

The Play Cafe Project

What would Froebelian play cafes look like?

Play cafes inspired by Froebelian principles as new models of Early Learning and Childcare provisions.



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Contents

INTRODUCTION: The Play Cafe Project	1
Objectives and Research Questions	1
What are Play Cafes?	2
Context	4
Froebelian approaches and the key contribution of this project	5
The Play Cafe Project, its distinctiveness and connections to the Froebelian Futures Mobile Play Cafe	6
WHY GREECE & SCOTLAND	8
Scotland	9
Greece	11
BEING, LEARNING, SHARING, DOING PRAXIS	13
Being, Learning, Sharing, Doing praxis	16
Play Dates as methodological approaches	18
Pop up play cafes as Being, Learning, Sharing, Doing: Reciprocal and intersectional praxis	21
Analysis	24
Ethics	27
KEY FINDINGS	30
What did we find? - Key overall findings	35
<i>Existing social and play provisions</i>	39
<i>Children's environments which cater for adults</i>	40
<i>Adult environments which cater for children (childfriendly)</i>	41
<i>Family environments which cater for 'all' ('family-friendly)</i>	41
<i>Community/other specific groups where children are involved</i>	42
<i>Adult environment like cafes and restaurants that do not cater for children</i>	42

THE FROEBELIAN PLAY CAFE EXPERIENCE: 'A UNIQUE', 'MAGICAL', HIGH QUALITY EXPERIENCE. 'AN OASIS'.	65
The Scottish and Greek context: similarities and differences	66
THE CHILDREN'S STORYBOOKS	74
Alex's cross-cultural experience.	76
Limitations of this research	77
INGREDIENTS TO DESIGNING PLAY CAFES	78
Differences and similarities across our pop up play cafes inspired by Froebelian Principles	82
Inspired by Froebelian Principles	88
Engagement, Outputs and Impact	92
Implications for policy and practice	105
Sustainability of the Play Cafes inspired by Froebelian Principles	108
Important critical and ethical thoughts about Play cafes inspired by Froebelian principles	111
Academic Impact and Engagement	116
SHORT TIMELINE AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION	122
The Play Cafe inspired by Froebelian principles history	123
Glossary	125
References	130
Appendix 1:	137
Table with details about the children and families that participated in the ethnographic and participatory research	

Appendix 2: **145**

Table with details about the parents/carers, grandparents and practitioners that were interviewed about their experience of the Froebelian Futures Mobile Pop up Play Cafes and We Play Festival Pop up Play Cafes

Appendix 3: **150**

Table with details about the business owners, community groups and practitioners that were interviewed about their business, community spaces and/or practice

Introduction: The Play Cafe Project

Objectives and Research Questions

Play and high-quality early learning and childcare (ELC) is an urgent global priority evidenced by the substantial financial and political investment in the early years, the UN Sustainable Development Goals, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and UNICEF'S Child Friendly Cities. However, there is a lack of high-quality sustainable community-based play provisions in public life, beyond ELC institutions.

The play cafe project had **two** objectives:

- a) understand the current opportunities that children have to play in community and business play spaces and their underlying philosophies and principles and
- b) to explore children's, families', practitioners' and business owners/staff views of play cafes and co-design what Froebelian play cafes may look like.

Research Questions

- 1) What are the current opportunities that young children have to play in community and business play cafés, and their underlying philosophies and principles?
- 2) What are young children's, families', practitioners' and business staff views and experiences about current play cafes, and how would they envision these differently?
- 3) How can we co-design with children, families and practitioners Froebelian play cafés which are inclusive for all?



What are Play Cafes?

Children conceptualised play cafes as inter/intra-generational social and play spaces, that are free (in terms of payment). Play cafes are viewed here as places for connection, for looking after each other (care/love), and for eating. Play cafes were also considered fun and as spaces that have play resources and books, paint, music and experiences linked to dance and food/cooking.



Play cafes are considered spaces which offer 'hands-on' everyday and real experiences (e.g., 'making coffee'), spaces where you can go into imaginative worlds and spaces that you can be with friends. Play cafes have inside and outside spaces and are like playgrounds but not exactly like the ones that we currently find in public life and outdoors. Play cafes were also viewed by some children as spaces for intersectional and intergenerational activism; for example, spaces that should also be accessible to 'poor people' and/or people from marginalised backgrounds.

As we are developing this work, we are coming to conceptualise high quality play cafes as important types of informal high-quality play and social provisions in public life for young children and related adults, as life-affirming spaces and initiatives and as spaces for intergenerational and intersectional activism. Play cafes are models for integrated and whole family support.

Play cafes can be businesses or community based spaces that offer social, food and play opportunities for families with young children, but also emerging 'play cafe' style experiences in liminal spaces that are created by families and children organically and temporarily, often bringing their own play and food resources. Social and play spaces are defined in this paper in different forms and across different contexts and spaces, both in community and private business practices, such as play groups, designated toy libraries, Stay and Play 'messy play' drop-ins, soft play businesses, playgrounds and could also include emergent, temporal and self-created play cafe type experiences in public spaces.



Context

Currently, Froebelian pedagogical approaches linked to child-community centered approaches, are spreading in early years settings (see explicit mention in [Realising the Ambition policy document](#)), but less is known about the impact and application of such principles into community and public spaces. The Play Cafe project is the first research project that explored this ambition in an international context, Greece and Scotland. **The project explored the potential of Froebelian principles for new environments like play cafes and provided opportunities for high quality learning, care and education in informal settings.**

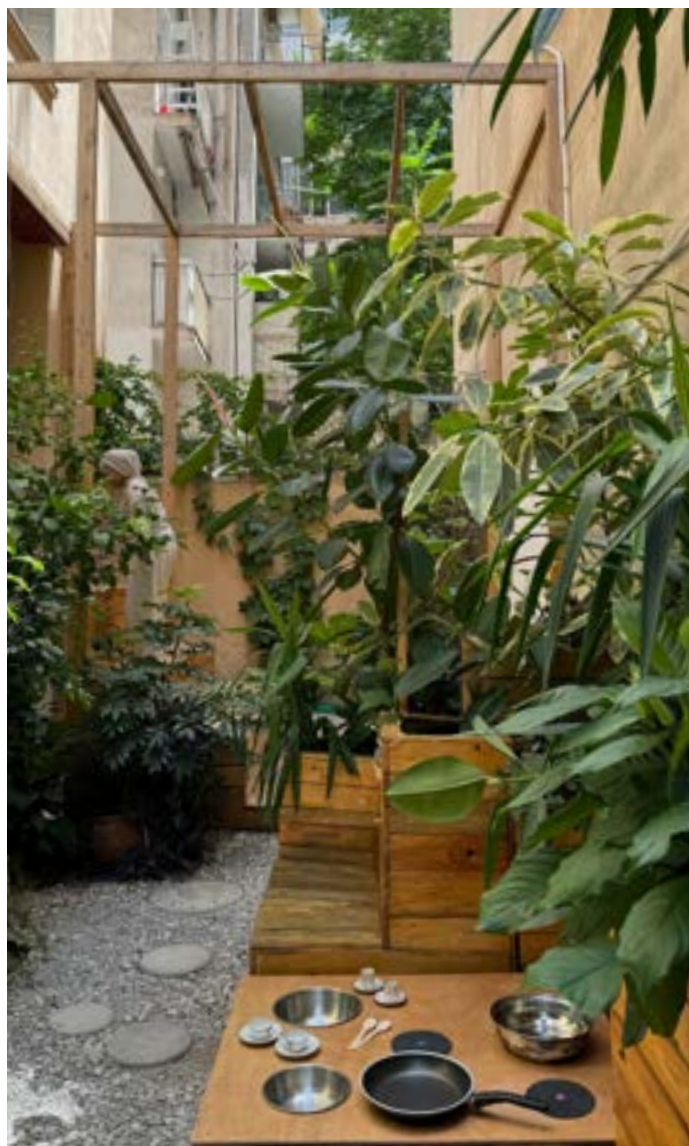
The Play Cafe Project worked with children, families and practitioners to co-design what Froebelian play cafes may look like in two contexts:

Scotland and **Greece**, in order to respond to the diverse needs of each country, to support children's play expressively and creatively and provide informal, integrated and whole family support

Scotland



Greece



Froebelian approaches and the key contribution of this project

Froebelian approaches highlight the importance of working with both children and parents/carers at the earliest opportunity (Downs, 1978). The importance of informal learning opportunities beyond institutional environments for children is well-documented (Murray, 2021; UNESCO, 2020; Borisova, 2020). **However, despite emerging research evidence that focuses on free public spaces, as informal learning sites (Pascal et al 2018; Konstantoni 2022), there is still a gap in our understanding of how young children experience public play spaces like play cafes.** A growing number of community and business play cafés are emerging which seek to provide ‘child-friendly’ spaces, but to what extent are these adult designed spaces relevant for young children, and constitute environments that promote children’s rights and high quality education and learning?

The importance of cafes in ‘fulfilling certain political, cultural and social functions has been acknowledged in the social sciences’ as has the vital role that they play in ‘community life and specifically in the well-being of people who are otherwise marginalized’ (Warner, Talbot and Bennison 2012: 306-307). However, for marginalised populations such public spaces can also be places of isolation, anxiety and violence (Konstantoni 2022). Within early years, a ‘kindercafe’/playcafe scene has recently emerged (Konstantoni 2022; Johnson Reed 2021), as a grassroots initiative, created mainly by dissatisfied mothers who wished to address the gap in the market by offering a suitable play space whilst at the same time offering good quality food/drink and a relaxing surrounding for parents/carers whilst the children play.

To date, children’s and families’ experiences of play cafes and their politics have not been researched, analysed or theorised. There is a significant gap, particularly evident in relation to young children's experiences in community social and play spaces, especially indoor environments (FitzGibbon and Dodd, 2023; Konstantoni, 2022). Research is even scarcer concerning play and informal learning spaces for children under two years of age and babies. This project will fill the gap in our knowledge about these play spaces, about their principles and philosophies and about how these are experienced by children and their families. Although a variety of community and business play areas like play cafes exist internationally, there are no play cafes, that are based explicitly on Froebelian principles.

Froebel formulated the idea of the ‘kindergarten’ in an attempt to create a space where children could play until their parents finished work. Currently, Froebelian ideas are spreading in many early years settings throughout Scotland (McNair et al., 2022; Froebelian Futures 2025; Education Scotland 2020) and internationally (Bruce et al 2023; Bruce et al 2018).

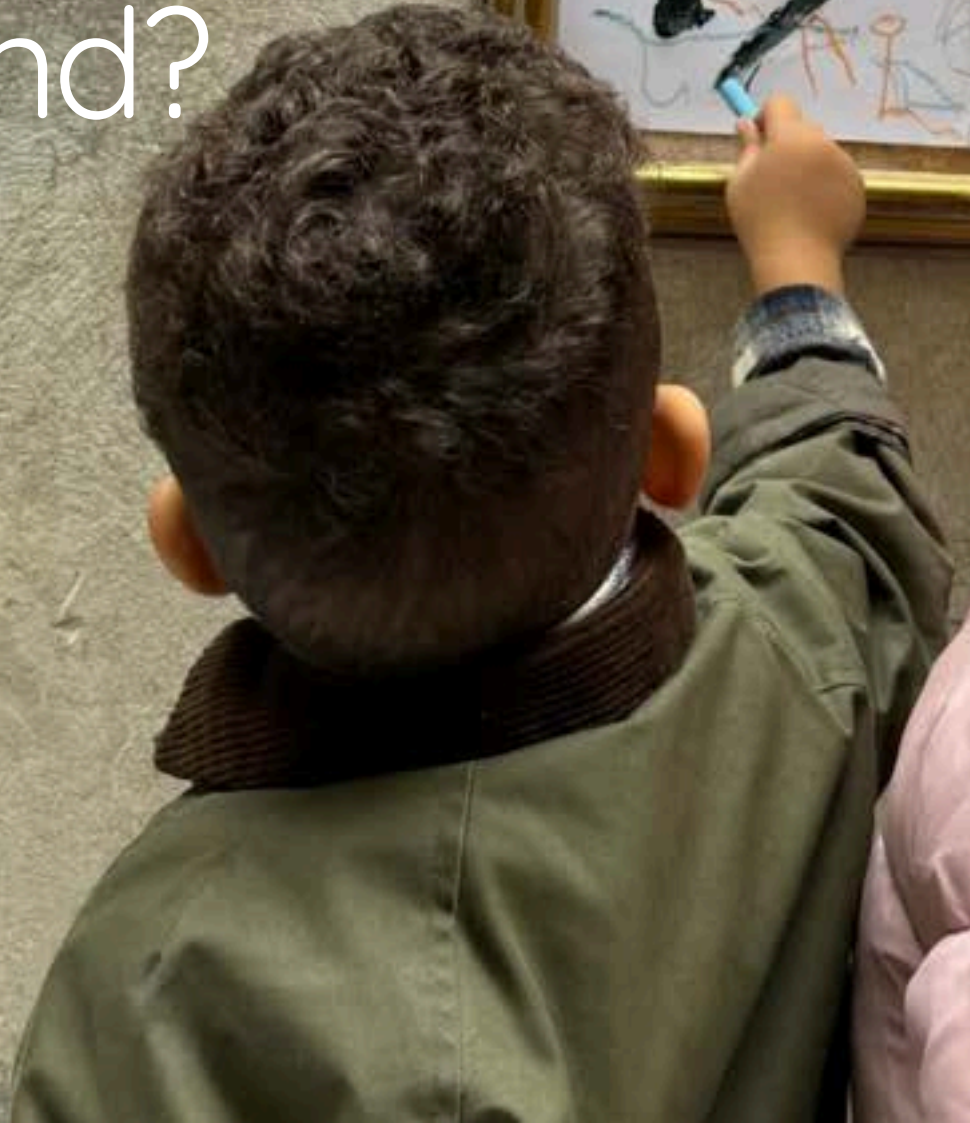
With this project we aim to extend Froebel’s work to applying his principles to play cafes and other public/semi public community spaces; spaces which enable children and their families to co-exist together in quality learning, care, education and social environments.

The Play Cafe Project, its distinctiveness and connections to the Froebelian Futures Mobile Play Cafe

The Play Cafe Project	Froebelian Futures Mobile Play Cafe
<p>A research, co-design and knowledge sharing project in Greece and Scotland. This project employed an ethnographic, participatory, creative, art and play-based methodological approach and co-design workshops. The project also created and piloted co-created play cafes in Greece.</p> <p>The project worked closely with 42 families with young children under 8 years old [through research play dates (including research play visits at the Froebelian Futures mobile play cafe)] and 19 young children advisors.</p> <p>The project also worked in partnership with Froebelian Futures to curate the We Play Festival.</p> <p>The Play Cafe project as part of the research also evaluated the Froebelian Futures mobile play cafe.</p> <p>The research also included semi-structured interviews with parents/carers, business owners, community groups and practitioners; semi-structured interviews with adults who participated in the Froebelian Futures project and We Play Festival pop up play cafes; reflexive discussions with practitioners and research team and engagement with a group of practitioners, students, parents/carers through community events, teaching experiences, Play Cafe gatherings, the We Play festival, Conferences and co-design workshops.</p>	<p>An action-in-practice project which facilitated and created pop-up play cafes for children, families and key workers across Edinburgh, co-designed with community organisations.</p> <p>This project did not include research; its main goal was action-in-practice and to build partnerships and networking in Scotland. However, the research as part of the Play Cafe Project (and further match funding from the University of Edinburgh) provided evidence about the short, medium and long-term impact of the mobile play cafe and the sustainability of the play cafe at mid and long term, as well as a better understanding of the elements that enable it. It also allowed us to explore the transferability of Froebelian Principles acquired/embedded in the Play Cafe to other spaces (home, playground, other public spaces).</p>

<p style="text-align: center;">The Play Cafe Project</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Froebelian Futures Mobile Play Cafe</p>
<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Understand the current opportunities that children have to play in community and business play spaces and their underlying philosophies and principles. • Explore children’s, families’, practitioners’ and business owners/staff views of play cafes and co-design what Froebelian play-cafes may look like. 	<p>Objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prototype what a Froebelian play cafe could look like in practice- direct impact in communities (in Edinburgh). • Build partnerships and networks with third sector, community groups, NGOs, extending and inspiring the application of Froebelian principles in community settings.

Why
Greece &
Scotland?



Scotland

was selected because of its progressive children's rights policy [being one of the first devolved nations in the world to incorporate the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNRC) into law (UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024)] and a strong Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) pedagogical emphasis on play and child-centred pedagogies with clear links made to Froebelian pedagogy (Education Scotland, 2020).

Scotland has as an ambition to become 'the best place to grow up' (Scottish Government 2022). Despite play and high-quality ELC being a key priority of the Scottish Government [with significant investment, e.g. expansion of funded ELC: investing 1,140 hours a year for all three- and four-year olds and eligible two-year-olds (Scottish Government, 2020)], the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 and Scotland's National Play Strategy 2013, there is lack of free and high-quality community-based play provisions in everyday public life, beyond ELC institutions (Konstantoni et al 2024; Konstantoni 2022). This is particularly important for young children who are not yet in ELC.



Despite the country's wealth, 24% of all children in Scotland are 'locked in poverty' (Child Poverty Action Group 2024). UNCRC concluding observations 2023 (CRC 2023) also highlighted that there were almost 200 recommendations to further children's human rights across Scotland and the wider UK, including a specific focus on 'support for play' and involving children in the development of spaces for children to play, and 'non-discrimination' particularly linked to children in disadvantaged situations like minority ethnic communities. Thus, Scotland is an important case study both because of its progressive children's rights policy and its ELC pedagogical emphasis on play and child-centred pedagogies (Education Scotland, [2020](#)), but also because of the high number of children in poverty in the country (Child Poverty Action Group [2024](#)).





Greece

has made progress towards children's rights, e.g. having recently launched the first National Action Plan on the rights of the child for the period 2021-2023 (OHCHR [2022](#)). Greece has launched UNICEF'S Child Friendly Cities Initiative (CFCI) with municipalities signing Memoranda of Understanding committing to implementing the CFCI pilot initially for three years (UNICEF 2025). Greece 'remains one of the five EU member states with the highest risk for children to live at risk of poverty or social exclusion' (UNICEF 2020) as well as 'one of the major entry points into Europe for refugees and migrants', 37% of whom are children. Greece is facing polycrisis from climate crises and increase in natural disasters, to austerity and the refugee crises. More specifically, in Greece there are 'heightened risks from the escalating impacts of climate change and increase in disasters' which will last a lifetime with detrimental effects in children's education, livelihoods, health and wellbeing (UNICEF 2024). According to UNICEF ([2024](#)) '307,763 children are estimated to be at high risk of being affected by climate change in Greece', highlighting that the 'climate crisis is a child rights crisis'.

Greece has faced 'austerity measures and government spending cuts' which have impacted the most vulnerable in the country (UNICEF [2020](#)). Although progress has been made towards children's rights e.g. creation of the first National Action Plan on the rights of the child for the period 2021-2023 (OHCHR [2022](#)), Greece 'remains one of the five EU member states with the highest risk for children to live at risk of poverty or social exclusion' (UNICEF [2020](#)). The child population was 1,715, 781 (2023) (16,5% of total population), with 480,000 (2023) (28,1%) in child poverty (Eurochild [2022](#)). Moreover, Greece is at the forefront of the refugee/migrant crisis as 'one of the major entry points into Europe for refugees and migrants' and has received over a million individuals since the beginning of 2015, 37% of them children. Recent statistics estimated 44,500 refugee and migrant children living in Greece, 'of which over 4,000 [...] unaccompanied' (UNICEF [2020](#)). The number of children arriving in Greece 'quadrupled in 2024' (Save the Children [2024](#)) with 'one in every four' arriving 'without family or a legal guardian'. These children have faced 'numerous violations of [their] rights' (UNCRC [2022](#)) as well as exposure to 'violence, exploitation and abuse' (UNCRC [2024](#)).



Being, Learning, Sharing, Doing praxis

This was an ethnographic, participatory, creative, art and play based project which started in October 2022-May 2025 (32 months), with fieldwork taking place January 2023-December 2024 (24 months) with 42 families from different geographical locales in Scotland and Greece, ethnicities and nationalities with very young children under 8. The families were involved from the early stages of research (e.g. theme of research) to co-designing child-community-centred play cafes, including the actual creation of a pop-up play cafe and play festival experience for young children and their communities. Young children traversed through different ages during this time, youngest was newborn, now 18 months, and oldest 6 years old, now 8 years old).

Our research process involved a group of **19 young children advisors**: seven young children advisors (1-8 years old) came from Scotland and Greece; four of these were children of two of the researchers (in Scotland) and a group of 12 young children advisors came from the Culture Lab of the Network for Children's Rights in Greece. Ethnographic, including relational collaborative ethnography, intergenerational auto-ethnography and participatory, play-based and art-based methodological approaches (see further below) took place with 42 families (this includes two of the researchers' own families), to explore young children's and their families' experiences of social and play spaces and cafes.



There was a group of three researchers who were involved in fieldwork and spent time with families (Kristina, Reyhaneh and Aggeliki), including intergenerational auto-ethnographic approaches by Kristina and Reyhaneh as mothers of young children. We discuss these in detail further below.

Semi-structured interviews with parents/ carers (40) were carried out to understand more about families' everyday life with children and their views about young children's play in public life. The team also interviewed 25 business owners, community groups and practitioners, as well as 55 adults who participated in the Froebelian Futures project and We Play Festival pop up play cafes. We also analysed 'feedback through postcards' (286 postcards + 80 postcards in Greece), feedback via emails and reflexive group conversations with practitioners (one session with 5 practitioners in Scotland and 15 sessions with 4-9 practitioners in Greece). The research also included reflexive discussions between the research team (more than 20 group discussions and informal reflections).

The project also involved play cafe community gatherings, community engagement events, and co-design events through play cafes and the We Play Festival (see summary of activities in table 2 below).

- Developed conceptualisations of play cafes
- Geographical mapping
- We Play Festival community event, including co-design engagement activities to co-design what an ideal social and play space would look like
- Co-design workshops Scotland and Greece
- Auto-ethnography & relational and collaborative ethnography; play-based, art-based, creative and participatory approaches
- Community engagement a) with a group of practitioners/ Postgraduate students on early childhood masters degree (home and international students), on an early childhood postgraduate course, b) as part of the Froebelian Futures conference, c) pop up play cafes in Greece and Scotland, and d) an embodied play cafe workshop for practitioners and parents/carers in Greece

Table 1. Summary of engagement and research experiences

Engagements/Activities	Number
Semi-structured interviews with parents/carers	40
Semi-structured interviews with business owners, community groups and practitioners	25
Semi-structured interviews with adults who participated in the Froebelian Futures project and We Play Festival pop up play cafes	55
Feedback through postcards	286 postcards + 80 postcards in Greece
Feedback via emails	more than 6
Reflexive group conversations with practitioners	one session with 5 practitioners in Scotland and 15 sessions with 4-9 practitioners in Greece
Reflexive discussions between the research team	more than 20 group discussions and informal reflections)
Engagement with a group of practitioners, students, parents/carers through community events, teaching experiences, Play Cafe gatherings, We Play Festival, Conferences and co-design workshops.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) 1 group of practitioners/postgraduate students on early childhood masters degree (home and international students) (more than 30) b) as part of the Froebelian Futures conference (more than 30 in one session and community engagement 'through postcards' during the conference) c) 2 co-design workshops at the We Play Festival (46 and 13 people) and pop up play cafes across Greece (2) and Scotland (17) d) 1 embodied play cafe workshop for practitioners and parents/carers in Greece (more than 70 people)

Table 2. Summary of Interviews, feedback, reflexive discussions and engagements

Being, Learning, Sharing, Doing praxis

Our play cafe work research can be conceptualised as Being, Learning, Sharing, Doing (BLSD) praxis where we worked together with young children in a relational, reciprocal, collaborative and intersectional way. We have written a paper on our approach: Konstantoni, K., Mozaffar, R., Eri Tantawi, I. H, and Dimoulia, A. (under revisions) Ethnographies with young children about play and public life with an impact: Being, learning, sharing, doing young children co-led research praxis, which we will draw on here. Young children co-led the research with significant adults in their lives, and the research became a collective endeavour for change. Power dynamics were always present and these needed to be understood, negotiated and challenged. A visual representation of our ethnographic and participatory praxis of how we were involved in young children co-led research can be located below.



Figure 1: Being, Learning, Sharing, Doing: Young children co-led research praxis

Our BLSD praxis was a reciprocal, relational and collaborative entanglement between young children and adult - researchers - parents / carers - practitioners, as well as a deep critical reflective practice in which adults and children researchers are engaged in a continuous process of understanding and challenging intersectional power dynamics, through an intersectional and de/anticolonial analysis and praxis. Being, Learning, Sharing, Doing praxis evolved through our relational, collaborative ethnography and intergenerational autoethnography; through play dates as research approaches; through processes of co-creation with young children advisors based on lived experiences and emerging knowledges- in which we were traversing between being-living- playing- researching-learning-sharing-doing-working; through our co-creations of pop up play cafes and lastly through our multimodal creations.

This research praxis was inspired by discussions between, and the lived experiences of Kristina (adult researcher and parent) and Alex (young child, son of Kristina), sharing what this research meant for them.



The idea of the play cafe project emerged initially by both personal lived experiences of Kristina (adult parent) and Alex (1st child), and later Ariana (2nd child), when trying to access public life to play and to socialise and also through research with a range of families from diverse backgrounds who were facing similar and deeper intersectional inequalities (Konstantoni, 2021).

Our BLS research praxis was a reciprocal and collaborative endeavour between young children and adult researchers - parents / carers - practitioners in which we were traversing between and across roles like mother-researcher-practitioner and/or fields like research-community-home. Traversing across time, space, places and roles in early childhood research highlighted the importance of interconnections in young children's lives, in trusted, safe and holistic relationships and in embodied and lived experiences (Hackett, 2017). Our research showed the importance of place-making (e.g. places that make you feel relaxed, safe, friendly). Intergenerational and intersectional analysis and activism in early childhood research processes are important, as are relationships that are embedded in honesty, openness, transparency, respect, care/love, attentiveness, and processes that are child-community centred, anti-discriminatory and anti-racist.

Play Dates as methodological approaches



We organised social play dates with each family (42 families, 1-9 visits). Time spent with the families in each visit ranged from 30 minutes-7 hours, or whole day play dates in some cases, depending on the family and visit. Please see visual below for information on the range of places we visited with the children when playing in public life.



The children and their families decided how to participate e.g. spending time together, chatting, playing, creating, living, being, walking and running around, sharing observations and stories, role-playing, voice-recordings, video-recordings, mind-maps, drawings (i.e. multimodalities).

