

Natural Play in natural Surroundings

Urban Childhood and Playground Planning
in Denmark, c. 1930 – 1950

Ning de Coninck-Smith

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The working paper takes its jumping off point in a proposal from 1937, where it is suggested, that a family and children's park should be established north by Copenhagen - close to the woods and the beach. Ning de Coninck-Smith views the proposal in the light of the history of the playground planning and the discussion concerning what kind of play, that is regarded best for the children.

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*Ning de Coninck-Smith**

Introduction

In December 1937 the director of the Copenhagen public housing association F.C. Boldsen sent a proposal to the Ministry of Agriculture for the transformation of the Cottage Park in Klampenborg, north of Copenhagen into a family and children's park, *Dyrehavens Familie- og Børnepark*. The details had been worked out by the landscape gardener C.T. Sørensen (1893-1979) in collaboration with the Copenhagen school-teacher Hans Dragehjelm (1875-1948), better known as "the father of the sand-box".

According to their plan the park was to be connected with the beach north of Bellevue via three bridges over the old coast road. At the water's edge they planned a lagoon, fed by the salt water of the Sound, protected from the waves by a high wall. Around the lagoon lay an artificial sandy beach.

Inside the park itself connected green stretches were interrupted by free-standing trees, smallish groves and bushes. The play areas were concentrated in three circles around a paddling lake. Between this and the lagoon was a large fortified area where smaller children could play after they had changed into "play clothes" in the changing rooms. The mothers and

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fathers could drink coffee or beer in the shade of the pergola. The remaining area was divided up into a zoological park, a nature park, pitches for ball games and an area for folk dancing. On the slopes down towards the Sound people could eat their packed lunches in peace and quiet. Just outside the fence there were places for bikes and prams; there were local train stations and trams within walking distance.

In the documentation they sent, Hans Dragehjelm argued for the design of the park, saying that there it

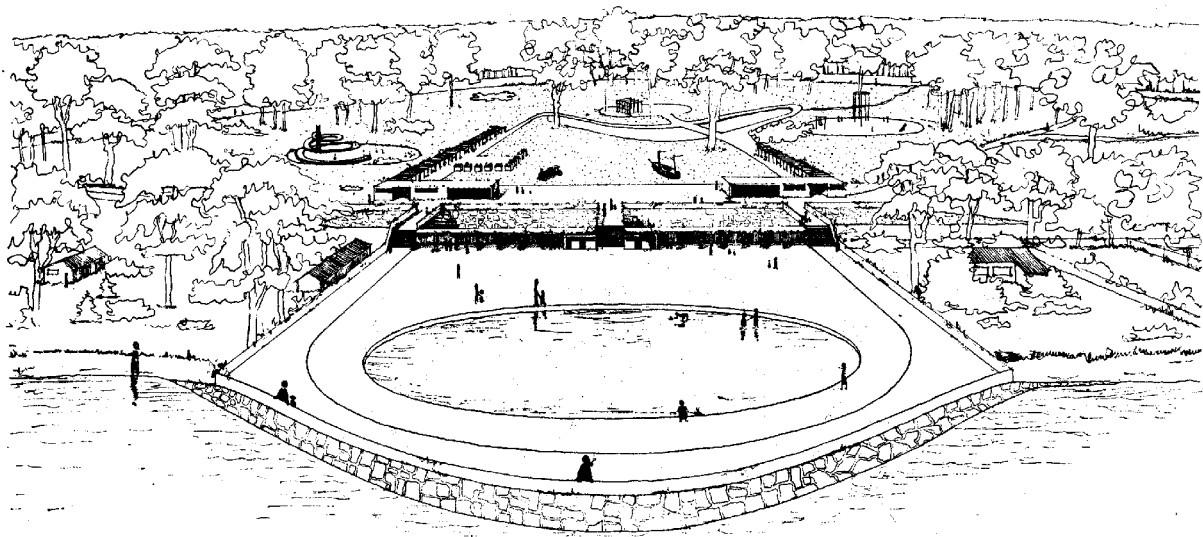
"would be possible for parents with children of the common people, at no great expense, to spend their leisure time in safe surroundings, so that the children would find an outlet for their natural urge to be "children of nature". I am thinking in particular of the chance to play in open terrain, among trees and bushes, and in close contact with small animals, to which children in big cities in particular usually have no access."

Sørensen's and Dragehjelm's plans for the Cottage Park were about the interplay between the adult view of the nature of children and the natural surroundings and landscape in which the children's nature was to be expressed. There was thus more to it than aesthetics and social commitment; the drawings testified at least as much to the views of the 1930s about play and urban childhood.

