



HUB

FOR DESIGN

& PLAY



**10 INSIGHTS
ON THE DANISH APPROACH
TO DESIGNING PLAY**



HUB FOR DESIGN & PLAY

Over the last year HUB for Design and Play has explored the Danish approach to design of play. A close dialogue with a number of Danish companies that develop and organise design of play has resulted in the 10 insights presented on these cards. The collaboration and the dialogue were conducted by means of interviews, company visits, and workshops at HUB for Design and Play. Hence the insights are based on quotes, observations, and realisations garnered along the way.

Practice stakeholders

- LEGO Future Lab
- PlayAlive
- Plus Plus
- ABCity
- DR Ramasjang/Ultra
- Winther
- Gonge
- Nicolai for Børn
- Four Esses
- Uniqa

Knowledge stakeholders

- Carsten Jessen
- Jens Martin Steenhold
- Martin Rauff-Nielsen
- Barnabas Wetton

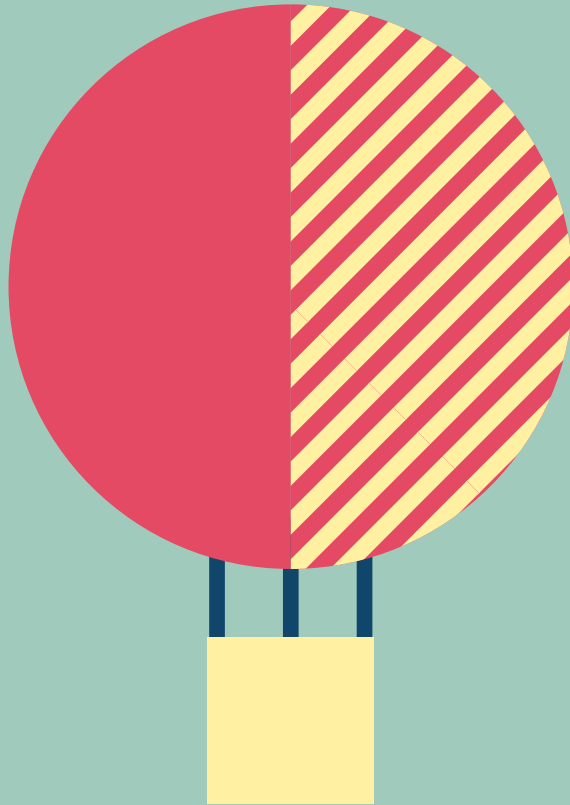


DANISH™

Danish Design & Architecture Initiative

Funded by The LEGO® Foundation





OPENNESS TO THE NEW
AND UNEXPLORED

OPENNESS TO THE NEW AND UNEXPLORED

AMONG DANISH DEVELOPERS OF PLAY THERE IS A GENERAL FOCUS ON CULTIVATING THE PROCESS AND THE WILD IDEAS AND NOT SHY AWAY FROM EXPERIMENTS AND TROUBLE. BOUNDARIES ARE PUSHED IN THE DEVELOPMENTAL PROCESS INSIDE ORGANIZATIONS AND IN THE CHILDS PLAY.

Companies and experts working with design of play declare that they ...

- are ready to learn
- are willing to test new things and new ideas
- consciously push boundaries and seek unorthodox solutions
- leave room for the expression of unconventional ideas

Example

The company Winther / Gonge, a developer of physical playing and learning products, has developed an internal playful development process, which is evident in its products. Although the products are simple and of high quality there is usually a twist that provides an additional dimension in the play. The developers are open and ready to explore new opportunities – a feature their customers expect from them and their products.

“WE DON’T MIND COLLIDING WITH THINGS AND PICKING THEM APART”

“WE WANT TO CONTINUE LEARNING SOMETHING NEW”

“WE DON’T SHY AWAY FROM TESTING NEW PROTOTYPES”



PLAY MAKES
US HUMAN

PLAY MAKES US HUMAN

THE QUALITY OF PLAY AND THE QUALITY OF LIFE ARE CLOSELY LINKED. THROUGH PLAY WE CREATE RELATIONSHIPS, DEVELOP SOCIAL SKILLS AND ACQUIRE SELF-CONFIDENCE. WHEN WE PLAY WE EXIST IN THE PRESENT AND FEEL THAT LIFE IS MEANINGFUL.