All researchers accessed families with young children through personal contacts and Reyhaneh and Aggeliki also worked with children and families through organisations that they were either deeply connected with or worked in or were signposted towards. These organisations worked with families who were structurally disadvantaged and marginalised facing deep intersectional inequalities e.g. the NGOs focused on migrant mothers and their children, single mothers and their children, families that were in poverty and social and economically disadvantaged, and refugee or recent migrant families.

Aggeliki worked at the Network for Children’s Rights and connected with children who attended play sessions for children 5 to 12 years old, living around central Athens. Aggeliki also connected with families from rural spaces away from the centre.



The play cafe team aimed, and was well-positioned, to work with a range of families from various backgrounds (see further below).

Finally, all children participants contributed to co-created research, by being together with the researchers and sharing their lived experiences and emerging and embodied knowledges traversing between being - living - playing- researching- working- learning- sharing- doing.

The families came both from majority and minority ethnic backgrounds, including both visible (e.g. wearing hijab, communities of colour) and non-visible minorities. The range of nationalities included: Greek, Egyptian, Moldovan, Syrian, Bissau-Guinean, Romanian, Albanian, Serbian, Cameroonian, Iranian, Hungarian-Scottish, Afghan, British, British-Greek, Nigerian-British, Scottish, Black Scottish, White South Africans, Greek/British/Italian, Spanish/Scottish. Some children were also defined as neurodivergent with additional support needs e.g. autism, Down Syndrome. Families' religions/faiths included: Muslim, Christian Orthodox and atheist. The families came from a variety of different backgrounds, including academics, students, freelancers, artists, engineers, researchers, entrepreneurs, unemployed and others. Many of the families were from disadvantaged social and economic backgrounds (receiving Universal Credit etc) with diverse immigration statuses (from British or Greek citizens to refugees and immigrants including with indefinite leave to remain). You can find details about the families in Appendix 1.



Pop up play cafes as Being, Learning, Sharing, Doing: Reciprocal and intersectional praxis

As part of our BLS work we also co-created pop-up play cafes inspired by Froebelian principles. Pop up play cafes were created as part of (1) the We Play Festival, which was a collaboration between The University of Edinburgh, The Play Cafe Project, Froebelian Futures, and The Scottish Storytelling Centre supported by a host of other partners. For full details please see [here](#). (2) Pop up play cafes were also co-created in Scotland and Greece, as part of knowledge sharing and community engagement in order to co-design ideal play cafes.



Picture 1:
Pop up play
cafe in
Scotland, We
Play Festival
Festival

Picture 2:
Pop Up play
cafe in Greece



The young children advisors, the children research participants and their families really valued the play cafe experience, which according to their experiences made a considerable difference to families from marginalised backgrounds who face many barriers (due to fear of discrimination and racism, among others) and experience many complex inequalities in public life

Another final point is that the children participants and the young children's advisors were involved in BLSD praxis during the play cafe experience as lived experience and through the research process, where they were also learning (through play), sharing (their experiences, knowledge and recommendations) and doing (playing and at times looking after both the play cafe and any younger children and babies).

We also engaged with multimodal approaches (Konstantoni and Kustatscher 2015) with an aim to facilitate children's participation.

For example, our research-informed storybook methodology (see further below) with the children advisors of the play cafe project engaged with a multimodal definition of co-creating creative research outputs with young children. It evolved through involvement of both children advisors and the play cafe team in a long series of conversations, play, 'hanging out', sketches and open-ended activities including drawing sessions, formal/informal meetings and online meet ups.



Analysis

A combination of thematic analysis, narrative analysis, discourse analysis and embodied experiences took place. We created summarised narrative stories for each family (Lewis-Beck, Bryman, Futing Liao 2004a), with a focus on thematic analysis (see below). Narrative stories focused on the demographic/context details of each family, the stories that they shared about their lives, the language that they used to share these stories and their interpretations of their everyday lives.



Narrative stories also contextualised the information in relation to the context in which the narratives were produced and the structural factors that influence these narratives. To allow for an organic and dynamic flow of analysis, we recorded emerging themes in a joint visual mapping on Jamboard.

We followed Braun and Clarke's (2021) reflexive thematic analysis process. We coded each family's and participants' data and then identified themes and patterns. Thematic analysis, included common patterns, areas of contradictions and tensions. Initially agreed-upon themes were used as flexible guides allowing for adaptation as new themes emerged. The team developed a shared coding and dynamic framework to maintain consistency across datasets (allowing also local variations and adaptation as new themes emerged) in order to merge and adopt comparative analysis across countries. We were also guided by how data were answering our research questions. Critical discourse analysis (Lewis-Beck, Bryman and Liao, 2004b) was used intentionally with some of the data. During our data familiarity and coding/theme process, team members identified cases when a deeper analysis of power, language (including non-verbal/body language) and discourses was needed to examine specific stories/narratives that people shared to make sense of their experiences, paying attention to how language and power discourses were being used to understand social and cultural contexts and how these impacted on perceptions/experiences.

Analysis



Lastly, our analysis included embodied experiences (children and adults) (Leigh and Brown 2021; Kara 2020); personal or collective stories or ‘felt’ experiences of bodies in action in multimodal ways, not always restricted to the written form. Experiences were not just external observations but rather lived internal sensations and perceptions of family bodies playing and socialising in public spaces, experienced and shared through ‘just being’ and creative, art-based and play-based approaches (e.g. storybook-ing, storytelling, drawing, writing poems, performing, ‘youtubing’ etc). We analysed children’s experiences together with them, we shared our interpretations with them of key themes both about themselves and about other children, we co-created storybooks as part of analysis and this process was an embodied analysis and sense-making of key findings across the research project.



Analysis of this report

For the purposes of this report we draw our analysis from a combination of ethnographic fieldwork, interviews and feedback postcards. We combine the words with pictures from the field. The Play Cafe Project chose to provide an alternative way to share our main findings through a reflective resource which unpacks the 'ingredients to designing play cafes' inspired by Froebelian principles. This is an alternative, creative and more practical way to share our main findings including information about what children, families and practitioners valued as significant elements when we co-design high quality play cafes. The reflective resource includes rich ethnographic fieldnotes. We encourage readers to read this as it also draws on our research findings (see details about the reflective resource further below).

Additionally, in collaboration with the children advisors and participants, we decided to share our ethnographic fieldwork, findings and rich/thick descriptions in a multimodal way, through two storybooks. The children's storybooks illustrate, portray, witness and tell the story of the children advisors and children/family participants throughout the research project. The storybooks are based on ethnographic fieldwork findings (such as direct quotes, experiences and pictures).

Following young children's advisors suggestions, we also included in the storybooks drama, creative writing and fantasy (e.g. the baddies trying to find the children) as a way of demonstrating power disparities and inequalities that the children feel. We would encourage readers to read across our multimodal outputs for a more holistic and rich understanding of our findings.

Lastly, the play cafe project evaluated the Froebelian Futures mobile play cafe and included in its research fieldwork play dates that took place within these play cafes. References to this are found throughout the project.



Ethics

The project received approval from the Moray House School of Education and Sports Ethics committee. Information leaflets about the study and consent forms were provided to participants in their desired language (English, Farsi and Greek). Kristina, Reyhaneh and Aggeliki, received written consent from adults that participated in the research process and from parents/carers of the children. Verbal ongoing consent from children was received throughout the research process. Pseudonyms are used throughout the report, except where a participant and their caregivers (in the case of children) have given additional consent and requested their actual name is used.

Researchers' roles and positionalities

The Play Cafe team was a diverse team of researchers and artists/illustrators. All researchers accessed families with young children through personal contacts and Aggeliki and Reyhaneh also worked with children and families through organisations that they were either deeply connected with or worked in or were signposted towards.

Kristina is a white Greek-British mum of two from a middle class background. Kristina connected with 10 families that were close to her, both considered majority (e.g. White Scottish in the Scottish context or White Greek families in the Greek context) and minority / mixed (e.g. Black Scottish and migrant families in the Scottish context). As Kristina knew the families well, a key ethical consideration was to continuously remind families about their lives being part of 'research data' and when it should not. Therefore, the process needed to be guided by deep ethical and relational research processes of ongoing relational consent. As Kristina knew the families well, their research play dates resembled non-research play dates / parts of their everyday life and gatherings with more reflective intentionality to think about the research questions and objectives.

Aggeliki worked at the Network for Children's Rights and connected with children who attended the weekly 'messy' play sessions, a space for children 5 to 12 years old, living around central Athens. The group had been together since September 2023 and Aggeliki joined them in December. The children initially asked many questions about why she wanted to take notes about them ('Why are you writing about me? I am just colouring'). After a couple of months, Aggeliki observed that the children were used to having her around and would share their play experiences eagerly.

Aggeliki reflected on the socioeconomic differences between the children visiting the Network for Children's Rights. Children from Egypt, Greece, Ukraine, Albania, Serbia and Moldova attended messy play sessions and spoke Greek, Arabic, English and Urdu; it was important for all of them to feel comfortable with the research. Speaking a language that was familiar to the children was crucial for gaining their trust. Aggeliki observed how her identity (White Greek woman) would impact the way the children and families saw her and how her affiliation with the [NGO] (which families knew and trusted) made it easier to establish bonds with and talk to the parents.

Ethics

Reyhaneh is an Iranian Muslim woman who wears a hijab and lives in Scotland. Reyhaneh found that factors such as her position in the research and her intersecting identities had an impact on the research process in different ways and depending on the context and the people she was relating with. For example, her Iranian identity and ability to speak Farsi enabled her to connect, build trust and spend time with Iranian migrant families and recent Afghan refugee families. On the other hand, she felt her identity was the reason several cafe owners did not respond to her when asked to participate in the research. As a result, she did not feel confident in contacting bigger mainstream institutions and venues of historical and cultural significance and interview cafe business owners, most of which were run by White Scottish people. Additionally, in one of the venues, Reyhaneh was spoken to so rudely that one of her children became distressed and did not want to go to that venue again. Interestingly, she was treated differently (and more kindly) as soon as she informed staff about her ties to the University. Kristina and Aggeliki had a different experience and easily accessed mainstream venues/cafes, perhaps because of being perceived as belonging to a majority group (e.g. White Greek and White British middle class).

The play cafe team aimed, and was well-positioned, to work with a range of families from various backgrounds. The team could speak Greek, English, Farsi and Dari and the intersectional positionalities of our researchers allowed us to engage and connect with a diverse range of families from various backgrounds.

Still, engaging families with no connections to us raised certain challenges. The process of building trust with families from marginalised backgrounds such as refugees required considerable amounts of time. Additionally, certain group organisers with access to families from marginalised backgrounds acted as gatekeepers and refused us access to the latter.

Our researchers found that connecting to the children and gaining consent through play was much easier, and that the children were happy to take part. At the same time, our positionalities impacted on which children and families we did not reach, raising the question around 'which families and children count' in our own research.

Across the process and depending on the context, our researchers' roles ranged from active-relational-participatory observations (e.g. Kristina would invite the children to share if they wanted what to write about) to observation without participation (e.g. Reyhaneh did not always want to intervene in children's play to allow natural play to emerge) depending on situation and child/ family desires. Two of the researchers were mothers and their children were also an integral part of the research both as participants and as advisors.

Mother-children researchers

Reyhaneh and Kristina were involved in the research as mother-researchers. We both characterise our way of being with our own children as gentle parenting that is child-family-centred, respectful and driven by rights and best interests. Crucially, we made sure our own children understood when everyday life experiences were actually treated as research data (and when not), as well as the implications of this distinction, through honest and transparent discussions.

Ethics

Kristina and Reyhaneh also experienced critical research moments while with their children; the challenge laid in how to record these events without distracting the organic feel of play and everyday being and life. In some instances, children would also say 'stop' (to documentation), 'leave your phone', 'close the book', and to enjoy being together without a research purpose. Other times, the children advisors would highlight what should be documented as part of the research; for example, Mohammad once said 'mum, look what I've created, take a photo of it!'

Knowing what was considered 'research data', and what not, needed to be guided by deep ethical and relational research processes of ongoing relational consent (Schulte 2020).

Throughout the research, Ariana spoke a lot about working on the play cafe and was intentional about when experiences could be part of the research.

Kristina's fieldnotes (April 9th, 2024)

(Kristina and Ariana are sitting together around the family table in the living room. Ariana is painting and Kristina has her laptop near by. Ariana starts chatting with Kristina)

Ariana: 'I am working for the University. I am painting. Let's write about the play cafes. I am drawing for the University, (...) I am drawing a playcafe.'

Kristina: 'What can you see in the play cafes?'

Ariana: 'It has lots of toys, nana hold my hand, I can see drawing.'

Kristina's fieldnotes (from January 2023- December 2024)

'I am working with mummy about the play cafe'

'I am writing about the play cafe'

'Mum are you working? About the play cafe? I work with you too, come on, let's write'

'I am working for the university'

'I am taking photos about the play cafe' (while taking photos)

'Mum take a photo of me playing here, write it for the research'

We can see here how Ariana would intentionally highlight what can be included as part of the research. For Ariana, research 'documentation' was expressed through a multimodal ethnographic way of combining writing, painting, drawing, photography and through embodied experiences of play.

Key Findings

Children are agents, reclaiming play spaces creatively

Adults experience anxiety and stress

about young children playing in public life and public spaces (especially indoors) with some country-specific differences; 'being in the way', 'nowhere to go'; 'no space to play'.



Noticeable differences in children's play depending on the environment

The Froebelian play cafe

was considered an ideal social and play space, of high quality; a unique space and experience.

Families face barriers

to accessing current available spaces (due to intersections linked to affordability/ economic barriers; accessibility; location; racial, religious and cultural barriers; not feeling welcomed; language barriers; time/activity restrictions).

Play Cafes recognized as an important type of informal high-quality play and social provision in public life

both indoors and outdoors; spaces where both child and parent/carer interact but also spaces where the child can play and the parent/carer relax.

Not all children have access to the same spaces and experiences

Who they are and where they live matters; e.g. refugee families or recently arrived migrant families who do not speak English or families of colour from low social economic backgrounds feel isolated and do not always access public spaces.



Outdoor spaces are highly valued, especially natural spaces like the beach, parks and open green spaces

but they may not always be accessible by all families because of adverse weather conditions.

Power relationships between children and adults or between children / between adults have an impact on play experiences.



Feeling safe, having trust, feelings of belonging and community, diversity in resources and staffing, anti-racism anti-discrimination are important

High-quality social and play spaces (especially indoors) are scarce

'there is nowhere to play in this cafe'; 'we want to play'; 'play all day'.



Ingredients for an ideal social and play space for young children and their families include

high quality play and learning; design, space and resource matters; care, love and relationship matters; pedagogy and meraki matters; role of the adult matters; knowledge sharing, learning and research; a one-stop space for all provisions both for young children and adults/carers; community and social justice; role of the adult matters; Human and other-than-human Matters; children's rights; de/anti-colonial work.

A strong desire for the creation of high-quality Play Cafes;

playing locally is important; as such Play Cafes are needed across diverse communities and neighborhoods.



Technology, young children and play in public and family life

Technology e.g. screens, often used as processes for children's body regulation (e.g. in order to sit down in restaurants/cafes). Children were not really observed to ask for screen devices when engaged in spaces that were enriching e.g. nature, the Froebelian play cafes. Technology e.g. video calls or online gaming used as tool to stay connected with families and friends that lived in different countries. Technology like online games were also used as processes of learning through play e.g. learning numbers, the alphabet, colours or languages.

The importance of food

Food as memory, cultural identity, community, togetherness, belonging and love; food also as exclusion.

The importance of the weather



Kristina's fieldnotes (September 1st, 2024)

We have arranged a family gathering as part of the research with Moda, her three children (two boys and a girl) and her husband. Both my children, husband and mum (grandmother) also joined us. We first met at the park. We felt that the children could have a run and play outside before we sit in a restaurant. After our play outside, we chose to go to a restaurant near by. This restaurant was relatively near our house too, so all very convenient. We knew that there was a children's menu in this restaurant, they also provided a drawing pack and crayons which always signals in principle that 'families are welcome here'. We choose to sit around a table near the entrance, that has relative space and is also quite separate from the other tables. We discuss how this table would be good as they children can have space and we won't be in the way. Adults and children find their seats enthusiastically. We are happy to be together and to shortly enjoy our food.

The children sit next to each other. We start looking at the menus to choose our food and the drawing packs arrive. The children get excited about drawing. As they draw, they chat with each other and laugh. The boys make lots of movement as they sit in their chairs, going underneath the table, laughing and also 'tease' each other. I notice that we as adults are getting worried about that, and we are starting to wonder how long we will last sitting or whether we will even order and eat our food. The girls are quite happy drawing. Once the children had completed their drawings, they wanted to stand up, walk around, move and run. I noticed that we as adults were encouraging them to stay a little longer until their food arrives. Technology (phones) were also offered by the adults to encourage the children to sit. However, the 'volume' from the phones is 'too loud'. The boys start singing and talking loudly and passionately.

We start to get the looks from people next to us, especially when the boys started to speak louder. 'Shhh θα μας διώξουν' ('Shh they will ask us to leave') said Moda's husband. The boys start a game between watching on the phones and teasing each other. They are enjoying themselves. Two of the younger boys started running out of the restaurant, wanting to go and play outside. They wanted to cross the road and to play at the park. The dads follow them to make sure they are ok and safe and to support their play. The girls started to want to wonder in the restaurant too and also go outside! We took turns, as adults, to follow the children and try to encourage them to come back so that we can all enjoy our food. Food arrived! This felt like forever! We invite the children to come back in and to sit around the table to eat their food. The adults are getting quite stressed as they have got up and down the seat so many times and going in and out of the restaurant in less than an hour. 'Pheww' is often heard from the adults as they looked stressed about trying to get the children to sit.

The children ate their food so fast! It felt like 5 minutes and they already started moving their bodies fast, talking loudly. All adults took turns to think of different ideas that might inspire the children to stay a little longer so that the adults can enjoy their food. 'Would you like to draw?'. But the children's bodies wanted to move and they were curious to explore both inside and outside. In the meantime the looks from other adults in the room felt more intense and judgy! We start talking between us about the looks we feel and observe. Moda's husband then says 'Δεν κάθονται... πάμε να φύγουμε' / 'they (the children) can't sit in here...let's go'. We have barely finished our food and drinks, but we all decided that leaving is the best thing to do for the children and for us. 'Εγώ καλύτερα να μένω σπίτι' / I prefer to stay at home says Moda's husband. As we all go out of the restaurant, Nik (one of the dad's) says 'Αυτό ήταν εφιάλτης!' / 'that was a nightmare! We all look and feel very anxious and stressed. 'Χάλια ήταν εκεί μέσα' / 'we had a terrible time in there' says Nik.

Reyhaneh's fieldnotes (November 24th, 2023)

'One day after school [...] I said to my children: you can choose wherever you want to go for lunch. Both children got really excited: We want to go to [X]! [...] I suggested a second closer place to them [...] I thought Rose would be tired sitting in the car for over half an hour so I mentioned to her again: it's going to be a long drive to [X], you might get tired and bored and hungry in the car. Rose thought about it and said: No mum, I will be okay [...] and so we headed to [X] where they had a lovely time. This turned out to be a really significant experience about going out to socialise, eat and play in public by doing everyday real things (...) like shopping with the children sized trollies, making coffee with the real coffee machines in the cafe space, which highlighted the everyday real practices that were important for children and play in public life.'



Reyhaneh's Fieldnotes (March 18th, 2023)

Holly (Mum of Milo and Lulu) said one of the things they do for a night out with their children is going out for dinner. She told me to join them with my children, so the kids will enjoy their time together more. As I arrived, I joined them at the back seating section of the restaurant, which Holly seemed to feel was a better option as the children could move around more freely, and the family felt more comfortable that they are not disturbing others with their children.

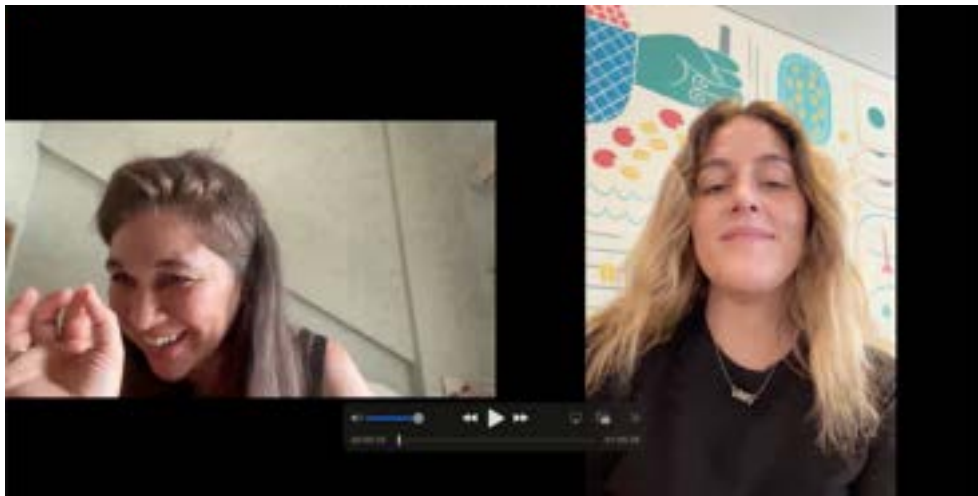
From the beginning, Milo and Lulu were both playing on two mobile phones. This was all they were doing for the first 30 minutes (...). After half an hour, their parents took their phones from them, but Milo was upset. Their mum started playing knots and crosses with them with a piece of paper and pen. Milo and Lulu both looked excited to play with their mum. As their food hadn't yet come after 45 minutes and Milo was unsettled and started moaning, their dad used the paper menus which were on the table and made them paper guns. They really liked their guns and started playing with them around the table.

Then their food arrived and they all sat and finished their food. After their dinner, Milo was moaning again on what to do, so their dad held his hands to help him climb up his legs...



Kristina and Aggeliki's Fieldnotes and Reflective online session (July 7th, 2024)

We were chatting together online about the pop up play cafe we co-created in Greece (based on the research to date, on Froebelian pedagogy and on what children had shared with us that is important for them, their ideas and interests). Aggeliki shared with me (Kristina) how the practitioners that worked with children were so amazed with the children and how they observed that they were **SO** different in our play cafe space, to what they normally are like in their weekly sessions. I was thinking about my observations of the practitioners, being so happy, curious and in awe with the play cafe experience we had created (I remember one practitioner writing in the postcard 'My dream is to have a play cafe. This one!') but also with how much they were surprised with the children and their play. Aggeliki spoke to me about how the practitioners noticed a difference in behaviour, for example at the weekly sessions the children, do not seem to be so curious and focused in their play. In contrast to our play cafe where all children were busy playing, creating, experimenting. Aggeliki noticed a difference in the children's curiosity to play and how they played for hours uninterrupted. This then reflected the practitioners behaviours too. For example in the weekly sessions Aggeliki spoke about how practitioners are always observed to having to 'shout' the children's names so that they can encourage them to come and join in the activity they had planned for them. The children are not always interested in the planned activity however, so then they start running, get easily distracted by the next thing in that small space (e.g. draw, doll house). The children at the weekly sessions, especially the boys were often observed to tease each other, run around in a very small space, get loud, and then the practitioners would get stressed and focused on regulating behaviours. Aggeliki spoke with enthusiasm about the complete difference in experience in our play cafe, where the setting was set up with intention based on children's and practitioners knowledge about play, children played freely, in depth and curiously [even one of the children that was considered more 'challenging'/'disruptive' by the practitioners], there was more space because it was an outside garden (although relatively small) and practitioners were observed to be near by and come in when children wanted them to or to extend their play. Practitioners were also observed to sing, dance and play with the children in a different, more relaxed and in depth way in the play cafe according to Aggeliki and the practitioners. It made us reflect together about how much the intention behind the design of the space, the resources, the pedagogy, everything matters.



Aggeliki: I saw that our philosophy and our intentions behind the creations of a play cafe really had an impact on how the children played and that was amazing to see (...) when one of the educators from the [x, name of organisation], saw the setting, she said this is a beautiful setting, I am just worried that our children are so rowdy and they play, you know, and they cause a lot of like big mess when they play they will be very, not destructive but like (...) she saw the little house, the kitchen and everything that was supposed to be more calming effect, and she was like this looks beautiful I just don't know how our kids are going to react to it, because they are used to being very loud and everything. And then seeing the kids being so focused and playing like that, reaffirmed what we have been doing for the past year and a half, that also has a deep philosophy and it is rooted in intention (...). I had my doubts too, because I had seen in the [X organisation] different creative teams with the same children, they had such a different, reaction and approach to play.

What did we find?

Key Overall findings

- Play cafes **underpinned by child-community centred, social justice and sustainable principles**, such as Play Cafes inspired by Froebelian principles, provide accessible high-quality play and care experiences for young children to live well, learn, play and thrive.
- Play cafes that are considered '**high-quality**' are scarce.
- **Play cafes** inspired by Froebelian principles need to be recognised as **new innovative models of ELC provision**.
- **Families urgently need high-quality play cafes** in community centres and co-being, co-working spaces so that a) children and their families can access high quality play, early learning and childcare, and social experiences, b) parents/carers can participate in the workforce flexibly, have access to social networks, community support, skill development and recreational opportunities, and c) families (children and carers/parents) can get informal support and access to information linked to well-being and health.
- **Play cafes underpinned by child-community centred and social justice** pedagogical practices provide safe and equitable spaces for families of diverse/marginalised backgrounds.
- **Play cafes that are underpinned by Froebelian principles** are designed with social justice and sustainable intention from the design of the space, the play materials, the pedagogical practices, the food and the social and play experiences making the world a better and sustainable place, so that children and families live well in the now and in the future.



More analytically in relation to the research questions:

Research Question 1

What are the current opportunities that young children have to play in community and business play cafes, and their underlying philosophies and principles?

We found that parents/carers with young children face a lot of anxiety and stress when playing in public life and public spaces (especially indoors) with some country-specific differences. For example, feelings of 'being in the way', or that there is 'nowhere to go' or 'no space to play' in spaces like cafes, restaurants were expressed.

'There is nowhere to play in this cafe, where can we play?'

(Max, 6 years old, White Scottish/British Greek)

Young children and their families face many barriers, e.g. due to intersections linked to affordability/economic barriers; accessibility; location; barriers linked to social demographics and positionalities, racial, religious and cultural barriers; gender, age, ability/neurodiversity etc; not feeling welcome; language barriers; dietary barriers; time/activity restrictions) and experience many intersecting inequalities when playing in public life (indoors and outdoors).



'...There are so few play cafes left in Edinburgh, so few free/cheap places to go with small kids. Have to pay through the nose for soft play etc. We really need this! Somewhere relaxed where parents can chat and socialise too.'

