LEKKONTORET

designing an environment for participatory design practices between adult designers and children

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Abstract

Article 12 of the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child asserts that children have the right to participate in society, express their views and have their opinions respected. A 2009 revision of the Article outlines that, to achieve this, states should "provide an environment that enables the child to exercise her/his right to be heard"(CRC, 2009). In countries such as Sweden, where the UN Convention has been enshrined in national law, this Article presents a unique challenge – for governments, city planners, designers and other actors working with child culture.

In this thesis, I consider how environments can be designed to facilitate democratic exchanges between adult designers and children. The thesis is based on the development of a research project, during which I created a design studio, Lekkontoret, and tested a method for participatory design through a case study in Gothenburg. The case study involved two adult designers working with six children to create a children's programme for a cultural heritage site. During this project I used my position as a child culture designer to interrogate the realities of child participation and aimed to bridge the gap that exists between law and practice in the implementation of Article 12.

After describing the research project and findings, I conclude this thesis by summarising the project's outcome: a method for conducting participatory projects with children, which focuses on child-adult relations and the importance of context when facilitating participatory design projects. I propose ways an adult designer can design and implement an add-on environment for participation through props, tools and scenography, which would enable children and adults to work together on level-ground within a public site.

KEYWORDS

Participatory Design Children's Participation

ABBREVIATIONS

LK - Lekkontoret UNCRC - United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child

Literary Review

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child
A Gap Between Law and Practice

Sweden has made the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child law (Ministry of Health and Social Affairs, 2018). The convention has 54 articles, which focus on provision, protection, prevention and participation aiming to provide children with the same opportunities as adults to exercise their rights in a democratic society (Van Bueren, 1995). This research project takes Article 12 of the convention as a starting point. The Article outlines a child's right to participate in society, express their views and have their opinions heard and respected (UNCROC, 1989). The Article poses a number of questions and challenges, not least whether equality between adults and children is attainable in practice and, if so, how does a government work towards achieving this? Child participation is seen as both a solution to implementing the law and a requirement for children to exercise their rights. My position as a child culture designer has allowed me to investigate child participation in practice. I have used the 2009 revision of article 12 as a design challenge/ question, by focusing on the requirement that, "States parties should encourage the child to form a free view and should provide an environment that enables the child to exercise her or his right to be heard" (CRC, 2009). I have been investigating the role and nature of this environment and how it can be designed to facilitate democratic exchanges between adult designers and children. This thesis is based on the development of a research project, during which I created a design studio, *Lekkontoret*[1], and tested a method for participatory design through a case study at Gathenhielmska Huset, a heritage site in Gothenburg. This essay reviews existing theories and practices related to child participation. It explores the persistent power dynamic between children and adults; the role of the environment and the political nature of the objects that furnish that environment in facilitating (equal) interactions between adult designers and children.

1 Swedish for Play Office

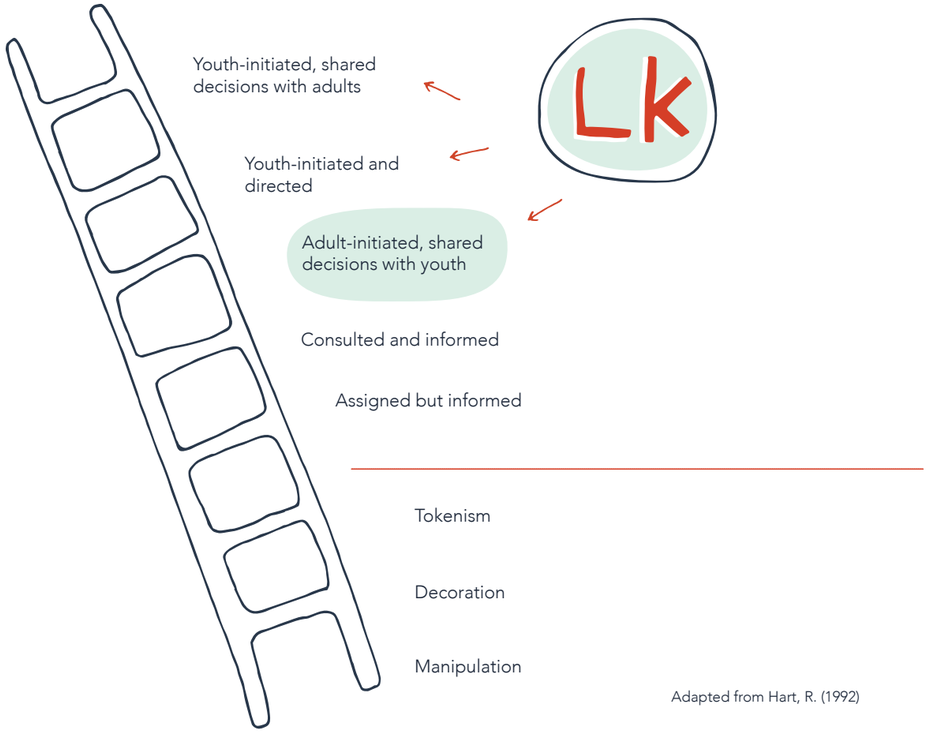
Searching for a Democratic Participatory Design

There is a need for children to have sustained opportunities to practice participation so that they can be understood and acknowledged as competent and engaged citizens[1] in their community and, eventually, their city. Child's-rights academic, Roger Hart, defines participation as the, "process of sharing decisions which affect one's life and the life of the community in which one lives. It is the means by which a democracy is built and it is a standard against which democracies should be measured," (Hart, 1992:5). Participation can therefore be understood as being the act of engaging in democratic citizenship. The design process offers opportunities for child participation, but many design practices working on achieving the UNCRC's Article 12 through children's participation do so in a limited way in terms of actualising a democratic process. Democracy is often achieved only through the outcomes of a design solution - in that children can use the final product or space. There is thus a need for a more participatory design process, one where children can be involved in the processes leading to the design outcomes.

Key thinkers in childhood studies; Roger Hart, Colin Ward and John Wall have framed my intentions for Lekkontoret to enable democratic and ethical relations between children and adults. Ward highlights the ways children occupy space in the city, using play in a way likened to protest, to claim all parts of the city. All areas that children access, not only child-designated areas, should be designed to accommodate children (Ward, 1978). Roger Hart maps the different ways children can be involved in participatory processes with adults. Hart's ladder of participation is useful when considering the different ways children can participate in a project. Types of participation range from token gestures of child involvement to youth-initiated projects where adults share in decision making (Hart, 1992). Projects that occur at this level are rare, because the existing power dynamic between children and adults is difficult to overcome.

1 The 'citizenship rationale' for child participation can be ambiguous, because it could either refer to engaging children as active citizens with rights and responsibilities or it could refer to preparing children for civic duties so that they can be engaged citizens in the future (Mannion, 2007). Children are currently not afforded the same rights and responsibilities as adults, their citizenship is thus deferred, but Lekkontoret aims to posit children as competent 'beings' able to perform and practice civic duties - albeit differently to adults.

Education scholar, Greg Mannion, explores this power dynamic, arguing that child participation should be reframed as being about the relations between children and adults and the roles people assume when either 'childing' or 'adulting' (Mannion, 2007). Mannion draws our attention to the importance of context or space when considering meaningful child participation. Children and adults occupy different spaces and feel a sense of ownership and power within their designated areas. Lekkontoret builds on Mannion's assertion that the context interactions take place in frames the nature of the exchange. A feeling of ownership over one's environment leads to more agency and autonomy - which are necessary ingredients for a democratic exchange to take place. Lekkontoret aims to be a space where both adults and children feel they share and occupy the same territory - equally.



Adapted from Hart, R. (1992)

My research project is adult-initiated, but the case study workshops are designed to explore making shared-decisions with youth. The Lekkontoret office has a long-term goal of becoming an environment where the youth initiate projects, but share decisions with adults.

Participation in Practice

Various design practitioners have attempted to rethink participatory processes to suit child-adult interactions. Jon Geib and Annelies Vaneycken, both design practitioners and researchers, have explored participatory processes in Gothenburg. Geib's research is focused on what he terms 'critical indirectness' in participatory processes. He calls for more involvement from design and art practitioners in public sector institutions. Geib creates speculative urban designs and experimental public policies to imagine and spark dialogue about a more cosmopolitan or multivocal public culture (Geib, 2019). Designer and researcher, Annelies Vaneycken, has attempted to actualize a democratic process in participatory design practices with children by designing for and with ambiguity to counter age-related hierarchies. Vaneycken, like Mannion, stresses the importance of focusing on, rethinking and challenging the child-adult relationships when attempting to create free and equal interactions. She has developed a practice based on research through design intervention through projects like the *Public Play* workshops, held with children from Belgium and Sweden. Vaneycken uses 'openness' and ambiguity, which she describes as being "the quality of being open to the simultaneous coexistence of several meanings," to explore democratic agency during her workshops (Vaneycken, 2020:19). She describes openness in; assignment, material, setting, facilitator's role, participants role and workshop goal. For openness in assignment, Vaneycken creates new words, like *Bodyscan* in her project *Recipes for unControl*. The participants would have no reference to the new word and would, hopefully, be encouraged to interpret the assignment as they see fit (Vaneycken, 2020). Kerstin Bergendahl's *ParkLek*, Annette Krauss's *Hidden Curriculum*, Studio Goja's *Stadlekveterna* and Hefin Jones's *Cosmic Colliery* are examples of participatory design projects where processes of participation are being reimagined to create more equal and meaningful exchanges between participants.

An area overlooked: The role of objects

My position as an artist and sculptor has drawn me to consider the role objects could play when designing for democratic relations between children and adults. Object theorists, Sara Ahmed, Bruno Latour and Bonnie Honig have identified various ways objects, and people, can have agency. Latour and Ahmed are useful when understanding the ways objects communicate function whilst Honig's research on public things has driven Lekkontoret's desire to design objects for democratic relations between children and adults. Ahmed describes a phenomenology of usefulness - how we arrange our worlds according to the objects we use. Ahmeds observes how objects in public spaces are able to communicate systems (whether political, social or economic) through their use. This is useful when trying to understand the ways objects are able to direct behavior and communicate ideas. A designer could, for example, pull from an existing object's history of use by referencing aspects of the object's aesthetic identity and in so doing direct the participant's behaviour or communicate specific associations. Ahmed also points at the ways objects have intended users and describes the ways objects can have implicit or explicit use instructions - this becomes increasingly important when hoping to target a specific audience, like children (Ahmed, 2019). Latour, one of the leading contributors to the actor-network theory[2], underlines the way objects have agency by acting for people - they can extend our abilities, allowing us to act from a distance (Latour, 1992).

2 The actor-network theory is the methodological and theoretical social theory developed by Bruno Latour, Michel Callon and John Law. The theory states that agency can only be achieved when actors (humans, non-humans, objects and organisations) interact with one another. This process of constant interaction means that society is always being reconfigured according to the 'actors' relation to the 'network' (Callon, 2001).

Fig.1

How to design for public things?

