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**«SLOW! CHILDREN AT PLAY»:
LOCALIZATION OF CHILDHOOD
IN MOSCOW PLAYGROUNDS IN
WINTER**

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Children and adults have different abilities and power in the city space. Playgrounds, as one of the places for children, illustrate the localization of childhood. Play area design is established by adults, and the quality of play materials may influence the variety of games and types of play but outdoor playgrounds are also influenced by a factor which was previously ignored – the weather.

In this paper it is questioned how weather conditions may influence children's play behaviour and spatial practices in a winter playground. Through observations of two Moscow playgrounds in December – January 2014-2015 and June 2015, we show that winter playgrounds even enrich the playing possibilities with the accessibility of snow as “loose part” materials. Winter weather not only allows children's creativity in games but also redefine the symbolical borders of a playground and its equipment, turning the playground into a unified space. As children can play on the playground, with the playground, and beneath its blurry borders as well, the spatial and power inequality between children and adults slightly reduces, and city space becomes more democratized.

JEL Classification: Q26, Q54

Key words: playgrounds, weather conditions, winter cities, inequality, children's creativity, loose parts materials

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Introduction

According to official statistics there were 700,000 children aged 1-6 years (pre-school age in Russia), and another 500,000 children aged 7-11 years (elementary school age) living in Moscow as of January 1, 2015³. This total number of children aged 1-11 years equals almost 10% of the city population, so statistically speaking, one out of ten pedestrians we meet will be a child. However, like most other metropolitan cities, Moscow is an adult city. Children are missing here - they do not play in the yard and on the street, they don't use public transport, and usually the only time you see them is on their way to school, to some other educational classes or just going home.

The suppressed position of non-adults in the city was not widely recognized before the development of human geography and childhood studies. The comparatively new field of children's geography addresses the question of whether children's needs, capacities, perceptions and usage of places and space differ from adults' (Holloway and Valentine 2004; Holloway 2014).

As adults dispose different kinds of resources (economic, political, administrative, information and technology, physical among others), and definitely have more power, they are in charge of city planning, spatial design and control over space. Childhood in the city is localized, and places for children are strictly defined – these are mostly educational institutions, shopping centres and special recreational facilities and playgrounds. Of course children are not prohibited from exploring other places in the city, but it may be hard for them due to traffic and mobility, safety issues and the legitimacy of being outdoors unsupervised.

This macro-view usually emphasizes the structural inequality and subordinate position of a child. However it overlooks the actual senses and practices of children and underestimates their ability to transform the space which is highlighted in the micro-view. One of the ideas of this article is to combine these approaches with a particular focus on playgrounds.

Playgrounds, compared to other “children places”, provide children with an opportunity to explore and develop spatial practices through games and free play. Distinct spatial practices of children and their abilities to use different playgrounds may depend on the play area design (Hayward, Rothenberg, and Beasley 1974) and accessibility of loose parts materials (Nicholson 1971).

Outdoor playgrounds also stimulate children in learning about the environment and getting a new experience of natural elements such as water, sand and plants. However, one of the most important things about outdoor playgrounds is that they are influenced by a factor which

³ According to Moscow Department of Russian Federal State Statistics Service http://www.gks.ru/wps/wcm/connect/rosstat_main/rosstat/ru/statistics/publications/catalog/doc_1140095700094

has been ignored – the weather. Weather conditions and their essential part in playground experience are further analysed in the context of the “winter city approach” (Pressman 1999; Enai et al. 2004).

How does the weather influence children’s games and spatial practices? This article presents a pilot study to investigate the significant impact of the weather on children’s play behaviour and space exploration. Observational data of two Moscow playgrounds collected in winter and summer periods reveals that low temperatures, wind and snow may not only restrict the time spent in the playground, but can also enrich the possibilities to play and even symbolically smooth the children – adults power imbalance in city space ownership. The conducted observation shows that winter playgrounds allows the variety of modes of functional, constructive and dramatic types of play behaviour, provide snow and ice as “loose parts” for new and inventive play practices and symbolically democratize the city space.

We will first briefly discuss the relevant literature on localization of childhood, the playground design and perspectives of winter city approach. Next, we will touch upon specific features of winter playground observation compared to summer period playground observation. Finally, we will illustrate the peculiarities of the layout, spatial boundaries and practices and play possibilities of a winter playground compared to a summer playground. The limitations of this study and future research questions will follow.

Theoretical assumptions

Localization of childhood and adult hegemony

An example of global processes and children’s local worlds intersection can be found if we suggest that childhood in the city is institutionalized, and one can rarely meet children outside of educational institutions and commercial premises (Alparone and Pacilli 2012; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2014). This compelled localization of childhood is revealed when one lists the places children can use and inhabit:

1. Places full of activity (street, sidewalk, shopping centre)
2. Places where interaction with other children or adults is possible
3. Places with sufficient variety in the environment, where diverse possibilities for use are present (a differentiated path structure, ambiguous places such as streets and back alleys, or places with a variety in design)
4. Places with natural elements (such as grass, trees, gardens, and parks)
5. Safe, intimate, enclosed, and hidden places (Van Andel 1990)

Another classification is based mostly on related emotional experiences rather than functional capacities of places: places to play, “scary” places (as attics, basements), interesting places (where one can observe somebody or something), “hot spots” (where one can get or do something forbidden, like a scrapyard), meeting places and existential places (where one can reflect and get a spiritual experience) (Осорина 2008).

