



The Public Playground Paradox: "Child's Joy" or Heterotopia of Fear?

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Literature depicts children of the Global North withdrawing from public space to “acceptable islands”. Driven by fears both of and for children, the public playground – one such island – provides clear-cut distinctions between childhood and adulthood. Extending this argument, this paper takes the original approach of theoretically framing the playground as a heterotopia of deviance, examining – for the first time – three Greek public playground sites in relation to adjacent public space. Drawing on an ethnographic study in Athens, findings show fear to underpin surveillance, control and playground boundary porosity. Normative classification as “children’s space” discourages adult engagement. However, in a novel and significant finding, a paradoxical phenomenon sees the playground’s presence simultaneously legitimizing playful behaviour in adjacent public space for children *and* adults. Extended playground play creates alternate orderings and negotiates norms and hierarchies, suggesting significant wider potential to reconceptualise playground-urban design for an intergenerational public realm.

Keywords: playground paradox; heterotopia; fear; Athens; ethnography; public realm

Children’s Joy

In Greece, the term used to describe a public play-space is “παιδική χαρά”, meaning children’s joy. The idea for this paper came when a friend added her comment to a Facebook post depicting a Greek playground rules sign: ‘children’s misery’. Many scholars have commented on the “failure” of the playground space to engage children with the public realm. As long ago as 1961, Jacobs argued ‘how nonsensical is the fantasy that playgrounds and parks are automatically O.K. places for children, and streets are automatically not O.K. places for children’ (80). Later, Heseltine and Holborn (1987, 12) argued that the very presence of the playground could be seen as ‘a measure of failure’ to engage children in public, everyday life while more recent literature has addressed the suspicions initiated by other people in the playground space (Weck, 2017; Wilson, 2013). Turning these arguments on their heads, we suggest that the fact that playgrounds do not engage adults with children’s culture could be seen as a further measure of their failure. Perceptions of children as angels in need of protection

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3 (Valentine, 1996a), segregate the playground space and discourage adults from
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5 engaging with it.

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7 Contemporary literature suggests that it is adult perceptions about childhood that
8 structure conceptions of public life and the “ideal” places for children (Edmiston, 2010;
9 Horschelmann & Blerk, 2012; Gol-Guven, 2016; Gulgonen and Corona, 2015; Kylin &
10 Bodelius, 2015; Loukaitou-Sideris, 2003; van Vliet and Karsten, 2015). Well-rehearsed
11 fears about children’s safety (Christensen, 2003; Gill, 2007; Jones, 2000; Thomson and
12 Philo, 2004), and an over-specified public space (Kylin & Bodelius, 2015; Wheway,
13 2015; Valentine, 1996b) affect children’s presence in the street. The literature paints a
14 picture of the children of the Global North withdrawing from public space to
15 ‘acceptable islands’ (Matthews et al. 2000, 63), ‘special’ (Rasmussen, 2004, 157)
16 ‘proper’ places (Olwig and Gulløv, 2003, 101) to occupy what might be understood as
17 an ‘archipelago of normalized enclosures’ (Stavrvides, 2015, 9). At the same time, adult
18 fears render adult presence essential to securing their children’s safety (Mackett et al.
19 2007), with some scholars specifically attributing the ‘strict regulation and control of
20 traditional public spaces’ (Loukaitou-Sideris, 2003, 131; Beets and Foley, 2008; Carver
21 et al. 2008; Valentine and McKendrick, 1997) to parental anxieties. Greece has not
22 escaped this phenomenon (Katsabounidou, 2015). As early as 1987, Tzouvadakis’ study
23 (1987) of the home-school journey in Athens, found that although 63 percent replied
24 that their children were aware of the city’s dangers, 72 percent perceived their child as
25 incapable of travelling around on her/his own.

26
27 At the same time, fears concerning children’s unruly behaviour – perceived as a
28 threat to adult hegemony (Holloway and Valentine, 2000b, 14) – often lead to conflicts
29 and informal ‘negotiations’ of space. In this context, literature focuses on the scale of
30 the everyday as a place for children’s transgression (Alfrink, 2014; de Lange, 2015;
31 Aitken, 2001; Castonguay and Jutras, 2010; Galani, 2011; Jones, 2000; Olwig and
32 Gulløv, 2003). Against a backdrop of adult-defined public space, children appear as
33 destabilising subjects, unbalancing the existing order. Children often defy adult
34 limitations by creating ‘their own spatialization rather than remain[ing] utterly confined
35 within the limits of adults’ geographies’ (Jones, 2000, 37), challenging and reproducing
36 existing social relations, questioning the adult order (Alfrink, 2014).

