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DOSSIÊ: A INFÂNCIA URBANA NAS CIÊNCIAS SOCIAIS: PROBLEMÁTICAS E DESAFIOS METODOLÓGICOS

(At)tending to rhizomes: how researching neighbourhood play with children can affect and be affected by policy and practice in transcalar ways in the context of the Welsh Government's Play Sufficiency Duty

(A)tendiendo los rizomas: cómo la investigación de los juegos de barrio con los niños y niñas puede afectar y verse afectada por las políticas y prácticas de manera transcalar en el contexto del programa 'Play Sufficiency Duty' del gobierno de Gales

(A)tendendo aos rizomas: como a pesquisa de brincadeiras de bairro com crianças pode afetar e ser afetada por políticas e práticas de maneira transcalar no contexto do programa governamental 'Play Sufficiency Duty' do País de Gales

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Abstract: The authors draw on their experiences of researching the Welsh Government's Play Sufficiency Duty to discuss how the conditions for the Duty itself, its implementation and for children to play out in their neighbourhoods develop in rhizomatic ways that can be both planned and unexpected. Looking at examples of neighbourhood research with children, they suggest four dimensions of children's participation (as the capacity to affect and be affected): first, seeing playing itself as a mode of participation in the production of public space; second, through participation in research and influencing planning and design at a hyperlocal level; third, through the ways such research affects researchers and others; and fourth, how the stories that emerge from the research spread in rhizomatic ways that affect policy and practice at multiple intra-related scales.

Keywords: Children's play. Public space. Participation. Rhizomes.

Resumen: Los autores se basan en sus experiencias de investigación sobre el programa Play Sufficiency Duty del gobierno de Gales para discutir como las condiciones del programa y su implementación para que los niños jueguen en sus vecindarios, se desarrollan de maneras rizomáticas que pueden ser planificadas e inesperadas. A partir de ejemplos de investigaciones vecinales con niños y ninãs, los autores sugieren cuatro dimensiones de la participación infantil (entendida como la capacidad de afectar y ser afectada): primero, ver el juego como una forma de participar en la producción del espacio público; segundo, participar en la investigación e influir en la planificación y en el diseño a nivel hiperlocal; tercero, las formas en que esta investigación afecta a los investigadores y otros; y cuarto, cómo las historias que emergen de la investigación se propagan en formas rizomáticas que afectan la dicha política y la práctica en múltiples escalas interrelacionadas.

Palabras clave: Juego de niños y ninãs. Espacio público. Participación. Rizomas.

Resumo: Os autores baseiam-se nas suas experiências de investigação sobre o programa Play Sufficiency Duty do governo do País de Gales, para discutir como as condições do referido programa e a sua implementação para que as crianças brinquem nos seus bairros, se desenvolvem de maneiras rizomáticas que podem ser planejadas e inesperadas. Observando exemplos de pesquisas em bairros com crianças, os autores sugerem quatro dimensões da participação

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infantil (entendida como a capacidade de afetar e ser afetada): primeiro, vendo o brincar como um modo de participação na produção do espaço público; segundo, através da participação na pesquisa e influenciando o planejamento e o *design* a um nível hiperlocal; terceiro, pelas formas como essa pesquisa afeta pesquisadores e outros; e, quarto, como as histórias que emergem da pesquisa se espraiam em formas rizomáticas que afetam a referida política pública e a sua prática em múltiplas escalas intrarrelacionadas.

Palavras-chave: Brincadeiras infantis. Espaço público. Participação. Rizomas.

Introduction

The title for this article comes from conversations between the three authors about their research both for and into the Welsh Government's Play Sufficiency Duty (PSD), which places a statutory duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient opportunities for children to play. The authors have been involved, together and separately, in researching the PSD since its commencement in 2012. In this article we discuss examples from our research and some of the conceptual tools used, exploring how they can spread rhizomatically (Deleuze and Guattari 1988 [2004]) as stories, affecting and being affected by policies and practice at many levels. We frame this capacity to affect and be affected as four interrelated dimensions of children's participation in the production of public space and as children enacting their right to the city (and smaller settlements): play as participation, engaging in research and influencing decisions, affecting researchers and others, and affecting policy and practice at transcalar levels.

