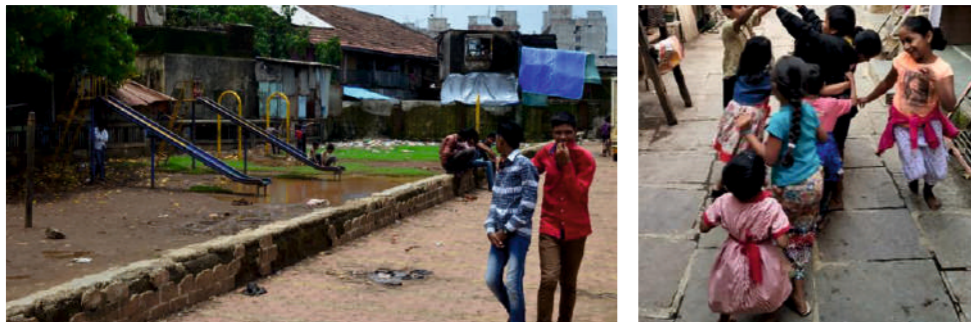


THE CULTURE & DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S PLAY

The socio-cultural influences of playgrounds on the development of children and communities with case studies in Mumbai

PROJECT: THE CULTURE AND DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S PLAY.

The socio-cultural influences of playgrounds on the development of children and communities with case studies in Mumbai.



Under the pressure of increasing urbanisation, tremendous socio-spatial inequalities and densification spaces of play for children have always been very limited in Mumbai. But providing children with possibilities for free safe and hygienic play positively influences their intellectual development, the development of social skills and their emotional and physical well-being. Against this background the research project wants to understand the present status of the 'Cultures of Play' in selected informal settlements in Mumbai, to know how playgrounds are contributing to children's and community development, to develop a design tool for sustainable playgrounds for children under the age of 16, and to identify obstacles for building and maintaining playgrounds. In order to reach these aims the research project used the methodology of participatory action research.

From the perspective of children and parents living in informal settlements these spaces are vibrant, giving them an identity and social stability but also opportunities to earn their living. Looking at informal settlements "with their eyes" informed us best as how to develop these spaces and about what is destroyed through bluntly ignoring the needs of the inhabitants of these habitats. In general, there are very few and open public spaces for children to play. Children and parents want to have safe, clean and hygienic play spaces.

WHY

CULTURES OF CHILDREN'S PLAY: WHY RESEARCHING CULTURES OF PLAY AND DEVELOPING A DESIGN TOOL FOR PLAYGROUNDS IN INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN MUMBAI?

INTRO

All scientific research in this project has predominantly started with the ambitions followed and amazing experiences made by the NGO Anukruti.

As an architecturally inclined organization, Anukruti has developed unique playgrounds through numerous projects done in different low funded schools, slum communities and orphanages within the city and beyond.

To contribute to its work through scientific research, and finally - against the background of a lot of obstacles to build playgrounds in Mumbai - to ease its often hard work on the ground of playing are main motivations for the research project.

GOALS

Document and understand the historical development and present status of the 'Cultures of Play', and compare the results of the present status of play spaces.

Understand how playgrounds are contributing to children's and community development and how this raises the perspectives of children of their own environment.

Develop a design tool for sustainable playgrounds for children under the age of 16 in these areas in Mumbai.

Identify obstacles for building and maintaining playgrounds particularly with regards to policies.

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS OF RESEARCH

PARTICIPATORY OBSERVATION: Observation is a very fruitful method in research on children's everyday life. All they do (during play or interactions) is connected to their perspectives and views. During the activities and social interactions, they interpret the symbols at a place and in this way objects and social spaces of their culture. Children see in which way other people act within geographical areas and adapt their own strategies of using spaces.

DRAWINGS: Drawing is part of the daily activities of children. Drawing is an important way to communicate with others and therefore the picture is like a visual aid and even a data material per se. During the drawing process, the children could develop imaginary connections, showing their representations and imaginations of space

CONVERSATIONS WITH CHILDREN AT PLAY: Conversations with the users of the play spaces are one of the best options to understand, what children think about their places and why they use it. Children learn and experience a lot of their surroundings by imitation at play. They could articulate these experiences immediately thereafter, if you ask them at the playground.

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH PARENTS AND COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES: In addition to the children's views the perspectives of their parents are very promising and interesting. Adults and especially parents look at other elements of play areas. Topics and questions are defined in advance to focus the interview. Other than in quantitative, standardized interviews, mainly open questions are used and the order can change in accordance to the course of the conversation.

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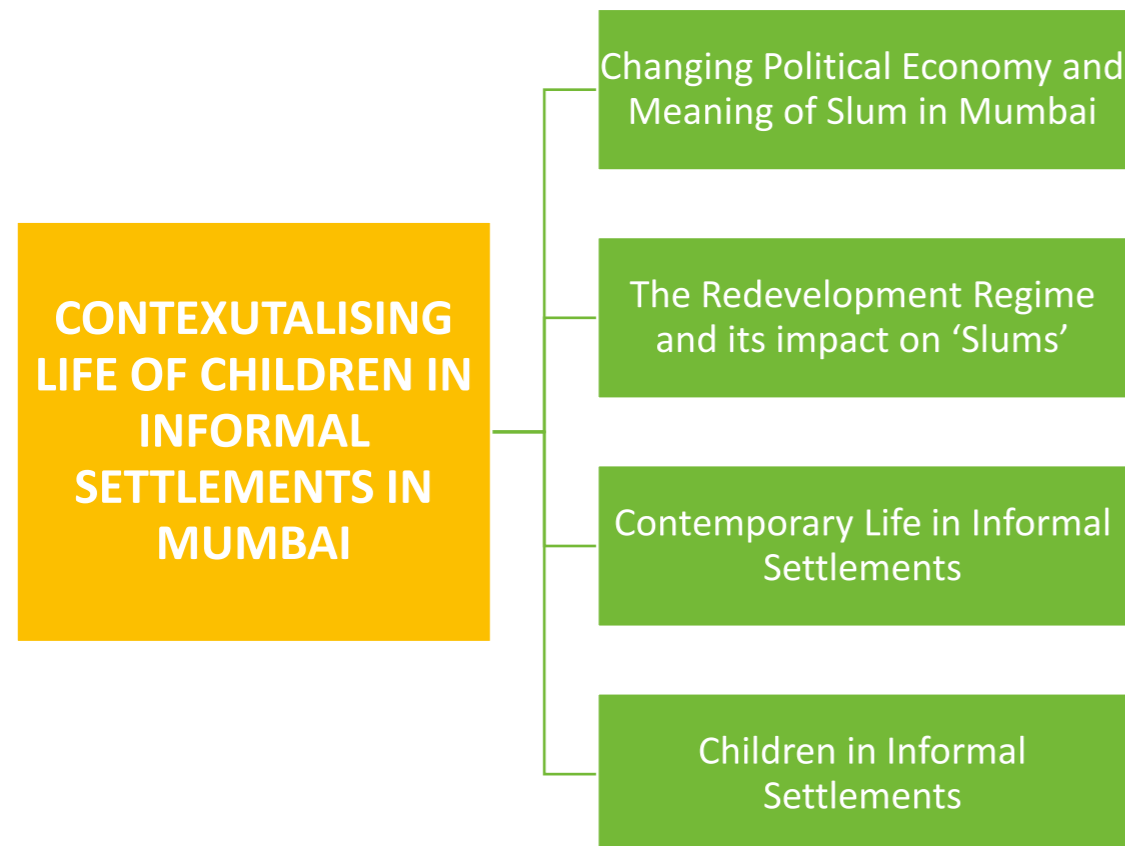
SLUMS: DEFINITIONS AND POLICIES IN AN INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT, INDIA AND MUMBAI