Outdoor freedom is almost always limited and controlled by parents, mostly for safety reasons and prevention of potential damage to the health and morals of the child. For example, according to the research of the Public Opinion Foundation (POF) on average 69% of the Russian population thinks that it is dangerous for children to walk without supervision near their places of residence. This share is even higher for Moscow and cities with a population over 1 million. (76% and 87% respectively)⁴.

There are many possible reasons for this concerning technological development and deep social changes. The first point mainly refers to traffic. The growing number of vehicles has led to an increase in the number of road accidents involving children, resulting in many children leaving the street (Valentine and McKendrick 1997; Carver, Timperio, and Crawford 2008; Alparone and Pacilli 2012). In Russia traffic was named the most popular reason among parents for restricting their children from playing outdoors (16% of parents, according to POF⁵).

The other popular justifications for keeping children under supervision during an outdoor play are crime, violence against children, the fact that people have changed in a bad way and many more reasons concerning safety in one way or another. This kind of anxiety has a generalized name of “stranger danger” (Hillman, Adams, and Whitelegg 1990; Valentine and McKendrick 1997; Joshi, MacLean, and Carter 1999; Holloway and Pimlott-Wilson 2014). However, it should be mentioned that in most of the empirical studies safety has been estimated by parents’ perceptions rather than by any objective measurements (Carver, Timperio, and Crawford 2008).

The social changes have had no less impact. The perception of children has gradually changed from being “young adults” to “little angels”, who should not work anymore but rather indulge in games and training in designated areas (preferably at home), and not on the street (Zelizer 1985; Karsten 2003; Holloway and Valentine 2004). Educational trajectories and the attitude towards children as investment have influenced the amount of study time and the preference of extra-curricular activities (Postman 1985; Katz 2008; Lancy 2014). In big cities, the community network ties weaken and people lose touch with their neighbours, which results

⁴ <http://fom.ru/posts/10557> “Children’s safety outdoors” research within the Weekly “FOMnibus” questionnaire, 14-15.07.2012. The sample included 1500 respondents in 100 settlements among 43 regions of Russian Federation

⁵ <http://fom.ru/posts/10557> “Children’s safety outdoors” research

in “fewer eyes on where children play” (Alparone and Pacilli 2012; Holt et al. 2015; Visser, Bolt, and van Kempen 2015). These issues are interconnected and may also include the influence of female employment (Fyhri et al. 2011), modernization and gentrification (de Coninck-Smith 1990) and other changes in social life.

Our main interest focuses on playgrounds as they simultaneously represent the “localized” childhood on the one hand, and children as the legitimate tenants on the other hand. Or as Hayward, Rothenberg, and Beasley (1974) put it, playgrounds tend to be less socially structured than other settings that children experience (e.g., school), although they probably are more structured than many other play settings (e.g., streets, alleys).

Many scholars while discussing children’s life in the city, apply even stronger concepts of “adult hegemony”, “adult gaze”, “socio-spatial marginalization”, “landscapes of powerlessness” etc. (Sibley 1995; Valentine 1996a; Valentine 1996b; Matthews and Limb 1999; Matthews, Limb, and Taylor 2000; Vanderstede 2011). These concepts directly refer to the power discourse and the feelings of belonging and ownership of various places in the city, and playgrounds in particular.

In areas with an obvious power distribution, we can speak of “territorializing” – the ability of adults’ spatial control and possibility to determine the children’s movement over a particular area and the area itself. Adults don’t have to physically occupy the space in order to enhance control over it (Thomson 2005). This is relevant for any playground since territorial “rights” of adults are implied, but always show as a permanent possibility of intervention into the process in phrases such as “Come ride the slide”.

H. Blackford applies the concept of “panopticon” to the organizational structure and principles of work of the playground. In the example of several playgrounds in the suburbs of San Francisco, she discovers that children usually play at the centre, and parents (mostly mothers) embody the possibility of surveillance, while circling around the children on the benches. Children know the watchman and they do know that they are not being watched all of the time, but even if parents miss any disturbance, they have “eyes in the back of their heads” (Blackford 2004).

Parent surveillance is a disciplinary power over children, but what is more important, is that the playground panopticon makes mothers gaze at one another and monitor each other’s mothering practices. At the same time, those practices are formed by the city space organization in a wide sense, as a way to manipulate the disciplinary borders of the whole city structure (Blackford 2004; Шпаковская 2015).

Regardless of the number and conditions of slides and swings, and potential availability of some natural or unusual objects for a game, on the macro-level all playgrounds represent the difference in positions of children and adults in the social structure. Adults have more power and resources, therefore they have a symbolic right to choose the most appropriate educational and educative practices for children.