In seeking a mode of production for this article that might adequately account for multiple knowledges, relationships and contexts, we revisited a recording of a local authority focus group meeting from our recent study (Russell et al. 2020). The focus groups brought together people working at strategic and frontline delivery levels from across a range of professions to explore examples of actions taken, the conditions that supported these actions, issues faced by those who want to make a difference, and possible solutions and recommendations. The particular focus group meeting we chose to revisit looked at issues to do with

the built and natural environment and included professionals from play development, planning, housing, parks and open spaces, green infrastructure, landscape architecture and highways.

We were looking to re-encounter stories from the research to see what more might be thought, said and done about the forms of knowledge we had been party to producing, and which have also taken on a life of their own. We each listened to the audio recording of the selected focus group and then met (online) twice to discuss it. Our first conversation was recorded and transcribed, providing the broad shape and material for the article. The second meeting worked with the first rough outline to develop the article further.

Our main focus in this article is on participative hyperlocal research with children to explore their relationship with their neighbourhoods and how this research has been affected by and has affected policy and practice, offering up extended conceptualisations of children's participation in urban public space. We use the term 'urban public space' here to broaden discussions from cities alone: much of the research was carried out in towns and some in ex-mining villages, all of them looking at children's relationships with the built environment. In addition, we draw on Lefebvre's (1970 [2003]) notion of urbanisation as a productive force whereby the uneven mesh of physically and digitally connected networks of settlements spreads the urban beyond the specific sites of towns and cities and into the countryside, dissolving binary notions of urban and rural. The research drawn on in this article show that issues of children's spatial justice and their right to participate in public space pertain broadly and that the focus on cities can obscure the lives of children living in smaller settlements.

At times our conversations wandered into other aspects of our involvement in the PSD as researchers, practitioners and advocates. This 'wayfaring' (Ingold 2007) does not have efficiency as its purpose; rather, its intention is to *inhabit* the landscapes of our research experiences, to dwell there, exploring lines of thought, knowledge production and practice.

The article opens with a brief introduction to the PSD itself and key concepts used in our research, including interrelated notions of spatial justice, account-ability and response-ability, and collective wisdom. Overall, the approach is a relational, embodied and affective one that sees the production of space (and of knowledge, professional practice and playing itself) as emerging from ongoing encounters between human and non-human bodies, material objects and landscapes, histories, desires, technologies and so on, as well as the political economy of late capitalism (Lester 2020).

We then work with these ideas and with fragments of our conversations (presented as quotations) to broaden thinking about children's play as *participation in the production of public space*. We explore 'participation' as the ways that children are affected by and affect the socio-material conditions of their lives both directly and indirectly through meshworks of connections across four interrelated dimensions. First, seeing playing itself as a mode of participation in public life and as a part of the right to and production of the city (or smaller settlement); second, through participation in research and influencing planning and design at a hyperlocal level; third, through the ways such research affects researchers and others, sharpening their ability to notice how spaces work or not for children beyond the original study; and fourth, how the stories that emerge from the research spread in rhizomatic ways that affect policy and practice at multiple intra-related scales. In doing this, we argue that examples of hyperlocal research with children, whilst singular and intensive, can nevertheless extend beyond the parochial in ways that can affect how public space is produced at transcalar levels.

The Welsh Play Sufficiency Duty

Building on a history of support for children's play since its inception in 1999, alongside an explicitly rights-based approach to policies regarding children, the Welsh Government introduced the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, which included placing a statutory duty on local authorities (LAs) to assess and secure sufficient opportunities for children to play. As a part of this Duty, LAs are required to prepare and submit to the government a Play Sufficiency Assessment (PSA) every three years in line with statutory guidance, together with annual action plans.

We have had the privilege of researching and working with the PSD before and since its commencement. As our work, both local and national, has developed, we have worked with key principles and conceptual tools that acknowledge how the relationship between policy and children's play is not straightforward. Play is not only something that happens in designated spaces and times; it is not something that can simply be 'provided' by adults. It emerges opportunistically from a dynamic assemblage of conditions (Lester and Russell 2013). Given this, we advocate that assessing and securing sufficient opportunities to play should be a process of *paying attention to those conditions*. This implies seeing children's right to play less as an individual entitlement and more as a matter of *spatial justice*.

