

- 1 Helena Mattsson, *Architecture and Retrenchment: Neoliberalization of the Swedish Model across Aesthetics and Space, 1968–1994* (London: Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2023); Anna Klingmann, *Brandsapes: Architecture in the Experience Economy* (Cambridge, MA and London: MIT Press, 2007).
- 2 Original quote in Danish: “Børn bør have naturoplevelser som en naturlig del af deres dagligdag, f.eks. på naturlegepladsen, selvom denne aldrig vil og bør kunne erstatte oplevelsen af den ægte skov, strand og mark!” Friluftsrådet, *Naturlegepladser* [Nature playgrounds] (Copenhagen: Frie Børnehavers Forlag, 1998), 4.
- 3 Friluftsrådet, *Naturlegepladser*, 3.
- 4 “Nature Playground,” Visit Copenhagen, accessed March 2, 2024, <https://www.visitcopenhagen.com/copenhagen/planning/nature-playground-gdk493825>.

During the interwar and postwar decades, Danish playgrounds were intended to contribute to the formation of productive, creative, and democratic welfare citizens. They would gain increasing attention and financial support by municipalities and the state along with the professionalization of childcare as part of social and educational welfare measures. Since then, the emphasis has shifted from children’s constructive and creative play, emulating the sort of play one would find amongst children in the countryside, to children’s experiences and development of competences, thereby resonating with a growing appreciation of the agency of architecture as part of the experience economy and the neoliberalization of society.¹ Beyond the ideas of “the good life,” which sustained previous versions of the Nordic welfare society, ideas of individuality and “good experiences” have become prevalent. Each child should be allowed to express and unfold her or his “potential,” rather than confining to a predetermined figure of an ideal welfare citizen—or perhaps this is precisely the figure of a new, updated version of the ideal Nordic welfare citizen.

By the turn of the twenty-first century, the integration of play and nature resulted in so-called “nature playgrounds,” which could either be playgrounds built with natural materials or playgrounds which provided experiences and activities related to nature. In 1997, Friluftsrådet (The Danish outdoor council) organized an ideas competition on nature playgrounds and stated that “Children should have experiences of nature as a natural part of their everyday life, for instance in the nature playground, even though this never can or should replace the experience of the real forest, beach, or field!”² Nature itself was seen as a cause, since nature playgrounds would help “children grow up as considerate users of nature and environment” and furthermore that play at nature playgrounds would stimulate children’s positive development with positive consequences in terms of health, motor functions, and concentration.³

The prominence of sensory experiences and health is repeated in descriptions of the nature playground in Copenhagen’s Valby neighborhood, published by VisitCopenhagen, a media brand run by Wonderful Copenhagen, the official tourist organization in the Copenhagen region, which states that “you will find outdoor challenges and playful experiences that can get your heart rate up.”⁴ In today’s Nordic welfare society, playgrounds have become part of city branding and tourism marketing strategies. Yet in comparison with their interwar and postwar counterparts, contemporary playgrounds rely on a slightly more passive engagement with matter. While the welfare society still plays an active role in securing space for children to play, the ideas of what this does to children have changed. This chapter explores the discourse and design of playgrounds as part of Danish welfare measures. It includes



Nature playground, Valby, designed
by landscape architect Helle Nebelong,
1994–2004.

- 5 Concerning the notion of welfare landscapes, see Ellen Braae, Svava Riesto, Henriette Steiner, and Anne Tietjen, "Welfare Landscapes: Open Spaces of Danish Social Housing Estates Reconfigured," in *Mass Housing of the Scandinavian Welfare States: Exploring Histories and Design Strategies*, ed. Miles Glendinning and Svava Riesto (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh, 2020), 13–23; and Ellen Braae, *Urban Planning in the Nordic World* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press; Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 2022).
- 6 Martin Søberg, "Children as Symbolic Figures in Welfare Space Photography," in *Architectures of Dismantling and Restructuring*, ed. Kirsten Marie Raahauge et al. (Zurich: Lars Müller Publishers, 2022), 50–71. See also Ning de Coninck-Smith, *Barndom og arkitektur: Rum til danske børn igennem 300 år* [Childhood and architecture: 300 years of spaces for Danish children] (Aarhus: Klim, 2011); Roy Kozlovsky, *The Architectures of Childhood: Children, Modern Architecture and Reconstruction in Postwar England* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); and Marta Gutman and Ning de Coninck-Smith, "Introduction: Good to Think with—History, Space, and Modern Childhood," in *Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children*, ed. Marta Gutman and Ning de Coninck-Smith (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2008), 1–19.

considerations of how ideas of children and the usefulness of playgrounds as enculturating social technologies aided the formation of the ideal citizen of the welfare society, tracing changes to these ideas from the mid-nineteenth century until today.