On the other hand, children may have even a greater power over their parents, although they may or may not use that power, which is based on natural feelings of parental love and deep emotional affection, and can also be an outcome of “little angels” child image. Obviously parents consider their wills and interests and give them voices. The micro-level questions the way how children choose their places of interest, how they feel and imagine and change different objects, and which senses children make out of them. On the micro-level one might ask whether playgrounds actually differ and what it can mean for children and their spatial practices.

The play area design and the power of “loose parts”

The “adult hegemony” may be an illustration for Lefebvre’s “representation of space”: shape, height and the distance between objects, the materials and technologies of production are all designed by professional architects and engineers, nothing is left for children to apply their modifications⁶. Still small swings and slides enrapture the children, because those are established specially for them it feels like *their place*. The terms of use of the playground equipment are regulated by the age and weight of potential users.

Playgrounds become “representational spaces” as children will always try to redefine them, and apply their imagination. Playgrounds allow children to act on the basis of adult “prescribed” object logic or to “surmount” it (Осорина 2008). Although children may still not be able to use these spaces for their intended purpose, they are learning to use them in other ways, which allows them to transform the slides into space stations and a pile of chairs in the room into a hut. Here we can find “spatial practices” as well, as the subjective meaning of children comes face to face with the necessity of implementation (as children often lack knowledge/experience/resources for real spatial changes, they are dependent on adults).

Lefebvre argues that “social space is constructed neither by a collection of things or an aggregate of (sensory) data, nor by a void (...), and that it is irreducible to a “form” imposed upon phenomena, upon things, upon physical materiality” (Lefebvre as quoted in Giesecking et al. 2014). It becomes evident in the playgrounds as they can simultaneously be a space rocket and a pirate ship, and tomorrow become a simple “playground”.

⁶ For example, <http://www.gosthelp.ru/text/GOSTR521692003Oborudovani.html> , <http://www.aif.ru/dontknows/1225282> - the Russian established standards for playground construction

Hayward, Rothenberg and Beasley (1974) define three types of playground: traditional, contemporary, and adventure. A traditional playground usually contains swings, slides, and climbing bars and represents a part of a school, a housing project or a neighbourhood park. Contemporary playgrounds may contain novel forms, textures and materials, and they are somewhat “sculptured”. And the last one, adventure playgrounds, focus more on the play materials than the play equipment and encourage children to plan and re-plan the area at will.

The question is not only in the design specifications, but in the child’s freedom in behaviour and activities and in the relationship between the type of play area design and the occurring play. They state that each of the three playgrounds has predominant activities, and that different play settings develop into places where different activities take place. (Hayward, Rothenberg, and Beasley 1974).

This idea of interrelation of the play settings and child activities was further developed both in geography and environmental studies, and in medical studies. One of the most interesting ideas concerning this issue has been proposed by Maxwell, Mitchell and Evans. According to their approach, the playground design may encourage particular play behaviours and social interaction: child’s play can be dramatic/fantasy (imaginary roles or using objects to represent something imaginary), constructive (when a child’s activity is goal-oriented), functional (repetitive muscle movements); games with rules, and non-play (such as watching other children play or sitting on a bench) (Maxwell, Mitchell, and Evans 2008). The dramatic and constructive types of play are considered “higher order” play behaviours and require more variety in the playground equipment and design. The main differentiation is stated between the “contemporary” and the “adventure” playground, where the first one allows mostly simple types of play and thus does not enough encourage creativity.

The emergence of adventure playgrounds is connected with the name of Danish landscape architect Carl Theodor Sørensen and his belief that children prefer to play everywhere but in the playgrounds built for them. Sørensen wanted to give children an opportunity to imagine, create and shape the playground space. Adventure playgrounds, also known as “junk playgrounds”, are based on the idea that children could make use of whatever junk was lying around in their environment for play (Staempfli 2009)⁷.

Unlike traditional and contemporary playgrounds, adventure – type play areas do not have fixed play structures and instead provide children with a variety of innovative practices and behaviours: building and construction, gardening, taking care of animals, sports, water play and

⁷ The adventurous side of junk spaces has also been noted by Osorina (Осорина 2008)

many more⁸. Even the availability of lumber, boxes and stackable blocks in a playground area may significantly contribute to children's play and development.

These last were named “loose parts” by S. Nicholson, who believed that the degree of child’s inventiveness and creativity in any environment are proportional to the number and kind of variables in it, and most environments such as schools, playgrounds and others do not have those variables i.e. loose parts. They are just clean and impossible to play around. That’s why spaces for children should be left unfinished in order to let them invent and modify them (Nicholson 1971).

Maxwell et al. (2008) develop this idea empirically and argue that the array of play materials available has no less impact on types of play than the playground design itself. According to their observation of 16 children at the university-based laboratory day care program, the intervention of additional loose parts (Styrofoam blocks, pieces of fabric etc.) increased both constructive and dramatic play as children used the constructed places for more sophisticated further activities. It’s also important to notice that natural environments provide “loose parts” on a regular and simple basis such as water, sand, mud, snow, sticks and leaves.