Spatial justice refers to children's fair and just access to – and participation in – what public space has to offer; more specifically it is about children's everyday freedoms (Gill 2021) to move around, play and hang out in their local neighbourhoods. Such freedoms are restricted through configurations of space that privilege the economy, giving street space over to cars (both moving and parked). The removal of children from public space because of traffic renders them 'out of place' and streets less inhabited, giving rise to a range of additional fears for safety (Carroll et al. 2018; Russell et al. 2020). However, research into children's everyday lives undertaken as part of the PSD has shown that despite the general trend away from playing out, children still want to and do play out where conditions are right.

Paying attention to the conditions that support children's playing out can be developed through the twin processes of *account-ability and response-ability*. Account-ability is the process of accounting for how spaces might support or constrain playing, and rests on understanding how

the production of space operates to include or exclude children, both as a marginalised group and specific children who face additional barriers to participation in the public realm. Response--ability entails responding to such accounts by holding habits of thought and action up to critical scrutiny to see how spaces might be produced in more just ways.

The PSD requires LAs to work in partnership across a range of professional domains; successful partnerships require working with a *collective wisdom* that acknowledges there are multiple ways of knowing about space; this also includes children's own wisdom about their neighbourhoods.

Play as participation: children's right to public space

Playing out is a way of participating in everyday neighbourhood life and a part of the ongoing production of public space. Such an assertion encompasses Lefebvre's (1969 [1996]) vision of the right to the city (and smaller settlements) as both access to the services and goods the city has to offer and also "the right to everyday social participation, to webs of connection, to making the city in ways that are not driven purely by the forces of capital, to shared moments that transcend daily drudgery" (Russell 2020, 16). Playing-as-participation is an affective state (Deleuze and Guattari 1988 [2004]), marking children's ability to both affect and be affected, their power to act in ways that can momentarily enhance life through making affirmative connections with other human and non-human bodies, materials and space (Lester 2013).

Seeing play as a form of participation is a generative way of theorising children's participation beyond the dominant reference to article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), bringing in article 15, children's right to freedom of association and peaceful assembly. Playing and hanging out constitute a disturbance of the dominant economic configuration of public space: children dwell rather than pass through and physical features are reappropriated in novel ways

beyond their original intention. Children "work with the world they have been given but do not have control over" (Pyyry 2016, 14), temporarily taking over and re-making spaces in ways that can prefigure a more democratic and just production of public space (Carroll et al. 2018).

'Just a thing that happened': the power of the example

In our research study we chose to work with *examples*, not intending these to be offered as examples of good practice to be replicated elsewhere, or even to exemplify general ideas, but to show the singularity of events. "Each singular example shows the messy and contingent details of the unique contexts, processes and people involved" (Russell et al. 2020, 16). In traditional research, examples are often dismissed as anecdotal or unscientific unless they are used to exemplify a theory or concept that already exists. What that does is generalise the example; it becomes a particular example of a general concept. This is not useful if we are trying to move beyond unexamined habits of thought towards thinking differently about spatial justice for all children. As Massumi (2002, 18) says "the success of the example hinges on the details. Every little one matters". The quotations below are taken from recordings of our conversations.

> *Wendy:* It's like what [PSD Lead Officer] said about research with children. He said, we know the general stuff, that's all out there, we don't want to keep repeating that, what we don't know is how it is for these children in this space at this time and it's that specificity, that singularity, that's valuable in this hyperlocal research.

> *Mike:* I do just wonder whether there is a tendency for people, when they are invited to do things at events, that there is a feeling they should do something quite grand and generalising, as opposed to just going to share this particular story about this particular thing that was done, and maybe not even give any kind of conclusions to that, *just to present a thing that happened*. And it really struck me that in that [focus group], that's what we asked them to do, was just to share in detail some examples. And a huge amount came out from that.

Ben: They are just incredibly motivating and inspirational stories about children playing, that leave people feeling, I just want to do some more of that stuff, it isn't distilling, it isn't generalising, it's not drawing too many conclusions is it, it's just telling stories of examples.