I have approached the design of the environment and the objects that furnish the environment using Bonnie Honig's theory of *Public Things*. Honig, a political and legal theorist specializing in democracy, has outlined the political power of objects and the ways they can be used to encourage democratic behaviours. Honig discusses the ways objects condition human behavior and mediate relationships, referring to D.W. Winnicott's 'transitional objects' and 'holding environments' to ask whether democracy depends on public things. These public things include the objects that are built, used and maintained by communities collectively. Winnicot's object-relations theory posits objects as central to a child's understanding of the world as being both external from their own psyche and fixed. When a child understands that an object survives when out of sight they learn object permanence and develop subjectivity in relation to the physical world (Winnicot, 1987). Honig believes that the same is true for democratic citizens in that the belief in a democratic way of life relies on public things as transitional objects that maintain and encourage relations between diverse citizens (Honig, 2017). Honig states that, "without public things, we have nothing or not much to deliberate about, constellate around, or agonistically contest" (Honig, 2017:5). Lekkontoret will act as a kind of test site for this theory - a community of children and adults built around and through shared ownership of the Lekkontoret *Office Things*.

The Lekkontoret office occupies the site visually, giving the child participants a sense of ownership when working in adult spaces like Gathenhielmska Huset. The props will furnish the site, creating a 'holding environment' where democratic relations can take place and where the children can feel confident to act as 'citizens' in Lekkontoret's world. Artists like Shannon Finnegan and Lucy Orta work in this way; using props to intervene in the real world. Finnegan uses props to advocate for people with different abilities in public spaces. She has created *The Anti-Stairs Club* to protest different ableist spaces. The club has various accessories that communicate its participants needs, such as pillows which are placed on public furniture and a uniform, which gives the group a visual and collective identity (Finnegan, 2019). These props act as public things.

Shannon Finnegan appropriates symbols and objects associated with public services and institutions to make a statement about ownership in public spaces. They are not only symbolic or visual, they also cause participants to feel a sense of shared responsibility as part of the 'Club'. They encourage agency and action in public protest. The props speak to the public infrastructure they protest in that they provide an alternative use and design of public things - which in turn visualize and give rise to an alternative group of citizens/ collective.

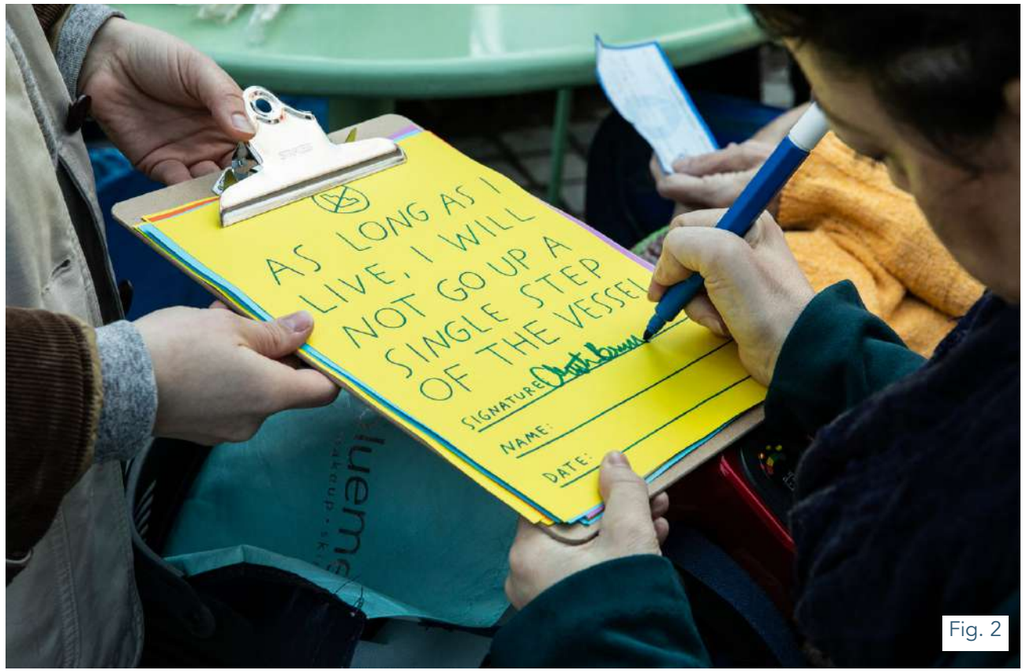


Fig. 2

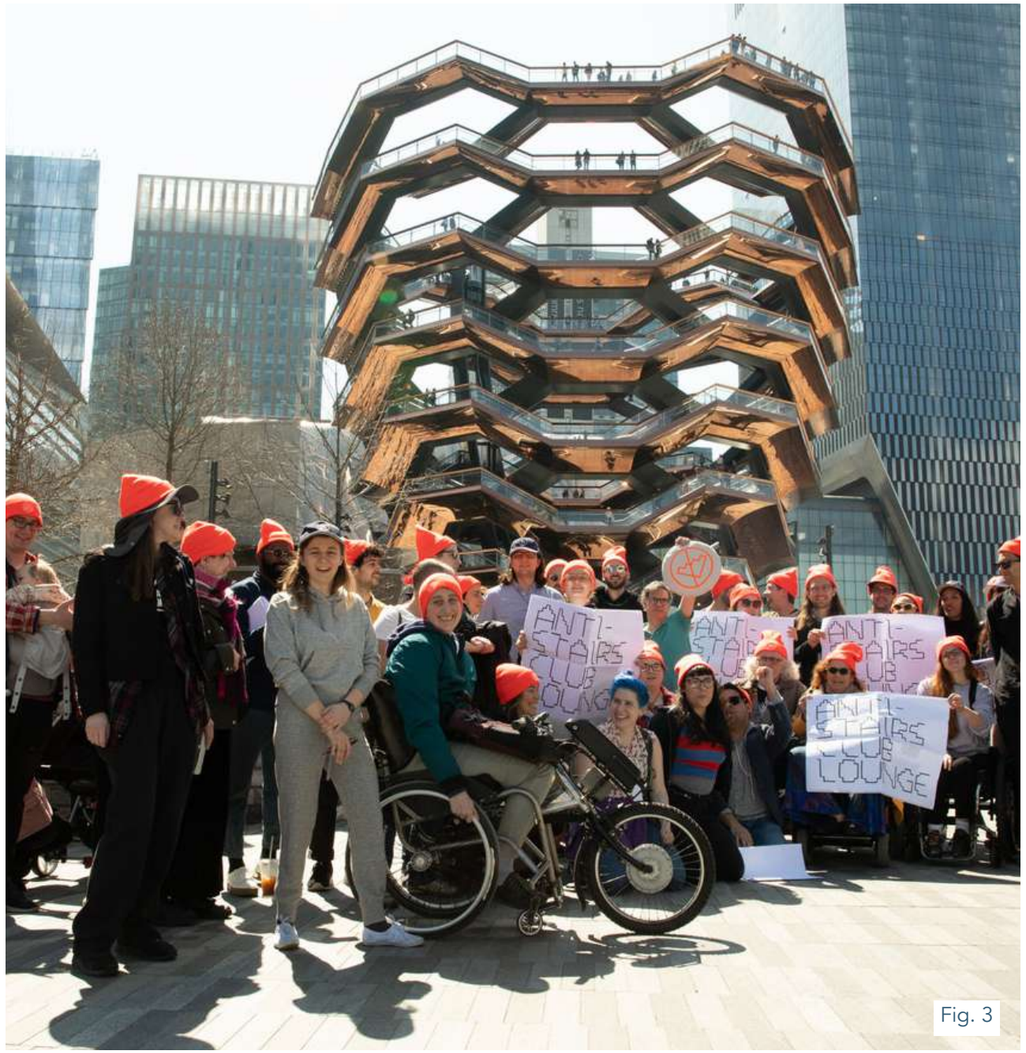


Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Multidisciplinary artist, Lucy Orta, has used objects as props to furnish the office in her participatory art project, *Antarctica World Passport*. The project explores socio-political issues of mobility, autonomy and habitat. To Orta Antarctica represents a Utopia, because its harsh climate would cause people to work together. The passport office invites viewers to become citizens of Antarctica by symbolically transferring their national identity to become a citizen of the world. The viewer must perform a pledge, written by Orta, to the passport officials and submit personal data into an application porthole before receiving a unique identity number and passport book (Orta, 2017). The mobile office has occupied various sites, visually claiming a space through a sculptural installation of found objects. The installation would make participants feel a sense of immersion in the artist's idea while the passport book itself and the use it communicates has driven the project's intentions and directed participant behaviours. The design of Lekkontoret as an immersive space through its spatial design and *Office Things* has drawn from this project. Orta was able to install a temporary or add-on environment within an existing space and invited participants to belong to this new space through props and performative elements such as the passport book and pledge. The gathering of ready-mades or found objects in combination with a new, more radical idea, like a world passport, creates a convincing space for speculative design.

Jon Geib's project, *Ett Skep Kommer Lastat* (2015) demonstrates a template for co-design that can be applied to the Gathenhielmska case study. Geib aimed to build empathy and respect in Gothenburg's Frölunda neighborhood through urban exploration and imagination. He conducted observational tours where children were gathered in an after-school club and asked to observe and discuss local apartment blocks. The children noted the ways people communicate indirectly through architectural interfaces. The tour was followed by workshops where children were asked to build, from their imagination, the inside spaces of some of the apartments they had seen in small peep-hole boxes. These boxes were then displayed together to form apartment buildings in the exhibition (Geib, 2015). Geib's main question, "who is your neighbour?" probes at social relationships in the city and gives us insight into a child's perspective of a neighbourhood and social community. The boxes created by the children are the main communicators in the project, because they facilitated discussion during the workshops, illustrated the children's views and sparked diverse conversations at the exhibition. Geib also created a 'space probe' with the participants during the project. This pushed the project into an imaginary world of space exploration, which may have helped the children engage in a more open and playful way. The probe also acts as a public thing for the group as it is a tool created and maintained by a community that helps them function as a collective with a shared goal.

The Gathenhielmska case study allows me to explore systems of exchange between adults and children using objects and the office environment (*Office Things*). The environment, which I frame as an agent of democratisation, is able to to drive, document and facilitate interactions. A case study approach gives me an opportunity to experience first-hand the realities of child participation and the challenges related to the age-related hierarchy that defines interactions between children and adults. It also gives me a chance to learn, through practice, why a gap persists between law and practice in the implementation of Article 12 and to test whether shifting attention to context might work towards closing this gap.

Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Fig. 8

Method Description

Research Questions

This project has been framed by two main research questions that aim to address the UNCRC Article 12 and the Article's 2009 revision, which states that, "States parties should encourage the child to form a free view and should provide an environment that enables the child to exercise her or his right to be heard" (CRC, 2009).

How can child culture designers create shared environments between children and adult designers to enable democratic interactions during participatory design projects?

How to design for ownership when aiming to create a shared environment that fosters democratic interactions between children and adult designers?

Case Study Approach

The method I used to investigate and explore my research questions was based on learning and testing through artistic methods and a hands-on approach within a case study. I conceptualised a children's design office, Lekkontoret, which I then materialised in a real-world context where I tested it as an environment for participatory design. I then evaluated the test and have adapted it as a methodology to be used in a working design studio.

My research method was applied in three phases:

1. Design and Conceptualisation
2. Application within a case-study
3. Critical evaluation and formulation of method outcome

1. Design and Conceptualisation

1.1 Conceptualizing Lekkontoret

Professional interviews with staff at the Gothenburg Traffic Office and Child Culture Design studio, Studio Goja during my first year of study helped me identify a need for a more long-term approach to participatory design where children are exposed to and involved in all aspects of the design process. The conceptual framework for Lekkontoret came about because of these conversations. I started conceptualisation through a speculative design method where I imagined and materialised a children's design studio, which could function in Gothenburg. This speculative concept evolved through material testing and became a framework for real-life testing. I constructed and refined a mission-statement for the office and worked on a business plan, which could be sent to prospective funders and stakeholders.