"Right to housing has been declared to be a basic right for all people, and yet particularly in the large urban centres, it has been found almost impossible to implement this right meaningfully"

The five conditions that define a slum are:

- Durability of the hutment 'against extreme climate condition'.
- The number of inhabitants 'sharing the same room'.
- Availability of access to sufficient and affordable potable water.
- Access to sanitation facilities that are 'shared by a reasonable number of people'.
- Security from forced eviction.'

Mumbai is the financial capital of India, hosting not only a relatively strong stock exchange but also a lot of headquarters of larger companies, e.g. banks, in India. Slums first emerged in Mumbai just before independence but "unauthorised and insanitary hutments put up by the vagrant and the homeless" constituted only 1% of the 15% to 18% of the city's population staying in slums (Bombay Municipal Corporation 1964). Over a period of time, the term "slum" in Mumbai became equated with squatter colonies alone" (Bhide 2018: 77). The collapse of the Mills in Mumbai created a large unemployed workforce, this created a "shift from formal to informal and to small-scale industries. Industries such as footwear and garments were established where semi-skilled labours were required. Small petty businesses were also encouraged such as fruit sellers, tea sellers, vegetable sellers, *pani-puri* sellers et cetera. In this way another kind of informal services emerged in the city attracted lot of people. But due to massive flow of migrants to the city as well as lack of town planning, minimum level of basic amenities of life insurers and dilapidation of many houses etc.,



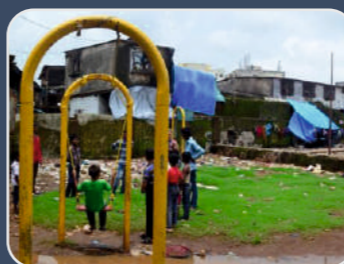
The Relation between Social and Built Space in Play

- Children also do something creatively with the spatial structures produced by planners.
- Children also do something creatively with the spatial structures produced by planners.



The Relation between Gender, Space and Play

- People, who possess more societal resources of power (traditionally men), regulate the physical development of spaces according to the needs, demands and ideas, which support their own life worlds.



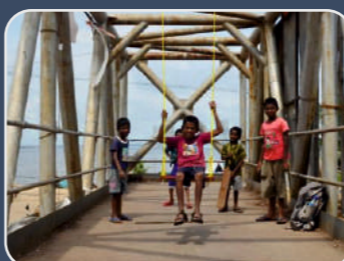
The History of Play in India

- The general perception of 'play time' is that play has no value in preparing students for anything, it just seen as what it is, that is just 'play' the context of which is derogatory in its understanding.



Urban Policies around Playgrounds: some aspects

- Mumbai reached such a state that even traffic circles have to be included whilst calculating open spaces; and yet minimum standards are hardly reached.



Making Spaces for Play in Maximum City by Sourav Kumar

- The Red Swing Project and the idea of tactical urbanism, offers one way to help imagine alternative futures and incrementally improve the liveability of the city.

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The chosen informal settlements of Mumbai, though masked in vibrancy and contented chaos, have not only been deprived of basic amenities, but also of play spaces have as the most prominent absent facility for its children.

Khar Danda is one such settlement. It's a fishers' village located on the western side of Khar Road and Bandra. Situated next to a *naala* (hindi: water channel), this colony is densely packed. The narrow, uneven path along this water stream has rather become the epitome of open space for children here.

Though **Dharavi** has now achieved recognition all across the world, its little dwellers are yet left unseen – especially its girls. The lack of space limits their play opportunities and the raucous lifestyle steals the childhood out of the child. However, children here, very interestingly, invent play for themselves in a very innovative form. Along the *gallis* (hindi: small lanes) and around the *chowks* (hindi: plazas), children discover their own meaning of play. They upgrade the usual sports so as to fit it to their personal social and spatial context and surrounding: they make use to all possible elements to equate instruments.

Juhu is a typical example of a socio-cultural paradox. Its affluent, rich dwellers have major emphasis over the vicinage. However, in the nook of it there also lies a humble, very well settled and old neighbourhood. With majority of its residents as fishers and their shelters being categorized as informal, the children in this community are rather fortunate to have a public garden of their own. The beach has its own unique aura. Kids from all over the city - irrespectively of their backgrounds - meet here every day to play.