However, even less than a dozen out of almost 20,000 Moscow playgrounds may be considered as contemporary, not even adventure⁹. Yards are mostly owned by municipalities, so the playground construction is their responsibility. When a new house is build, the playground is outsourced to the construction company. This leaves very little room for any public initiatives, NGOs or companies, and due to the approximate re-equipment cost of 3,000\$¹⁰, any innovations and architectural delights are rather costly (and also institutionally hard to accomplish). This fact strengthens the meaning of natural environments and elements of playgrounds which could provide broader opportunities for children’s play types and behaviour.

Summing up the discussed literature, it can be proposed that the playground actually represents a place of childhood localization as it provides children with an opportunity only to accept space created and supervised by adults. The inequality in social structure positions and power on the macro-level is supplemented by inability to apply creativity and modify the playground space on the micro-level. As the playground equipment usually provides few opportunities for creativeness, the creative behaviour and play can be stimulated by the natural environment and “loose parts” accessibility. The weather factor is quite important in this case and affects both children’s indoor and outdoor activity and spatial practices.

⁸ See for example “A study of adventure playgrounds and city farms in Europe and what they contribute to sustainable urban development” conducted by Oliver Ginsberg <http://www.bdja.org/oli/index.html>

⁹ See for example this list of the Unusual and interesting Moscow playgrounds http://workingmama.ru/article/72352/detskaja_moskva_top-9_detskix_ploschadok

¹⁰ In prices of March 2014 (<http://rg.ru/2014/03/07/ploschadki.html>), which was equivalent to 100,000 rubles.

Winter city playgrounds

According to Smirnova's research of the spatial environment of two Moscow kindergartens 70% of preschoolers drew flowerbeds, trees and butterflies as examples of some natural elements on their "Dream playground" (Смирнова 2011). The growing interest toward outdoor education comes from the fact that nature can be used in three general ways: as a classroom, as a home and as an enchanted world (Änggård 2010). The time spent in the natural environment should be considered as an essential part of the educational program of a kindergarten, a preschool or an elementary school. "Outdoors" is especially rich in stimuli for generating new experiences and broadening the repertoire of behaviour (Staempfli 2009). "Outdoors" provide children with an opportunity to develop physically and emotionally, to advance their knowledge of the environment, to evolve new social practices and situations and of course, to play.

However, "outdoors" is a vague term which needs some more specific features. Canter (1977) proposes that places may vary by their physical, functional and psychological aspects, – and therefore two playgrounds with a set of completely similar equipment, safety and spatial characteristics may differ in their popularity and type of visitors.

Moscow has a continental climate with a variation in average monthly temperatures, warm summers and severe winters (which usually last from the beginning of November till the end of March)¹¹. This 5-month winter weather with low temperatures, snow and wind can be a significant obstacle not only for playground activities, but for outdoor activities in general.

Tucker and Gilliland's review of 37 studies of climate and weather influence on people's physical activity indicates that season might have an integral effect on behaviour. They highlight that the decline in activity during the colder season is particularly prominent in studies of children, and parents identify that they are not similarly interested in spending time outdoors in cold and warm weather (Tucker and Gilliland 2007).

Änggård (2010) states that Swedish preschoolers spent outdoors on average 5,8 hours on a summer day, and only 2,0 hours during winter. Enai et al. (2004) have discovered a relationship between the amount of time playing outdoors and the rates of positive adaptation replies to winter among younger children, while the adaptation replies of older children become increasingly more negative. Steinsvik (2004) names extreme cold, darkness, rain, the combination of wind and snowfall or cold conditions as factors limiting children's play outside. And Ciucci et al. (2010) have found out that the outdoor humidity has a significant positive

¹¹ See for example <http://www.moscow.climatemps.com/>

effect on frustration, sadness and aggression among preschoolers while solar radiation affects sadness only, which means that a sunny winter day can still make children cheerful.

As it was subtly noticed by Norman Pressman, the visionary of the “Winter cities” approach¹², winter may symbolize both joy and misery depending on one’s interests, cultural experiences, character and overall disposition. Even though there can be multiple interpretations of what “winter” looks and feels like, it is usually associated with restricted daylight, precipitation in the form of snow, low temperatures and prolonged periods of these three elements (Pressman 1988; Pressman 1999). All those factors result in social, economical and psychological implications. Would that mean that winter cities and their space are even less friendly toward non-adults?

On the one hand, there are issues of snow management, heating costs, design and architectural decisions, mobility and safety, limited outdoor activities and reduced will for participation in them, feelings of gloom and depression. These are the winter “miserics”.

On the other hand, the winter “joys” are related to outdoor sports, cultural events and celebrations, leisure opportunities, ideas for city planning and snow and ice art, the beauty and purity of winter nature. For example, 18% of Russians claim that winter is their favourite season, and 45% more – that they tend to like winter¹³. Interestingly, “weather” is almost equally important for likes and dislikes: 27% of those who like winter named the snowy chill the main reason, 24% of those who do not like winter named the same reason as the most important. Still the winter season is usually something that people accept rather than look forward to, and the creation of a positive thinking toward winter has been named the primary goal of winter city municipalities, planners and scientists.

