



Sharing Public Space

Youth Experience and Socialization in Marseille's Borely Park

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This article presents a field study conducted in a public park in a major city of southern France. Using a comprehensive approach and an ethnographic method, the goal is to gain insight into the everyday activities that govern the use of public space. By granting meaning to actions considered useless and insignificant, the purpose of this article is to understand how the sharing of public space, in particular the overcrowding observed in Borely Park, participates in youth socialization. People's experiences and interactions in a public park create ties between them. The sharing of places, and the impressions generated as a result, help bring peers closer together while also bridging the generation gap. Through its description of how the youth use this metropolitan park, this study highlights the importance of the sense dimension in the building of societies. Finally, this work argues that youth are continually learning to live together without really realizing it.

Keywords: urban park; play; leisure; socialization; experience

At the south end of the grounds, facing a large avenue lined with plane trees, stands an 18th-century chateau designed by painter-architects of Italian inspiration. Rectangular areas covered with lawns and low hedges, trimmed to leave an unencumbered view of the chateau, enclose fountains and statues. In short, a true French garden. To

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the west of the main avenue are vast meadows planted with tamarisks extending all the way to the seaside. To the east lies a landscaped garden where lush, vigorous vegetation offers cool shady spots that form “a charming grove crisscrossed by carefully designed pathways” (Historical Note, Archives of the City of Marseille). This is what the *bastide* looked like in 1775, owned at the time by a merchant family made rich through trade in the port of Alexandria.¹ It was the wealthy Louis Borely who had the mansion built. His heirs continued to enjoy the delights of the estate, adding a few personal touches here and there, until 1856, when one of Borely’s descendants—more interested in the upcoming development of railway transport than in the tranquility of the domain—turned the property over to the City of Marseille in exchange for land to the north where the railroad was to pass. On August 15, 1863, the domain was opened up to the public and named Borely Park. Except for one painful interlude, the German Occupation, when it was turned into a fortified camp, the park has been devoted to serving the people ever since.

Marseille is the most highly populated metropolitan area in southern France (Philippe, 2001). Following a series of migrations, the native population of this port city was mixed with people from various ethnic groups (Italians, Armenians, *pièd-noirs*, North Africans, etc.).² Today, the city counts 800,000 inhabitants, spread across its vast territory (three times the area of Paris proper) bounded on all sides by hills or the sea. The urban landscape is full of contrasts. According to the sociologist J. Viard (1989), “The Canebière [the city’s main street, and also its emblem, which leads to the Old Port] has gradually become a dividing line between the working-class city to the north and the wealthier city to the south” (p. 14; authors’ translation). The northeast quarters are striped with massive gray blocks of apartment buildings and housing

units, the “bad areas” riddled with poverty and unemployment; in the southwest quarters lie luxurious dwellings and homes, with a view of the sea and succulent vegetation and Borely Park.

The tamarisk meadows of the original Borely domain have become a race-track and a golf course, separated from the sea by the busy coastal road enjoyed by locals and tourists alike. The central avenue of the park is now paved, but two of the rectangular lawns have been retained.



Figure 1. The Main Entrance of the Park, Its Castle, and Its French Garden

Source: © Olivier L’Aoustet.

Many joggers use the avenue, alone or in small groups. They are soon joined by young children accompanied by their mother or their grandparents. Runners, cyclists, rollerbladers, and scooter users speed down the paths, providing a lively scene for bystanders. One of the spectators may be that old man who comes day after day in the early afternoon to sit with friends his age already settled into their favorite spot on the grass. Folding chair in hand, he goes to the same place, at the same time, to meet the

same people. They talk. A few steps from the 70-year-olds, a man is facing a tree. He's a combat sport enthusiast: With wide movements of the legs and arms, he feigns an attack with his trunk. A sandwich is lying on the edge of the improvised ring. He

works a couple of blocks from the park and this is his lunch break.

To the east of the central avenue, the landscaped garden has been maintained and boasts of a wide variety of plants and many lawns. An artificial lake embellishes the center of the garden. Near its ends, the lake can be crossed on little wooden bridges. An island in the middle offers a restaurant and a play area for children. Swans, ducks, geese, pigeons, and sea gulls move around the lake. "I've



Figure 2. A Bucolic View of the Public Park

Source: © Olivier L'Aoustet

been coming every day for 7 years to feed them," says an old man who knows the park birds perfectly. "Saturnin is the only one who'll let you stroke him," he replies. Young children also take an interest in the feathered creatures, coming with their families to offer leftover chunks of bread. On an immense lawn nearby, a soccer game is starting up. Ten adolescents wearing spiked shoes are putting all they've got into the competition. A few meters away, two lovers are clasped in each other's arms, taking no heed of the many mountain bikers swishing by. They lie on the grass in the shade, alternating between kissing and exchanging a few soft words.