The fate of the proposal

"The Children's Paradise", as Dragehjelm and C.T. Sørensen had called their proposal, was according to the housing association director in line with a number of other efforts to make Klampenborg (also called "the Danish Riviera") into "a Nordic tourist and amusement centre". Among these efforts were the Hvidovre Beach Park, the artificial Bellevue Beach, Stauning's Lawn (all from 1930, designed by C.T. Sørensen in cooperation with the architect Poul Baumann, and with another architect Arne Jacobsen as the man behind the bath-

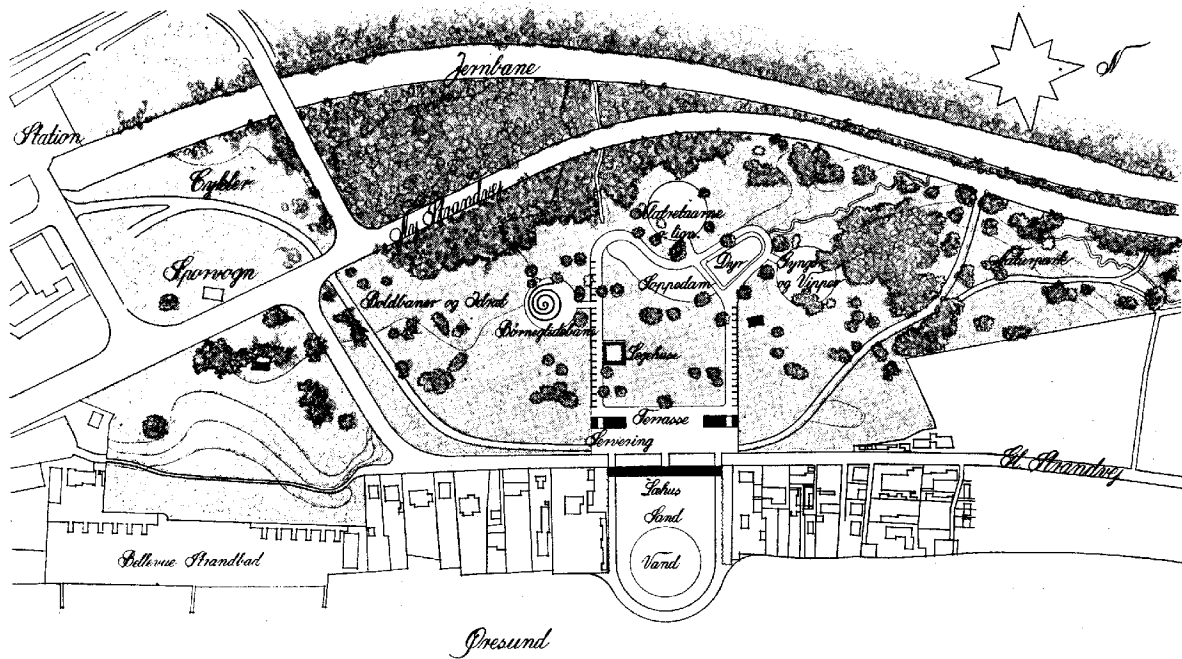
PERSPEKTIV AF PARKEN SET UDE FRA SUNDET



Perspective of the Children's Park seen from the Sound.
(source: Ministry of Agriculture Skdj. 6029, 1937).

BØRNEPARK I KLAMPENBORG

PLAN AF PARKEN I MAAL 1:5000



Children's park in Klampenborg (1: 5000).
(source: Ministry of Agriculture Skdj. 6029, 1937).

houses and kiosks), Arne Jacobsen's complex of flats (from 1934) and the Bellevue Theatre (from 1937), not to mention the new beach road from Charlottenlund to Klampenborg, were planned to continue along the coast to Rungsted (1). But unlike these initiatives, which were aimed at the well-off, motorized part of the Copenhagen population without children, this project was for carless families with children and thus belonged together with the housing association's other home-building projects for families with many children.

The Cottage Park had taken its name from the series of small buildings that the architect M.G. Bindesbøll had designed in the 1840s for the Klampenborg Spa, Well and Bathing Institution. The institution was ravaged by fire in 1923. After the Ministry of Agriculture had bought the area, in the autumn of 1937 the institution - despite many protests - was doomed to demolition (2). But already in the years before this the Cottage Park had attracted the attention of the planners. In 1935 the Cooperative Architects had suggested a fenced complex farther back and a restaurant in the area down towards the beach. The plans for the restaurant were still being aired two years later, just as the proposal to tear down the detached houses along the coast road Strandvejen below the park in order to extend the Bellevue bathing area to the north was aired at regular intervals.

The allotment garden system that already existed could become too crowded, thought the housing association director; but the citizens of Tårnbæk, neighbours to the Cottage Park thought this was not necessarily true. Via the parish council and the homeowners' and sports associations they took up the cudgels against the project. No one wanted the restaurant, or a park that would become a "*Dyrehavsbakke No. 2*" (*Dyrehavsbakken* is a big amusement park not far off). The Homeowners' and Local Authority Association demanded compensation for the financial loss that they thought the closure of the spa institution with its fashionable bathing environment would mean for the shopkeepers of the fishing hamlet. They wanted the northern part of the park approved for housing

projects, and a Tårnbæk station to be built as part of the coastal line. The sports association favoured a "*large-scale sports ground*" at the southern end of the park towards the water with room for tennis, badminton, football and athletics - for the benefit of the locals in their everyday life and the Copenhageners on Sundays (3).