(The Heart of Newhaven, Postcard Feedback)

Not all children have access to the same spaces and experiences; for example, families in poverty, or recent refugee families or migrant families that do not speak English or migrant autistic/neurodivergent children feel isolated and do not always access public spaces due to not feeling that they belong, or fear of and/or experiences of discrimination and racism.

'Unfortunately, we had to stop going to some of our favorite play spaces because of the cost. It gets expensive for a family of three. It would be fantastic if we had the opportunity to have a play cafe that caters to all families' economic needs.'

(Interview with Paraskevi, White Greek, mother of a 3 year old child, Greece)

Interview with Moda

(Albanian, recent migrant, parent of three children, two of whom are under 7)

Moda: I don't go anywhere [...] I am at home, always at home. I don't know anyone, I don't speak the language [English] [...] if there was a place and I knew you (Kristina) were also there I would also come on my own [with the children], but without knowing anyone, where can I go?

Interview with Reyhaneh

(Iranian, team member)

Reyhaneh: 'It was truly a unique experience because I've been knowing these families (Afghan Refugee families) for months [...] what was really special was how they trusted the space [...] they blended in very quickly with people and the children were freely playing within the space [...] and I know that these families are mainly in the hotel not really going to any specific social places or play spaces, I know they spend most of their time at the hotel [...] they don't really blend into the city yet'



Not all parents access public spaces for social and play purposes. For example, community partners emphasised that some of the families that they work with which can be described as systematically excluded or from marginalised and socially & economic disadvantaged backgrounds like low income single mothers, low income single mothers of colour, refugee families, recently arrived migrant families that were new in the area.

‘They don’t go anywhere.’

Existing social and play provisions

Parents/carers and community partners mentioned a range of places and existing social and play provisions that are used by families, with some country specific variations, in particular:

- Soft Play Spaces
- Local Parks
- Open green and blue spaces
- Adventure Parks
- Museums
- Galleries
- Venues of cultural, art and historical significance
- Playgrounds
- Libraries [e.g. Bookbug in Scotland (singing and storytelling, including Bookbug in a diversity of languages like Spanish, Greek) at local libraries)]
- Toy Libraries (mainly Scotland, community and charity-run drop-ins held over two hours at specific times of the week)
- Community Spaces e.g. churches (in Scotland only), activity based like swimming, art and gymnastic classes, sing and sign classes (Scotland), baby sensory classes
- Community Organizations
- Community Playgroups (Scotland)
- Play-cafes
- Cafes and restaurants
- Private bookshops (this has also started in some areas of Greece)
- Other people’s homes (indoors and outdoors e.g. like gardens)

Spaces can be categorised in at least four categories:¹

Children's environments which cater for adults

e.g. softplay, play cafes, playgroups.

Spaces such as softplays, play cafes, playgroups have been designed for children to play; which means that the play area is the main focus. Each space is child-focused from their perspective e.g. layout and design, encouraging play in different ways. Depending on the spaces these vary from spaces that are bright colours which focus on children's physical play like soft play, to spaces that have children's furniture, play equipment and resources. It is often that these spaces offer hot/cold drinks like coffee/tea/juice and snacks/food for both adults and children e.g. have a cafe space. There is a focus on free play at least in principle as in, the children enter and choose where, how, when to play, however each has its own restrictions in the space available for example 'no running', 'no food', 'no shoes', not allowed to bring and consume your own food etc. Some of these spaces offer soft play and sensory rooms which are often very bright and overstimulating, imaginative play (like offering a 'home' space, a 'book corner', arts and crafts, cars, tracks and trains, role play) and the resources are mainly plastic. There are also some emerging play cafes that are focusing on more wooden toys, which were also for sale. Spaces like these often offer organised classes across a range of activities.

Although most of these spaces are basing their provision on knowledge either personal knowledge of being mothers themselves or on what they think children like, it is often the case that resources are in the room with no specific intentionality (with some exceptions), or specific play pedagogical theory. Some of the spaces also provide resources that are from donations e.g. playgroups. For some spaces, it feels that resources are just mingled together with no specific purpose or intention. These spaces could be enriched by more natural and open ended resources, intentional child-centred and sustainable design both of the room, the play resources and the 'ethos'. Moreover, almost all spaces are mainly run by White Majority owners and staff (with some exceptions) and this is reflected in the resources, the books and it would be important to work on their social justice play pedagogical approaches and resources. Many of these spaces do not always have practitioners/staff that have specific knowledge and experience in childhood practice. Many of these play cafes advertise the value to parents/carers either as spending quality time, 'keep your eye on your child' at all times or a safe space which is considered an important 'selling point'.



¹ Thank you to Addison and Addison for conceptualising this during some initial pilot scoping work in 2019 for play cafe related work.

Adult environments which cater for children (childfriendly)

e.g. having toys and books in a cafe space or a children's corner with toys

Spaces like these are mainly restaurants/bars and or coffee shops that have designated play areas or resources for children. Most of these spaces require children to leave after a certain time and the space remains open for adults only. The design and layout of these venues is targeted toward adults both with and without children and the play spaces are separated off. These are more social spaces for adults which provide small spaces for the children to entertain themselves rather than creating opportunities for family play e.g. a soft play within a pub. Costs of food tend to be higher in these spaces which may indicate that they are not entirely inclusive.



Family environments which cater for 'all' ('family-friendly')

Some of the spaces appear to feature a more 'family-friendly' design and layout, in that they are creating an almost 'homely' environment which people of all ages can enjoy. They are not advertising themselves as spaces for play, they merely provide a play space for children. These spaces seem to draw families looking for a 'cheap and cheerful' lunch in an environment that is comfortable for everyone. It seems probable this would include lower income families. They all have small play areas and some use words such as 'gated' or 'fenced in'. There is perhaps more of an attempt to keep the children happy during lunch, rather than creating a space for learning, development, exploration or participation in community/social/democratic life in these play areas. All of these cafes offer children's menus and each offers space for buggies and/or baby changing facilities and so are attractive to families in that aspect.



Community/other specific groups where children are involved

Some of the cafes are part of community spaces that families can enjoy e.g museums, galleries, country parks, farms. These cafes are integrated as part of larger organisations as opposed to stand alone units. Many of the spaces are arts-based and create opportunities for individuals/groups/businesses whilst also providing entertaining and interactive spaces for the whole community to enjoy. These spaces increase opportunities for many things including family time, community bonding and tourism. They consistently present an aim to have a positive impact on social well-being and through welcoming children, make the experiences accessible and fulfilling for many families. However, each venue has limits to the extent they cater for children as individuals. Many of the venues do offer at least some free activities which increases accessibility greatly. The outdoor spaces are advocates for sustainability and are positively demonstrative in regard to interactive learning and play. Experiences such as nature walks and interactions with farm animals are available which are arguably great for encouraging curiosity and imagination in children and are equally beneficial in creating opportunities for quality family time. Although there are play areas and soft plays available in some of these spaces, they have a sense of 'organised fun'. Financial costs of renting, running the spaces is a challenge (remaining financial viable) and could potentially affect the provision for children and families.

Adult environment like cafes and restaurants that do not cater for children

Spaces that are adult-centred and do not provide anything for families with children.

Parents and families have raised the below issues:

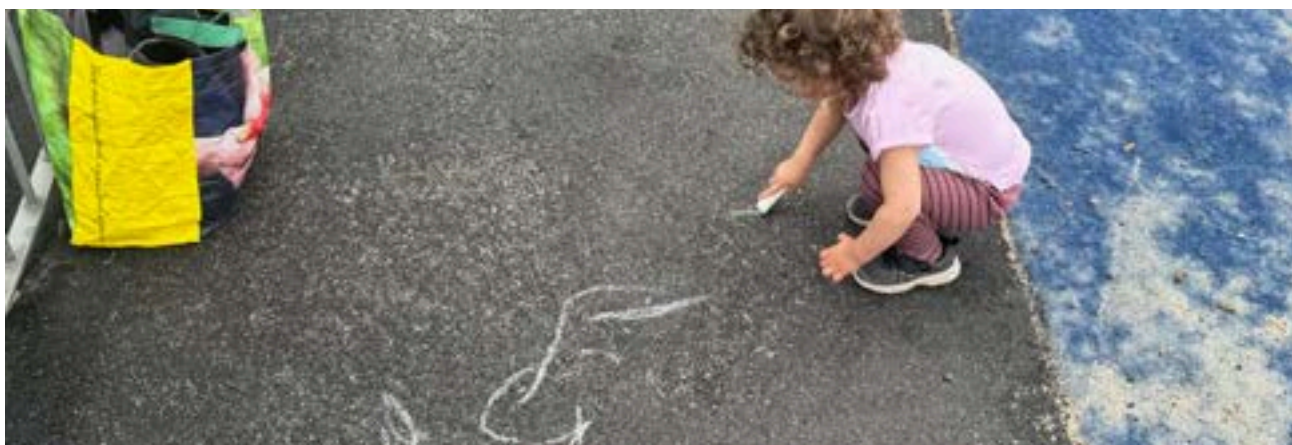
Overall, although scarce, there is an emerging play cafe scene that exists in both Scotland and Greece, the existence and potential of which is valued by some parents/families that use them. However, there are **many barriers** that need to be addressed, and **urgent further development is recommended** so that children and families receive the best play cafe provisions.

- Families urgently need **high-quality play cafes** in community centres and co-being, co-working spaces so that a) children and their families can access **high-quality play, early learning and childcare**, and social experiences, b) parents/carers can **participate in the workforce flexibly**, have access to social networks, **community support, skill development** and recreational opportunities, and c) families (children and carers/parents) can get **informal support** and **access** to information linked to **well-being and health**.
- Play cafes that are underpinned by **Froebelian principles** were considered **high-quality**.



‘Loved the openness of the café (Froebelian Futures mobile pop up play cafe) and the time block (rather than having to make a 1 hr slot). Loved the nurturing of parent and kids with tea and soup and H enjoyed water play, blocks and musical instruments’

(The Heart of Newhaven, Postcard Feedback)



Barriers with current play provisions

1) Some of these play spaces offer children and their families specific structured or semi-structured activities and time-limited sessions linked to reading, singing, dancing, swimming, gymnastics, arts and crafts, free play ('stay and play'), messy play etc. Many of these activities are linked to **time restricted sessions** which are not always practical for parents/carers. For example, a specific play group or a music class. Opening times of cafes also seem limited with many closing at 4-5 pm, although this is understandable for the people that run the spaces it raises difficulties in relation to **accessibility** for families who would like to use the service after finishing work or after school.

Families need: Access to a play cafe space that is not restricted to a one-hour slot or a specific time-slot; ideally play cafe spaces will also be available after work/school and on weekends offering sustained time and space to interact and play was important for families.

'It's so hard to find free/cheap new things to take the kids to, soft play is very expensive for 2 kids over 3 years!'

(We Play Festival, Postcard feedback)

'...There are so few play cafes left in Edinburgh, so few free/cheap places to go with small kids. Have to pay through the nose for soft play etc.'

(The Heart of Newhaven, Postcard Feedback)

2) **Accessibility, affordability and being clean:** Some participants mentioned soft play spaces as spaces that they would choose to go as an option, but they were **costly**, which results to visiting them once a month or once a fortnight. Costs of entry and wider costs of a 'day out' with children, transportation, time travelling, parking, public transport. Tangential costs (like food and drinks which need to be purchased on the premises) are also important to consider. Some businesses may create expectations of buying 'treats', food or toys for children, which increase peer pressure and children's consumer drives.

Soft play spaces were also considered as **dirty** and as transmitting viruses easily. Moreover, general **accessibility** like space for prams and buggies, parking and reliability of public transport are also very important and can be barriers to families. Families and children that have English or Greek as an additional language, and/ or additional needs and disabilities raised concerns over not finding always mainstream play cafes accessible.

Families need: Accessible, affordable, clean and social just play cafes

Families need play cafes spaces in their **local area, near their home and easy to access**

Families need play cafes where they **feel welcome, that they belong and inequalities are challenged**

Current play provisions not good enough: Play room designs, play resources and play pedagogy are not **always good enough**

3) Families across the two countries mentioned that **public playgrounds 'are not always great'** as they only have a few slides and swings and that 'nice' playgrounds are usually far away and **require traveling**. Indoor play cafe spaces are **not always considered 'high-quality'** due to the lack of sustainability with the **plastic toys, overstimulation or the lack of careful thought and design of the play resources**.

Parents, grandparents/carers highlighted how current play groups (in Scotland) are **not well designed** either. Although parents/carers value their existence, the opportunities for children to play and for meeting people, the **resources are not always well thought through in terms of the design, families are not always felt welcome** and they **noticed a difference between** how children played in the **playgroups** and our **Froebelian play café** in terms of feeling more confident, independent play and deep play. Play groups were considered to be louder and more stressful. In addition, often **play groups have the same toys/resources** and do not always rotate their toys, and the structure that they follow is quite repetitive. In current provisions (i.e. play spaces) children do not really have the opportunity to paint so parents/carers appreciated this opportunity for their children. Playgroups are often run by volunteers who may not always have deep knowledge and skills of play pedagogy, children's rights and social justice.

'...well I feel that I have been ruined by the (Froebelian)play cafe (We play Festival play cafe) (we both laugh), because... he just played so well, he like was so engaged, he loved it, I felt like he was like being enriched all the time and then when I went to view the playgroup, like it was perfectly nice but I was just like 'its no playcafe', it was like in a church hall and the children were like, a lot of them were like crying or being like eh eh you know like wanting the teacher to like do things and ... not that many of them were like sort of into something... (...) maybe if I hadn't gone to the play cafe I would have been like this is great, but I just felt it wasn't, they didn't feel like they were (...) in-depth (concentrating in-depth in play)

(Interview with Veronika, White Scottish mother of 2 mixed race children under 2 years old)

'Materials and safety are very important to me, some of the playgrounds we visit are disintegrating and no one does anything to fix it'

(Interview with Giannis, White Greek father of 2.5 year old child, Greece)



**'It (We Play Festival) is quite a comfortable and beautiful decoration event, so we just have been here once or twice so for me it is similar to some toys in the nursery or in some playgroups but the difference is that I think it feels more relaxed and more how do you say warm yeah here, than just pure toys, I think also the stuffs are more professional, also the decoration of the place is superb, all the wooden is very good yeah... we are growing up in a different culture so this kind of playground we don't have that in our childhood play space so we find this very happy and very good for kids a safe environment to play in (...)
I liked it I really enjoyed it a lot**

(Interview with Wei, Chinese, Father, recent migrant parent of one child under 5)



'We try other playgroups but firstly I feel that it is just a place where they have dumped a few toys together and they just leave the kids to run around and she doesn't really enjoy it very much and she doesn't interact with other children there which she did at the play cafe (We Play Festival). She interacted really well with other children older than her and younger than her so that was a big difference from these spaces that we go to (...) I realised that she was completely in her own zone coz she took all her clothes off I mean she wouldn't do that anywhere else but she felt so at home it was like being at home, she was really comfortable... she felt so at home there that she can just be herself... if you go to these other spaces they are quite judgemental I find as well they are looking at how you are reacting to a child's behaviour

(Interview with Elizabeth, White British, Grandmother and carer of two children under 7)

'Early on, we took our daughter to some of those sort of baby sensory classes and we started describing them as baby raves because it really felt like an overstimulation, and so she couldn't. She couldn't take in any of the... Any of what was happening because it was bright light here. Sound here? Texture here. Everything here and. And sort of the what what we are realizing about sort of this point of our of where our daughter is is. Sometimes she really wants to sit with the thing, and we're aware that even if we try to. Help her or guide her. She will kind of tell us like I I'm doing this right now. I need to do this and I feel like.'

(Interview with Kevin, parent, American, 12 December 2023)

Aggeliki's Fieldnotes, 10th of May 2024

Today I arrived at the [X name of NGO space where they organise play activities] around five and it was quiet still. There were two volunteers and two educators there, so I greeted them and I left my stuff. I grabbed my notepad and went to the back because two children were already there playing (...). Aaliyah came running and said hi to everyone. (...).

Lana and Lana and Daphne also joined the play.

There was no activity planned today so the children were allowed to just play freely for an hour. The tables at the front were placed in a way that allowed for people to sit together so the girls decided to sit and get different markers and paints and draw. I sat with them and started drawing as well. They all looked really concentrated on their drawings until I started asking them about what they would like to see in a place space.

Aggeliki: if you could play in the space that you designed and you created what would you like having in there?

The girls looked at me and said: We would like to have many toys. Daphne said she wanted books and Lara and Lana said they wanted to have a lot of paint.

Aggeliki: if you could have anything that you love in there what would it be?

Aaliyah: I want a really big wall so I can paint with my friends.

Aggeliki: that's a really good idea and would that be indoors or outdoors?

Aaliyah: it would be indoors and outdoors. We would do different things.

Aggeliki: what kind of things?

Aaliyah: outdoors we would run and maybe we can have a waterfall, and we can take the water and bring it back inside.

Aggeliki: that's a really good idea.

Daphne: we can have a waterfall in the Centre of Athens.

Aaliyah: we could build one

Lana and Lara said they could have a little pond with some fish there.



Soft play spaces are considered by some parents as spaces that parents take their children **'to run out the energy' rather than** to be **enriched**.

'The energy of being there (softplay) is people whose children are driving them crazy and needed to get out of the house rather than sort of something that is (...) it feels like, like the idea is to to run out the energy on the child rather than were there for any sort of enrichment. It feels like OK, they're hyperactive, we need to get them to do this and so we we haven't been too keen on those, but we still kind of go to them.'

(Interview with Kevin, parent, American, 12 December 2023)

4) All participants highlighted the **gap in the market and in our communities** in offering something like the Froebelian Futures play cafe and **play cafes inspired by Froebelian principles**, which they described as being a **high quality resource for families with young children, urgently needed**. This has been heightened post-covid as many of what parents/carers described as play cafe spaces had closed; as a result, there are now more playgroups than play cafes (referring to this, a parent said 'I think it is something that is lacking'). It was very clear from the parents, practitioners and community organisations that these **high quality social and play spaces are scarce** and more needs to be done for this type of **informal high-quality play and social provision in public life** (not just in early years centres and nurseries)- especially if we think about children under three, children that do not attend early years centres/nurseries, community and/or private business places that could be used by child-minders, families, grandparents and others. High-quality play cafes could also be used by as **co-working and co-being** spaces whilst being with their children. Having options of short timeframe childcare within the play cafe would also be valued by some families.

All participants highlighted the need for such **high-quality play cafe spaces to be made permanently available**.

Families need high quality playgrounds in their local areas and also high quality indoor play cafe provisions because of the weather. Ideally indoor and outdoor provisions need to be connected and offer a natural flow.

5) **Power relationships between children and adults or between children have an impact on play experiences, as do different play environments**. For example, **who children are and where they live matters** (e.g. refugee families or recently arrived migrant families who do not speak English or families of colour from low socio-economic backgrounds, poor families feel isolated and do not always access public spaces). **Geography also matters**; for example, families in poverty from majority white Greek backgrounds that lived in villages in rural Greece had more opportunities and resources to play freely in public life. It was easier for these families to be included in the social life of the local community; they knew the people that run the local cafes and even though these local cafes were not designed with children in mind, their natural design with indoor and outdoor provision (e.g. some of these cafes were on squares, connected to outdoor spaces), feeling freedom to play and feelings of safety in these communities played a big role for children to engage in deep play.

Some parents (who had cars and were more privileged in terms of socio-economic background) could afford to take their children to expensive private outdoor adventure parks, farms, and drive outside of the city to country parks (Scotland) and others to spend the day or half the day.



One child suggested that wider power-structure inequalities could be addressed through 'rich people' or people in power like governments paying and providing these spaces for free.

'Maybe the rich people can pay for the poor people, so that they can come to the play cafe.'

(Max, 6 years old, White Other, Scottish/British Greek)

Structural power dynamics linked to discrimination against children and families was raised as an important barrier. Not feeling judged / not feeling self-conscious was important for families. Families raised the importance of a need for a cultural societal change towards families and children in public spaces, so that families with children do not feel judged and self-conscious, feel welcomed and are not discriminated against. This would allow them to enjoy their right to life, wellbeing and play.

Risk and safety were a theme that emerged in both contexts, albeit with some different contextual differences. The concept of safety was also identified as part of current play cafes. For example, the indoor spaces, specifically the ones designed for children, use the provision of a 'safe' environment for play, through use of tools such as CCTV and 'gated spaces', as a way to appeal to parents. Play cafe spaces that have 'gated spaces' could be enjoyed by some children who prefer smaller spaces but would restrict other children that prefer to roam freely and imaginatively. Risky play would also evoke power relations between adults and children for example some parents or practitioners would be inclined to intervene in children's play or sometimes take over or would be risk averse. Practitioners and / or parents / carers with deep knowledge of child-centred and play pedagogy would counteract this by promoting children's rights, child-led play, allowing 'risky play' with sensitive adult guidance and intervention when needed.

Families need safe, child-friendly spaces and urban/rural space designs



Children (and families) need to be trusted about the self-regulation of children's bodies despite the all good intentions of community care, parent/carer policing or perpetuation of images of childhood innocence or immaturity (e.g. children not knowing best about their bodies because they are too young and innocent).

Adult intervention in children's play and life (power relations) was also observed in relation to perceived risks of children getting a cold, if they were observed for example without a coat on in cold weather. Children's bodies are often regulated and policed by adults and so are parents that may follow their children's lead. Adults were often observed to not always trust children's desires and judgements about their own bodies. Although ethics of care is really important and adults have a responsibility towards safeguarding children's right to protection this needs to be balanced by children's right to participation and a wider trust about knowing about their bodies. When sensitive intervention and guidance is needed it is important for this to evolve around open conversations about the weather, bodies and being safe and warm, without control.

6) **Not having knowledgeable staff with deep knowledge, reflective practice and skills** in child-community centred approaches, children's rights and social justice creates **barriers** for children. It is important for play cafes to have knowledgeable and reflective adults in the space with **deep, intentional and reflective play and social justice pedagogy**.

*'A place with lots of love and happiness,
with very happy faces'*

(Moda, mother of three children, Albanian and recent migrant)



7) **High-quality play and social spaces are scarce** and families that attended the **Froebelian pop-up play cafes** (in Scotland and Greece) considered them **ideal social and play spaces, unique spaces and experiences.**

'This (We Play Festival)! We would love something like this as a regular place to visit and feel it is lacking in our community and in Edinburgh in general.'

(We Play Festival, Postcard feedback)

Playing **locally** is important so such Play Cafes are needed **across diverse communities and neighbourhoods.**

'It was a shame that we knew this place (We Play Festival play cafe) is only temporary, we came every day, but I knew it's not going to be there the next week, and this was sad.'

(Interview with Esaa, Iranian, father of a 3 year old child)





'I thought it (We Play Festival play cafe) was incredible, it was very unique, in a lovely setting and it had a variety of different things that you wouldn't normally see in a typical play cafe... the work-bench with the real tools, the chance for them to cook, I liked that everything was wooden as well, often it would be more plastic toys... the water feature as well, that was quite unique.'

(Interview with Tasmin, White Scottish mother of two children under 7)

‘This (We Play Festival play cafe) place is amazing! Make it permanent!’

(We Play Festival, Postcard feedback)



‘As a parent of an autistic child I would like it (We Play Festival) to be an ongoing thing, a play cafe throughout the year.’

(Interview with Laoura, White Greek mother of an autistic child, 7 years old)

8) Despite the **lack of high-quality play provisions**, children were observed to be **active agents in reclaiming play spaces creatively**.

“Cafes are not good, cafes are designed for adults’ Max, 6 years old



Children’s agency and creativity in organic and impromptu design of play spaces: Reclaiming spaces

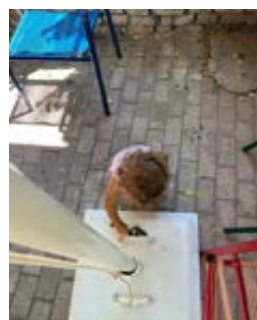
‘There is no space’



Reclaiming space



Reclaiming space



Above is a photo story about a family gathering at a coffee shop that was situated on the road in a small village in the mountains in Greece. Cars would occasionally pass by near the chairs we were sitting and we did chat about whether this was safe enough. We decided that as cars were sporadic that it would be ok to sit for a little while. In the first picture on the left you can see the cafe which did not have any space to play.

Kristina’s Fieldnotes, Summer 2023, Greece.

Ariana (2 years old) starts to creatively create her own space through play and through the everyday objects that she found around her. Adults (including the owners) did not interrupt her play. Ariana started to create imaginative worlds too and creating different areas in different spaces in the area that she had access to, like under the umbrella, in a tree, through the little wall. She starts to make it cosy (e.g. putting a little lamp candle holder) and also gathers things like lemons, candles from the tables and space around her and starts cooking. She then also invites others to join her in the space she had reclaimed and created for herself. She also comes to us where we were sitting and offers us her food that she had made.

'Freedom means to play outside.'

Max, 6 years old, White Scottish/British Greek

'Why are we doing this Melina, is it for fun? Why are we doing this?'

Matt, 2 years old, Black Scottish (asking Melina about the purpose of their play)

'Shall we go to the square? When are we going to the square? I want to go to the square to play.'

(Lampros, White Greek 6 years old)

Also, children and families would often take their favourite toys, resources, arts and crafts, books, drawing and others in order to create as much as possible spaces that they can play and have a nice time.

However, there is an urgent and strong desire for the creation of high-quality play cafes in diverse communities/neighbourhoods. There is a need for both indoors and outdoors; spaces where both child and parent/carer interact, play and relax.

Reyhaneh's Fiednotes, 2nd April 2024

[X a religious gathering space] is a building that the Muslim Pakistani Community own. They have given us Iranian Muslims one of the rooms within the building, so we can use it whenever we want for religious and national ceremonies and celebrations. We can also use the kitchen and toilets within the building. X has become a gathering point for many of us, for longer than 10 years now. As recently some Afghan families have come to the city, through our connections with them, some of them are joining us for the gatherings in X. It is worth noting that apart from our religious believes, we speak the same language and share remarkably close cultures as neighbouring countries, so all of this has made us gather in one place.

In our room in the X we have divided the space with curtains into two, one section where the men sit, one section the women. Although the curtains are open, but on some occasions in the religious acts, we may close them for a brief time. We have also made a small section at the back of the women's sections divided with a sofa, for children's toys. These are plastic made toys which are donated to the space. There is a doll house, some dolls, and soft toys. Some unicorns and horses, and few building block pieces. There is also a lot of Farsi books, pencils, and papers.

Here I will be describing one of the days we gathered in X on a religious occasion in Ramadhan.

