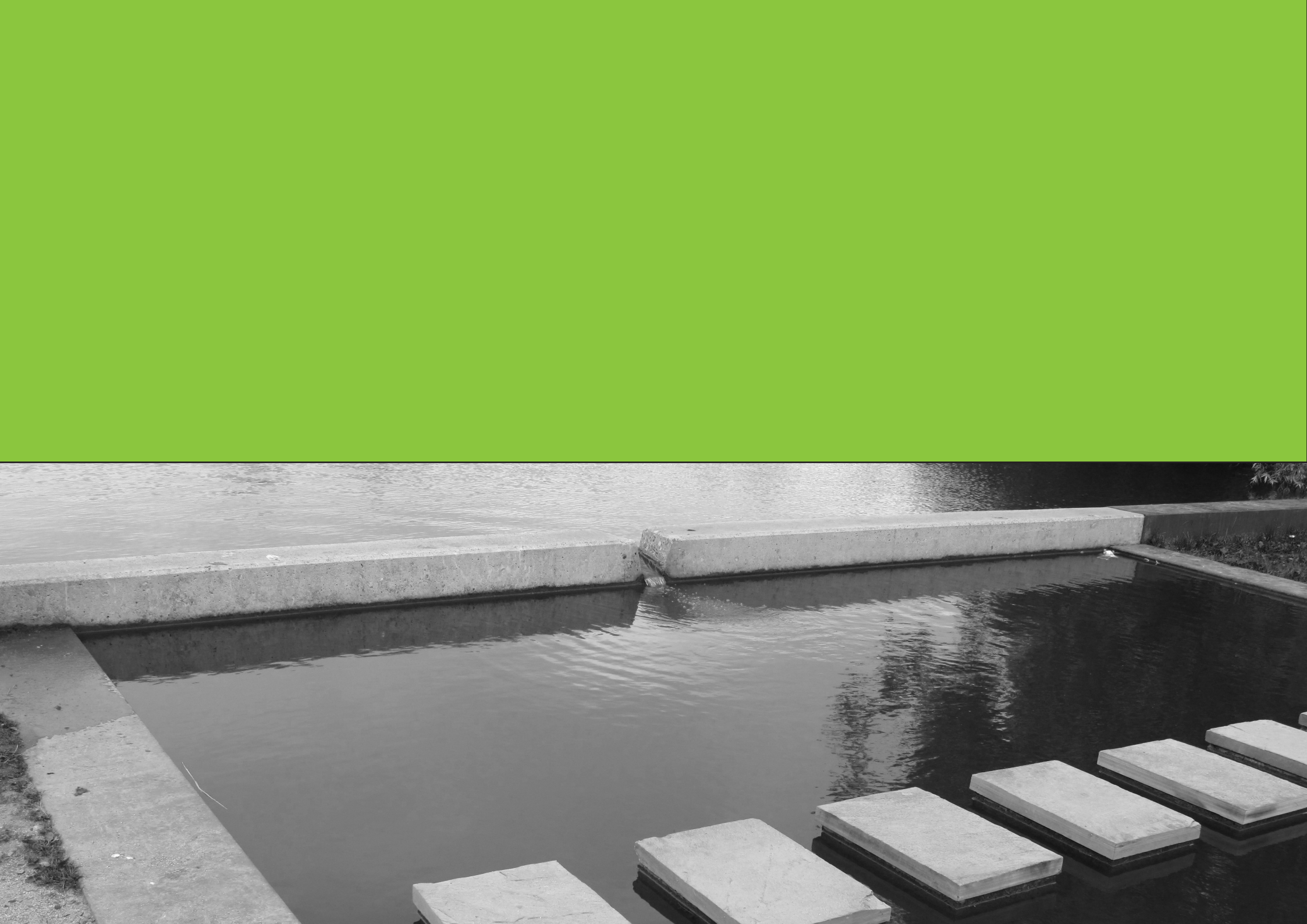
9. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

as confirmed in the interviews about places children are allowed to go in terms of their spatial range. Therefore a mix between children's and adults' involvement is recommended for designing places for children as these will be perceived more by children as children's places with a meaning to them (Rasmussen, 2004) and will meet their needs and preferences more. This brings us to the sub-research question; *To what extent should children be involved in the development of play areas?*