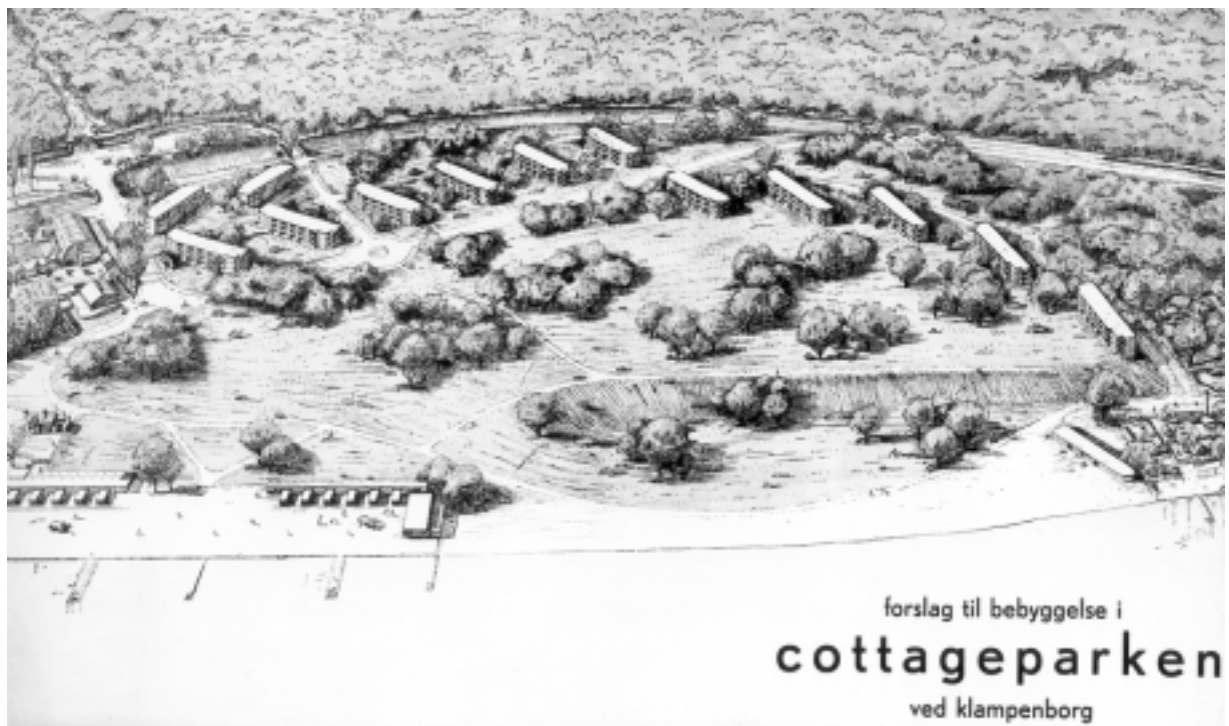
In the heat of the debate the poor Copenhagen children from big families slid into the background. The grandiose plans ended in a beach shelter for the excursions of the Gabriel Jensen excursion organization. But the tennis club had its grounds expanded and two of the old pavilions survived: one as a restaurant on Stauning's Lawn, the other as private residences in the middle of the park. The park was kept in its original English-garden-inspired style with winding paths, spectacular vantage points and large green lawns. No one talked any more about tearing down the villas on the Tårnbæk coast road.

The Cottage Park and its background

1. Play, the population question and traffic.

We can only guess why the Dyrehaven family and children's park was taken off the drawing-board and later consigned to oblivion; the documents at the Ministry of Agriculture at least give us no explanation (4). Perhaps it was the resistance from the Tårnbæk citizens that made the difference; perhaps the initiative-takers behind the planning of the Klampenborg-Belleveue area - *Naturfredningsforeningen* (the Danish "National Trust"), and the Gentofte and Lyngby-Tårnbæk local authorities - thought that it got in the way of their plans for an open view of the Sound and the preservation of "decidedly *Danish* natural amenities".

At any rate it is certain that the idea of a Dyrehaven family and children's park had not just come out of the blue. Since the 1880s the Copenhagen City Council had at regular inter-



The proposed building in Cottageparken.
(source: Ministry of Agriculture Skdj. 6029, 1937).

vals discussed the issue of children's play amenities in the city. An increased density of built-up areas and increasing traffic again fed the debate from the end of the 1920s when new services for the children of the city saw the light of day, such as sleighing tracks, roller skating rinks, paddling pools and paddling beaches (5). If we disregard the roller skating rinks, these innovations had grown out of a wish to get city children in contact with nature but in an urban framework. Not nature-nature, but city-nature. Sørensen and Dragehjelm wanted the same, but in a more radical version.