WELFARE AND PLAY

Securing spaces for children was part of the task of the Nordic welfare society during the interwar and postwar decades, not only as part of the "welfare landscapes" of educational programs, which included schools and kindergartens, but also in the context of housing estates and in urban parks and squares.⁵ Children were an important target group of welfare spaces, since they were considered to be particularly malleable and in need of care, and thus covered by society's guarantee to provide settings for "the good life." Indeed, children became symbolic figures in the foundation of the welfare society as such and its specific spatializations.⁶ Playgrounds are spaces designed for the activities of children yet designed by adults who often have specific ideas about children and how those spaces will affect children. They are also a means of getting children off the street, for security reasons and to allow traffic to run more smoothly. In the Nordic welfare society, playgrounds became settings for educating children to become productive, cultured, and democratically minded citizens, thereby sustaining the welfare society's foundational ideals of participation and equality. These ideas reflected the modern perception of pedagogies as part of a process of enculturating the child, stimulating development. The child was perceived as being "unfinished"—that is, in the process of becoming an adult and thereby an active, contributing member of society. Concurrently, the child was perceived as being in a more "natural" or "wild" state, ready for enculturation just like other "primitive" human beings. Sometimes, this resulted in Social Darwinist attitudes which viewed the child as developing according to natural laws from a primitive or natural state toward cultured adulthood.

Playgrounds were spaces in which considerations pertaining to productiveness, naturalness, health, and cooperation—key ideological aspects of the welfare society—clearly unfolded; in a Danish context, this was particularly apparent in two specific types of playgrounds: the *sand playground* and the *junk playground*. While the former type was imported from other European countries, the latter was invented by the Danish landscape architect C. Th. Sørensen, an important contributor to the design of Danish welfare landscapes during the mid-twentieth century. The junk playground became an international success, inspiring the construction of similar junk or, as they are sometimes called, *adventure playgrounds* in other European countries and the US.

SAND PLAYGROUNDS

The attention to play as a developing factor was already characteristic of pedagogics during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Play was not valuable as such but was a means to developing useful citizens. This idea of children as being in formation, contrary to

- 7 J. Lauritsen, *Underholdende og dannende legemsøvelser for unge mennesker, især drenge i hjemmet og paa skolens legeplads* [Entertaining and formative physical exercises for young people, especially boys at home and on the school playground] (Copenhagen: Chr. Steen og Søns Forlag, 1865), 3.
- 8 Legeplads-Foreningen, *Legeplads-Foreningens anden beretning* [The Playground Association's second report] (Copenhagen: O.C. Olsen, 1896), 3–4. Annette Westermann, “De første offentlige legepladser” [The first public playgrounds], *Legepladsen* 3–4 (2009): 12–13.
- 9 Original quote in Danish: “Bestyrelsen har opfattet det som sin Opgave ikke blot at tilvejebringe Legepladser, men ogsaa at bidrage til at fremme den ordnede Leg. De store Byers indsnævrede Plads hæmmer den frie Leg, forhindrer Børnene i at lege mange af de bedste og fornøjeligste Lege, som de ældre huske fra deres Børneaar.” *Legeplads-Foreningen, Legeplads-Foreningens anden beretning*, 5.
- 10 The articles were published in 1890 and 1891 and reprinted as a small book; see Rigmor Bendix, *Om legepladser* [On playgrounds] (Copenhagen: Fr. G. Knudtzons Bogtrykkeri, 1891).
- 11 Original quote in Danish: “Børnene vide slet ikke, hvor de skulle gjøre af deres unge Livslyst. Der er ikke det Sted, hvor de kunne vende sig hen med deres Fantasi, med deres Byggelyst og Undersøgelsestrang. ... Lidt Grus og Jord, Pinde, Smaasten kunne gjøre et Barn i Timesvis lykkeligt—og artigt.” Bendix, *Om legepladser*, 5–6.

adults, was a significant part of welfare society programs during the interwar and postwar decades. Many of society's institutions—older ones like schools and newer ones like public kindergartens—were aimed at contributing to this development and social construction of useful citizens out of the natural phenomenon that is children.

Playgrounds as urban sites designated for child play had already appeared in Copenhagen during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Previously, children had been playing in the streets or on the terrain of the old city fortifications, which were now partly being demolished to make room for new urban quarters including new public parks. The first rather simple municipal playground was established in one of these parks, Ørstedsparken, and constructed between 1876 and 1879. It consisted of an open space with gravel paving intended for children's ball and song games. Playgrounds could however also be found in connection with schools and were used especially for physical exercise. As the teacher J. Lauritsen had argued in an instructive publication in 1865, such exercising was both entertaining and educational and would contribute to a positive development of people's character and freedom.⁷

The early playgrounds in Copenhagen often came about through collaborations between private philanthropists and public institutions. Legeplads-Foreningen (The Copenhagen playground association) was founded in 1891 and established a playground on Grønningen the same year on a site made available by the Ministry of War. Contrary to the playground in Ørstedsparken, it comprised various kinds of play equipment, including swings and seesaws, and featured activities organized by adults.⁸ Rigmor Bendix, chair of the association, stated in 1896: “The board has considered it its task not only to provide playgrounds, but also to contribute to the promotion of ordered play. Large cities' limited space inhibits free play, prevents the children from playing many of the best and most amusing games that older ones remember from the childhood years.”⁹ Curiously, for Bendix, “ordered” and “free” play did not seem to be in conflict. On the contrary, the spatial and behavioral ordering conducted by adults was presented as a prerequisite for the free play of children. Society rescued children from the streets, where many of them would previously have been playing, and provided a space for children's enjoyment and the development, display, and continuation of cultural practices. This reads as a premonition of later welfare programs which would emphasize well-being and culture.

