

O P E N L O N D O N
HOW CAN **PLAYGROUNDS**
i n t e g r a t e
CHILDREN
IN LONDON?

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GLOSSARY

Business Improvement Districts (BIDs): defined area within which businesses are required to pay an additional tax (or levy) in order to fund projects within the district's boundaries. The BID is often funded primarily through the levy but can also draw on other public and private funding streams.

'Laissez-faire': Abstention by governments from interfering in the workings of the free market.

Privately Owned Public Space (POPS): public space that, although privately owned, is legally required to be open to the public under a city's zoning ordinance or other land-use law.

Pedagogy: discipline that deals with the theory and practice of teaching.

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this dissertation is to look for solutions for the design of playing areas. The purpose is to put children in an active role in the city because they are one of the main sectors excluded in these spaces. The game in the public space will be used as a tool of learning and community education, which is essential to preserve the democratic values of a society.

INTRODUCTION

The liberal tradition in England makes London a city that understands the management of the public from the private benefit. It is the collectives and the communities composed of independent individuals that administer the social space. The neoliberal system presupposes a situation of equality of conditions in all the individuals that constitute the community (Eagle, et al., 2017). However, this situation of equality tends to be idealistic since, depending on its context, each individual starts from different social conditions.

The government, for its part, tends to intervene as little as possible in the economy known as 'laissez-faire' that in French literally means 'allow to do' (Eagle, et al., 2017). That is why a gradual privatization of public space takes place. Space management is delegated to private corporations that engage to develop these areas in exchange to have them in property. This management is understood from the own benefit of the entity, which incurs the failure of understanding the citizen as a potential client (Shenker, 2017). However, not all sectors of the population can participate in this economic exchange, which causes marginalization of certain sectors of society (Shenker, 2017; Köksal, 2012) like homeless or children (Monbiot, 2015).

This lack of consideration in the urban model of privatization motivates the search for mechanisms of social inclusion. First, there will be a theoretical analysis that reveals the need for children to play as a way of learning (Stauch-Nelson, 2012). This will be an incentive that comes before the intention to create playgrounds, the evolution of the playground throughout history will be reviewed to know how playgrounds arrive to London, as we know them today. In addition, throughout this contextualization, specific examples of relevant architects and designers will be analysed in detail, as they are a reference for the basic concepts that we now understand as unquestionable.

In the second part, the contributions for playgrounds design nowadays will be explained and how concepts that were proposed in a very different context are reformulated into the present. Moreover, the role of the designer on children's playground will be questioned. Does the designer alter the game of the child? Or the child does not stop deciding on the game? Is it positive that the designer takes part?

Finally, and based on the previous analysis of London and the evolution of playgrounds in the city, potential areas in London will be proposed to try solving the situation of exclusion suffered by children in the city. On the other hand, fundamental ideas raised by the playgrounds that have had an impact on the conception of the same will be collected. The intention is to introduce a study that precedes an urban playground design in London. The ideas that will be exposed for that design are first, that the urban design devices invite children to develop activities, understanding them as one of the main sectors excluded in this type of space.

LONDON PUBLIC SPACE

The urban fabric of London has been generated throughout history in a gradual and sometimes orderly manner. The city suffered various reparcelling, caused by the various fires that ravaged the city at different times in history, as the great fire of 1666. In its genesis, the shape of the city arises from a juxtaposition of plots and homogeneous building (Rogers, 2017), residential areas that start from the type single-family housing and commercial areas in which small merchant reside are concentrated (Hudson, 2014). In the United Kingdom, from its condition of parliamentary monarchy, the crown has a symbolic role and its reflection in the form of the city does not have the forcefulness of other European capitals where power was executed from an absolute model (Rogers, 2017) (Rue Rivoli, Paris, by Napoléon III).



FIGURE 1 | Regent Street London, UK, John Nash and others, 1811-27

alignment is due to the refusal of one of the owners of one of the plots before the expropriation of the same to extend the axis of the street straight, which would have been normal (e-architect, 2012). This example illustrates how the power of private property in London is capable of diverting even the designs of the crown itself.

Currently, the neoliberal economic model, whose origin lies in the free-thinking tradition of the Anglo-Saxon world, is causing the gradual privatization of public space in London. This privatization arises from the ambiguity that today presents the concept of public space. Public are no longer those spaces whose property belongs to the state, but those spaces in which an activity of community interest is developed, which concerns a broad sector of the population (Köksal, 2012). In this sense spaces that in the past belonged to the sphere of the private, happen to have public status through dissemination mechanisms such as social networks (domestic spaces, work ...) (De magalhaes & Freire Trigo, 2016). Faced with this ambiguity, originated as the commercialization of public space, a local policy with increasingly tight budgets delegating the management of public space to private entities that commit to urbanize and manage that space in exchange for ownership (Shenker, 2017). This form of subcontracting is known as BID