With the involvement of children in the planning process not just the meaning of the place will change, it is also assumed that it will affect children's spatial practice, as is shown in the questionnaire results and interviews. Children mention and confirm that when they are involved in the planning process of their play areas, they will also make more use of the play areas because of the facts that they will like the design more, the feeling of pride, and the sense of responsibility. This is an interesting and essential point, not only for the desire of a used landscape but also in relation to children well-being. Currently, the social issue obesity is increasing rapidly under children in western societies and it would be desirable to get children stimulated to be more physical active through an active approach. With the involvement of children in the planning process (designing) it is assumed that it will add to children's well-being such as children's physical (Sallis & Glanz, 2006), social and cognitive developments and by being a member of the community with the rights of a citizen which will add to the feeling of citizenship and sense of belonging. Thus especially within the planning process of 'places for children', children should have a voice to show their opinion and to create 'children's places' instead, since it is experienced by children that adults do not always know what is best for children in relation to places for children.

For future research it would be desirable to examine the effects of the distance thoroughly in relation to what distance children are allowed and willing to make for their everyday play behaviour. The results of this research show that it plays an important role in their judgement about formal playgrounds and the small amount of time they spend in playgrounds designed for children of their age. Additionally, children also gave arguments for playing in specific informal play areas, such as the street because this is close to their home and they are taking the conflict with cars for

granted. Finally, the new trend of natural/green playgrounds and natural/green school playgrounds would be interesting to do further research on, because construction play is currently not perceived in playgrounds by children. Children mentioned to prefer construction play and to play in the nature. It would be interesting to examine if these elements do answer children's needs in terms of being diverse, challenging, and complex, which is lacking in the current playground designs (traditional playgrounds).



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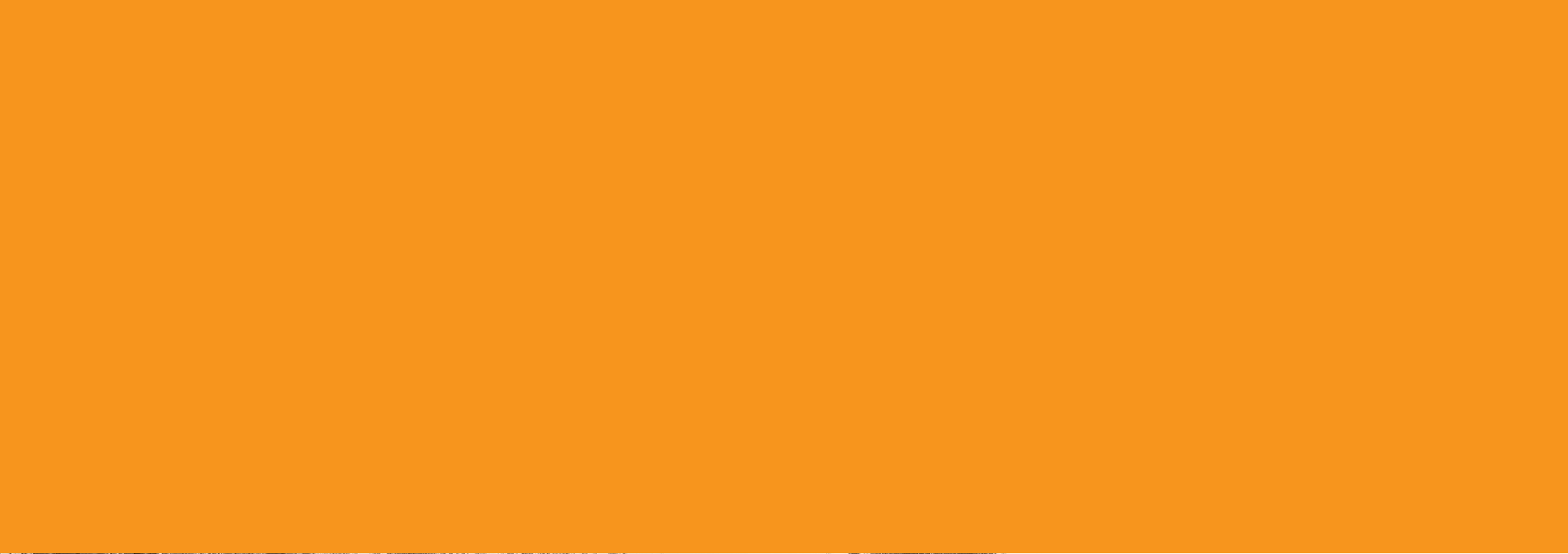
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Annex 1: Jantje Beton Norm – range and square meters

On a website of a national political party named SP (Socialistische Partij), there is a brief explanation of the 3% norm which shows that, 300m² of one hectare should be designed for children, a number based on research about sizes of different play facilities as sandboxed, basketball field, and a small football field.