Prior to the foundation of Legeplads-Foreningen, Rigmor Bendix had published several articles on playgrounds in the Danish newspaper *Berlingske Tidende*, calling for more playgrounds to be established.¹⁰ As she stated: “The children do not at all know what to do with their young lust for life. There is no place to where they can turn their fantasy, their urge to build and examine. ... A bit of gravel and dirt, sticks, pebbles, could make a child happy for hours—and well-behaved.”¹¹ Hence, rather than the organized activities that she would refer to a few years later, Bendix pointed to things that would be abundantly available for play to children in the countryside—that is, natural things. Indeed, she stressed how children in the city occasionally would behave just like children in the countryside, when they were building and playing on unoccupied urban sites. Concurrently, emphasis was put on good behavior, and while children should be provided with certain degrees of freedom it was important that this

Temporary sand playground in the
City Hall Garden, Copenhagen, 1907.

The landscape form of the beach emulated
as a sand playground by landscape architect
C. Th. Sørensen in the courtyard of the
Klokkergården housing estate, Copenhagen,
1938–39.



- 12 Original quote in Danish: "den Tid vil komme, hvor man ikke anser det for det styggeste Syn at se en Plads med legende Børn, selv om hvert enkelt af dem ikke er saa fint." Bendix, *Om Legepladser*, 28. See also Rodrigo Pérez de Arce, "Sand and Snow," in *City of Play: An Architectural and Urban History of Recreation and Leisure* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 83–84.
- 13 See for instance: Jean Paul Friedrich Richter, *Levana; Or the Doctrine of Education* (London: George Bell and Sons, 1898 [1807]), 156–57.
- 14 Original quote in Danish: "Ret forstaaet, leger Børn ikke i Sandet. De arbejder som Kunstneren ved sit Værk. Ret Spørgsmaal til dem, naar de former og bygger, tal til dem,—der svares næppe! Indfald og Ideer fødes og virkeliggøres, og dette taaler ingen Forstyrrelse. Denne Syslen er en saa inderlig selvsk Tilfredsstillelse, at der næppe gives nogen større." Hans Dragehjelm, *Barnets leg i sandet: Vejledning og vink for hjem, skole og legeplads* [The child's play in the sand: Guidance and tips for home, school, and playground] (Copenhagen: Tilgjes Boghandels Forlag, 1909), 10. Decades later, Dragehjelm would publish an article with a similar title, yet a different content, describing in detail the history and practices of sand play. Hans Dragehjelm, "Barnets leg i sandet" [The child's play in the sand], in *Lærebog i dansk skole-sløj: Smaasløjdsystemet* [Textbook in school crafts], ed. G. F. Krog Clausen, Th. Rasmussen, and R. C. Rasmussen (Copenhagen: L. A. Jørgensens Bogtrykkeri, 1934), 20–54.
- 15 Original phrase in Danish: "forstaaende og nyttig Verdensborger" Dragehjelm, *Barnets leg i sandet* (1909), 13.
- 16 Dragehjelm, *Barnets leg i sandet* (1909), 19–20.
- 17 Original phrase in Danish: "Sandlegen er for Barnet et Sprog, der er i nærmeste Slægtskab med dets Skitseren og Tegning med Blyant eller Griffel. Igennem det skaffer Fantasien sig Luft, og det er dette tavse, men synlige Sprog, der henrykker det skuelystne Publikum." Dragehjelm, *Barnets leg i sandet* (1909), 23.
- 18 Dragehjelm, *Barnets leg i sandet* (1909), 64.

did not result in chaos. This points to an ambiguous idea of the child around the turn of the twentieth century, which was seen as being in need of freedom but also of education, not least to secure its development in a direction deemed valuable by society. This view was also connected to certain aesthetic views on the city and to questions of beauty. After all, when playing, children easily end up getting dirty. Bendix quoted art history professor Julius Lange, who stated at a meeting that "the time will come when a place with playing children will not be perceived as the ugliest sight, even if each one of them isn't very nice."¹²

A large heap of sand was placed in Copenhagen's City Hall Garden in 1907; this was the first Danish sand playground. It immediately became very popular yet was only a temporary installation. The year after, sand was part of a playground opening on the Elephant's Bastion in the Christianshavn neighborhood, where the old ramparts were still intact; the idea of sand playgrounds soon spread throughout the country. Usually, the sand would be structured by a wooden frame, as a sandbox, and tables to play at would be placed in the sand. The sand playground or sandbox allowed for a stimulation of the enterprise of children, which was seen as healthy and edifying. Pedagogically, sand playgrounds had roots in the romantic movement of the eighteenth and early nineteenth century, for instance in the ideas of Jean-Jacques Rousseau and the German romantic writer Jean Paul.¹³