As an urban intervention developed by the crown in 1811, we can mention the opening of Regent's Street by the regent George IV, who wanted to connect the Regent's palace with Regent's Park (Figure 1). The project was developed by the architect John Nash and, although it had a representative intention, it also established a division mechanism between the neighbourhoods of Soho and Mayfair. As an anecdote of its design can be cited the construction of the Church of All Souls, which through its circular floor establishes a mechanism of articulation of the different alignments of the street. This change of

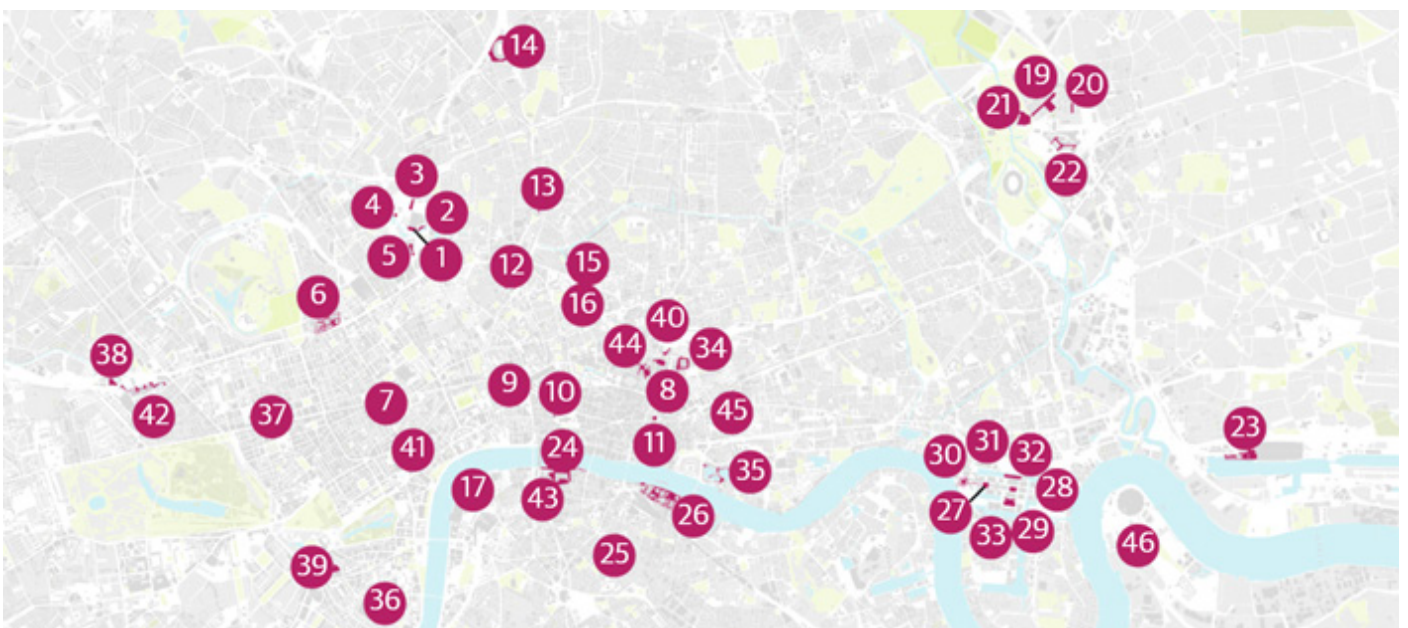


FIGURE 2 | London's privately owned public space, mapped. *The Guardian*.

(Business Improvement District) (BritishBIDs, n.d.) and POPS (privately owned public space) (Figure 2) (Shenker, 2017; Grail & Dawkins, 2008). These are defined as places that help increase economic activity thanks to security assistance in the neighbourhoods in which it is practiced (De magalhaes & Freire Trigo, 2016; Grail & Dawkins, 2008; BritishBIDs, n.d.). The regulation of these spaces is defined by the same private entities that manage the area, imposing the most advantageous conditions for their own benefit. These can be of different conditions: from collectives of residents or merchants who are associated in the community to multinationals whose benefit is conditioned by speculative variables (BritishBIDs, n.d.; Shenker, 2017). This type of management model is increasingly common in the United Kingdom and especially in London (De magalhaes & Freire Trigo, 2016; Shenker, 2017).

Let private entities be managers of public places incurs that they can choose who is part of the activity that is taking place in such places. That is why certain sectors of society are not welcome to participate because the interest of the entity is their own benefit (Shenker, 2017). That is when the child is excluded from relegating him to the city parks where is isolated from the rest (Monbiot, 2015). It is true that, as will be discussed in the next chapter, in green areas children are able to explore and be in contact with nature (Stauch-Nelson, 2012). However, it is necessary to include them in the real activity of the city to be an agent of change in it, which will be discussed in the third chapter

PLAY PEDAGOGY

For years, and because of the current socio-economic context, in education creativity has been left aside as a personal expression as a way of learning to give more importance to other factors such as competitiveness in order to reach certain standards understood by all as important for the development of the person (Best, 2016). However, new research has been done that defend the learning through art and in which the efforts in the singularity of the child are focused (Stauch-Nelson, 2012).

