Embodying the City: playfulness, children’s bodies and urban spaces

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If it is indeed so that in order to play, children don’t need equipment but opportunity, we decided to look into the opportunities (and constraints) of experiencing playfulness in urban spaces that children explore on a daily basis and into possible means of enhancing (or limiting) them, as well as into children’s embodied agency in the urban context. To this end we bring together the ideas of playable cities, children’s geographies, play and playfulness as means of situationist redefinition of urban spaces, and embodied knowledge of children’s self-awareness in order to explore how children perceive, express and reflect on their embodiment through playful movement in the cityscape. The micro-sociological approach allows to address a widespread dismissal of the body as an important source of social knowledge and to highlight the role of the embodied, engaged and sensory in children’s relationships with the urban spaces. Our analysis is twofold – on one hand we explore affordances of urban spaces, architecture and design that promote or constraint children’s embodied playfulness, and on the other we follow ways in which children actually utilise them to embody their experiences of the city as their life space.

We base our reflections on results of storywalks, artistic urban interventions and psychogeography experiments with groups of primary school children from Poznan, Poland, and London, UK.

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