The head teacher Hans Dragehjelm published the book *Barnets leg i sandet* (The child's play in the sand) in 1909 and contributed to the introduction of sandboxes in Denmark, based on international inspiration. He wrote enthusiastically about the bodily sensations that children experience when playing with sand, comparing their creativity to that of an artist: "Rightly understood, children don't play in the sand. They work like the artist at his work of art. Pose questions to them when they shape and build, speak to them—they will hardly answer! Thoughts and ideas are born and realized, and that doesn't tolerate interruption. This pursuit is such an utterly selfish satisfaction that something bigger hardly exists."¹⁴ The sand would, so to speak, guide the child in its development, it would have an enculturating effect, contributing to developing the child into an "understanding and useful world citizen" and it furthermore encouraged cooperation.¹⁵

Dragehjelm claimed that playing with sand would contribute to the development of the child's ability to perceive spatial objects and figures, and three-dimensionality as such through bodily sensation, in particular the sensations of the hands in contact with the sand.¹⁶ These ideas were influenced by the pedagogy of Friedrich Fröbel and others. As mentioned, sand also had creative potential, stimulating the imagination of the child: "To the child, the sand play is a language closely related to sketching and drawing with a lead or a slate pencil. Through it, fantasy acquires air, and it is this silent but visible language that delights the audience hungry for spectacle."¹⁷ In line with the philosophy of object lesson pedagogy, Dragehjelm described the "work" with the sand masses as "practical" physics and mathematics, which would prepare the children for "actual work."¹⁸ Again, play and playgrounds were considered elements in the enculturation of children to being useful citizens, that is, productive workers. This might not necessarily relate to a welfare

- 19 Original phrase in Danish: "Lad Barnet flage i sin Sommerfugleflugt og rør ikke støvet paa dets Vinger!" Hans Dragehjem, *Børns frie leg og legepladser* [Children's free play and playgrounds] (Copenhagen: Jul. Gjellerups Forlag, 1918), 24.
- 20 Original phrase in Danish: "Sandlegepladsen skal være som en strand, der uden videre er en herlig legeplads." C. Th. Sørensen, "Den store have" [The great garden], *Arkitekten måneds-hæfte* [The architect monthly] 54, no. 1–2 (1952): 45.
- 21 Malene Hauxner, *Fantasien have* [The garden of fantasy] (Copenhagen: Arkitektens Forlag, 1993), 151.
- 22 Annemarie Lund, *Danmarks havekunst III, 1945–2002* [The art of the Danish garden III, 1945–2002] (Copenhagen: Arkitektens Forlag, 2002), 86–87.
- 23 These images of the typical Danish landscape were established during the nineteenth century; see Gertrud Oelsner, *En fælles forestillet nation: Dansk landskabsmaleri 1807–1875* [A collectively imagined nation: Danish landscape painting 1807–1875] (Copenhagen: Strandberg Publishing, 2022).
- 24 C. Th. Sørensen, *Parkpolitik i sogn og købstad* [Park politics in parish and market town] (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 1931).

society ideology, but indeed to ideas of a close relationship between citizens and society. Dragehjem displayed a pastoral and vitalist attitude according to which children should develop their skills, but in a natural, entrepreneurial way, getting accustomed to work and gaining empirical knowledge of materials and natural forces. As such, play was free, but also useful as part of the development of the child. In his publication *Børns frie leg og legepladser* (Children's free play and playgrounds) published in 1918, he even metaphorically likened children to animals: "Let the child flutter in its butterfly flight and don't touch the dust on its wings!"¹⁹ Children were somehow less spoiled by culture than perhaps adults and playing with sand would keep them innocent from the vices of modern urban life.

JUNK PLAYGROUNDS

The domesticated nature of the mid-twentieth-century playground designed by C. Th. Sørensen or other landscape architects related inherently to a concept of the child as pure potentiality. The child was a sensible adult in formation, yet still in a state of savageness which was gradually diminishing through processes of enculturation. In this sense, children could be likened to plants, their wildness could indeed be tamed and arranged into the formats of society. It was the task of society to perform this enculturation, a process of care by which the welfare society demonstrated its strengths whilst also sustaining itself as a system which needed a constant influx of new citizens. Sørensen pointed to landscape forms that could be emulated in the design of urban playgrounds. As he stated in 1952: "The sand playground should be like a beach which as a matter of course is a wonderful playground."²⁰ He used such forms as motifs, for instance, in landscapes that he designed in connection with large housing estates during the interwar and postwar decades such as Hjortekær, Højstrupparken, and Tingbjerg, which contained abstracted versions of the groves and deciduous forests typical of the Danish landscape. Such reference to specific landscape forms, motifs, or even landscape pictures had already been present in the work of Danish landscape architect G. N. Brandt, who preceded Sørensen by a generation, yet Sørensen turned this kind of imitation into a higher level of abstraction and stylization.²¹ His designs included hedges, hedgerows, orchards, and groves, which were all part of the Danish agricultural landscape.²² Questions of naturalness were similarly pertinent to the design of playgrounds, often with reference to images of what was considered a typical Danish landscape.²³ The idea was that this naturalness would help children become *healthy*, i.e., natural, individual beings; the enterprise and ingenuity which characterized rural child life was further seen as foundational to the development of healthy welfare citizens.