We could not imagine that 200 years ago we had to explain principles in the education of the child that we have completely assumed in our society (Kinard, 2015). In addition, many of the educational theories have not been supported by science until 30 years ago. Science obtained the evidence to support numerous principles posed by Froebel, the creator of kindergarten in Germany (Stauch-Nelson, 2012).

Froebel was trained in different fields of study throughout his life. However, he was focused on developing a philosophy of teaching in which he focused in particular on the early education of children (Stauch-Nelson, 2012). Its principles are based on the law of unity in nature, understanding the man connected with it and being part of it (Best, 2016). Richard Louv argues that citizens reject the contact with nature and is alienated more and more from it, despite the fact that children have a special fascination with nature (Kinard, 2015; Islington Play Association, n.d.). In addition, it consider the law of opposites, complemented by the previous one and understanding that the learning of something begins by understanding its opposite, thus creating a clear connection between both (Stauch-Nelson, 2012).

On the other hand, Froebel understood the purpose of education as the personal and individual representation of the essence that carries within (Kozlovsky, 2007). Thus developing an awareness with nature and humanity. This is translated into the understanding of personal and individual development in the game that takes place in the parks and in which the child works on reflection and observation (Stauch-Nelson, 2012). Its development is a constant meditation between its introspection and the external world. These dimensions of the child will be applied by architects like Aldo Van Eyck in his post-war parks and will be explained later (Kozlovsky, 2007; Withagen & Caljouw, 2017).

For this reason, the writings of Rousseau, prior to Froebel and on which he based a large part of his philosophy, introduced the Romantic idea in which the child was understood as unique, creative and capable of expressing himself in all senses (Stoll Lillard, 2005; Kinard, 2015). Like Pestalozzi and Rousseau before him, Froebel stressed the importance of experience as a learning method (Stauch-Nelson, 2012).

A great tangible contribution of Froebel was the gifts and occupations in which the child interacts with objects through touch and sight, assessing factors such as colour, shape, weight or size (Provenzo, 2009). With this they can come to understand abstract relationships and concepts such as space, force and quantity (Figures 3 and 4).

It is important to know how to translate the theories that have been previously raised into practices for learning and play. Froebel raises a series of points that are applied in classrooms to exer-



FIGURE 3

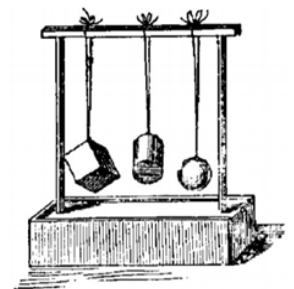
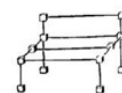


FIGURE 4

"Characteristics of Froebels' Method". Gifts illustrated.

cise art as teaching. First, he understands that the child's natural instinct should be used as an educational tool, that is, to carry out activities that appeal to him and that seem fun without forcing him to do them (Stauch-Nelson, 2012). Second, by accumulating experiences in which they interact with the world, they will establish the foundations of body and mind development (Kinard, 2015). That is why, activities such as painting, drawing, acting, telling stories or the simple fact of running will be important parts of an effective methodology (Provenzo, 2009; Stauch-Nelson, 2012). Third, people are creative beings so it is very interesting to move the practice from the beginning of learning and introduce objects and materials in the play areas in a creative way. Children, like adults, are social beings and it is an essential part that they work in harmony together. In the case of parks, these places are understood as small citizens who learn to live in society (Withagen & Caljouw, 2017). Working on the other hand, their individuality. Finally, art is understood as an instrument that helps clarify the mind, perceive beauty and understand the world around us, thus having a true vision of things. Exercises such as observation can benefit both practically and aesthetically. Many of these pedagogical bases that preceded and gave rise to the park concept also influenced the post-war parks that were proposed as an emergency solution (Kozlovsky, 2007).

PLAYGROUND EVOLUTION

In the middle of the 19th century that new ideas appeared that understood the growth of the child with greater complexity, valuing the path that was taken until maturity (Kinard, 2015). It is in that moment when writings of Rousseau appear, among others, introduces the Romantic ideas that understand that the child grows in an open and natural environment (Provenzo, 2009; Stauch-Nelson, 2012). In addition, from this same idea where the gardens start as the beginning of the playground conception. The game happened in parks and open spaces where the child could be in contact with nature and explore (Kinard, 2015; Stauch-Nelson, 2012). In Germany there was a special interest on physical activities, that is why the “outdoor gymnasias” playgrounds appear. Moreover, today’s playscapes like seesaws, slides or swing sets are influenced from this idea (Kinard, 2015).

