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Children's Use of Public Spaces and the Role of the Adult – A comparison of Play Ranging in the UK, and the *Leikkipuisto* (Play Parks) in Finland

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Abstract

Globally, public spaces are designated for children and young people to use within their communities. In the UK, these spaces have historically been playing-fields and parks with fenced playgrounds. The adult presence within these public spaces has evolved; from the supervisory role of the 'park keeper' to the active engagement of play workers and more recently Play Rangers. For over 100 years in Finland, Leikkipuisto have provided extensive, child-focused play parks; balancing man-made and natural resources, to provide a vast range of affordances. Furthermore, the adult - the Ohjaaja - is integral to the provision. This paper draws on the experiences of the authors, and considers how the Play Ranger and the Ohjaaja have similar roles in supporting children and young people to play. This is discussed in relation to Kyttä's four hypothetical environments: Bullerby, Glasshouse, Wasteland and Cell (2004), and historical and funding differences between the UK and Finland.

Key Words: United Kingdom; Finland; Play Rangers; Ohjaaja; Leikkipuisto, Affordances; Play; Parks and Open Spaces

Introduction

National Play Policies in the United Kingdom (UK), for example in Wales (Welsh Government (WG), 2002) and Scotland (Scottish Government, (SG) 2013), have attempted to address children's right to play and the need for space for children to play. There is a

generally accepted understanding of the short and long term positive effects of play in outdoor environments for children in both the personal and social domain (Lester and Russell, 2008). These include cognitive thinking and academic achievement (Johnson et al, 2013); social skills and teamwork (Fjortoft, 2001); dimensions associated with attachment and a sense of belong to community (Clements, 2004; Alparone & Pacilli, 2012) and physical health (Burdette & Whitaker, 2005). The benefits of play to health are particularly important given the links between childhood and adult obesity (Reilly & Dorosty 1999; Danielzik et al, 2002; Whitaker et al, 1997).

The significance of the role of play for children is of constant interest to policy makers and stakeholders from education, social care and health. With regards to children's leisure time, as defined in UK policies, play is important in all areas of children's development and the need for sufficient space to play is required. However in recent times within the UK, funding allocated to outdoor space for play in the child's community has often been reliant on third sector funding streams such as the BIG Lottery Fund (2006). Although Wales now legislates for Local Authorities to undertake a Play Sufficiency Assessment every three years under the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, this does not guarantee money to support children's outdoor play space.

Despite these efforts in public agenda and policy, most European and western countries show a significant decline in the number of children having independent mobility and the ability to access playgrounds and outdoor environments for play (Gleave, 2009; Alparone & Pacilli, 2012). Alparone and Pacilli's (2012) study found only 14-31% of children in Italy aged 8-11 went to school on their own and equally few were allowed to play outdoors without constant adult supervision. Likewise, an Independent Communications and Marketing (ICM) survey

commissioned for National Playday by Play England (ICM, 2007), found 71% of adults had played outside in the streets close to their homes every day when they were children, compared to just 21% today. This pattern of decreasing numbers of children playing outside is becoming a common feature across Western Europe. However, there is one notable exception to the decline in childhood independent mobility and play and that is in Finland (Kyttä, 2003). Uniquely for western countries, the play parks or leikkipuisto of Finland are not empty; rather they are thriving, vibrant and important places irrespective of the varied and often inclement weather. The leikkipuisto of Helsinki, Finland, not only provide a place for young families to play but are an integrated and integral part of the education system, providing a place for play for all children up to 16. Where the UK has experienced several decades of changing political priority and agenda which has resulted in policy decisions that have destabilised the role and provision of play, Finland has pursued a different course.

This paper seeks to consider the use of public spaces in the UK and Finland through acknowledgement of their differing historical establishment and cultural contexts. In order to explore the features of the open spaces for play, the theoretical framework of alternative hypothetical environments devised by Marketta Kyttä (2004) is used. This paper begins with a brief overview of Kyttä's (2004) framework. This is followed by considerations on the decline of children's use of parks and open spaces in the UK as a result of policy changes in the 1980's and 1990's, and the rise in popularity of the Play Ranger provision since 2008 in supporting children's play in these spaces. An overview and discussion of the Leikkipustio in Finland and the role of the Ohjaaja; explores the narrative of outdoor play within a Finnish context; enabling a comparison of the two countries.