Hyperlocal participatory research: account-ability and response-ability

Questionnaires can yield useful information (Dallimore 2019; Tawil and Barclay 2020). Yet there is much these instruments miss about children's wisdoms regarding their neighbourhoods. As Wendy commented, "You need both. A lot of the time it's the messy detail, just authentic description that is missing".

Spatial and creative methods, including mappings, walkabouts, photo walks and talks (Pyyry 2015) and spatial technologies can offer a meaningful and interesting way to engage children in sharing their life experiences (Freeman 2019) and help adults develop ways of paying attention to how space can work for children. Such hyperlocal research has been central to the authors' own approaches to the PSD and beyond. Rather than categorising and quantifying spaces or establishing broad issues that influence play, this research seeks to reveal the granular and contingent singularities of children's everyday play lives in specific places. In doing so it pays attention to where and what matters to different children, generating more and more examples of how children make use of their local environments, the mundane and overlooked features they value, the customs and rituals they develop, the extent of their everyday freedoms, and how these are shaped by – and shape – the particular material and social characteristics of where they live.

Much has been written on the ethics of both children's participation and participatory research with children. Critiques include questioning the authenticity of children's 'voices' within adult-led procedures, problems of representation (both in terms of children's experiences and of representing all children), a lack of reflection on adult-power relations and a lack of attention to children's own quotidian forms of participation.

As Lester (2013, 26) states, the dominant understanding of participation "assumes an autonomous child who can represent and articulate their desires and opinions in ways that fit with adult political processes". Bodén (2021) suggests that the ethics of participatory research are often judged on a sliding scale of research on, to, with, for and by children, but concludes that this is overly simplistic in practice and ethics are messy, contextualised and dynamic. In the research studies discussed here, although structural power inequalities were ever present, the intention was to use the twin processes of account-ability and response-ability to pay critical attention to children's relationships with space and to draw on authentic descriptions (accounting) to scrutinise the ethics of the production of space and question existing habits of thought and practice in order to make changes towards spatial justice for all children (responsiveness). 'Voice', from this perspective "emerges from relations among objects, spaces, affects, bodies, discourses, texts, and theory, in dynamically shifting arrangements and re-arrangements" (Mayes 2019, 1193). As such, the starting point was to attend to children's expressions of participation though playing in public space and to find a range of methods that did not necessarily rely on words or rationality. "This suggests that adults are alert to what unfolds as children are playing without prescription or projection of where it might go, which requires considerable sensitivity and restraint" (Lester 2020, 36).

The two examples of research with children discussed in the focus group and our subsequent conversations were for planned redevelopments and were carried out by the PSD lead officer in partnership with, in one case an Environmental Development Officer (a landscape architect) working for a social housing landlord, and in the other a municipal Environment and Recreation Facilities Officer. The mode of children's participation described here – our second dimension – is perhaps the one that most readily comes to mind when thinking of children's participation and article 12 of the CRC.

In both examples, play sessions were offered

in the space to be redeveloped and researchers/ playworkers observed – paid attention to – how the children used the space, and then gradually started conversations about what they would like to do in the space, using their findings as a brief to the developers.

> *Mike:* One of the important things they did when they were doing the research with children was look at children's existing and preferred *behaviours* rather than the *objects* that they want, and that then leads them to kind of go, actually they can do this stuff in all kinds of ways in all kinds of places. And children talking about where they want to be able to play and where they do play, I think that is a big part of the catalyst for that shift about seeing play as a function of all public space, community space, and moving away [from playgrounds].

> *Ben:* So the design brief is not what kit they want, it's that kids want to be able to run and jump and hide and seek and be high and be under and they work to what facilitates that.

These and other examples of research with children explored below help adults to appreciate children's own wisdom about their neighbourhoods and how they play there.

Children's ways of knowing: towards a collective wisdom

One of the strengths of the PSD is the requirement to work across professional domains: if playing is seen as a matter of spatial justice, partnership working extends beyond the usual collaborations to include those whose work affects how public space is configured and produced, including in planning, housing, highways, parks, open space, green and blue infrastructure, town centre management and more. Each perspective has something to add. We have referred to this as a collective wisdom that acknowledges multiple ways of knowing. This includes children's own wisdom about their neighbourhoods.

