

## **Play as production – production as game?**

### **Towards a critical phenomenology of productivity**

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#### **Abstract**

Play-related products and cultural export have through recent decades contributed to a certain Danish image on the world level – with Lego blocks at the commercial end and adventure playgrounds (*skrammellegepladser*) at the pedagogic end. The phenomena of toy production and play export challenge our understanding of what play and game are, and of their social as well as political significance

The lecture will start at the municipal level where the city of Odense is branding itself as “city of Hans Christian Andersen” and “city of play”. This is followed up on the international level where Danish play-related products have expanded on the world market.

In the field of sport, Denmark has shown that sport is not just elite sport. Danish sport is based on local associations. People meet in mass summer festivals of popular sport. Folk High Schools develop sport as personal development, often in an experimental way. Street sports, parkour, play and games are promoted. Sports policies have reacted by building innovative sport facilities with cultural ambition. A network of critical sport journalism – “Play the Game” – has obtained international recognition in fighting doping, corruption and criminality in elite sport. Civil society is a basis for the play foray of market and state. The critical question has risen, how Denmark should invest in the global competition on the Olympic level, as compared to Beijing, Dubai etc. Or should Denmark rather promote people’s Sport for all on the world level?

The empirical material leads to some questions about the connection between play and Danishness. More generally: How are policies of play and policies of identity related to each other?

Other questions of theoretical relevance concern the relation between play and production. In contrast to the established understanding of play as per definition being “unproductive”, the question arises whether play can be or is a productive power. Modernity has dissociated play and production, defined play as unproductive, and work as not-playful, giving competitive sport priority as *the* ritual of industrial modernity. This can be questioned in a world of expanding high tech games and robot toys, as well as commercial sport and entertainment industry. At a closer observation, it is not only the essence of play that stands for debate, but also what production and productivity are.