Theory of the Use of Play Spaces

Kyttä's hypothetical framework developed on the ideas of Gibson (1979) and Reed (1996) and the theories around child-friendly environments (Haikkola et al, 2007). Gibson (1979) coined the notion of affordances and defined them as 'what [an environment] offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill' (p127). His analysis was dynamic and transactional between person and environment; it was concerned with action and exploration. Over the past decades, research into affordances, functional analysis and their application has informed planning of child focused settings such as schools and playgrounds including both natural environments such as shrubs and trees (Fjørtoft, 2001), designed features as in asphalt (Fjørtoft, 2001; Kristofferson & Sageie, 2009) and children's perception of choice in their play (King & Howard, 2014).

Reed (1996) observed children are not placed in natural environments with myriad opportunities and affordances rather they are 'put in a modified environment in which specific possibilities are emphasized and others are downplayed' (p124), where the decisions for play are prioritized and often made by adults. In attempting to classify the affordances of environments, Reed (1996) defined two dimensions; the Field of Free Action (FFA) unconstrained and unregulated access of affordances and the Field of Promoted Action (FPA) where certain affordances are made available and others denied. To extend the enquiry further, Kyttä (2003) differentiated the Field of Constrained Action (FCA) to clarify the social and cultural factors affecting children's actualisation of affordances. It is this third dimension along with her categorisation of hypothetical environments that lends itself to discussion around the cultural comparison of the role of play and playground in the UK and Finland.

Kyttä differentiated between different levels of affordance: potential, perceived, utilized and shaped in order to analyse four hypothetical environments: Bullerby, Glasshouse, Wasteland and Cell (2004).

- 1) Bullerby : called after the fictional, village idyll and home to Pippy Longstocking in the stories of Astrid Lindgren. Bullerby can be rural or urban but must provide an inclusive and involved dimension to the setting and the everyday activities therein. Affordances are perceived, utilized and even shaped by children.
- 2) Cell : where the child is held inside with no access to the environment; all opportunities for potential affordances are restricted.
- 3) Wasteland : has extensive perceived FFA and FPA but does not result in actualisation of affordances due to an environment empty of things to discover.
- 4) Glasshouse : here a large number of affordances are only passively perceived because of the limits on fields of promoted (or indeed free) action make actualisation difficult.
(Kyttä, 2004 and see also Lester and Russell, 2010)

There are two key concepts for the discussion of child friendly environments, the first being the actualisation of affordances and the second being the extent of independent mobility.

Simply, it is these two together that result in a successful child-friendly environment.

Bullerby represents a self-fulfilling positive environment where independent mobility results in actualisation of affordances, increasing the child's independent mobility. Parents and wider society are supportive of this cycle and have no unreasonable fears for safety and security, thus the cycle is further reinforced.

The opposite cycle is that of the Cell environment; here a lack of independent mobility reinforces an inability to actualize affordances. There is a resultant perpetuation of cultural fear and restraint. The Wasteland and Glasshouse environments offer differing priorities; the former offers extensive independent mobility but little in the way of potential affordances. The latter offers the reverse; plentiful affordances but heavily restricted independent mobility. This simplified discussion allows for the recognition of cultural features and contexts to be influential.

Kyttä's hypothetical environments and the theory underpinning them are supported by several studies that have set out to identify key features that enhance play spaces (e.g. Fjørtoft, 2001). There is also considerable discussion regarding the interaction of the three fields of action; free, promoted and constrained. For example, Lester and Russell (2008) interpret Kyttä (2004) in their review of play, stating:

In their play, children often move from one field of action to another, and they are also likely to try and enlarge the field of free action (p145)

Lester and Maudsley (2006) state children are having their time and access to outdoor space being controlled and regulated. This control and regulation has been referred to as the 'Institutionalised Triangle' (Rasmussen, 2004, King & Howard, 2014). The result of this, as Lester and Maudsley (2006) assert, is the 'ever-increasing 'field of constrained action' impacting on a child's 'field of free action', giving rise to glasshouse and cell-like local environments' (p58)

Glasshouse and cell type environments relate to Barker and Smith's (2000) term of bounded space, where policies and procedures can reduce the potential of actualized affordances in the parks and open spaces. Kernan's (2010) study on indoor and outdoor affordances in early years' provision in Dublin found that restriction to the outdoors promoted a glasshouse, wasteland or cell-like environment where there were restricted fields of promoted free action, and in provision that did have access to outdoors, promotion of free action was still very limited.