In the Jantje Beton norm children of the age zero to six should be able to access within 100 meter a play area of 100 m², called on block level. On neighbourhood level, for children of the age of six to twelve should be able to access within a range of 400 meter a play area with a minimum of 140 m². Finally, on district level, for children of the age of thirteen and older have a range of 1000 meter and a play area of at least 60 m².

Annex 2: Questionnaire

Play Functions

Vraag 1: Heb je in jouw buurt de mogelijkheid om bewegingsspel te doen als rennen, klimmen, springen?
(Tekenen een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Ja, heel veel
- Ja, veel
- Niet veel / niet weinig
- Nee, weinig
- Nee, helemaal niet

Vraag 2: Wat vind je van bewegingsspel als rennen, klimmen, springen?
(Tekenen een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel leuk
- Leuk
- Niet leuk / niet, niet leuk
- Niet leuk
- Helemaal niet leuk

Vraag 3: Hoe vaak doe je een bewegingsspel als rennen, klimmen, springen?

(Tekenen een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel vaak
- Vaak
- Niet vaak/ niet soms
- Soms
- Nooit

Vraag 4: Heb je in jouw buurt de mogelijkheid om constructiespel te doen als bouwen met zand, takken, stenen?

(Tekenen een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Ja, heel veel
- Ja, veel
- Niet veel / niet weinig
- Nee, weinig
- Nee, helemaal niet

Vraag 5: Wat vind je van constructiespel als bouwen met zand, takken, stenen?

(Tekenen een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel leuk
- Leuk
- Niet leuk / niet, niet leuk
- Niet leuk
- Helemaal niet leuk

Vraag 6: Hoe vaak doe je een constructiespel als bouwen met zand, takken, stenen?

(Tekenen een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel vaak
- Vaak
- Niet vaak/ niet soms
- Soms
- Nooit

Play Functions

Vraag 7: Heb je in jouw buurt de mogelijkheid om fantasiespel en verhaaltjes spelen?

(Tekenen een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Ja, heel veel
- Ja, veel
- Niet veel / niet weinig
- Nee, weinig
- Nee, helemaal niet

Vraag 8: Wat vind je van fantasiespellen als rollenspel en verhaaltjes spelen?
(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel leuk
- Leuk
- Niet leuk / niet, niet leuk
- Niet leuk
- Helemaal niet leuk

Vraag 9: Hoe vaak doe je een fantasiespel als rollenspel en verhaaltjes spelen?
(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel vaak
- Vaak
- Niet vaak/ niet soms
- Soms
- Nooit

Vraag 10: Heb je in jouw buurt de mogelijkheid om rond te hangen op bijvoorbeeld bankjes en in speeltuinen?
(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Ja, heel veel
- Ja, veel
- Niet veel / niet weinig
- Nee, weinig
- Nee, helemaal niet

Vraag 11: Wat vind je van rond hangen op bijvoorbeeld bankjes en in speeltuinen?
(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel leuk
- Leuk
- Niet leuk / niet, niet leuk
- Niet leuk
- Helemaal niet leuk

Vraag 12: Hoe vaak hang je rond bijvoorbeeld op bankjes en in speeltuinen?
(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel vaak
- Vaak
- Niet vaak/ niet soms
- Soms
- Nooit

Size & Distance

Vraag 13: Hoelang is de afstand die je vanuit jouw huis moet lopen naar de dichtstbijzijnde speeltuin?
(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel kort
- Kort
- Niet kort / niet lang
- Lang
- Heel lang

Vraag 14: Hoe groot is de dichtstbijzijnde speeltuin?
(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel groot
- Groot
- Niet groot / niet klein
- Klein
- Heel klein

Vraag 15: Hoe vaak speel je in de dichtstbijzijnde speeltuin?
(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel vaak
- Vaak
- Niet vaak/ niet soms
- Soms
- Nooit