Winter weather conditions may affect lifestyle, personality and even social order (Nash 1981; Dunin-Woyseth 1990; Kuismanen 2005; Eliasson et al. 2007). Nash’s pioneering research on social relations in “frozen places” has revealed that “winter social order” is characterized by exaggerated body glosses¹⁴, decreased number of people, displays of a festive attitude, and an attitude of adventure and exploration. Winter allows individuals to redefine their use of public space because any violations are suspended in spite of temporality and liminality of weather conditions and assumption that normal order will renew when it’s over (Nash 1981; Bell 2009).

¹² The “Winter cities” approach had several issues of origin (see <http://wintercities.com/>) and several aims aside only speaking of negative features of winter climate. Those are: to understand the effects of on both settlements and the life-styles of people; to identify the best practices of planning urban areas in winter climates; to provide greater adaptation to winter conditions and to create more unique places through design initiatives; and to recognize and improve the life of the most vulnerable in winter cities (who has limited mobility of financial sources, as children, the old, the poor) (Davies 2015)

¹³ <http://fom.ru/TSennosti/11276> “Why do people like or dislike winter?” research within the “TeleFOM” phone survey questionnaire, 07-08.12.2013. The random sample of mobile phones included 1000 respondents older than 18 years in 480 settlements among Russian Federation

¹⁴ There he relates to Goffman and states that “orientation gloss” is influenced by “inescapable” winter discomfort and inability to behave as usual

The festive attitude toward winter and the feeling of adventure develop both because of weather conditions and available social activities outdoors. Eliasson et al. (2007) have found that air temperature, wind speed and cloud cover influence people's weather assessments and place-related perceptions, emotions and attendance, and Hitchings (2010) mentions that people do actually respond differentially to different phases of the year because of too much time spent in climatically controlled indoor environments.

Not only children's physical activity, but also perceptions of winter depend on the amount of time spent outdoors, and adults may also experience "childlike amusement" when going outside in snowy conditions.

But regardless of winter weather advantages and disadvantages there emerges a completely different set of opportunities for children in a winter city caused by environmental conditions and democratization of the city space. The snow which is usually named both among winter pros and cons, acquires a transformative influence for the spatial practices of children. It redraws the boundaries among objects and places, and the world becomes a "white blanket" (Engel 1991) with blurred hems of snowdrifts. Snow in a playground area may function as a "loose parts" material and reinforce children's abilities for creative play.

How do children behave on a snowy winter playground and what difference can winter weather make for their experience? How does weather influence children's games and spatial practices? Although these questions seem simple, they may uncover some hidden potential in creating a child-friendly environment, positive images of winter and environmental education.

The influence of winter conditions on children's behaviour in snowy playgrounds was investigated during an observation at two playgrounds in one district of Moscow.

Research methodology

The observation of the two playgrounds in the "Filyovskaya poyma" district of Moscow was conducted in two parts: the main eight observations took place in December - January 2014/2015 and additional four observations in June 2015. As the amount of time spent by children outdoors is highly correlated with the study year structure and the preliminary observation stage showed little significant activity in the playgrounds during winter workdays, winter observations were held on weekends (except for the New Year holidays, first week of January). Summer observations were held both on workdays and weekends¹⁵.

¹⁵ It's also important to recognize that the variety of weekend activities depends on season. For example, only 33% of parents mentioned that their children spent summer holidays at home while others told that their children had an opportunity to visit relatives, travel abroad, participate in a summer camp or likewise (<http://fom.ru/Nauka-i-obrazovanie/11055>, "FOMnibus" questionnaire, 25.08.2013, 1500 respondents in 100 settlements among Russian Federation).

All observations were held from 13.00 to 16.00, since there is a greater possibility of seeing children outside regardless for their individual schedules for meals or naps. Each observation lasted from 40 minutes to 1,5 hours depending on the weather conditions. The latter also played a remarkable part in the observation procedure – during winter months the process was often interrupted by wind, cold and snow, to which the observer was not quite prepared unlike the observed.

Both playgrounds were located in yards surrounded by low-level metal fences. As there were no car garages or special parking lots on the territory, the second-level playground border was formed by the ring of cars parked nearby. This type of spatial organization and content is quite common not only for Moscow yards, but for the most part of other Russian cities.

“Filyovskaya poyma” district is a residential district with multi-storey buildings (from five to seventeen) and quite high population density. The district territory can be reached and explored by car or public transport, and one side of the area is circled by a river bend. This distinguishes the “Filyovskaya poyma” from both the central part and other residential districts. The latter consequence won’t be essential for playground observation as residential district playgrounds do not have many differences. But in the central part of Moscow the number of office and historical buildings, land costs, socio-demographic composition of the population, ecological and safety conditions and many other factors may influence the popularity of a playground and maybe even its functions.

The observational abilities of the researcher were partially restricted and differed during winter and summer periods. The “complete” participant role (Gold 1958) and an active involvement can be suggested as a violation of participants’ territorial boundaries or as a “stranger danger” regardless of weather. But even “participant-as-observer” and “observer-as-participant” roles were not possible in winter due to the fact that the researcher did not have an explicit motivation for showing up at a playground (significantly older than children, but not accompanying a child).