There are a range of cultural or social factors that will contribute to the fields of constrained action and therefore limit or curtail the use of the space by children and young people. These factors vary in likelihood and severity, but impact on the child's and parent's experience of the environment. They might include whether a park is used for dog walking, whether the park has a history (or the potential) of being a site of bullying, gangs or drugs; or even a social/parental fear of paedophiles. More benign aspects of constrained action might be due to poor maintenance such as overhanging branches preventing access to equipment or pathways; or being situated near busy main roads with no safe crossing.

The ways in which the parks and open spaces in the UK are used by children and communities has changed over the last 50 years. As with parks across Western Europe and America, the UK's parks are becoming less and less frequented. We argue that the loss of the park keeper, along with a reduction in funds to maintain public open spaces during the consolidation of local authority grounds maintenance in the 1980's has contributed to the emptying of the parks by causing a shift towards Glasshouse or Cell environments. We suggest that the park keeper alleviated the Field of Constrained Action, through ensuring safety within and access to the environment. The park keeper, although not directly involved

in supporting children's play, maintained the grounds, ensured dog control, policed for potential dangers and perhaps most literal, opened up the gates each morning. The park keeper's presence facilitated the Fields of both Promoted and Free Action.

A Brief History of UK Parks and Open Spaces

Conway (1996) stated that the creation of public parks in the United Kingdom are "an important part of the urban environment, socially, physically, psychologically and historically" (p83). Sherer (2006) makes the same point in the USA, where in their defence of more parks and open spaces stated "City parks and open space improve our physical and psychological health, strengthen our communities, and make our cities and neighbourhoods more attractive places to live and work" (p6). This statement can probably be made for all parks and open spaces globally.

In the UK, the development of parks and open spaces can be traced back to the Industrial Revolution and the rise in municipal parks and open spaces during the 19th century saw them become a key element in the overall feature of urban areas (Gordon & Shirley, 2002). This increased during the late 19th and early 20th century where the design of the park consisted of an "open space in the centre of the park for cricket and football and to position the other activities around the periphery" (p80). Around this time, with the reform in both education and child labour, social reformers were worried how children and young people were spending their free time (Holme & Massie, 1970). Fears of delinquency and increased awareness of fitness saw the parks and open spaces being supervised by adults for their physical and moral welfare (Cranwell, 2008). Adults began to supervise the parks and open spaces; from paid school caretakers to drill instructors (Cranwell, 2003) which continued into

the 1930's and 40's. This adult presence was the precursor to the qualified and trained play leaders, adults who organised play activities in the parks and open spaces.

During the 1950's, 60's and 70's it was not uncommon for a park or open space to have a park keeper, a gardener or both, but due a variety of factors, e.g. Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) within the Local Government Acts of 1988 and 1992 and Best Value (Bovis, 1999) we have seen the park keeper disappeared from the park and open space landscape (English Heritage (EH), 2005). It is far more common today in 2016 to walk through a park or open space and not see anybody tending, managing or 'holding' the space. Increasing industrialisation and rapid urbanisation of the 40's, 50's and 60's saw development and increase in the number of public parks to support the expanding population. However, by the 1990s the emphasis on space for play had shifted dramatically, seemingly in favour of profit and adult leisure activities, reflected in the findings from Voce (2006) 'For every acre of land occupied by playgrounds in England there are more than 80 acres taken up by golf courses'.

