

Cities as playgrounds: *Oyun İstanbul*¹ as a case study

Yasin Çağatay SEÇKİN¹

¹ cseckin@itu.edu.tr • Department of Landscape Architecture, Faculty of Architecture, Istanbul, Türkiye
ORCID: 0000-0002-4105-9506

Received: June 2026 • Final Acceptance: July 2026

Abstract

This paper introduces the transformative initiative *Oyun İstanbul*, which aims to make playing an integral part of urban life in Istanbul. The paper highlights the decline in outdoor play in modern cities and the need for sustainable, inclusive, and accessible spaces that encourage social interaction and physical activity. Prioritizing children's right to play, the *Oyun İstanbul* initiative aims to transform Istanbul from a city of playgrounds into a playable city where public spaces are designed in collaboration with children and young people. The paper demonstrates how participatory design encourages community involvement and improves the urban environment through a range of pilot projects. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating nature into play, creating inclusive public spaces, and using tactical urbanism approaches to provide safe, enjoyable, and diverse play experiences. Ultimately, the *Oyun İstanbul* movement serves as a model for cities worldwide, advocating for a holistic approach to play that enriches community life and supports children's developmental needs.

Keywords

Equal play, Nature, Play culture, Playable city, Safe play.

1. Introduction

“When I think back to my childhood, starting from the year I began school, I remember always playing outside after I turned five. In the summer, we wore Tokyo slippers [2] in the heat. I didn’t like playing house. So it was clear even then that I wouldn’t like housework. We played dodgeball or tag outside. I also remember playing hopscotch and jumping rope. I think I played hopscotch the most, which consisted of a series of linear squares and two side-square blocks scattered between them. We played five stones and a game with a rope in our hands. When we went to the beach for five stones, we took care to collect smooth, round stones, and everyone had their own stone. I also collected marbles. In the Aegean, marbles are also called acorns. And another name, cicoz, was what my father, who grew up in Cihangir [3], called his marbles. Even now, I collect cicoz in a jar at home. Don’t ask me why, because I don’t know. I remember collecting Fruko [4] crown caps and playing games with them. How happy we were when we popped each other’s caps. Of course, this last one was a game I played with the boys. I also played soccer with them, but I remember that because I was a girl, they counted my two goals as one. I would beat some of them up if I got angry.”

Nilgün Günaydın, Being a child in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Blue Days [5]

The 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, even the 1990s... Years when playing outside the front door was a fundamental part of life (Bornat, 2025). Once a common activity for communities, it has gradually disappeared with the advent of the 21st century. However, play, an important part of human life, has been for centuries not only a fun leisure activity but also an element that supports social, emotional, cognitive, intellectual, and physical skills. It creates fertile ground for creativity and problem-solving. And most importantly, it creates environments for socialization. Modern city life and its challenges, especially in recent years, have led to a significant decline in the daily physical activity of all citizens. To counter this decline, there is an urgent need for sustainable,

accessible, inclusive, safe, and creative solutions. Promoting an active social life and reversing the sedentary lifestyle that causes health problems such as childhood obesity and screen addiction has become a social responsibility. Efforts undertaken under this responsibility have led to the implementation of a new model focused on play and physical activity to create a more livable city in Istanbul: ‘Oyun İstanbul’.

With the aim of developing and diversifying opportunities for play and physical activity, *Oyun İstanbul* set out on the premise that a city better suited to children is a better city for everyone. It set as its fundamental goal the evolution from a city with playgrounds to a playable city. Since 2019, *Oyun İstanbul* has been conducting research, production, and collaborations to make Istanbul a city where everyone, especially children, can fully enjoy their right to play, as stated in Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Working in collaboration with all citizens of Istanbul, efforts have begun to improve play opportunities in public spaces for children and young people in the city. At the same time, past successes and failures have been examined, and inspiring developments and ideas have been encountered on the path to becoming a fully playable city.