Children's relationships with space, and therefore their ways of knowing about it, are very different from adults; although the conditions of their lives are affected by the same socio-political

and socio-material processes, they are experienced differently (Horton and Kraftl 2017; Jans 2004). Children (and adults) actively seek out moments where life is better; for children, this is often what space offers for playing and being with friends, including physical, social and affective aspects (Kyttä et al. 2018; Lester 2020). If we are to learn anything about the conditions that support and constrain children's ability to play out, then we need to find ways to attune to the "radical otherness of children's perceptions, perspectives and experiences" (Burchardt 2020, 68).

Children's place naming (toponymy) is frequently shared in such research and offers a sense of children's ways of knowing about their neighbourhoods. Often such names are descriptive of what children can do there, such as "the sliding hill" (Hart 1979, 342) or "the swinging tree".[3] Hart (*ibid*) adds that areas adults have very general names for will "commonly have dozens of minute niches for different activities". In one example of such research, conducted by two of the authors, the children, who all played out most days, were able to reel off 16 names for such spaces: the rec, bottom park, top park, top shop, top of the village, bog's pond, Taff's field, the cricket field, the footy pitch, the haunted house, the steps, the bars, lion's rock, the forest, sandy bay, and the river. To the adult researchers, the river, when visited, appeared to be more of a stream and the forest a small area of woodland, both of which hint at how differently children and adults experience spaces. However, the children's ability to name and describe what they do in these areas, suggested a strong and long-lived community play culture, where even simple features like some steps with handrails hold significant cultural value as places for meeting up and playing.

Lived examples such as these can be revelatory when presented to adults, challenging long and widely held misconceptions about children and their play, and opening up possibilities for thinking and doing things differently. In doing so, this research helps adults to appreciate chil-

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3 Armitage, Marc. 2021. Hard Lessons on the road to becoming an advocate for children and their playing. *Marc Armitage*, 10th August 2021. Accessed 8th September, 2022. https://bit.ly/3UwSlsU.

dren's wisdom, their intimate knowledge of their neighbourhoods and what they afford for playing. Often adults are not aware of the significance of such spaces for children, and this becomes a problem if those adults are responsible for the design and management of public space. The extract below from our conversations shows the importance of special places, how examples from the research affect adults and how they can travel across different professional arenas (as discussed later).

> *Wendy:* one of the things I love about this research is that it pays attention to what's already there and what's important and so they talk about not taking stuff away because that's what children already use. And I think that's what people forget.

> *Ben:* The plethora of stuff about doing research with children on designing child friendly cities, on designing play friendly spaces, it strikes us that all of that seems to start halfway through the process and misses out the bit about doing research on how people are using the space currently.

> *Wendy:* I've just done some workshops with Welsh local authorities … and [LA officer] was talking about the research with children you did for them. One of the things he picked out was your photo of the steps and railings, and he said, "they don't go anywhere but kids use them, they're important for kids so we'll leave them there".

Geographer Doreen Massey (2005) speaks of space as the ongoing production of a multiplicity of interrelations. Adults may see the left-behind concrete steps as an eyesore with no purpose, yet this research shows how important they are for the local children who use them as a meeting and hanging out place. These methods draw out children's wisdom, their very different relationships with space. They also help adults develop the ability to see the signs of where children have played:

> *Wendy:* So I was saying, look at the paint missing on the railings - you know that whole idea of play traces. It's part of that paying attention, which is kind of research with children but it's research with absent children - the space becomes imbued with their presence even in their absence. Which is what we as adults need

to pay attention to. And I think doing actual research with children helps us see in that way.

Australian children's folklorist June Factor (2004, 142) draws on Aboriginal song and story lines to coin the term "play lines". Her description resonates well with children's relationships with their neighbourhoods:

> In traditional Australian Aboriginal societies, tribal territory is inscribed in the memory of its community through song and storylines: invisible tracks that trace the history, meaning and use of every significant feature of the environment. Each place has its own story, its own melody, and often its own special importance for a particular family. To an outsider, it is just a landscape of trees, rocks, water … Without close, patient and attentive listening and learning from the traditional owners of this land, the song and storylines that mark every inch of their earth are unknown and unknowable to the non-initiated. Outsiders cannot read the invisible tracks that hold the land and its people in such close embrace.