Furthermore, many of the parks that remained had "become run down, neglected and vandalised" (Conway, 1996, p83). Conway goes on to assert the impact of the neglect on the wider community "the message that [the parks] proclaim, is that no one cares, that there is no community and little order" Conway (1996) stated:

"The major problems confronting historic public parks in the 1990s are lack of funding for maintenance and the immediate repair of factors of vandalism, and the lack of park-keeper to give people a feeling of security" (1996, p83)

In addition to the waning park keeper, funding and maintenance, other factors have contributed to the decline in use of many of the parks and open spaces in the UK. Bullying, drugs, dog mess, litter and non-stimulating play equipment have all resulted in fewer children using the play spaces provided (Gleave, 2009). However, children in the UK have been encouraged back to these play spaces through the presence of mobile play work teams supporting children's play. The rise of the Play Ranger in the UK offers a new approach to children and young people using their parks and open spaces.

The Rise of Play Rangers

The concept of modern day Play Ranging in the UK can be traced back to Michael Follett (Follett, 2005) where it was observed that parks and open spaces were often unoccupied, a similar situation that was observed in Los Angeles (Loukaitou-Sideras & Sideras; 2010). Play Ranging is a form of Playwork where the aim of Playwork is "to create environments that enable children to experience the sort of play opportunities and experiences that have been lost from daily life" (Brown, 2009, p1). Playworkers work with children to support and facilitate play spaces for children often between 5-15 years of age, although it is not uncommon for Playworkers to work with children under the age of 5 years. Their professional practice is underpinned by the eight playwork principles (Play Principles Scrutiny Group, 2005), where the second principle states:

Play is a process that is freely chosen, personally directed and intrinsically motivated. That is, children and young people determine and control the content and intent of their play, by following their own instincts, ideas and interests, in their own way for their own reasons (PPSG, 2005)

The role of the playworker is to support and facilitate, but not direct children's play to any adult-led agenda. Play Rangers are 'detached' playworkers, working in open spaces and parks within the community where as stated in the fifth playwork principle:

The role of the playworker is to support all children and young people in the creation of a space in which they can play (PPSG, 2005, p1)

For Play Ranging in the UK, the space where children can play is often their local open space or park. This community based play relies on children and young people getting to their nearest park or open space under their own steam. There is also, unlike with formal childcare, no expectation for parents to 'sign in and out' their children and consequently no responsibility for the Play Rangers to keep the children or young people in the park. This is what is known in the UK as an 'open access' policy. This defines the concept of 'ranging'; effectively, the child's independent mobility. As children get older the distance they range is different (Wheway & Maynard, 1997). Likewise, the proximity of the space to home also plays a part. However, often highly built up or urbanised areas might offer a very conveniently located space (ensuring high independent mobility) but the space offers very limited affordances, typifying Wasteland environments.

Although guidance for Play Ranging exists (e.g. Rees-Jones, 2007), the community-based nature of Play Ranging makes it difficult to have a one-size fits all model. Play Ranging across the UK, although underpinned by the eight Playwork Principles, will vary in relation to local needs, regional and national policies and funding available. A typical Play Ranger session can involve between two and five Play Rangers in a park and open space with as little

as one child to over sixty children attending. This is the nature of open access play as the number of children can vary on a daily basis. What is evident is that when a Play Ranging team turns up to an empty park and open space, it is not long before children start to use these spaces again. Although the role of the park keeper and the Play Ranger is very different (the former maintained the space for play, the latter supports the process of play), what was evident is that the presence of an adult in the parks and open spaces encouraged children to use their community spaces.

In West Wales, an open access play project was set up to encourage children and young people to use their local parks and open spaces. The Purple Routes Play Project was unusual; as the primary agenda was to support children's play in their communities, not to meet any specific health or educational outcomes reflecting the eight playwork principles (PPSG, 2005). The Purple Routes Play Project was funded through the BIG Lottery Healthy Families programme within the Child's Play remit (BIG Lottery, 2006). The project involved two teams of four playworkers, a senior playworker who had to have, or work towards the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level 3 in Playwork and three playworkers who either had, or were working towards the NVQ Level 2 in Playwork. Each team would run a two hour play session in a variety of urban and rural parks and open spaces each night after school all year round. As well as the human resource, other resources ranged from arts and craft, sports equipment, board games, den making equipment, robes, large plastic barrels and both large and small scrap. The evaluation of the project found the role and presence of the Play Ranger was key:

“The role of playworkers [Play Rangers] in facilitating high-quality play and in building positive relationships with children and parents has been a key attribute of this programme, and has in no small part contributed to its success” (Wavehill, 2013)