1.2 Research-based Making

The research phase of this project guided the design choices I made when conceptualising Lekkontoret. These design choices set the parameters for the project, which take my position as an artist/ sculptor into account. My background in sculpture drew me to consider the role of objects when designing an environment to facilitate specific behaviours. I designed the Lekkontoret objects (*Office Things*) based on theoretical research, as defined in the literary review and my BEAM analysis[1]. The objects are then tested within my case study, where they are evaluated according to my research question and project aims.

1 Attached as Appendix A

2. Case Study Application

2.1 Context: Site and Stakeholders

I identified a site and stakeholders and presented Lekkontoret as a children's design office with child and adult designers, working as consultants on design projects. The stakeholder was told that the office would provide an environment and resources for a participatory project where we would work on a design brief relating to child influence in their space. The brief was co-designed with the stakeholder through a series of meetings and on-site observations. The site had to fulfill specific requirements, such as being an adult-context. The process section of this paper describes these choices in more detail.

2.2 Funding Stakeholders

I applied to Göteborgs Stad Projekstöd for funding at the start of the project. The stakeholder was able to assist with this process. I also applied to smaller funding bodies for match-funding. These funders were interested in supporting child participation in public projects. I was able to invite participants and install LK through a case-study, because of external funding.

2.3 Participants: Office Staff

I recruited child participants by asking the stakeholder for interested parties and by asking fellow students and lecturers. The recruitment process also involved the creation of marketing material for LK, which was communicated through a website and social media platforms. I identified and approached a Child Culture Designer with relevant skills to assist on the project as an adult designer. I also approached a student in Child Culture Design who could assist with documentation. I presented the adult designers with Lekkontoret and the case study as a project proposal.

2.4 Activations: Workshop Series with participants and Co-Designed Outcome

I required a situation where I could test the LK environment in use. I decided on a workshop process, because I needed a method for co-design and interaction that could be done through an intensive and short-term process with a relatively small group of people. The LK adult participants and the site stakeholder met to discuss the duration of the workshops and the nature of the co-designed outcome.

3. Critical Evaluation

3.1 Qualitative Analysis and Compiling a Method

The qualitative analysis was conducted after each interaction and after the project's completion. It involved a de-brief and discussion amongst adult participants where we evaluated the workshop and whether it met our aims.

I used my experience of the office environment during the case study to conduct a critical evaluation of the project. This was done through an object analysis where all LK objects were analysed based on their ability to offer affordances which result in opportunities for participants to feel a sense of ownership and practice autonomy and agency. I also conducted an interview with the site stakeholder which helped me refine the Lekkontoret method proposed as my design outcome.

The Process section of this paper will describe my methods in action, referring to the reasons behind design choices and their implementation within the case-study.

Description of Process

I have divided my process into five design components. The components are presented first in general terms with reasons behind my design choices and then within the Gathenhielmska case study, where they can be understood in practice. This section begins with a project timeline, which shows how I divided my time between the five components. The final component, Critical Evaluation, includes the ways my design process and the case study have informed the design of Lekkontoret as a method for participatory design between children and adults.

The Design Process

1. Context
2. Participants
3. Office Things
4. Activations
5. Critical Evaluation

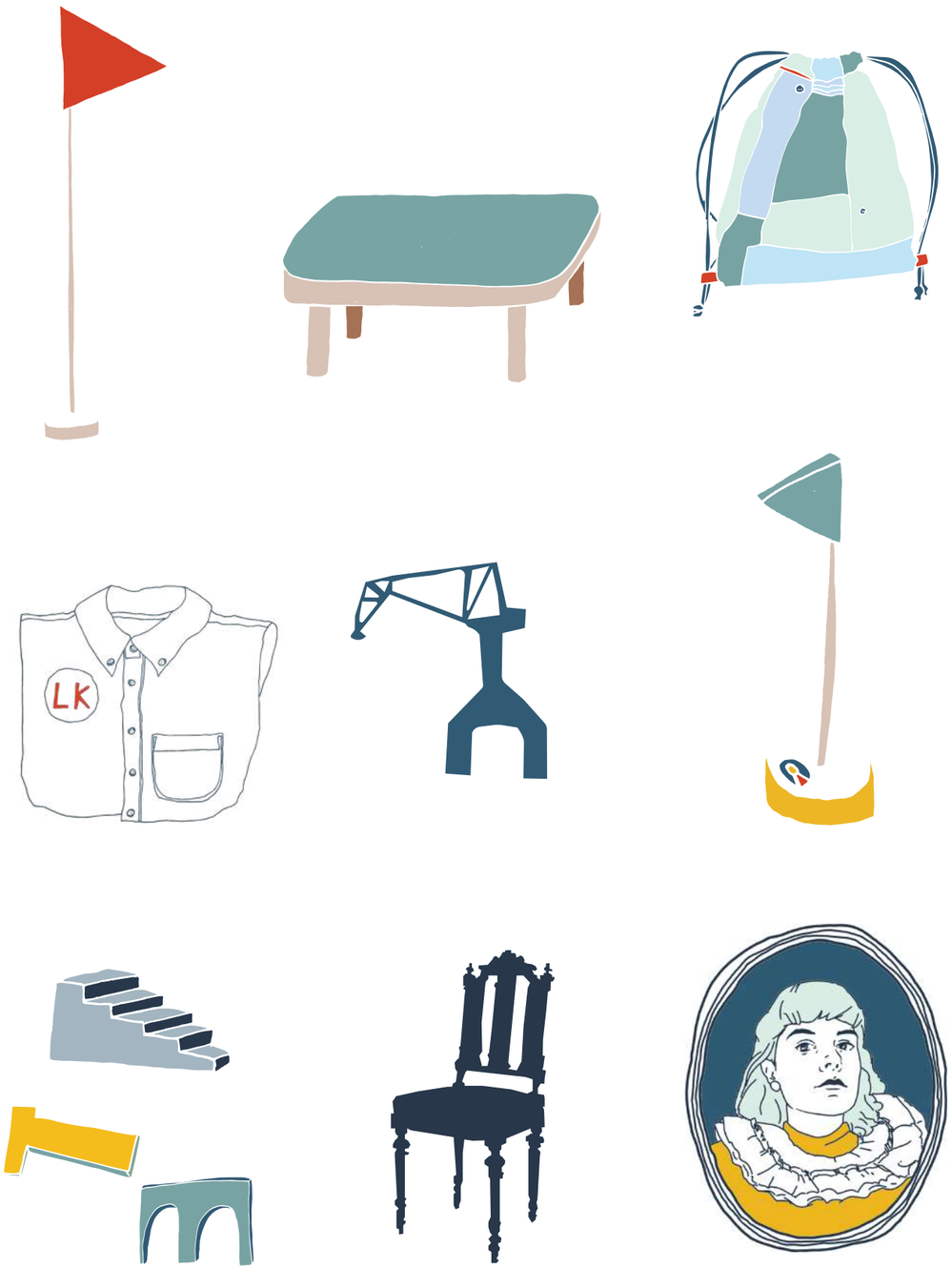


Fig. 9

Site and Stakeholders

Activations

Office Things

Critical Evaluation

Stakeholder Meetings

Funding Pronto

ESSAY + BRIEF

Materialisation

Funding Estrid Ericson

REVIEW 1

Planning Workshops

WORKSHOP 1

WORKSHOP 2

WORKSHOP 3

WORKSHOP 4

Recruitment and Website

Website production
team gathered

Production 1

Uniform kits, signage/flags,
exploration tools, office props

Production 2

Materials created with children in workshops for
documentation, expression and collaboration

Gathenhielmska On-site Meetings

2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Site and Stakeholders
Activations
Office Things
Critical Evaluation

REVIEW 2
Materialisation
Vernissage
REVIEW 3 EXAM
COMPILED THESIS

Gathenhielmska Feedback Meetings

Last 2 Child-led tours

Co-Designed Outcomes

Tour and Exibition Production
Photographs, Vinyl, Tour Activity, Treasure Chest, Audio Editing, Sound Boxes, Photo Stands, Installation

Funding Pronto

Evaluation and Documentation MFA

Compiled thesis writing + presentation of project

Analysis of Process, investigating the role of the environment

Stakeholder Interview

13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22

1. CONTEXT: SITE + STAKEHOLDERS

Fig. 10

This research project has focused on the spatial aspects of child participation. The context or environment for participation has become central to this study, because the site where children and adults meet determines the nature of the interaction. I decided that Lekkontoret would not work from schools after observing that most designers and institutions working with child participation held short-term workshops in school settings. Participatory design projects present a rare opportunity for children to influence areas outside of school and to work with adults who are not within the school staff body. Removing participatory design projects from the school environment would mean that children could learn and access more parts of the design process while also increasing their physical presence in different parts of the city. Designated spaces for children, like schools and parks, can marginalize children further by controlling where, how and to whom they can exercise their agency (Mannion, 2007).

Fig. 11

Through Lekkontoret I aim to create a new space of engagement where adult-child relations can be reshaped so that new forms of learning can take place within an intergenerational context. This aim requires a site where Lekkontoret can situate itself as a new child-adult space within an existing adult space. A conventionally adult space gives children an opportunity to expand their territory in the city through participation. It would also give Lekkontoret an opportunity to exist as a new environment in contrast to its surroundings. This spatial contrast is achieved through the Lekkontoret *Office Things*, which visually claim the space while also reinforcing new behaviors from both adult and child participants. It's important for a child to be seen and heard in spaces they usually have no influence over. Their body and its relation to the space becomes a point of departure for more child friendly designs, which could make all parts of the city more accessible to differently sized bodies.

Gathenhielmska Case Study

I hoped to find a space that children would not usually have access to that allowed for exploration. I approached a prominent cultural institution and heritage site, Gathenhielmska Huset, because I had worked with them before and knew they were wanting to open the house to the public and specifically to children. We met during Autumn 2019 and discussed ways the house could be made more accessible to children. We decided on a brief together - to design a children's programme for the house, with a tour activity and play objects. We agreed on a workshop process consisting of four weekend workshops on-site in the house, culminating in an exhibition of the experience and the design outcomes. The workshop series was to focus on child investigations and observations in the house. We decided on three main questions we would explore during our time at the house as a kind of design brief:

Can we make historic buildings more accessible to young children?

How can we increase child influence and presence in the city?

How can we provide more opportunities for playful interactions with history and cultural heritage?

Why Gathenhielmska - A Child-Unfriendly Site?

Gathenhielmska is an important cultural heritage site in Gothenburg, because of its exterior design, interior treasures and its history as a state-sanctioned pirates home. A Lekkontoret at Gathenhielmska would provide an opportunity for children to be involved in a design process whilst also creating a platform for children to have a more long-standing relationship with the house. It also presents unique challenges, because of its fragile contents. How can children feel a sense of ownership in a space where access is limited for all ages? How can we install an environment that makes both children and stakeholders feel secure? These are useful design challenges, because LK seeks to work in spaces that could be considered unfriendly towards children. Gathenhielmska provides a context where we need to work around not being able to touch the walls or move certain artefacts and therefore forces us to consider how we can design for children in child-unfriendly sites.

Fig. 12

Fig. 13

2. PARTICIPANTS: OFFICE STAFF

Child Designers

The adult designers recruited six children between the ages of 3,5 and 5 years old for the Gathenhielmska case study. Children below reading age are not well-represented or catered for in cultural institutions or in the urban environment in general. They spend the vast majority of their time in pre-schools, parks and their homes and most have not yet had any extra-curricular activities. Starting participatory projects that engage children as citizens from an extremely young age could help set a new standard for child involvement by proving child competencies and giving children an opportunity to feel competent and more willing to exercise their right to be heard as they grow older.