2. Inspiring developments and ideas

In 1943, during a period of increased resistance to the Nazi occupation of Denmark, *Skrammellegepladsen* (Junk Playground) opened in Copenhagen’s Emdrup district (Frost, 2010). *Skrammellegepladsen* was part of *Emdrupvænge*, a large housing project with over 700 households (Dighton, 2020). Created through the collaboration of Danish landscape architect Carl Theodor Sørensen with playworkers Jonas Bertelsen and Agnete Vesteregs, this area was minimally designed to reflect elements of rural Denmark (Henriksen, 2006). At Emdrup, nothing was static or expensive. It was filled with reusable junk – wood, rope, canvas, tires, wire, bricks, pipes, rocks, nets, logs, balls, abandoned furniture, wheels, vehicles, and an unimaginable assortment of other things (Dighton, 2020).

After Marjory Allen traveled to Denmark in 1946, this creative idea spread to England (Highmore, 2013). As Allen noticed, the junk playground, with no play restrictions, gave children more space to shape their own games rather than focusing on rigid play structures. After returning to England, Allen promoted the idea of adventure playgrounds by asking the question “Why Don’t We Use Our Bombing Ranges Like This?” in an article of the same title in *Picture Post* magazine (Wilson, 2014; Allen, 1946).

Allen was very impressed during her visit to Emdrup and by the charismatic playworker Bertelsen (Robinson, 2021):

“I was completely swept off my feet by my first visit to Emdrup playground. In a flash of understanding, I realized that I was looking at something quite new and full of possibilities. There was a wealth of waste material on it and no man-made fixtures. The children could dig, build houses, experiment with sand, water, or fire, and play adventure and make-believe games. They were also fortunate in their leader, John Bertelsen. A trained nursery school teacher and ex-seaman, he was a great man, a philosopher, and a poet. His imagination, confidence, and insight made the whole experiment an outstanding success.”

Bertelsen was Emdrup’s first playworker (Kozlovsky, 2007). He was a member of the Danish Resistance Movement and fought against the Nazis. The children at Emdrup had great respect for him. According to Bertelsen, the playground should provide an emotionally stable and nurturing environment for the children who use it. By placing responsibility in the hands of the children playing at Emdrup, he aimed to develop their social skills and independent thinking abilities. As Bertelsen said, children’s play was not what adults saw, but what the child experienced (Bertelsen, 1972). This sentence also strongly emphasized the importance of free and street play even then.

Allen established the Lollard Street Adventure Playground in south London, and others followed it. A form of free play, often led by children, de-

veloped in bombed-out areas. These attitudes towards play were in keeping with the political and social context of the time. They represented the freedom and optimism for the future that communities were fighting for (FCDO, 1971). These types of playgrounds, which were not overly controlled, gave children the opportunity to explore and interact with each other.

However, over the years, playgrounds became more formal. These types of areas were also standardized as “adventure playgrounds”. The concept of a playable landscape, which had once guided them, succumbed to equipped playgrounds.

By the 1960s, the fabric of city centers had visibly deteriorated. Many cities lost their residents to the suburbs. Perhaps the most striking example of this situation was in New York City, where Jane Jacobs published her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* in 1961 (Jacobs, 1961).

Jacobs vividly described life on the streets of her own neighborhood, Greenwich Village. Jacobs’ descriptions of the local area included children playing. She even devoted an entire chapter to them in her book. For Jacobs, children represented the life of the city, and the streets were the best places to represent it. Here, they could play freely under the supervision of neighbors and others around them, and at the same time they were safe.

However, over time, society’s approach to raising children has changed significantly (Tranter, 2015). Today, most parents do not think like Jacobs. What has changed in the intervening half-century? Did changing urban planning lead to unsafe streets, which in turn led to more helicopter parenting? Or did helicopter parenting, by preventing children from playing in the streets, make the streets less safe?

On this subject, researcher Tim Gill, in his book *No Fear: Growing Up in a Risk-Averse Society*, states that play has been harmed by an increasingly risk-averse approach. This is because it restricts children’s play, limits their freedom of movement, and prevents them from exploring the world. In his book, Gill argues that in a world where adult control is increasing, there is a need for

an approach that balances protecting children from real threats with providing them with learning opportunities (Gill, 2007).

In his book *Urban Playground: How Child-Friendly Planning and Design Can Save Cities*, published in 2021, Gill argues that children's status in urban planning should be elevated and that cities should be viewed through their eyes (Gill, 2021). This argument is entirely parallel to *Oyun İstanbul*'s fundamental goal.