Sørensen introduced the idea of the junk playground in his book *Parkpolitik i sogn og købstad* (Park politics in parish and market towns) published in 1931 by Dansk Byplanlaboratorium (The Danish town planning institute).²⁴ Its expressed intended readers were municipal politicians, amongst whom it aimed to stimulate discussion of, in the institute's terms, "park politics"—that is, planning matters regarding green open spaces. Its chapters were organized typologically, focusing, for instance, on cemeteries, road plantation, and



Junk playground in Emdrup, as part of landscape designed by C. Th. Sørensen, 1943.



Junk playground in Emdrup, as part of landscape designed by C. Th. Sørensen, 1943.

- 25 Original phrase in Danish: “*moderne, sund og demokratisk Maade.*” Original italics. Kai Hendriksen, “Forord [Foreword],” in Sørensen, *Parkpolitik*, 6.
- 26 Original phrase in Danish: “det første og vigtigste punkt i byernes parkprogram.” Sørensen, *Parkpolitik*, 49.
- 27 C. Th. Sørensen, “Etagehusets have” [The gardens of multi-story buildings], *Arkitekten månedshæfte* 37, no. 4 (1935): 49–64.
- 28 Sørensen, *Parkpolitik*, 52–54.
- 29 Original phrase in Danish: “de udnyttes til leg af børnene, som hvor de kan komme til, graver huler, opsætter telte, anlægger haver og hvad børn nu ellers beskæftiger sig med.” Sørensen, *Parkpolitik*, 54.
- 30 Original phrase in Danish: “Måske kunde vi her forsøge at indrette en slags skrammellegeplads på passende og ret store arealer, hvor børnene fik love at udnytte gamle biler, pakkasser, kvas og den slags ting.” Sørensen, *Parkpolitik*, 54.
- 31 Original phrase in Danish: “Jeg tænker mig et areal af ikke alt for ringe omfang, vel lukket for omverdenen med tykke og tætte plantninger; her skulde man samle til større børns fornøjelse alt muligt gammelt skrammel, som bybørnene fra etageboligerne kunde få at virke med, som børn på landet og i forstæderne nu har det. Her kunde være grene og affald fra beskæring af træer og buske, gamle pakkasser, bræddestumper i det hele taget, ‘døde’ biler, kasserede dæk o.m.a. som det vilde være en fryd for raske drenge at få noget ud af. Naturligvis vilde der se forfærdeligt ud, og naturligvis måtte der holdes en vis orden, jeg vil dog tro, at det ikke behøvede at gå helt galt med noget sådant.” Sørensen, “Etagehusets Have,” 61.
- 32 Agnete Vestereg, “Skrammellegepladsens historie” [The history of the junk playground], in *Skrammellegepladsen i Emdrup 1943–1968* [The junk playground in Emdrup 1943–1968] (Emdrup: Skrammellegepladsen i Emdrup, 1968): 3–25. The programme of the junk playground was described by John Bertelsen as a new kind of empirical science: *skrammologi* (“junkology”). John Bertelsen, “Skrammologi” [Junkology], *Arkitekten månedshæfte* 54, no. 1–2 (1952): 35–43. See also Ole Schultze Henriksen, *Skrammellegepladsen* [The junk playground] (Frederiksberg: Dansk Pædagogisk Historisk Forening og Samling; Videncenter for Pædagogiske og Sociale Studier – CVU København og Nordsjælland, 2006); and Ida Vestergaard, “Skrammellegepladsen i dag” [The junk playground today], *Legepladsen* [The playground] 1–2 (2006): 3–5.
- 33 Ning de Coninck-Smith, *Skrammellegepladsen* [The junk playground] (Aarhus: Aarhus Universitetsforlag, 2022), 7.

sports grounds. The chair of the institute, Kai Hendriksen, argued in his foreword that such politics would not only benefit and bring joy to all citizens in a “modern, healthy, and democratic way,” but that they might even, consequently, bring down expenses in relation to hospitals and prisons.²⁵ Children’s playgrounds were the “first and chief item on the urban park program,” according to Sørensen, especially since more and more children were growing up in apartment buildings without gardens.²⁶ He was particularly critical toward urban apartment buildings where no play areas were provided, a topic he addressed specifically in an article in *Arkitekten* (The architect) a few years later, in 1935.²⁷ Sørensen provided concrete details on how playgrounds should be laid out: they should be large, sunny, provide shelter and sand, grass and water should preferably be present.²⁸ He also mentions how children would often prefer to play on unbuilt plots, “they are used for play by the children who, wherever possible, dig caves, set up tents, create gardens and what else children occupy themselves with.”²⁹ It led him to the idea of the junk playground: “Perhaps here we could try and organize a sort of *junk playground* on appropriate and rather large areas where the children would be allowed to make use of old cars, packing cases, brushwood, and those sorts of things.”³⁰ The idea of an actual junk playground was further developed in Sørensen’s 1935 essay on apartment building gardens:

I imagine an area which shouldn’t be too small, closed toward the surroundings by thick and dense plantations; here, to the joy of larger children, all sorts of old junk should be collected which the city children from the apartment blocks could work with, just like the children in the countryside and the suburbs have. There could be branches and rubbish from the pruning of trees and bushes, old cardboard boxes, pieces of wooden boards in general, “dead” cars, scrap tires and other things which would be a joy to lively boys to make something out of. It would naturally look terrible and naturally would have to be kept in some sort of order, but I think that such a thing wouldn’t go all wrong.³¹

In 1943, the first junk playground was laid out in Emdrup in Copenhagen in connection with the housing estates Emdrup Vænge and Emdrup Banke, built by Arbejdernes Andels Boligforening (the Workers Cooperative Housing Association) in 1938–43 and designed by the architect Dan Fink. In collaboration with Fink, Sørensen designed the junk playground, consisting of a 60 by 80 meter lawn surrounded by 2-meter-high banks with plantation and a wire fence. It included an open shed, toilet, and drinking fountain. In the beginning, it was only open during the summer season from April 1 until October 31. Here, children were allowed and encouraged to build on their own using scrap materials and the playground soon attracted hundreds of children, although providing enough materials proved rather difficult during the first couple of years of the playground’s existence, not least due to the scarcity of materials caused by the Second World War.³² As Ning de Coninck-Smith has argued, the idea was to transform the children into responsible citizens by training their abilities to act on their own and to provide them with ingenuity and a sense of collaboration and democracy.³³ The junk playground in Emdrup attracted

- 34 Ning de Coninck Smith, "Den historiske legeplads" [The playground in history], *Legepladsen* 3–4 (2009): 8.
- 35 De Coninck-Smith, *Skrammellegepladsen*, 36–40.
- 36 Original phrase in Danish: "Af alt det, som jeg har været med til at føre ud i livet er Skrammellegepladsen det grimme, for mig er den dog det skønneste og det bedste af mine arbejder." C. Th. Sørensen, "Skrammellegepladsen" [The junk playground], *Byplan: Vore byer og deres planlægning* [City plan: Our cities and their planning] 2, no. 1 (1950): 3.
- 37 Original phrase in Danish: "De overvejelser, som førte til skrammellegepladsen, byggede på erfaringer fra landet, men selv udnyttede jeg kun i ringe grad de gode betingelser, som søer, enge og skove bød. ... Efterhånden står det mig ganske klart, at til udeleg skulle vi kunne give børnene tre landskabsformer, skabe sådanne til dem." C. Th. Sørensen, *Haver: Tanker og arbejder* [Gardens: Thoughts and works] (Copenhagen: Chr. Ejlers, 1975), 133.
- 38 Original phrase in Danish: "Stranden, det må blive en forbindelse af sandlegepladser og soppedamme, men det synes et mere uløseligt problem end rumfartøjer. Kan det virkelig være sandt? Engen, græsflader, der kan leges på, det skulle være så temmelig let. Lunden, d.v.s. skovlignende plantninger, det lader sig gøre, men et problem er, at det tager tid, inden træplanter er store og stærke nok til leg." Sørensen, *Haver*, 134–36.

international visitors, including, in 1946, the British landscape architect and philanthropist Lady Allen of Hurtwood, who subsequently introduced the concept in the UK, now renamed "adventure playground." Concurrently, a similar type of playground appeared in Switzerland, where it was called a "Robinson playground" after Robinson Crusoe. It also led to similar playgrounds being laid out in various parts of Denmark.

PRODUCTIVITY AND COOPERATION

The postwar baby boom and the rising number of women engaging in paid work resulted in an increasing demand on institutions and care for children. In the Nordic welfare society, it was seen as the obligation of the state to provide such services. According to de Coninck-Smith, the sand playground took traditional play with whatever materials were available such as dirt, pebbles, and sticks and made it more organized, more hygienic, even stimulating the craftsman or engineer in the children.³⁴ Hence it was a means of formation itself, even if appearing to be more natural and relaxed. As de Coninck-Smith had pointed to, playgrounds became part of the care of children and not only a question of moral education and of getting children off the streets. Pedagogically, rather than the previous disciplining and instructing attitude, emphasis was increasingly put on the active, creative, and curious child.³⁵ The junk playground expressed this shift, imitating the sort of play which would previously have taken place in rural areas and on unbuilt urban plots, often without interference from adults. As such, it can be viewed as a critique of education and pedagogical measures, and an attempt to enculturate the child toward becoming a productive, active, and morally healthy citizen.