For centuries there had been a concern with children's play - a dual attitude to play as an expression of the primitive nature of the child on the one hand, and as the child's own path towards learning and adulthood on the other. The late 1800s saw great adult involvement in children's right to be children and to play, and thus a dissociation from other versions of childhood, where adult life and the child's life, work, learning and play dovetailed more imperceptibly into one another; if for no other reason, because play required not only the desire to play, but also space and time. The healthy

childhood was rooted in play, so it was far from a matter of indifference what children played, where they played and with whom. The same was true for the playground founders of the inter-war years, but in the light of the new child psychology, functionalism and the planning optimism of the period, the straightforward moralizing of the turn of the century had been replaced by common sense, strongly colored by a firm belief in the creative nature of the child. Playground planning had become an element in the art of social engineering with kindergartens and other preventive child care.

In the 1930s children's play was to be natural and was to take place in nature-like surroundings. This has three consequences for the playground planning of the day.

- First, nature was imported to the playgrounds. The planners drew inspiration from the fields, meadows, forests and beaches of agrarian society, and from the manse and manor gardens.
- Secondly, the playground was designed in accordance with the individual nature of the child. Allowances were to be made for the children's ages, gender and social backgrounds, and there was to be more scope for what children themselves might think of doing.
- And thirdly, the planners made efforts to make the playground a natural - in the sense of inevitable and indispensable - element in the life of all city children.

Sørensen and Dragehjelm drew on their own separate sources, and in the inter-war years these became more and more plentiful. The "cultural-radical" ideology with functional and socially aware architecture, and early Danish child psychology both placed play at the centre of children's development. Both sources were given a strong boost by the interest in the population problem, an interest that came to Denmark from Sweden, where the Myrdals predicted that only better housing and living conditions for the general population would reverse the falling population trend. In 1936 Alva Myrdal wrote the book

City Children, which became very important in the cultural-radical discussion of city childhood and motherhood. In her view women's dual employment was the premise on which all future planning would have to build. Rational planning could prevent women having to choose a job rather than motherhood, and would let them manage both. So the strain had to be taken off the mother in the home by collective cooking and washing, and functional and easy furnishings. The children were to go to institutions for the mothers' sake, for their own sake and for the sake of society. In the institutions there was plenty of room for play, and playing with other children socialized children and developed them as individuals. In professional hands they would not fall victim to the mothers' "unreflecting, haphazard upbringing" which down through the generations had led to "malaise, mental disturbance, degeneracy and criminal tendencies, maladjustment and inefficiency, bitterness and social unrest" (6).

In Denmark the population was not falling as much as in Sweden, but infant mortality was higher than in the other Nordic countries. In 1935 the Danish parliament set up a population commission, which among other things recommended state support for housing for big families, maternal benefits, and the expansion and professionalization of infant care and the kindergarten area. Apart from the Act on state Support for Housing of 1938, the Act on District Nurses from the previous year and the expansion of the National Council for the Unmarried Mother and Her Child in 1939, the work of the commission only bore fruit after World War II.

It was not only the relatively high infant mortality that formed an obstacle to the sociopolitical efforts to check the falling population. The number of traffic accidents in which children were involved was also striking. Children had always been injured in traffic. The 1930s - as far as it is possible to judge from uneven statistical material - represented the culmination of a development that went back to the mid-1870s. Since then the figures for children's accidents in Copenhagen alone had increased four fold - a development that closely paralleled

the entry of the car into the urban scene. Unlike today, when children are mainly injured as cyclists or as passengers in cars, in the 1930s they were mostly injured in traffic accidents while they were playing or just happened to be on streets and pavements. In the 1930s the traffic accidents were more conspicuous than today, because far fewer cars were involved in far more accidents involving personal injuries. But the number of children killed and injured was smaller than in the 1990s. In 1935 for example 888 children under 15 were involved in traffic accidents (39 of these were killed) - one per 146 cars. In 1991 the number was 935 children under 14 or one for every 2032 cars (with 45 killed). In the optimistic spirit of the age it had to be possible to plan one's way out of these problems: traffic instruction in the schools was one way - another was playgrounds (7).

2. Functionalism and childhood

The 1930s was a time of economic crisis, yet a lot of money was spent building for children. And it was hardly a coincidence that it was the cultural-radical architects who were particularly preoccupied with the space of childhood. In the hope that the growing generations could build up defences against the swing to the right and Nazism, the architect Kai Gottlob designed two schools for Copenhagen City Council with the mottos "*Count the light hours only*" (the Katrinedal School in Vanløse from 1934) and "*You should always know the way the wind blows*" (the School by the Sound on the island of Amager from 1937-38). These were "aula" schools, inspired by German functionalism, situated in large, green park-like areas that could be used for teaching, botanizing, play and ball games, where consideration for children's health during the schoolwork was given pride of place. The light poured in through the large south-facing window sections, and there was no skimping on the number of water taps. For the School by the Sound a special fresh-air school was built for

Copenhagen children with poor health. When the weather permitted, the classroom walls could be pushed aside, and you could literally have teaching with open doors. But the design of the school was also determined by "culture centre" thinking. In the new suburbs of the town the school was to function as the rallying-point for children, young and old, and for that purpose an aula was necessary (8). The day-care area too attracted the interest of the architects. The formal inventiveness was far less here: quiet, regularity and cleanliness dominated the planning, but scope was provided for play indoors and outdoors, as in the architect Poul Henningsen's day-care institution at Dehn's Laundry in Gladsaxe (1938) or the architect Edvard Thomsen's day nursery at Utterslev from 1940. The institutional buildings looked like the apartment or rowhouse buildings of the day, in view of the wish to make the institution like a second home for the children (9). The housing construction took form in large rowhouse projects like Emdrupvænge or the large blocks in Amager and Bispebjerg. The homes were full of light, and functional with small kitchens, short corridors and room for children's games in the children's room or in the nearby playgrounds.