IN ORDER TO ANSWER THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS THE FOLLOWING QUALITATIVE METHODS OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH WERE USED:

- Participatory observation of each playground/play space: these observations focused on the description of the built environments and social spaces (who plays? How are they interacting during play? How are they communicating?)
- Conversations with children at play: 40 conversations (half boys, half girls, ranging from age of 8 to 13) were carried out. These conversations were not structured because children should have the possibility to freely articulate about their play.
- drawings with the children in each playground/play space: in special workshops children brought in their inspiring ideas and wishes for the development of their playgrounds. The number of children participating ranged from 11 (Juhu Beach) to 32 (Nalla Ground). Concerning age the range was from 4 to 16, in total balanced concerning girls and boys. These drawings built the basis for the development of the design tool.
- Separated semi-structured interviews with children (questionnaire in the appendix): these interviews concentrate on understanding the children's perceptions and appropriation of the playgrounds/playspace: In total 28 interviews were carried out (11 girls, 17 boys in the age between 7 and 14). 6 children have a muslim background.
- Semi-structured interviews with parents (questionnaire in the appendix): focus was on understanding the role of play and playgrounds for parents in the development of children and their communities, evaluation of existing playgrounds, information about their households and neighbourhoods, wishes concerning the development of playgrounds in the future. In total 17 interviews were carried out (2 men, 15 women). Most of the women are housewives (age range: 21 to 48) living in low-income households with more than three persons. 5 parents have a muslim background.



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JUHU KOLIWADA

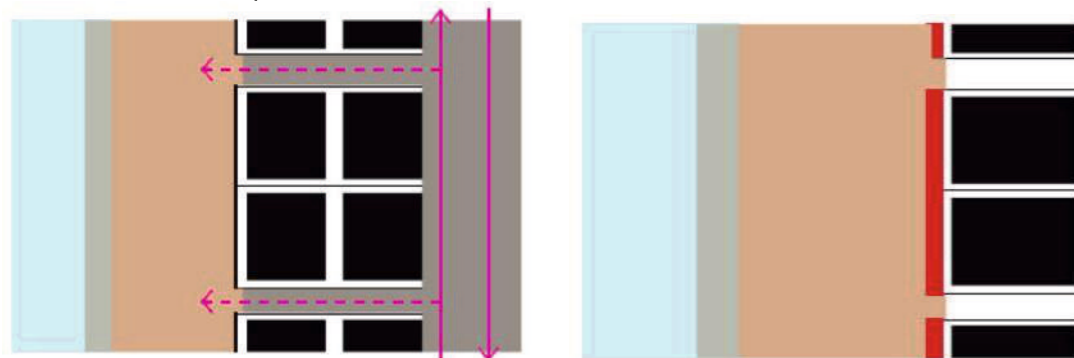
The urban village Juhu Koliwada is a home to fishers, hence giving it its image of a "Koliwada". It is a complex organism not only in its built character but also in its socioethnic layers. The geographical topography stimulates play very distinctively within the region. Sand of the beach taking over the streets of Juhu Koliwada becomes an important constant and a reminder of democratic spaces that awaits all. The beach is itself a reason for the settling of the fishers across this coast to the development of its current socioeconomic fabric. The entire urban village is experienced through extremely narrow lanes into an organic pattern of lanes and open space pockets.

SITE1: THE BEACH

Juhu Beach is a six km long shore line of the Arabian Sea. Our site study limits our scope of study to mere two hundred and fifty meters. The beach is a democratic space since people from all different social backgrounds use the public space: It remains open to all, limiting no expressions of social collaboration. It hence becomes a very important social space for the dwellers of Juhu Koliwada. It is a showcase of recreational activity and play from this region. The presence of the beach automatically reduces the quantum of play that could otherwise take place within the alleys of the urban village. The beach becomes an important asset not only for Juhu Koliwada but also for the city of Mumbai.



As the water levels are low the organization of play randomizes and overlaps at various nodes. As the water levels are high, the organization of play is more linearly structured and continues to overlap.



Accessibility is easy as the beach has multiple access points at regular intervals connecting the beach with the city through narrow lanes dividing the built fabric.



JUHU KOLIWADA

0m 50m 100m 150m 200m 250m 300m



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ACTIVITY MAPPING



10 AM- 1 PM

The park is closed: within the paved spaces at the main entrance of the park informal play of approx. 10-15 kids living around has been observed - playing football and cricket. Around 12:30 - 1 pm the space starts emptying and its footfall is seen to be reduced.



2 PM- 4 PM

The entry to the park still remains prohibited. Smaller groups of men and women with their kids are found to be resting here in the shade. They are usually people on the way to the beach.



4 PM- 6 PM

The park is now accessible for all. At this hour park measures a high footfall and even higher towards the weekends. A lot of kids with their parents are seen sitting and walking. Elderly adults are seen strolling through the park. Lawns are filled with multiple groups relaxing and playing games. The formal play instruments are taken over by the kids.

SITE2: SHRI SUNIL DUTT GARDEN



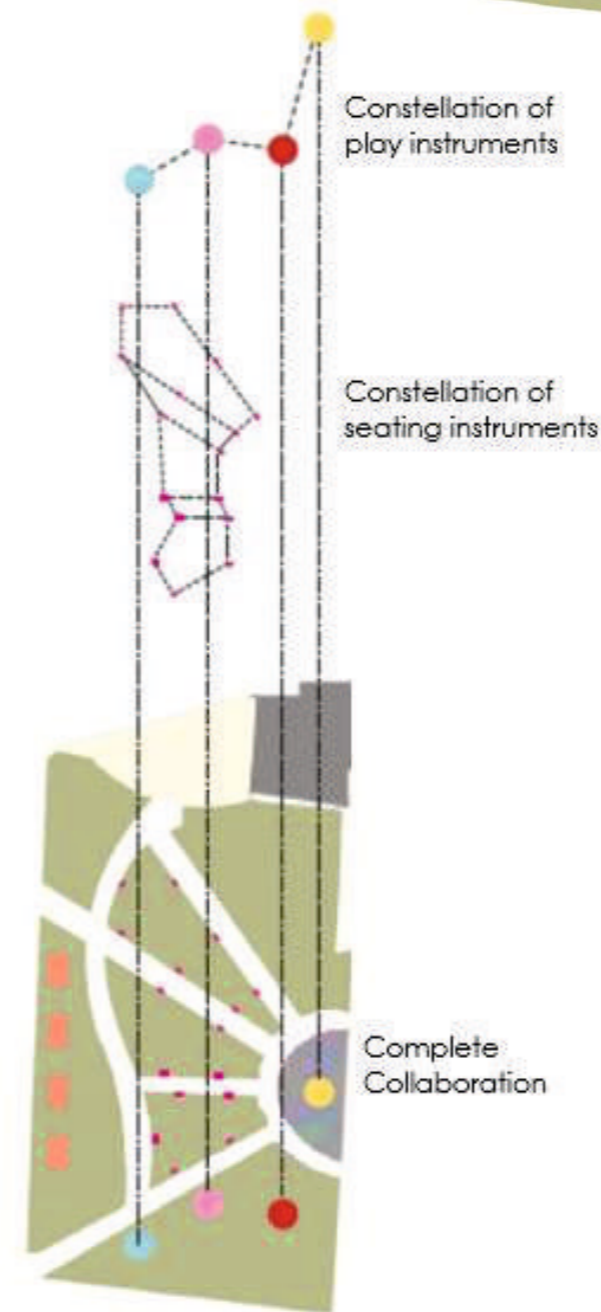
Shri Sunil Dutt Park is a formal public garden within Juhu Koliwada. It can only be accessed at particular times in the day and otherwise remains closed.