Thereby the “complete observer” role was adopted for winter observations (Spradley 1980; Tedlock 1991; DeWalt and DeWalt 2011). It allowed the researcher to co-present (at a justifiable distance), watch and make brief notes on the recorder, but with no opportunity of interaction. However, even in this case, many parents threw their surprised and worried looks in the direction of an aimlessly wandering female, which illustrates the specific features of the “winter social order”.

In warm weather, the playground area is often visited by adults who use playgrounds as recreational spaces for reading, gathering together, fresh air, and exercise. This justified the

presence of the researcher and even allowed to take minor part in children's activities (e.g. to pick up the ball). As a result, the "complete observer" role was expanded by some elements of participation.

All the data were collected with a recorder and then transcribed. The observational notes were accompanied with photo materials when possible.

Results: A "Playground" or a "playground"?

Physical borders and layout

Both playgrounds can be described as "traditional" according to Hayward, Rothenberg, and Beasley (1974) (see Appendix1)

As it was previously mentioned, both playgrounds are located in yards, and as there are no parking lots and the space lacks any demarcation, the cars are parked due to owners' preferences, usually near border stones. It symbolically forms the second-level playground border in addition to metal fences. This "barricade" limits the space visually and physically and creates an impression that playgrounds rebuff for some space with the surrounding objects.

However, fences are quite useful and are strongly connected with the type of housing units. Apartment buildings do not usually have any surrounding area, so all the facilities such as playgrounds, electric stations and dumpsters are concentrated in the yards and demarcated by fences. This short distance between children and potentially dangerous objects doesn't seem to bother adults, while children actually use all these objects in their play and spatial practices. This organization is common for Moscow playgrounds, since the space is very limited.

The important feature of a yard playground is the number of people who passes through it. One of the playgrounds was divided into two independent sectors along the entire length by a footpath: more active slides and ladders "concentrated" on the left side, while comparatively quiet swings and benches "concentrated" on the right side. This playground was much more popular, because the footpath increased the number of visitors; it had become not only an aim of the stroll, but a stop on the route to the shop, bus stop and children's hospital. Comparing the two playgrounds, we might conclude that the divided one had never had less than three pairs of visitors (an adult with a child), while the other one was even empty sometimes¹⁶.

The playground facilities differed by the age of children and thus influenced the type of visitors: the sandbox set attracted small children while the presence of a horizontal bar and parallel bars drew teenagers. This is a visible representation of space (Lefebvre). These two

¹⁶ The playgrounds in both yards had free access and the number of inhabitants was the same. The facilities were also comparable, so this kind of difference was not produced by the qualities of the playground area.

categories did not compete with each other and could use the same playground at different times. Similar conclusions in the study of playgrounds in the Catalan towns were proposed by M.B.Ferre, A.O.Guitart and M.P.Ferret (2006): age is the most important factor both determining and influenced by the ways of using playground equipment. Small children under 6 years should be provided with slides, sandboxes and plastic/wooden houses¹⁷, and older children tend to steer away from the playground equipment and create their own forms of entertainment.

Of course parents do play an important part in choosing the playground, so the criteria get more complicated and include not only the physical conditions and equipment variety, but also the ground conditions, the number of people present, the walking route and many other factors. Potholes and ditches enrich and decorate play opportunities for children, but they may become a potential problem for adults. And the more of these “controversial” features the playground has, the less likely it is for a particular family to go there for a walk. The decision is usually a matter of negotiation, not a simple desire.

The layout of the playground does not change because of seasons, but the number of visitors increases in warm weather. Playgrounds become recreational areas in good weather conditions, so that both children and adults use them for spending their own leisure time. Even if people simply pass by, they are more likely to slow down and have a short rest on the bench. On the contrary, as the weather factor influences the amount and quality of the time spent outdoors (Tucker and Gilliland 2007), playgrounds in the winter become comparatively mono-functional: there are few reasons for being there except for playing.

Spatial boundaries, weather and play

Children can be more creative while defining the boundaries of a particular space, unlike adults. Adults usually use formal criteria such as fences, borders, signs and etc, while children might use symbolic boundaries and exclude adults or peers from participating in the game. Even if it is physically not possible to prevent outsiders from intrusion, children still can rethink the space and produce its new semantic connotations: “You’ve entered a secret area! Hey-ey-ey! The alarm is on! The pass is closed!” This observation is consistent with previous studies (Holloway and Valentine 2000; Holloway and Valentine 2004; Ferré, Guitart, and Ferret 2006).

However, weather seems to be one of the factors previously ignored in vain. Winter and summer playgrounds significantly differ in boundaries, perceptions of space and spatial practices. Summer playgrounds are places of “adult hegemony” with fixed equipment locations of and established space usage. During summer children mostly play in a way predetermined by

¹⁷ Which is enshrined by the standards of Moscow urban planning and educational recommendations

the playground construction and constructors or with the objects they find nearby or bring with them. They can play on the playground but not with the playground.

The summer playground concentrates the activities around the equipment, but the collaboration happens seldom. A child sees an occupied swing as being occupied and usually chooses another object of interest. Several times during observation children attempted to engage in a play with other children, but the outcomes were mixed due to a variety of factors. Adults perceive an occupied swing as a form of a queue and persuade children to take a minute or rather go and play somewhere else, when they don't necessarily encourage joint games.