General characteristics of the LK age-group as learnt during the case study

They cannot read

Difficulty navigating and conceptualizing space and distance

Limited attention span

Social interactions are primarily with their nuclear family[1]

Still developing language and fine motor skills

1 This is especially the case during the Covid-19 pandemic, when the Gathenhielmska case study was conducted.

LK Age-group

The LK age-group are experiencing Erikson's[2] 'Initiative vs Guilt' normative crisis. They are developing a conscience which controls their initiative. They are more assertive at this age and are more willing to direct play. It is an important moment in development, because if they are given an opportunity they will learn to trust their initiative and build confidence in decision-making skills (Erikson, 1968).

Adult Designers

Permanent adult designers

The child culture designer(s) are permanent office staff. They initiate projects, connect children to adult partners and provide the environment (Lekkontoret office things) that enables children to exercise their right as outlined in Article 12 of the UNCRC.

Project-Based Adult Partners

The adults that require Lekkontoret services and need a child's perspective on a project. These are also adults attached to sites that are not child-friendly or made accessible to children. These stakeholders are also considered to be 'designers' during the project and are therefore included in the design process. They meet with the adult designers and child team regularly to discuss the project and take part in workshop activities.

2 Erik Erikson developed the 8 stages of psycho-social development. He describes 8 normative crises which an individual must overcome when developing their personality. This crisis occurs when there is a clash between the individual's psychological needs and the needs of society (social pressure). Erikson's theory is not without criticism, it presents a model suited primarily to male children from Europe or American and does not account for less sequential development. People navigate the normative crises throughout life and not only during these ages. The stages are however useful when seeking a more general overview of an age-group. (Erikson, 1968)

Fig. 14: Vanja, Unni and Bonnie waiting for Workshop 1 to start at Gathenhielmska Huset.

Gathenhielmska Case Study

Child Designers

We recruited six children between the ages of 3,5 and 5 years old for the Gathenhielmska case study. I designed a website and created a digital poster[1] to recruit child participants. I distributed the poster online in a *Lekkontoret Website*[2] and through social media and sent it to fellow students, university staff and to Gathenhielmska's mailing list. The poster invited children to work as designers and gave parents/guardians information about the workshop series.

The age-group presented us with useful design challenges and questions which we could explore with the child designers during the workshop. Because this age is often excluded from participatory projects, we had to learn more about their specific needs in order to design experiences and investigations more suited to their abilities.

Adult Child Culture Designers

The LK office for the Gathenhielmska case study had two adult designers, myself - an artist with a background in sculpture and art history, and Marie Caroline Peris, a child culture designer with a background in architecture. I asked Marie to be my partner at the start of the project, because I felt that the office would benefit from her skills and that we would be able to accomplish more as a team.

Adult Project Partners

We partnered with the Gathenhielmska event manager Lewis Smith, who was present for all workshops and participated in most of the activities. We also had another adult designer, Luke Quinn De Jager, who documented the process through audio and photographs. He was also introduced as an office member from the start of the project. We tried to make sure that the children were comfortable with his presence by including him whenever possible.

1 Digital Poster attached as Appendix B
2 Can be accessed at https://lekkontoret.com/ (Paterson, 2021).

Fig. 15: Vanja and Charlie running down the Gathenhielmska Huset staircase during Workshop 2

3. OFFICE THINGS: PROPS + SCENOGRAPHY

I have designed various *Office Things*[1] to construct an environment and visually occupy a site. These things include office furniture, a uniform, a workshop kit, various flags, a website and site-specific tools for play and research. All of Lekkontoret's *Office Things* work together and should be considered as part of a larger family of objects to create an environment. I have borrowed forms, concepts and materials from a variety of reference points including the scouts and conventional office spatial design and dress-codes. Artists like Shannon Finnegan, Maywa Denki and Lucy and Jorge Orta have guided my design process. They have similarly appropriated found objects and institutional visual references to communicate new or imagined organisations (Orta, 2017)(Finnegan, 2019).

I have attached an object inventory as Appendix C, which details the objects intended functions, the affordances they allowed and my reflections on their application during the Gathenhielmska Case Study. I will briefly describe how and why I made some of the key office things before demonstrating them in use during the Case Study when describing the 4th component, *Participation: Lekkontoret in Action*.

1 Referring to Bonnie Honig's Theory of Public Things. Honig discusses the ways objects condition human behavior and mediate relationships, referring to D.W. Winnicott's 'transitional objects' and 'holding environments' to ask whether democracy depends on public things. These public things include the objects that are built, used and maintained by communities collectively (Honig, 2017).

Fig. 16

UNIFORM

Object:

Dickie Collar Uniform for all LK office staff

Production Process:

Adjusting a second hand men's work shirt to fit all staff as a collar

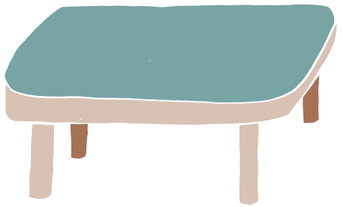
Activation:

Worn by all staff during interactions on-site

The uniform design was influenced by conventional adult office norms. I wanted to play with the idea of a uniform as being both a sign of authority and service. I made each child a dickie collar from a mens shirt. The materiality of the uniform contributes to the office's visual and conceptual identity in that it appropriates and adapts an object from the adult-world to suit a child office's needs. It becomes an apron, bib and visual link that brings all office members together, whether young or old.

Fig. 17: Charlie wearing her Lekkontoret uniform with a red badge related to a specific activity.

OFFICE FURNITURE



Object(s):

Stools, Cushions and Basket Seats

Production Process:

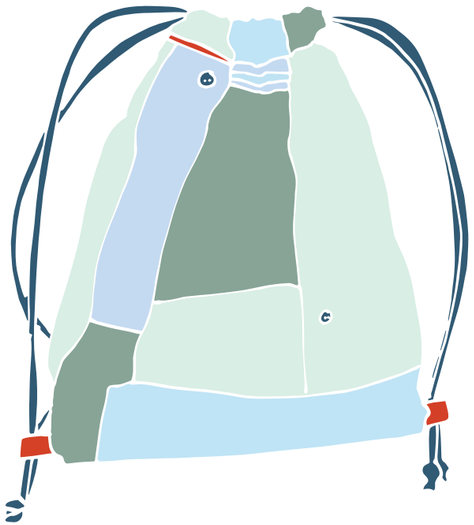
The stools are made with basic woodworking skills using birch. They are scaled to suit a 4 year olds body. The Basket Seats are converted second hand office storage baskets with custom-made lids. Marie Caroline Peris made the LK cushions using a textile in the same shade of blue used on the other furniture items.

Activation:

Used on-site to furnish the LK environment during interactions.

All elements are scaled to child bodies and aim to enable children to extend their physical limits in different settings while also serving as a visual intervention on-site. All furniture is light enough for the children to carry around for different activities.

Fig. 18,19: The stools in use for reaching in the kitchen and carried outdoors for play



KIT

Object(s):

Drawstring Bag, Parent/ Guardian Notebook, Participant Notebook, Uniform, Small LK cushion, Portrait Stickers

Production Process:

The bag is made from the off-cuts of the men's shirts sewn together as a pachwork. The adults recievedlarge notebooks while the children recieved small notebooks. Each book is labelled with a custom-made portrait sticker of the participant. The small LK cushion is a miniature of the larger cushions used in the office and is made in the same blue textile.

Activation:

Delivered to child participants by adult designers ahead of the workshops.

Each child recieved a kit in preperation for a project. The kit acts as an invitation to spark excitement. It is also intended to build confidence before the project start by making the children feel more prepared. The kit is visually representative of the office through color, this helps the children identify the LK environment on-site and feel a sense of belonging from the start.

Fig. 20

FLAGGERS

Object(s):

Twelve large red flags and eight small yellow flags

Production Process:

Both flags are made with basic woodworking skills using birch and mdf. The large flags range from 100cm-130cm high. The small flags are 30cm high.

Activation:

Both flags are used on-site and become workshop tools to be used by all participants.

I designed two different flags for Lekkontoret to use during participatory projects. A small yellow flag and a large red flag. The small flag is to be used on a floor plan or map designed for the site, while the large flag is to be carried around the site during activities to mark areas. The small flags have each got a portrait sticker representing an LK office member. The large flags signal an occupation to outsiders while also helping us create a physical layout for workshops when we need to create a smaller space inside of a larger site. They can also be used for safety, by creating a physical boundary for children and alerting outsiders. The red flags became an important part of the office's visual language and were drawn by some of the children during homework activities[1]

Fig. 21

1 Homework extract attached as Appendix D

Fig. 22: Vanja used chalk from another activity to mark her flag - an act of appropriation and ownership.

Fig. 23: Charlie used the red flag to mark the old chair, which she said is the ghost's favorite.

4. ACTIVATIONS: LEKKONTORET IN ACTION

The Lekkontoret office was installed and activated on site at Gathenhielmska Huset through workshops, tours, and an exhibition. This section describes these interactions, focusing on the ways the office environment was utilized in practice and how it facilitated interactions between child and adult participants.

The Workshops

The workshops were held at Gathenhielmska Huset over four Saturdays. I will not describe each workshop's structure and content, but will instead describe the ways the office environment was used and changed during the workshops; how it was activated by the child and adult participants and how it affected child-adult relations.

The Samling Circle

The study trip to Reggio Emilia during the first year of child culture design led me to consider the importance of spatial design and how it can affect learning and interactions. Reggio Emilia is a region in Italy, which has municipal pre-schools that have attracted international attention, because of their unique approach to primary education. The approach considers young children as, "having an infinite wealth of potential and ability; abilities to wonder, investigate, and co-construct their own knowledge" (Otskey, 2015). The Reggio school environment and curriculum are designed to cultivate and encourage this view of child competence and is thus an important source of inspiration for Lekkontoret. The Reggio curriculum is child-directed and teacher guided, which means that the children's interests drive the education (Otskey, 2015). These interests are expressed within the *Piazza* setting, which translates to 'square' and references a town square by also becoming a central, public space in the school. The spatial layout of the *piazza* is large and open and all main spaces of the school should face it. It is used for daily meetings and has a culture of citizenship and public identity attached to it, because the children are encouraged to share in this space (Ceppi and Zini, 1998). The *Samling Circle* is Lekkontoret's version of the Reggio ***Piazza*** - hoping to host the same kinds of interactions between children and adults. It was placed in Gathenhielmska's main room where it faced three of the main areas for exploration.

Fig. 24: Flags during a *Samling Circle*. They position participants and signal a visual occupation.

The space was set up in a large circle using the LK flags and cushions. The small flags became an important part of the circle, because the children decided to use them to mark their spots before we started. The children would move their flags from the floor plan to the circle at the start of the day, which came to signify their presence and participation. The workshop day would start with a samling circle where all staff gathered in a circle to discuss our past week and what we wanted to do during the day. We would also end our day in the samling circle where we would reflect on what we had done and discuss homework tasks and what we would do during the week ahead. This room layout became an important part of the Lekkontoret environment and is representative of its aims, because we insert this new space for intergenerational sharing within an existing context.

Fig. 25: Flags during the Samling Circle.

Sailing Through Gathenhielmska Huset

The child-led activities were important observation moments for the adult designers, because we could note how the children used and appropriated the LK environment to develop their own stories or conduct their own investigations. The adults played a supportive role during these kinds of activities, providing objects, lifting heavier furniture and joining in on play.