Vraag 16: Hoelang is de afstand die je vanuit jouw huis moet lopen naar jouw favoriete speeltuin?
(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel kort
- Kort
- Niet kort / niet lang
- Lang
- Heel lang

Vraag 17: Hoe groot is jouw favoriete speeltuin?
(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel groot
- Groot
- Niet groot / niet klein
- Klein
- Heel klein

Vraag 18: Hoe vaak speel je in jouw favoriete speeltuin?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel vaak
- Vaak
- Niet vaak/ niet soms
- Soms
- Nooit

Qualities for Play Areas

Vraag 19: Hoeveel groen, zoals bosjes, is er bij/in de speeltuin waar je het meest speelt?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel veel groen, bosjes
- Veel groen, bosjes
- Niet veel / Niet weinig groen
- Weinig groen, bosjes
- Helemaal geen groen, bosjes

Vraag 20: Wat vind je (zou je vinden) van groen (bosjes, bomen) rond en in de speelplek?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel leuk
- Leuk
- Niet leuk / niet niet leuk
- Niet leuk
- Helemaal niet leuk

Vraag 21: Wat voor ruimte geeft of biedt de stoep je in jouw buurt om te spelen?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Hele goede ruimte
- Goede ruimte
- Niet goed / niet slecht
- Slechte ruimte
- Hele slechte ruimte

Vraag 22: Wat vind je (zou je vinden) van spelen op de stoepen?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel leuk
- Leuk
- Niet leuk / niet niet leuk
- Niet leuk
- Helemaal niet leuk

Safety Issues

Vraag 23: Zijn er auto's in jouw buurt waar je speelt?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Nooit
- Weinig
- Niet weinig / niet veel
- Veel
- Heel veel

Vraag 24: Heb je last van auto's in jouw buurt met spelen?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Helemaal niet
- Weinig
- Niet weinig / niet veel
- Veel
- Heel veel

Safety Issues

Vraag 25: Zijn er groepen jongeren in jouw buurt waar je speelt?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Nooit
- Weinig
- Niet weinig / niet veel
- Veel
- Heel veel

Vraag 26: Heb je last van de groepen jongeren in jouw buurt met spelen?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Helemaal niet
- Weinig
- Niet weinig / niet veel
- Veel
- Heel veel

Vraag 27: Ligt er afval in jouw buurt waar je speelt?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Nooit
- Weinig
- Niet weinig/ niet veel
- Veel
- Heel veel

Vraag 28: Heb je last van het afval in jouw buurt met spelen?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Helemaal niet
- Weinig
- Niet weinig / niet veel
- Veel
- Heel veel

Vraag 29: Hoe vaak zijn de speeltoestellen waar je mee speelt kapot?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Nooit kapot
- Soms kapot
- Niet soms / niet vaak kapot
- Vaak kapot
- Altijd kapot

Vraag 30: Heb je last van kapotte speeltoestellen in jouw buurt met spelen?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Helemaal niet
- Weinig
- Niet weinig / niet veel
- Veel
- Heel veel

Other Play Facilities

Vraag 31: Kan je op het schoolplein spelen buiten schooltijd?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Ja altijd, geen hekken
- Ja, hekken blijven open
- Nee nooit, hekken gaan dicht

Wanneer je op vraag 31 nee nooit had ingevuld, sla dan deze vraag over!

Vraag 32: Hoe vaak speel je op het schoolplein buiten schooltijd?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Altijd
- Vaak
- Niet vaak/ niet soms
- Soms
- Nooit

Vraag 33: Wat vind je van het spelen op het schoolplein buiten schooltijd of hoe zou je het vinden als het wel zou kunnen?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel leuk
- Leuk
- Niet leuk / niet, niet leuk
- Niet leuk
- Helemaal niet leuk

Vraag 34: Hoe vaak worden er buurtactiviteiten in jouw buurt voor jouw leeftijdsgroep gedaan?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel vaak
- Vaak
- Niet vaak / niet soms
- Soms
- Helemaal nooit

Wanneer je op vraag 34 Helemaal nooit had ingevuld, sla dan deze vraag over!