The winter playground is covered with snow, and it changes everything. Isolated objects “glue” together: footprints, snowmen, snowballs, snow fortress, and so on. The play is transferred from the slides, swings and sandbox into a *unified space*. Moreover, this unified space sticks out beyond the formal boundaries because snow does not end behind the fences, it lays on the pavement, on the cars, and all the way around. The new boundaries are marked by snowdrifts, which do not only clear the place and simplify the movement but physically demarcate the playground and the rest of the area¹⁸.

The parents' involvement into the games depends on the child's age, the parent's own will and abilities and on the weather as well. At cold weather parents are more likely to participate in games as they need to move around to keep warm. In the summer, parents preferred to sit in the shade. The second situation is closer to Blackford's playground panopticon and supports the power inequality and parent surveillance.

Discussing the “winter social order” Nash highlights that “weather conditions” refer not only to temperature, but to the sensation outdoors. Goffman's concept of “*umwelt*” can help to develop a broader look at the weather influence on social relationships and behaviour. Winter provides an increased freedom to individuals in defining appropriate use for urban space, and alters the cooling down of the individual sense of *umwelt* (Nash 1981). The occurring democratization of urban space usage links to the minor anomie of the citizens' spatial practices and perception of social order.

A similar thing happens to children in the winter playground: as the spatial boundaries blur, and the physical characteristics of a snowy place allow creativity, children can play not only on the playground but with it and even beneath it. They become more independent in their activities, their choice of games and partners. Of course, one does not say that snow easily democratizes the playgrounds (as well as the rest of the city), but it democratizes the space. Both

¹⁸ It should be mentioned that not only winter chill and fluffy snow can influence the spatial practices. The rainy weather and puddles will also determine movements and activities. The distinction we would like to highlight here is the integrity of the snow cover.

visual and symbolic boundaries between children's and non-children's places become a little less clear.

Summer playground supposes all types of play behaviour: children can use the space and equipment for construction, functional and dramatic play. A winter playground also allows various types of functional play like sledging, skiing, sliding, climbing, snowballs, snowmen, playing with snow deposits. The ability to dig, shape and construct the snow, to manipulate the environment, investigate the physical characteristics of snow and ice and get differential feedback is essential for developing constructive play (Maxwell, Mitchell, and Evans 2008). Moreover, weather conditions provide increased possibilities for dramatic play (e.g. with snow castles and snowmen). Those types of play behaviour are peculiar to the winter season and can sufficiently enrich children's experience. All types of play behaviour were observed both on a summer and a winter playground, and the comparison of each type frequency requires more data and further investigation.

Both observed traditional playgrounds provide opportunities for "high order" play behaviours regardless of the season, but the physical characteristics of snow and ice and their presence on the playground substitutes the availability of artificial loose parts (boxes, stackable blocks, tires), which also increases the diversity of play behaviour. Children may use other available natural elements (like mud, leaves, sprigs etc.) from spring to autumn, but some of them are considered dirty and useless by parents, and some of them are hard to get (or even prohibited – one should not pick flowers). The snow is already there, all of the same quality and in a renewable amount.

All discussed features and assumptions are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Summer and winter playgrounds comparison

	Summer playground	Winter playground
Functions	Democratized (recreational area)	Predetermined, mono-functional (play)
Space, borders	Predetermined, controlled space and borders; established usage of space and equipment)	Democratized; unified space, symbolical borders
Types of play behaviour	Dramatic, constructive, games with rules, non-play	Dramatic, constructive, games with rules, non-play
"Loose parts" accessibility	Middle, depends on the location and equipment	Great: snow as a substitute, the amount is renewable
Joint play possibilities	The collaboration among children is infrequent, parents rarely involve	The collaboration among children is infrequent, parents repeatedly involve
One can play...	On the playground	Both on and with the playground

It won't be fully true to conclude that snow and ice can turn a "traditional" or a "contemporary" playground into an "adventure" one. But the quality of play material can be no less important than the design of the play area. In this case weather conditions have a major impact on the spatial practices and play behaviour of children, which should not be written off due to the low temperatures and wind.

Conclusion

In this work we have made an attempt to define the potential peculiarities of "winter" playgrounds. How do they differ from "summer" playgrounds and what can they offer children besides specific weather conditions? That answer seemed obvious but required us to investigate the subjects of play area design, localization of childhood and winter city approach.

Children in modern cities have few places for a free play due to various issues of technological development and social changes. Winter cities characterized by low temperatures during the winter season, snow and decreased daylight time can even enhance parents' worries about the safety and health of their children. A lack of organized outdoor activities, complicated and dangerous mobility and unwillingness to feel cold while supervising the outdoor play even increases the dominance of adults in their spatial practices.