I entered the room with Hamid and Rose. As usual, Hamid ran towards his friends, including Sajjad, and they started running around together. Sanaz and Shakira, as well as Mohsen were sitting close to their mother while Masha was in the children's corner playing with the horses. Hamid continued to run around the room with Sajjar and two more boys. they were running from one side to the other. They were very cheerful, laughing and chatting, playing tag very actively. Zahra as usual, comes to X with her three children, husband, mum and dad. And she was sitting in the corner with her mum and Hareer who is the other Afghan mum, as they usually do. Mohsen crawled to her wanting a feed, Hareer got up and closed one of the curtains so Zahra could feed Mohsen with comfort. So Zahra started feeding Mohsen.

Reihan was looking into the books in the back corner which is separated for the children. But she came to her mum and little brother Mohsen after he was fed and happy. She played with Mohsen, cuddled him, picked him up and came and showed him to me.

By now many other Iranian families including Yalda's family had arrived, so one of the men started the program with reading verses of Quran. After the Quraan and Salat (formal prayer) the women helped to put the food in the dishes and the men helped to distribute the food. Everyone sat around the food and ate together and started eating while they were chatting and socialising. After cleaning, the formal ceremony had started, and the children were all started freely playing, running around, laughing etc. Yalda who had just arrived started playing with Reihan and Masha also joined them. They were playing with the horses for a while, and then started running around with the boys playing tag. Mohsen who had just learned to crawl, moved away from her mother freely. While Hamid was with me at one point, Mohsen came to us and crawled up from Hamid's leg, touched his face and Hamid really enjoyed this polite interaction with a baby. At another point, Mohsen crawled to the other side of the room towards his grandfather and got cuddled by him. There were many occasions where children went to adults, who were not their parents, but they call them uncles and aunties, and interacted with them

Reyhaneh's Fieldnotes (continued)

While the ceremony was running with reading prayers and men and women were sitting around, children were running and very noisy, as anyone would expect children to be when they were freely playing. Of course the noise was disturbing the prayer reading, and distracted the adults. However, no one still told the children to stop or be quieter. In X, this group of people who gather seem to have got to the conclusion that it is important that our children enjoy their time while we are there, and they have the right to freely play and enjoy their social time together, just as much as the adults have the right. So no one stops the other. Reihan and Yalda continued to play together, chatting, walking around, looking into the books and sometimes playing with the dolls. Rose, Sally, Moses were also a team, they were playing tag, sometimes just running through the part of the curtain that was closed and laughing together. Rose came to me every now and then for a cuddle, then went back to play. All children were very engaged, but at one point, which was in middle of one of the more important prayers, Masha who had now joined the three boys running and playing tag was very loud. She was very loudly laughing, sometimes screaming, and running into middle of the room. At this point the adults were finding it hard to hear the prayer, and the ceremony was very distracted. I could observe some of the adults looking at Masha, and being distracted but still not doing anything. I could see that the atmosphere is not good. I thought it's best if I intervene (adult intervention). I went to the other girls first, asked them if they would like to come with me to another room and I would tell them a story. They got very excited and said yes (...)

9) Parents/carers varied in terms of their understandings of the **importance of free**, rather than structured, **play**. Some parents in Greece spoke about the value of structured play rather than free play especially as the children were getting older. Some parents linked structured play, and activity-based play to learning and thus quality, devaluing the important time for free play or not seeing it as serious business and linked to learning. However, our observations were that children were learning through free play and this was significant. When children had ownership of their play, they were free to be creative they were also learning in a holistic creative and innovative way. For example, children observed to role play shopkeepers, they were observed to transform and design spaces from materials and resources they could find around them in order to create the imaginary shop. They would use materials that would make them look like shopkeepers and then they would also write the orders practicing the letters or making calculations of how much each 'thing' costed and what the change would be. There were also parents that valued free play and would support their children with this. For example, one migrant single mother and her child from a more affluent background, would often play in public life such as the child riding his bike, taking his bike on buses and trains and traveling by plane to expand his understanding of space, community, culture and geography. They would plan where to go, explore the maps, neighbourhoods, communities and countries and the various landmarks on the way, developing an understanding of intersections between the local, national and international context.

Questions about who has access to high-quality play, what kinds of play are valued, and how various cultural conceptions of children are reflected or excluded are persistent in both Greece (particularly in Athens) and Scotland (Edinburgh), across both sorts of venues (private and community spaces).

Research Question 2

What are young children's, families', practitioners' and business staff views and experiences about current play cafes, and how would they envision these differently?



Play cafes are often appreciated by families and children as spaces for fun, for play, for socialization and relaxation but views across different groups reveal deeper complexities. Children were observed to enjoy these environments but often feel constrained by some of the adult rules or overly structured play, desiring more freedom and creativity. Families, especially from marginalized backgrounds, may experience play cafes as exclusive due to cost, cultural barriers, accessibility (in terms of distance particularly if they are in e.g. the centre of Athens, outskirts of Edinburgh).

Despite their perceived 'cleanliness', safety, and often 'attractive' design, current play cafes have the potential to perpetuate social exclusion. Community places may strive to be accessible and 'inclusive' but they may not have consistent funding or support in order to offer the best play and social experiences for the children and their families.

Both types provide significant play experiences when they are at their finest. The difficulty lies in making sure that these chances are not only created for the convenience or financial gain of adults, but are also fairly distributed, culturally appropriate, genuinely child-community centred and socially just.



Practitioners, parents/carers and children critiqued the lack of educational depth and lack of open-ended free play opportunities in mainstream play cafes, seeing potential for more equitable, enriching and meaningful engagement. There were some play cafes that offered wooden resources to engage in play (e.g. in Scotland) but there was no careful design intention or pedagogical approach that underpinned the practice, although business owners did draw on their own parenting knowledges and experiences. Similar observations emerged in Greece, although there was one play cafe that described itself in our interview as being influenced by a Montessori approach.

Meanwhile, business staff juggled customer satisfaction with profit and business sustainability. Across all perspectives, there was a shared aspiration for play cafes to become more accessible, child-led or child-relevant, culturally responsive and community spaces where play is not only fun but also empowering and equitable.



While play cafes in Greece and Scotland are becoming more and more valued as community areas, yet, a number of significant issues have surfaced. Many families, particularly those from lower-income, immigrant or refugee background, pointed out that play areas are not always 'inclusive' and accessible,

Existing play cafes might be costly, too structured (with exceptions) or culturally inhospitable, even though they frequently include some recreational or educational activities. Children often feel overwhelmed in settings that are controlled by adults and exhibit a need for autonomy, creativity and ownership in their play. At the same time, parents/carers and professionals stress the value of areas that foster relaxation, community development and engagement. It has been demonstrated that co-creating play cafes with children and families improves their quality and 'inclusivity' while fostering social cohesion among various groups and enabling meaningful play and cultural relevance. Additionally, the play cafes will adjust to the needs of the families that visit them, especially if it becomes a matter of business sustainability. Some play cafes in Greece and Scotland have incorporated more 'unhealthy' foods, soft play, or screens (observed in Greece) to accommodate families and keep their business alive. However, our observational findings revealed that such spaces like soft play are not spaces that children were observed to be engaged in deep play and it is often a space where children focus on one aspect of play which is more physical. Deep play was observed consistently in nature (beach, woodlands etc), the Froebelian play cafes, and spaces featuring arts and engaging/creating with open ended and everyday play materials. Engaging in real life and daily activities was valued by children and was also observed to be linked to learning. Playing with a purpose was a common theme that families and children mentioned as important.

The use of technology such as screens was often used for children's body regulation (e.g. parent/children needed a moment to eat, wanted the child to sit on the chair until they complete their food at a restaurant etc). We observed that some children might ask for access to screens if the space and the people were not engaging, enriching and curious. Parents also tended to offer children devices when the space did not offer opportunities to engage with their children e.g. like at restaurants. Children were not really observed to ask for screen devices when they played in nature, the Froebelian play cafes or in outdoors spaces. Technology in the form of video calls or online gaming was also used as a tool to stay connected with families and friends who lived in different countries. Online games were also used as processes of learning through play e.g. learning numbers, the alphabet, colours or languages.

Eating and sharing food is also a very important practice and for some families healthy food options as well as dietary considerations like Vegan, Vegetarian, Halal are very important. Not having Halal food for example would be a reason of exclusion for some Muslim families. Food was considered memory, cultural identity, a practice of connection, togetherness, belonging and love.



Play cafes and mainstream cafe spaces do not always feel welcoming to some migrant families. For example, one Albanian family (who had lived in Greece for many years) and had recently arrived in Scotland when we started the research, found it more welcoming to go with their children to a local coffee space which was run by Greek people even though this was not by design child-centred. However, the actual coffee space was run by owners who were very kind and respectful to families and children, did not restrict children, who were 'allowed' to be themselves and play in the space, move things around (especially when the cafe was not busy), play with the jar with water and cups on the table and resources that were in the space. Most importantly, speaking the same language with the owners was also considered an important factor for choosing where to go. **Diversifying staff representation (similar to the needs of the early years sector about diversifying staff and resources) in play cafe spaces would be an important step forward.**



The weather was mentioned in both countries as a factor that plays a role and can restrict children's play (cold and rainy in Scotland or very hot in the summer in Greece). However, both indoor and outdoor spaces are very important for children and families. Having continuous access and more permanent play and social spaces for families is very important, which also enhances sense of ownership, belonging and trust.

Child-community centred pedagogical approaches where children are free and creative with facilitation, guidance and collaboration with adults is key.

Due to the lack of high-quality play and social provisions for families, there is a **strong desire for the creation of high-quality play cafes in diverse communities/neighbourhoods.**

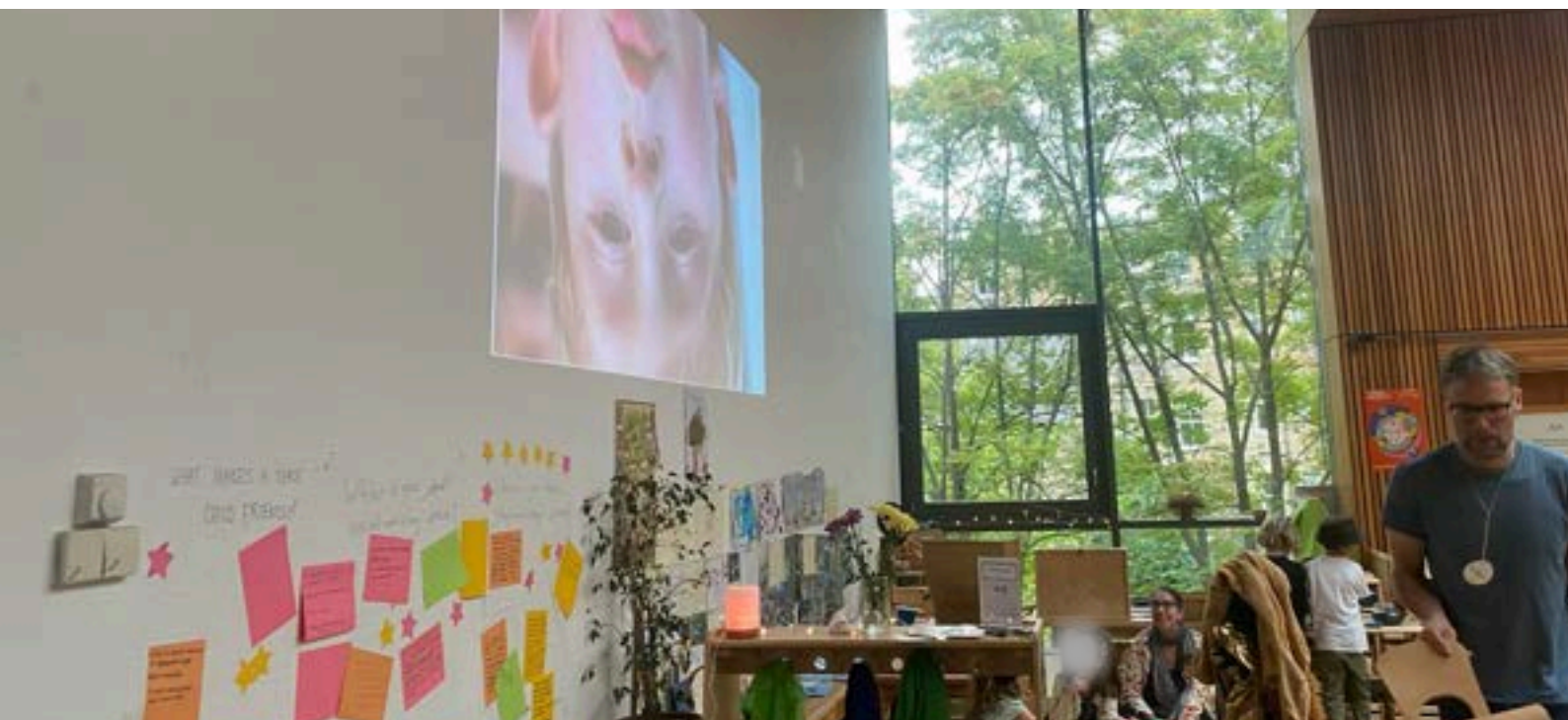
The Froebelian play cafe experience: 'A unique', 'magical', high-quality experience. 'An oasis'.

All participants highlighted the positive difference the Froebelian mobile Play Cafe made to them as an experience. It was described by parents/carers as a 'magical place' and an 'oasis' and was considered as a high-quality play and social space which would enhance quality of life for residents and create a more vibrant and thriving environment for the children; a real resource for the community. High quality and what made the experience 'magical' and important was defined by participants in relation to many things like relationships (people coming together to make it happen), resources and materialities (e.g. play resources, food, space, design etc), commitment, people (e.g. families, young children, practitioners etc), pedagogical practices (e.g. slow pedagogies, child-community centred approaches, social justice approaches), children's rights and the role of the adult (e.g. Froebelian principles in action), anti-discriminatory and anti-racist praxis and knowledge sharing, support and community. Based on the findings, we have co-created the Ingredients to designing Play Cafes inspired by Froebelian principles (please see further below).

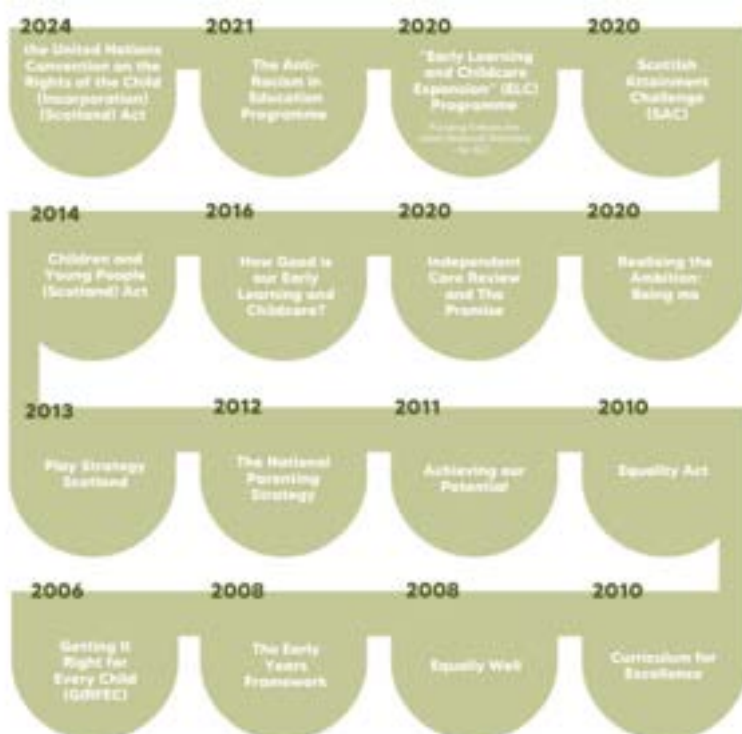


The Froebelian Futures Mobile pop-up Play Cafe, according to participants was not only important as a direct experience but it has had ongoing effects and impactful activity traversing the immediate effect of the Play Cafe in the specific time and space.

The **Scottish** and **Greek** context: similarities and differences



Our research shows that there are similarities and differences in both contexts (Greece and Scotland) that have an impact on childhood experiences. First of all, there are two different countries with very different provisions on a structural level in terms of policy, funding, social services and welfare support. Scotland has a very progressive children's rights policy landscape, the recent UNCR (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024 is a strong example of this commitment on a national level. Policies and strategies like the Play Strategy 2013, Scotland's Play Vision Statement and Action Plan 2025-2030, Realising the Ambition: Being me (2020) are indicative examples of strong policies on aspirations to realise children's rights. Please see further relevant Scottish policies here:



Scotland also has a dedicated Minister for Children, Young People and the Promise whose responsibilities include children's rights. Scotland has as an ambition to become 'the best place to grow up' (Scottish Government [2022](#)). In Scotland there is significant investment in early learning and childcare (e.g. expansion of funded ELC: investing 1,140 hours a year for all three- and four-year olds and eligible two-year-olds (Scottish Government, 2020)]. There is also a recent £25 million investment for local authorities to invest in developing play parks across Scotland. There is thus a lot to celebrate about Scotland's world-leading policy framework for play; however, there is still 'a lot of work to do and many challenges to overcome to deliver' this vision for all children (Play Scotland 2022). For example, despite play and high quality Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) being a key priority of the Scottish Government there is lack of free and high-quality community-based play provisions in everyday public life, beyond ELC institutions (Konstantoni et al 2024; Konstantoni 2021). This is particularly important for young children who are not yet in ELC. **There is also a tendency to link children's play with outdoors (e.g. £25 million investment for outdoor play parks) and although this is greatly appreciated and valued, investment in indoor spaces like community spaces for high quality play in public life would be essential (especially if we consider the weather and how children and families also value playing inside and outside).**

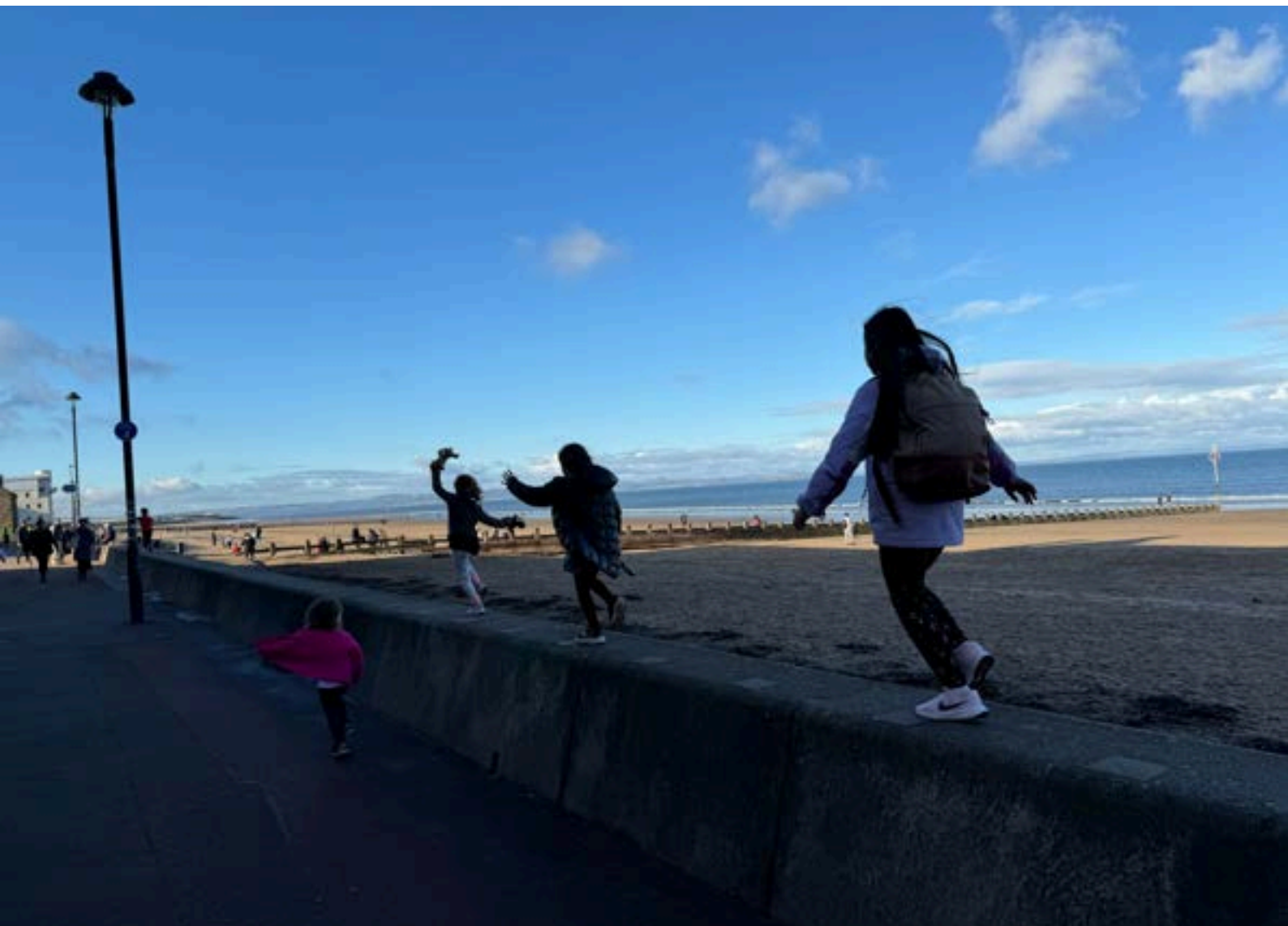




Greece has taken a number of steps to be in line with its international obligations concerning children's rights, based on regional and global frameworks such as the European Child Guarantee and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. The creation of the National Action Plan (NAP) under the European Child Guarantee, which is required by Article 53 of Law 4837/2021, is a noteworthy milestone. International organizations such as UNICEF and national authorities worked together to develop this plan; however, lack of consultation with other NGOs, community-based organizations and municipalities drew criticism. The development of the plan was seemingly carried out as an obligation rather than an ongoing collaborative process with many stakeholders that would capture the needs of children more holistically. The plan still places special attention to populations like disabled children, children from migrant backgrounds and those at risk of poverty and social exclusion. The NAP sets out a plan so children in need have access to basic services like education, healthcare, nutrition, housing, and childcare. The National Center for Social Solidarity (EKKA) under the recently established Ministry of Social Cohesion and Family has been designated as National Coordinator for the European Child Guarantee, but there are persisting gaps surrounding its implementation - particularly for children facing poverty, institutionalization and services provided to children from migrant and refugee backgrounds.

Despite these initiatives, Greece still faces obstacles in realising children's rights. Additionally, although the percentage of children at risk of poverty or social exclusion has decreased, from 37.8% in 2015 to 28.1% in 2023, UNICEF notes that this proportion is still among the highest in the EU. Gaps in financial commitments and the requirement for a complete legal framework that unifies disparate legislation impede the implementation of child centred policy. The CRC Committee has suggested that Greece create a high-level state body to supervise the performance of CRC duties and provide sufficient financial resources to guarantee the sustainability of children's rights projects.

This policy landscape and follow-up funding, or lack of it, reflect real childhood experiences. For example, city centres in cities like Edinburgh and Athens offer different opportunities for outdoor play park experiences and natural open green spaces. Edinburgh presented more immediate access to local green parks across different neighbourhoods, open nature spaces, play parks, although we acknowledge that different children across Scotland would face different experiences and this should be the focus of further research. Central Athens (where some of the children lived) were observed to offer no immediate access to green parks, open spaces and accessible playgrounds in some highly deprived areas. There are of course differences depending on where children live in both countries and who these children are. In Scotland, one parent/carer raised her concern on the availability of play spaces for their children. Emily highlighted that staying in a 'non-pretentious neighbourhood' can be quite tricky, as close to her area, crime rates can be generally higher, especially during the pandemic. This shows that safety can be a factor for parents/carers to visit these spaces with their children across countries depending on where they live. Similarly, community partners emphasised that some of the families that they work with (who can be described as systematically excluded or from marginalised and social & economic disadvantaged backgrounds such as low-income single mothers, low-income single mothers of colour, refugee families and recently arrived migrant families who are new to an area) **'don't go anywhere'**.





Across Greece, from small towns to more affluent urban areas there are public squares which are surrounded by coffee shops and 'tavernas' (restaurants). The 'tavernas' often naturally flow between indoors and outdoors and children play freely with natural resources that they can find in their environments or that they bring with them e.g scooters, footballs. Many of these 'tavernas' which often have their tables and chairs on the squares next to playgrounds, also have a relaxing vibe where children feel free to roam around and play. Of course, this depends on the adults that are in the space too. Majority children in these small areas seem to have a strong presence in public life, as they are known in the community and mingle intergenerationally. On the other hand, some of the migrant and majority children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in central Athens would not really have access to these type of informal 'tavernas' with spaces to play; there are also no green and open play spaces in their local and immediate neighbourhoods/ environments. These children did not have access to any play cafes other than the play space that was offered through the local community organisation which was a lifeline in the local area for these children.

However, as resources are scarce within local NGOs, questions are raised about who is responsible for financing resources for providing quality play and spaces for parents/carers to work and/or relax? The NGO model is based on donations and often there is no choice in the resources that they provide. Funding for families and children is generally scarce on a structural level and not really prioritised. Educators in the Greek NGO were creative but ultimately limited by the resources which in turn limited what they could do, including being true to their own ideas about engaging with children in creative and participatory ways. Structural financial constraints have an impact on children's play experiences. Volunteers that often run sessions in the NGO are often not trained or lack experience and skills of working with children and so there was a big distinction between them and professional practitioners. Volunteers did not feel confident, did not really develop deep rapport with the children and were not knowledgeable/skillful to manage conflicts between the children when these occurred. Further training in child-centred, Froebelian approaches and social justice approaches would greatly benefit the children.



Public spaces funded by governments in central Athens where the NGO was located did not allow for high-quality play for children e.g. playgrounds. Some of the families in Greece mentioned some playgrounds and play and social spaces for families that were considered of 'high-quality', but these were funded by private individuals and organisations, with considerable funding and planning going into their design and provision. However, these spaces were mainly accessible for well-off families and families with access to a car. Thus, there are inequalities in relation to who has access to these spaces in Greece.

In cities like Edinburgh, where the research took place, restaurants and cafes do not tend to have the kind of natural flow between indoors and outdoors (although of course there are exceptions) that was observed in many 'tavernas' that are situated in squares. Signs like 'No Skate boarding/ Bicycle Riding/ Roller Skating' were also observed in outside areas near restaurants and cafes in Scotland.



Picture taken in Scotland in an outside area, surrounded by restaurants and cafes.

Signs reading '**no running**' and '**no food**' were also observed in Edinburgh indoor play cafe spaces, making it particularly difficult for children and young families to socialise and play. Some restaurants have designated play areas like soft play; others have no provision at all, or provide some limited resources (e.g. drawing packs). In general, there is a tendency in Scottish contexts for children to be separated by their families or families to be given designated and separated areas.