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38 The playground space was initially created as a space for children’s protection and
39 segregation from the rest of society and the city (See: Gagen, 2000a, 2000b), while later
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3 approaches perceived it as the starting point for engaging children in civic life; a place
4 of social interaction (Allin et al. 2014; Bennet et al., 2012; Bunnell et al., 2012, Daniels
5 and Hohanson, 2009; Doll and Brehm, 2010; Frost, 2012; Galani, 2011; Johnson, 2013a;
6 Kinchin and O'Connor, 2012) and identity formation (Crust et al. 2014; Gross and
7 Rutland; 2014; Murnaghan, 2013; Richards, 2012). The body of research on the
8 playground, however, has tended to approach it as a play-accommodating, self-
9 contained structure (Luken et al. 2011; Nasar and Holloman, 2013; Refshauge et al.
10 2013) without exploring its publicness and connections to adjacent spaces. Other
11 research explores children's relation to public space but does not address play and the
12 playground as facilitators of this relation (Van Der Burgt, 2013; De Martini Ugolotti
13 and Moyer, 2016; Elsley, 2004; Nayak, 2003; O'Brien, 2003; Olwig and Gulløv, 2003;
14 Skelton, 2000; Valentine, 2004, 2001). In contrast with these approaches, this study
15 addresses all three concepts of 1) play, 2) public space and 3) playground and explores
16 their inter-connections.
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29 **Heterotopia and the Fear of the Other**