Companies and experts working with design of play declare that they ...

- strengthen the interaction between people through play
- boost children's self-confidence
- reinforce the feeling of presence through the playing experience
- help develop social skills
- enhance the users' quality of life through play

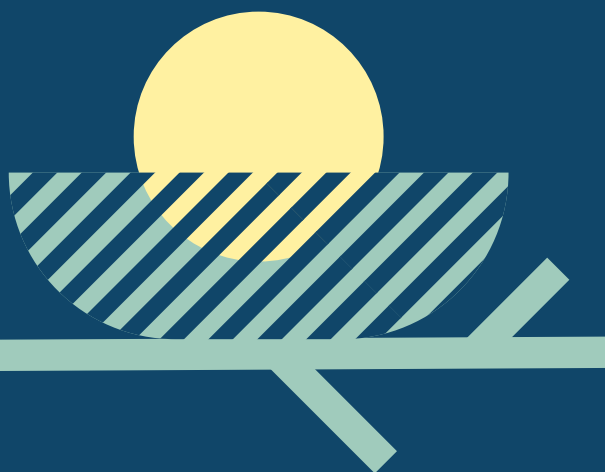
Example

PlayAlive works with interactive sensors for playgrounds developed on children's own terms. The company is convinced that free play is a positive thing. When physical play is fun it helps to create freedom and development in the children. The company is mindful not to overprotect the children or guide the play, but rather create a space where the children can experience themselves and each other.

"THE DOPAMINE CONTENT IN THE BRAIN INCREASES DURING PLAY. YOU HAVE A FEELING OF SELF-AWARENESS AND OF EXISTING IN THE PRESENT"

"WE NEED CONSTANT CHALLENGES IN ORDER FOR THE PROCESS TO REMAIN EXCITING AND PROVIDING US WITH AN EXPERIENCE – IT IS A FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE IN HUMAN BEINGS, AND IT IS THE REASON WE HAVE DEVELOPED"

"WHEN WE PLAY WE EXPOSE OURSELVES FOR A WHILE AND ESTABLISH DEEPER BONDS BETWEEN EACH OTHER"



RESPECT FOR
PLAY IN ITSELF

RESPECT FOR PLAY IN ITSELF

**WE PLAY BECAUSE WE FEEL LIKE IT AND THINK IT IS FUN.
PLAY IS A STATE OF BEING AND HAS NO EXTERNAL PURPOSE;
PLAY IS MEANINGFUL IN ITSELF AND THAT GIVES IT
ITS LEGITIMACY.**

Companies and experts working with design of play declare that they ...

- see play as a state of being or a process
- respect play for its own sake
- aim to “wow” their users
- develop playing experiences without holding their users accountable for learning targets

Example

In the children's community centre, 'Nicolai for børn' in Kolding the goal is to create aesthetic and unconventional playing experiences which you just don't want to miss. These experiences include relationships between the child and the grown-up and the experience of doing something together – not because that is the goal, but because it is irresistible. In the community centre you are free – free to create your own experience.

**“PLAY IS SOMETHING IN ITSELF,
A PHENOMENON, NOT A MEANS FOR
SOMETHING ELSE – IT IS OF VITAL
IMPORTANCE FOR US AS
HUMAN BEINGS”**

**“WE PLAY BECAUSE WE THINK IT
IS FUN – AND NEVER ASK AFTERWARDS
WHAT WE GOT OUT OF IT”**

**“PHYSICAL ACTIVITY FOR THE
FUN OF IT”**



SOCIAL
RESPONSIBILITY

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

DANISH DEVELOPERS OF PLAY ARE AWARE OF THE FOOTPRINTS THEY LEAVE ON THEIR TARGET GROUP. THEY EMPHASIZE THE SOCIAL ASPECT, BOTH IN THE CONTEXT OF THE INDIVIDUAL PLAYING COMMUNITY AND ON AN OVERALL SOCIAL LEVEL.