In both contexts, even families that had economic resources reported that accessibility and costs restrict access to indoor/outdoor play spaces.

In Greece, as shown in the storybooks, the issue of safety seemed to be very prominent in the children's and families' narratives, especially from families and children that lived in central Athens. The neighbourhoods that children lived in (in central Athens), were economically deprived, densely populated with high buildings, with traffic and no green spaces and pollution. These neighbourhoods also dealt with issues like drug dealing and substance abuse, with needles that could be found lying around streets and playgrounds. Any playground in the near area is often broken or not in use, with sharp and broken exposed materials surrounding it. These circumstances raise serious safety implications for children access to public spaces, restricting them from playing.



Roads, cars and traffic were a theme across childhoods but depended on where the children were based geographically in both countries. For example, in some neighbourhoods in more rural or spaces like small towns, and depending on the families, there seemed to be trust in the community and the child to roam around more freely (with the parent being close by).

A related theme in the Greek context was the prominence of safety in relation to children's bodies. In both contexts, adults would intervene in children's play and this seemed to be particularly prominent in the Greek context, both from adults known to the children (parents/carers or close family members) but also unknown adults (in smaller local and rural communities). Their interventions centred around concerns for children's health, including children dressing appropriately for the weather (especially during winter or spring); 'Βάλε κάτι στο παιδί θα κρυώσει κοπέλα μου' ('Put a cardigan on the child, it will get a cold dear'), or 'Θα πέσεις, πρόσεχέ' ('you will fall be careful'). Such remarks can be interpreted in a number of ways, including as community care, parent policing or dominant ideas about childhood innocence (i.e. the child not knowing what is best for their own bodies). In any case regulation of the children's bodies in the interest of safety was prominent.

The children's storybooks

The storybooks' narrative/storyline (both Scottish and Greek) was created by Alex Bizas; storybook pages from Alex, Ariana, Roujda, Mohammad, the young advisors from NCR and Vasiliki are also presented. The play cafe team co-created the storybook in dialogue with the young advisors so that wider findings from the play cafe project from a diverse range of young children and their families could be presented.



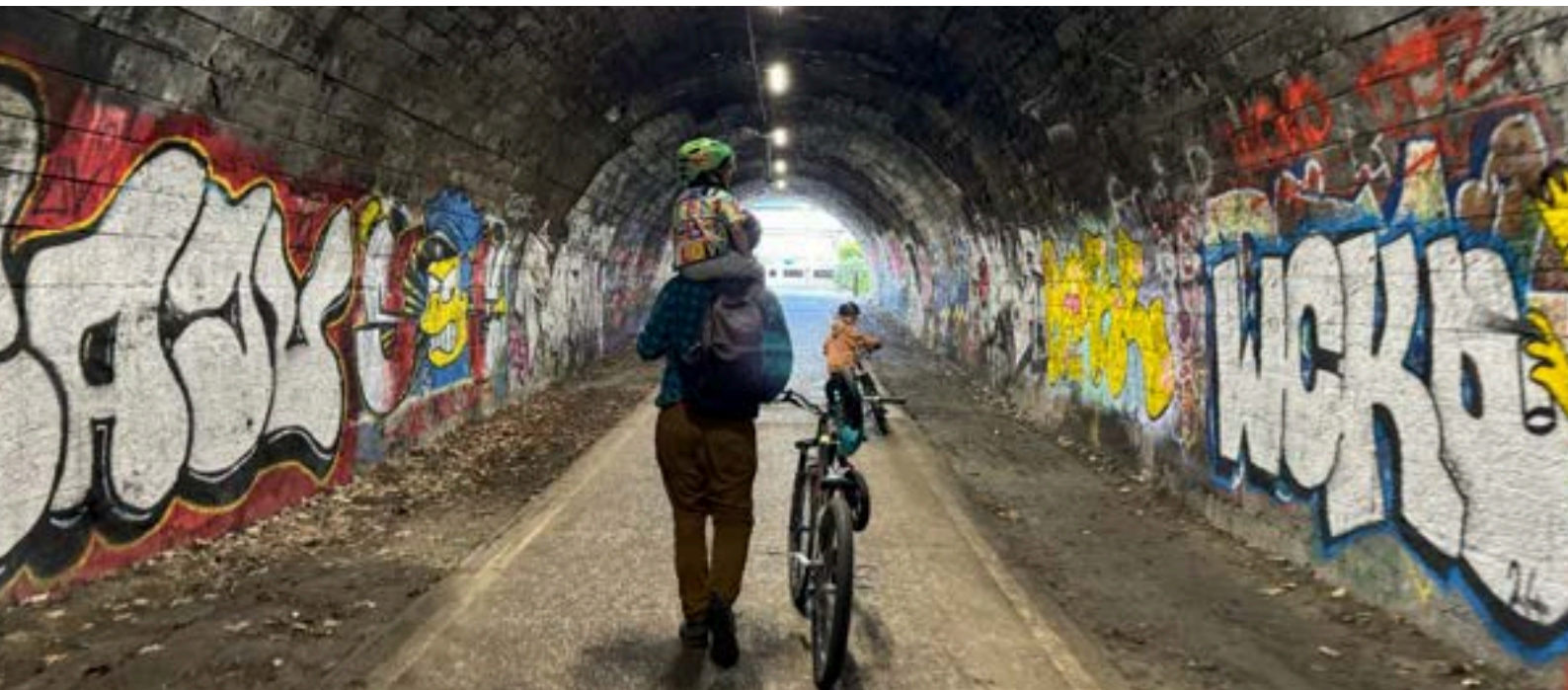
The process of co-creating the storybooks (**storybook-ing**) is part of a forthcoming article. In short, the story starts off by showcasing the young children advisors, and the book goes on to illustrate the barriers and challenges children and families face when playing in public spaces in Greece and Scotland, as they share how they envision their ideal play cafes. The story unfolds in a context where, despite the barriers they face, children come together to co-create a strategy and action plan full of vision, knowledge and ideas about how their ideal play cafes could look like. In the story the children go and hide away from powerful adults who restrict their play, to co-create their fantasy play space. In the scenario of the book powerful adults, which were thought of either as people in government or people with money, try to stop the children from playing. In the end, due to the important work that the children and adults that support them have done, the powerful adults are persuaded to share and invest resources to enable the creation of 'amazing' play cafe spaces.

The children's storybooks also highlighted both similarities and differences across Greece and Scotland.

In the Greek context, children shared stories in the storybook about streets that are very dirty in the centre of Athens and so children can not play outside. Many public spaces are neither open nor safe to play in. Children spoke about how there are no lights at night and children can not play outside. In Greece, especially during the summer, the weather is very hot. Especially due to climate changes, the hot weather has often become unbearable and children often play at night after 6pm when the sun sets (it is too hot to play during the day so children are mainly inside their houses from 11 am - 6 pm during the summer times - this is hard for children that live in the most deprived areas in the centre of Athens). Children also discussed safety and how they do not feel safe in dark streets, saying 'it gets scary and not safe for us to play'. The children and families also mentioned that the streets are full of traffic/cars and that trees make walking on pavements difficult, making it hard for children to play outside and in front of their houses.



In contrast to children in the centre of Athens in more rural spaces or small towns it is often the case that children play on streets and outside of their houses.



Alex's cross-cultural experience...

One of the young advisors, Alex, who had a cross-cultural experience (between Greece and Scotland), felt that in Greece, and more specifically in smaller towns as opposed to Athens, the adults 'let children run in Greece', whereas in his experience he felt that Scotland and in Edinburgh 'they make a lot of signs and children don't always see the signs so they tell them off'. In his experience in Edinburgh there is 'no running place' - no places where he is allowed to run (especially in cafes and restaurants). Alex's experiences of playing in squares while the adults sit in the tavernas and coffee shops to eat and drink, and are close enough but also give children space to play on their own, are something that he values. Alex loves that he can go and have lunch and join his parents and then go back to play: 'You can go and have lunch and go back to play'. The culture of the square is something that children value and perhaps there is a lot to learn from this within the Scottish context too. Children, however, also spoke about the politics of play which perpetuate intersectional inequalities. For example, large groups of older boys often take over the squares by playing football, often hurting unintentionally younger children and girls. Roma children were excluded from play and it was often the adults that perpetuated discriminatory and racist attitudes e.g. by encouraging majority white Greek children not to approach or play with them and to wash their hands when they engaged with them. In smaller towns and rural areas, it is also often the case that stray dogs form packs and often attack or chase people away; some children and families highlighted the severity of the situation as they could not leave their houses without a car, even if the playground was next door, since they had been bitten and attacked by the dogs before. Getting bitten by a dog was something that the children feared and made it hard for families to access public life.



Limitations of this research

Our project worked with a diverse range of children and families from different backgrounds. However, accessing more children from different social demographics would be important. For example, future research could explore children's experiences from different contexts e.g. rural and urban in the Scottish context. Although the rural-urban category was explored in Greece, most of the families in Scotland were based in a Scottish city.

Research play dates sometimes happened within family settings or with individual families and thus we did not always explore children's peer dynamics with all families, depending on their choice of play date and the setting. Groups of families that joined our research play dates were interesting to explore in relation to peer dynamics and play cafe politics.

Because we were guided by the families and children about how many research play dates we organised, there were some families that due to being very busy (three families out of the 42) were only able to meet the researcher once or twice, whereas other families met with us 7-9 times (the range was between 3-9 visits). This introduces some differentiation between the depth of work across the families; however, we wanted to respect the families' decisions and were very grateful of any time together. Families that were close to us either through an organisation that we worked within or were connected too, or through personal contacts, were the families that we felt we bonded more and were thus able to engage deeply with their life and stories.

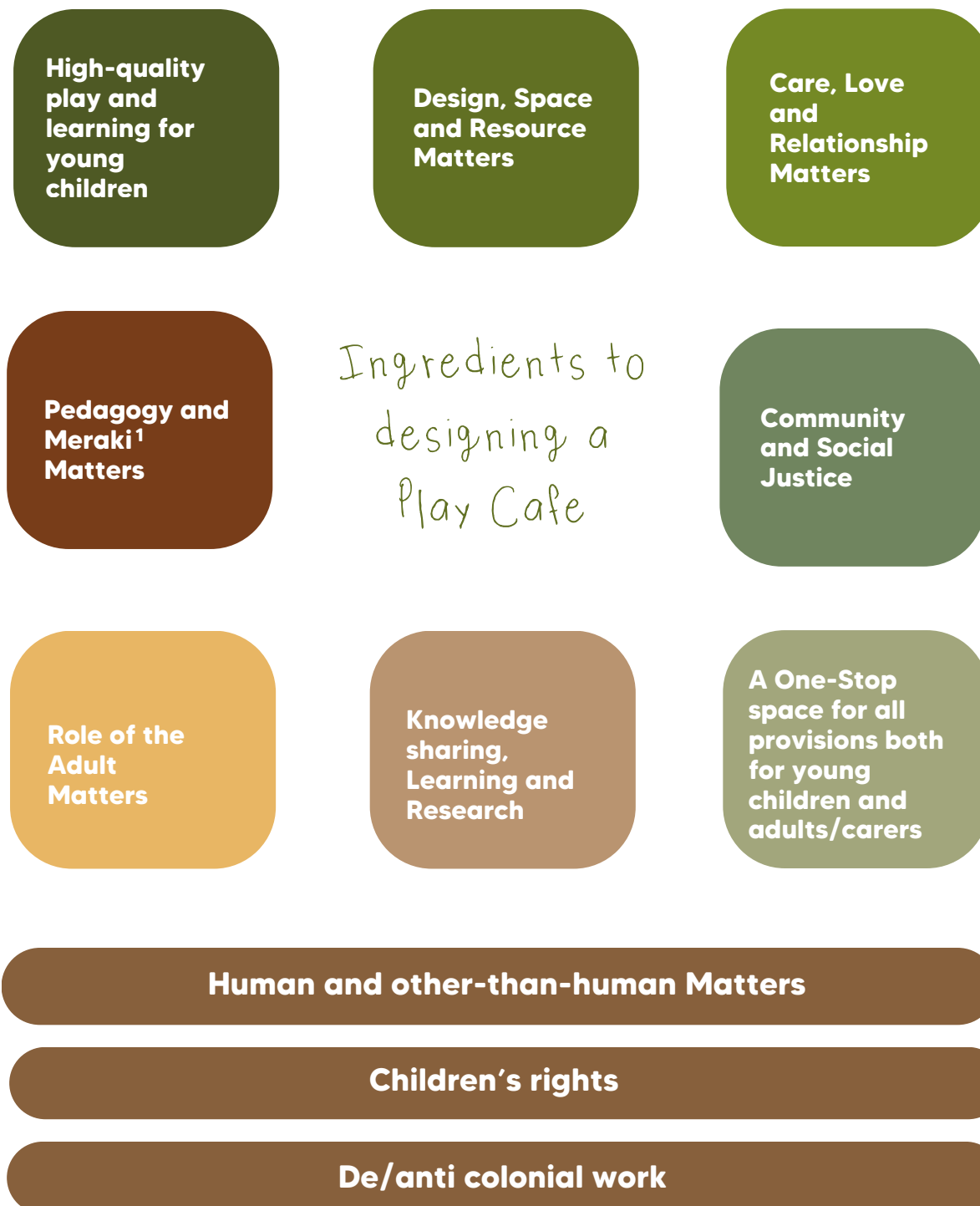
Lastly, children in this research were always with their parents. This made sense to the project as play cafes are intergenerational places. However, this also meant that sometimes parents/carers would take over during the research process or interfere in their children's response (or non verbal response to a potential question or invitation) or play choice. Of course, this depended on the child and the family dynamics, with other children 'leading' the way. Future work could also focus on younger ages including more babies and their play cafe stories.

Ingredients to designing Play Cafes

Inspired by Froebelian principles

As part of our research, our community-based and co-design initiatives, children and parents/carers shared with us what matters when we create ideal social and play spaces for them. We have named these **the ingredients to designing a Play Cafe**.

For further details about this please see our Reflective resource which takes you through the Ingredients to designing a Play Cafe.



¹ Inspired by Konstantina Papaspyropoulou

The Ingredients for Designing Play Cafes inspired by Froebelian Principles are based on children, families and practitioners' perspectives. Across Scotland and Greece, there are many commonalities about what children shared as important for them, including: places that inspire and support imaginative play, food making, real and imaginative cooking and sharing, play and art experiences like painting, dancing, singing, creating their own artifacts, building and creating from everyday materials, blocks, and woodcrafting, music and others; spaces that are designed carefully and with intention to enable accessibility, deep play, creativity and freedom to express in multimodal ways; spaces that they can play on their, with peers and intergenerationally; spaces where it is OK to get 'messy' (and that have second hand clothes and shoe alternatives in the space) and at the same time look after each other and be mindful and caring of the space and resources; spaces that allow, importantly, free play alongside collaboration with adults who are sensitive guides and facilitators to support and extend play.



The following ingredients were further identified as important across Scotland and Greece:

- knowledgeable adults
- design and resources/materials that enable children to be creative, engaged in enriching and deep play
- space for both high energy experiences, like running, and also smaller and more quiet spaces
- natural flow between indoors and outdoors,
- feelings of belonging, togetherness and respect
- recognition of power disparities and inequalities that need to be challenged,
- children's rights,
- pedagogy,
- interconnections and interdependency between children, adults, the environment and the world
- social justice and sustainability,
- intergenerational informal co-existence for leisure, learning, working and play,
- food as a factor of coming together, sharing knowledge,
- food as memory, culture and identity, as love, affection and social justice, and
- free access.



Lastly, the research highlighted as important spaces, spaces that have diverse resources, staff, and food options, as well as approaches that respect and realise children's rights to provision, participation and protection.

What is different across the two countries is the context in which these ingredients come to life and what they mean practically for different communities. For example, what food will be created together will perhaps be different, different rhythms due to the weather and opening times may vary across the different countries, music will also be country specific as will the resources that are in the play space (e.g. culturally relevant). Differences in relation to the role of family life and community could shape the everyday happenings of the play cafe. **Bringing these ingredients to life, through memories, ancestral and contemporary knowledges, traditions and context specific knowledges, histories and cultures. Honouring and elevating local practices is important and what is meaningful in the specific local contexts.** Interestingly, in the Greek storybook the children who were coming from very disadvantaged backgrounds wanted to include in the play cafes, expensive cars and access to swimming pools. The importance of materials and the status that you get from certain material is important for children to re-imagine different worlds where they have access to resources they currently do not have access to. The importance of joy and happiness and what this would mean for different communities is also context specific, for example dance and music may be important for some communities and not for others. Also, the ways in which communities across countries defined 'high-quality' are country-specific; although there may be many similarities, there are also differences that will inform the play cafe doings (e.g what the space would look like and what experiences would take place within them).



Differences and similarities across our pop up play cafes inspired by Froebelian Principles



Across the pop-up play cafes that were carried out in both Scotland (We Play Festival) and Greece, multiple similarities and differences were observed. Both pop-up play cafes portrayed an embodied experience of connectedness and togetherness with children, families and the community. This led to rich interactions and engagement across intergenerational groups in the play cafe spaces. At the same time, Scottish and Greek pop-up play cafes also displayed several respective differences.

In Scotland, collaborating with Froebelian Futures meant that we had access to amazing Community Playthings resources/equipment as well as access to ready-made and beautiful sets for the We Play Festival and to amazing Froebelian trained practitioners (e.g. Simon Bateson, Lian Higgins, Emma Clarkson, Carol Cerdan, Rebecca Innes and many more). Collaborating with a range of community organisations and groups in the Scottish context was enabled by the We Play Festival.

Due to the nature of the pop-up play cafe in Greece and the lack of financial resources, the Greek play cafe team did not have a readily available set of play resources. This encouraged a collective effort from local practitioners, communities, the Network for Children's Rights, researchers and children to come together and curate two pop-up play cafes that provided the same warm, loving and enriching experience, within a more organic and authentic way in terms of its resources and community based co-design interactions. Greek practitioners were actively involved in the co-design and the practice of the playcafes. Eftychia-Afroditi Panagopoulou, for example, crafted hand-made mud kitchens, hand-made wooden water play trays, hand-made playdough stamps, self-made wooden blocks, hand-made wooden peg dolls representing different skin tones and a range of recycled everyday play materials in order to equip the two pop-up play cafes in Greece .



Konstantina Papaspyropoulou crafted hand-made sewing kits, inspired the team towards slow pedagogies and suggested the word and practice of 'meraki' as a key pedagogical practice. Vasiliki Bourdouvali brought in her own weaving kits and made her own Greek sequence books—simple, visual guides designed to provoke curiosity to children to navigate different play experiences independently. These books included: e.g. 'how to make the colour yellow' etc, 'how to make fruit with chocolate and chocolate crispies', 'how to bath a baby', 'how to make fresh orange juice' and basic origami crafts inspired by local Greek culture. Some of these booklets were inspired by booklets created by Cowgate Under Fives in Edinburgh.



Ioanna Moschouri shared her mobile puppet collection, bringing recycled materials so that children could create their own puppets and experiment with animating them



Aggeliki and the team visited local second hand markets and also shared resources from the Network for Children's Rights.



Kristina created heuristic treasure baskets, brought in recycled or everyday resources from home, second-hand child-size chairs and tables, the fairy lights and some play and art resources from Scotland. Iffah and Reyhaneh worked closely with the practitioners across both play cafes in Greece and Scotland where they helped with setting up the pop-up play cafes, engaging in the different elements of the play cafes. For example, Iffah facilitated the crispy chocolate making experience, worked with the children as an illustrator, co-creating the storybooks and Reyhaneh facilitated the art and creative painting experiences.



All practitioners also organically 'flew' across the different experiences offering 'freedom with guidance'. Artemis Stratiki and Danae Karagianni offered musical gatherings in Greece and Emma Clarkson, Ioanna Tsimikou and Petros Tsaftaridis in Scotland.



As a result, this brought together a natural and deep collaborative experience between children, families and communities across the project. The interactions that were shared across multi-language spaces were also encouraged, promoting togetherness despite the differences that were faced.



Research Question 3

How can we co-design with children, families and practitioners Froebelian play cafes which are inclusive for all?

Co-designing Froebelian play cafes that are inclusive for all requires a genuinely collaborative, participatory approach where children, families, and practitioners are seen as experts of their own experiences. **Our Being, Learning, Sharing, Doing Praxis is an attempt to provide the first conceptual model of how co-led and co-created research praxis can be operationalised with young children and their communities.** This means creating space for open dialogue, listening deeply (active listening) to children's ideas, valuing their creativity, and embedding their suggestions into design decisions, from the layout and materials to the types of play offered. Families, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, need to be engaged in ways that acknowledge barriers such as language, time, cost and cultural differences. Power dynamics, intersectional inequalities, dominant perspectives and white hegemonic practices are present and these need to be acknowledged and challenged. Practitioners (alongside parents and children) bring vital insights about pedagogical practices, helping to ensure that play remains open-ended, relational, and connected to nature and the real world, in line with Froebelian principles.

By embracing co-design as an ongoing process rather than a one-time consultation, we can shape play cafes that reflect diverse lived experiences and foster community, joy and belonging for all. Critically applying Froebelian principles according to parents, practitioners and community partners set the foundations for high quality play and social spaces for families in public and community spaces. However, applying Froebelian principles in everyday public life is not a 'copy and paste' approach, it needs to be culturally and contextually specific and responsive, co-designed with communities of practice.

As part of our work in collaboration with Greek practitioners we co-created Play Cafe Principles inspired by Froebelian principles. In this project Kristina and Effie led on drafting play cafe principles based on our work (research-practice), engaging the whole team across Scotland and Greece. The principles were also based on the research findings and on children's and families lived experiences and perspectives.

You can find these in the following page:

Froebelian Principles

The importance of play

Play is a right that needs to be safeguarded. Play is innate and is very important for both children and adults as it connects, discovers, experiments, learns, relaxes, creates commons. Play can be serious business and fun. We recognise that play can also be a hurtful/toxic experience for children and this needs to be acknowledged and changed. Through play children understand and experience the world and others.

The importance of childhood and children's rights

Childhood is important both in the present and for the future. It is not just a preparation for the next stage in life, however experiences in childhoods also have longer term impacts.

Children have rights to protection, participation and provision that need to be protected, safeguarded and materialised.

Free play, Creativity and Freedom of expression

Free play, self-directed and child-community centred play is so important for children's and adults' learning, creativity and being. Creativity and freedom to express ideas, emotions, feelings and experiences through multimodal ways enables children and adults to express themselves in different ways. Through this children and adults express their 'inner outer and their outer inner'

Autonomy and Living together Harmoniously

Autonomy and interdependence in children's play and social experiences are important. Being able to participate and be part of larger communities through community organisations, civil society, families and friends is also important. Everything in the world is connected, entangled and interdependent. Both children and adults are relational and interdependent and seek to live together in harmonious, respectful and collective co-existence. The play cafe is a one stop space for both children and adults/carers to play, learn, enjoy, relax, get support. A space that also enables parents/carers to co-work whilst the child plays.

Attunement with nature and Sustainability

Being attuned with nature and paying attention to the world and things around us, ensuring that our actions create a sustainable impact both for the now and for the future.

Love, Care and Meraki

An ethics and praxis of love and radical care of both self, others and the wider world, is key for living well, for learning and emancipation. Pedagogy that is guided by professional love, care and meraki provides children with transformational, liberatory, curious and inspiring experiences.

Knowledges, Embodied, Lived Experiences and Critical Reflexivity

All knowledges are valued and respected, academic, practice-based and embodied & lived knowledges. The play cafe space encourages continuous critical reflexivity and lifelong learning developments. Checking our biases and prejudices personally and collectively and taking action is essential. The play cafe values co-created knowledge towards more equitable and sustainable livelihoods.

Social Justice, Anti-discrimination, Anti-racism and Anti-colonial

Play cafe spaces are spaces that practice social justice principles, anti-discrimination, anti-racism and anti-colonial practices. This means going beyond celebrating diversity and seeking 'inclusion', to radical transformation and equitable and liberatory processes, practices, structures and experiences. Social justice principles acknowledge interconnected and entangled common worlds, inequities and seek to challenge and remove these. Social justice approaches strive towards empathy, respect, solidarity and emancipation/liberation.

Joy and hope

Joy and hope are important for living well, resisting hardships, and imagining better futures.

A pedagogy that is attuned to the different rhythms of childhoods. Encouraging the best play experiences through participative approaches, mutual collaboration and understanding of children's and families' lived experiences, interests, needs, their histories and cultures.

Participatory pedagogies

Pedagogies that are attuned to children's rhythms

Pedagogies of the commons

A slow approach that places children and their communities at the heart of practice. Providing spaces, processes and resources that enable children and their communities to actively co-create, design and research equitable, sustainable and accessible spaces and experiences in their communities

Community, families, children, parents, carers, policymakers and stakeholders working together towards a collective and shared approach in providing the best play and social experiences to children and families, sharing ideas and resources in an equitable, participatory and democratic way.

We would encourage Play Cafe teams when they curate play cafes in different neighbourhoods, settings and contexts to spend considerable time co-creating their Play Cafe principles, involving a range of different perspectives (adults and children) and communities. It took our team nearly a year to agree on the above and we acknowledge the continuous dynamic, reflective and responsive nature of coming back to these and keeping them 'alive', meaningful and relevant.



As part of the research and its findings, we have put together ingredients to designing play cafes inspired by Froebelian principles with the aspiration to make 'amazing' and socially just play cafe spaces. This is an alternative, creative and more practical way to share our main findings about what children, families and practitioners valued as significant elements when we co-design high quality play cafes. The ingredients are based on key findings from more than 400 participants and indepth work with families, children and practitioners across nearly three years (see details about our ethnographic and participatory praxis).

A reflective resource has been created which goes through each interconnected ingredient. This reflective resource also responds to research questions 2 and 3. You can find the reflective resource here:



←
Designing a Play
Cafe:
Reflective Resource

Engagement, Outputs and Impact

Engagement and Impact

The Play Cafe Project has had considerable impact and generated engagement at different levels and communities throughout the research study from conversations with children, families, carers, community organisations and even government representatives. This can be observed throughout the multiple Pop-up play cafes that were organised, in partnership with Froebelian futures and The University of Edinburgh. The Play Cafe project has also further organised and arranged two pop-up play cafes in Athens, Greece in 2024.

All participants highlighted the positive difference the We Play Festival and pop-up play cafes made to them as an experience. It was described by parents/carers as a 'magical place' and an 'oasis' and was considered as a high-quality play and social space which would enhance quality of life for residents and create a more vibrant and thriving environment for the children.