On the other hand, in the post-war period, after the Second World War, the adventure playground appeared as the park of the future (Kozlovsky, 2007) and tried to restore the freedom of play that had been lost throughout history. This kind of park, according to its promoters, had several purposes. The first rejected the previous concept of pre-fabricated park in which the same games are repeated like the swing or the slide among others (Kozlovsky, 2007). His intention is to leave open the possibility of play and leave it open to the imagination of each child (Withagen & Caljouw, 2017; Kinard, 2015; Tuset Davó, 2011). During the post-war rights were legitimized in the game that today we do not conceive in children; destruction, play with garbage and waste and playing in bombed areas. In fact, the Danish architect Carl Theodor Sorensen, promoter of the adventure playground, observed how the children played in rubbish sheds to project places where this type of activity was allowed, what he would call “Junk playgrounds” (Staempfli, 2009) (Figure 5). The architect understood the playgrounds through the functionalism and took abstracted and symbolic forms of the Danes rural landscape rejecting the construction of the place from artistic aesthetics since the child is the one who had to contribute the imaginative part, and not the architect or the artist (Kozlovsky, 2007). Sorensen said that “of all the things I have helped to realize, the junk playground is the ugliest; yet for me it is the best and most beautiful of my Works” which describes as “Junkology” (Kozlowsky, 2006). Moreover, according to Kozlovsky (2007 and 2006) “The junk playground aims to provide an environment where the players can take risks, experiment with fire, build, fail and destroy, as a way of knowing the world empirically, through doing”, which is the same idea that the theorists of the pedagogical part of play defend.



FIGURE 5 | Sorensens' Junk Playground in Denmark

The other point of view was through modernism, based on Froebel's ideas, which raises the abstraction of forms. This is the case of the architect Aldo Van Eyck and the artist Isamu Noguchi, who proposed harmonic view on the urban landscape (Tuset, 2011).

First, Aldo Van Eyck designed more than 700 parks in the postwar context in Amsterdam (Tuset Davó, 2011) (Withagen & Caljouw, 2017). With this he opposed the CIAM (Congrès Internationaux of Modern Architecture), which planned a massive reconstruction of the city leaving aside the small scale the behaviour of people and thus leaving forgotten spaces in the city where there was an opportunity to create spaces of socialization and consider play areas away from neighborhoods (Withagen & Caljouw, 2017). Van Eyck proposed to use these spaces to build a city with human architecture. In the book *The Child, the City and the Artist* the author wrote, “If they (the cities) are not meant for children they are not meant for citizens either”. His intention was to design spaces on the existing city, in those empty spaces to transform them into places of socialization. On the one hand, he never conceived fences in his parks, as it was previously done (Kozlovsky, 2007). This way of creating open spaces would make children become active agents within the city, instead of being cut off from the activity that took place in it. The figures 6 shows a direct relationship between the city and the game in which children had to learn to relate to others and have the responsibility to help each other to avoid the dangers of the city (Kozlovsky, 2007). In addition, the benches that he introduced around the playground fulfilled two functions. First, benches allowed parents or caregivers to watch the children while playing. And second, a sense of community was created as something sought by the author (Withagen & Caljouw, 2017). This is one of the keys that will be tried to move in section three to combat the marginalization that is given to children in the present in London.



FIGURE 6 | Aldo van Eyck's playground at the Buskenblaserstraat in Amsterdam.

Two great ideas can be found in Aldo Van Eyck's playgrounds. The first is the introduction of the concept of 'open function' as a premise to stimulate children's creativity (Kinard, 2015). Van Eyck based on the theories of the American psychologist James Gibson who understood that animals, including people, change their behaviour according to their environment, which coined the term affordances to those possibilities of behaviour that the animal performs according to the object or situation that arises (Withagen & Caljouw, 2017). For example, a cup allows a clear possibility of affordance, of action, for grasping. Being more specific, Gaver divided the term into three categories; the perceptible, the false and the hidden. The example of the cup would be a perceptible affordance, an obvious one. The false affordance understands that the actor perceives a non-existent possibility of action, such as the placebo effect. Finally, a hidden affordance implies that there are possibilities of action that the actor is not able to perceive, for example, because of the pre-conceived idea that he may have of an object (Gaver, 1996).

It is in this last conception where the elements of the parks of Aldo Van Eyck are based on. Swings like the slide produces the movement itself. In contrast, his abstracted and geometric shapes leave the possibilities open to the imagination. Some caregivers would correct a child's behavior that reverses the use of a swing, as it could be climbing the slide ramp (Withagen & Caljouw, 2017). This use, that the companion perceives as obvious, is not that clear from the vision of a child and, trying to teach the child what is right or wrong, when there really is not a good answer, can incur on a dependence when making decisions. Instead, the indeterminate use of Van Eyck's games provides a freedom for the critical development of the child by learning through experience. In his swings, he used metal structures and concrete blocks with abstracted shapes, the triangle, square circle (Kozlovsky, 2007). On the other hand, and continuing with the arrangement of elements in a geometric way, it gives rise to different spaces of play in the same park (Tuset Davó, 2011), thus creating a harmonious composition appreciable from on the floor plan (Figure Y). As seen in the plan, as well as in a large part of his designs, he adopted the sandbox as an important element of the game. The sandbox was born in the nineteenth century and Van Eyck incorporated them because of

its fascination (Withagen & Caljouw, 2017). He praised the positive characteristic of the sand, as of snow has, because it can be molded. However, sand has an advantage in relation to snow, that it can be moved to any part of the world (Kinard, 2015). The game with the sand opens a world of possibilities in the game that the architect, Aldo Van Eyck, simply incorporated without trying to invent anything new and thus giving raise in the value of his playgrounds.