Companies and experts working with design of play declare that they ...

- want to strengthen the sense of community
- challenge and develop the users within several areas of competency
- develop the users' creativity
- are concerned about their users
- are conscious of their role and their influence on a happy childhood

Example

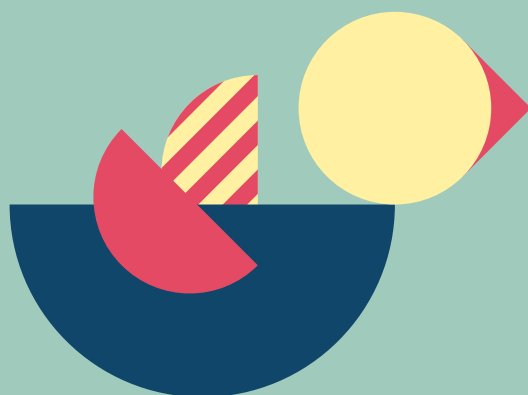
Four Esses develops games for children that contribute to their understanding of life and mastering of future challenges. There is a conscious desire on the part of the company to fulfil this need through its products. The content is of vital importance and should contribute to making the world a better place. The developers feel a responsibility for developing superb products and always strive to do better.

“IF WE WANT CHILDREN TO GROW UP IN A SOCIETY WHERE THEY MUST BE CREATIVE, THEY HAVE TO ENGAGE IN PLAY”

“WE WANT TO STRENGTHEN THE COMMUNITY – THERE HAS TO BE ROOM FOR EVERYONE”

“A GOOD LIFE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN HARD-CORE SUCCESS – AND WE ALSO APPLY THIS PRINCIPLE WHEN DESIGNING PRODUCTS FOR CHILDREN”

“OUR PRIMARY TASK IS TO CREATE THE FRAMEWORK THAT GUARANTEES ALL CHILDREN OPTIMAL LIVING CONDITIONS”



FREEDOM AND
FLEXIBILITY

FREEDOM AND FLEXIBILITY

DANISH DEVELOPERS OF PLAY PRIORITISE THE FREEDOM FROM CONTROL WHEN CREATING THE FRAMEWORK FOR PLAY. IN ORDER TO CREATE SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS THE PRODUCTS HAVE TO CHALLENGE THE CHILDREN ON SEVERAL LEVELS AND OFFER MULTIPLE FUNCTIONS.

Companies and experts working with design of play declare that they ...

- generate more play with simple systems
- strive to provide the playing experience with several dimensions and room for reflection
- are aware of the fact that different user groups experience play differently
- prioritise freedom over control in the play
- want to create equal opportunities for all

Example

The company PlusPlus has developed a very simple block that looks like a plus sign, and it offers endless playing opportunities when assembled. It is a conscious choice on the part of the developers that the block must keep the play open thus continuing the free building experience.

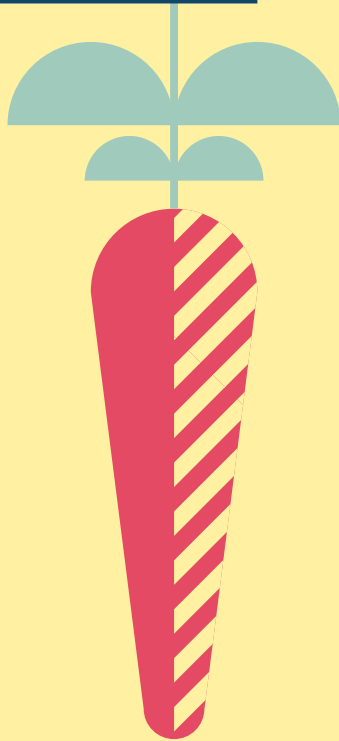
“THE SIMPLER, THE MORE PLAY”

“PLAY HAS TO BE UNRESTRICTED SO THAT THE CHILDREN CAN BUILD, CONSTRUCT AND CREATE ON THEIR OWN TERMS”

“THE ATTENTION SPAN HAS TO BE MORE THAN 30 SECONDS...”