3. What kind of nature is good for children?

It was within this architectural climate that C.T. Sørensen's and Hans Dragehjelm's Family and Children's Park belonged. Their models came from Germany, England and the USA (10), but for several years both had been concerned with the playground issue. Dragehjelm introduced the sand-box in Denmark in 1907 and was later the man behind four ministerial circulars (1918, 1923, 1925 and 1935) on playground furnishing (11). Since 1925 Sørensen had arranged 5-6 environments for public housing associations. He described his experience of this in 1935, for example, in an article on apartment block gardens in the journal *Arkitektens Månedshæfte*. Sørensen thought that natural play - and thus the best play - worked

best in natural and rural surroundings. In the city a large sand-box - at least 50 cubic metres - stood for the beach; a paddling pool for the sea; a continuous grassy area encircled by bushes and winding paths represented the meadows, the open fields and the quiet forest glade. The children should preferably also have the opportunity to keep animals. The farm landscape was to stimulate the children's imagination and their potential for self-expression. In the countryside children had all the room they could dream of; in the city the planners had to make an effort to create large continuous areas between the houses. Roses, nice flower beds and front gardens were a waste of space. They grew at the expense of exuberance and creativity. In that case, dandelions and hogweed would be better.

Sørensen was not an opponent of playground equipment, but he wanted it limited to the things the children liked best - that is, see-saws, swings, sand-boxes and "special asphalted places for drawing squares and spirals for the children's games and hopscotch; one could also imagine special walls with black plastering where the children could have a legitimate outlet for their urge to write and draw" (12). Instead of play equipment he wanted to give the children tools and building materials, and this led him to the "junk" or adventure playground. The idea appeared for the first time in the book *Parker og Parkpolitik* (Parks and Park Policy) from 1931, but was stated more specifically in the above-mentioned article, where he wrote:

"Finally we should probably at some point experiment with what one could call a junk playground. I am thinking in terms of an area, not too small in size, well close off from its surroundings by thick greenery, where we should gather, for the amusement of bigger children, all sorts of old scrap that the children from the apartment blocks could be allowed to work with, as the children in the countryside and in the suburbs already have. There could be branches and waste from tree polling and bushes, old cardboard boxes, planks and boards, "dead" cars, old tyres and lots of other things,

which would be a joy for healthy boys to use for something.

Of course it would look terrible, and of course some kind of order would have to be maintained; but I believe that things would not need to go radically wrong with that sort of situation.

If there were really a lot of space, one is tempted to imagine tiny little kindergartens, keeping hens and the like, but it would at all events require an interested adult supervisor..." (13).

But not everyone was equally enthusiastic about Sørensen's ideas. The parents complained that the children got dirty in the sand-box and wet in the paddling pool; other residents would rather have roses than children, see-saws and swings. Only one of the 5-6 paddling pools that C.T. Sørensen had helped to plan since 1925 had survived the criticism. All the others had been turned into enclosed flower beds. All the same Sørensen thought that "paddling pools should be pushed through in spite of the protests of a few childless curmudgeons; there is no point in denying the children the great pleasure of playing with water" (14). In Sørensen's world garden and playground were all one - like the manse or manor garden. If each block had its own gardener, he later wrote - as the manor had in the old days - many of the practical problems of cleaning, maintenance and care of the grounds would disappear, and there would also be the potential for communal greenhouses and the keeping of domestic animals (15).

C. T. Sørensen's and Hans Dragehjelm's proposal was not only a sign of the times; it also had old roots. Closest was the holiday organization Gabriel Jensens Ferieudflugter, which started in 1901 as a social-educational initiative for the schoolchildren of Vesterbro in Copenhagen. The holiday trips lasted one or two days, and the distance and the availability of public transport were crucial. Klampenborg and Charlottenlund, along with the lake area Damhussøen, Skodsborg and Jægerspris, all just outside Copenhagen, were the favourite excursion destinations for the first few years. Other similar examples were the summer camps for "*delicate children*" which also belong to the turn of the century, and holidays for Copenhagen schoolchildren, which started after the cholera epidemic in

1852. The aim of the older initiatives was a mixture of physical toughening and a wish to let children sense and experience nature. There was also an element of criticism of the city and all it represented, and a good deal of National Romanticism. The children were to become familiar with the Danish countryside with the fresh sea breeze on the open beach and the spreading beech trees.