30 The critical framework of Heterotopia, defining spaces of 'alternate ordering'
31 (Hetherington, 1997, 39), is used in this study in order to frame both the deviance and
32 the potential of the playground. Foucault (1998) suggests that in contemporary society
33 heterotopias enclose some form of deviance: that is, subjects or behaviours inconsistent
34 with the prevailing social norm; 'those in which individuals are put whose behaviour is
35 deviant with respect to the mean or the required norm' (180). The name he chooses,
36 "heterotopia", meaning "other-spaces", highlights the otherness of these spaces.
37 According to Genocchio (1995, 38), Foucault establishes a clear-cut operational
38 difference when he draws a distinction between these disordered spaces and the
39 established social order. Fear creates heterotopias in order to both protect and to be
40 protected from (See for example studies of gated communities: Bartling, 2008; Hook
41 and Vrdoljak 2002; Low, 2008). Rest homes, mental health institutions and prisons
42 (Foucault, 2012) are just some of the spaces framed as heterotopias of deviance, to
43 which 'individuals and social groups who do not fit into the modern social order'
44 (Cenzatti, 2008, 76) are assigned, in order to protect both them and the body of society
45 from them.
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3 We here employ the concept of Heterotopia as an analytical tool 'rather than a
4 clear-cut spatial delineation' (Gallan, 2013, 560) or a means of spatial classification. We
5 frame playground as a Heterotopia of Deviance (Foucault, 1998): a space with strict
6 rules, driven by society's anxieties occurring from the perceptions of what it is to be a
7 child, and how one should play (See: Aitken, 2001; Gagen, 2000a, 2000b; Gulgonen
8 and Corona, 2015; Holloway and Valentine, 2000a; Loukaitou-Sideris, 2003; Jarvis et
9 al, 2014; Rasmussen, 2004; Singh and Gupta, 2012; Solomon, 2005). In societies
10 permeated by a 'culture of fear' (Furedi, 2002, viii), playgrounds function as places
11 where "vulnerable" children can be segregated for their "protection".
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19 At the same time, the concept of heterotopia is used to explore the
20 playground's potential, expressed and realized through the act of playing.
21 Heterotopia offers a way to think about transgression, moving away from
22 dualisms:
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25 Transgression, then, is not related to the limit as black to white, the prohibited to the
26 lawful, the outside to the inside, or as the open area of a building to its enclosed spaces.
27 Rather their relationship takes the form of lighting in the night which [...] lights up the
28 night from the inside, from top to bottom, and yet owes to the dark the stark clarity of
29 its manifestation (Foucault, 1998b, 74).
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34 While Foucault was more interested in institutionalized heterotopias, intended
35 (in their majority) to preserve the existing status quo¹, our approach reflects McLeod's
36 (1996) stance: we explore how heterotopias form everyday life; or as we would like to
37 call them, "everyday heterotopias". These are interwoven in the urban fabric, forming
38 an integral part of people's everyday experience. Everyday heterotopias include the
39 element of the familiar and the repeated rather than the exception and the festival and as
40 such, are capable of empowering their subjects. Genocchio (1995) criticises the over-
41 use of the term and argues that by naming a heterotopic space as such, one deprives it of
42 its heterotopic characteristics. While recognising this position, we contend that this can
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54 1 The school does not exclude individuals, even in confining them: it fastens them to an
55 apparatus of knowledge transmission [...] an apparatus of normalization of people (Foucault,
56 2000, p.79).
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3 also transfer heterotopia from the scale of the everyday into an abstract theoretical
4 sphere with little practical spin-off.
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6 For the purposes of this study we identify two core characteristics of heterotopia,
7 of relevance to the playground space. First, as discussed above, deviant: the playground
8 space is a heterotopia of deviance (Foucault, 1998). Playgrounds can be understood as
9 places created to house childhood – a state of human life that is usually thought of as
10 one that deviates from the “normality” of adult life. Playgrounds are spaces of
11 protection for the vulnerable, but at the same time spaces where the alternate orderings
12 of play manifest. Playgrounds become one of the “acceptable islands” (Matthews et al.
13 2000, 63), ‘special’ (Rasmussen, 2004, 157) ‘proper’ places’ (Olwig and Gulløv, 2003,
14 101) that children are allowed to use, creating a network of temporary, dispersed
15 “housings”, potentially engaging children with the public realm, yet at the same time
16 segregating them from it. The totality that seems to emerge from Foucault’s attempt to
17 present heterotopias as completely different and distinct from their surroundings has
18 been often criticised (Genocchio, 1995; Saldanha, 2008). In this study we first approach
19 the playground space as a heterotopia of deviance in order to focus on this characteristic
20 of difference. However, we then move beyond, in order to explore the limits of this
21 difference.
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34 Second, isolated yet penetrable: the playground has a ‘system of opening and
35 closing that both isolates it and makes it penetrable’ (Foucault, 2012, 267), transforming
36 it into a kind of “enclave” – referring not only to the physical characteristics of space,
37 but also to the social interactions taking place there – constructed by the members of the
38 heterotopia, consciously or unconsciously. Existing literature approaches the
39 playground as a heterotopia without exploring its opening mechanisms or its reciprocal
40 relation to its surroundings (Campo, 2013; Kern, 2008; Richards, 2012; Vermeulen,
41 2011; Wesselman, 2013). Rather it examines playgrounds as spaces in themselves,
42 without connecting them to their general context. Drawing on the outlined
43 characteristics, this paper examines the interrelationship between fear and the practices
44 associated with the playground space. The term “fear” has been chosen in order to
45 cover the expressions of paranoia and fear (Gill, 2007) emerging from a ‘culture of fear’
46 (Furedi, 2002, viii) which continues to gain ground: ‘a generalised and insidious anxiety
47 about safety that has found expression in fears for children’ (Gill, 2007, 14) as
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3 expressed in the playground space. How does fear manifest itself in the playground?
4 and What are the associated implications for children's presence in public space?
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9 **Methodology and Methods**