“WE WANT TO CREATE PRODUCTS THAT CAN BE USED AGAIN AND AGAIN, IN MULTIPLE WAYS”

“THERE HAS TO BE ROOM FOR ALL KINDS OF CHILDREN – THEY DO NOT ALL PLAY IN THE SAME WAY, FOR THEY HAVE DIFFERENT PREFERENCES AND NEEDS”



MOTIVATION AND COMMITMENT

MOTIVATION AND COMMITMENT

DANISH DEVELOPERS OF PLAY SEE THEMSELVES AS CREATORS OF THE FOUNDATION OF A POSITIVE PLAYING EXPERIENCE. THEY WANT TO INSPIRE CHILDREN TO EXPLORE AND DEVELOP PLAY AND HEREBY THEIR OWN COMPETENCIES.

Companies and experts working with design of play declare that they ...

- want to appeal to children's imagination
- see it as their goal to generate play
- offer the users the freedom to create the play themselves
- want to challenge and motivate children to engage in physical play

Example

Uniq is passionate about developing unique playing environments for children. The company is keenly aware that children must have the opportunity to create the play themselves – hence they see themselves as inspirators. The fact that children are unpredictable and may use things in a different way from what was originally intended is exciting and what creates a unique experience for the developers.

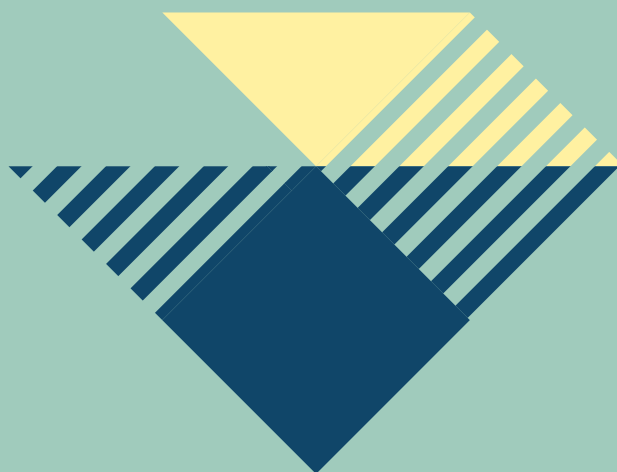
"WE WANT TO CREATE PLAY AND GIVE OWNERSHIP OVER THE PLAY"

"WE HAVE TO GENERATE PLAY"

"WE SEE OURSELVES AS 'STORY STARTERS'"

"THE EXPERIENCE HAS TO PROVIDE THE OPPORTUNITY FOR REFLECTION"

"WE WANT TO INSPIRE THEM AND FORCE THEM TO DECIDE WHAT TO DO NEXT"



MAKING AN EFFORT

MAKING AN EFFORT

INTERNATIONALLY DANISH DESIGN IS ASSOCIATED WITH HIGH QUALITY, AND THAT ALSO APPLIES IN THE CASE OF DANISH DESIGN OF PLAY. DANISH DEVELOPERS OF PLAY MAKE AN ENORMOUS EFFORT AND CAREFULLY THINK THROUGH ALL ASPECTS OF THEIR PRODUCTS, BOTH IN TERMS OF FORM AND CONTENT.

Companies and experts working with design of play declare that they ...

- are aware of the importance of creating a unified experience of the product
- are willing to make a detour in the process in order to reach a satisfactory result
- receive great international praise