Motivated by these developments and ideas briefly mentioned above, five goals were set out, encompassing the actions needed to achieve a playable, play-friendly İstanbul (IMM, 2022; Karaulan Sozuer & Seckin, 2025):

- Transforming into a Playable City
- Enhancing the Relationship between Nature and the City
- Providing Equal Play Experience in the City
- Creating a Play Culture in the City
- Playing Safely in the City

3. Transforming into a playable city

In vehicle-priority metropolitan cities, children playing in the streets are confined to specific areas to protect them from death or injury. Planning approaches that restrict children's play are driven by adults' comfort needs. Unfortunately, although those under 18 constitute a significant segment of society, they have neither the right to vote nor the power to influence decision-making mechanisms. Although everyone was once that age, children are rarely mentioned in city planning policies or guidelines.

Therefore, it must begin by defending children's rights, including their right to participate. This understanding allows children to act as effective partners and participate in the process. This is one of the most important conditions for transforming a city into a playable one. In this context, areas designated for children to play should be prioritized in planning.

According to this approach, first, children and young people in İstanbul needed to be included in decisions affecting the city's built environment, thereby giving them the power to influence change. Within this framework,

work began in different parts of İstanbul to make the city playable, together with young people and children.

3.1. Pilot project: İstanbul Beşiktaş [6] Barbaros square and young skateboarders

Skateboarding has become a global phenomenon today, with thousands of skate parks. It has even secured its place as a sport in the 2020 and 2024 Olympic Games. Skateboarding is an urban activity that contributes to city streets and public spaces.

Despite this, physical barriers are installed in many public areas worldwide to prevent skateboarding. While homeless people are excluded from public spaces with oddly shaped benches and other elements, skateboarders encounter rough surfaces, skate-stopping blocks, and chains that deliberately prevent them from skating (Borden, 2019). On the other hand, street skateboarders, free from the restrictions of disciplined skate parks, argue that cities should be full of movement, pleasure, and joy, a view that points to the fundamental aim of *Oyun İstanbul*.

With this approach, when the redevelopment of Beşiktaş Barbaros Square on the Bosphorus coast of İstanbul was on the agenda, it was decided to bring



Figure 1. Steps and ramps designed in collaboration with skateboarders in Beşiktaş.

together the skaters who had long used the area to jointly shape the square's design. Meetings were held with young people who currently skateboard in the area and middle-aged city dwellers who had skated there in previous years. Five workshops were held during the design process. Practical discussions were held on topics such as the city, skating, and urban life, not just on a theoretical level. Details were discussed regarding ergonomics for humans, skating areas, and seating areas. During all these studies, the steps and sloped surfaces on the square's ground were re-evaluated in light of the definition of a *skateable urban space*.

A skateable urban space was not a skate park, but rather a skateable area where many activities could be carried out simultaneously within the city. Changes were made to certain points in the square's design for those new to skateboarding, and adjustments to the heights that could be reached on a skateboard were evaluated together.

Detailed studies were conducted to determine what measures could be taken in the area to prevent skateboards from hitting people at speed when they skated beneath. As a result, together with the young people, the goal of making the square a playground for everyone was achieved. The participation of young skateboarders in every stage of the design and production process strengthened social cohesion and a sense of belonging.

3.2. Pilot project: Istanbul's children design parks

The Project created significant value through its participation as an example of the application of new-generation, dynamic methods in children's playground design. Children were accompanied by experts involved in the project's design and production, in workshops where methods and materials suitable for different age groups were used. Initially, the participation processes included sketching and model workshops; during the implementation phase, field checks were also conducted with the children who designed the park.

The first two projects were carried out in Beykoz [7] Akbaba Park and Şile [8] Darlık Park. In both areas, landscape architects first conducted preliminary research and field studies for the project. The current situation was identified. Following discussions with the neighborhood headmen, children from the relevant age groups were invited to participate in the activities through an open call. All designs resulting from the workshops with the children were reported and communicated to the relevant designers. After the designers and producers completed their work to realize the playground that the children had imagined, the projects were implemented on site.