The second feature of the Aldo Van Eyck's playgrounds was the aesthetics of them through their standardization. Although the composition in each park was different, each of them was different but the elements used were repeated in form and material. His shapes were geometric and made of concrete and metal. The use of these materials helped to integrate the parks in the city because of the similarity of tonalities with the buildings. However, it has been demonstrated that, in spite of being aesthetically attractive and therefore educational, a direct relationship was not found between what children find attractive and what they understand as joyful play (Withagen & Caljouw, 2017).

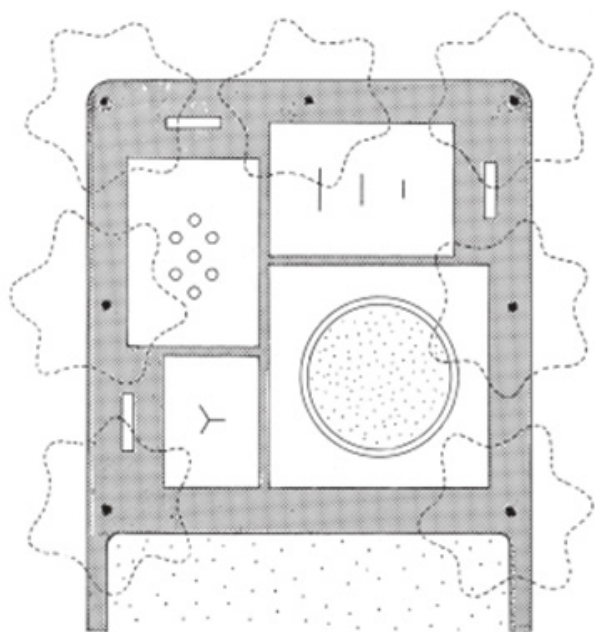


FIGURE 8 | Aldo van Eyck's playground plan.

Understanding this perception in children, Isamu Noguchi developed his parks. As Aldo, Noguchi defended an aesthetic need, but he solved it in a very different way (Kozlovsky, 2007). The Japanese sculptor projects his parks from the modeling of the ground respecting the unexpected movement of the children. Their simple and suggestive forms appear as the child goes through them and discovers them (Tuset Davó, 2011). With this, the floor is a malleable mass for research and discovery of the public through the relationships that are created in the movement of the space (Figure 7).

In the mounds and contours of his sculptural playscapes, a landscape appears that site of the artist's own childhood adventure. The philosophy behind these play forms is that the imaginations of young children are stimulated by interesting shapes and colours' and that they like to endow objects with their own fantasies rather than play on ready-made forms.



FIGURE 7 | Isamu Noguchi's Playgrounds

On the other hand, and returning to the beginnings of the post-war playgrounds, there was a legacy in which the English society of the time adapted the 'Junk Playgrounds' to its post-war context (Kinard, 2015). The 'Junk Playgrounds' appeared as a temporary opportunity for urban reconstruction of the bombed places (Staempfli, 2009). This measure was contrary to the predominant proposal to rebuild London with rational and functionalist principles, dividing the metropolis of organized neighbourhoods around schools and playgrounds. In such reconstruction initiatives, the population, including children, had the integral responsibility of making playgrounds a real fact. For that reason, the playgrounds worked as independent associations of the state composed of different sectors of society (Kozlovsky, 2007). In addition, it was justified that such citizen participation solved social problems. However, the fact that the child plays in bombed areas could create, on the child, an approval of the situation of destruction and put him away from tolerance, thus experiencing a situation of marginalization. This way of playing with junk is understood as a catharsis where the children are seen as a builder over the rests of the war (Kozlovsky, 2007).

Furthermore, the promoter of such playgrounds in England, Lady Allen, understood that it was necessary to change the name of 'Junk Playgrounds' into 'Adventure Playgrounds', due to the negative and degrading connotation of the word Junk (Staempfli, 2009; Kozlovsky, 2006). Several changes were introduced in the reinvention of these parks. In origin, adult supervision was not required, but the Workers' Co-operative Housing Association suggested the performance of a leader who would act from the outside without intervening in the child's purpose (Kinard, 2015; Kozlovsky, 2007) (Figure 8). Non-intervention would benefit, on the one hand, for the child to make his own decisions, knowing he or she is observed (Martinelli, 2016). On the other hand, it would help children to act in society and learn values of responsibility to resolve conflicts (The Land, 2015). These are the values we understand today to develop as good citizens in democratic rights. With this, they are independent and able to defend their convictions. The idea, rather than ending with everything, was to help them get out of the state of destruction (Kozlovsky, 2006). These strategies are reflected in the architecture of several authors. Betrtesen's playgrounds were nomadic while those of Vesteregn were more sedentary, with mechanisms that allowed painting or modeling (Kozlovsky, 2007). Ideas that are clearly influenced by Froebel with his kindergarten.