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11 There is a long tradition of using ethnographic methods to research the playground
12 space (Blackford, 2004; Corsaro, 2003; Ferre et al. 2006; Mayeza, 2017; Opie, 1994;
13 Thorne, 1999; Willett et al. 2013), with a few studies specifically using ethnography to
14 approach play and playgrounds as heterotopias (Gallan, 2013; Low, 2008; Richards,
15 2012; Vermeulen, 2011). Ethnography was here chosen as a means to focus on the
16 practices of heterotopia, the ways the playground space is experienced as "other" and
17 its connection with what is considered "normal" public space. The findings in this paper
18 are drawn from a study that took place over five months in 2016 and 2017 in three
19 playground sites in Athens, Greece. Approximately 100 hours of observations were
20 conducted in the playgrounds and their adjacent spaces, during morning, afternoon and
21 evening, both weekdays and weekends, by [researcher's name]. The data collection
22 methods consisted of ethnographic observations, field notes, informal discussions and
23 61 semi-structured ethnographic interviews (Angrosino, 2007; Aitken and Herman,
24 2009), using 'theoretical sampling' (Ball, 1990, 165). A reflexive journal (Punch, 2012)
25 complemented [researcher's name]'s field notes, forming a comprehensive 'research
26 biography' (Ball, 1990, 170). A variety of visual mapping techniques were used to
27 explore the physical and spatial characteristics of each space and their relationship to
28 participants' behaviours. The theoretical framework of heterotopia guided the analysis
29 process by engaging with ethnography's plurality and constant change informing the
30 codes and making sense of the data.
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47 **Cases and Context**

48 Athens is a city that struggles with its limited and as a result, valuable, public space.
49 Since 2008, Athens² has been undergoing a period of social transformation suffering the
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56 ² Chosen in part because of [researcher's name]'s familiarity with the city since she grew up
57 there.
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3 results of austerity; an 'ongoing humanitarian crisis' (Dalakoglou, 2012). Greek culture
4 is characterised by simultaneous extroversion and introversion towards local public
5 space. Immediate neighbourhood space is no longer as familiar as it used to be (See:
6 Athens' Oral History Groups, 2016) while neighbourhood interactions have become
7 infrequent. Many public spaces, in Mediterranean countries, are seen as potentially
8 dangerous - especially in the evening - and are avoided by citizens. As Ferré et al.
9 (2006, 173) argue:

15 This affects people's daily lives, especially those people who for reasons of gender and
16 age (women, the elderly) spend more time close to home.

18 However, the summer months, especially, bring many people to piazzas and
19 playgrounds. Typically placed in public piazzas or in leftover spaces in local
20 neighbourhoods, playgrounds are seen as meeting points both by children and parents
21 (Galani, 2011; Ferré et al. 2006). 'Metaphors for cultural meanings' (Blackford, 2004,
22 237), Athenian playgrounds are places where one can trace the forces structuring
23 children's everyday lives.

28 The chosen playground sites were paradigmatic cases, that is 'cases that
29 highlight more general characteristics of the societies in question' (Flyvbjerg, 2001, 80)
30 reflecting the typical neighbourhood play-space in Athens: fenced, municipality-
31 provided playgrounds placed in public piazzas, abiding by the "standardized
32 playground" model (Doll and Brehm, 2010; Solomon, 2005). Typical play structures
33 were see-saws, swings, slides, monkey bars, climbing structures and ropes, while soft
34 "carpet" was placed around the structures. We selected three cases, each located in a
35 district representing a different socio-economic identity³. In this study we focused on
36 the ethnographic research principles structuring a 'thick description' (Carspecken,
37 1996). As Flyvbjerg (2001) argues: 'The advantage of large samples is breadth, while
38 their problem is one of depth. For the case study, the situation is the reverse' (87). The

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50 3 Traditionally understood as lower, middle and upper-middle income areas. However, it is
51 important to note that in austerity Athens, one cannot make clear-cut categorizations of
52 municipalities according to their socio-economic status. This is because of both the effect of
53 the 'Vertical social differentiation' (Maloutas & Karadimitriou, 2001) and the fact that
54 economic austerity has minimised the previously extended middle-class, altering the socio-
55 economic structure of society. Any differences observed between the case studies cannot be
56 clearly connected to their socio-economic identity.

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3 purpose of this research was not to make comparisons between contrasting cases, but to
4 study the typical playground population examining a range of patterns of behaviour.