Gathenhielmska Huset was owned by a privateer, Ingela Gathenhielm. Her narrative was woven into all of the workshops and became an important part of the children's imaginations of the house. The children used the LK furniture in combination with the house furniture to create a ship and lifeboat during the second workshop. They made use of the flags, the basket seats, the cushions and the stools and completely transformed the Lekkontoret office environment into a space for play. This appropriation of the office furniture vs. the sites furniture made it clear that they understood the office furniture belonged to them. The venue manager at Gathenhielmksa Huset reflects, "It was great to see how the objects were appropriated further. The objects appropriate and take over the space, but also how the objects were appropriated by the children. For example the way the baskets became boats and the flags were used as oars. Giving them objects that they could get very comfortable using and where they knew they could do anything with, made them also feel more at home in the space"[1] (Smith, 2021).

Fig. 26: Charlie pushing Vanja in a lifeboat (one of the LK storage baskets

1 Interview attached as appendix D

The Importance of Loose Parts

Our intention was to keep workshop plans very flexible. We wanted the children to feel like they directed the workshop content and in that way also had a sense of ownership over the process. The child-led ship building activity, for example, was used as inspiration for the next workshop, where we provided a big collection of loose parts[1] with our furniture so that the children could build and storytell more easily. We came to realise that the age-group we worked with are able to express themselves most easily through play. We therefore tried to provide a variety of objects to allow for different kinds of play and to give the children an opportunity to reshape or hack the LK environment.

1 Referring to Simon Nicholsons *Theory of Loose Parts* where he discusses the way the majority of people are excluded from participating in planning, designing and building of any environment, because these activities are reserved for professionals. If more aspects of our environment is 'loose' or flexible then we would be able to experiment and express ourselves more within an environment that is more representative (Nicholson, 1970).

Fig. 27: Unni in the midst of role-play using LK furniture and loose parts.

Mapping, Movement and Ownership

The case study's children are still developing a sense of space and direction. Understanding a space and being able to navigate creates a feeling of ownership and control and leads to more autonomy and agency. The floor plan is a site-specific office thing that aims to help the children navigate the site. The map becomes more complicated after each interaction to include objects and stories that the children and adult designers attach to the site. The floor plan was useful[1], but when re-create in future sites, I would add physical markers in each room that are then repeated on a portable map that can be carried into the different spaces. The floorplan lacks the immediacy of a portable map where a child is able to recognize elements and not have to recall from memory. Another mapping activity that wasn't as successful as we hoped was mapping the house and the public square next to the house using the body. We thought that the scale of the site would be easier to understand if we related it to a child's body - how many Vanja's wide is Gathenhielmska Huset? This was mostly confusing for the children. It was an important exercise for the LK environment, because we had to place the office in an open public space. The office became performative and symbolic in the public space, our uniforms, the clipboards the children were using and the flags drew attention and clearly signalled a child's presence.

1 Refer to Office Things inventory in Appendix B

Fig. 28: Using the floor plan to talk about the house.

Fig. 29: Vanja with an LK children's clipboard measuring her body on the square using chalk.

Fig. 30: Enar on a blindfold tour during workshop 3

Child-Led Tours

We ran different kinds of tours through the space after and during the workshops. We had a blindfold activity and an activity where we all got turns to lead through the house using a long piece of fabric. These opened the space up more in a safe and controlled way and also gave the children a chance to lead the exploration. Each child had an opportunity to bring family or a friend to see the house. They went around alone with an audio recorder, without the adult designers, and could show the house and provide a tour. The youngest participant brought her best friend, she used the opportunity to describe and demonstrate the best play spaces in the house. The children's movement through the house showed us that they felt a sense of ownership and had built confidence in the space during the workshops.

"It felt like a really important step in opening up and to some degree democratizing the space"

Really! Why?

"Because it's not just old men that get to run around here now"

Lewis Smith, Gathenhielmska Huset Venue Manager (2021, Appendix C

The Exhibition

The exhibition was held over a weekend at Gathenhielmska Huset where we presented the workshop process to the public[1]. Some of the workshop activities were installed within the house alongside LK *Office Things* and audio clips from the child-led tours and investigations. Lekkontoret also offered visiting children a tour activity during the exhibition. The specifics of the co-design process, which led to the tour activity are not within this research paper's parameters. I will instead describe the process in relation to the LK environment and office things.

Pirate Queens and Treasure Chests: Site-Specific Office Things

Pirate queens and treasure chests, is the title of the exhibition we held at Gathenhielmska Huset. The exhibition theme started developing during the first workshop, because the children were really drawn to keys and all the different locked chests in the house. I started to design and incorporate site specific *Office Things* that would encourage and further develop the key narrative.

Our first adult-led key activity happened in workshop 2 after we noticed the children kept asking the house's venue manager, Lewis, whether he had the keys for the chest. I made Lewis a big key chain to hang lots of keys off so that he could embody and perform a character. The children were given head torches and asked to find Lewis's lost key in Kungssalen - one of the darkest and scariest rooms in the house. The found key was used to open a drawer filled with artefacts to investigate. I found that the combination of uniform, job and tool (headtorch) gave them more confidence in the room. It also worked for the adult participants. The role-play and a prop helped Lewis contribute to the office and join in. Lewis was more comfortable being part of the team and stayed with us throughout the workshop. I designed cookie cutters in the shape of keys in workshop 3, which were used in Ingela's Bakery (Ingela Gathenhielm also owned a bakery). They were used to foreground the key narrative so that the children would discuss and play out more stories about Ingela's keys.

1 See exhibition invitation for more details, attached as Appendix E

Fig. 31: Office staff in uniform and head torches sitting around an LK table

Fig. 32: Catherine, Unni, Colette and Lewis opening a drawer using the found key.

Fig. 33: Investigating the artefacts we found in the drawer. Staff in uniform seated around a storage seat being used as a table.

Fig. 34: Vanja and Bonnie discussing the key shaped cookie cutter.

Tour Activity

We designed a tour activity for the exhibition that also works with the key narrative. The activity is to find Ingela's missing keys by moving around the house and following clues. We used hiding spaces the children had identified, illustrated the artefacts they found to be important and based our clues on their narratives. I found an old chest, which I changed by adding elements for play such as dress-up clothing. Once the children find the last key in the hunt for ingelas keys they are able to open it and play with the contents.

The head torches, blindfolds, loose parts, cookie cutters, key chain and chest became site specific *Office Things* for the Gathenhielmska Case Study. They were added because we wanted the children to contribute to the workshop content and for them to see their influence. They came about because we allowed for a more flexible and adaptable process of learning through doing where the children guided our designs and the focus of our investigations.

5. CRITICAL EVALUATION

This step in the project process describes some of the key insights learnt during the case study that have influenced Lekkontoret as a method for participatory design. I will discuss some of the design challenges, including the tensions that arose between stakeholders; the documentation of child-made material; child safety in adult-spaces and the problem with adult authority figures. I will also use this step to describe the importance of a co-designed outcome and how the case study has informed the way lekkontoret will conduct future projects.

The Trouble with Grown-Ups

Safety in Adult Spaces

The Gathenhielmska case study has made me consider the major points of tension when trying to give young children more power. The issues are mostly rooted in adult misconceptions of child competencies, but also arise, because our society and urban environment is not designed for children as equals. This means that it isn't always safe for children to be completely autonomous.

Safety concerns came about during workshop two when the children had already developed more confidence in the house and were becoming more autonomous. The stakeholder was concerned about their safety and was also worried about the fragile artefacts and tapestries in the house. We decided to spend the next *Samling Circle* discussing ways of taking care of the house and creating a list of rules for other children who might visit the house. We recorded all audio from this discussion and shared it with the stakeholder. One of the children says that the house is extremely fragile and that we shouldnt touch the walls. This activity reassured the Gathenhielmska venue manager who states, "The rules which were introduced had a big impact on how I felt," he goes onto advise us to, "work with the stakeholder at the start to identify the risks and then to introduce the rules from the start so that the boundaries are clear. This is also linked to broader things like risk assessments" (Smith, 2021: Appendix D). This rules list or code of conduct will become one of LK's office things in all future projects.

Adult Participation and Role-Play

I spent most of my energy during the case study focusing on the child participants but have come to realise that the adults are equally important. Adult participants need to be active and willing listeners as well as contributors to the office environment. The uniform and the *Office Things* provided a useful framing for role-play for the adults, it was easier for the adults to enter into the Lekkontoret environment with a costume and props. Adults should contribute to child-led activities like the ship-building play, they should not merely support and assist. If Lekkontoret aims to be a shared space between child and adult participants then both parties need to contribute. More importantly, adult participants need to play and Lekkontoret should support this by encouraging role-play and performance.

Fig. 35: An adult participant playing inside the shadow theatre. The theatre was installed in workshop four as a space for the participants to further explore and present some of the stories that had been developed during the workshop. It is a useful set-up for storytelling, because it conceals the performer, making public performance less daunting. The case study showed that adults need to feel comfortable before contributing to play - this can be achieved through costume, props or by offering a physical barrier like the theatre.

Fig. 36: Lewis showing Enar his set of keys. These were a prop used within an activity to build on a narrative. The also helped Lewis join in on the play, because he could embody a character in the narrative.

Diffusing Age-Related Authority

The Lekkontoret environment tries to diffuse adult authority by making all members share ownership of the *Office Things*. This is done through aesthetics, scale and spatial layout. The adult and child members all wear the same uniform, use the same furniture and participate in the same activities. The design of the environment also attempts to deal with the power imbalance by scaling all LK office things to suit child bodies. This gives the child participants an advantage in that they would feel more comfortable and hopefully more confident in a space otherwise scaled to adult bodies.

Both adult participants in the Gathenhielmska case study did not speak the same language as the child participants. This became an advantage when trying to design for democratic interactions, because the language barrier made it more diffcult for the adults to instruct or explain. The office hired a translator to make communication less difficult. The translator became a useful figure during the workshops, because they could exist outside of the LK environment and mediate interactions. They were told to wear all black and were not given a uniform. It worked to have an external authority figure so that the office environment could be more democratic, but this strategy is not ideal. The authority figure is still an adult.

Fig. 37: The children and the translator, Elin, sitting down for Fika. LK furniture scale can be seen here.

Fig. 38: Office staff in uniform and Elin the translator in all black.

Fig. 39: Unni with her photograph at the exhibition. She had told everyone to come to her first vernissage.

The Importance of a Design Outcome

Lekkontoret is framed as a child design studio, which positions the participants as designers doing a particular job. A design brief and an outcome is thus attached to the LK agenda. Gathenhielmska had asked Lekkontoret to design a children's programme for the house. The brief is necessary for the children to learn about and influence the design process whilst also leaving something behind, which makes the space accessible to future children. This brief was quite challenging with our age-group within the given time frame. Pre-readers are still developing drawing capabilities, which meant we had to focus on other forms of expression and documentation. We decided to use audio, because we found that the sound of children and their views expressed through words has quite an impact on a listener. The audio also allows children to occupy a site through sound when they are unable to be there physically. The audio was installed during the exhibition at different sites in the house. The exhibition video captures some of the audio installations and can be viewed *here*[1]. The exhibition was presented as a part of the design outcome. It gave the LK staff a space to reflect after the workshop series and also presented an opportunity for members to invite others to see their work and experience the house.

1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Oq96niIRKU

Fig. 40: LK office staff opening the chest during the exhibition.

