

Playground prototype

How do you design a playground for adults? A quick google search reveals that the adult playground is an existing paradigm in modern architecture. Typically the adult playgrounds are open spaces constructed to afford physical activity. In these spaces there often is machines set up that can be used to exercise and climbing walls also implemented to exert a physical challenge to the adults. In our prototype we wanted to do something different. We looked at children playgrounds and discussed what kind of activities they afford beyond just physical exercise. What we ended up designing is something very different from the common adult playground. In the next paragraphs i will discuss how our design relates to playgrounds.

Children's playgrounds are open spaces typically involving different structures, like houses, towers, slides and sandboxes. Furthermore there often is different props scattered around the playground like balls, sticks, buckets and shovels. There are no rules in a playground, you can play in any way you like and use the structures and props however you see fit. The only rule on a playground is that you play. In Huizinga's (1998) words you enter the 'magic circle' when you enter a playground. When children play they educate themselves for their future life. Children often does not have the same intimacy barrier as adults have and on a playground they play with each other unrestrained by their relationship to the other children. They fight, engage in competitions, play mom and dad etc. The only rule that prevents the playground from becoming a malicious mayhem is that the children are well aware that they play. If a kid feel that the play has gone too far, in other words that the 'magic circle' has been broken they can at any time exit the playground. My point is that a children's playground is not interesting because the children can be physically active it is interesting because they are very social. I am convinced that the children learn a lot of their social skills on the playground. The play itself is a safe way to explore social interaction and the psychological barriers involved. The common adult playground does not involve play in the same way children's playgrounds does. Whether that is the design of the playground or the mentality of the adults is hard to answer. But if the design does not afford social play it will likely never happen. A nice example of what can be perceived as an adult playground is night clubs. The adults attending the night club are well aware of the social interactions involved in such a place. However a night club is a very linear playground. The play is more or less dictated beforehand and there is not room for imaginative freedom from the attending adult's side. What they do well is that they help adults engage in social relations in a somewhat safe environment. Everybody attending the night club know that there has to be space for social experimentation, that is the play.

Our playground is designed to help adults play in a social context. We acknowledge that adults are much more restrained towards social interaction than children. Unlike the common adult playground we do not want to play along these restraints we want to challenge them and provide the tools necessary to play with other adults. In our playground we play a lot with the human sensory system. Basically we make it hard for the adults to navigate using their regular sensory system. The idea is that by handicapping the adults they have to learn to navigate in new ways. The best way to learn how to navigate is by playing with the other persons in the playground. The different rooms in the playground affords play where you have to use different senses. By depriving the adult's senses and establishing a framework for new ways

of communicating we ensure that all of the adults are on the same page, equally handicapped. To interact with the space they have to play with the other adults which in turn will establish social interaction. Our intention is not to make a playground where adults can romanticise. Our intention is to create a space where adults can play without risking losing their pride.

Our playground is designed as a tunnel system. The farther you go in the darker it gets. The idea is that you yourself can decide how far you want to go. Hopefully this can establish the necessary trust needed to experience the feeling of play. The dark setting obviously carries along undertones of terror. This is of course dangerous because we risk that people can panic in the midst of the playground. However sensory deprivation will always be uncomfortable. It is very similar to horror films. We are scared because we lose control but are equally relieved once it is all over and we realise that it was just a film. The same feeling of relief can be experienced in our playground when people start playing to overcome the terror. The unfortunate thing about a tunnel system is that it is hard to escape which most likely will have a negative impact on how the safety of the playground is perceived. Inside the tunnel there is different rooms that deprive and stimulate different senses. Unlike the regular playground these different activities are not played with in the same single space. This makes our playground more of an interactive exhibition than a regular playground.

Bibliography:

Huizinga, Johan (1998 [1938]): *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play-Element in Culture*, London et. al.: Routledge, 1-27.