The park is maintained by the BMC and hence during its accessible hours it demands no entry fee, making it open for all. Evenings are very crowded and a larger footfall compared to mornings has been observed. The paved space in front of the gate of this park caters to the public at all times of the day. Even though the space is not necessarily a play area, it nurtures play and other daily activities around it.

PHYSICAL SPACE

The park does have a lot of formal play infrastructure like metal swings, wave type of slides, normal slides, a jungle gym, various multi-play stations and multiple outdoor double seater swings. There is an installation of a boat with blue paved ground simulating the water. Various kiosks and structures for seating are shaded by palm trees.

Play instruments are aligned to the south of the park. That doesn't limit activity of play only to the southernmost quadrangle. The play activities seem to be independent of play equipment scattered throughout the park. Unlike on Juhu beach outside play instruments aren't brought in.

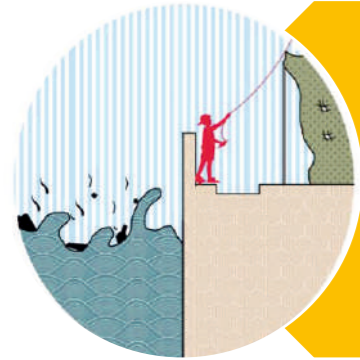


The park has three entrances. Its main entrance is from the North and the beach entrance is from the West which is not accessible. There is no control from the neighbouring settlements.

There is a specific infrastructure in the park for sitting or relaxing: kiosks, shaded seating's towards the west of the park cater children, young couples and elderlies. The raised edges of the paved path become tactical seating spaces. The blue paved ground simulating the water under the boat installation also turns into a seating space.

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Khar Danda

Khar Danda is a fishing village located on the western side of Bandra and Khar Road. The settlement has an organic urban structure. The lack of sustainable fishing practices along with pollution within the megacity has far-reaching implications for the future not only for the seafood consumption and the health of the ocean but also for the livelihood of fisher folk in Khar Danda and beyond.

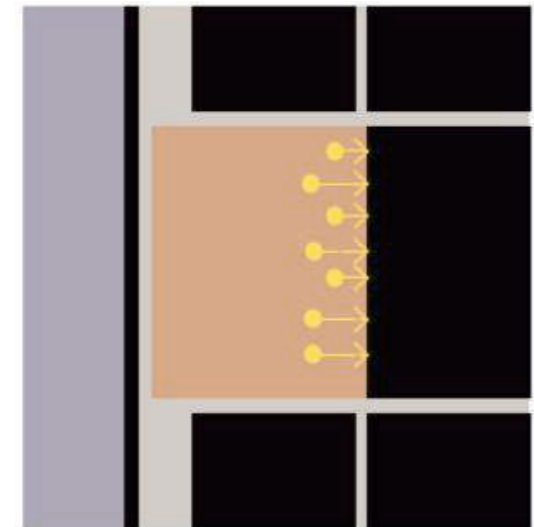
SITE:



The *Nalla Ground* is a pocket formed right at the edge of the *nalla* which continues right from Juhu Tara road to the Western edge of Khar Danda. This is a vacant plot of brown ground where people of all age groups can be found. The dry muddy terrain allows only a certain kind of games to be played. The ground shares its edge with an under-used built structure which has become not only a space for kids playing their local games but also an open space for all dwellers.

PHYSICAL SPACE

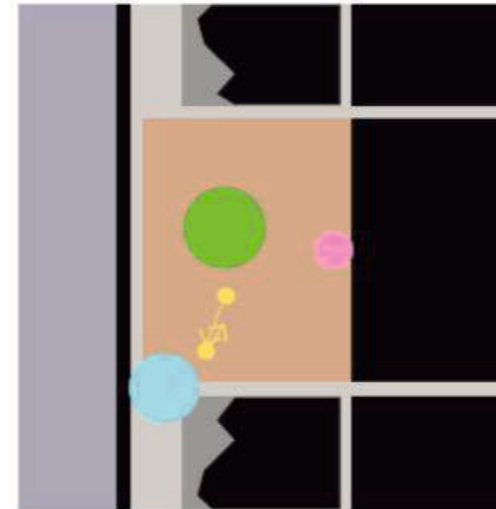
The Nalla Ground shows the presence of no formal play elements. But kids specifically play a particular game called *goti*. The game comes in a set of three concrete balls of around 2 cm in diameter. Beside of *goti* marbles are also very important play elements: especially girls play in the lanes around this ground. After the peripheral settlements had been demolished, a lot of furniture from homes became available for kids to be made their elements for play.



Proposals for a new road at the periphery had resulted in breaking the adjacent houses down. A lot of debris and house hold furniture stored along the streets have become part of the urban landscape now.

Constellation of play was along the wall and the game played was goti or marbles.

Constellation of play shifted from the wall more towards the centre and the West.