It is these lines that adults who want to help create conditions for children to play out must learn to appreciate. Researching with children is a good starting point for both revealing the significance of children's spaces and beginning to see the "invisible tracks" even when children are not there. In our conversations, we made the connection between the idea of play lines and anthropologist Tim Ingold's (2007) work on lines.

> *Wendy:* I really like the concepts of play lines. It can bring in Tim Ingold's ideas of blobs and lines … Blobs are static, they've got boundaries, and for certainty we like to stick things in boundaries. But life, vivacity, movement come from lines. When rational adults use lines, they use them in a very straight transporting way, getting from A to B, but what kids do is they wayfare, seeing what's there on the way. And what Tim Ingold says is we should wayfare more because that's where the good stuff happens.

> *Ben:* And the places they wayfare to and from and in between are knots within the meshwork of lines. And [village] was an absolute classic example of that, because of those paths that have been worn over generations [desire lines] - those children could name up to 16 different places and there were obviously lines between each of those 16 knots. [But] the kind of knots those children are talking about are much

more permeable than we might traditionally understand as fixed equipment dedicated playgrounds.

Mike: You can't necessarily establish where the edge of that space ends, it's just that they go around that sort of space, and then they talk about playing massive games of hide and seek around that space, it goes quite far beyond the actual [knot] itself.

Appreciating children's ways of knowing about their own relationship with space is part of the process of co-producing a collective wisdom that can work both across professional boundaries and at multiple scales of spatial practice to address issues of spatial (in)justice for children.

Affecting and being affected

In our conversations, we talked about the power of research to affect and be affected. Part of this was immediate, in terms of the research affecting design briefs and other spatial practices: our second dimension of children's participation. The researcher in the examples from the focus group (a PSD lead officer) commented, "The really refreshing thing for me was we did that, we wrote a report and then [the housing association] actually listened to it and designed it specifically for what the kids had said". A similar example is the LA officer realising the importance of the steps and not removing them, as discussed earlier.

Research with children has repeatedly acted as a spur for changing attitudes and practices, making it a central part of 'doing play sufficiency' in Wales:

> *Ben*: It was so exciting, finding out from that first PSA how powerful research could be in influencing the work of the play team, because there were some really obvious things that came out that were like, wow, we need to redesign the service. Just really strong findings that spoke to the power of doing research and then that generated a much greater focus on research as a routine part of the job.

Research has also affected adults themselves, both how they felt about children's play and spatial justice and also becoming better attuned to

"the different spatial and temporal patterns and rhythms of playing" (Harker 2005, 29), in turn affecting adult sensibilities towards play. This is our third dimension of children's participation. As Ben commented:

> I just think they're so excited in that interview about what it is that they're doing. They talk about feeling quite a lot - you can see and feel the experience when you go out there with the children or with the community, or the parents can see or feel it and it makes you able to speak more powerfully about it. It can't be underestimated.

Sharing stories of changes that help create conditions for children to play generates hope and enthusiasm. Often the general literature about children's loss of everyday freedoms to play out describes problems that seem insurmountable, such as tackling the dominance of cars in residential neighbourhoods and the associated fears for children's safety (Russell et al. 2020).

> *Mike*: I remember a long time ago, doing a session with parents [on barriers to playing out and the consequences] and a woman just going, god that's depressing, I mean, what do we do about that? I think that's a big difference in this research - it becomes much more hopeful because we can give examples of things being good or being made better and it all feels so much more doable. The number of times they talk about having examples of the things they've worked on together and the enthusiasm that comes from having done that and being able to talk about it and then they go and do something else. That was quite enlightening for me really. I think sometimes when you work at a strategic level[4] you're always looking at the big picture and trying to make the big changes. But throughout that research, time and time again, it was like the little example was the thing that was the catalyst for other big things.