Fig. 41: The chest on an LK tray to be left at Gathenhielmska.

The LK office staff co-designed a tour activity, which was presented during the exhibition weekend. The activity requires children to complete a scavenger hunt for Ingela Gathenhielm's keys, using clues. The activity's contents were based on the children's observations, but the outcome was designed by the adult designers. The child participants informed the design decisions but they couldn't access parts of the production process, such as illustration. The chest and the tour activity will both remain in Gathenhielmska Huset so that other child visitors can explore and play in the space. The outcomes do, however, require participation from the Gathenhielmska stakeholders since they need to supervise the activities.

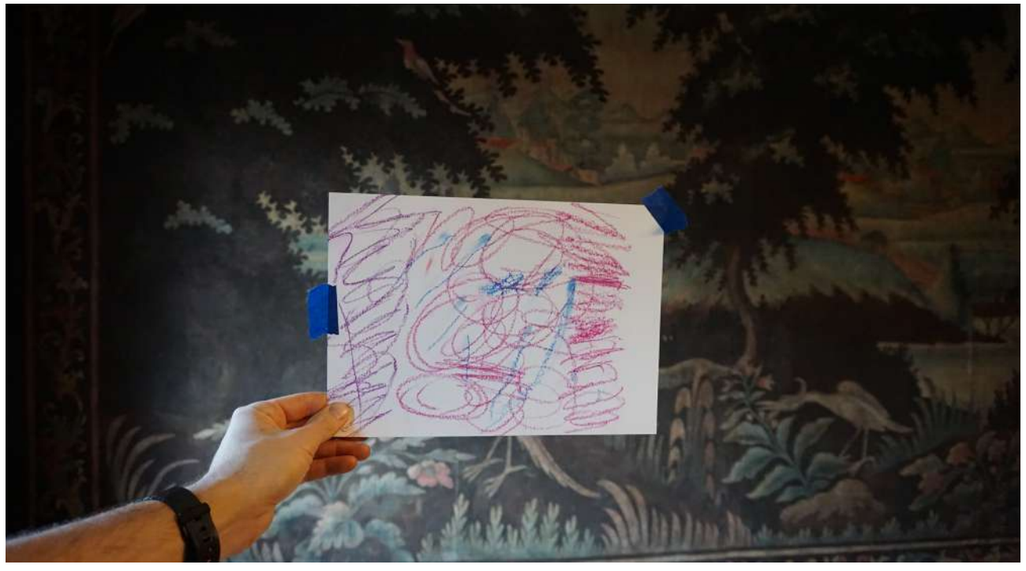


Fig. 42: A drawing by Charlie of the wind around Gathenhielmska. Most of the drawings by the LK age group need annotation or a recorded audio explanation if they are to be understood by adults.

Democratising Documentation

Online documentation is an important component of Lekkontoret. The Reggio Emilia approach to documentation informed the decision to stress the importance and need for documentation during the case study. The Reggio Emilia approach considers documentation to be central to primary education, especially when documentation is child-led and organised. Documentation is used as a means of collaboration and sharing between children, teachers and art teachers (Schroeder Yu, 2008). An aspect that has been especially inspirational to LK is the way considered and intentional documentation can add perceived value to children's work. It makes learning visible, which is necessary when communicating why LK is important to adult partners.

The website and instagram page became a space to share and reflect on the workshops. The child participants used the images to tell their parents about their experiences. Future docmentation should be more interactive and should have aspects that are child-led. Child participants could be able to add images, videos or audio to the website and instagram page to create a kind of diary together. LK should also test recording devices and cameras that young children can use for documentation.

Annette Krauss, an artist working wth child participation, has initiated a number of collaborative projects with children where the children are given control of the projects doumentation. In her *Hidden Curriculum* project, she provides the necessary tools, teaches the children how to handle them and then allows them to take control of the documentation (Krauss, 2014). There is a danger that LK adult designers become curators and editors of child participants work. LK should create an environment where the documentation is created collaboratively.

Further Testing and Changes to the Lekkontoret Model

Lekkontoret will continue to work with Gathenhielmska in order to create a design outcome that exposes the office staff to more parts of the design process. We have plans to build a Lekstuga[2] (play hut) in the garden with the same group of child and adult participants. The Lekstuga project will become the second iteration of Lekkontoret as a method for child participation. A Lekstuga is a more concrete and permanent outcome, which the LK children (and other children) would be able to use, because the garden is open to the public. We will add a step to the design process by including professional craftspeople in the production of the outcome. The children will be able to complete some tasks with professional supervision. We will follow the same process for the observation/ investigation phase as the initial case study by working within the LK environment on-site at Gathenhielmksa.

The next section of this paper deals with the description of the project's result. It presents Lekkontoret as a model, which could be followed by other child culture designers. The model has been defined through its application during the Gathenhielmska case study.

2 See Project Proposal as Appendix G

Description of Result

In this research project, I have considered how environments can be designed to facilitate democratic exchanges between adult designers and children. The project was based on the creation of a design studio, Lekkontoret, which was tested as a method for participatory design through a case study in Gothenburg. The case study has given me hands-on experience with participatory design and has helped me shape Lekkontoret as a functioning child design studio. This studio and its accompanying methodology is my design outcome.

The process chapter of this paper has described Lekkontoret in action, demonstrating the ways the LK environment can be used during a participatory project. It is a proposal, which could be applied to other projects, showing ways an adult designer can design and implement an add-on intergenerational environment within an adult context for participatory design projects. My result is thus tied to the case study, which holds both my physical outcomes (the LK *Office Things*) and the studio's methodology in practice.

This chapter holds three Lekkontoret maps, which aim to simplify the studio's objectives; briefly outline the design process and describe the business structure.

1. LK Mission Map

2. LK Family Tree

3. LK Process Map Simplified

Lekkontoret Mission Map

PRODUCT

A children's design office with child and adult designers, working as consultants on design projects.

Providing an environment and resources for participatory projects that enable children to exercise their right to be heard.

DESIRE

Responding to Article 12
UN Convention of the Rights of the Child as LEGAL requirement in Sweden as of 2020

DIFFERENTIATOR

Age-group: pre-readers

Context: Outside of child environments

Process: Children included in all parts of the design process (informants, designers, makers, testers and users)

SOLUTION

To a need for participatory projects with children by offering a service where children act as consultants and designers on design projects.

Article 12.1 UNCRC

"States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child" (OHCHR, 1990).

"States parties should encourage the child to form a free view and should provide an environment that enables the child to exercise her or his right to be heard"

"The views expressed by children may add relevant perspectives and experience and should be considered in decision-making, policymaking and preparation of laws and/or measures as well as their evaluation, These processes are usually called participation. The exercise of the child's or children's right to be heard is a crucial element of such processes. The concept of participation emphasizes that **including children should not only be a momentary act, but the starting point for an intense exchange between children and adults** on the development of policies, programmes and measures in all relevant contexts of children's lives"

Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2009. *General comment No.12: The right of the child to be heard*, Geneva, 2009.

Lekkontoret Family Tree

PERMANENT DESIGNERS

Adult Child Culture Designer(s)

Initiates Projects

Connects Stakeholders to children + other adult collaborators

Provides/ designs an environment (*Office Things*) that enables the child to exercise their right to be heard

Returning Child Designers

PROJECT-BASED DESIGNERS + PARTNERS

Child Designers

Adult Collaborators

FUNDING

Our projects can be divided into two seperately fundable components; the co-design phase which comprises of workshops on-site and the production phase where the children and/or creative professionals produce our designed outcome.

Child Participation: Funded by the state, non-profits, research institutes or charitable foundations.

Design Outcome: Funded by private/public stakeholder who gain a physical outcome from the process.

Child Team

Children below reading age who are invited to participate as part of Lekkontoret. Each project is seen to have a unique team of designers, but as LK develops we will try to gather a more permanent child design team, made up of returning child designers.

Project Stakeholders

The adults that require LK services and need a child's perspective on a project. These stakeholders are also considered to be 'designers' during the project and are therefore included in the design process. These stakeholders could include; the traffic office, museums, architects, culture houses.

Creative Professionals

Hired for production of designs. To collaborate with LK team throughout the process. Potential for children to learn from this part of the design process. These professionals could include; carpenters, gardeners, architects, museum curators, artists, chefs, textile designers, metalsmiths.

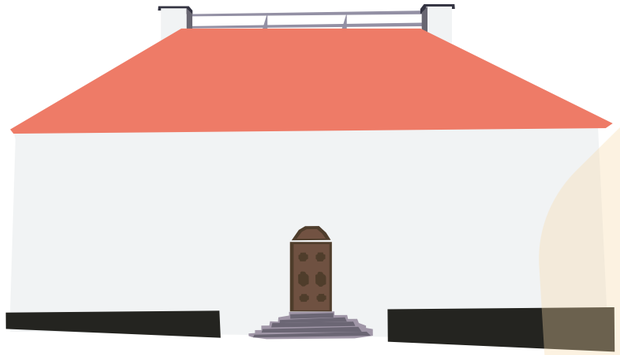
Lekkontoret Brief Process Map

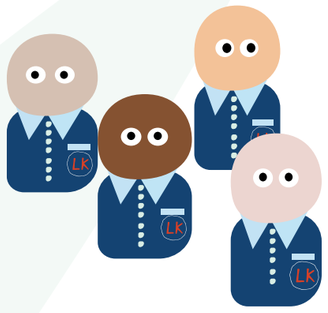
Identify Need

Identify and approach cultural instituitions or public organisations that require child participation.
Target child unfriendly spaces.

Adult Child Culture Designer(s)

initiate participatory process

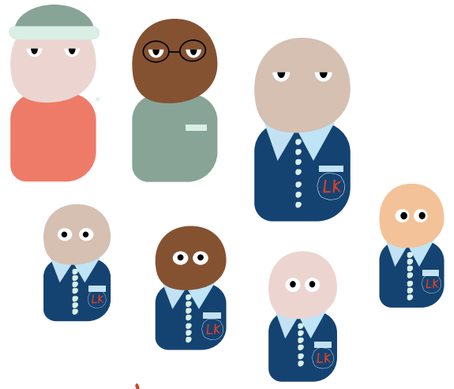




Recruit Child Design Team to form a Lekkontoret

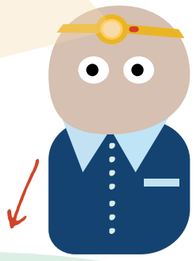
Design Brief

Develop a design brief together with the project stakeholders



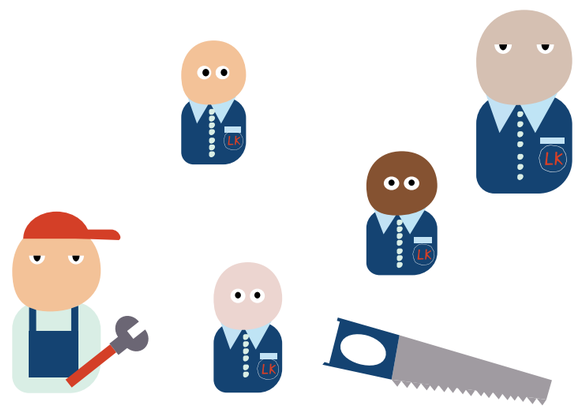
Co-Design Phase On-Site

Activations, Interactions,
Investigations with LK office things



Collaborate with creative professionals

To produce an outcome and leave behind a more child-friendly/ playful space



Conclusion

In this thesis, I have considered how environments can be designed to facilitate equal exchanges between adult designers and children. The thesis is based on the development of a research project, during which I created a design studio, Lekkontoret, and tested a method for participatory design through a case study in Gothenburg. The case study allowed me to gain invaluable insights into the realities of child participation and led to the project's outcome: a method for conducting participatory projects with children.I acknowledge that this method is still rudimentary, but it should be seen as a step towards Lekkontoret's long-term goal of actualizing a democratic participatory design process with children.