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6 The focus on minutiae, which directly opposes much conventional wisdom about the
7 need to focus on 'important problems' has its background in a fundamental
8 phenomenological experience, that small questions often lead to big answers.
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11 (Flyvbjerg, 2001, 133)
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13 14 **Findings**

15 ***Fear Classifying Space***

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17 One of the clearest and most strongly evidenced findings of this study was that people's
18 experience when in the public realm was largely informed by an unwritten, shared
19 classification of space. Within each observed site, particular areas and physical
20 characteristics were observed to be associated with particular sets of behaviours and
21 types of users. This classification was shared between the three cases, revealing broader
22 societal norms regulating people's interaction with space:
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28 If you were supposed to enter the flowerbed, there wouldn't be bars around it (Father,
29 Dexameni).

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31 All piazzas had a clear distinction between children's and adults' spaces. Guardians
32 would classify areas and elements as safe/not safe, for play/not for play, according to
33 their designated use:
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36 Because they are safer there... It is there where the playing structures are (Nanny,
37 Dexameni).
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42 Despite the playground appearing to physically be part of public space
43 (physically accessible to all users) it was not socio-culturally perceived as public space.
44 Rather it emerged through both observations and interviews as a distinct space,
45 classified as "children's". Separation and supervision are the two main attributes of
46 'proper' places for children's play (Olwig and Gullov, 2003, 2; Aitken, 2001). The
47 fence – the physical structure providing this separation – emerged as having major
48 importance:
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53 We control them better that way (Father, Ilioupolis).

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55 Understood through the lens of heterotopia, the fence defines the porous limit of the
56 playground enclave of deviance – a physical indicator that this area accommodates
57 alternate orderings in the normality of public space:
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3 Because children are more constrained that way... more secure. The fence is necessary
4 for the children's safety (Nanny, Dexameni).
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6 Even in the more radical approaches to the playground (Kinchin and O'Connor, 2012;
7 Lady Allen of Hurtwood, 1964), the fence has endured as a prerequisite for its
8 operation, acting as the boundary between child/adult, play/non-play space. When asked
9 about the "ideal playground", the quality of the play equipment was often mentioned by
10 the parents second after the need for a fenced space that would make segregation and
11 supervision easier. They often chose to visit smaller playgrounds for their perceived
12 safety, despite offering fewer play opportunities. There was evidence that supervision
13 had been internalised by the children (Blackford, 2004) in a Foucauldian sense
14 (Foucault, 1991):
15

16 We need the fence. Because without it we may get out chasing the ball and get lost
17 (Girl, Ilioupolis).
18

19 It is interesting to note that children [even toddlers] were familiar with the spatial
20 restriction of the playground in their everyday lives, recognizing this "cut-out" from the
21 public realm as their own. In Vyronas, for example, where the playground was visible
22 from quite far away, it was observed that children and toddlers recognized the space,
23 asking their parents to enter. The fence acted as a landmark in the city's landscape,
24 indicating the "rightful place" for play. Perceiving playground as merely a space with
25 specialised play-equipment strengthened the belief that one should only play with this
26 equipment, while all other games (e.g. ball games) and interaction should take place
27 outside:
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29 We are playing here [outside] as inside is for those that want to swing (Boy, Vyronas).
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40 Both adults' fears and the perceptions of children, as special "deviant" beings
41 were materialised in the spatial characteristics of playground. Parents characterized as
42 "good" a playground that is safe, clean, fully paved with soft materials, containing low
43 challenge equipment, no visual obstructions (thus allowing supervision) and adequately
44 segregated from its surroundings. The fear culture (Gill, 2007) has established strict
45 playground safety regulations and standardisations in Greece (See: ELOT, 2008;
46 Ministry of Internal Affairs, 2014; 2009) that are continually increasing, fuelled by
47 increasing parental safety concerns and the fear of physical injury - a trend similar to
48 those noted in the UK and USA (Gill, 2007):
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3 I was surprised to listen to a mother in Ilioupolis listing the technical regulations as
4 established by the law (Field notes).

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6 Children themselves tended to simply prefer challenging spaces where they could meet
7 friends:

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9 There aren't any other children to play with in the playground, so I prefer sitting on the
10 bench outside... (Girl, Vyronas).

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12 I would prefer it if the slide was higher (Girl, Ilioupolis).

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16 As places created to safeguard children, the playgrounds' function revolved
17 around children's safety. Conforming to the "proper" use of the play structures was
18 often mentioned as the main prerequisite to avoid both conflict and accidents,
19 strengthening the playgrounds' deviant character as a space promoting specific
20 behaviours:

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22 They should play properly. So they will not get hurt. And that way, other children can
23 play as well. They take turns on the slide (Mother, Ilioupolis).