The Play Ranger, in addition to facilitating play became ‘an adult reference point’ for children, once the informal role and responsibility of the park keeper. This was evident by the number of children and young people attendance falling significantly when the Play Rangers left the park. This is reflected in the comment below:

“What happens on the day is determined by the children. They turn up decide the kind of things they want to do and then Purple Routes set up for them. And this was despite the fact that they wouldn’t know how many children would turn up, or what age they’d be”. (Wavehill, 2013, p48)

The evaluation of the Purple Routes Project (Wavehill, 2013) reflected Mulac’s (1941) and Abernathy’s (1970) key aspects of Play Leadership: community engagement; child-led and a positive portrayal of the Play Ranger focusing on children’s play needs. Lester and Russell (2008) make the point that the adult in the child or young person’s play space by their presence can reduce the fields of constrained action and provide more fields of promoted action. This in turn may lead to more fields of free action. It is clear that the presence of the Purple Routes Play Rangers were actively attempting to facilitate the shift of Wasteland, Glasshouse or Cell environments into Bullerby environments.

Where children were finding new ways to play using the equipment provided by the Play Rangers and utilising the existing fixed play equipment, it can be argued that more Bullerby

type environments were created, where the Play Ranger supported children's self-directed play. As stated by McCormak's (2010) review of parks and open spaces, what is important is the interplay between the social and physical environment and the presence of the Purple Routes team were an important link within this interplay. In addition, when the Play Rangers left the park and open space, so did the children. The UK is not unique in supporting children's play. The adult presence in the parks and open spaces has been going on for over a century in Finland – the Leikkipuisto.

Leikkipuisto in Finland

The Leikkipuisto (play parks) were established in 1914 by two teachers who realised that during the summer, many children were unsupervised and unfed. They decided to provide food and care for around 300 children in the Kalio area of Helsinki in a local playground. Over the next decade, the idea spread and more philanthropists and teachers offered out of school, summer care. In 1942, leikkipuisto became the responsibility of the state. Over the next 10 years, land, resources and funding for staff, equipment, cabins and toys followed; as well as an emphasis on year round provision rather than just during the summer. One hundred years later, Helsinki has nearly 70 leikkipuisto. There are indoor facilities and extensive outdoor play areas of at least a hectare but often significantly more (City of Helsinki SSD; 2010). Each leikkipuisto has between three and five qualified, trained and committed professionals: Ohjaaja (meaning instructor, counsellor or guide). Furthermore, these spaces are designated solely for play; dogs are not permitted here. And, just as one hundred years before, every noon across Helsinki, during the long, warm summer, hundreds of children up to the age of 16 receive a free, hot lunch. Over 353,000 children shared lunch in the summer of 2014, at a cost of just 35p per child (City of Helsinki, DEEC 2014).

The leikkipuisto are considered to be part of the education system in Finland; they are positioned within the Department of Early Education and Childcare. Moreover, they are embedded into the communities within which they serve. Up to the age of seven (the statutory school starting age) the child and his family will come to the leikkipuisto. There are regular toddler groups that can be accessed (music sessions, arts and crafts etc) but for the most part, the child plays outside supervised by the Ohjaaja as well as the parent.

Approximately 550 children attend a morning session across the 68 leikkipuisto (Rönkkö; 2015 personal communication). From noon, the leikkipuisto is specifically designated a setting for school children. From the age of seven years, the school day is just three hours, so more than half the children in the statutory school system spend the afternoon sessions at a leikkipuisto, cared for by the Ohjaaja (more than 6,000 children per day across Helsinki) (Rönkkö 2015 personal communication). The leikkipuisto as school provision continues for the first three years of school (ages seven to ten) (City of Helsinki SSD; 2010). Thereafter, the leikkipuisto remains central to the family, school and community throughout childhood and into early adulthood, with children continuing to attend the leikkipuisto regularly but particularly during the ten-week summer break, until the age of 16.