Through this project, children gained the power to shape the spaces they use in their daily lives with their own imagination and creativity. This application enabled children to perceive the urban space as an intervenable, collective area and to see themselves as individuals who can make decisions about the space.



Figure 2. A view of Akbaba Park and the treehouse designed according to children's imagination.

4. Enhancing the relationship between nature and the city

Play is the cornerstone of childhood development. It is where creativity, problem-solving, and social skills take root. However, the harsh reality is that modern childhood is overly programmed and controlled. Amid endless educational activities, children have forgotten how to play without an agenda. The freedom to explore, imagine, and take risks—and with it, the magic of childhood—is steadily diminishing.

Yet nature is the world's greatest playground. Nature is not merely a backdrop; it is a teacher, a healer, and an endless source of inspiration. In nature, there are no rules or instructions. Children take risks and learn to solve problems on their own. They learn by doing, failing, and trying again. They develop courage when they fall and pick themselves up. For example, a child climbing a tree assesses their limits, tests their balance, and builds self-confidence. These are moments that shape not only their childhood but also their character.

One of the best aspects of free play in nature is that it is unstructured and child-led. There is no need for detailed plans or expensive equipment. Perhaps they will collect stones and try to identify them, or perhaps they will just lie on the ground and watch the clouds pass by. Whatever they choose, the important thing is to allow the child to take the lead; to interact with nature on their own terms (Quinn, 2022).

4.1. Pilot project: Nature detective

The main goal of the project is to create nature awareness by encouraging contact with nature through play, sparking a sense of discovery and curiosity. The project makes it easier for children to experience the nature of the city they live in through play. It shows that nature is both a playground in itself and one of the different ways to play in the city, thereby also developing the city's play culture.

The Nature Detective game is played using a booklet containing routes specific to Istanbul's historic groves and urban forests, along with directives to be completed on each route. The book-

lets also contain information about the park or urban forest, as well as various games.

Initially, a total of eight game routes were prepared: four in the parks and urban forests on the European side of Istanbul and four in the urban forests on the Asian side. By the end of 2023, two new routes had been added to these, bringing the total to ten. All routes can be played individually, but on Fridays, they can also be played collectively in a park or urban forest on each side of the city, accompanied by caregivers.

5. Providing equal play experience in the city

In the goal of becoming a playable city, it is very important to design public spaces that are enjoyable, safe, socially inclusive, and accessible for everyone. This goal encourages design solutions that facilitate accessibility and inclusivity. It aims to remove all barriers that hinder individuals from moving around the city.

Children used to play frequently in places such as streets and neighborhoods. Unfortunately, these areas have now become dominated by traffic and parking, with vehicles taking precedence. Many public spaces have chosen to exclude children by banning games such as skateboarding and ball games. Over time, urban planning has limited children's play opportunities to private playgrounds. However, access to these playgrounds was not equally provided to all children in the city.

At this point, a series of actions was taken to create accessible play opportunities, increase social interaction in recreational areas, and provide inclusive recreation services for all groups, adopting a universal design approach.

5.1. Pilot project: HOP [9]

In 2020, a pop-up play area program was launched to provide inclusive play opportunities in Istanbul neighborhoods where recreational areas are limited or fragmented. HOPs quickly transformed streets, sports fields, and small green spaces across Istanbul into temporary play areas.

Play services were implemented to bring play to areas where it was not possible to find a suitable space to

create a park or permanent play area, and where urban pedestrian mobility was particularly difficult for children. These services brought play to neighborhoods with limited access to it, using readily available materials (threads, pieces of fabric, sponges, etc.), recycled materials (cardboard boxes, egg cartons, bottles, etc.), and lightweight, structured or unstructured toys. Accompanied by playworkers, HOPs were set up in suitable open spaces to encourage free play. By HOP, play opportunities in the city were expanded, contributing to the development of children's ability to create their own games and their social skills.

HOPs were also used for post-disaster recovery. After the Kahramanmaraş earthquakes [10] on February 6, 2023, while difficult conditions continued in the region, efforts were made to support children through free play. Between February and September 2023, *Oyun İstanbul* teams reached more than 10,000 children in the earthquake zone with HOP. HOPs are essentially an adaptation of the adventure playground concept that began in Denmark in 1943. As previously mentioned, this approach originated with children in World War II Europe, who created their own games and toys from the debris and rubble left behind in bombed areas. Building on this experience, HOP activities were carried out in

six districts of Hatay, and the impact of play on children's post-disaster recovery process was once again clearly observed.