Vraag 35: Hoe vaak doe je mee met de buurtactiviteiten?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Altijd mee
- Vaak mee
- Niet vaak / niet soms mee
- Soms mee
- Nooit mee

Vraag 36: Wat vind je van de buurtactiviteiten of hoe zou je het vinden als het er wel zou zijn?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- Heel leuk
- Leuk
- Niet leuk / niet, niet leuk
- Niet leuk
- Helemaal niet leuk

Children's Background and Play Behaviour

Vraag 37: Hoeveel uur speel/ben je ongeveer doordeweeks in de SPEELTUIN?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- 2 - meer uur per dag
- 1 - 2 uur per dag
- 1/2 - 1 uur per dag
- 0 - 1/2 uur per dag
- 0 uur per dag

Vraag 38: Hoeveel uur speel/ben je ongeveer doordeweeks BUITEN?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- 😊 2 - meer uur per dag
- 😊 1 - 2 uur per dag
- 😊 1/2 - 1 uur per dag
- 😊 0 - 1/2 uur per dag
- 😊 0 uur per dag

Vraag 39: Hoeveel dagen per week speel/ben je ongeveer in de SPEELTUIN?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- 😊 7 dagen
- 😊 4 - 6 dagen
- 😊 2 - 4 dagen
- 😊 1 - 2 dagen
- 😊 0 dagen

Vraag 40: Hoeveel dagen per week speel/ben je ongeveer BUITEN?

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- 😊 7 dagen
- 😊 4 - 6 dagen
- 😊 2 - 4 dagen
- 😊 1 - 2 dagen
- 😊 0 dagen

Vraag 41: Ik ben een ...

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- 😊 Jongen
- 😊 Meisje

Vraag 42: Mijn leeftijd is...

(Teken een rondje om één gezichtje)

- 😊 9
- 😊 10
- 😊 11
- 😊 12
- 😊 ouder

Annex 3: Data Analysis of the Questionnaire results

Table 1.1; Descriptive Analysis – Closest & Favourite Playground

Children Perceived	Mean	St. Dev.
Distance & Size	(N = 111)	
	(range 2 to -2)	
Closest Playground		
Distance	1.27	0.899
Size	0.37	1.070
Practice	0.04	0.114
Favourite Playground		
Distance	0.30	1.317
Size	1.12	0.865
Practice	0.03	1.109

Table 1.2; Correlations Distance & Size and practice

Relationship Between Distance & Size and Practice	Correlation	
	Pearson's r Correlation	P-value
Distance Closest Playground		
Practice Closest	0.391	< 0.001
Size Closest Playground		
Practice Closest	0.309	0.001
Distance Favourite Playground		
Practice Favourite	0.287	0.002
Size Favourite Playground		
Practice Favourite	0.200	0.037

Table 2.1; Descriptive Analysis – Play types

Children Perceived Play Types	Mean (N = 111) (range 2 to -2)	St. Dev.
Movement play		
Accessibility	0.51	1.078
Attitude	1.33	0.813
Practice	0.69	0.980
Construction play		
Accessibility	-0.16	1.240
Attitude	0.45	1.263
Practice	-0.75	0.995

*(n.s.) presents a not significant correlation because the P-Value is > 0.05

Table 2.1; Descriptive Analysis – Play types

Children Perceived Play Types	Mean (N = 111) (range 2 to -2)	St. Dev.
Fantasy play		
Accessibility	0.33	1.371
Attitude	0.28	1.252
Practice	-0.69	1.212
Hanging around		
Accessibility	0.85	1.055
Attitude	0.61	1.002
Practice	-0.09	1.041

Table 2.2; Correlations Practice – Attitude & Accessibility

Relationship Between Practice and Attitude & Accessibility	Correlation	
	Pearson's r	P-value
Practice Movement play		
Attitude	0.301	<i>0.001</i>
Accessibility	0.245	<i>0.010</i>
Practice Construction play		
Attitude	0.430	<i>< 0.001</i>
Accessibility	0.240	<i>0.011</i>

Table 2.2; Correlations Practice – Attitude & Accessibility

Relationship Between Practice and Attitude & Accessibility	Correlation	
	Pearson's r Correlation	P-value
Practice Fantasy play		
Attitude	0.584	< 0.001
Accessibility	0.398	< 0.001
Practice Hanging around		
Attitude	0.603	< 0.001
Accessibility	0.228	0.016