Where in the UK, the definition of the play worker and Ranger has evolved over time in terms of role and responsibilities, the Ohjaaja's role is clear and specific and remains mostly unchanged. All Ohjaaja begin on a voluntary basis but all have a higher level qualification in an aspect of social care or health. The lead Ohjaaja of a leikkipuisto is usually an experienced social worker, health practitioner or a similar professional. Furthermore, the pay for Ohjaaja is commensurate with the status and grade of this level of professionally qualified specialist. The Ohjaaja is responsible for 'holding' the play space;

To supervise, which means providing safe conditions in the park area as well as taking care of all the children according to the situation at any given time

(City of Helsinki SSD; 2010).

The Ohjaaja and the leikkipuisto exist within an educational context that prioritises children and families. The system recognises the value and significance of outdoor play in the ‘here and now’ yet also values the long term benefits, as demonstrated in Finland’s consistent success in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings

(Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2006; 2009; 2012).

The leikkipuisto are designed to be Bullerby environments. Through a balance of well-designed play equipment and natural resources; and the guidance and supervision provided by the Ohjaaja, the fields of free and promoted action are extensive. Children are invited to actualise the myriad affordances; to perceive, utilize and shape in both fields of promoted and free action. The Ohjaaja’s primary objective is to attend to the needs of the child but the approach is emphatically ‘here and now’. The Ohjaaja will ‘hold back’ or ‘bite their tongue’ (Tuukanen; 2013 personal communication) in order to enable the child to develop his or her own independence. The organisation of the leikkipuisto day is such that it invites and reinforces the development of independent mobility and personal determination. The parents know and trust the provision, the schools have integrated with the play grounds and the children are expected to access the parks independently. The following comment is made by a senior leikkipuisto supervisor (responsible for eight leikkipuisto in Eastern Helsinki) – it perfectly expresses the Ohjaaja’s approach to play

The purpose [of the leikkipuisto] is to promote interaction within the community, to support the childhood, the adulthood, the responsibility and the friendship

(Rönkkö, 2015 personal communication)

The field of constrained action is limited both by the facilitation offered by the Ohjaaja but also by the unusual cultural context of Finnish society. There are few rules in Finnish society, but those there are, are adhered to unwaveringly. The state is responsible for key aspects of society and this very clearly defined structure facilitates a sense of freedom. In addition, in part due to the climate but also due to the historical, cultural and geographical makeup of this country, characteristics of independence and resilience are held in high esteem. This has manifest in socially expected behaviour such as children walking to school alone from the age of seven; children being able to get fully dressed (and undressed) into clothing suitable for a -40°C temperature from five; and an expectation to be able to survive in nature through foraging, fishing, outdoor pursuits and similar cultural past-times in one of the 180,000 lakes.

An analysis of environments in Belarus by Kyttä (2003) found that with an increase in urbanisation came an increase in Glasshouse model settings as has been experienced in the UK. However, simply blaming urbanisation is not credible. Bullerby environments can be found in both rural and urban settings. Broberg et al (2003) found successfully Bullerby environments in very urban settings in Turku, Finland. Haikkola et al (2007) explored the Finnish urban context and found it to be very child-friendly having “availability and easy access for the children to the positive elements of the environment” and providing “free spaces for the children’s activities, different recreational opportunities and a feeling of social safety” (p340). Again the cultural context is fundamental here with Finnish building and

planning traditions inviting a more spread out arrangement, more integrated within the natural resources. Thus Finnish children are able to actualise natural affordances in a more independent way (Nordstrom, 2010).

Discussion: Play Ranging in the UK and the Ohjaaja in the Leikkipuisto

Using Kytta's framework it is possible to discuss the parks and open spaces and specifically the role of Play Ranging in the UK and the Leikkipuisto in Finland. It could be argued that up to the privatisation in the 1980's, the British park keeper was the continuous adult presence in the park. With the demise of the park keeper, along with the change in policy and reduced funding to maintain public open space, the field of constrained action is left unchecked. The rules around access and safety become arbitrary and abstract i.e. the fear around allowing independent mobility prevents the children actualising the affordances that may or may not have been enhanced with funding (fields of promoted action). UK parks become Glasshouses at best and Cells at worst. The shifting sands regarding the nature and extent of children's play space in the UK is in stark contrast to the consistency and integral positioning of play parks in Helsinki Finland.