FIGURE 8 | Adventure playgrounds, London

Moreover, Allen disseminates the idea of returning the rights, lost in war, to children (Kozlovsky, 2007). In her writings, he criticizes the conventional playground for not attracting the attention of children and observes that they are more attracted to the remains of the war for parks (Kinard, 2015). Although Allen was the promoter of the idea in the UK, it was thanks to certain organizations that carried out the first Adventure Playgrounds. Although such parks, in their primitive form, were few physical examples, the idea of Junk Playground had great repercussion since it was intentionally spread in strategic places (Kozlovsky, 2007). That is why there is such a clear influence of these parks today, which will be discussed in the next section.

On the same space of London, architects Peter and Alison Smithson developed social researches during the post-war decades, in which they analyzed how social structures took place in the city and how concepts of association and identity are set up in a community (Smithson & Smithson, 1967). It is specially interesting their study of children at the "slums" in London (Figure 10). As they explain through different schemes and pictures, the play of the children in these areas took place in the streets (Figure 9). The streets of the slums are normally made up by rows of 40 or 50 similar houses, which can sometimes seem monotonous or even boring. However, children in these areas used these spaces as real playgrounds. What the Smithsons tried to show by this research is that children actually develop a sense of identity and community through the play, and that sometimes, abstract spaces, such as the streets in the slums, can encourage the play and stimulate creativity even more than standard parks (Smithson & Smithson, 1967).

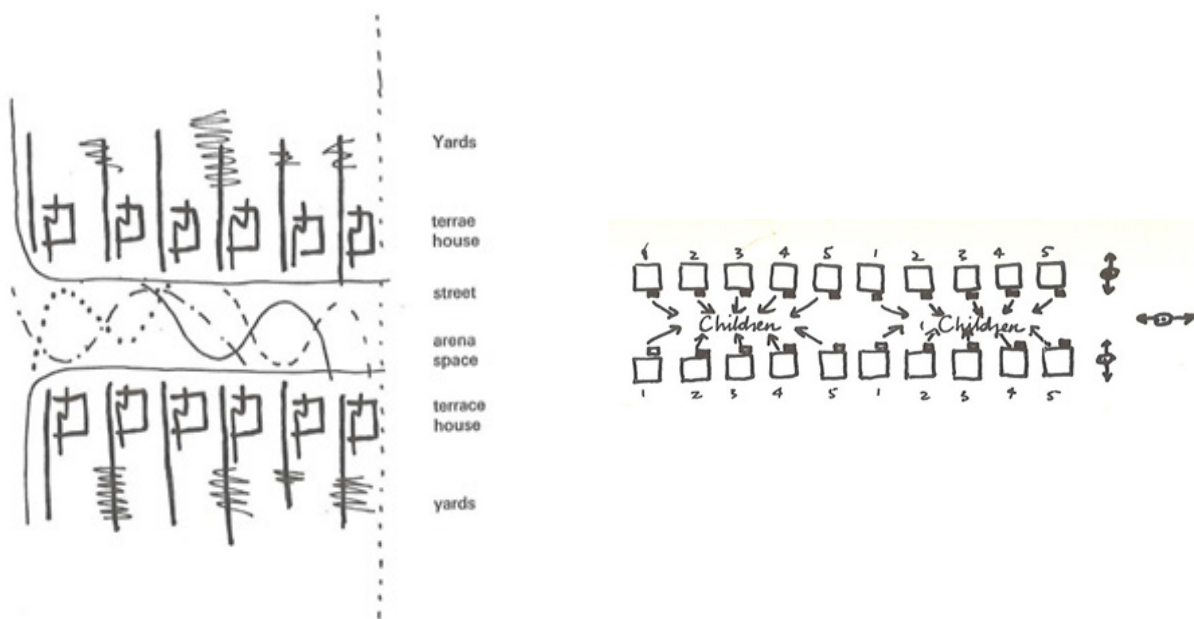


FIGURE 9 | Smithsons' sketches from their urban study of London.



FIGURE 10 | Photography from the Smithson study of play in the slams, London

The Smithsons took this idea of the play as a generator of community and applied it at their different architectural projects of collective dwellings through the concept of the “streets in the sky” (the corridors of the building, which were intended to foster the play and the different activities of the children). A good example of this could be seen at the Robin Hood Gardens’ complex (Smithson & Smithson, 1967). Somehow, this thought of the play as an ethical need drew them to design playgrounds in which they applied different concepts of their architectural thinking (Figure B) (the “new brutalism”). It is common the use of rough materials which were shown “as found”, as they had to propose an actual and pure vision of the material (Winston, 2015). It is often used the concrete, not only for its homogenous appearance, but also for its great plastic possibilities (Figure 11). Other butalist architects, such as Erno Goldfiner (Balfron Tower playground, London) or Jack Lynn (Park Hill, Sheffield), designed playgrounds following the thinking set by the Smithsons.