The Pop-up Play Cafes, according to participants was not only important as a direct experience but it has had ongoing effects and impactful activity traversing the immediate effect of the Play Cafe in the specific time and space.

Although it is hard to evidence the exact extent and sustainability of the impact of the project, the examples mentioned by participants demonstrate impact in different scales:

Small scale

Small scale impact was mentioned in home settings and attitudes, with parents saying that the Pop-Up Play Cafes inspired them to change the way their home space is organised and the resources they provide to their children by incorporating more open ended, natural materials into their children's play experiences at home. Parents/carers also mentioned that the Play Cafe had inspired them to do more cooking with their children at home.

'It encouraged me to think about more open ended and just giving having a variety of things out and seeing what he does with it rather than saying these are blocks for doing X'

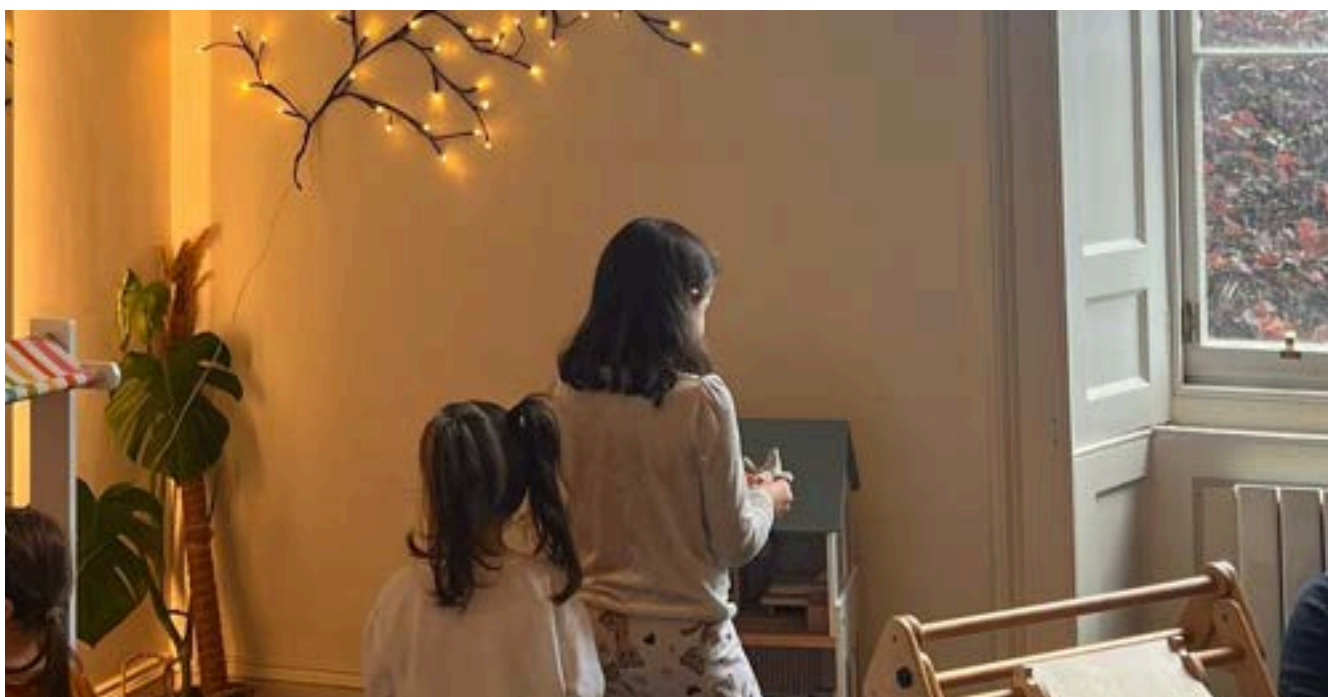
Medium scale

Medium scale impact was observed with partners like Kin Collective, receiving funding to create their own pop up play based on Froebelian principles for their communities,



Large scale

A mother created a new charity ([WorkPlusPlay_Hub](#)) with a mission to give parents the flexibility to work without compromising family time by developing the idea of a co-working and play space for parents/carers and children inspired by the We Play Festival and our Pop-up Play Cafe, with plans to base the play space on the Play Cafes inspired by Froebelian principles. There is additionally further work with community partners which is underway (by applying for funds) in Scotland (e.g. Heart of Newhaven) to create the first permanent Play Cafe based on Froebelian principles. Kristina is also continuing to work with practitioners and community partners in Greece to co-develop pop up Play Cafes in the Greek context and to share knowledge about the Play Cafe principles based on Froebelian pedagogy and what would this mean in how these travel in different contexts. Lastly, there is the development of an international play cafe network based on our pop-up Play Cafe work to continue to share knowledge, raise awareness and offer play cafe experiences, talks, gatherings and embodied workshops.



Play cafe gathering at Little Plaza

Play Cafes in Greece

Pop Up Play Cafe

21 Ιουνίου 2024
 δωρεάν συμμετοχή για παιδιά ηλικίας 0-7 ετών
 Αθήνα

"Τα παιχνίδια είναι η υγιεινότερη έκφραση της ανθρώπινης ανάπτυξης στην παιδική ηλικία, αφού είναι η μόνη ελεύθερη έκφραση της παιδικής ψυχής."
 Ηλίας Φραγκός, Έκδοτος at Παιδαγωγικό Παιδαγωγικό Ινστιτούτο

Τρεις λειτουργίες του play café:
 Παιχνίδια
 11 Ιουνίου 2024
 10:00 - 12:00

Ένα υπέροχο, δωρεάν pop - up play café για παιδιά ηλικίας 0-7 ετών και τις οικογένειές τους στο **Peposee Garden**

Σας περιμένουμε για ένα βρασιερό πρόγραμμα και παιχνίδια και πολλές παιχνιδο-επιχειρήσεις για παιδιά διαφορετικών προσχημάτων ηλικίας - με ειδικότητες που θα σας βοηθήσουν να ενισχύσετε τη γενική ανάπτυξή τους και το θετικό κλίμα τους παιδιών σας μέσα από τα παιχνίδια, σε ένα όμορφο, φιλικό περιβάλλον.

Κατασκευές, αφήματα, καλλυπνιστικά παιχνίδια, μηχανικά παιχνίδια, βόλυν και μεταφράσεις, κηλίδες, ζωγραφική, είναι κάποιες από τις δράσεις που θα σχεδιαστούν για τα παιδιά σε συνεργασία με εσάς.

(δωρεάν είναι δωρεάν υγιεινά εσπερίδα, καθώς και προγράμματα: Όποιος επιθυμεί μπορεί να φέρει τα δικά του φαγητά και ποτά).

Δέληση συμμετεχόντων

Δεν είναι απαραίτητη η εγγραφή μας για τη συμμετοχή σας, αλλά θα ήταν πολύ βοηθητική για την αποτελεσματικότερη οργάνωση του χώρου. Αν έχετε λοιπόν, λίγο χρόνο μπορείτε να επιβεβαιώσετε την συμμετοχή σας, επικοινωνώντας μαζί μας στο email a.dimitou@pdp.gr.

The Play Café Project, University of Edinburgh
 Δωρεάν για το Παιδαγωγικό Παιδαγωγικό Ινστιτούτο
 Μια επιχείρηση χρηματοδοτούμενη από το Παιδαγωγικό Παιδαγωγικό Ινστιτούτο www.ppidi.gov.gr

21st June & 19th October 2025

Over **35** families



Embodied workshop
for practitioners and
parents: Free play

19th October 2025

Over **70**
practitioners



Play Cafes in Scotland



we play festival

21st September 2023 -
1st October 2023

Over **1500**

individuals



Play Cafe Gathering
25th May 2025

All

children & families
from the Play Cafe
Project

**Play Cafe
Gathering** 
at Little Plaza
24 Haddington Pl, Edinburgh EH7
4NF, United Kingdom



Celebrate with us in a beautiful play cafe at Little Plaza combined with art experiences, painting, live guitar music, weaving, making your own play dough, role play, chocolate crispie making and more!

Light snacks, tea, coffee and juice are available for everyone!

Come to collect your gift voucher and the Play Cafe Storybooks!
Our storybook illustrator Ifrah Humaira will be there too!



Play cafe gathering at Little Plaza

One of the largest movements that The Play Cafe Project organised was the **We Play Festival** held from the 21st of September 2023 - 1st October 2023 at the Scottish Storytelling Centre, in collaboration with the University of Edinburgh, Froebelian Futures and the Scottish Storytelling Centre, supported by a host of other partners.

For a full list see [here](#)

Alongside the We Play Festival's pop up Play Cafe there were a range of events: talks, workshops, storytelling, well-being activities, music and film. A long week of events for children, families, academics, practitioners and the wider community to be together and share knowledge.

We Play Festival brought more than 1500 families and children around Edinburgh to attend and participate throughout the week. Over **30** organisations, researchers, practitioners, artists, directors and individuals across disciplines and research interests gathered to share their knowledge, research and experiences with both academics and non-academics creating a connected and embodied experience through the Play Cafe initiative. We really appreciated the presence of Ms Natalie Don, Minister of Children, Young People and the Promise and the Department of the ministry together with the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland, Marguerite Hunter Blair (Chief Executive of Play Scotland and Theresa Casey (writer on play and children's rights) to be part of a panel discussion on the rights of a child.



In the picture - Observatory of Children's Human Rights Scotland and chaired by Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland Nicola Killean, Theresa Casey (writer on play and children's rights, and past-President of the International Play Association), Marguerite Hunter Blair (Chief Executive of Play Scotland) and Natalie Don MSP, the Minister for Children, Young People and Keeping the Promise.

Multimodal Outputs

Co-creating Storybooks with Children Advisors

As part of our multimodal research outputs, the project aims to elevate children's perspectives in their own rights, hence initiating the co-creation and co-designing of our Storybook-ing process. In collaboration with the children advisors and participants, we have created illustrated children's storybooks which illustrate, portray, witness and tell the story of the children advisors throughout the research project. The storybook is based on ethnographic fieldwork findings (such as direct quotes, experiences and pictures that represent the children's 'real life' experiences). Following the young children's advisors suggestion, we also included in the storybooks drama, creative writing and fantasy (e.g. the baddies trying to find the children) as a way to demonstrate power disparities and inequalities that the children feel. This Storybook was translated into four different languages (English, Greek, Farsi and Arabic) - a common list of language used and practiced among our Children advisors and their families. Each family received 2 storybooks (1 based in Scotland and 1 based in Greece).



Scottish Context

We have it in 4 different languages

- Greek
- Farsi
- Arabic



Greek Context

We have it in 4 different languages

- Greek
- Farsi
- Arabic



Podcast Channel

The Play Cafe Project has co-created with our children's advisors additional research outputs by starting a Play Cafe Podcast. Initiated by one of our Research Advisors in Scotland, this podcast aims to be a platform filled with the 'voices' of children and the community discussing, contributing and elaborating on their idea of play, public-life, children's rights and research. It is an informal platform for conversations to flow informally and naturally in multiple, various and diverse languages. We have published our first podcast storytelling our experiences of Co-curating Play Cafes in Greece.



Podcast link [here](#)



Instagram Channel



We have also successfully created an online presence through our Social Media account, [Instagram](#), with over 300 followers, by providing and sharing an authentic and organic experience of The Play Cafe Project (e.g. behind the scenes, the process of our work, the outputs and more). Our 'followers', which are mainly families, communities and organisations who are interested in our work, reacts positively towards our posts and interactions and would love to see a sustainable planning of this movement.

Youtube Channel



Magazine



Co-curating Play Cafes in Greece

<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/playcafe/wp-content/uploads/sites/10077/2024/05/Co-curating-Play-Cafes-In-Greece.pdf>



E-Book



Greek Froebelian Network:

Critical Froebelian Encounters in Greece

Reflective Resource

Designing a Play Cafe: Inspired by Froebelian Principles

Reflective Resource for Practitioners, Community groups, Businesses and Parents



Design Proposal

Design proposal to The Moray House School of Education & Sports @ University of Edinburgh

A **design proposal** for a family space at Old Nursery in MHSES at the University of Edinburgh. This proposal is designed by the members of the community and young children and suits their needs and curiosities. A space that is culturally relevant and responsive.

By Kristina Konstantoni and Reyhaneh Mozaffar
Design of brief: Iffah Humaira Eri Tantawi



Implications for policy and practice

Our research seeks to challenge traditional understandings of young children as incompetent and innocent, and to make visible alternative narratives of young children as capable, creative, curious, rich in experiences and knowledge, caring and activists. This included a diversity of childhoods across intersections of age, class, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, gender, geography, cultures and others. The Play Cafe project aims to dive into co-designing and co-creating play spaces and provisions with young children, enabling opportunities for child-community led and participative approaches to research and to including children in day-to-day decision-making processes. In line with the UNCRC (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024, **this approach suggests implications for policymakers and practitioners to recognise Play Cafes as alternative modules of early learning and childcare provisions, empowering children’s perspectives and encourages political and social change.**

Future directions and sustainability of the play cafe project

The Play Cafe Project has shown visible impact towards the community and organisation that we have worked with throughout the last few years. Feedback was provided on the necessity and need to have permanent Play Cafe Provisions set up in different communities.

The evidence is very clear from our work that **high-quality social and play spaces are scarce**. Our future vision is to create **more permanent free high-quality Play Cafe spaces** for families with young children across diverse communities. This vision is rooted in respect for human rights, children’s rights and social justice, values shared by the project and the Scottish Government, as exemplified by its policy priorities.

We were approached by a few community organisations that we have worked with as well as Charity Organisations on potential future collaborations to implement the Play Cafes into their spaces for sustainability.

Kristina Konstantoni has been **awarded funding by the Scottish Funding Council** to support a mentor engagement for The Play Cafe Project

(Niall Shannon the founder and director of Barouder Consultancy)



Play Cafes could provide potential collaborations between universities (e.g. University of Edinburgh), private sector organizations and businesses, community organisations (e.g. The Heart of Newhaven Community, Homestart Edinburgh, Multi-Cultural Family Base, etc.) research communities, and the government. This can be seen through our recent **We Play Festival**, which brought together (more than 1500) young children, families, researchers, children’s rights activists, organizations and communities together to share and exchange knowledge.



In light of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) Act 2024, there is a need to take action in safeguarding and materializing children’s rights. Play in public spaces and communities further constitutes a key priority for the Scottish Government (Play Scotland 2012; Play Scotland 2024) as play is fundamental for children’s health and well-being, improves attainment and reduces inequality (Play Scotland 2022). **Although there is a lot to celebrate about Scotland’s world-leading policy framework for play, there is still ‘a lot of work to do and many challenges to overcome to deliver’ this vision for all children** (Play Scotland 2022). Through this project and guided by the young children, their families and their communities from various backgrounds, we are hoping to **critically rethink and disrupt current White Western ideals about what quality, equitable play spaces mean**. In order to make Scotland the best place for children to grow up in, it is **imperative to decolonise our minds, processes and practices in early childhood and play**.

The importance of creating equitable and accessible high-quality play spaces for young children would play a significant role in integrating children's rights into Scotland's policy and practice. Our findings are clear; there is an urgent need for communities to gain access to these forms of play spaces to support children's play and learning, and the well-being of the community.



Sustainability of the Play Cafes inspired by Froebelian Principles

There were suggestions on integrating the pop-up play cafes into community organisations and community places such as libraries, as well as run-down or vacant shops and spaces in communities. By providing guides about high quality play cafe resources and equipments, ongoing training about the play cafe's principles and translating them into practice could see play cafes emerging in different areas and venues.

While there is huge discussion on sustaining the play cafe and integrating it into the community, there is also a huge concern around the lack of funding availability for high quality play cafes. Practitioners and community organisations highlight the importance of sustained investment and financial support to be able to set up, sustain and maintain the quality and value behind the pop-up play cafe.



This includes maintaining the quality of resources available at the play cafe. There is the issue of how the play equipments and resources available at the play cafe can be used and abused by users of the community and that changes would be required along the way. These considerations require a fixed and consistent amount of investment and financial support which could maintain the quality and value of the pop-up play cafe.

Many families and practitioners mentioned the importance of working with communities. The involvement of community organisations during our pop-up play cafes has generated highly positive response in children and families attending the play cafe. Therefore, this shows how important key connections are in continuing this play space for children in this way.

The idea of integrating parts of the play cafe into local community organisations was also suggested, to continue the practice of the pop-up play cafe.

Expanding the application of play cafes inspired by Froebelian principles across neighbourhoods and contexts is the work that we are doing now.

Our previous play cafe work found that businesses and communities want to create and embed play cafes in their practices to provide accessible high-quality play, social and care experiences for young children and their families to live well, learn, play and thrive. However, businesses and communities need support to do this.

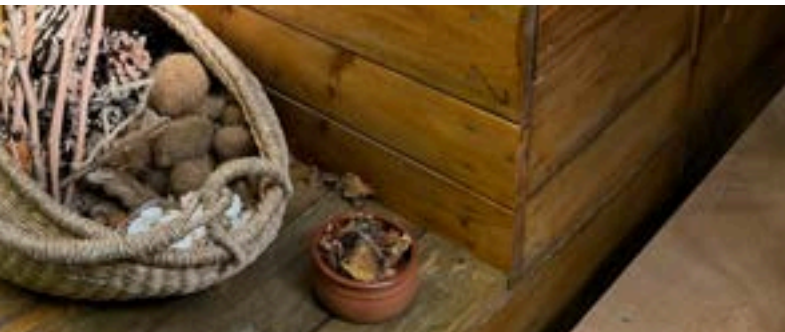
Finally, the use of social media accounts to promote and keep the community well-informed of the pop-up play cafes were suggested as one of the many ways to sustain the play cafe. Being visible on social media such as Instagram could provide the community with well-updated news and information on the play cafe, such as the Froebelian principles, the resources, the objectives and the goals of the play cafe. Visualisation through pictures and videos would act as invitations and provocations to community members to explore new spaces.



We propose the below actions:



2. Investment in ongoing research funds to identify best practices of sustainable social enterprise business models, scaling up models for the creation of additional permanent Play Cafes across Scotland.



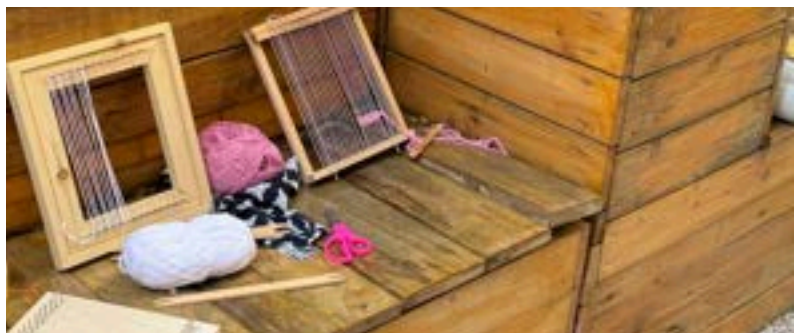
4. Investment in creating training packages, guides on how to set up play cafes inspired by Play Cafe principles



1. Allocation of funding for the creation of long-term (3-5 years) pilot Play Cafe(s), based on the findings of this project.



3. Investment in funding for research including prospective doctoral students and post-doctoral researchers to provide longitudinal research studies and evidence of the short-, mid- and long-term impact of Play Cafes. The research produced will add significant knowledge to the Play Cafe literature and literature linked to play in public and semi-public spaces and life.



5. Investment in opportunities for training in early childhood and human rights/children's rights, anti-racism, decolonial and child-community centred approaches in public/semi-public play spaces

Important critical and ethical thoughts about Play cafes inspired by Froebelian principles

Play Cafes inspired by Froebelian principles have the intention of being viewed as high quality community resources which would be accessible for all, ideally for free. Some critical thoughts and discussions emerged from two participants about whether these type of wooden materials represent a white middle class ideal and whether these play spaces would actually not be meaningful or would create discomfort or feelings of not belonging for some families from marginalised backgrounds like for poor families. Similar discussions have emerged in early childhood academic discussions, see for example the recent special issue by Jayne Osgood and colleagues 'Bewildering early childhood 'pioneers' (Osgood et al., 2024)

The potential perpetuation of white European supremacist views through Froebelian Play Cafes needs to be recognised, addressed and challenged. First future Play Cafes inspired by Froebelian principles need to be context and culturally specific and responsive; this means that they are not a 'copy and paste' (Konstantoni et al., forthcoming) approach. There are some common principles like for example respecting children and their rights, the importance of self-directed, child-community centred and free play, the importance of community and unity, relationships and nature which also need to be revisited in each country and context so that they make sense to the specific community. Drawing on local/national contexts in relation to local traditions, knowledges and being in dialogue with Froebelian principles would be important. Participants highlighted that rather than not offering such high-quality Play Cafe spaces because of concerns that they may not be relevant for families that are less affluent, the most important element is to build strong community links of trust with families, where families feel welcome, safe and supported which would then bring them into the play space. Working with communities and co-designing Play Cafes according to needs, interests, cultures, geographies is very important. In our reflective resource we discuss the ingredients of designing Play Cafes and the important role of antiracism, anti-discrimination and de/anti-colonial practice (Konstantoni et al., 2024).



Play Cafes are not spaces where children spend time away from their families like in most common early learning and childcare spaces (although parents/carers did highlight that they would value opportunities for short 'drop offs' with knowledgeable and skillful practitioners looking after their children so that they can go to the doctor or complete life admin or go shopping). This raises particular kinds of opportunities and challenges of co-existence in this social and play space. For example, some parents/carers found it hard to not intervene in children's play or not direct children's play, translating Froebelian principles into practice and changing attitudes is something that takes time through constant critical reflexive practice and ongoing continuous learning development. However, images of parents as not knowing or as negative (not knowing best) were expressed. This raises a really significant point about the balancing act between sharing knowledge and learning from parents/carers. There was also some judgement expressed about particularly disadvantaged families not showing the most positive models of parenting. For example, practitioners noticed that parents/carers would sometimes intervene in children's play, or sometimes take over 'fill in words' or would be risk averse whereas practitioners would counteract this by promoting children's rights, child-led play, allowing risks and others.



Understanding the various nuances and intersectional conceptualisations around 'high quality' play is a complex practice as it evolves over time (Nxumalo, 2019; Viruru, 2001) and it also needs to be decolonised (Nxumalo, 2019) by critically reflecting on and disrupting the dominance of universalist, White Western and Eurocentric ideals (Sarma, 2023; Nxumalo, 2019; Viruru, 2001; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2014).

Decolonisation is a 'critical analysis of how colonial forms of knowledge, pedagogical strategies and research methodologies...have shaped what we know, what we recognise and how we reward such knowledge accordingly' (Arshad, 2020). It is important to acknowledge 'the effects of colonialism, racism and epistemicide (the killing of knowledge systems)', and seek 'to remove those influences' (Arshad, 2021).

For the Play Cafe project and the creation of Froebelian Play Cafes in public life, Konstantoni et al (2024: 28) share some key questions which could guide our thoughts and praxis:

- How do we decolonise Froebelian early childhood pedagogical practices? Can we?
- How can we offer high quality play spaces and at the same time disrupt the use of a universal checklist (which is influenced by white Euro-centric Western practices) (Viruru, 2001; Nxumalo, 2019; Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2014) in creating existing play spaces for children?
- Through this project, how are we going to learn from those who have been engaging in this work of decolonisation (within and beyond early childhood), to decolonise our own minds, processes and practices? What does this mean practically?



Konstantoni et al. (2024: 29) continue by sharing some reflective thoughts about how to take our Play Cafe work forward:

‘...continue to learn and unlearn through critical reflexivity and relational ethics/power, by continuous engagement with work from communities of colour and indigenous knowledges and with a range of families from Greece and Scotland to understand intersectional embodied knowledges, local cultures and a range of life stories (...). We would like to acknowledge that on the one hand there is a need to learn from/with families to disrupt hegemonic practices and on the other hand this process is embedded in power imbalances between ourselves and communities, which allows us the privilege to learn and grow. Through this process, we are going to share our learning with children and families in various multimodal ways, through resources which will be created with the advice of our young advisory team and participants (e.g. storybooks for young children, briefings, and audio-visual approaches) to ensure there is value for all involved. We will also push for the creation of such Play Cafe spaces for families (...). (we will also) ...be open to dialogue and critical reflective practice of our own intersectional positionalities and what these mean for us as a diverse team (e.g. White British Greek, Iranian, Malaysian, White Greek) and how it is a continuous process of understanding the privileges and power we hold in certain spaces (alongside the disadvantages in other spaces). This includes an analysis of how Whiteness and internalised Whiteness operates and what we can do practically to continuously dismantle White superiority and power in early childhood.’

De/anti-colonial work in early childhood and specifically within the Froebelian Play Cafe project is a continuous process of being aware, recognising and challenging the effects of colonialism, neocolonialism and racism, disrupting colonial power dynamics and inequalities (Konstantoni et al., forthcoming).

Although we as the Play Cafe project team are no experts in De/Anti-Colonial praxis, we present ourselves as Devarakonda writes (2021a, 2021b) as learners, unlearners and relearners and through the Play Cafe project we have created a reflexive resource in a card game style about the ingredients to designing a Play Cafe which includes thoughts, questions and further resources about de/anti-colonial work in the Play Cafe context (see here). Decolonial work will not be addressed through a simple reflexive resource; it is indeed an ongoing complex, deep and reflective process of learning and unlearning - it is about action and disruption. However, the reflexive resource recognises Play Cafes as politicised spaces and firmly places De/Anti-colonial praxis at the heart of any future Froebelian Play Cafe assemblages in public life, if indeed we want Froebelian pedagogy to live up to its aspiration as a pedagogy of liberation (liberatory education, Wright 2013), advocacy and change (May 2006).



Academic Impact and Engagement

Presentation, Conferences and Seminars

The Play Cafe Project has been invited to multiple conferences, seminars and presentation opportunities across the UK and internationally.

Presentations

Konstantoni, K. (2026, forthcoming, Invited) Play Cafes designed with intention, pedagogy and meraki. June, Norland.

Konstantoni, K. (2025, forthcoming, Invited) Play Cafes and community engagement. Edinburgh Community Engagement Forum, 29 October, University of Edinburgh.

Konstantoni, K., Eri Tantawi, H. Mozaffar, R., and Dimoulia, A. (2025, forthcoming, Invited) Working creatively with children from minority ethnic backgrounds. 10th of November 2025. Organised by the Binks Hub. Moray House School of Education and Sport.

Konstantoni, K. (2025, forthcoming, Invited) Ethnography, Presentation and workshop for PGR student community in Moray House School of Education and Sport.