Research into democratic participatory design showed that few had addressed in practice the role context can play in shaping child adult relations. Focusing my research on the physical site for participatory projects meant I could contribute to the existing discourse on participatory design practices while also investigating the UNCRC's requirement for states parties to "provide an environment that enables the child to exercise her/his right to be heard"(CRC, 2009). I worked in a context that is unfriendly towards children - this meant that I had to design an environment that could be installed on-site to create a safe space for participants. A safe space in that it protects (the external and/or internal), but also safe in that it encourages participants to share and learn together. This choice resulted in some challenges between stakeholders, but ultimately proved the need for an add-on environment, which could be applied to other sites, to give participants new physical and social boundaries within an existing context.

I have investigated the political nature of objects by designing *Office Things* to form the LK environment. The case study showed how a small change in scale or a material's weight can have a profound political impact by enabling children to influence and interact within a space unfriendly towards their needs, interests and bodies.

The visual impact of an office for play within an adult context should not be understated as a result. Flags, for example, were able to signal an occupation to outsiders. Flags accompanied by tiny stools communicated that this occupation was made by children. Because we worked within a context with a complex history, these visuals mingled with other stories of occupation and opened up possibilities for further interpretations and understandings of power relations and struggles. I think that because LK works on-site and not in child designated spaces, it will always relate and respond to its context in this way by sparking conversations about ownership in the city.

I plan to continue developing Lekkontoret as a design studio working with and for children. I have gathered a team of three adult designers and have received positive feedback from the Gathenhielmska exhibition, where many children expressed interest in joining the design team. We would like to continue expanding our method for participatory design, paying attention to one of our initial requirements, which was to include children in all aspects of the design process. The case study did not achieve this, but it has informed the decision to include other professionals, such as craftspeople, in the outcomes phase of future LK projects. This is an area that needs further development and will be tested during the upcoming Lekstuga project, where carpenters will be included as collaborators.

I set out to investigate the gap between law and practice in the implementation of Article 12. I found that there are possibilities in closing this gap, at least within a participatory environment. However, you can't have a truly democratic participatory process until society practices a democracy that recognises children as active citizens. The strength of Lekkontoret lies in its ability to connect children to adults and places they usually would not have access to. Child presence in these places leads to a society where child needs and perspectives must be accommodated — a society where children are seen and heard and recognised as competent citizens.

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Designing for and with Ambiguity

Colin Ward
The Child in the City

Greg Mannion
Going Spatial, Going Relational

Jon Geib
'Who is your neighbour?'

Studio Goja
Stadleksvetarna

Bonnie Honig
Theory of Public Things

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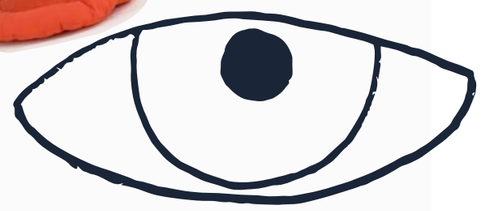
Dunne & Raby
Speculative Everything



Living Labs
Collaborative Future Making

Maywa Denki

Hidden Curriculum

A

ARGUMENT

Annelies Vaneycken
Recipes for Uncontrol

Mannion

Park Lek
Kerstin Bergendal

UNCRC

Goteborg Alvstaden
Kvaliteitsprogram
Child Imapact Ass.

Simon Nicholson
Theory of Loose Parts

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METHOD

Kerri Smith
art as research

Annette Krauss
art as pedagogy

Annelies Vaneycken
Recipes for Uncontrol

Shannon Finnegan
'The anti-stairs club'

Dunne & Raby
Props

Tillsammans ska vi jobba på Gathenhielmska huset,
ett av Göteborgs äldsta hus.

Vi behöver ett team av nyfikna och modiga barn som
hjälper oss återupptäcka sjömannen Lars Gathenhielms
berättelser och skatter.

Vi vill utforska huset genom en serie workshops med
fokus på berättande och lek. Det kommer hållas fyra
workshops, på lördagar från vecka 8 till 12.

Vi kommer samarbeta med maximalt 5 barn mellan 4
och 8 år (på grund av covid-19-regler)

Projektet har finansierats av Göteborg Stads Projektstöd
och är därmed gratis. Vi tillhandahåller fika och allt
material

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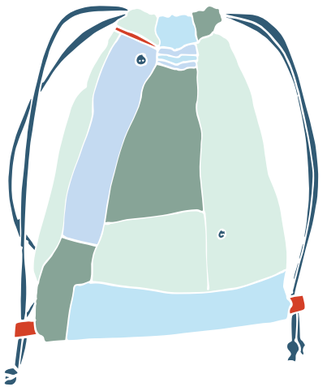
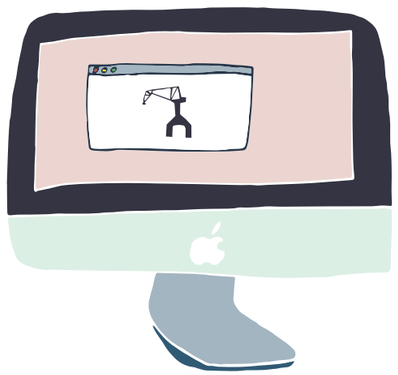
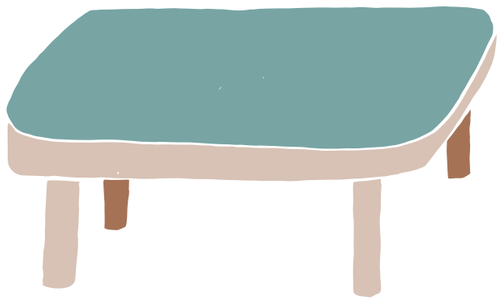
material

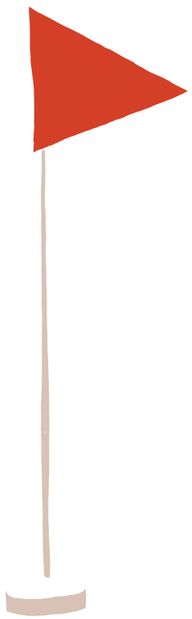
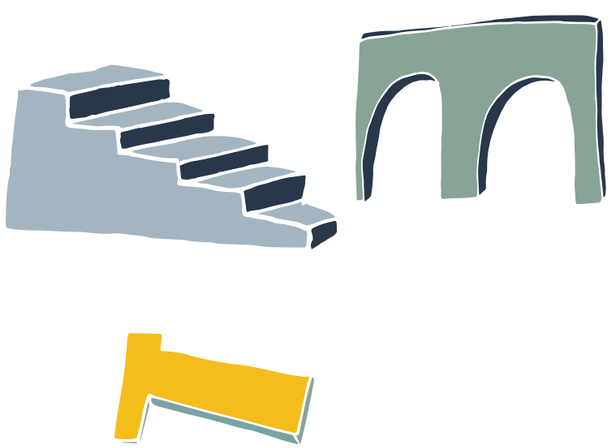
Website Excerpt:

Lekkontoret, 2021. *Gathenhielmska*, ReadyMag. viewed 21 May 2021<https://lekkontoret.com/gathenhielmska/>.

	INTENDED FUNCTION	AFFORDANCES	REFLECTIONS
UNIFORM 	Collective Identity Visual statement Service Authority Confidence Belonging	**Role-Play** The children wore their uniforms for all of the sessions and would put them on when entering the site. They referred to them as arbetskläder (work clothes). Both adult and child participants could use the uniform as a type of costume for entering the LK environment in a performative way. It encourages participants to take on a new role and develop new ways of interacting across generations within the office environment. The uniform also creates a visual statement and has a performative element for outsiders viewing the office. This allows us to occupy a space as a collective.	**Badged** We gave the children LK embroidered labels, which they could attach to their uniforms with the help of their parents. We also would attach different ribbons during the workshops to create groups. The children could have more of an opportunity to adapt their uniform. We could also offer badges after different projects to prove participation and to build a sense of pride. It would be important to consider the hierarchical nature of badges and whether this sort of visual is necessary or useful - this is something to discuss with all LK members. **Size and Design** A simple t-shirt would be more comfortable, but would not have the same visual appeal We should add straps to the side to fix it more to the body.
PORTRAIT STICKERS 	Collective Identity Visual statement Confidence Belonging Applied to Office Things	**Play and Identification** The stickers could be applied to office furniture and objects from the floor plan and used in play. They allowed the participants to project themselves onto the objects during play.	**LK in the Everyday** Marie Caroline Peris drew portraits of each child which were made into stickers. The children were given some to use on their own possesions, which they did. This allowed LK imagery to infiltrate their everyday.

	INTENDED FUNCTION	AFFORDANCES	REFLECTIONS
LEKKONTORET KIT  **COMPONENTS** Drawstring Bag Notebook for Child Participant's Adults' Notebook for Child Participants Small LK Cushion Portrait Stickers Uniform	Project Invitation Collective Identity Visual statement Service Authority Confidence Belonging Role-Play Adult Communication Spark Excitment	**Notebooks** The notebooks are used for adult LK members to correspond with parents and for child participants to take notes or sketch between workshops. **Role-Play** The kit became a tool for role-play in that it worked alongside the uniform as props for work in an office. The child participant notebook also became a prop for role-playing work. **Small Cushion** The small cushion was used in the introduction activity where we asked all participants to bring something they thought they would need for the job. The cushion was used to present their object. It could be placed next to their large cushion seat. The cushion was incorporated in play, especially on the floor plan, because of its scale.	**More Things!** I would add a headtorch, chalk and binoculars/ magnifying glass in future kits to encourage role-play and to provide more investigative tools. **Self Documentation** The age-group finds sketching and note-taking difficult. Parents had to therefore annotated the homework or would record the audio from sessions. It would be useful to add a disposable camera or to encourage parents to share images and videos online through the social media.
WEBSITE AND SOCIAL MEDIA 	Reflection after Workshops Pride Documentation Communication to Prospective Stakeholders and Funders	**Reflection and Sharing** The website and instagram page have become a space for sharing and reflecting on our work. The child participants can use the images to tell their parents about their experiences working in the office. It is also useful for communicating the project to a wider audience.	Future documentation should be more interactive and child-led.

	INTENDED FUNCTION	AFFORDANCES	REFLECTIONS
LEKKONTORET FURNITURE  **COMPONENTS** Stools Basket Seats Cushions	To Furnish the LK Environment Furniture for Child Bodies Enhance Capabilities Visual Occupation Distinguish LK Furniture vs. Stakeholder Furniture Seating Storage Reaching Portable	**Stools** Used to give children more access to an adult space. Carried around by children for outdoor play. Used at the toilet and sinks for reaching. Used to look into cupboards. **Basket Seats** Used to plan and construct the physical layout of meetings in any public site. Storage space for lunch, workshop materials or for use in play. Used as seats, tables, drawing tables, stages, instruments and in play to act as various objects such as a ship or a car. **Cushions** Used to position meetings and for easy seating when moving around. Useful during play, because they are light. A small stool next to a toilet or a ring of small cushions immediately suggests a child's presence and helps LK occupy a site.	**Appropriation and Ownership** The appropriation of the office furniture vs. the sites furniture made it clear that the children understood the office furniture belonged to them. The furniture was used in various child-led investigations and play activities. The children could identify that the furniture was for LK and was therefore theirs to use.
SMALL FLAG 	To Represent Self on Floor Plan Navigation Positioning in Room	**Room Layout by Children** The children would fetch the small flags from the floor plan before each workshop and place them within the cushion circle to show where they would be sitting. The portrait stickers on the small flags also meant the children projected themselves onto the flags when talking and playing. Adult LK members used the flags to create a circle for our group meetings.	**Play** Appropriated in play as oars, markers, weapons etc.

