

**INTERNATIONAL, INTERDISCIPLINARY SYMPOSIUM  
CALL FOR PAPERS**



**ADVENTURE PLAYGROUNDS OF THE PAST/FOR THE FUTURE: CURRENT  
STATE OF KNOWLEDGE, ISSUES AND PERSPECTIVES**

**8-10 December 2021.**

**ENSAPVS, Archives nationales et MSH Paris Nord, Paris.**

**Summary**

Adventure playgrounds are unique spaces of play. While the 1990s saw their disappearance in France, a recent resurgence has brought up questions around their legacy and theoretical basis as socio-pedagogical experiments. This symposium, organised by TAPLA (Terrains d'aventure du passé/pour l'avenir – Adventure playgrounds of the past/for the future) and supported by Labex: *pasts in the present*, is designed to investigate how adventure playgrounds raise questions around the place accorded to children in the city, and more specifically, children's unmediated experience of socio-spatial learning systems. In addition, we aim to lay the groundwork for an international, interdisciplinary network, combining the human and social sciences with spacial design and urban planning, along with the fields of education and socio-cultural community work.



## Description

Adventure playgrounds (spaces for learning through play) first arose in Denmark in 1943, as a (temporary) educational response to a crisis situation. The junk playgrounds in the vacant lots of bombarded cities, provided an opportunity for post-war society to channel the energies of disoriented youth, at a time when the line between resistance and delinquency was blurred (Kozlovsky, 2006). In cities, the widespread shortages of the first years of Reconstruction justified acts of appropriation, reuse, repurposing and waste conversion. Adventure playgrounds therefore filled not only a social vacuum – with educational play used as a means to influence child behaviour (Cohen, 2007, p. 32), but also a spacial vacuum – as they responded to the urgent need to build on urban ruins (Kozlovsky, 2008). Adventure playgrounds gained remarkable popularity in Great Britain at the end of the Second World War (Allen of Hurtwood, 1968). From the 1960s, adventure playgrounds appeared in Switzerland, Germany, Wales and Belgium. They first appeared in France in the 1970s, where they became known as “*terrains d’aventure*” or “*terrains pour l’aventure*”. The first French adventure playground was opened in Paris in 1971. However in France, these educational and spacial experiments were not to last, unlike those of its European neighbours (Switzerland, Great Britain and Germany in particular), which continue to this day.

There is now real value in gathering, organising and updating available resources on adventure playgrounds. It is clear that the majority of work from French sources dates back to the 1980s and earlier. The available publications (D’Allaines-Margot, 1975 ; Savoye, 1978 ; Vergnes et al., 1975) and photographic documents (Flatard et Prémel, 1982), mainly relate to past experiences. When adventure playgrounds are cited today, it is often as mythologised, utopian educational spaces, belonging strictly to an idealised past. The accounts of the closure of the last adventure playground in Paris in 2007 (on the blog *Les Petits Pierrot*, and in the recent work of François Grandeau (2020)), depict these spaces as innovative experiments that are nonetheless shaped by an outdated model that has proved difficult to shake.

Today, adventure playgrounds are little understood in the field of socio-cultural community work, where they are often perceived in a negative light, and as conflicting with usage and safety regulations. This symposium is part of a push to rediscover adventure playgrounds and reflects the renewed interest in play spaces in Europe (Newstead, 2019), both from a theoretical and a practical point of view. New spaces and projects have recently emerged in a number of countries (Milne, 2014; Leichter-Saxby & Law, 2015). The growing interest in adventure playgrounds is also evident from the range of publications on the topic for both academic and mainstream audiences (Maclean, Russell & Ryall, 2015; Kilvington & Wood, 2010) and for those looking to work on these kinds of projects.

Adventure playgrounds are both play areas and gardens, spaces for fun and education, construction and recreation, spaces in constant evolution. As hybrid objects, they are ideal for

interdisciplinary study. This symposium invites work from such diverse domains as ethnology, anthropology, history, archival research, urban sociology, education sciences, urban planning, architecture, landscaping, geography and philosophy. We will also take into account the diverse skills of professionals and community members on the ground, who will be invited to share their experiences during the three days of the symposium.

## Research angles

A variety of terms are used to describe adventure playgrounds across different countries: *Abenteuerspielplatz* in Germany, *skrammellegeplads* in Denmark, *robinsonspeelplaats* in The Netherlands, *terrains d'aventure* in France and *Jardin Robinson* in Switzerland. The various terms employed not only represent linguistic differences, but also the range of social and spacial approaches to these projects across Europe. What are the different social and spacial structures associated with them? How do they relate to traditional ways of creating urban spaces? And how do they deal with the concept of risk?

Within this symposium, we aim to take a comparative, international, interdisciplinary approach to study the specific ways in which adventure playgrounds are created, and their role in socialisation and play. We want to investigate how adventure playgrounds can help us rethink how we create, not only of spaces of play, but urban spaces inhabited by children more broadly.

