

Nationhood in the Carpathian Region
Hungarians and their Neighbours – Sociological Perspectives

Joint Conference
of the
Hungarian Sociological Association
and the
Department of Sociology and Social Work in Hungarian of Babeş-Bolyai University

Book of Abstracts

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The Urban Playground Movement and the Recreation of Public Space – Exploring Motivations for Participation

Re-invention and re-use of the public space has manifested itself in many ways since the early 2000s, and one of these efforts is represented by the Urban Playground Movement. The originally North-American phenomenon spread quickly internationally, and local groups have been organising large-scale, free urban games in public spaces for around a decade. The organisers' manifestos and sociological accounts (e.g. Molnár) tend to use ideologically charged frames when discussing the meaning of these phenomena, which allows for a deeper understanding than simply categorising these activities as instances of *l'art pour l'art fun*.

The research's central hypotheses for key motivations for participation in these kinds of events were based on the very few existing academic sources. These were complemented through the first, qualitative stage of the research with two paired-interviews with the main organisers of the most active Hungarian Urban Playground group (Budapest UP!). The two motivational directions we sought to explore were (1.) Urban Playground participation as an act linked to alternative conceptions of the urban public space and (2.) Urban Playground participation as the practice of a new kind of sociability (Molnár referring to Simmel). The first account concentrates on the perceived loss of public spaces linked to the privatisation of the city, the weakening of the interaction-facilitative function of urban domains. The second interpretation is about the 're-invention' of urban sociability, the ethos of free, spontaneous and playful interaction between residents of the city. In the second step quantitative surveying took place at the biggest annual Urban Playground event, the International Pillow Fight Day (organised locally by Budapest UP!). The usage of a simple randomisation process employed in protest surveys was the basis for selecting the respondents. Our aim was to assess whether the two types of interpretations of the Urban Playground Movement presented above capture participants' motivations. We present the first results of this study.