



## Children's contexts of living and playing: Interdisciplinary perspectives

KU Leuven Child and Youth Institute ([L-C&Y](#)) and Research[x]Design ([RxD](#)) are delighted to invite you to a symposium on **Thursday 30 September 2021** from **09h30 to 13h00** in the [Justus Lipsiuszaal](#), Blijde-Inkomststraat 21, 3000 Leuven.

The symposium is limited to 60 attendees. Video recordings of the presentations will be made available on the L-C&Y website.

Please **confirm** your attendance **before 23 September** via [this link](#).

You can park at [parking Ladeuze](#)  
or get off at [bus stop](#) campus Vesalius.

The symposium will be in English.

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With his [PhD research](#), Research[x]Designer Piet Tutenel foregrounds children affected by cancer as 'everyday designers' of the world, even in a highly structured environment like a child oncology ward. At the occasion of his [PhD defence](#) we organize a 'meet the jury' symposium which brings together educational and design researchers who explore children's experiences of, perspectives on and interactions with the built environment. Through different modes of inquiry and across domestic, public and institutional settings all four presenters show how children shape and are shaped by the built environment. With this symposium we search for more cross-pollination between research that focusses on children's care environments and childhood research in other contexts.

## Programme:

*Exploring with children what makes a city child-friendly* by Céline Ramioul, OSAR Architects & KU Leuven, Dept. of Architecture

What makes a city child-friendly? This question is often answered by adults rather than children themselves. Moreover, designing child-specific places tends to put children out of sight. With an eye to designing cities as places for everyone, including children, we explored together with them how they experience their city. In our attempt to engage a group of 22 eight-year-olds, we used a combination of drawing, interviewing, walking and photography, and asked their feedback on preliminary findings to fine-tune our analysis. Insights gained suggest that they are excited by physical boundaries and are curious about what lies behind them; transitory zones (places passed through in the course of daily public life) are relevant to them in terms of independent mobility and affordances like play and social interaction; adults do not always see what places afford children and children themselves are not always aware of it. Societal challenges important for child-friendliness today include rejuvenation and aging, safety, and environmental sustainability. Finally, children often do not seem to be aware that the physical environment can be improved, which is why participation remains important: it can teach children that they can do something about their city. The fact that children have different knowledge about the city than adults, can only enrich participation processes.

*Designing opportunities for play in the built environment for and with children* by Andrea Jelić, KU Leuven, Dept. of Architecture and Dept. of Civil Engineering & Aalborg University, Dept. of Design and Media Technology, DK

The focus on play in the context of the growing research on child-friendly environments has come to the forefront in recent years as a public health and children's rights concern. Providing opportunities for play in the built environment is seen as crucial to support children's health and development across key physical, emotional, cognitive, creative, and social skills. At the same time, the goal of creating cities and buildings that take children's needs seriously entails acknowledging children as capable experts in their own lives and active collaborators in the design of built spaces. In this talk, I present selected results from a systematic review of this multi-disciplinary research with the aim to understand how designing *for* and *with* children can help promote and enhance opportunities for play in the built environment. By mapping the landscape of scholarship across five analytical categories—scale of children's involvement, play, space, stakeholders, and methods—we uncover trends and tensions in the surveyed literature and identify key insights for further research and practice. In particular, I discuss three salient aspects: (1) a nuanced understanding of play and diversity of children's bodily and cognitive skills; (2) the contexts of play, between informal and formal play spaces; and (3) relation between research perspectives, scale of involvement, and design outcomes.

*The built and lived environment as an invisible pedagogue: Children on the road living in reception centres* by An Piessens & Siska van Daele, KdG University of Applied Sciences and Arts, Centre of Expertise Pedagogical Support in Daycare and School

Most accompanied and unaccompanied refugee children who seek asylum in Belgium, temporarily live in reception centres and all have access to school. Governmental policies and practices in both of these environments seem to prioritise cultural and linguistic immersion and essentialist interpretations of 'sense of belonging' dynamics. The experiential, participatory research project 'On the Road' mapped the perspectives of children living in reception centres. Our analysis shows that the built and lived environment plays a crucial role in children's negotiated sense of belonging and hybrid identity. The built environment and rules of engagement influenced the interaction among and between children and other

inhabitants, sometimes leading to conflicts and tensions. These conflicts and tensions need to be dealt with, but there are different avenues for intervention. Foregrounding the built and lived environment and attributing pedagogic value to all its components opens up possibilities to reframe the behaviours and attitudes of the children not as problems of acculturation or belonging, but as negotiation skills.

*At home with children: Learning from lockdown* by Rosie Parnell, Newcastle University, School of Architecture, Planning & Landscape, UK

The [At Home with Children](#) study aims to understand what constitutes 'liveable' domestic space for families with children under pandemic conditions. Throughout the study we are documenting different expressions of spatial resilience and the ways the family home is re-imagined, used and altered in order to allow all family members and activities to co-exist. This presentation reports on preliminary findings from two different surveys - a questionnaire and online photo survey. This study wants to learn from families experiences in order to share good practice, direct impact on policy-makers and housing professionals about where to target resources for short-medium term impact, and test and inform domestic design guidance and space standards for long-term impact. The study will provide an evidence-based framework that can be used to evaluate current domestic standards for new housing in the UK.

For questions concerning accessibility contact [Ann.Heylighen@kuleuven.be](mailto:Ann.Heylighen@kuleuven.be). Please also consult the KU Leuven [Access Guide](#).

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