5.2. Pilot project: Play streets

Aiming to support the physical, social, and mental development of children, especially in disadvantaged areas with limited access to playgrounds, this project has enabled children to play safely and freely on many streets dominated by vehicles, as in the old days.

Selected streets were closed to traffic for a set period and turned into play streets. The project reminded residents of times when children, rather than vehicles, ruled the streets, moving freely and safely.

Within the scope of the project, street pedestrian areas were defined based on feedback and observations from citizens. Temporary designs were implemented on the street using fixtures such as benches, trash cans, and planters. This allowed residents to experience the space while also shaping it according to their own needs.

For many areas temporarily closed off and turned into play streets, residents applied after the implementation for the street to be completely cleared of motorized traffic; if this was not possible, they requested that it be declared a pedestrian-priority street. Some of these streets, defined in the spirit of a *semt pazarı* [11] began to be used routinely as play streets on a specific day of the week. This helped to permanently spread access to play and play culture, while also contributing positively to neighborhood culture.

The first trials of the project were conducted on some streets in Maltepe [12]. Following these initial trials, a significant development took place in Üsküdar [13]. Thirty-nine children who heard about the project and sent letters to the municipality led to the launch of the Play Streets project. In 2024-2025, a total of 15 play streets were established across 12 neighborhoods in Üsküdar in just one year.

6. Creating a culture of play in the city

Globally, the largest investment in children's play in cities is in fixed-equipment play areas. However, a fun



Figure 3. A view from one of the HOPs held in Istanbul.



Figure 4. A view of one of the HOPs set up among the earthquake tents in Hatay.

city should offer children all the play opportunities they need at any time through its parks, squares, streets, and sidewalks.

Beyond designated parks and playgrounds, it is important to provide play opportunities for different age groups in the neighborhood. Play should not be limited to designated parks and playgrounds; instead, play opportunities should be integrated into the streets, so that even the time spent traveling from one place to another can be turned into play and exploration.

Sidewalks, despite being used intensively every day, do not sufficiently utilize their potential as spaces for play and social interaction. It is true that these overlooked areas increase children's confidence and ability to meet others and explore their immediate surroundings. Because they are in front of their homes, these areas provide a greater sense of belonging and freedom of movement than parks do, while allowing play culture to spread throughout the city. Playable streets and sidewalks increase the legibility of journeys between public spaces, from doorsteps to destinations. They allow people to enjoy their journeys more.

6.1. Pilot project: Talking walls

Within the scope of this project, designed to create lively, dynamic, and playful urban canvases in the city's landscape, artists worked on numerous unused spaces across Istanbul to support the image of a playable city.

Inspired by nature and enlivened with colors reminiscent of play's liveliness, the walls began to serve as points of encounter between the city and art. The launch of the project during the COVID-19 pandemic provided significant support to Istanbul artists who were struggling to produce work.

The project's initial works were Esk Reyn's *Colors of the Play*, located on a 200-meter-long, 2,000-square-meter wall surface, and Kien's *Passage of Imagination*, which transformed a train underpass. Additionally, as part of the project, a mosaic mural featuring hand motifs was created in collaboration with 128 mosaic artists to draw attention to a world where children are saved from malnutrition. This mural, in addition

to being a valuable social responsibility project, had a significant impact on promoting the *Oyun İstanbul* movement in the city. All three works were carried out in Kadıköy [14].