Eri Tantawi, H. I., Konstantoni, K., Mozaffar, R., Dimoulia, A., (2025) Co-creating and Storybook-ing with very young children: The role of children illustrators-researchers (mobile play cafe), (upcoming) 25 August 2025, 33rd EECERA Annual Conference

Konstantoni, K., Mozaffar, R., Eri Tantawi, H. I., Dimoulia, A. (2025, Invited)) Co-creating and storybook-ing with very young children: Research, Innovation and Impact through Being, Learning, Sharing, Doing praxis. International Child and Family Conference. 17th – 19th June 2025. The University of Bristol, UK

Aviles, L., Konstantoni, K., Mason, S., Eri Tantawi, H. I., Williams, J, A. (2025) To Engage Boldly: A World Cafe on Radical Research Engagement. The Impact Festival, 2025 The University of Edinburgh

Konstantoni, K. and Sabeti, S. (2025, Invited) Ethnography in/and/of Education. Post-Graduate Development Session, Morray House School of Education and Sports, 13th May 2025.

Konstantoni, K. (2025, Invited) The Play Cafe Project. College of Arts and Humanities and Social Science Research Themes Showcase 2025, The University of Edinburgh, 24th April 2025

Konstantoni, K. (2024, Invited Keynote Talk) Play Cafe: **Νέα κοινά για μικρά παιδιά και οικογένειες** (New commons for young children and families). Embodied workshop and talk for practitioners, professionals and parents/carers, 'Free play'. The Play Cafe Project and The Network for Children's Rights, Greece-Athens, 19 October 2024.

Konstantoni, K. (2024, Invited Keynote Talk) 'When intersectionality met childhood studies: Thinking back and forward' Critical conversations. Intersectionality and Critical Childhood Studies. K Reporters International Workshop, NTNU Trondheim, Norway, 5-7 June 2024.

Konstantoni, K., and Mozaffar, R. (2024, Invited Talk) 'Play cafes and Froebelian approaches in community and public spaces'. Froebelian Futures in conversation with series. Organised by Froebelian Futures, The Play Cafe Project, The Early Years Research, Policy and Practice Group and the Children and Young People Thematic Hub, Online Public Webinar, 15 May 2024, (135 registrations)

Konstantoni, K., Mozaffar, R., Eri Tantawi, H. I. (2024) Co-creating and storybook-ing with very young children: Research, Innovation and Impact through Being, Learning, Sharing, Doing praxis. Seminar on Children's Rights Research with Young Children: the potential and challenges of participatory methods, Thursday 5th December 2024. Seminar organized by Children's Rights European Academic Network, Observatory of Children's Human Rights Scotland and Children and Young People Thematic Hub (MHSES) University of Edinburgh.

Konstantoni, K., Mozaffar, R., Dimoulia, A and Eri Tantawi, H. I. (2024) The Play Café Project: Froebelian approaches in community and public/semi-public spaces. Presentation for the Children and Young People Hub Opening social/ research welcome event. 30 Oct 2024, Edinburgh (face to face and online)

Konstantoni, K., Mozaffar, R., Dimoulia, A., Eri Tantawi, H. I. (2024) 'The Play Café Project: Froebelian approaches in community and public/semi-public spaces'. Froebelian Futures Conference, 25th May 2024, Edinburgh (face to face and online)

Konstantoni, K. and Panagopoulou, E. (2024) The Play Café project. Co-Curating Play Cafes in Greece. Presentation as part of an online book 'Greek Froebelian Network: Critical Froebelian Encounters in Greece', Online book created by Vasiliki Bourdouvali. Froebelian Futures Conference, 25th May 2024, Edinburgh (face to face and online)

Konstantoni, K., Mozaffar, R., Dimoulia, A. and Eri-Tantawi, I. (2024) The Play Cafe Project: What would Froebelian Play Cafes look like? Poster presentation at UNICEF's 1ST International Conference, Inclusive Education and Children's Rights, Technopolis, Athens, Greece, Organised by UNICEF, Ministry of Education, Religion and Sport and the Institute of Educational Policy. 11-12 April 2024.

Konstantoni, K., Mozaffar, R., Dimoulia, A., Bateson, S. and Khalfaoui, A., Eri Tantawi, H. I. (2024) Play Cafe: an important type of informal high-quality play and social provision in public life for young children, their families and their communities. Presentation to the Scottish Government, 20 February 2024, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh.

Konstantoni, K., Mozaffar, R., Dimoulia, A., Eri Tantawi, H. I., Khalfaoui, A., Young advisors: Alex, Roujda, Mohammad, Ariana, Konstantinos, Beba (2024) The Play Cafe project: What would Froebelian play cafes look like? 18 January 2024, Presentation to the Froebel Trust Research Committee. Online.

Konstantoni, K. (2024) The Play cafe project and Froebelian Futures (mobile play cafe), 8 November 2024, Presentation to the Froebel Trust. Online.

Publications and Blogs

The Play Cafe Project currently has two publications under review (please see below) and one book chapter published as part of the 'The Power of Froebel in Early Childhood Education Exploring Ideas, Practice and Impact in Scotland' book series.

We have further created a project website to act as a platform for accessible information and resources to the public. Our website <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/playcafe/> has been designed to include our works, events, publications, resources as well as opportunities for engagements and interactions.

Publications (Journals, Chapters, Briefings, storybooks, reflective resources etc)

Al-Rozzi, M., Fry, D., Orgill, M., McMellon, C, Rizzini, I., Shabalala, F., Tamish, R., Konstantoni, K. Kustatscher, M. (forthcoming) Bringing young children into conversations about their lives, *Children & Society*.

Konstantoni, K., Eri Tantawi, I. H, Mozaffar, R., Dimoulia, A. (under revisions) What are Play Cafes? Thinking through the ingredients to designing Play Cafes, *Childhood*.

Konstantoni, K., Mozaffar, R., Eri Tantawi, I. H, and Dimoulia, A. (under revisions) Ethnographies with young children about play and public life with an impact: Being, learning, sharing, doing young children co-led research praxis, *Children & Society*.

Konstantoni, K., Bateson, S., Eri Tantawi, H. I., Mozaffar, R, Khalfaoui, A., and Dimoulia, A. (forthcoming) The travels of a Froebelian Mobile Play Cafe initiative: A critical analysis of applying Froebelian principles in community spaces. In McNair, L and Addison, L. (eds). *The Power of Froebel in Early Childhood Education: Exploring Ideas, Practice and Impact in Scotland*. Routledge.

Bizas, A., Konstantoni, K., Mozaffar, R., Eri-Tantawi, I. H., Biza, A., Zeini Aslani, R., Zeini Aslani, M., (2025) Welcome to Our Play Cafe. The University of Edinburgh and the Network for Children's Rights, Edinburgh.

A Team of Young Advisors from The Network for Children's Rights in Greece, Dimoulia, A., Konstantoni, K., Eri-Tantawi, I. H., Beba, Konstantinos, Vasiliki (2025) 'Welcome to Our Play Café'. The University of Edinburgh and the Network for Children's Rights, Edinburgh.

Konstantoni, K. and Mozaffar, R. Design proposal. Small family space@ Moray House School of Education and Sport Old Nursery School, Holyrood Campus.

Konstantoni, K. and Panagopoulou, E. (2024) The Play Café project. Co-Curating Play Cafes in Greece. The Play Café Project website. University of Edinburgh. <https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/playcafe/wp-content/uploads/sites/10077/2024/05/Co-curating-Play-Cafes-In-Greece.pdf>

Konstantoni, K., Mozaffar, R., Dimoulia, A, Eri Tantawi, H. I. and Khalfaoui, A. (2024) The Play Café Project Briefing. The Play Café Project Website, University of Edinburgh.
<https://blogs.ed.ac.uk/playcafe/wp-content/uploads/sites/10077/2024/04/The-Play-Cafe-Project-Briefing.pdf>

Konstantoni, K., Panagopoulou, E, Bourdouvali, V., Dimoulia, A., Eri- Tantawi, I. H, Mozaffar, R., Stathopoulou, S. (2024) Co-curating Play Cafes in Greece. The Play Cafe Project Magazine. The Play Cafe Project. The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh.

Konstantoni, K. Mozaffar, R., Dimoulia, A and Eri-Tantawi, H. I. (2024) The Play Café Project Reflective Resource. The Play Café Project. The University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh

Blogs

What are Play Cafes? Young children's experiences of play and public life

The Play Cafe Project [Website](#)

What are Play Cafes? Young children's experiences of play and public life

[The Children and Young People Thematic Hub](#), Moray House School of Education and Sport

A week in Athens with The Play Cafe Project Team

The Play Cafe Project [Website](#)



I wanted to take a moment to extend my warmest congratulations to your team for the remarkable success you have achieved with your latest initiative (We Play Festival)...

It's truly impressive to see the dedication and hard work that you have put into it — we visited it twice and my son and his friend had the most memorable time learning, playing independently, and exploring.

Having witnessed the positive outcomes of your initiative, I believe that it would greatly benefit the community I currently reside in (x), if we could have a similar setup permanently established here — I believe it could have a profound impact as well. It would contribute to enhancing the quality of life for our residents and creating a more vibrant and thriving environment for our children. This opinion is shared by several friends who have also had the opportunity to visit you at the Scottish Storytelling Centre recently.

I understand that such an endeavour requires careful planning, resources, and support. I would be more than willing to collaborate with you and your team, in any way I can, to explore the possibility of implementing a similar initiative in our community.

Once again, congratulations on your well-deserved success





Hello,

I am writing to thank you for your extraordinary pop-up event this week at the Scottish Storytelling Centre (We Play Festival). I brought my 10-month-old daughter to play at your event today, and we had an absolute blast.

The workshop staff, the available toys, the general atmosphere, the activity stations — everything was refreshing, calm, and engaging. Thank you for a lovely experience.

I am writing, also, to see if there are similar events planned for the future. I deeply wish there were some way to spend afternoons at a place centre like the one your team has curated several times a week. Are there any future plans for a more permanent installation? Similarly, are there any existing nurseries in Edinburgh that you recommend that espouse a similar pedagogy?

Thank you for a lovely afternoon.

Wishing you a wonderful rest of the week.



Short timeline and background information



2017

Young Children's Rights in Humanitarian Crisis

Moray House SeedCorn Funding, University of Edinburgh

2018-2019

Re-imagining the Civic University: Towards an interactive Research-Policy-Practice Centre for the Early Years

Economic and Social Research council Business Booster Funding, College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Edinburgh

2019

Pop-up play cafe: Part of the Scottish Government and Workforce Scotland's Fire Starter Festival

The Institute For Continuous Improvement Grant

2019

'How can businesses and public play spaces and cafes be reimagined and reclaimed as socially just rights-reinforcing spaces for children?'

Edinburgh Futures Institute Research Awards

2021

Delivered in 2023: We Play Festival

College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences Knowledge Exchange and Impact Grant, Froebel Trust grant and University of Edinburgh Grant

2021-2024

Froebelian Futures

The Froebel Trust

2022-2024

The Play Cafe Project: What would Froebelian Play Cafes Look like?

The Froebel Trust

Approval of funding 2020



The Play Cafe inspired by Froebelian principles history



The idea emerged from a mum and her young son and further developed with her daughter too. The concept of the Froebelian Play Cafe was coined by Kristina Konstantoni (University of Edinburgh) and her son Alex Bizas when he was around 2, due to a lack of indoor public spaces that would meet both of their needs; where Alex could play freely and Kristina as a parent could enjoy, relax and get support too; lack of places that were child-centred, holistic, open access, equitable and not restricted to a specific activity like a music class or a time session. Kristina and Alex's experience of cafes and other related indoor public spaces for play was very disappointing, they felt that they were not carefully designed to support play and did not all have staff that had the ethos and ways to support children's free play.

Kristina and Alex experienced many inequalities whilst accessing public spaces and they also noticed during their research that many of the current public places were not always equitable spaces for communities of colour and for a range of families of various socio-economic and marginalised backgrounds.

Alex attended at the time Cowgate Under Fives Centre ((since renamed Cowgate Early Learning and Childcare). Cowgate’s practice is inspired by a Froebelian approach which values children’s rights, child-centred approaches, promotes holistic approaches and where the space is carefully designed to support and nurture play. Alex and Kristina wondered why couldn’t these Froebelian principles apply to other social and play spaces for children and families in public life. Kristina worked in partnership with Cowgate ELC, Riverside Cottage Nursery, Community Playthings, Let Me Eat and other University members to co-develop the first pop up Play Cafe as part of the Fire starter Festival⁴. This led to follow up pop up Play Cafes in different communities and neighbourhoods (e.g. Leith, Pilton/Granton, Newhaven, Edinburgh Old Town) as part of the Froebelian Futures project. Kristina’s daughter was born in 2021 and since then Ariana has also been key in the play cafe Being, Learning, Sharing, Doing praxis, sharing her knowledge enthusiastically and creatively, her ideas, lived experiences and perspectives, enjoying ‘working with mummy for the University’ and with other partners until ‘amazing’ play cafes are provided for all children.

Love

Kristina, Alex and Ariana (nana Jayne and daddy Nik) x



Please note that many of the concepts in this briefing are contested in the literature. Below we provide some working definitions for this briefing.

Term	Definition
anti-discrimination	An approach (policy and practice) and praxis which prevents and challenges discrimination for personal characteristics (e.g. age, gender, marital status, pregnancy, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation).
anti-racism	An approach (policy and practice) and praxis that identifies, addresses, opposes, challenges racism and white hegemonic structures; proactively preventing and challenging racism that exists in our society.
care and love	As defined by bell hooks (2000) in her book 'All About Love', care and love are viewed as transformative forces and political actions towards social justice. We define love based on hooks (2000) as : To love is to be open and honest, caring, affectionate, we show responsibility, respect, commitment and trust (hooks 2000).
child-centred, child-led, child-directed approaches	<p>Approaches that keep in focus, and involve working closely with, the children and their families/communities when making decisions about their lives, such as planning curriculum or experiences based on children's needs, curiosities and interests. Child-centred approaches are linked to the realisation of children's rights. For example, General Comment 1 on the aims of education highlight that: 'education must be child-centred and empowering' in terms of its curriculum, educational processes, pedagogical methods and the environment; education must respect children's dignity and enables the child to express their views and to participate; education promotes non-violence (UNICEF, n.d). https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/the-right-to-education/</p> <p>Child-centred approaches involve understanding the impact of interacting oppressions and marginalisation, working through conflict, recognising biases and systemic advantages and challenging white hegemonic narratives and dominant thinking (see Intersectionality).</p>
cultural relevant and responsive	Culturally relevant and responsive pedagogies recognize the importance of including children's cultural references in all aspects of learning (Ladson-Billings 1995). For example, using resources and cultural references that children use in their everyday life to unpack bias, challenge discrimination, racism, white superiority e.g. books, music, play resources etc or introduce additional resources.

Please note that many of the concepts in this briefing are contested in the literature. Below we provide some working definitions for this briefing.

Term	Definition
free play	<p>Children are free to 'think for themselves, make choices, solve problems and pursue their own interests' at their own pace. Children are free to be, 'to move, explore, play, create, participate and to learn at their own pace'. Free play encourages the child to be, to explore how things work, through purposeful activities which are active, hands-on and of interest to the individual child. Free play is not synonymous to do 'anything and everything' as freedom operates 'within a framework of responsibility and respect for others, the resources and the natural environment' (Tovey, 2017).</p> <p>https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Froebels-principles-and-practice-today.pdf</p> <p>Free play involves sensitive adult guidance to work through conflict, recognition of biases and systemic advantages and challenging white hegemonic narratives and dominant thinking (see Intersectionality; freedom with guidance).</p>
freedom with guidance	<p>Children play freely and at their own pace with adults close by who support, sensitively, actively and gently guide, and extend their play. Children are recognised as unique and autonomous and have a strong supportive community. Children's freedom operates within a framework of responsibility and respect for others, the resources and the natural environment.</p> <p>https://www.froebel.org.uk/uploads/documents/FT-Froebels-principles-and-practice-today.pdf</p> <p>Freedom with guidance involves sensitive adult intervention to work through conflict, recognise biases and systemic advantages and challenge white hegemonic narratives and dominant thinking (see Intersectionality).</p>
hegemonic whiteness	<p>Systems that privilege white people and their thoughts, actions, functions, outcomes of institutions and systems.</p>
inner and outer worlds	<p>Inner worlds of children refers to their emotions, feelings, thoughts, ideas and make meaning, while the outer worlds refer to the world of things and experiences around them.</p>
intergenerational	<p>A term used to highlight the interactions and relations between members within different generations (e.g. between children and adults).</p>
intersectionality	<p>Critical analytical tool and praxis to understand the impact of interacting social categories (e.g. race, disability, class, ag, gender) in relation to power and intersecting oppressions and marginalisation; this also includes 'a counter-hegemonic praxis that seeks to challenge and displace hegemonic whiteness in the naming and legitimating of particular kinds of politics, policy-making and knowledge production (Konstantoni and Emejulu 2017: p.8).</p>

Please note that many of the concepts in this briefing are contested in the literature. Below we provide some working definitions for this briefing.

Term	Definition
pedagogy	<p>Pedagogy is the process and activity of educating, parenting or generally living and being with children ‘that requires constant practical acting in concrete situations and relations’ (van Manen, 1990: 2). Pedagogy relates to the ‘how’, or practice of educating or facilitating learning experiences (Siraj-Blatchford et al. 2002; Wall, Litjens, Taguma 2015: 4). Pedagogy is not neutral. Pedagogy ‘is organized around knowledge built on situated action and infused with theories and beliefs (beliefs, values and principles)... (Oliveira-Formosinho and Formosinho 2012: 1). For example, participatory pedagogical approaches focus on ‘the actors who co-construct knowledge by participating in the learning process’ (Oliveira-Formosinho and Formosinho 2012: 1).</p>
play	<p>According to General Comment No. 17 (UNCRC, 2013, p.5-6) play is defined as ‘any behaviour, activity or process initiated, controlled and structured by children themselves; it takes place whenever and wherever opportunities arise. Caregivers may contribute to the creation of environments in which play takes place, but play itself is non-compulsory, driven by intrinsic motivation and undertaken for its own sake, rather than as a means to an end. Play involves the exercise of autonomy, physical, mental or emotional activity, and has the potential to take infinite forms, either in groups or alone. These forms will change and be adapted throughout the course of childhood. The key characteristics of play are fun, uncertainty, challenge, flexibility and non-productivity. Together, these factors contribute to the enjoyment it produces and the consequent incentive to continue to play. While play is often considered non-essential, the Committee reaffirms that it is a fundamental and vital dimension of the pleasure of childhood, as well as an essential component of physical, social, cognitive, emotional and spiritual development’.</p> <p>Froebelian approaches also argue that play ‘is never trivial’ and that ‘it is deeply serious’ (Powell and Louis 2020). ‘Play is the most important resource that children have to help them grow, learn and connect with people, the world around them and their imagination (...). Froebel described play as ‘the highest expression of human development in childhood, for it alone is the free expression of what is in the child’s soul’ (Powell and Louis 2020).</p>
post-humanism	<p>A conceptualisation that aims to decentre the human, acknowledges the relational aspects of existence (e.g. human, other-than-humans, technology, climate change, the cosmos, materialities, animals, plants, trees, nature, culture, places, times, histories etc) and rejects dualisms (e.g. mind/body; male/female; nature/culture).</p>
principled approach	<p>An approach which is underlined and guided by principles. For example, see Froebelian principles here: https://www.froebel.org.uk/about-us/froebelian-principles</p>
public spaces	<p>Public spaces include open spaces, beach, parks, streets, squares, sidewalks and footpaths that connect, pavements, seafronts and promenades, playgrounds, marketplaces, spaces between buildings or roadsides that anyone can use and access in principle for free.</p>

Please note that many of the concepts in this briefing are contested in the literature. Below we provide some working definitions for this briefing.

Term	Definition
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quality

The concept of quality is a contested term. In this briefing we define quality based on children’s, families’ and practitioners’ perspectives and experiences in different geographical locales and from different backgrounds. According to children, their families and practitioners’ high quality is linked to: experiences, relationships and the nature of these interactions, processes, spaces and places, design and resources, pedagogical practices, provisions, community and social justice matters, sharing of knowledge and research and the role of the adult. Human and post-human matters transgress all of the above and are important elements of high quality alongside the realisation of children’s rights. These are presented visually below and explained briefly in pages 12-24.



semi-public spaces

Semi-public spaces are open to the public but have a certain private element to them e.g. privately owned coffee shop, a soft-play, restaurants or shopping centres, malls. Semi-public spaces may also include libraries, community centres, castles, museums, galleries, adventure parks, country parks. Some semi-public spaces may also have an entry fee or may have specific rules of conduct regulating what is considered acceptable behaviour.

social cohesion³

A sense of belonging and a space for communities to come together while recognising differences, inequities and inequalities that contribute to power imbalances. A space that works towards being anti-racist and anti-discriminatory and which works towards building solidarity amongst spaces and people. Social cohesion involves working through conflict, recognising biases and systemic advantages and challenging white hegemonic narratives and dominant thinking (see Intersectionality).

³ Thank you to Pavithra Sarma for providing feedback and critical thoughts on this working definition, which we have included within the definition.

Please note that many of the concepts in this briefing are contested in the literature. Below we provide some working definitions for this briefing.

Term	Definition
social justice pedagogical approaches	<p data-bbox="592 414 1442 728">Social justice pedagogical approaches in this briefing are defined as pedagogical approaches that are critical, reflective, participatory, decolonial and intersectional in the creation and exchange of knowledge and understanding, in their processes of facilitating learning experiences and practices. Social justice approaches which recognise differences, inequities and structures of power, including white hegemonic practices, and work towards being anti-racist and anti-discriminatory. Approaches that are committed to learning and unlearning, reflection and 'the ability to recognise oppressive structures, to take on feedback and experiences from people who are racialised as Black and as People of Colour' and 'the ability to take new input on board, translate it into improving... praxis and to envision new and non-oppressive ways of being' (Farukuoye 2021) (https://scotdec.org.uk/download/anti-racist-toolkit-for-teachers/).</p> <p data-bbox="592 757 1442 967">Social justice pedagogical approaches work through conflict, recognise biases and systemic advantages and challenge white hegemonic narratives, processes, practices and dominant thinking. Social justice approaches are committed to creating equitable relationships, spaces, processes, practices, policies and encouraging adults, children and their communities to challenge and transform unequal power relations. Pedagogical approaches seek to understand the impact of interacting social categories (e.g. race, disability, class, ag, gender) in relation to power and intersecting oppressions and marginalisation.</p>

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Appendix 1: Table with details about the children and families that participated in the ethnographic and participatory research

Child	Narrative about Family background information	Researcher
Milo	Milo is a 5 year old boy. His mother is named Holly, she is 44 years old and is currently a PhD student. Her husband, John, is 49 years old and is self-employed. They are an Iranian Muslim family, living in Scotland since 2019 with their 4 children. Their first son is married and lives separately. They live in a rented 4 bedroom cottage house, with their second son, Mesiah who is 19, daughter Lulu who is 7 years old, and son Milo who is 5 years old.	Reyhaneh
Sally	Sally is a four year old girl. Hannah, her mother, is 43, has a PhD, and is an academic. Ali, her father, is also 43, has a PhD, and is an academic. Both are Iranian-British and Muslim and have lived in a city in Scotland for over 14 years. They live in a 4 bedroom house in an affluent area. Their first daughter is 8 year old Molly. Sally is their second daughter.	Reyhaneh
Yalda	Yalda is a 5.5 year old girl. Her mum is Laleh, 34 years old, has a PhD and works as a researcher. Mahmood, father, 35, has a PhD and works as a researcher. They are both Iranian and Muslim, and have lived in a city in Scotland since 2023. They live in a two bedroom rented flat. Yalda is their only daughter.	Reyhaneh
Feli	Feli is a 5 year old boy. Feli's mum is 27 years old and a single mother of one. Feli has been living in a city in Scotland for 2 and a half years after moving up from London. The mother is Scottish but raised in England. Feli is half Scottish and half Hungarian. Feli's mum lives in a rented four bedroom flat in a city centre, along with her sister and two sons. They co-parent together to make a beautiful blended family. They are also a Neurodiverse household.	Reyhaneh
Geo	Geo is a six year old girl. Her mum, Jolly, is 41 and works part time. Stewart, her father, is self-employed, 57 years old, and has lived in a city in Scotland for 20+ years. They are a Scottish family. They live in a 3 bedroom house in a relatively affluent neighborhood.	Reyhaneh
Saghi, Soraya and Sanaz	An Afghan Muslim family. Mother Hareer and father Ali moved to a city in Scotland in 2021 as refugees. They have three daughters, Saghi, Soraya and Sanaz, aged 7, 2 and 6 months. The mother speaks basic English. The husband speaks English fluently and is currently working part-time in a sales shop. Before that, Ali used to work in retail security.	Reyhaneh

Child	Narrative about Family background information	Researcher
Cherry and Danny	Danny is a 5 year old boy and Cherry is a 2 year old girl. Vilary is the family's mother. She is 43 years old and is employed in the public sector. Her husband, Scott is also 43 years old and works as a manager. They are a white, atheist family from England living in Scotland since 2006 with their 2 children who were born here. They are home owners, living in a 3 bedroom flat in an affluent area in a city centre in Scotland.	Reyhaneh
Sajad, Mohsen and Reihan	An Afghan family who moved to a city in Scotland as refugees in 2021. Zahra, the mother is 37. The father in his 40s. Reihan is a 7 years old girl, Sajad is a 4.5 year old boy and Mohsen is a 2 month old boy. The father speaks English but the mother speaks very little English. They are a Muslim family, and have moved to the UK along with Zahra's mother and father. They were in a strong social economical position when living in Afghanistan but since moving to Scotland they can be described as coming from a low economic background.	Reyhaneh
Rose and Hamid	Rose is 3 year old girl, and Hamid is a 6 year old boy. Fatemeh, their mother, is 37, has a PhD and is a researcher. Seraj, the father, is 40, has a PhD and is an engineer. Both are Iranian, Muslim, and have lived in a city in Scotland for over 10 years. They are now British citizens. They live in their 3 bedroom house in an affluent area.	Reyhaneh
Moses	Moses is a three year old boy. Mary, his mother, is 40 years old, and a Postgraduate student. Ali, the father, 44 years old, is a former academic. They are Iranian and Muslim and moved to a city in Scotland in September 2023 on account of Mary's studies. They were in a strong social economical position when living in Iran but since moving to Scotland they can be described as coming from a low income background. They live in university accomodation.	Reyhaneh
Max and Stephany	Max is a 6 year old boy and Stephany is a 2 year old girl. Their mum Nefeli and their dad Thomas are in their late 30s. Their mum is British/Greek and an academic and their dad is Greek and works in a charity. They live in their own two bedroom flat in an affluent neighborhood in a city in Scotland. They have lived in Scotland for over 19 years. They often travel to Greece to be with family and friends.	Reyhaneh