KHAR DANDA



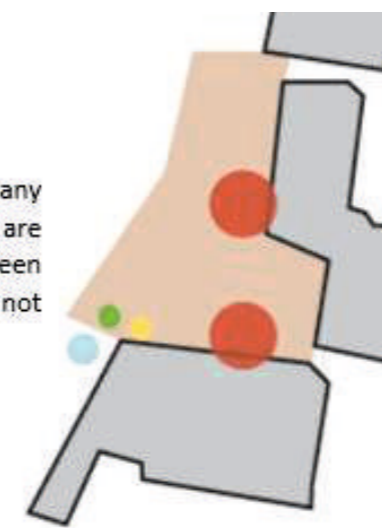
10 AM- 1 PM

Within this time frame, the small shops which are commercial extensions of houses start functioning. Kids are often seen playing *goti* at this hour on the ground. Women are observed drying pulses and cereals etc. on the streets. Around 12pm kids are seen in school dresses and bags - going with their moms to the school.



2 PM- 4 PM

Very few children are observed playing. Many adult men take over the edge of the built and are observed drinking alcohol. Kids are often seen playing marbles and *goti* in smaller groups of not more than 5-6 kids.



4 PM- 6 PM

Play reduces in the ground as now there are more adults involved in smoking pot and alcohol. Only a few kids are playing their games in more protected corner.

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Dharavi

Dharavi is one of the largest, wealthiest and the most complex informal settlements in the world. It is home to one of the most dynamic and entrepreneurial communities in India. It is also one of the most densely populated parts of Mumbai, suffering from lack of infrastructure and a number of critical challenges: high density, unsanitary living conditions, lack of water supply, electricity and also a population which is largely uneducated with limited access to healthcare.

SITE 1: MUSLIM CHOWK

The Muslim Chowk is one of Dharavi's densest neighbourhoods where migrants of Muslim communities bound by similar religious beliefs live together. The tenements here are grouped around a small chowk (Hindi: ground) accommodating a big mosque built five years ago.

The mosque transforms the chowk into an important landmark, most iconic block and active at all times of the day. Shops and restaurants are placed on the ground floor with residential or other commercial units stacked upon them. It is one of the safest places within the neighbourhood because of the mixed-use nature of the ground with simultaneous residential and commercial activities and the continuous hustle-bustle of the passer-bys, children and people visit the mosque at different times of the day.

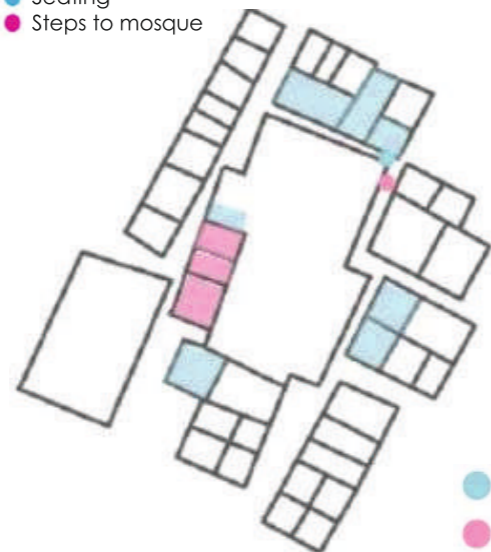
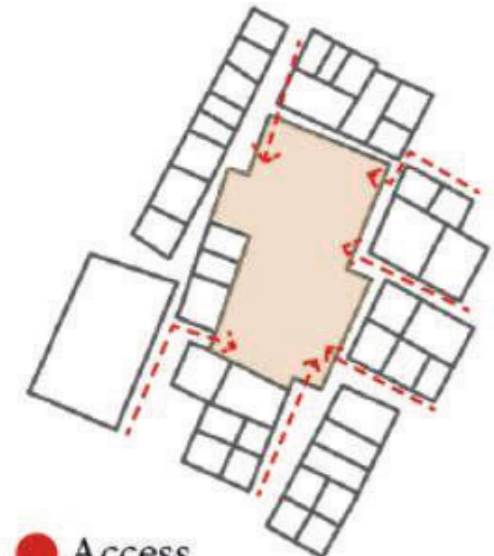
The ground does not hold any fixed elements of play, hence the constellation of play differs as when the game changes.

The ground is very well accessible by the residents and also acts like a thoroughfare for many passer-bys.

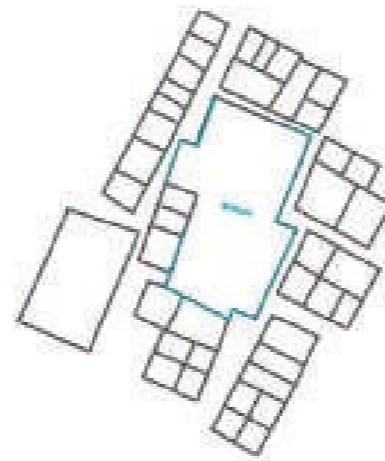
The ground is mostly controlled/looked after by the community and also by the neighbouring keepers of shops/res.

Existing benches, steps of the shops/ restaurants form seating spaces all around the *chowk*.

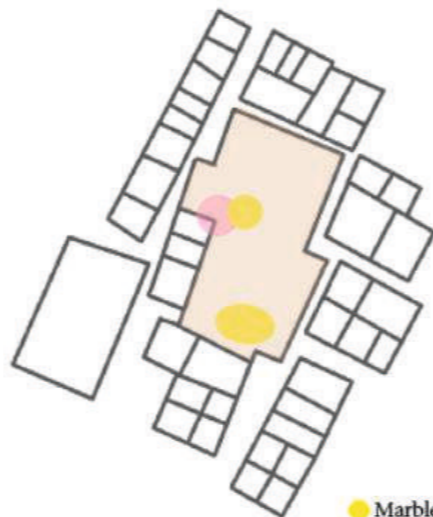
- Plantation
- Seating
- Steps to mosque