7. Playing safely in the city

Ensuring that children, young people, and families can move around Istanbul safely and easily using sustainable modes

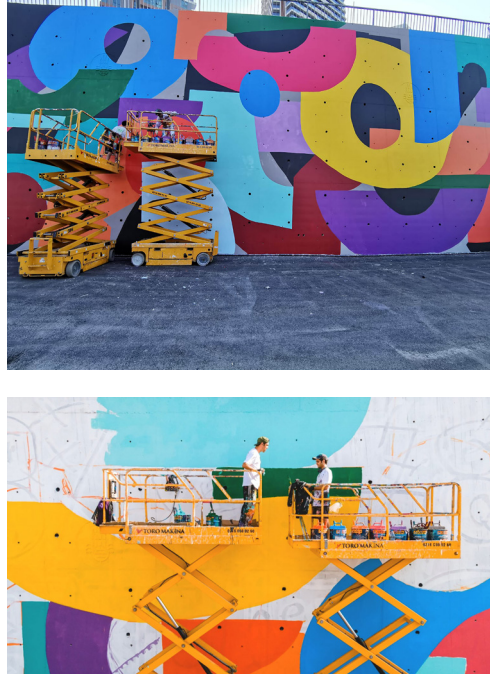


Figure 5. Moments from the painting process of *Colors of the Play*.



Figure 6. North and South entrances of the *Passage of Imagination*.

of transportation, such as walking, cycling, or public transport, paves the way for safe play in the city. Moving and stationary traffic are the biggest enemies of street games. Therefore, it is important to free the streets from the dominance of private vehicles and make them suitable for cycling and walking.

One way to bring children back to the outside world and restore their confidence to play there is to ensure that their five-day-a-week journey to school is one they can make safely on their own. Unfortunately, many metropolitan cities today cannot offer their children the opportunity to walk to school alone, which is a good indicator of freedom on the streets.

7.1. Pilot project: Interactive space applications

The project, organized as part of the *Oyun İstanbul* movement, aimed to enable citizens to experience the space through various activities and to assess the effects of the planned project before its permanent implementation.



Figure 7. The existing condition and two alternative proposals for the site.

The first project was carried out in Tuzla [15] in 2022. Yenice and Aygün Streets were temporarily closed to traffic for two months and cleared of vehicles. This closure was implemented through two different alternatives that would not block access to residential areas or disrupt the transportation system. In the first alternative, only Yenice Street was closed for one month, whereas in the second, both streets were closed for one month.

The streets where the application was carried out were designated as free-play and recreation areas. Thus, these areas, which were not pedestrian-priority, became more accessible to pedestrians. It was presented to local residents as an example of tactical urbanism carried out under the leadership of the local administration.

Throughout the process, announcements were made at regular intervals on social media accounts. Banners were hung in and around the work area, and information brochures were distributed. Communication was established with the neighborhood headman to ensure that the process was communicated to citizens by a local leader. The activities carried out in the area were presented to the public through events held on different days, with the participation of various stakeholders. Information activities continued throughout the events and participation processes. Citizens' opinions were gathered through in-depth interviews as well as online and field surveys.

With the interactive area application, there was a significant decrease in the overall number of vehicles despite changes in vehicle traffic circulation. In contrast, there was a significant increase in pedestrian traffic. The fact that pedestrian density during the week of the application was even higher than pedestrian density on weekends before the application showed that the pedestrianization application was actively used even during the week. The interactive zone application did not cause traffic congestion on streets that remained open to vehicle traffic outside the application area, and no complaints were received from users. On the contrary, accord-

ing to the survey results, 70% of users requested implementation of the second alternative, which proposed pedestrianizing both Yenice and Aygün Streets. The general demand was to slow down vehicle traffic and, if possible, to pedestrianize these streets completely. Ultimately, based on user feedback, vehicle counts, and survey results, the most suitable model for the area was identified and implemented through participation.

7.2. Pilot project: Safe school streets

One of the projects where tactical urbanism methods were most effectively used in the field was the Safe School Streets Project. The applications carried out in Üsküdar constitute an innovative urban design intervention aimed at increasing children's independent mobility and improving the quality of public spaces in the city. As an alternative to traditional vehicle-oriented school environment arrangements, applications that consider children's daily mobility as a design parameter have developed different pedestrian-priority spatial strategies across different school areas.

In 2024, as part of the applications covering the surroundings of three schools. Sidewalks were widened, waiting areas were redesigned, and urban furniture and landscape elements were integrated to transform the school fronts into safe public spaces. Physical interventions across all three areas increased the number of children playing by 6-fold, public space usage by up to 4-fold, and pedestrian mobility by up to 40%. By these measures, school routes are no longer merely transit routes. They were transformed into spaces where children could interact socially, play, and spend time safely.