The symposium also aims to understand the various temporalities and approaches to the creation and use of adventure playgrounds in light of their relevance today. What do children learn from this formative experience? What are the cultural particularities of each European country? What elements have become obsolete? And why did adventure playgrounds slowly disappear in France and not in other European countries? In addition to tracing the history of the spacial inclusion of children in urban projects and the place given to children by adults in cities, the symposium is also designed to lay the groundwork for a historiography and a typology of the people involved in adventure playground projects.

The current health and environmental crisis has led to a withdrawal from public space and associated practices, with particular consequences for the space and time allocated to socialising and leisure. We can therefore hypothesise that this unusual situation could lead to changes in work culture, and even new ways of creating space and new leisure practices. What role could adventure playgrounds play in this renewal?

Contributions should approach the topic from one of the **five the following research angles**:

Angle 1: Updating a model from the past: archival sources

The first angle relates to the archival research required to understand the history of adventure playgrounds and the ways in which they could be adapted to contemporary society. This research



covers documents from local and national authorities in the relevant countries and from community organisations and individuals (activists, community workers, designers etc.). This approach raises several issues.

First of all, the issue of how to define the object of study, given that the terminology used to describe adventure playgrounds varies, even within a single country. There is also the question of whether we are in fact dealing with the same object with the same uses across different countries. Comparisons between sources from different countries and different kinds of creators would therefore be useful in order to more clearly define possible nuances, differences and types. Digital models could be generated from sources such as maps, relational databases, timelines etc. Prototype projects would be welcome, as well as suggestions as to how these sources might be used by researchers from other disciplines.

This angle of research will also bring close attention to the genealogy of adventure playgrounds, both in France and internationally, in particular in order to uncover the reasons for their gradual disappearance in France from the 1980s.

#### Angle 2: The capacity to act, risk-taking and autonomy

The second angle focuses on the freedom to act and take risks afforded to children in adventure playgrounds. This research explores the specific pedagogical approaches involved. The aim is to understand how the freedom granted to children in adventure playgrounds constitutes the basis of a pedagogical project aimed at developing autonomy in thought and action. As spaces of exploration and unmediated experimentation, spaces of “doing” (Ingold, 2017, 2018), adventure playgrounds provide not only physical freedom, but also relational freedom, since adults remain on the sidelines, supporting, rather than restricting the children’s actions. In these spaces therefore, children not only learn about their capacity to act on their environment, but also within their social relationships. Research from this angle will look the pedagogical approaches implemented to encourage and provide a framework for this freedom of action. It would therefore be useful to analyse the perspectives of those involved on the ground.

While the conditions under which adventure playgrounds emerged are highly distinct from those of today, lessons may still be learned from their approaches to construction, not only concerning spaces for play, but also the place accorded to children, to unmediated experience, and to “doing” in the sense of interaction between an individual and their environment within a socio-spatial learning system.

#### Angle 3. Building learning spaces together

The third angle of research relates to the collective nature of building adventure playgrounds. Children, parents and community workers are involved in the creation of adventure playgrounds from conception. Researchers could therefore analyse how this specific approach relates to the



learning processes inherent in creating adventure playgrounds. An analysis of the socio-spatial organisation of adventure playgrounds, the role of community workers and the distribution of tasks over time and in space through the prism of play, would give insight into the ways in which responsibility and power are shared within adventure playgrounds as a learning project. It could also provide an opportunity to investigate the values and principles of those involved and their relationship to the local environment.

#### Angle 4. Build while playing/ Play while building

The fourth angle relates to using play as a means to create space. Children create the space in an adventure playground as they play: they arrange it, adjust it, shape it and destroy it to build it anew. In this specific process, play serves as a framework for unmediated experimentation, challenging traditional approaches to the design of play spaces and educational projects. Understanding this process of play-creation opens up possibilities for rethinking planned design, its norms and functional configuration. Introducing use and users as ways to create space, and accepting the absence of prior planning, provides a new perspective on how space can be designed, created and used. This research would look at: practices, spatialities and stakeholder networks, from the underlying perspective of freedom of action with regards to normative models. From a spatial point of view, what can adventure playgrounds tell us about the design of recreational spaces in particular, and public space in general?

International comparison would help to contextualise any existing mechanisms of normalisation for these spaces, from an architectural point of view and in terms of social practices. This research would also benefit from an historical overview explaining changes and highlighting the turning points (stakeholder organisation, legal frameworks, industrial pressure, social demand etc.), which may have led to new kinds of adventure playgrounds. Feedback from professionals in the areas of socio-cultural community work, but also design (including contractors and contracting authorities) would be welcome.

