

1. 'Playing around' with children's outdoor play

“Play...is based on representing emotional expressions but only within the systems of regulation such as rules, rituals or referees, although these restrictions break down [from time to time] under the force of the original emotion.”

(Sutton-Smith, 2011)

The World Health Organisation declared in the year 2000 that obesity was a global epidemic (WHO, 2000). As a result, there is a growing body of research exploring how 'obesogenic environments' contribute to the increasing prevalence of obesity. Children's play environments are one important component of the collective research focus that seeks to unpack children's 'obesogenic environments'. However, the human voice and societal norms and rules have, to a considerable extent, been underplayed in these studies. An improved understanding of the (built) environmental features that determine the character and frequency of outdoor play has been limited as a result. While recognising the scientific contribution of such work, I argue for an approach that takes the structure-agency interplay of children's seasonal geographies *fully* into account to reveal 'obesogenic *landscapes*' instead of 'obesogenic environments'. I choose this alternative term to indicate that the environments in which (non)activity takes place are dynamic and replete with meaning.¹

In this thesis, I employ what I term 'near and distant participatory ethnography' which consists of a mixed-method research design deriving from qualitative and

1 Landscapes in a geographical sense are the arenas for diverse symbolic meanings, norms and rules; they have pluralistic and multiple natures such as Tuan's (1979) landscapes of fear or Gesler's (1992) therapeutic landscapes. The formation of landscapes is more than the formation of an environment. Landscapes are shaped by countless physical, societal and individual influences and interactions. The geographical meaning of landscapes emphasises the subjectivity and individuality as well as commonalities within population groups of experiencing, viewing and valuing environments (Cresswell, 2014).