In contrast to these initiatives, where nature was perceived as having sufficient, even unlimited nurturing resources on which human beings could draw, Sørensen and Dragehjelm wanted to shape the landscape so it became child-friendly. Children were to experience nature, it is true, but they were also to be protected against rain, wind and storm, waves and currents. The trees were to be felled, the bushes thinned, the lawns were to be laid out to allow for wear, nature was literally to be a space for children running and playing. But nature was also to be protected from the children, the animals were to be fenced in and a supervisor was to be hired.

However, nature in itself was not enough; there had to be play equipment - but preferably formed from nature's own materials and appealing to the child's creativity like the sand-box and the climbing-tree. While Sørensen and Dragehjelm may have thought that they knew best in many issues related to playground furnishing, they were prepared to concede to the children's pleasure in swings, see-saws, slides and roundabouts.

Earlier times had seen the children as the problem; they were unhealthy in mind and body, and this was manifested in an urge to destroy and a lack of respect for nature and everything to do with it. Sørensen and Dragehjelm turned the issue of children and nature on its head and made nature the problem: it was not child-friendly enough. Behind this reversal was partly a different view of the nature of the child, partly a break with the idea that children were children.

4. What kind of play is good for children?

One of the central figures in the discussion of the child in the 1930s and 1940s was the psychologist Anne Marie Nørvig (1893-1959). In a number of popular science books and as editor of a parents' correspondence column in the magazine *Børn, Alle Forældres Blad* (Children, the magazine for all parents), which appeared between 1937 and 1952, she disseminated the latest insights of the period into the nature of the child. Her attitudes were formed by American and Continental developmental psychology in which researchers like Arnold Gesell and Charlotte Bühler played prominent roles. The developmental psychologists gained their knowledge from observations of ordinary children, and they were particularly interested in the smaller children and their games. The urge to play was instinctive, and play was the child's lifestyle, the dynamo behind all human development. In play the intellect of the child matured, the child learned to learn, to work and to function socially. Normality was rooted in play, or in Anne Marie Nørvig's words from the book *Det sunde Barn* (The Healthy Child), published in 1940:

"But play is not only a preparation for the work of the adult, it is also an absolute condition of the child's continuing to be mentally and physically healthy. A child who does not play as soon as it is possible to play is either ill or badly nurtured, and in both cases we have to find the causes preventing the child from playing and remove them, whether they are harmful to physical or mental health". (p. 66)

This in the view of developmental psychology play on the one hand had a value in itself, and on the other a value related to the norms and values of the adult world. In the educational debate it was particularly those aspects of children's play that furthered intellectual or work skills that were interesting - this is above all clear in Piaget's work. For the same reason educational expertise recommended constructive toys, sandboxes and junk/adventure playgrounds. That these were

mainly activities that had the adult male engineer as their model was something no one bothered to think about.

Inasmuch as normality was rooted in play, it had to be a task for society and parents to ensure children the best conditions for playing the games that were in accordance with the nature of children. It was not enough that they required space, time, playmates and the right clothes. One also had to decide which games were most in harmony with the child's nature and promoted the desired normality. Since Darwin it had been a widespread view that human development went through a number of stages echoing those through which the species had moved from the primitive towards an ever-higher stage of development. Children this had a natural urge to be *naturmennesker* ("natural human beings", i.e. primitives or savages) as Dragehjelm wrote in his application to the Ministry of Agriculture; so they love to build dens, climb, fight, throw things and hunt. These were views that the leading educationalists and psychologists of the day such as John Dewey, Stanley Hall and Arnold Gesell all supported.

The theories about the children's urge to be like the ancestors of humanity took material form in the adventure playground in Emdrup, which was inaugurated in August 1943 as part of a housing project with 719 large-family households. At first up to 900 children a day came to the playground; later the figure stabilized between 200 and 400 depending on the season. A shortage of construction material in the war years made dugout dens popular. But this was in reality quite in accordance with the nature of the children, for "the adventure playground is an attempt to give the city child a substitute for the play and development potential it has lost as the city has become a place where there is no space for the child's imagination and play. Access to all building sites is forbidden to unauthorized persons, there are no trees where the children can climb and play Tarzan. The railway station grounds and the common, where they used to be able to fight great battles and have strange adventures, does not exist any more. No! It is now not easy to be a child in the city when you feel the urge

to be a caveman or a bushman", as the first supervisor of the playground John Bertelsen wrote in an article in the building journal *Bygmesteren* in 1946. The same philosophy was behind other almost contemporary projects like Hulebyen (Cavetown) in Brede from 1956 with the landscape architect Erik Mygind as the initiator, and H.E. Langkilde's "Negro Village" in an old gravel pit in the school park in Gladsaxe (16).