Still the winter weather conditions have an undisputed positive effect on children' play behaviour in playgrounds. Firstly, they allow the functional, constructive and dramatic types of play behaviour (Maxwell, Mitchell, and Evans 2008) and provide abilities for new and inventive practices with snow and ice as examples of natural loose parts materials (Nicholson 1971). Secondly, snow and ice can improve the characteristics of "traditional" and "conventional" playgrounds (Hayward, Rothenberg, and Beasley 1974) by adding more options for creativity in play and practices. Thirdly, snow symbolically blurs the physical boundaries of playgrounds and nearby territory, which allows children to play not only in the playground, but also with it. Last but not least, this issue may also deal with the preconditions and outcomes of "winter social order" (Nash 1981) and the democratization of city space.

Aside from the winter weather "miserics", the city will not automatically become more child-friendly just because of winter snow and frost, but it will finally allow children to "trespass" the restricted play area and migrate to the wider city outdoor space. This endows children with a little more power and stature among other categories of citizens, as e.g. older people or teenagers may not be so lucky in having their special places. That's why maybe

sometimes one can observe playgrounds become occupied by non-target audience members the minute after children leave.

Discussion

The methodology applied might be reconsidered because of the potential “observer effect”. As has been mentioned, the prolonged periods of playground observation need to be justified in winter time (which also relates to Nash’s ideas of applying Goffman’s “orientation gloss” to inescapable winter discomfort). This could be achieved through a more active participant role or having contact with informants. Both these solutions require contemplation and reflection.

The conducted observation can be named as only one of the first steps in winter playground space investigation. The next step requires collecting wider data on different weather conditions (even during a winter season) and among distinct areas of the city. The important fact would be to compare the observed practices of play and behaviour on the same playgrounds during the study year and different time and days of the week, and to distinguish the influence of weather and location.

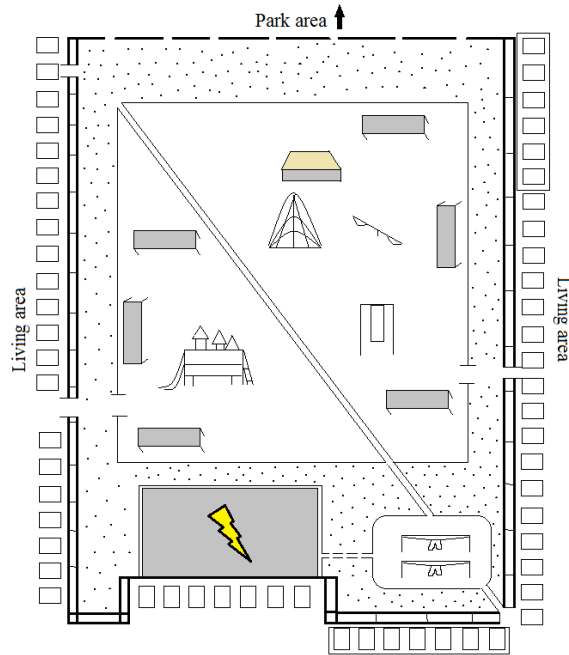
Another part of the same aim would be to compare children’s play and behaviour in winter parks to that also in winter but just on the streets and in the house yards. As the spatial borders become blurry, and the snow becomes one of the most important parts of the games, it may be not easy for children to recognize the difference between safe/unsafe and appropriate/inappropriate places to play. If there is a real city space democratization taking place, does it have any rules and borders? How could one get involved in this? Further investigation of these questions could be of interest.

One of the important issues of this study is the potential practical use for city planners. Previous winter city literature discussed mostly the possibilities of enriching the play opportunities by design resolutions and climate control technologies (Steinsvik 2004; Enai et al. 2004). The idea of this article is not to abandon the necessity to provide children (and their parents, who might be also interested) with warm playground settings, but to highlight the opportunities of winter weather play and suggest the option of special play area construction, which would reveal those advantages¹⁹.

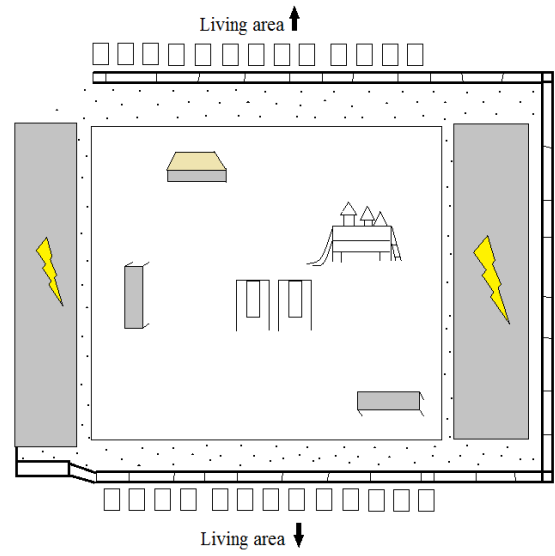
¹⁹ See for example the winter playground in Sweden <http://pinpin.se/project/kiruna-winter-playground-2016/>

Appendix 1. Observed playgrounds schemes

Playground 1



Playground 2



- | | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| - Parked car | - Swing |
| - Bench | - Balance swing |
| - Climber | - Fence |
| - Slide | - Powerhouse |
| - Sandbox | - Clothesline |
| - Ground | |

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