24
25 Children, following the unwritten rules of the heterotopia of deviance would often scold
26 each other, making sure they were using the structures "properly":

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28 Not like that! You should play that way! (Girl, Dexameni) (See also: Zeiher, 2003).

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32 As one might expect, perceptions of playgrounds as solely children's spaces
33 excluded adult play with no adult able to give examples of their own play behaviours in
34 the playground:

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36 For example, we wanted to play on the monkey bars, but I was ashamed to do so
37 because I was expecting someone to say to me that there are children that want to play
38 (Father, Ilioupolis).

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40 The fear of 'I don't want to break anything' (Father, Ilioupolis) was present, defining
41 the playground's character as a child's space and strengthening the heterotopic
42 characteristic of deviance needing "special equipment".

43
44 Parents' fears did not welcome the presence of other adults in the playground:

45
46 If it is a young man we would talk to him, we may say to him 'do you want something
47 here?' ... We will ask him... we don't want him to stare at the children (Grandmother,
48 Dexameni).

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50 Parents' interaction with the 'outsiders' acted as the opening and closing mechanism of
51 the heterotopia of deviance. It is interesting to note, however, that while male adults

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3 were considered dangerous, older people or childless mothers were seen with sympathy
4 and were allowed to use the playground:
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6 I would think that... ok. She came to see the children... Often the ones that do not have
7 children of their own, crave to see children playing [...] (Grandmother, Ilioupolis).
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10 In line with parental perceptions, "Others" themselves did not perceive the playgrounds
11 as part of the public space, but rather as 'places only for children' (Blackford, 2004,
12 232). The suspicions that parents had expressed about certain unaccompanied adults
13 were, accordingly, felt by those adults:
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16 A grandfather in Dexameni argued that he wouldn't stay in the playground if he wasn't
17 with the toddler as he would be embarrassed by the people looking suspiciously at him
18 (Field notes)
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21 These perceptions were observed to limit interactions and restrict access.
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24 25 ***Transgressive Play: Beyond the Fence***

26 Loaded with expectations, the playground space could not always fulfil its purpose as a
27 safe play-space, often lacking the needed infrastructure. Play often acquired a
28 transgressive character as people invented new ways of interacting with the space in
29 order to compensate for its inability to accommodate the desideratum "valuable" play.
30 Play, bearing "possibility", transformed the playground and questioned the norms of the
31 Heterotopia of Deviance. What was considered "normal" and "proper" was challenged,
32 with new orderings emerging:
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36 A father plays on the see-saw with four children. He balances the one side of the see-
37 saw and the children try to balance on the other side of the structure (Field-notes,
38 Dexameni).
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41 A mother in Vyronas, self-conscious of the transgression of the playground norms,
42 trying to justify allowing her son to jump in and out of the fence, said:
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45 They are bored... there aren't any play-structures.
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48 A major finding of this study is that the fence's physicality often supported play
49 to take place outside the playground. The absence of the fence was often mentioned by
50 guardians as having potential to restrict play:
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53 No, it's better that way. When they kick, they kick to the fence. If it was open [...] the
54 ball could hit a child in the playground. If the two areas were together, the older
55 children wouldn't have anywhere to play (Mother, Dexameni).
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3 In all three cases, the piazzas' infrastructure, especially those elements placed closer to
4 the playground, compensated for the limitations created by the playground's
5 prescriptive and age-specific structures. Children would exit the playground to play in
6 the piazza, taking advantage of its infrastructure and its affordances, using these as an
7 extension of the playground structures.
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11 A boy runs from inside the playground to the green area, climbs a tree, jumps down the
12 ledge, runs around in the piazza, climbs the ledge again, into the upper level green area
13 (Field-notes, Ilioupolis)
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16 A strange paradox emerged, what we here call "the playground paradox", according to
17 which the fence did not confine play inside the playground but actually supported
18 transgression. The playground emerged as a space physically segregated, but not
19 isolated from the public realm, with the physicality of the fence itself allowing games to
20 transgress the playground boundary:
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24 A girl walks on the fence's ledge and starts shouting and waving to the people in the
25 café across the street. They wave back to her (Field-notes, Vironas).
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28 Someone kicked the ball so high from inside the playground that it landed in the
29 flowerbed!! The children kick it back in again laughing (Field-notes, Dexameni).
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32 It is important to clarify that this kind of play behaviour was not observed in piazzas
33 that did not include a playground⁴. In all three cases, play flowed from the playground
34 space unifying the playground with its surrounding space and extending the play area,
35 challenging the classifications of both piazza and playground.
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40 Despite play taking place beyond the fence, the playground's supervision ring
41 (Blackford, 2004), fuelled by adults' fears, was observed to also transfer to the adjacent
42 public space, usually placing parents on the margins of the piazza, supervising children
43 who would play in the centre. Children, however, used boundaries in their games in
44 order to explore and challenge safety limitations. Their play often revealed their
45 perceptions about the enclosed playground space and in many cases it questioned or
46 even reversed it:
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56 4 Although these cases were beyond the scope of this research, [researcher's name]'s
57 experience as a resident of Athens confirms this.
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3 The children exited from the hole in the fence and were calling their parents sitting in
4 the playground sitting area 'you are in a cage!!' (Field-notes, Dexameni).