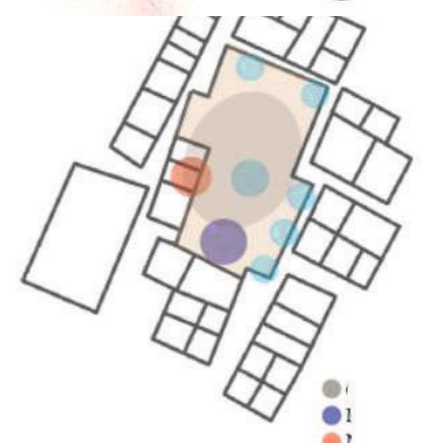
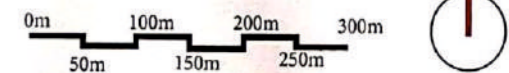
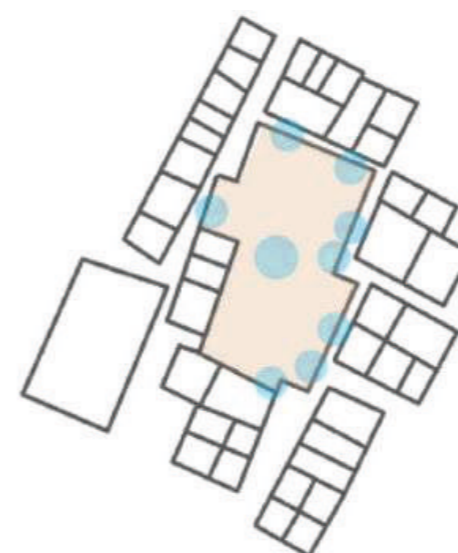
- Shops
- Mosque



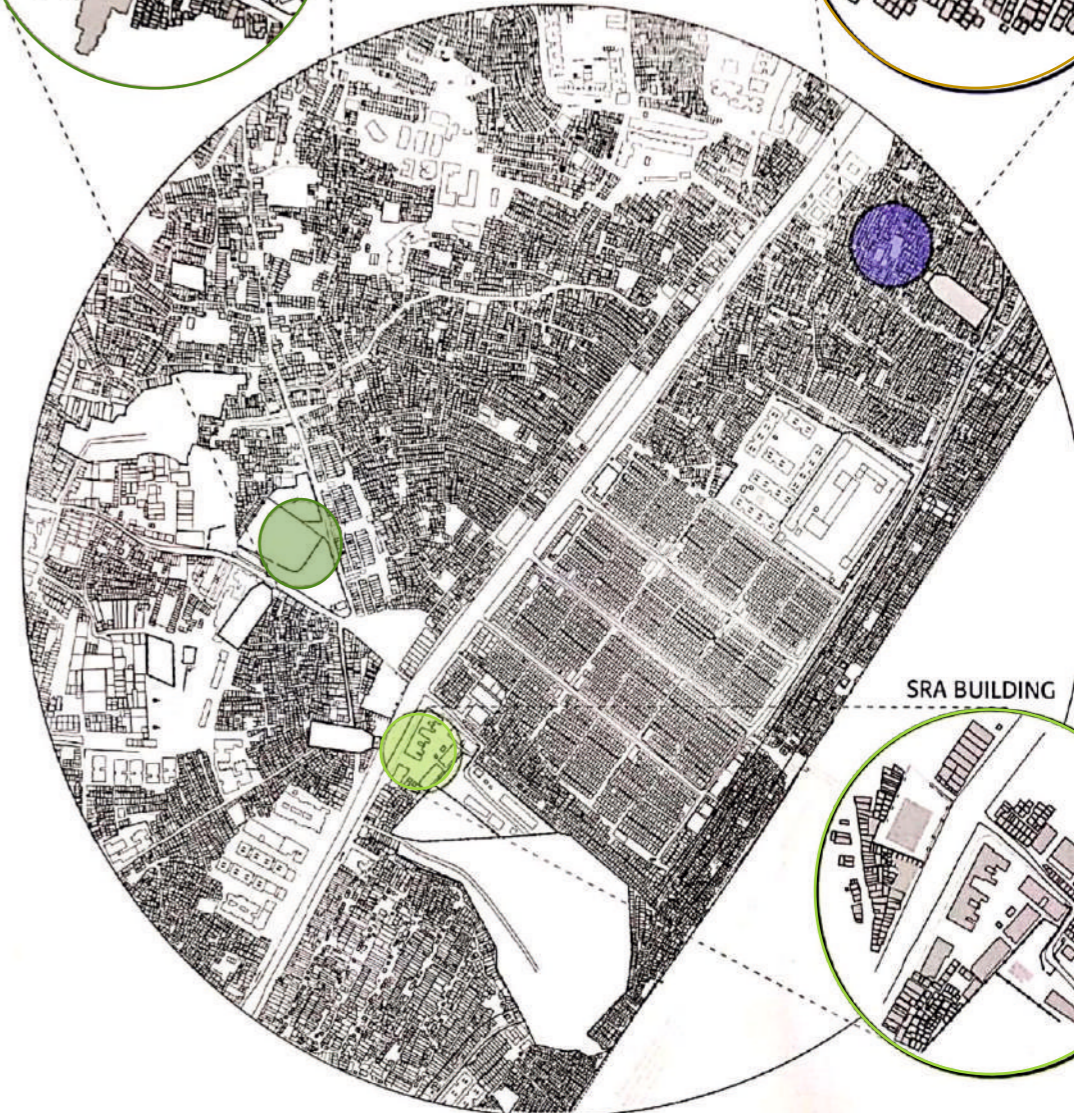
● Seating spaces



- Marbles
- Guess the d



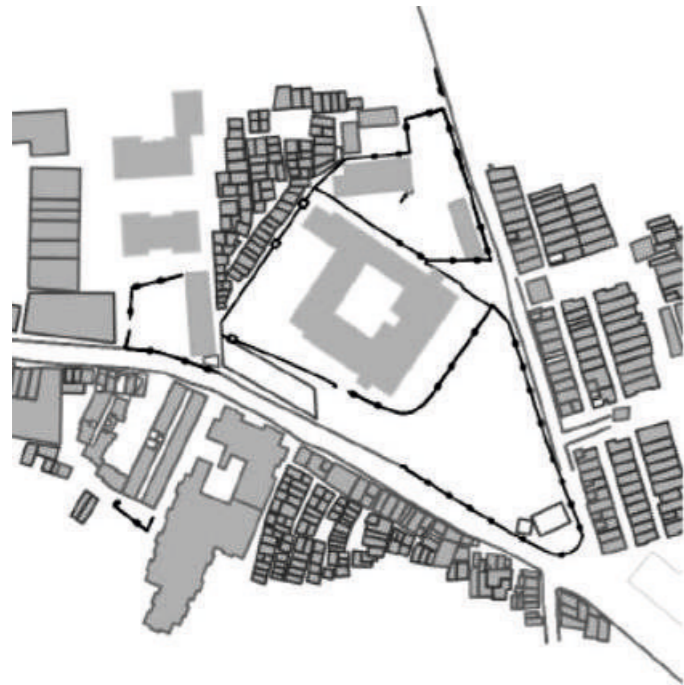
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SRA BUILDING