FIGURE 11 | Churchill Gardens estate, Pimlico, 1956

TODAY'S PLAYGROUNDS

Throughout history the game is understood, on the one hand, as a right because it arises spontaneously in the human being. Therefore, it should be a form of liberation (Martinelli, 2016; Kozlovsky, 2007). However, modern society restricts and censors it for the interest in rationalizing such spaces (Kinard, 2015; Kozlovsky, 2007; Martinelli, 2016; Stauch-Nelson, 2012). In addition, the concentration of the population in the city conceives a learning through the game totally different from the one that would take place in the city. The Figure 12 is a sketch of the Smithsons in which it is understood how the urban fabric of the city forms the landscape (Smithson & Smithson, 1967). This conception understands the importance of including, through design mechanisms, all sectors of society. Consequently, the role of architects, designers, artists or any intervention that affects the urban landscape has a great impact on the interaction of people with the environment.

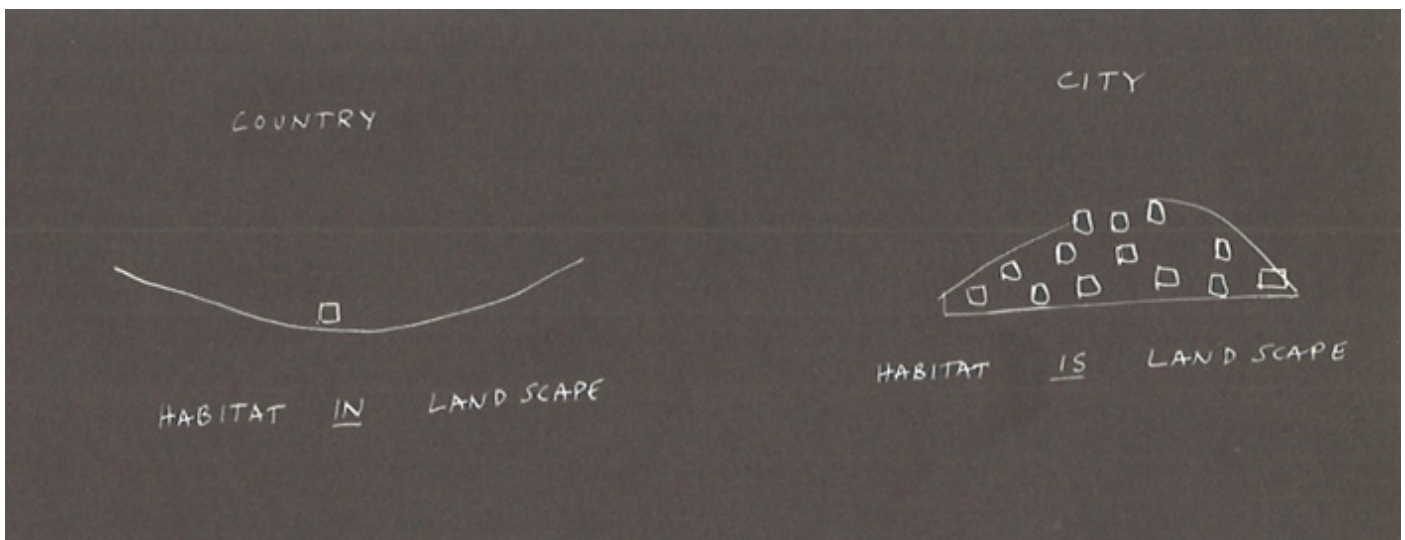


FIGURE 12 | Smithsons' sketches from their urban study of London.

Nowadays, playgrounds are still conceived with the same notions with which the first Victorian parks were made which were built through the exercise of gymnastics outdoors (Harper, 2017). In 1980, the parks industry began to follow standards and restrictions set by the Consumer Products Safety Commission in the United States (Erickson, 2012). These bases were raised to mitigate the danger of children playing in playgrounds. Many playgrounds like these can be found in London and, in fact, it is a very usual way of intervention. The most common characteristics of such standardization are, on the one hand, the use of prefabricated slides, seesaws, swings and grouped structures (Figure). This class of elements, as was already criticized since the post-war period (Kozlovsky, 2007), promotes a repetitive and predictable activity because the action to be executed is clear from the beginning. The object is the one that proposes the action, instead of being the actor the one who proposes the movement (Gaver, 1996). In that case, the possibilities are reduced and the child loses the power to assume responsibilities and develop the imagination. The same happens when elements appear in the parks with existing references of the urban landscape such as boats, cars or houses (Figure). In these cases, the possibilities of play are reduced but also, references are taken from adults without understanding why, as an imitation, which reduces the capacity for creativity.

On the other hand, the use of bright and showy colours is usually justified by the user's profile. However, it becomes a place isolated from the rest, which is not part of the landscape, as Sorensen would defend (Kozlovsky, 2007). This isolation is not only caused because of its out of context when designing the space. The use of fences to delimit the play area restricts the freedom of the child and loses its meaning when it is viewed in an environment such as a park in London, where there is no limit.