Sometimes, there is just something about the stories that captures the imagination, and they travel, continuing to affect policy and practice. This fourth dimension of children's participation – as with the others – happens in rhizomatic ways (Deleuze and Guattari 1988[2004]). There is no single root or beginning, rhizomes can spread

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4   Mike Barclay was the PSD lead officer for Wrexham County Borough Council until 2018.

in many directions, rupturing and/or sprouting. Rhizomes contain aspects of planning and organisation and also elements of unpredictability. Since there is no single starting point, the ways in which research with children has affected people, policy and practice have a history, but not one that can be described in any linear fashion. As Mike commented, "The PSD has been a catalyst for all this, with a whole history before it". Two of the authors reflected on what had influenced their approach to the first PSA in 2012:

> *Mike*: I realise in terms of my desire to do research with children, *Play for a Change* (Lester and Russell 2008) had come out just before the Play Sufficiency Duty came in and that stuff really highlighted the value of doing research with children about the detail of their everyday lives.

> *Ben:* I remember at the time we designed research for the first PSA I was coming off the back of doing my postgraduate certificate and studying research methods, and I'd absolutely fallen in love with it. It was just that amazing coincidence, a timely occurrence.

Our conversations also noted how the PSD has been affected both by the Welsh Government's commitment to partnership working and by Play Wales[5] "ploughing the furrow of working to a different agenda" (Ben) that has always included research, cross-professional networks and being open to working with the tensions between policy, practice and research. This has supported the development of a fruitful culture where:

> *Mike*: there's always been academics, policy and practitioners involved together and I think as a consequence you get those conversations of real-life examples of hyperlocal stuff being interrogated through different theoretical lenses

> *Ben*: and equally with policy development.

Such a culture creates the conditions for a group of play officers working across LAs to host a series of conferences bringing different professions including "planners and parks and landscapes and foster carers" (Ben) together to talk about children's play and their role in it. Focus group participants spoke with enthusiasm about how they had been affected by the conferences, one of them saying, "I could see and feel the passion in the room, and I thought hang on, there's some really committed people here", adding that now "our drive has got to be summed up as passion and belief".

Meetings, conferences and other events provide opportunities for sharing examples of research with professionals and policy makers locally and nationally. As Mike pointed out, "a lot of that rhizomatic stuff happens by chance but let's not overlook the intentional aspect of it as well". Events are assemblages where people, histories, ideas, connections, examples and so on come together and then part affected, with the potential for ideas to spread.

The example of the steps discussed earlier was shared at a network meeting of LAs convened partly for that purpose; it was also later retold at a meeting of the Welsh Government's Ministerial Play Review, attended by several government officials. Similarly, the language of the conceptual tools used in the Play Sufficiency research "filters in and we hear [PSD lead officer] talking about collective wisdom and government ministers talking about spatial justice" (Wendy), with some of the concepts becoming "the tools of doing play sufficiency" (Mike).

(At)tending to rhizomes: some closing thoughts

Children's right to public spaces encompasses their right to participate in their production. In our conversations we have explored four dimensions of that participation through our research. First, children's play is a form of such participation, where they appropriate and reconfigure spatial arrangements in ways that enliven life. Our account-ability and response-ability as adult advocates entails paying attention to the spatial, temporal and socio-material conditions that support all children's ability to play out, seeing this as a matter of spatial justice, and working to produce those

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[5]   Play Wales is the NGO that has worked closely with the Welsh Government both to introduce the PSD and support its implementation (https://www.playwales.org.uk).

conditions. Ethical research with children on their neighbourhood relationships helps produce those conditions through immediate actions (the second dimension); through how the research continues to affect the researchers, in terms of their sensitivity to children's relationship with spacetime (the third dimension); and through the sharing of examples in multiple fora with other professionals and policy makers (the fourth dimension).

Such research has emerged from multiple conditions that include the policy culture in Wales, the work of Play Wales and the playwork sector, the involvement of academics, cross-professional working and more. This culture has emerged rhizomatically in both planned and autopoietic ways. Part of adult response-ability involves (at) tending to the rhizomes that affect policy and practice at multiple intra-related scales. Deleuze and Guattari (1988[2004], 10) note:

> Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialized, organized, signified, attributed etc., as well as lines of deterritorialization down which it constantly flees.

(At)tending to rhizomes therefore requires deliberate actions aimed at producing conditions both for children to play and for adults to take further actions in support of play; at the same time, it also implies welcoming the unpredictable ruptures and reshoots, the disturbances of business-as-usual that catch professionals' and policy makers' attention and help them to think again about spatial justice for children and their collective right to play out.

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