THE CULTURE & DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S PLAY

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SITE 2: BMC SCHOOL GROUND

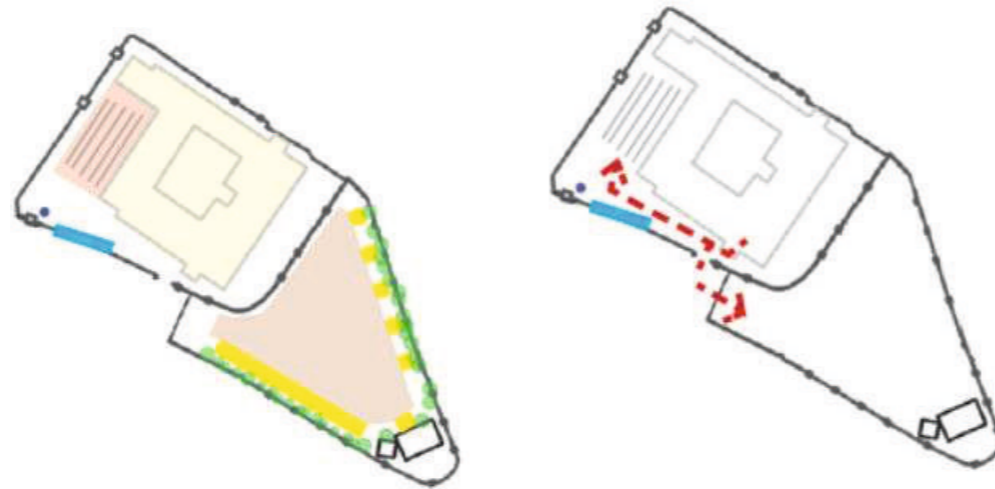
0M 25M 50M 75M



small play area within the school compound. Next to the school there is a large BMC ground which has been renovated recently. The students from the school are primarily found using their own school ground during break time and before/after school hours.

The BMC ground is a gated ground which has particular opening hours. This ground is used by the residents for other activities like political meetings and rallies.

The ground has been recently renovated and is loaded with some equipment's for play and exercising.



The ground within the school is covered in paver blocks and has a racing track marked on it. While the BMC ground is a proper *Maidaan* (Hindi: ground) and has formal play equipment like slides/swings/sea-saws etc. installed on the peripheral edges

The ground within the school is accessible only to the school children and only during school hours. It is monitored by the watchman of the school, while the BMC ground is a gated ground which is open from 7am to 10pm

tracks. Boys were found running around while girls were engaged in games like skipping and phugdi which does not require any fixed elements of play.

The school and ground both are controlled by the BMC authorities and not by the neighbouring houses. The density of the ground differs at different times of the day with it being most crowded at evenings. This is the time when children come back home from school/tuitions. The school as well as the ground is gated and remains shut at odd hours of the day to keep out uncertain activities.

This ground is used not only by the residents from the immediate neighbouring settlements but also by people living all over Dharavi, as it is one of the largest grounds in the vicinity. There exists no other playground within the radius of 100 meters from this playground.

The school ground has benches on one side where the guardian sits and watches the children play. The ground doesn't have any designated seating spaces for par-ents.

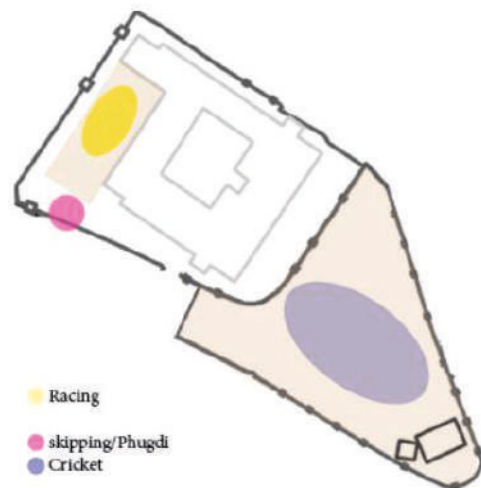
There exist only a number of small plants around the peripheral edges of the ground, while the rest of the ground is an open Maidaan.



● Seating
● Plantations
●

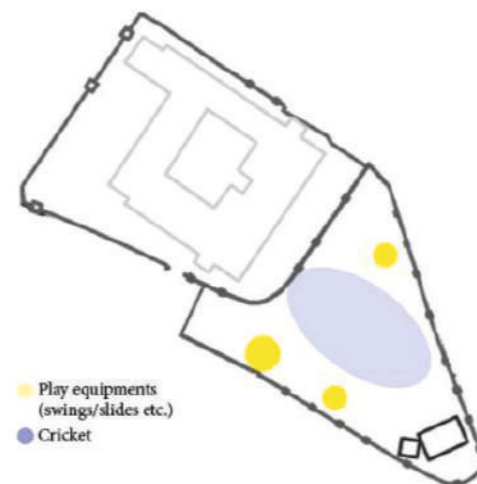
SOCIAL SPACE

The school provides a short break at 10:00 am when all students from different grades come out and play together in the school ground within the compound. The higher grade students get a shorter break of around 15 minutes while the younger ones continue to stay for another 15 minutes. The younger students are looked after and monitored by the guardian of the school. Girls and boys use the school ground in a similar manner, with girls being engaged in activities like skipping and phugdi.



10 AM- 1 PM

A lot of children come out and use the school ground during their break time (10:00am) and are engaged in activities like racing, catch and cook, phugdi, skipping etc. The school ground re-mains empty at all other times of the day after 10:30 am. The BMC ground is also used by some boys for cricket.



2 PM- 4 PM

The number of activities within the BMC ground tends to increase around this time as some kids finish with school. The ac-tivities here are mainly cricket on the Maidaan and the other play equipment is used by younger children and girls.



4 PM- 6 PM

The ground is most active at this time of the day as children get done with the school as well as their tuitions. Parents also get free from work and get their children to play in the ground.