8. Evaluation

The *Oyun İstanbul* movement, briefly described in this article, has approached play and play culture as a value to be considered holistically since 2019. It brought a different approach to society's needs, demands, and expectations. Significant progress has been made in enhancing playability in recreational areas, with the goal of making İstanbul

a playable city. Through many strategic projects, including the ones described, a more accessible and inclusive play experience has been provided in the city.

The projects implemented clearly demonstrated that different solutions were needed in different areas of İstanbul. In this context, in addition to the inventory of play areas and play area transformation studies, and the pilot projects described above, many projects were implemented, including Girls in the Park and Play Spreads Across the City by Play Houses. The Playground Design Guide and İstanbul Play Master Plan were prepared. As part of the *Oyun İstanbul* initiatives, numerous sports events were organized, including orienteering and hiking for all age groups.

The relationship between the city and nature was strengthened through games and playgrounds integrated



Figure 8. Before and after Yavuztürk school district, in Üsküdar.



Figure 9. Before and after Kirazlıtepe school district, in Üsküdar.

with nature. Significant steps were taken to develop environmental awareness and increase nature awareness among both children and other users. In addition, monitoring and safety inspections of playgrounds in city parks began to be conducted in accordance with standards. Natural play areas were created through transformation workshops. In various parks on both sides of Istanbul, areas were created where children, accompanied by play facilitators, could develop their own games in all seasons. Knowledge was accumulated to develop special play area designs for individuals with autism, nurseries, and daycare centers, and the first examples in Istanbul were implemented.

Projects produced with a tactical urbanism approach created flexible, effective, and quick solutions in play areas based on user feedback. Projects produced based on user opinions or designed directly using children's



Figure 10. Before and after Altunizade school district in Üsküdar.

imaginations increased the value of public spaces while also helping children develop their social and mental skills.

All these projects go beyond being pioneering projects for the *Oyun İstanbul* brand and vision; they also serve as a source of inspiration for many cities around the world. Through the steps *Oyun İstanbul* is taking towards becoming a playable city, a valuable body of knowledge is beginning to take shape to guide all relevant institutions. However, the need for play is so universal, its reflections so varied, and the obstacles it faces so complex that achieving collective and sustainable success without inter-institutional coordination is quite difficult. Therefore, movements such as *Oyun İstanbul* need to be supported and developed through international cooperation and inter-institutional collaboration. Only then can we approach playable cities that are truly child-friendly and offer opportunities for play in every corner, all around the world.

Endnotes

[1] *Oyun İstanbul* can be translated as “Play Istanbul” into English and “Juego Estambul” into Spanish. Throughout this article, it has been used with its original name.

[2] Tokyo slippers or flip-flops are a durable and affordable style of flip-flops, typically made from a spongy, soft rubber material, available in either thong or single-strap designs. Known for their non-slip properties on wet surfaces, these lightweight flip-flops are frequently chosen for the beach, pool, and home, and are also recognized as a nostalgic childhood memory in Turkey.

[3] An Istanbul neighborhood known for its bohemian culture, mostly inhabited by artists, writers, actors, and foreigners.

[4] Turkish soda brand produced since the 1960s.

[5] Günaydın, N. (2015, July 2). Being a child in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Blue Days. Retrieved November 22, 2025, from <https://nilgungunaydin.me/2015/07/02/altmisli-yillarin-sonu-yetmisli-yillarin-basinda-cocuk-olmak/>

[6] Beşiktaş is a district in Istanbul. It is located on the European shore of the Bosphorus strait.

[7] Beykoz is a district in Istanbul. It lies at the northern end of the Bosphorus on the Asian side.

[8] Şile is a district in Istanbul. It is located on the Black Sea coast on the Asian side of Istanbul, at the eastern limit of the city.

[9] HOP is an acronym formed from the initial letters of the Turkish phrase “Hayalgücü Oyun Parkı,” which means “Imagination Playground.”

[10] The Kahramanmaraş earthquakes were two earthquakes that occurred nine hours apart on February 6, 2023, with epicenters in the districts of Pazarcık and Elbistan in Kahramanmaraş, measuring 7.8 M_w and 7.5 M_w respectively. There was widespread damage in an area of about 350,000 km². The provinces of Kahramanmaraş, Hatay and Adıyaman were the cities that suffered the most damage. According to official statements, at least 62,000 people died, with a total of more than 138,000 people injured.