*(n.s.) presents a not significant correlation because the P-Value is > 0.05

** Accessibility and Attitude do not have a significant relationship, four time n.s.

Table 3.1; Descriptive Analysis - Qualities of Play Areas

Children Perceived Design Qualities	Mean (N = 111) (range 2 to -2)	St. Dev.
Green Areas		
Presence	0.51	1.056
Attitude	0.83	0.943
Pavement		
Presence	0.32	1.198
Attitude	0.27	1.070

Table 3.2: Differences between Schools - Qualities of Play Areas

Differences between schools Qualities of Play Areas	Mean				St. Dev.				One-Way ANOVA
	(range 2 to -2)								P-value
	Note (N = 22)	Da C (N = 30)	Ari (N = 3)	Mal (N = 56)	Note	Da C	Ari	Mal	
Green Areas									
Accessibility	0.24	0.20	-0.33	0.82	1.179	1.126	0.577	0.897	0.011
Attitude	0.14	0.77	0.67	1.14	0.990	0.935	1.155	0.773	< 0.001
Pavement									
Accessibility	0.36	-0.03	0.00	0.50	1.093	1.273	1.000	1.191	0.251 (n.s.)
Attitude	-0.27	0.33	-1.00	0.52	1.241	0.884	1.000	0.874	0.002

*(n.s.) presents a not significant difference because the P-Value is > 0.05

Table 4.1; Descriptive Analysis – Safety Issues

Children Perceived Safety Issues	Mean (N = 111) (range 2 to -2)	St. Dev.
Cars		
Presence	-0.18	1.177
Attitude	0.29	1.302
Litter		
Presence	0.38	1.181
Attitude	0.94	1.122
Maintenance		
Presence	1.08	1.019
Attitude	1.02	1.213

Table 4.1; Descriptive Analysis – Safety Issues

Children Perceived Safety Issues	Mean (N = 111) (range 2 to -2)	St. Dev.
Gangs		
Presence	0.06	1.295
Attitude	0.65	1.216

Table 5.1; Descriptive Analysis – Other Facilities

Children Perceived Other Facilities	Mean (N = 111) (range 2 to -2)	St. Dev.
School Playgrounds		
Accessibility	(range 1 to -1) -0.33	0.622
Attitude	0.51	1.056
Practice	-0.88	1.162
Neighbourhood Activities		
Accessibility	-0.65	1.208
Attitude	0.78	1.065
Practice	0.18	1.283

Table 5.2; Correlations Accessibility and Attitude & Practice

Relationship Between Accessibility, Attitude & Practice	Correlation	
	Pearson's r Correlation	P-value
School Playground Access		
Attitude	-0.049	0.616 (n.s)
Practice	0.022	0.857 (n.s)
School Playground Practice		
Attitude	0.335	0.004

*(n.s.) presents a not significant correlation because the P-Value is > 0.05

Table 5.3: Differences between Schools – Other facilities

Differences between schools	Mean				St. Dev.				One-Way ANOVA
	(range 2 to -2)								P-value
Other Facilities	Note	Da C	Ari	Mal	Note	Da C	Ari	Mal	
	(N = 22)	(N = 30)	(N = 3)	(N = 56)					
School Playgr.									
Accessibility	0.09	-0.21	-0.33	-0.55	0.426	0.620	0.577	0.601	< 0.001
(range 1 to -1)									
Attitude	0.41	-0.14	0.67	0.88	1.054	1.026	0.577	0.935	0.034
Practice	-0.55	-1.33	-2.00	-0.62	1.234	1.007	0.000	1.134	< 0.001

*(n.s.) presents a not significant difference because the P-Value is > 0.05

Table: Gender differences – Closest & Favourite Playground

Gender Differences	Mean		St. Dev.		One-Way ANOVA
	(range 2 to -2)				P-value
	Girls (N = 52)	Boys (N = 59)	Girls	Boys	
Closest Playground					
Size	0.29	0.44	1.073	1.071	0.457 (n.s)
Distance	1.19	1.33	0.841	0.951	0.416 (n.s)
Practice	-0.29	0.32	1.109	1.210	0.007
Favourite Playground					
Size	0.76	1.42	0.951	0.649	< 0.001
Distance	0.14	0.44	1.249	1.368	0.230 (n.s)
Practice	-0.24	0.26	1.031	1.133	0.020

*(n.s.) presents a not significant difference because the P-Value is > 0.05

No main differences are discovered between boy and girls during this research. These statistical results in the following tables show that by the vast majority of the findings no significant differences are found between the opinion of girl compared with boys (P -value < 0.05).