#### Angle 5: Ecology of action and learning about nature

The fifth angle will look at the crossovers, overlaps and relationships between adventure playgrounds and the field of environmental education. There are numerous links between the adventure playground movement and the environmental education movement. As spaces for unmediated experimentation, adventure playgrounds provide pedagogical tools that go beyond environmental awareness, offering an immersive experience of the living environment. Adventure playgrounds are ways of temporarily reclaiming urban waste zones. They implement an ecology of action based on recycling and reusing materials, and bring together local stakeholders. As such, they have much to teach us about the creation of resilient, efficient, sustainable spaces. How do adventure playground projects approach environmental and ecological issues? How can the founding principles of adventure playgrounds contribute to

environmental education? How can 21<sup>st</sup> century adventure playgrounds contribute to environmental transition?

## Submission

Language: French or English

Papers on various kinds of research (theoretical, empirical etc.) and current or future practical experiments are welcome.

Contributions may:

- be part of a round table or workshop including at least three papers;
- be presented individually (20') as part of a panel with other papers chosen by the organising committee;
- be presented as a short video (10' maximum).

Paper proposals (3000 characters maximum including spaces) will present the research topic, issue and hypothesis, the field and methodology used to gather data (or, systematic corpuses of sources if the research does not involve fieldwork).

Proposals will include the following information in order:

- The last and first names of the author(s)
- Their position and institution
- Email address
- The paper title
- The paper proposal (3000 characters maximum including spaces)
- A selective bibliography (3-5 references)
- 5 keywords
- The proposal title and summary (1500 characters including spaces).

Proposals must be sent in Word or .rtf format to: [tapla.colloque@gmail.com](mailto:tapla.colloque@gmail.com), by **May 31, 2021 at the latest**.

Proposals will be chosen on the basis of their scientific rigour and the originality of their empirical or theoretical content, or according to the value and quality of their experimental approach. Summaries (1500 characters) of the chosen proposals will be feature in the symposium's publication.

Please make sure you:

- 1- Write "Colloque TAPLA 2021-proposition" in the subject line of your message
- 2- name your file: (Name)-Colloque TAPLA 2021.doc



## Schedule

- National and international call for papers launched (February 26, 2021)
- Paper proposals to be sent by **May 31, 2021 at the latest** to [tapla.colloque@gmail.com](mailto:tapla.colloque@gmail.com)
- You will receive a response by June 21, 2021 at the latest.
- Presentation materials are to be submitted in .pdf format by November 22, 2021 at the latest.
- We plan to publish the conference proceedings by Autumn of 2022.

## More information:

On the TAPLA research project: <https://tapla.hypotheses.org/>

On the Labex research projects *Pasts in the present*: <http://passes-present.eu/fr/terrains-daventure-du-passepour-lavenir-44347>

## Organising committee

Delaunay Fanny, urbaniste, docteure en aménagement et urbanisme, ENSA Paris Val de Seine, CRH-LAVUE et Ingénieure d'étude TAPLA

Ramos Aurélien, paysagiste, doctorant en aménagement et urbanisme, ENSAP de Bordeaux, CRH-LAVUE et Ingénieur d'étude TAPLA

Raveneau Gilles, professeur des universités, anthropologue, Université Lumière Lyon 2, EVS

Roullier Clothilde, chargée d'études documentaires, responsable des fonds Jeunesse et Sports/Éducation populaire, Archives nationales

## Research committee

*The research committee is made up of coordinators, the entire TAPLA team as well as international academic partners.*

- Antonioli Manola – UMR LAVUE – PR ENSA Paris-La Villette
- Besse-Patin Baptiste – post-doctorant en sciences de l'éducation – chercheur associé au laboratoire EXPERICE
- Bouillon Florence – UMR LAVUE – MCF Paris 8



- Brown Fraser, professeur, Leeds University
- Simon Colwill Simon, enseignant, TU Berlin, Allemagne.
- Delaunay Fanny : urbaniste, docteure en aménagement et urbanisme, ENSA Paris Val de Seine, CRH-LAVUE et Ingénieure d'étude TAPLA
- Hoddé Rainier – UMR LAVUE – PR émérite ENSA, responsable réseau Pédagogies coopératives
- Joëlle Libois Joëlle, Dir. Haute école de travail social ▪ HES-SO Genève
- Monnet Nadja, LAA – UMR Lavue, MCF ENSA de Marseille
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- Roucous Nathalie, MCF Experice, Université Paris-13
- Roullier Clothilde : chargée d'études documentaires, responsable des fonds Jeunesse et Sports/Éducation populaire, Archives nationales
- Rozenholc Caroline – UMR LAVUE – MCF ENSA Paris-Val de Seine

## Location

The symposium will take place over three days, in Paris, from December 8 to 10, 2021: at the National School of Architecture Paris-Val de Seine (ENSAPVS) (day 1), at the National Archives on the Pierrefitte-sur-Seine site (day 2) and at the Paris Nord Maison des Sciences de l'Homme on the third and final day.

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