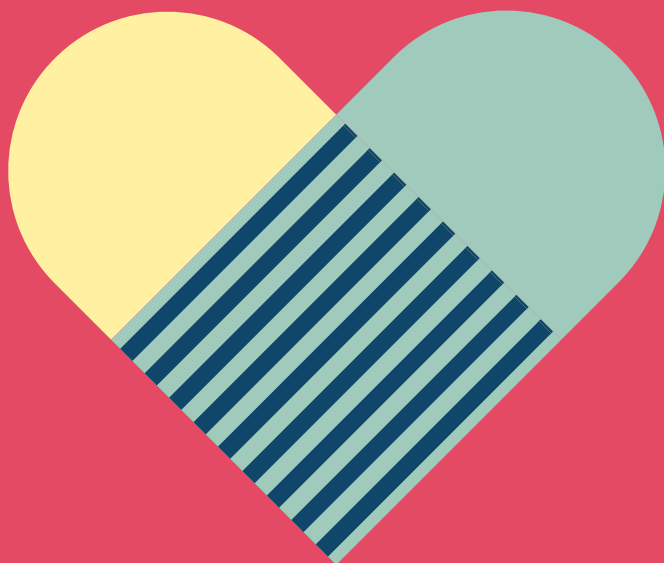
Example

The company DR Ramasjang, producers of TV programmes for children, are extremely conscientious in its work. The producers compare this approach with getting up early in the morning and preparing a delicious breakfast. They make an effort, not only to create entertainment, but also create inspiration for children in their everyday life and play.

“IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO CREATE A UNIFIED EXPERIENCE OF THE PRODUCT”

“WE SPEND SEVERAL YEARS ON RESEARCH IN ORDER TO ENSURE THAT WE HAVE DEVELOPED THE ABSOLUTELY BEST PRODUCT”

“OUR PRODUCTS ARE ASSOCIATED WITH QUALITY”



PLAY AS A
CULTURAL VALUE

PLAY AS A CULTURAL VALUE

DENMARK HAS A PEDAGOGICAL TRADITION WHICH STRETCHES FAR BACK AND PERMEATES OUR APPROACH TO PLAY. PLAY IS IMPORTANT FOR THE WAY WE HAVE STRUCTURED OUR SOCIETY. UNLIKE MANY OTHER LANGUAGES DANISH HAS A SPECIFIC WORD FOR 'PLAY' AS DISTINCT FROM... WELL, PLAY.

Companies and experts working with design of play declare that they ...

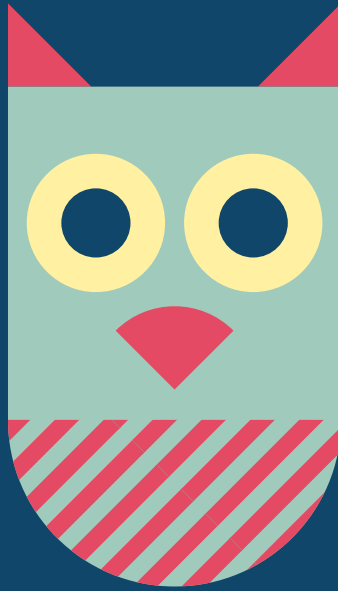
- attach great importance to basic human values in their work
- are conscious of their cultural heritage
- contribute to the users' lives and general education

Example

For many years, Carsten Jessen's research has concentrated on the development of play, and he formulates the extent to which we prioritise play, without always being aware of it. The richer we become, the more things we buy that entertain us. However, we also want these things to provide social interaction, which means that play is valuable for us as individuals.

"THE 19TH CENTURY DANISH PASTOR, POET, PHILOSOPHER AND EDUCATION PIONEER, N. F. S. GRUNDTVIG PLACED A HUGE EMPHASIS ON IMAGINATION AND EMOTIONS, WHICH, HE CLAIMED, HAD TO KEEP THE INTELLECT IN CHECK"

"THE DECISIVE EVOLUTION IN THE 1960S AND 70S WAS THAT CHILDREN THEMSELVES STARTED TO BECOME THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION – NOT THE ADULTS' PERCEPTION OF CHILDREN"



MULTIDISCIPLINARY **APPROACH**

MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

FOR DANISH DEVELOPERS OF PLAY IT COMES NATURAL TO INVOLVE BOTH THEORETICAL AND MORE PRACTICALLY-ORIENTED PROFESSIONALS IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES. THE DEVELOPERS RELY ON PEDAGOGICAL THEORIES AND INCORPORATE RELEVANT, PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE IN TESTS AND EVALUATIONS IN ORDER TO ADD FURTHER VALUE TO THE PRODUCTS.