FIGURE 13 | Conventional playground, London



FIGURE 14 | Diana Memorial Playground, London

Although conventional parks are a frequent option due to their easy installation, many designers and architects refuse these options and propose new ideas for the future. In December 2014, the first New York event of Adventure PlaygroundNYC took place. Through the organization Pop Up Adventure Play they began to rethink the concept of Adventure Playgrounds creating events in the city in which children could decide on the elements of the parks (Martinelli, 2016). There is still the figure of a caregiver who does not intervene in the child's play, as would be the case in post-war London. The project is being rethought in the present as there is a social pressure from the caregiver which is understood to intervene at all times so that the child does not harm himself. New studies show that we should let children take risks, letting them fall to solve their insecurities and develop a certain independence (Islington Play Association, n.d.). The initiative promotes that parents do not intervene so that social responsibility diminishes (Martinelli, 2016).

Another example of reinvention of the 'Junk Playgrounds' was an experiment that was done in 2014 in North Wales. It was based on the parks that Lady Allen moved to London in the war. What at first might seem like a lot of garbage for children is an ideal place for experimentation and fun (The Land, 2015). Even so, the park closed shortly after complaints from neighbours who were concerned about the flames and smoke (Moore, 2014) (Figure 15).



FIGURE 15 | Junk playground in North Wales, 2014



Assemble studio wanted to reinvent the brutalist parks of the Smithsons. It is a park located in an exhibition inside a museum that happened in 2015 in the centre of London, in RIBA (Winston, 2015). That is why concrete could not be used, like the Smithsons would use in their parks, instead they chose to use foam, which also has a stained look that is very similar to concrete (Terril, 2015). Brutalism aimed to expose the function of the building and show the truth of the material. In the case of the Smithsons they used concrete as truth, in the case of Assemble they used the foam (Figure 16). Depending on the colour of the foam it means a different density (Terril, 2015). In the Assemble proposal is important to know how they combine ideas from parks that stimulate the child in a positive way with the concern that exists for safety in the game thanks to foam.



FIGURE 16 | Assemble and Simon Terrill's foam playground at the RIBA headquarters, London

In a similar way with the Adventure Playgrounds, Matter Design proposes an equipment that encourages the child to move around the park. Brandon Clifford designed in Massachusetts this park (Figure 17) with the intention of creating a safer space without neglecting the needs of children (Howarth, 2017). With this, he considers similar systems to those of the previous parks, understanding that parents do not forget if a park is safe or not.



FIGURE 17 | Matter Design Adventure Playground, Massachusetts.

On the other hand, there are other designs that respond to specific needs and that do not need a previous reference to make sense. One of them is Asif Khan created a play area elevated from the ground in an elementary school in East London (Figure 18). The designer has raised a structure two meters above the ground to make a room because it was needed, as there was an increase of students in the school. For the design of the space, Khan based his design on the opinions and ideas that children give to him. Many of them ask to have a quiet space, so he creates a place with multiple uses that is located in an interior (Morby, 2016). In addition, as teachers should be able to monitor them, he design vertical wooden slats on the room where you can see through, but at the same time create a space of introspection (Figure). The solution that Khan gives solves a specific problem in a specific situation. A problem that usually appears when talking about parks is that it is always used standardization and the same solution is applied for any problem. The importance of a specific approach for each need must be one of the priorities.

The designers of the parks have a very important role in the development of children and how they are instructed when playing. Children are excluded from voting as citizens, without the right to decide and being separated from society (Harper, 2017). That is why it is so important for the designer, architect or urban planner to exercise a mediating role between the city and the child. Luckily, many of them build bridges between them to make the city work seriously with the child, what Harper calls child-friendly cities (2017).



FIGURE 18 | Asif Khan play area, East London.

CONCLUSION

The intention of this dissertation is to introduce the features needed for a future design of a playground resolving the problem of isolation that children suffer. First, potential spaces should be found to resolve the children isolation that is taking place in London. There are a lot of green spaces in London that could work for children development in nature. Garden could be a good option for children play on the Froebel conception. However, gardens already has a use in London and it does not solve the problem shown in the dissertation. That is why private spaces in urban public life, where there is no consideration of the child would be the best option. Finding areas as business centres where commercial activity is taking place, such as the Privately Owned Public Spaces (POPS), and propose playgrounds there would reverse the use of these spaces and therefore the idea of what can you do in that areas.

The second part is to find urban design mechanisms that invite children to develop play activities, understanding that they are one of the main sectors excluded in this type of spaces. First, the playground should be short live, as events, to be a realistic project. This is because activity is always changing there and this kind of events would be interesting to stimulate economics in different ways from businesses. Because of it, the structure can't be difficult to mount and dismount. As it would be easy to move, the second feature would be interesting to be changeable by kids, so that they have the freedom of imagining and interacting. Third, it should satisfy aesthetic issues to include the playground into the city, so that children are part of the space.

In conclusion, all off these characteristics should make the game in the public space a tool of learning and community education, which is essential to preserve the democratic values of a society.

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