[11] Semt pazarı, a traditional Turkish market set up once or twice a week in the neighborhood where all kinds of products are sold.

[12] Maltepe is a district in Istanbul. It is on the northern shore of the Marmara Sea.

[13] Üsküdar is a district in Istanbul. It is on the Asian shore of the Bosphorus, between Beykoz and Kadıköy.

¹⁴ Kadıköy is a district in Istanbul. It is on the Asian side of Istanbul, on the northern shore of the Marmara Sea, between Maltepe and Üsküdar.

References

Allen, M. (1946). Why Not Use Our Bomb Sites Like This? *Picture Post*, 33(7).

Bertelsen, J. (1972). Early experience from Emdrup. In A. Bengtsson, (Ed.), *Adventure Playgrounds* (pp.16-23). Crosby Lockwood.

Borden, I. (2019). *Skateboarding and the City: A Complete History*. Bloomsbury Visual Arts. <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781474208420>

Bornat, D. (2025). *All to Play for: How to Design Child-Friendly Housing*. RIBA. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003638599>

Dighton, R. (2020). John Bertelsen (1917-1978), The First Adventure Playworker. *Adventure Play*. <https://londonadventureplaygrounds.org.uk/about-adventure-playgrounds/pioneers-of-adventure-play/>

FCDO, The Central Office of Information for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (1971). Marjory Allen. *The Pacemakers (TV Series)*, S.1, E.12.

Frost, J.L. (2010). *A History of Children's Play and Play Environments: Toward a Contemporary Child-Saving Movement*. Routledge. p.185. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203868652>

Gill, T. (2007). *No Fear: Growing Up in a Risk Averse Society*. Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. <https://doi.org/10.7721/chilyoutenvi.18.1.0515>

Gill, T. (2021). *Urban Playground: How Child-Friendly Planning and Design Can Save Cities*. RIBA Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003108658>

Günaydın, N. (2015, July 2). *Being a child in the late 1960s and early 1970s*. Blue Days. Retrieved No-

vember 22, 2025, from <https://nilgungunaydin.me/2015/07/02/altmisli-yillarin-sonu-yetmisli-yillarin-basinda-cocuk-olmak/>

Henriksen, O.S. (2006). *Skrammellegepladsen*. Dansk Pædagogisk Historisk Forening og Samling og Videncenter for Pædagogiske og Sociale Studier. p.5

Highmore, B. (2013). Playgrounds and Bombsites: Postwar Britain's Ruined Landscapes. *Cultural Politics* 9(3), 323–336. <https://doi.org/10.1215/17432197-2347009>

IMM, Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality (2022). *Istanbul Play Master Plan*. IMM. https://yesil.istanbul/haber_istanbul-oyun-master-plani.

Jacobs, J. (1961). *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*. Random House.

Karaulan Sozuer, D. S., & Seckin, Y. C. (2025). Play as a tool to re-attach to nature in big cities: The case of Istanbul. *Ecological Frontiers*, 46(2), 659-669. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecofro.2025.10.019>

Kozlovsky, R. (2007). Adventure

Playgrounds and Postwar Reconstruction. In M. Gutman & N. Coninck-Smith (Eds.), *Designing Modern Childhoods: History, Space, and the Material Culture of Children: An International Reader* (p.171). Rutgers University Press. <https://doi.org/10.5860/choice.46-2746>

Quinn, M. (2022). *Rewilding Childhood: Raising Resilient Kids Through Play and Nature*. Independently published.

Robinson, N.J. (2021). Playgrounds for All. *Current Affairs*, 6(4), 15-17.

Tranter, P. (2015). Children's Play in Their Local Neighborhoods: Rediscovering the Value of Residential Streets. In B. Evans, J. Horton, T. Skelton (Eds), *Play and Recreation, Health and Wellbeing. Geographies of Children and Young People* (vol 9, pp.1-26). Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-4585-96-5_37-1

Wilson, R.B. (2014). Who Owns the Playground? Space and Power at Lollard Adventure Playground (Master of Arts Thesis). The University of Leeds.