	INTENDED FUNCTION	AFFORDANCES	REFLECTIONS
LARGE FLAG 	Visual Occupation Room/ Spatial Layout Marking Areas or Objects for Discussion Safety Marker	Appropriation The large flags were appropriated in a number of ways. Some of the children used chalk from a mapping exercise to mark their flags and occupy territories while playing in the garden. Others used them for digging or as play weapons. They were also used as oars for make-believe ships. The red flags became an important part of the office's visual language and were drawn by some of the children during homework activities	Scale Part of why the flags were so successful was, because they were very easy for the children to move around. The scale suited child bodies while still being large enough to have a visual impact. Variations Flags are an easily recognisable sign of occupation and ownership, even for a 4 year old. They communicate the office's aims of increasing child presence in the city to all ages and are therefore useful objects to expand on. I would like to create textile variations and would also like to explore using flags in a more external way, facing outsiders and passers-by to signify our occupation of a site.
FLOOR PLAN 	Site-Specific Tool Navigation Positioning in Room Orientation Play Storytelling	Play The small flags could be used to represent LK members when playing or working with the floor plan. This allowed members to talk about their experiences on-site by projecting onto the floor plan. The laser cut elements on the map were also used for play, converting the map into a flattened doll-house. The children could re-enact activities or stories on the plan. Ownership The act of mapping is intrinsic to ownership and power. This act, alongside the use of flags, represents the site's occupation.	Changes I would create physical markers in each room that are then repeated on a portable map that can be carried into the different spaces. The floorplan lacks the immediacy of a portable map where a child is able to recognize elements and not have to recall from memory.

Homework Assignment:
Vanja drew and described a LK workshop for her parents as homework. She drew the LK flags inside and outside the house when desribing activities. She also drew Enar (centre front) being measured in the public square.

Lekkontoret, 2021. *Vanja's Gathenhielmska.*

Lekkontoret Workshop Review Interview
Interview Conducted at Gathenhielmska Huset, 25th May 2021

Interviewer: Catherine Paterson Adult designer from Lekkontoret
Interviewee: Lewis Smith - Gathenhielmska Project Manager

What is Lekkontoret?
I understand it as a children's design office based in Gothenburg with a team of adult and child designers. A company led by Catherine Paterson which aims to increase child influence and participation in the city by working with children and encouraging child led explorations of spaces.

When were you most nervous during our collaboration?
I was most nervous in the final hour of workshop 2, until that point the workshop had been entertaining and rewarding to be a part of, but the final hour had been allocated as free play. The parents had also been invited and somehow the result was that children were left largely unsupervised to roam around the house. One of the children's parents asked me where their child was, which raised some concerns and I also found another child with a marker pen. That was the first and only point where it felt like it was out of control.

What was the most exciting bit for you?
Can I only choose one?
Yes please.
The most exciting from an intended outcomes point of view was seeing how comfortable the children were showing others around the space and navigating the space.
The most exciting from an experiential point of view was probably the head torch activity in Kungssalen, because it felt like a whole new way of experiencing the room, which was nice for me because I don't like the room so much. It was quite a lot of fun and a very clever way of exploring.

We were asked to do a project at the Stadsmuseum and they also have a lot of fragile artefacts and things that children can't touch. You experienced the kids in this space, could you suggest 3 things we should do differently with this future project - to ensure the stakeholder feels secure.

1. Be careful with the free play

2. Communicating the unpredictable nature of child participation and how this could affect the project outcome

3. The rules which were introduced had a big impact on how I felt. To work with the stakeholder at the start to identify the risks and then to introduce the rules from the start so that the boundaries are clear. This is also linked to broader things like risk assessments.

Could you observe any limitations due to our choice of age-group?
Relating to the brief, to design a children's tour, I think the age group presented challenges. A clear challenge seemed to be the issue of attention span, and our response was to incorporate free play and rest periods. The free play was at the end and it seemed like they could just go home. (need to communicate the value of free play to stakeholders).

Did one of our members teach you anything special/ new about Gathenhielmska Huset?
Whenever I do a tour of the space now I always say that the painting in Salongen is of Ingela Gathenhielm and her children that are carrying her off. The children dared to open cupboards and cabinets that I hadn't and found things In rooms that I hadn't and left stories and sounds that continue to echo.

As you've seen, involving children is complex and quite hard work with a lot of responsibility, is it worth it? Could you give us two reasons why?
I think it's worth it, I thought it was a fascinating and enjoyable experience and for me it felt like a really important step in opening up and to some degree democratizing the space.
Really! Why?
Because it's not just old men that get to run around here now.

Why not just have more adults collaborate in the space?
It's about opening up the possibility of space. Why shouldn't salongen be a hide-and-seek room as well as a concert venue or rehearsal space. It's also inspiring to see how parents responded, both the parents of those who had been involved but also those whose children got to take part in the treasure hunt. So many people commented on how rare it was that such an opportunity existed for children to properly be able to explore a heritage space like Gathenhielmska- or for there to be something designed specifically for them. My job as a venue manager is to open up the house to different communities and demographics and so to be able to have activities for children. The effort of making it a full bodied project rather than just an event is worth it, because it's more rewarding for everyone involved.

Why do you think we have all of this office stuff? (uniform, flags, furniture, cushions, portraits)
I understood it partly as a way of appropriating the space and helping to create a sense of pop-up alternative environment and then also partly as a practical way for children to exert themselves in or on the space. For example with the flags, very concretely. The uniforms added to role-play and a sense of collective identity. This seemed to help create a bond at the start. It was also great to see how the objects were appropriated further, the objects appropriating the space but also the children appropriating the objects, like with the boat and the basket with wheels that became a life-boat. Giving them objects that they could get very comfortable using and where they knew they could do anything with, made them also feel more at home in the space.

"HUSET HAR 15 RUM OCH I DET SÅ FÅR DET PLATS 1000 BARN"

– unni

kl. 12 - 17

1 - 2 MAJ 2021

Upplev Gathenhielmska Huset ur ett barns perspektiv

Vi har under de senaste månaderna jobbat med en grupp barn för att skapa ett lekkontor på Gathenhielmska Huset, i syfte att göra huset mer tillgängligt för barn. Tillsammans utforskade vi huset genom en serie workshops och upptäckte berättelser och skatt!

Vi vill bjuda in dig till en utställning som visar barnens perspektiv på huset och dess historia.

Gathenhielmska Huset
Stigbergstorget 7
Göteborg

web: www.gathenhielmska.se www.lekkontoret.com

insta: @gathenhielmskahuset @lekkontoret

pga de nuvarande covid-19 restriktionerna kommer antalet besökare att begränsas till 8 personer i huset.

Lekkontoret, 2021. *Invitation to Gathenhielmska Invitation.*

GATHENHIELMSKA LEKSTUGA

Project Outline

To design, build and install a free-standing lekstuga for Gathenhielmska Huset garden. The lekstuga will be designed to integrate aesthetically with the existing architecture and will not have any long-standing affect on the landscape.

Background

How can we make historic sites more accessible to children?

How do we increase child influence and presence in the city?

How can we provide more opportunities for playful interactions with history and cultural heritage?

Over the past few months, Gathenhielmska Huset and child design studio, Lekkontoret, have been working together to explore these questions by facilitating child-led explorations of the house.We assembled a group of six children between the age of four and five to explore and re-imagine the house from a child's perspective. The child/adult team of designers used mapping, storytelling and play to investigate different ways of making the house and its contents more accessible to children.

We learnt about Ingela Gathenhielm, a privateer from the 17th century, and searched for her treasures using head torches in the dark and dusty Kungssalen. We baked cookeys in Ingela´s bakery and ate lunch under the monkey-filled trees in the garden. We listened to rock-n-roll while drawing clouds in Versailles and danced with ghosts in Salongen. We measured Stigbergstorget with our bodies (fourteen Vanja´s long and ten Vanja´s wide) and held hands when venturing into the cold, scary attic. We staged a shadow theatre show, sailing puppet ships with loud cannons while fighting off sea-monsters. We built make-shift ships and sailed through the house, catching mermaids on our way.

We held an exhibition of the project: **"Uppleva Gathenhielmska Huset ur ett barns perspektiv!"** on the 1st, 2nd and 3rd of May 2021. Our work to make Gathenhielmska more accessible to children does not end here. We have put together a toy chest and we have also created a treasure hunt to give other young adventurers an opportunity to explore the house and create their own stories.

Why a Lekstuga?

We would like to design and install a children's lekstuga to be placed in the Gathenhielmska garden as a continuation of the Children in Gathenhielmska Huset project. We want more children to be able to enjoy the house and its stories, but from a safe environment outside of the house, where they can be supervised by their parents/ guardians. The stuga would contribute to the garden becoming an inviting public space for local families to enjoy the reserve. We believe it would attract families to the garden and to the house, creating an opportunity for Gathenhielmska to become a living cultural site in the community.

GATHENHIELMSKA LEKSTUGA

Design Process

We propose a design process where a team of child and adult designers work on a design for the stuga through a co-design workshops. The aim is to create a small lekstuga that suits the reserves aesthetics and that can be easily removed from the land. See preliminary sketches at the end of the document.

Design Phase

- Moodboard
- Site survey and measurement
- Co-design workshops with children (see plan)
- Design proposal and meeting with client
- Modeling and testing on-site

Production Phase

- Gathering of material
- Production on-site

Assessment phase

- Testing afternoon with children
- Refinement of design
- Evaluation of design process (lekkontoret)
- Evaluation of design outcome (lekkontoret+client)

GATHENHIELMSKA LEKSTUGA

The Workshops Process With Child Participation

Research shows that children are more motivated when they have choice and control over their experiences in museums (Sykes, 1992; Paris, 1997). Including children in the design process of the Lekstuga would give them a sense of ownership of the space, whilst also providing an opportunity for self-motivated learning. We would apply our observations and investigations from the children's tour to the design of the stuga and will work with the same child team that was involved inside the house. We have included a simplified plan for three workshops with children to be held in the Gathenhielmska Garden.

Workshop 1: Lekstuga Site Visits

The children will receive an introduction to the project where they are told about our aim to design a lekstuga for the Gathenhielmska garden. We will visit the garden and explore possibilities through mood-boarding activities. We will also visit the Slottskogen lekstuga for inspiration, play and sketching.

Workshop 2: Designing our Stuga

We will discuss the Lekstuga contents with the children. We will create cardboard mock-ups to test scale and play objects with the children.

How do we make a Lekstuga specific to Gathenhielmska?

How to turn a heritage site into a safe play site?

Can we design a Lekstuga for all weather?

Workshop 3: Child Feedback on Adult design proposal

The LK adult designers will pitch an idea to the children based on the workshop process. The children will the give feedback during the workshop.

Lekstuga Proposal:

Lekkontoret, 2021. *Excerpts from proposal to Higab and Gathenhielmska Huset.*

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