Table: Gender differences – Play Types

Gender Differences Play Types	Mean		St. Dev		One-Way ANOVA
	(range 2 to -2)				P-value
	Girls (N = 52)	Boys (N = 59)	Girls	Boys	
Movement play					
Accessibility	0.54	0.49	1.093	1.073	0.820 (n.s)
Attitude	1.31	1.36	0.755	0.866	0.757 (n.s)
Practice	0.67	0.71	0.944	1.018	0.836 (n.s)
Construction play					
Accessibility	-0.13	-0.19	1.189	1.293	0.827 (n.s)
Attitude	0.56	0.36	1.092	1.399	0.403 (n.s)
Practice	-0.75	-0.75	0.947	1.044	0.982 (n.s)
Fantasy play					
Accessibility	0.48	0.20	1.291	1.436	0.289 (n.s)
Attitude	0.35	0.22	1.219	1.287	0.599 (n.s)
Practice	-0.67	-0.71	1.248	1.190	0.867 (n.s)

Table: Gender differences – Play Types

Gender Differences Play Types	Mean		St. Dev		One-Way ANOVA
	(range 2 to -2)				P-value
	Girls (N = 52)	Boys (N = 59)	Girls	Boys	
Hanging around					
Accessibility	0.88	0.81	1.003	1.106	0.725 (n.s)
Attitude	0.58	0.64	1.036	0.978	0.726 (n.s)
Practice	-0.17	-0.02	1.004	1.075	0.433 (n.s)

*(n.s.) presents a not significant difference because the P-Value is > 0.05

Table: Gender differences – Design Qualities of Play Areas

Gender Differences qualities of play areas	Mean		St. Dev.		One-Way ANOVA
	(range 2 to -2)				P-value
	Girls (N = 52)	Boys (N = 59)	Girls	Boys	
Green Areas					
Accessibility	0.46	0.55	1.075	1.046	0.657 (n.s.)
Attitude	0.79	0.86	1.016	0.880	0.674 (n.s.)
Pavement					
Accessibility	0.31	0.32	1.181	1.224	0.950 (n.s.)
Attitude	0.31	0.24	0.875	1.135	0.718 (n.s.)

*(n.s.) presents a not significant difference because the P-Value is > 0.05

Table: Gender differences – Safety Issues

Gender Differences Safety Issues	Mean		St. Dev.		One-Way ANOVA
	(range 2 to -2)				P-value
	Girls (N = 52)	Boys (N = 59)	Girls	Boys	
Cars					
Perception	0.00	-0.34	1.103	1.226	0.131 (n.s.)
Attitude	0.49	0.12	1.155	1.403	0.136 (n.s.)
Litter					
Perception	0.29	0.47	1.143	1.217	0.435 (n.s.)
Attitude	0.92	0.95	0.987	1.238	0.903 (n.s.)
Maintenance					
Perception	0.98	1.17	0.939	1.085	0.333 (n.s.)
Attitude	1.02	1.02	1.146	1.280	0.992 (n.s.)

Table: Gender differences – Safety Issues

Gender Differences Safety Issues	Mean		St. Dev.		One-Way ANOVA
	(range 2 to -2)				P-value
	Girls (N = 52)	Boys (N = 59)	Girls	Boys	
Gangs					
Perception	-0.02	0.14	1.336	1.266	0.532 (n.s.)
Attitude	0.60	0.69	1.192	1.245	0.689 (n.s.)

*(n.s.) presents a not significant difference because the P-Value is > 0.05

Table: Gender differences – Other Facilities

Gender Differences Other Facilities	Mean		St. Dev.		One-Way ANOVA
	(range 2 to -2)				P-value
	Girls (N = 52)	Boys (N = 59)	Girls	Boys	
School Playgrounds					
Accessibility	-0.37	-0.29	0.528	0.696	0.481 (n.s.)
Attitude	0.53	0.49	1.007	1.104	0.852 (n.s.)
Practice	-1.09	-0.69	1.042	1.239	0.148 (n.s.)

*(n.s.) presents a not significant difference because the P-Value is > 0.05



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Source - Pictures Elisabeth Koen