C. Th. Sørensen recognized that the aesthetics of the junk playground differed from conventions. As he stated in 1950: "Of all the things that I have been part of realizing, the junk playground is the ugliest, however to me it is the loveliest and best of my works."³⁶ These domesticated, urban landscapes of play were aestheticized emulations of existing landscape forms, although also allowing for cracks of destruction and messiness. In his book *Haver: Tanker og arbejder* (Gardens: Thoughts and works) published in 1975, Sørensen emphasized the junk playgrounds as a way of introducing the qualities of the countryside into the modern city: "The considerations which led to the junk playground were based on experiences from the countryside, although I myself hardly used the good conditions that lakes, meadows, and woods offered. ... By now it is very clear to me that for outdoor play we should provide the children with three landscape forms, create such ones for them."³⁷ Those three main forms were the beach, the meadow, and the grove:

- *The beach*: that should be in connection with sand playgrounds and paddling pools but seems to be a more unsolvable problem than spacecrafts. How can that be?
- *The meadow*: fields of grass to play on, that is rather easy.
- *The grove* (i.e., wooded plantations): that is possible, but one problem is that it takes time before the trees are large and strong enough for play.³⁸

- 39 Max Siegumfeldt, "Et legepladsprogram" [A playground program], *Havekunst* [Garden design] 26 (1945): 28–30.
- 40 Original phrase in Danish: "For træer til at klatre i, buske til at lege imellem, jord til at rode i, vand til at pjaske i og græs til baade at lege paa og smide sig i udgør jo netop de oprindelige elementer for børns primitive leg," Siegumfeldt, "Et legepladsprogram," 30.
- 41 Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture* (London, Boston and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949).
- 42 Original phrase in Danish: "På landet eksisterer der, bortset fra de ulemper den moderne trafik har hidført, normalt intet legepladsproblem. Det er let at forstå, man behøver blot at pege på de få, men hver for sig så rigt nuancerede områder, der danner rammen om børnenes leg: vandet – landsbyen – marken – skoven." Grethe Meyer, Ibi Trier Mørch, Max Siegumfeldt, Agnete Petersen, and Jens Sigsgaard, "Analyse af legepladsproblemet – særlig med henblik på København" [Analysis of the playground problem with a view to Copenhagen], *Arkitekten månedshæfte* 54, no. 1–2 (1952): 13.
- 43 Original phrase in Danish: "at lede børnene frem til en sund social forståelse, gøre dem fortrolige med samarbejde og hensyntagen til andre og derved være med til at gøre dem til værdifulde samfundsmedlemmer." Meyer et al., "Analyse af legepladsproblemet," 18.
- 44 Original phrase in Danish: "Fugle bygger rede – mennesker huse." John Bertelsen, *Børn bygger* [Children build] (Copenhagen: Aktieselskabet Rockwool, Dansk Gasbeton Aktieselskab, 1958), 4.
- 45 Original phrase in Danish: "Når sandet siler mellem børnenes fingre fornemmer de stof og snart begynder byggeriet. ... Sandlegen er en herlig beskæftigelse – barnet er en skaber som leger med et stof." Bertelsen, *Børn bygger*, 12.

The emulation of existing landscape forms not only ensured continuity between nature and culture, and between childhood and adulthood, but also between a premodern rural society and a modern urban society based on the productivity and ingenuity of the citizen, the development of which was stimulated and encouraged in the sandbox and the junk playground. In 1945, architect and urban planner in Copenhagen Max Siegumfeldt published a "playground program." Siegumfeldt argued that children knew just as well as any professional adult how to form their playgrounds. He referred to how children historically would play on the ramparts, and he was critical of play equipment and the "ordered play" instructed by adults—of how adults wanted to teach children how to play through, for instance, ball games and singing games.³⁹ Playgrounds should contain recreational aspects, Siegumfeldt argued, and not resemble amusement parks. They should look more like gardens: "Trees to climb in, bushes to play between, dirt to mess about in, water to splash in and grass to play on and to throw oneself on are the original elements of children's primitive play."⁴⁰ This pastoral view of children and play emphasized the sensorial and experiential aspects rather than the educational aspects of playgrounds. As such, it mirrored the contemporary ideas of Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga's ideas of ludic man.⁴¹

In a densely illustrated essay published in 1952, Siegumfeldt along with the architects Grethe Meyer and Ibi Trier Mørch, garden architect Agnete Petersen and psychologist Jens Sigsgaard pointed to the difference between the urban and rural situation, the former in a poor state regarding spaces for play, while the countryside contained an abundance of spaces of ludic potential: "In the countryside, no playground problem exists, apart from the drawbacks of modern traffic. It is easy to understand, you simply point to the few but each of them richly nuanced areas which frame the play of children: the water—the village—the field—the wood."⁴² The purpose of such measures was to "lead the children to a healthy social understanding, to make them familiar with cooperation and consideration for others and thereby to contribute to turning them into valuable members of society."⁴³ Here, the point of creating playgrounds is extremely explicit: it aids the formation of welfare citizens.