Companies and experts working with design of play declare that they ...

- are consciously availing themselves of scientific and professional validations of their work
- base the product development on tradition and intuition as well

Example

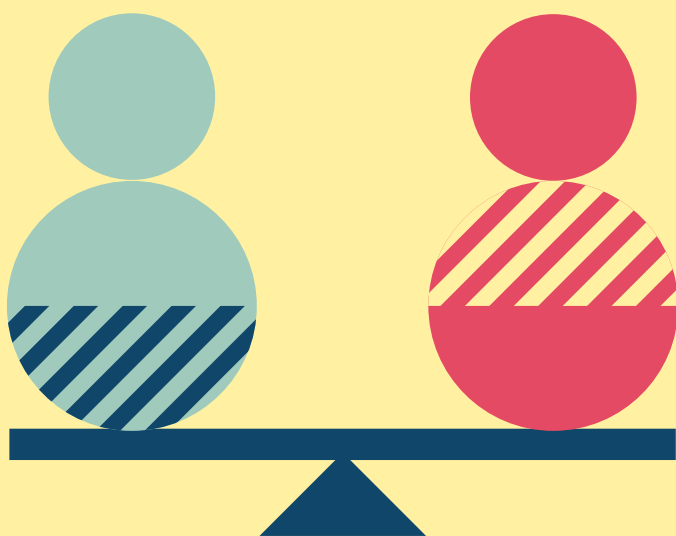
Irrespective of their extensive experience developing digital play, ABCITY aims for the very best collaborative partners when targeting learning and playing experiences for children. They utilise state-of-the-art know-how within linguistic science and pedagogy in order to create the best products for children.

“WE TEST OUR IDEAS AND PRODUCTS WITH PROFESSIONALS”

“COLLABORATION IS CRUCIAL IN ORDER TO CREATE SUPERB PRODUCTS”

“WE WANT TO BE ENLIGHTENED”

“IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO ADHERE TO A KNOWLEDGE BASE SO THAT WE DON'T END UP AS SWING SET SALESMEN”



RECOGNITION
AND EQUALITY

RECOGNITION AND EQUALITY

DANISH DEVELOPERS OF PLAY WANT TO INCLUDE THE USERS IN THE PROCESS. CHILDREN ARE GIVEN A VOTE, AND THEIR CONTRIBUTION IS WEIGHTED AND RESPECTED. THE SAME APPROACH INFLUENCES THE COLLABORATION AND DEVELOPMENT PROCESS IN THEIR OWN COMPANIES AND THEY DON'T SHY AWAY FROM CONFRONTING THEIR PROTOTYPES WITH REALITY.

Companies and experts working with design of play declare that they ...

- equally respect the user and the customer
- recognize the value of inspiration and input from the user
- cultivate the playing process and the flat management structure internally in their companies
- learn from both negative and positive user feedback

Example

Before developing a new product, LEGO Future Lab conducts several years of research into the specific user group for which the product is intended. The reason is that the resulting products have proven to hit the target and become very popular. The LEGO Group is constantly focusing on children who act both as inspiration and validation, since they are part of the development process from the start.

“CHILDREN ARE INVOLVED FROM THE BEGINNING, AS A SOURCE OF INSPIRATION”

“CHILDREN ARE UNPREDICTABLE – THAT’S WHAT IS SO EXCITING. WE SEE THINGS FROM BOTH THE ADULTS’ AND FROM THE CHILDREN’S PERSPECTIVES”

“CHILDREN HAVE THEIR OWN IDENTITY – THEIR OWN CULTURE”

“OUR PRODUCTS ARE NOT ALWAYS USED IN THE WAY WE INTENDED. WE INCORPORATE BOTH THE NEGATIVE AND THE POSITIVE EXPERIENCES WHEN WE SIT DOWN AGAIN AT THE DRAWING BOARD AND DEVELOP NEW SOLUTIONS”