There are several key issues experienced in the UK as different to Finland. Firstly, the encouragement of children using the parks and open spaces in Finland has state funding to employ the Ohjaaja in the leikkipuisto. In the UK, unless the Local Authorities employ a park keeper, the adult presence of the Play Ranger is mainly through third sector funding, although some UK local authorities do employ Play Rangers. State funding provides more security and recognition of the role of the Ohjaaja, something that Play Rangers, and indeed Playworkers in general lack in the UK (King, 2015).

Secondly, the creation of Bullerby environments requires a child's independent mobility. Unless children can access the potential affordances on offer, the Bullerby model cannot be attained. There are significant issues of the location of play spaces; their proximity to the child's home. In Finland, the leikkipuisto is centrally positioned within a neighbourhood, so a child may indeed have a choice of several located in walking distance from his home (although only one would be linked to his school). However, planning and zoning restrictions in the UK have made this degree of access of play spaces by many children impossible.

The issue of independent mobility is also at the route of the third major issue; the social fear arising from extensive urbanisation in the UK, and associated more densely populated conditions. There has been an increase in fear experienced by parents who then, in turn restrict independent mobility of their children (Hillman et al 1973, 1991). Psychosocial factors around the parents' perception of their own safety and attachment to the community dictate the extent to which a child has freedom of movement. Having a strong sense of community and neighbourhood relations significantly mediates for the influence of urbanisation on outdoor autonomy (Alparone & Pacilli 2012). The idea of prioritising the community and the freedom of 'open access' (a concept promoted by play rangers in the UK) is a fundamental feature of the Leikkipuisto, as the mission statement portrays:

Leikkipuito are open activity arenas for the local families. They reflect and respond to the needs of the community in their area

(Social Welfare Board, 2004 Section 480)

It is important to note that parents in Finland are aware of and do attend to potential risks affecting their children for example, having rational fears of dangerous adults. But generally

Helsinki city is understood to be a safe city; drunks in a shopping centre are considered to be “unpleasant not dangerous” (Haikkola et al, 2007). Perhaps again, the cultural context in Finland regarding national social policies provided alleviate the field of constrained action. For the given example, Finland runs a state alcohol monopoly, furthermore, there is a cultural tolerance for alcohol and substance misuse and treatment.

Play rangers and play workers across the UK are attempting to facilitate children back into the parks by actively fostering engagement with communities. For the leikkiopuisto providing not only a space for outdoor play with all the associated personal and social benefits (Lester & Russell 2008) but also a place for laying down a lifetime attachment to the community and schools in which they live. DCSF (2008) found over 70% parents in Finland saw leikkiopuisto as somewhere to get support and help with issues concerning children indicating the significance of leikkiopuisto’s embedding in the community, being a mutually beneficial relationship. Just as Clements (2004) and Alparone & Pacilli (2012) found play parks fostering a stronger sense of belonging to community, Prezza and Pacilli (2007) found that children with restricted early childhoods went on to become fearful in adolescence and had weaker ties to community.

A fourth issue is the way in which children actualise the affordances. In Finland, given the often severe climatic conditions and the topographical and geographical features to the country, the emphasis is on resilience and playing at survival. All leikkiopuisto have pools to wade/swim in, slopes and rinks for snow/ice play and wooded areas for exploring nature. Observation of children in Australia (Little and Eager, 2010) observed play preferences for risk-taking behaviour yet the dominant play behaviour in parks and playgrounds had little risk, suggesting that the play spaces held few opportunities to practice mastery of skills,

learning new or building on capabilities. Finland has ensured that these are designed into the leikkipuisto. The play rangers of the UK are also adept at facilitating access to actualisation of affordances but can be hindered by a culture of risk aversion in the UK.

The investment of government, culture and society into the leikkipuisto and the Ohjaaja in Finland have ensured that the children have a place to play. One where the fields of free and promoted action are expansive, the affordances are rich and the constraints are limited. The priorities being to ensure independent mobility of the children, in play spaces embedded in their communities that offer rich, authentic, culturally relevant affordances. The Play Rangers in the UK are attempting to emulate these factors, offering a structure to facilitate mobility, endeavouring to engage with communities and commitment to provide a diverse range of affordances that can be shaped by the children into their own version of Bullerby.

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