Child	Narrative about Family background information	Researcher
Nik	<p>Nik is a 2.5 years old boy. His mother, Laura, is from England, and his father is Nigerian. They live in a rented flat in a city in Scotland. Laura and her husband both work in retail. The family can be described as coming from a low social economic background. The family attended services and groups that were offered by a local community organisation that works with referred families.</p>	Reyhaneh
John	<p>John is a 2 year old boy. He lives with his mother and father. Suzy, his mother, is in her 30s and is unemployed. They are of black ethnic background, and can be described as coming from a low socio-economic background. This family attended services and groups that were offered as part of a local community organisation that works with referred families.</p>	Reyhaneh
Elsa	<p>Elsa is a 19 month old girl. Chloe, her mother, was born in Scotland but was raised in Spain. She is pregnant with her second child from her partner. Chloe has 7 other children from previous partner(s); her oldest daughter is 14 years old. Chloe can be described as coming from a low socioeconomic background and attended services and groups that were offered as part of a local community organisation that works with referred families.</p>	Reyhaneh
Chris	<p>Chris is a 2.5 year old boy. Chris' family is Scottish. His mother, Isla, grew up in France in a big family. Chris has a brother who is 7.5. Isla is a house wife and previously worked as a cleaner in care homes. They live in a rented flat with her partner and children. The family can be described as coming from a low socioeconomic background and has attended services and groups that were offered as part of a local community organisation that works with referred families.</p>	Reyhaneh

Child	Narrative about Family background information	Researcher
Dino	Dino is 2. His parents are in their early 30s and mid 30s and Greek. Both parents work in the third sector. This family lives in a large city in Greece and belongs to the Greek Orthodox faith. Both parents have professional backgrounds and balance work with caring for their toddler, who has recently started nursery. Their home life is warm and stable, and they enjoy spending time together both inside their home and during everyday outings. The family identifies as white, lower middle class and speaks Greek.	Aggeliki
Sotiri	Sotiri is 2 and both of his parents are in their early 30s. Sotiri's mum is a lawyer and his dad works in the public sector. A young Greek Orthodox family based in a large city in Greece, the parents share childcare responsibilities while maintaining busy careers. The mother often works from home, which allows her to spend much of the day with their toddler. Their routines include visits to local parks and time spent together in their neighbourhood. The family identifies as white, middle class and speaks Greek. They live in an apartment.	Aggeliki
Demi	Demi is 3. His parents are both in their mid 30s. This Greek Orthodox household lives in the northern part of a large city in Greece. The mother works in a company and the father is an agronomist; both are engaged in their community. Their daughter enjoys a variety of activities with them, from outings in parks and cafes to relaxing time at home. Since the research started, the family has welcomed another child. The family identifies as white, middle class and speaks Greek.	Aggeliki
Katia	Katia is 1 years old, Greek and her parents are in the mid 20s. This young family lives in a small town near a large city in Greece and shares close ties with their extended relatives. They are part of the Greek Orthodox tradition and create a nurturing environment for their infant daughter, balancing work and family life in a close-knit community setting. The family identifies as white, lower middle class and speaks Greek. The mother works in sales and is half Greek - half Polish. The father works in a factory. They live in a two bedroom apartment.	Aggeliki
Vasiliki	Vasiliki is 2 and her parents are in their late 20s and mid 30s. Living between two urban areas, this Greek Orthodox family creates a warm and supportive space for their toddler. The mother used to work as a professional but currently focuses on caring for their child at home, while the father works in a professional trade. Their daily life includes visits to parks, cafes, and local play areas. The family identifies as white, lower middle class and speaks Greek. They are Greek Orthodox.	Aggeliki
Daphne	Daphne is 6 and both parents are in their 30s. This Greek Orthodox family resides in a deprived area in a large city in Greece. The family values education and community. Both parents are scientists and support their daughter's regular attendance at a local cultural centre. A younger sibling is part of the household, and grandparents sometimes help with childcare. The family identifies as white, middle class and speaks Greek.	Aggeliki

Child	Narrative about Family background information	Researcher
Sayf and Saida	Sayf is 6 and Saida is 4. Their parents are in mid 30s and early 40s. This Muslim family from Egypt lives in a large city in Greece in a deprived area, with three young children. The mother is the main caregiver while the father works to support the household. The older children participate in activities at a nearby cultural centre and enjoy playing and learning together. The family is of Arab descent, with a lower socioeconomic background and speaks Arabic and English.	Aggeliki
Aaliyah	Aaliyah is 6 and her parents are in their late 30s. A Muslim family with roots in Egypt, they live a large city in Greece and have three children. The father travels for work while the mother manages the home and daily care. The children are active participants in local cultural centre programs. The family is of Arab descent, with a lower socioeconomic background and speaks Arabic and English.	Aggeliki
Yara	Yara is 6. This Christian Orthodox family has a mixed heritage (Moldova, Syria and Romania) and lives close to a cultural centre in a large city in Greece, in a deprived neighbourhood. Both parents are in their later 30s and work flexible or occasional jobs while caring for their young daughter, who regularly attends community activities. The family speaks Greek and identifies as white. They have a lower socioeconomic background.	Aggeliki
Lana and Lara	Lana and Lara are 6 and their parents are in their mid 40s. This Muslim family of Egyptian heritage lives near the centre of a large city in Greece in a deprived neighbourhood. The parents care for their twin daughters with help from teenage siblings, and the girls participate in cultural activities every week. The family is of Arab descent, from a lower socioeconomic background and speaks Arabic and English. Their mother stays home to look after the children and dad works in construction.	Aggeliki
Savvas	Savvas is 6 and his parents are in their mid 40s. This Christian family of mixed Balkan heritage (Albania, Serbia, Greece) lives in a large city in Greece. The parents are separated, and the child spends much time with his mother and older half-sibling near the city centre in Greece, in a densely populated and deprived neighborhood. The family remains involved in local community programs and cultural activities. The family identifies as white, speaks Albanian and Greek and is of lower socioeconomic background. His mum works in hospitality.	Aggeliki
Shafiq	Shafiq is 6 and his parents are in their mid 30s and mid 40s. This Muslim family of Egyptian background lives in a large city in Greece and has several children. The father works in construction while the mother manages the home. The children take part in activities at a nearby cultural center. The family is of Arab descent, speaks Arabic and is of lower socioeconomic standing.	Aggeliki

Child	Narrative about Family background information	Researcher
Aggelos	Aggelos is 6. This child lives near the centre of a large city in Greece in a deprived neighborhood. The family is of Albanian background. The household is engaged in local community life, and the child regularly attends cultural activities. The family speaks Albanian, identifies as white and is of lower socioeconomic standing.	Aggeliki
Grigoris	Grigoris is 6 and his parents are in their late 30s. This Greek family is living near a cultural center in a large city in Greece, in a deprived area. The family provide a stable home environment. Both parents work, and their young son enjoys taking part in neighborhood programs and activities. The family is white, speaks Greek and is lower middle class. His dad works for a company.	Aggeliki
Katerina	Katerina is 5. This young child from a Congolese family participates in programs at a local support network in a large city in Greece. The family benefits from community resources and engages with other families in similar circumstances. The family identifies as black and speak French, English and a bit of Greek. The family is reliant on many community services to make ends meet.	Aggeliki
Manos and Spiros	Manos is 5 and Spiros is 7. These siblings from a Gabonese family attend activities at a local community network in a large city in Greece. Their family is active in various support programs and finds connection through shared cultural and educational experiences. The family identifies as black, and they speak French and English. They come from a lower socioeconomic background.	Aggeliki
Tina	Tina is 4. A young child from a Filipino family, she participates in activities offered by a local support network in a large city in Greece. Her family engages with the community to create a welcoming and nurturing environment. They identify as Filipino, they speak English, a bit of Greek and Tagalog. They come from a lower socioeconomic background.	Aggeliki

Child	Narrative about Family background information	Researcher
Elsa and Anna	Monica is a 33 year old white woman from South Africa. She lives with her partner and her two children, Anna (3 years old) and Elsa (5 years old). Monica defined her self as a migrant, living in Scotland for three years. She defined her self as straight. She is currently doing her Phd and also is a part time researcher and carer. Her husband works at a University. She also defined herself as a poor 'middle class'. They live in a two bedroom flat in an affluent neighbourhood.	Kristina
Alberto	Alberto is 2 and from a mixed background (British, Greek, Italian). He lives in Indonesia and comes often to visit family in Greece. He lives with his mother and father who are in their mid 30s and self-employed 'digital nomads'. Alberto's father is Greek/British and his mother is Italian/British. They live in rented accommodation and come to Greece to see their family and friends. The family is relatively well off.	Kristina
Patroclos	Patroclos is 7 years old, Greek and lives in Greece. Patroclos lives with his mother and father in a predominantly working class town near a large city in Greece. The family live in a flat near their grandmother who lives downstairs. His dad works as a driver in a private company and his mum is a nurse. The family struggles financially.	Kristina
Arabella	Arabella is 2 years old and she has two older brothers (7 and 10). Arabella's mum is in her mid 30s and Albanian. Her mum lived for many years in Greece and had recently arrived in Scotland (last 3 years) with her husband who is in his 40s. They live in a rented flat in a mixed- relatively affluent area. Arabella's mum is on benefits and her husband is self-employed.	Kristina
Zenia	Zenia is 6 years old and Greek. Zenia lives in a predominantly working class town near a large city in Greece. Zenia lives with her mum and dad in a two bedroom rented flat. Her parents are in their early 40s and they both work in the private sector.	Kristina
Kostas	Kostas is 7 years old, neurodivergent and autistic. Kostas is Greek and lives with his mum and dad in a flat that they own, in a city in Scotland in a mixed area. In this area there is a mix of deep inequalities, poverty and rapid gentrification. Kostas's parents both work in the public sector and are in their early and mid forties.	Kristina
Rider	Rider is 4, Spanish/Scottish. He lives in a city in Scotland with his mum, Carlota. His mother is in her late 40s, Spanish and single. Carlota is a doctor. The family lives in an affluent area in a rented two bedroom flat.	Kristina
Xara	Xara is 3 years old and Greek. Xara was defined as neurodivergent with Down Syndrome. Her mum and dad are in their early 40s. Xara has an older brother. Xara's mum works in private company and her dad is an academic. The family live in a relatively affluent neighbourhood in a flat that they own in a city in Scotland.	Kristina

Child	Narrative about Family background information	Researcher
Giorgos	Giorgos is 4 years old and Greek. His mum is Kaliopi, who is in her late 30s. They live in Greece in a small town near Athens. Kaliopi has her own small business. Her husband works in the private sector. They live in a flat that they they own.	Kristina
Max	Max is 2 years old. He is Black Scottish and lives in a city in Scotland with his mother, father, baby sister (newborn) and grandparents. They live intergenerationally in a big house that they own in a mixed-affluent area. His mum is White Scottish self-employed and his dad is Black Scottlsh and works for a private company. Both parents are in their late 30s.	Kristina

Appendix 2: Table with details about interviewing parents/carers, grandparents and practitioners about their experience of the Froebelian Futures Mobile Pop up Play Cafes and We Play Festival Pop up Play Cafes

Participant	Narrative information about background	Researcher	Place of interview
Peter	Late 30s , white Greek man, living in a large city in Scotland for about 20 years. Peter lives in a relatively affluent area, father of two children under 8. Works for a charity.	Andrea	Online
John	White English Male, late 30s, heterosexual, father of two-year-old daughter.	Andrea	Online
Wang	40, female, Hong Kong, recent arrival in Scotland in a large city (last year). Mother of two aged 5 and 7. Living in Leith. Living in a area with a mix of deep inequalities, poverty and rapid	Andrea	Online
Alheri	Nigerian, in her early 30s, black, low-income background. Supported by organisation that works with families experiencing challenging circumstances and in need of emotional and social support.	Andrea	Phone
Fang	Originally from Hong Kong, has been living in a Scottish city for the last 12 years. Has 4 boys, with ages ranging from 8 months to 6 years old. Husband is Scottish and currently studying. Fang is the main carer for their children.	Andrea	Phone
Marta	White-Scottish female, 51 years old. Married to husband with two grown up children. Works full-time. Early learning and Childcare professional /manager.	Andrea	Face to face
Nur	Malaysian Muslim female, single. Holds a Master of Education. Student at a Scottish University.	Andrea	Face to Face
Mei	Social work student in a Scottish city from China, lived in a large city in Scotland for 2 years, works in an organisation that works with minority ethnic families. She identified as female.	Andrea	Online
Fatima	Iranian Muslim woman who wears a hijab and lives in Scotland. Holds a PhD. Moved to a large Scottish city 10 years ago. Has a PhD. Has a 5-year-old son and a daughter born before lockdown. 37 years old. Lives in an affluent	Andrea	Face to face
Rose	White middle-aged woman, born outside of Scotland. Has lived in a Scottish city for half of her life. Early Learning and Childcare Practitioner, lives in a mixed neighborhood in a large Scottish city.	Andrea	Face to face
Amy	25, Scottish, middle class background, has a masters degree. Parents went to university. Originally from a large city, moved to another large city in Scotland.	Andrea	Online

Shu	Female, Chinese, practitioner.	Andrea	Online
Emilia	White, from Italy, 40 years old. Moved to the UK in 2006 and in Scotland in 2018 after having backpacked few years around the world with her now husband.	Andrea	written via email
Aida1	Black migrant single mother from Spain, two children under 7. Comes from a low socioeconomic background.	Andrea	Phone
Elizabeth	White British, 66 years old, grandmother, background in teaching. Currently living in Scotland with one of her children and her grandchildren.	Andrea	Online
Hao	Chinese man, recently arrived in a large Scottish city (within last two years). Has one child attending nursery.	Andrea	Face to face
Karen	White Scottish woman in her 30s. Mother of a little baby.	Kristina	written via email
Aggeliki	32 years old, white Greek woman who has been living in a large city in Scotland for the last 8 years. Aggeliki is a translator and lives in a economically deprived area, which faces many social problems with gangs and vandalism. Mother of one two-year-old child.	Kristina	Online
Mary	White Scottish female, practitioner at an early learning and childcare setting for 3 years. Middle class. She used to be the lead practitioner at a playgroup, and had completed the Froebel certificate.	Kristina	Face to face
Anna	31 years old, British Pakistani, solicitor, has lived in a house in a Scottish city her whole life. Married for 5 years. Mother of a little boy who had just gone to nursery. Her mother is Pakistani, and her father is English. Bilingual (Pakistani and Urdu) and also speaks some Punjabi.	Kristina	Online
Emily	Bulgarian, in her 40s, University researcher. She is living in a non-pretentious residential neighbourhood, close to areas with high crime rates.	Kristina	Online
Annette	35-year-old French mother to a 16-month-old child, female. Works part-time at a bakery coffee place and also looks after her child. Lives in a mixed area with a mix of deep inequalities, poverty and rapid gentrification.	Kristina	Online
Norah	Mother to two children. White Scottish female, 30 years old, professional, therapist, lives in a mixed residential area in a Scottish city.	Kristina	Online

Isabel	31-year-old, White Scottish female. Married, has a 15-month-old daughter. Identifies as she/her. Works 4 days a week at a university and also as a clinical supervisor. Lives in a mixed area in a large Scottish city.	Kristina	Online
Ava	Grandmother of a two year old girl. White Scottish.	Kristina	written via email
Helen	35-year-old, British, heterosexual married woman. Country upbringing. Former primary school teacher. She has a 1.5-year-old child.	Kristina	written via email
Fiona	White British Woman. 34 years old, lives in a Scottish town near the sea. Practitioner in community work, pre-natal and post-natal.	Kristina	Online
Asia	Senior coordinator in a community organisation that works with families and children. White Polish woman, 42, non-religious, heterosexual.	Kristina	Online
Monika	Originally from South Africa. Came to the UK since 2015 and has been in Scotland since 2019. Has two daughters, five and four year olds. PhD student and part-time care worker. Her husband works for a University. Defined her self as a migrant, as straight, and as poor 'middle class'. They live in a two bedroom flat in an affluent neighbourhood.	Kristina	Face to Face
Sophia	Italian woman, has lived in UK from age of 18. PhD-holder. Married to EU national, both academics. Has a 6-year-old son and a 2-and-a-half year old daughter. Family lives in a Scottish	Kristina	Face to Face
Daisy	29 years old, white, from England. Interest and experience in arts. Went to art college, works with arts, adults and children.	Kristina	Online
Jennifer	White Scottish, practitioner and community worker, with community education background.	Kristina	Online
Yasmin	Female, British-Muslim. Born in England, her ethnic origin is Pakistani. Married with 4 children. Child-minder/practitioner.	Kristina	Online
Melissa	White British, founder of a social enterprise that support families' and parents' well-being.	Kristina	Online
Irka	White Swedish, living in a city in Scotland. Community worker and co-ordinator, in a community organisation that works with families and children. Worked 20 years in childcare, working with parents with children with medical complex needs. She works in social care.	Kristina	Online
Alan	White Scottish male, heterosexual, Early learning and Childcare Practitioner.	Kristina	Online

Ariana	White Greek, 40 years old, middle class mother of two daughters, works in arts and play with children. Lives in an affluent and privileged area in a Scottish centre. Has a postgraduate qualification. Studied childhood and education, early education, art therapy.	Kristina	Online
Belen	Spanish woman, born in South America, in her late 40s. Single mother. She is a doctor who lives in an affluent area in a rented two bedroom flat.	Kristina	Face to face
Maggie	White, female, Scottish, 38. Has 3 kids aged 7,5 and 2. Lives with her husband in an affluent neighborhood in a large Scottish city.	Kristina	Written via email
Kevin	Both Kevin and his partner grew up in the United States. Kevin's family is English speaking and partner's family is Spanish speaking. Kevin described himself as a recent immigrant mature PhD student to the UK. He has been in Scotland for the last 3 years. He is 36 and lives in a city in Scotland in an area with a mix of deep inequalities, poverty and rapid gentrification.	Kristina	Online
Tasmin	White Scottish, Catholic, in her early forties, mother of two young children, living in a relatively affluent and mixed area in a Scottish city.	Kristina	Face to face
Mariana	A woman and mother from Portugal in her early thirties. She has one child who was born in Scotland. She lives in a suburb of a large Scottish city, in a mixed area. Mariana was a teacher and a medical researcher.	Kristina	Online
Laoura	White Greek woman in her early forties, living in Scotland for the last 7 years in a flat that they own with her son and husband, in a city in Scotland in a mixed area. In this area there is a mix of deep inequalities, poverty and rapid gentrification. Laoura is a civil servant. Mother of an autistic child. The family speaks mainly in Greek but fluent in English.	Kristina	Face to face
Molly	White middle-class, middle-age woman. Originally from Europe, living in Scotland for 15 years now. Working in academia. Has two children. Living in a mixed area in a large Scottish city.	Kristina	Face to Face
Priscilla	White Scottish, 34, lives near a large Scottish city, in a residential area. Priscilla mentioned that she does not work and that she lives with her partner and looks after her child. She used to work as a manager. Her partner works in a warehouse. She described the family as 'just getting by'.	Kristina	Online

Veronica	White Scottish woman in her late 30s; self-employed. Mother of mixed race children who live intergenerationally in a big house that they own in a mixed area.	Kristina	Face to face
Norah	White Scottish Female in her 30s, mother of two young children, professional language therapist, living in a suburb in a community regeneration area.	Kristina	Online
Eva- Maria	White English, grandmother, 70 years old. Living in a mixed area in a Scottish city, living intergenerationally with one of her children and her grandchildren. They live in a large home that they own. She is originally from England but has lived in Scotland for more than 40 years. Her background is in the voluntary sector.	Kristina	Face to face
Daisy	29 Years old, from South of England. Grew up in small family. Mom was a teacher, hence her interest in teaching. Studied and works in the arts. Mother of a young child.	Kristina	Online
XinYi	36, Chinese, female, came to a Scottish city 5 years ago after getting married to husband who has been living in this city for 10 years. Her husband works as a chef. They have one child, 2.7 years old, who was born in Scotland. She focuses on looking after her child.	Kristina	Face to face
Aileen	White Scottish heterosexual female. She is a civil servant in a well-paid post. Described herself as the main earner in her household. She is currently on maternity leave. Her husband works in a community organisation. They have two children, 5 months and 2-and-a-half year old boys. They live in a mixed area in a large Scottish city.	Kristina	Online
Arran	38-year-old co-parenting single dad with a 17-month-old child. Lives in an affluent area in a Scottish city. White british male, heterosexual. Works in the private sector.	Kristina	Online
Olivia	Practitioner/ community worker, white Scottish, working in an organisation that supports people and families with young children in their community and empowering people to support each other. Focuses on well-being.	Kristina and Andrea	Face to Face
Ally	Ally is a Scottish woman in her 40s. She is a mother and works at a charity. She comes from a low socio-economic background.	Reyhaneh	Face to face
Aida2	Aida2 is a Scottish mum in her 40s who works in a community centre. They are middle class.	Reyhaneh	Face to face

Appendix 3: Table with details about the interviews with business owners, community groups and practitioners about their business, community spaces and/or practice

Participant	Narrative information about background	Researcher	Place of interview
Danielle	Danielle, Greek, white. A mom in her late 30s, started a creative play space in her neighborhood after noticing a gap in opportunities for creative play that help children develop different skills. The space is painted in pale blue and pink has lots of light exposure. There are lots of wooden toys. There are lots of opportunities for messy play, theatrical play and a set weekly program. Greek context.	Aggeliki	Face to face
Vivian	Vivian, Greek, white and her husband started a family cafe because they wanted to create different experiences for their children. In their early 40s both. She doesn't have background as an educator but she believes that children should have spaces for them and she enjoys having different things at her cafe and constantly adapts to be better for her community. Many weekly activities for children are hosted in the center. It's open with a large back yard, a big kitchen and a space that parents can sit and have coffee that is next to the play space. Greek context.	Aggeliki	Face to face
Miltos	Miltos is the owner of a family cafe but his wife is the one that had the vision of the space where families would come and relax, have coffee and spend time together. She thinks its important for educators and practitioners to be in the space and respond to children's needs. The cafes success showcases how needed it is. The space has an outdoors and indoors but most of the activities take place inside. Inside there is a kitchen/cafe space and a space for children that is painted white. The space is cosy and bright and wood is a dominant material in structures and toys. Montessori inspired. Greek context.	Aggeliki	Face to face

Sergios	White, Greek. He wanted his children to have positive experiences for them when they opened the cafe. He was prior in business. In his late 40s. His focus was creative and group play. He thinks parents don't let their children enjoy free play. The space is bright and has a kitchen, chairs and tables that are separate to the play space that is colourful, open and has a big library. Greek context.	Aggeliki	Face to Face
Petros	White, Greek, in his 40s. The space is large and has lots of tables and chairs and a soft play senction that is multicoloured. The space also has some tables where children can sit and paint or do other creative activities. The space also has some amusement park style games that work with coins. He started the space mostly as a soft play space but he listens to parents that want more quality play for their children and that is why he added other creative opportunities and hired educators to be with the children. Greek context.	Aggeliki	Face to face
Isla	70-year-old woman, White British/English, lives in a Scottish city in a mixed area. Has worked in the voluntary sector for over 30 years. Currently works in a community hub. Volunteered to facilitate play cafe experiences in the Scottish context.	Kristina	Online
Alan	White British male in his 40s. Early Years Practitioner in an Early Learning and Childcare centre and also facilitates play cafe experiences in the Scottish context. Froebelian-trained.	Kristina	Online
Eli	White middle-class, middle-age Italian woman. Lives in Scotland and works in higher education. Has two children. Lives in a mixed area in a large Scottish city. Volunteered to facilitate play cafe experiences. Froebelian-trained.	Kristina	Face to Face
Katerina	Greek woman in her 30s, facilitates storytelling and singing experiences for children in community spaces in the Scottish context.	Kristina	Face to Face

Lucy	White Scottish Christian woman and mother, has a degree but currently her main role is looking after her children. Lives in an affluent area in a large Scottish city. Runs a playgroup within a church space in a city in Scotland.	Kristina	Online
Alice	British Catholic woman and mother, has a degree, currently works voluntarily in different organisations, responsible for running a playgroup within a church space in a city in Scotland.	Kristina	Online
Afroditi	Greek woman in her 30s, Early Years Practitioner. Volunteered to facilitate play cafe experiences in the Scottish context. Froebelian-trained.	Kristina	Online
Ian	White Scottish Manager of facilities in a large institution (in a Scottish city) which offers a family room.	Kristina	Online
Maya	Cishet woman from India, Phd student. Volunteered to facilitate play cafe experiences in Scotland.	Kristina	Online
Farah	Iranian Muslim woman who wears a hijab and lives in Scotland. She is a mother. Holds a PhD. Facilitated play cafe experiences.	Kristina	Face to Face
Hope	Woman in her 40s from China, moved to Scotland more than 20 years ago, travelled a lot. Business and finance background. Owner of a private play cafe business in Scotland.	Kristina	Online
Alison	White Scottish, extensive, decade-long background in childminding. Mother. Holder of SVQs and HNC. Owner of a private play cafe business in Scotland.	Kristina	Face to Face
Kay	White Scottish, nanny/ babysitter. Mother. Owner of a private play cafe business in Scotland.	Kristina	Face to Face
Tara	White Scottish woman, in her early 40s, background in programme and project management in public sector, mother. Owner of a social enterprise play cafe business in Scotland.	Kristina	Face to Face
Carla	White Scottish, 45 years old, Early Years Practitioner, Froebelian-trained. Scottish context.	Kristina	Face to Face

Tina	White British, female, early 30s, lives in Scotland. Freelance arts educator/ practitioner/ arts engagement worker with adults and children. Facilitates and curates stay and play and art experiences for children and adults. As part of our interview, we focused on art and play experiences she facilitates as part of large cultural institutions and smaller organisations, both indoors and outdoors. Froebelian-trained.	Kristina	Online
Lina	White, Greek in her 40s. A mother that opened a family cafe. The space includes a living area with sofas and tables, a play space which is designed in a big corner, and there is also a garden. The venue also facilitates creative experiences and birthday parties. Greek context.	Kristina	Written
Nasma	Born in Portugal. Comes from an Indian family who had migrated there. Moved to England when she was young. Nursing	Kristina	Online
Karen	White woman from England, moved to Scotland five years ago. She is a mother. Has a degree, background in arts and creativity, with a diverse background of work experience e.g cafes. Owner of a private play cafe business in Scotland.	Kristina	Face to Face
Maggie	White woman from England, moved to Scotland 20 years ago. Holds a degree, worked in investment banking and has experience of work in cafes and bars. Mother. Owner and founder of a play cafe business in Scotland.	Kristina	Face to Face

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The Final Briefing



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