In his book *Børn bygger* (Children build), published in 1958, John Bertelsen, the first instructor at the Emdrup junk playground, emphasized the creative powers of children and their inclination to build as a natural drive. As he stated: "Birds build nests—humans houses."⁴⁴ The junk playgrounds might have had an appearance of disorganization and jumble, yet to Bertelsen they emblemized human activity and processes of forming matter. This basic experience would often start in the sandbox, Bertelsen argued: "When the sand pours between the children's fingers they sense matter and building soon commences ... Sand play is a wonderful occupation—the child is a creator who plays with matter."⁴⁵ Bertelsen linked these experiences of natural elements and matter to processes of enculturation which could also occur when children were playing in the urban fallow fields and were building dens. In the junk playground, these sorts of play—which were of great educational potential—were provided with ample space and matter. Significantly, Bertelsen even considered destruction an inherent part of these processes: "Destruction with a positive intention is easier to accept than the smaller child's destruction for the sake of destruction, yet something indicates that

- 46 Original phrase in Danish: "Ødelæggelse der har en positiv hensigt er nemmere at acceptere end det mindre barns destruktion for destruktionsens skyld, men noget tyder på at indøvelse og beherskelse af ødelæggelsens kunst er nødvendig for at klare livets forskellige opgaver. Lad os derfor tage alle glæder med: ødelæggelsens, opbygningens og det fuldenste værks." Bertelsen, *Børn bygger*, 11.
- 47 See also the publication on building playgrounds, published by Dansk Legepladsselskab (the Danish Playground Society) in 1981. Max Siegmundfeldt, ed., *Byggelegepladser i Danmark* [Construction playgrounds in Denmark] (Copenhagen: Dansk Legeplads Selskab, 1981).
- 48 Jens Sigsgaard, "The Playground in Modern Danish Housing," *Danish Foreign Office Journal* 54 (1965): 15–20.
- 49 Original phrase in Danish: "På legepladsen kan der skabes muligheder, der kan støtte barnet i at bevare og udvikle sig som den enestående personlighed det er." Svend Erik Laursen, *Legepladsen: indretning, materialer, sikkerhed* [The playground: Design, materials, safety] (Copenhagen: Forlaget Børn & unge, 1985), 13.
- 50 Trine Agervig Carstensen, "Rum til børn – legepladser som børns steder" [Spaces for children—playgrounds as children's places], *Nordisk arkitekturforskning* [Nordic architectural research] 1 (2004): 11–25. See also Flemming Mouritsen, "Børnekultur – legekultur" [Children's culture—play culture], in *Tekster om leg* [Texts on play], ed. Helle Skovbjerg Karoff and Carsten Jessen (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 2014), 237–65.

the practice and command of the art of destruction is necessary for coping with the different tasks of life. Let us therefore include all joys: of destruction, of building, and of the complete work."⁴⁶ Play emulated the natural processes of life and death, of growth and decay. It was situated and materialized in specific spaces, in the basic form of the sandbox, in the urban simulations of the bountiful Danish landscape forms, or in the ambiguous material conditions of the junk playground.

COMPETENCE AND EXPERIENCE

During the second half of the 1960s, the junk playgrounds were to an increasing extent made more institutional, including paid teaching staff and public financial support. Even their name changed, as they were now called *building playgrounds*, thereby emphasizing constructive play and building activities.⁴⁷ This development was supported by the 1964 Lov om børne- og ungdomsforsorg (Children and youth welfare act) which allowed playgrounds to be acknowledged as independent institutions.⁴⁸ Dansk Legepladsselskab (the Danish Playground Society) had been founded in 1959, chaired by C. Th. Sørensen, and focused on stimulating the creative abilities of children through the design of playgrounds. During the 1970s, junk or building playgrounds also became part of alternative, anti-capitalist urban practices such as Hudegrundens Byggelegeplads in Copenhagen's Vesterbro neighborhood and Byggeren in the Nørrebro neighborhood.

Yet while children's education and play were significant aspects of Danish playgrounds, security and risk became steadily more important aspects. This was, for instance, demonstrated by the attention toward installing impact surfaces preventing accidents caused by children falling and the fact that playground design became part of the Danish building regulations in 1994. The individuality of the child also gained in its significance. As Svend Erik Laursen stated in his book *Legepladsen* (The playground), published in 1985: "Opportunities are created at the playground which will support the child in maintaining and developing herself or himself as the unique personality she or he is."⁴⁹ This resonated with ideas of children possessing various competences, including, for instance, emotional and motoric competences, which surfaced during the 1990s. Children's experiences and specific cultures became matters of attention, including their sense of place in relation to playgrounds.⁵⁰ As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the concepts of "individual competences" and "experiences" would be allocated increasing importance during subsequent decades, becoming key objectives of contemporary Danish welfare production—not only with respect to children and the design of playgrounds but also in the formation of all welfare citizens.



Building playground in Kolding, 1961.

