Experiential Design – Rethinking relations between people, objects and environments

• Paper / Proposal Title:

(A Model for) Materializing playfulness: Developing a social play space for a multidisciplinary research community

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• Abstract (300 words):
(A Model for) Materializing playfulness: Developing a social play space for a multidisciplinary research community

The purpose of the paper is to explore playful attitudes in the context of a Finnish university consortium in order to develop a multifunctional and communal play space for the use of research and teaching personnel. The paper highlights how a mental predisposition towards adult playfulness may be employed in development and design of a physical university space for a multidisciplinary research and teaching community.

The empirical material consists of 80 survey responses of personnel and students, collected in an explorative pop up space - former indoor playground for children - dedicated for free time play for university personnel for a two week period. The survey inquired attitudes towards playfulness and play in adult life.

The elements of playfulness as theorized by Lieberman (1977) and brought up in the survey responses, will materialize in the design of the future playful space. For example, positive attributes in relation to playfulness, such as enjoyment, relaxation, fantasy and inspiration as facets of playfulness will be formulated into material equivalents in upcoming workshops.

The paper builds on the theoretical framework combining earlier research ideas of play seen as ingrained in everyday life (De Souza e Silva and Sutko, 2008), in adult life, and playful physical space (Heljakka 2013; Saker and Evans 2016). The playful attitude provides a framework for the creation of a space that enables its users to engage in play as an activity. The main contribution of the paper is to illustrate how to combine playful
attitudes with the design of a socially shared play environment and how material objects within this space can cater for play as a multidimensional activity.

**Keywords:** adult play(fulness), experimental design, physical space, research community, university personnel

**References**


**• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):**

Toy researcher and visual artist **Katrina Heljakka** (Doctor of Arts, MA in art history and M.Sc. in economics) holds a post-doctoral position at University of Turku (digital culture studies). Her doctoral dissertation on adult play(fulness) in contemporary toy cultures in visual culture for Aalto University was examined in 2013. Heljakka currently studies toys and the visual, material, digital and social cultures of play in the Academy of Finland funded research project Centre of Excellence in Game Culture Studies and leads Pori Laboratory of Play (PLoP) as a research manager and designer of multidisciplinary playful interventions. Her current research interests include playful spaces, the emerging toyification of culture, toy design and the hybrid and transgenerational dimensions of ludic practices. Heljakka’s academic articles have been featured in publications by e.g. New York University Press, Routledge, Palgrave, Springer, and in multiple scientific journals. In parallel to her academic career, Heljakka has worked in the toy industry, designed board games and location-based game experiences, curated and participated in art exhibitions in Europe and the U.S. and authored children’s storybooks. She has functioned as a long-time member of two international organizations, Women in Toys, Entertainment and Licensing and International Toy Research Association (ITRA). Contact: kairhe@utu.fi

**Annika Blomberg** (PhD in Business Administration) works as a TIAS (Turku Institute for Advanced Studies) funded post-doctoral researcher in management and organization
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