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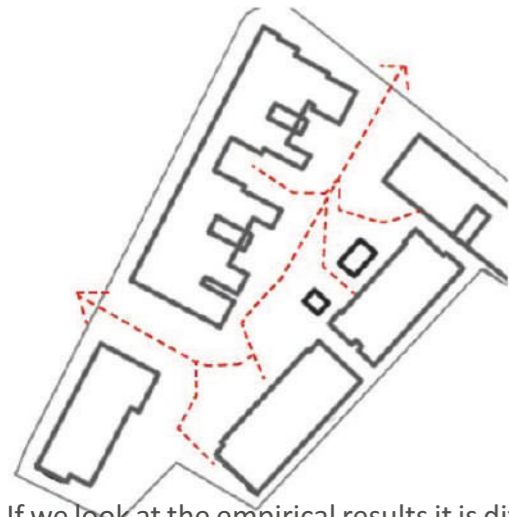
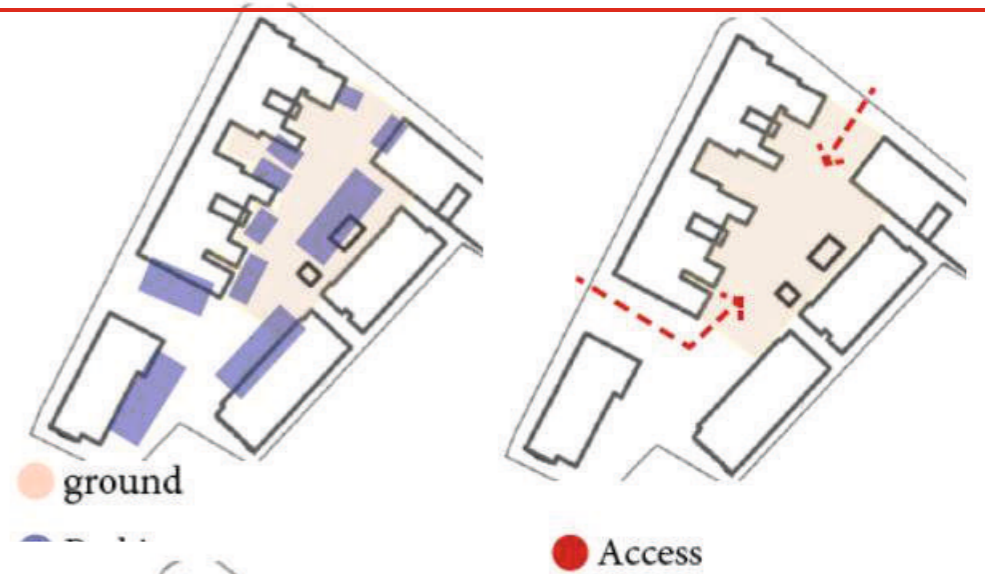
SITE 3: SRA building

The SRA building is one of the buildings which have been redeveloped by the Slum Rehabilitation Authority. It is a building complex that consists of five blocks with a parking space in between blocks. This open space within the block is used by the children for a variety of play activities. This SRA complex sits right on the 90 feet road and is well accessible.

PHYSICAL SPACE

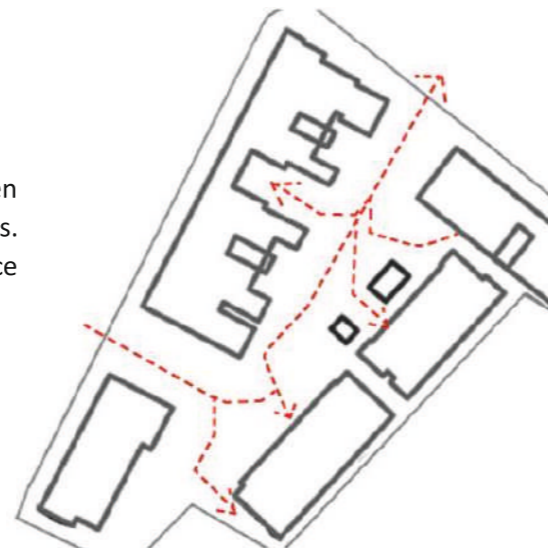
The open space between the blocks is used by the kids for playing games like cricket and marbles.

The SRA compound is a gated compound with access limited to only the residents living inside the complex



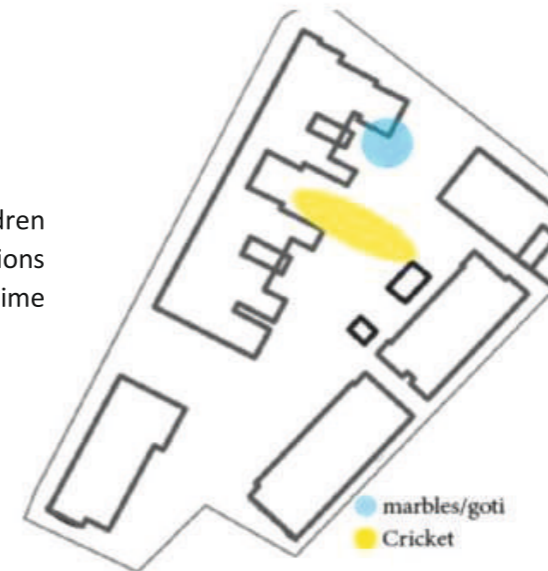
10 AM- 1 PM

This is the time when most children are either going to school or classes. Activities of play do not take place during this particular time slot.



2 PM- 4 PM

During this time most children return home from school or tuitions and rest at home for some time before getting down to play.



4 PM- 6 PM

This is the time when a big number of kids get down playing along with their friends. The majority playing are boys with the cricket being the most loved game while the girls are seen sitting in corners with their girls-groups chit-chatting.

If we look at the empirical results it is difficult to identify 'one' culture of play. There certainly are cultures of play emerging in all of the playgrounds, but these more general cultures are re-fracted by the place-specifics of these playgrounds and the characteristics of social and built space surrounding these areas. Also regardless of their cultural contexts boys carry out more exploratory and physical play than girls who are more engaged in symbolic and socio-dramatic play. This holds true for our research: "Boys tend to occupy larger spaces, play in larger groups and engage in activities that involve gross movements. Girls occupy internal or more restricted spaces, play in smaller groups, near their houses. However, common play activities are locally modified through using certain resources to play but also through giving common play activities local names, which also contributes to a certain local culture of play. So