5
6 The new play area supported the extension of children's agency into the public
7 space. All kinds of games (ball, scooters, pretend play) occupied the whole piazza area,
8 changing the space classifications:
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11 When children play in the green area [and] occupy the whole space, creating dust and
12 noise, no one complains. This is an area for play, if someone doesn't want dust she
13 could sit somewhere else (Field notes: Vyronas).

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16 Children often projected an attitude of "owning" the space in and around the
17 playground:
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19 Boys mocked two old ladies after they scolded them for throwing a ball directly onto
20 them, while the father murmured 'go sit further down' (Field notes, Vyronas).

21
22 At the same time, while perceptions of playgrounds as solely children's spaces
23 tended to exclude adult play, public space, unrestricted by play-structures,
24 accommodated a variety of play expressions:
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26
27 I prefer playing in the piazza: they chase me, I climb the tree et cetera. I don't play in
28 the playground space though. I feel embarrassed. The play structures bias you towards
29 child's play (Father, Dexameni).

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31 The father did not stop the children, but encouraged them to get wet, indicating which
32 beck of the green areas [outside the playground] was throwing out more water [...] The
33 children move in and out playing in both areas [piazza and playground] using the
34 playground as their 'castle' (Field notes: Ilioupoli).

35
36 Adults playing more actively occupied and manipulated space with children. An
37 intergenerational play area was created, catalysed by the playground, but having a
38 dynamic of its own. People taking advantage of the piazzas' affordances sustained a
39 new, intergenerational play-space, distinct from the playground but in constant relation
40 with it:
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42
43 Toddler kicks ball, ball goes to an old man sitting on the red bench. The boy gets closer,
44 the old man kicks it back. The toddler kicks the ball again toward the old man. They
45 play like that for 10min (Field-notes, Dexameni).

46 47 48 49 50 51 52 53 54 **Conclusion: Playground Paradox; Deviance and Transgression**