In the developmental psychology of the 1930s the environment played a far more positive role in the understanding of the development of the child than it had done in the early child psychology of the turn of the century, which was preoccupied with heredity and degeneration theories and with the physically and morally harmful influence of the environment on the child. With the environment followed an interest in the interplay between children and parents and between children and their playmates. Time and time again the psychologists repeated that children play best in groups, and are best served by being with other children. Children were born democrats by nature and social-mindedness was best developed in play with other children. "A child without playmates is an unhappy child because it does not experience the pleasure of frolicking around on an equal footing with the playmates from whom it learns to respect the laws of the group," wrote Anne Marie Nørvig in *Det sunde Barn*, quite contrary to the child experts of the turn of the century who had urged parents to keep a watchful eye on the movements of their offspring. But the parents did not have to worry; they were to "trust to the healthy nature of the child and their own nurturing abilities". If the child still chooses a friend the parents do not care for, "then it must be a comfort to them that at least with their nurturing they have helped to provoke the child's urge to learn naughtiness" (69-70).

Since Rousseau turned his back on the city and had Emile brought up in rural surroundings, the debate about the upbringing conditions of city children had been coloured by a nostalgic longing for the childhood in rural society. Rural

children's games were described as more authentic, spontaneous and simple - and thus truly childlike, unlike the artificiality and unhealthiness of urban childhood. The town planners of the 1930s did not have the same distaste for the city - rather the contrary. In their view the modern and the urban were two sides of the same thing. It was thus not a matter of killing off the town, but of making it a qualitatively better place to be for young and old. Instead of yearning for a past that was no more, innovative thinking was necessary. The efforts of the inter-war years to drag nature into children's play in the city continued after the end of World War II, personified in the architect Max Siegmundfeldt's work for the Copenhagen City Council. Even more firmly than Sørensen and Dragehjelm he asserted in 1945 that play in the city is something other than play in the country, because city children are different from children in the countryside.

"The street has a great allure for the children - it is where things happen - and it is a difficult matter for a playground to compete with the street, which for many of the children of the city has become their playground tradition. The countryside and the rural environment that we who come from the countryside think the children miss so much is for most of them something quite unreal. They regard a building site as the great outdoors, and the work on the building site as something far more real and significant than the farmer's work on the land. The children's play reflects the work of the adults and the society of the adults - children play at the life they know and see around them - and we will not get city children to accept the games of country children and play with stick-cows and stick-horses" (17).

Others in the period claimed that city children particularly needed calm and peace, places where they could relax

"with a book under a shady tree while others again just need to close their eyes and listen to the buzzing of the insects and the noise of a faraway tram...they must take a rest from the many impressions, from stressful schoolwork, a tiring city square or a noisy little brother. Like adults, they have a need to be alone

now and then, to get away from making decisions, to be free of others and to simply go off and wander about by themselves,"

as the supervisor of the Playground in the Copenhagen park Fælledparken, Thea Bank Jensen wrote in an article in *Arkitekten* in 1952 (18).

The ordinary playground in the Copenhagen of the thirties was an angular, asphalted or gravelled area on which a sand-box had been set up, as well as a see-saw and a couple of swings, a water tap and benches on which the mothers could sit (19). The playgrounds had long since been given this form so the children would have space for ordered games like ball games and singing games, and so that the city's patrolling policemen could keep an eye on what was going on. In the playgrounds of the future things were to look quite different; the garden was to be the model, not the gym; the placing of the trees and bushes was to ensure that there would be room for group games and for the individual child to be left in peace. The turn of the century's concern with children's destructive urges and its fear of what children might get up to when the adults were not there had been replaced by the belief in children's intuitive exploratory and creative nature (20). "The destructive urge ... could ... just as well be called constructive play", as Anne Marie Nørvig put it in *Det sunde Barn*.

These thoughts were made more specific in a planning competition for the playground of the future held by A-5, a periodical for young architects. A general tendency in the proposals received was the wish to concentrate the institutions of childhood from crèche to adventure playground around a green park-like area that could also be used in the family's leisure time.

During the war the expansion of a number of playgrounds began, with a tendency towards the play park principle. The playing and leisure lawns supplemented the familiar sand-boxes, paddling pools, roller skating rinks and play equipment in the parks Fælledparken, Enghaveparken, Nørrebroparken and Sundbyvesterparken, and in 1939 women playground

supervisors who were trained kindergarten teachers were engaged for them. Their work consisted of lending out play equipment and initiating games, and they were to make sure that the children did not bother one another and were not bothered by adults. The idea of having supervisors (they were called "play aunts" and "play uncles") had already been practiced at the playgrounds of the Copenhagen Playground Association around the turn of the century. Their reappearance on the urban scene now was due to the fact that the playgrounds were planned in accordance with both supervision and welfare considerations. This was also how Dragehjem and Sørensen saw their Cottage Park, where they wanted "a fairly limited area where parents who perhaps wanted to take a longer or more strenuous walk could leave the children under the supervision of a play aunt or a play uncle..." The reports from the play aunts just after the war showed that in those years 261,000 children came in the summer, and 138,000 in the winter to the city's 108 playgrounds. Nature had become an institution, part of preventive child welfare (21).