55 It becomes clear that examining the playground as a self-contained structure, isolated
56 from its surroundings, greatly limits our understanding of this space. At the same time it
57 is not easy to argue in favour of the playground's character as a place accommodating
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3 either fears or joy. The study reveals a space classification that reflects broader
4 perceptions and relations between the play-space actors. Perceptions of the playground
5 as children's space inform practices and interactions, limiting appropriation by adults
6 and intergenerational play. In particular, adults' willingness to engage in play with their
7 children was hindered by the playground classification as space for children.
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11 The playground as a heterotopia of deviance, informed by fixed
12 conceptualisations of childhood, both as a precarious stage in human life (Gagen,
13 2000a, 2000b; Olk, 2009; Zeiher, 2009) and as a 'repository for hope' (Kraftl, 2008,
14 82), was structured as "children's space" – occurring from and stimulating parental
15 fears – with strictly prescribed use and safety standards, intended for a specific group of
16 users. The physical border of the fence was considered essential for its function by the
17 parents, as segregation was interwoven with the playground's purpose. Our
18 observations revealed that it was the adults' anxieties that acted as the main opening and
19 closing mechanisms for this heterotopia, dictating who could use the playground space,
20 barring those considered suspicious. The findings suggest that parents' fears often
21 hindered the playground from becoming what one might suppose it to be – a space of
22 play, experimentation and joy – instead restricting it to its function as a segregating
23 heterotopia of deviance.
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27 Paradoxically, adults' fears about children's safety and expectations of
28 "valuable" play in the playground space were observed to support its own transgression.
29 The 'playground paradox' – a phenomenon whereby the playground restricted play and
30 interactions in its premises, but supported an intergenerational play area outside its
31 limits is a key finding of this study. Extending the play area, play itself created
32 alternate orderings, negotiating norms and hierarchies (Edmiston, 2010; Sutton-Smith,
33 1997) and accommodated "joy" outside the playground boundaries. This study
34 contributes to the reconceptualisation of the 'city as a playground' (Stenros, 2014,
35 p.213) and playful cities (Alfrink, 2014; Borden, 2007; Donoff & Bridgman, 2017;
36 Stevens, 2007, Vanolo, 2018; Walz & Deterding, 2014) placing traditional playground
37 spaces in the centre of the debate. The temporal transformation of surrounding public
38 space supported a reconceptualization of playground play as an inclusive,
39 intergenerational, behaviour. When in play, children and adults here co-authored their
40 identities and negotiated the established hierarchies, proposing 'alternative ways of
41 being' (Radley, 1995, 9).
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3 The critical framework of Heterotopia allowed us to examine the interplay of
4 both deviance and transgression in the playground space. Normalisation and
5 transgression practices – often in the guise of self-regulating fear or embarrassment –
6 were often mentioned by both parents and children, making play both the cause of
7 anxiety and socio-spatial transgression. The alternate orderings of the purpose-centred,
8 oppressive heterotopia, paradoxically fostered alternate orderings that empowered their
9 subjects. We draw connections with Loxham's (2013) study using the concept of
10 heterotopia to argue that a nineteenth century park was used both as a site of oppression
11 and liberation for its users:
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19 Despite an intended discipline, the ordering here differed from that of normal society
20 and paradoxically an unintended freedom to indulge in otherwise forbidden acts was
21 provided (566).
22

23 In both studies, it is this negotiation at the scale of the everyday rather than a utopian
24 conceptualisation of liberation that bears the possibility of change; an everyday,
25 unintentional utopianism (Gardiner, 2004; Kraftl, 2009a, 2007).
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28 Perhaps the most striking finding of this study therefore, is that the playground,
29 a "child's rightful space" with a prescriptive nature, encouraged an extended freedom
30 for children's action outside its limits. This study adds to the literature about children's
31 spaces of transgression. It moves away from conceptualisations about carved out spaces
32 (Beazley, 2000; Jones, 2000; Matthew et al., 2000a, 2000b) proposing children's direct
33 engagement with the public realm. We suggest that the debate should not revolve only
34 around ways to familiarise children with the public realm, but also include familiarising
35 the public realm with children's presence, practices and play. Extending the playground
36 to the surrounding public space, this ethnography reveals the potential of the playground
37 to bear the freedom to enact alternate orderings without being restricted by design
38 intentions and expected behaviours. The playground, supporting and projecting
39 children's agency into the public realm, can be transformed to a place that includes
40 "children's joy". Using the space's affordances as an extension to the playground
41 equipment, play was seen to temporarily transform surrounding public space into a
42 continually negotiated space which children were free to appropriate. This play area,
43 importantly, emerged as a part of the public realm.
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56 These findings therefore lead us to ask: what can be done in order for the
57 playground to contest the defining rhetoric of safety and instead engage more fully with
58 "children's joy"? How might the playground effectively expand the observed
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intergenerational and spatially transgressive play area to a more extended public realm, dissipating fears for and of children? We call for future research to examine this potential, exploring the possibilities of playground and urban design in dialogue, to help alleviate playground fears and to reconceptualise the function of this space.

Approaching the playground as a space through which children can act in “adult” public space, this research suggests that the playground can afford social and spatial transgression, which extends into and shapes a new character of public realm.

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