"Park" and "parking" have the same etymological roots, and the emergence of the new children and family parks was also meant to provide a place where the parents could park their children. In the Cottage Park, according to the plan, there was to be "a fairly limited area where parents who perhaps wanted to take a longer or more strenuous walk could leave the children under the supervision of a play aunt or a play uncle..." (22), and this parking principle gradually became more and more marked. The children's free time in the city had become a problem with the cessation of child labour - for the youngest children - and with the mothers increasingly getting jobs; but also because the functionalist "comradeship marriage" ideal of the period thought it was important that the women had time to themselves, to engage in sport and to read, and to be with their husbands (23).

Nature as argument

The playground planners of the thirties and forties were clearly aware that city children were different from country children and always would be. Another characteristic of their efforts was that they distinguished between the play of small and bigger children. The difference between boys and girls concerned them less; they planned for boys and now and then spared a thought for the girls, when it came to playhouses and flowers and hopscotch. They kept their faith that the child of nature benefited most from being in natural surroundings, but this "nature" had to be shaped in terms of the children's nature. And they had the belief that nature was not only found in the countryside; that it could be found (again) in the city. To that end they revived forms of play that children had known since time immemorial: games in the gravel and the gutter, in the open spaces of the city, the streams and canals; forms of play that urban development and civic order had criminalized, but which now re-emerged in more civilized - and more natural? - forms.

The playground visionaries of the 1930s and 1940s thought they had a monopoly of the natural and the healthy, and were not to be daunted by other views, whether they came from the doctors or the parents. The parents were ignorant, for example, when they complained that the children came home dirty from the adventure playground, where they were in general allowed to make a "shameful mess and muddle". They did not grasp the connection between the child's playful nature, health and - not least - normality.

Thus talk about the nature of the child can be used as an argument for wanting the best for the child and for not being able to see that others also want the same.

Notes

1. Arkitektens Månedshæfte, July 1932; C.T. Sørensen: „Hvidøvre og Klampenborg“ in *Havekunst*, 1931.
2. L. Gotfredsen: „Klampenborg Vandkur-, Brønd- og Badeanstalt. Et Hundredaarsminde“ in *Meddelelser fra Historisk Topografisk Selskab for Gjentofte Kommune 1939-45*, p. 337-367.
3. Mentioned in *Lyngby Tidende*, 11.11.1937, *Københavns Amts Avis* 30.11.1937, 3.8.1939 and 31.10.1939.
4. The Cottage Park is mentioned by Malene Hauxner: *Fantasiens have*, Copenhagen 1993, 179-181, and in the *KAB's Bebyggelsesplaner*, København 1945, 40-41. The case documents are in Ministry of Agriculture, Skdj, 6029, 1937 (National Danish Archives). The debate of the 1930s and 1940s is briefly mentioned in Malene Hauxner: *Børns leg in Landskab*, 2, 1986, p. 25-30
5. Printed minutes of the Copenhagen City Council, various years.
6. Alva Myrdal: *Bybørn*, København 1936, p. 45
7. "Safety instruction campaigns for Danish children 1920-1950. A study of urban childhood" Workingpaper no. 54, Humanities Research Center, Odense, 1995
8. Ning de Coninck-Smith : „Skolen ved Sundet - 50 år“ in *Arkitekten* 2/3 1989 p. 25-31
9. The day nursery in Utterslev is shown in pictures in Jens Sigsgaard: „Børnehaven“ in Einar Torsting: *Opdragelse og Undervisning*, Copenhagen 1948, p. 29-43
10. C.T. Sørensen: *Parkpolitik i Sogn og Købstad*, 1931
11. Ning de Coninck-Smith: *Da det nævenyttige barn blev nævenyttigt*, Arbejdsrapport no. 3, Humanistisk forskningscenter, Odense 1992
12. C.Th. Sørensen: „Etagehusets Have“ in *Arkitektens Månedshæfte*, 1935, p. 61
13. *ibid.*
14. C.Th. Sørensen: „Legepladsen ved Etagehuse“ in *Nordisk Byggedag IV*, 1946, 90 and *Etagehusets have* p. 58-59
15. „Den store Have“. *Arkitektens Månedshæfte*, 1952, p. 49
16. Clippings (27.2.1959-18.5.1960) in the archives of Dansk Legepladsselskab (The Danish Play Association)
17. Max Siegumfeldt in *Havekunst*, 1945, p. 39
18. pp. 28-29. See also Max Siegumfeldt: „Et Legepladsprogram i Fritidsproblemer for børn“, of *forint of Pædagogisk-Psykologisk Tidsskrift*, Vol. VI, Fsc. 6, 1946 pp. 198-99
19. Unfiled list of Copenhagen City Council's public play and sports grounds with plan, Copenhagen 1932 (Stadsarkivet), where one can read for example that the council had 67 playgrounds, 34 of these with a sand-box, two paddling beaches and one paddling pool
20. Erik Mygind: „Legepladser - men på en anden måde“, in *Byplan* 1950, p. 149-151

21. Stadsingeniørens Direktorat. København Beretning og Regnskab 1943/44-1949/50
22. Hans Dragehjelm's comments in Landbrugsministeriet, skdj. 6029, 1937
23. Myrdal, pp. 31 and 99 and C.Th. Sørensen: *Etagehusets have*, p. 62.

Working Papers

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