Borely Park as a Public Space

Borely Park is a public space open to all, subject to public law, and governed by the right to access (hospitality) and the right of scrutiny (resulting in the manifestation of appropriate conduct). The Borely domain is both "territory and population, a material framework and a unit of collective life" (Grafmeyer, 1995, p. 8; authors' translation). It is a space that is shared. Since the 19th century, public parks have instituted a form of urban entertainment. Nietzsche considered them as a refuge against disorder and vulgarity, as a location for the peace of mind. Nowadays, parks contribute in a different way to create social cohesion. In each garden—square or major urban park—there is a special atmosphere. Its spatial arrangement (relief, fauna, flora, presence or layout of an ornamental lake, building, playground, or business) gives it a unique aura. In this general atmosphere, the park merges populations and provides a gathering place for intense and remarkably diverse activity. In these parks, most of the development that takes place is not intended for a specific use. The priority seems to be first of all aesthetic. However, a great number of wide and varied activities can occur in these nonoriented spaces. Given this, these parks, considered as spaces reserved for ex-

uberance and inactivity, differ from other public places that are built according to strict functional standards (roads, public buildings, etc). It is significant to note, however, that certain urban places that are more built-up have similar characteristics. Places, squares, and other spaces with a “visual” vocation can be, like parks and gardens, spaces where spontaneous human activity can take place.³ In Borely Park, some seek the calm; others look for friends to play with. High schoolers go between classes to take a break and talk with classmates. Retired men go to play *pétanque* on the main plaza of the grounds.⁴ The high concentration of individuals in the park requires a more or less clear-cut division of the space into distinct zones. The activities and groups are not distributed equally across the individual areas. Each area is natural and spontaneous—in the sense that it does not result from an institutional breakdown—at the same time as it is based on customs, that is, indicative of singular ways of life. Accordingly, each area supports a manner of acting specific to those who make use of it. One part may be more the meeting place of senior citizens, whereas another is more likely to be used by adolescents for playing soccer. The spatial arrangement of each area is in effect what determines who uses it. For talking in summer, the elderly choose shady areas with park benches side by side; in the winter, it is the sunny places sheltered from the wind that attract them. Young soccer players practice on the open lawns, far enough from the water to avoid getting splashed every time the ball goes over the back line. Some locations are used solely for a given activity or by a given group; others accommodate different activities and groups at the same time. Persons and activities are spread throughout the park, not only in space but also in time. In the manner of European plazas, the different ways of using the park, which change with the time of day, the day of the week, the month, and the year, are a reflection of the liveliness of the grounds (Lennard & Lennard, 1984). Time and space can account for regularities in the social behavior observed in public places and explain variations in the reasons and times for going to the park (Field, 2000). The range of utilizations tells us about the life of the city. To capture this dimension of reality, the meanings carried by a place must be deciphered, and the images it offers must be translated (Rapoport, 1982).

Borely Park is the Mecca of Marseille. Rare is the city dweller who is unaware of its existence. Everyone knows where it is, or at least that it’s near the high-class neighborhoods in the southern part of the city. The park is a busy place. Borely Park is an excellent site for studying urban complexity. Delineating the multiple uses of the park and figuring out the reasons for the ineffectiveness of rules and regulations and the confounding of the norms in effect—these were the aims chosen for describing the vitality of this public space. As recommended by Sanders (1999), we focused on the significance of the collective activities observed in the park and tried to determine their characteristics. Although public use of this space is not only contingent on instituted allotments, the significance of the layout of the park is highly dependent on the many daily activities that bring it to life. The study explores the activity of the youth that come to the park, alone or with friends. Their actions in the park are a testimony to the often ambiguous nature of social life. Why do adolescents preferentially invest their time and effort in this space? How do they organize this overpopulated area? What reasons do they give for their actions? Based on observations of behavior in the park and the questioning of its users, we set out to understand how the sharing of public space, in particular the overcrowding observed in Borely Park, participates in youth socialization.⁵

Answers to these aforementioned questions were obtained through a field study and the empirical data it supplied. The methodological tools used included simple visits to the grounds, observations written down in a notebook, and tape-recorded discussions with park users—in short, time spent “hanging around” Borely Park (Shaffir, 1999). Ours was a “haphazard” kind of ethnography, that is, one without any preconceptions and based on the “intuitive approach” advocated by Simmel (1999, p. 52). Such an approach was chosen to permit analysis of the forms of socialization, understood here as a “mode of reciprocal action among individuals, through which, or in the form of which, a content gains access to a social reality” (p. 44; authors’ translation). By focusing on actions considered useless or insignificant, the ethnographic approach presents the current social function of a park.

A Family Affair

Ludovic is a 15-year-old boy who lives on the northeast side of Marseille, 25 minutes from Borely Park by bus. He goes there regularly during vacations and on weekends. Sometimes he comes just to “bike around,” but most of the time he brings friends with him. What he likes to do in the park is play sports with his buddies, especially soccer. Emmanuelle attends a high school near the park. Her reasons for coming are different: “It’s not to do sports. We come to talk, that’s all, with boys and girls we know. Since our high school is nearby, we often come on our lunch break.” Whether athletic types (soccer players, bikers, rollerbladers, or joggers) or adolescents attracted by a chance to relax for a while in the park (read, talk, go for a walk, hang out), the youth who meet at Borely Park have one thing in common: They all started coming to the park with their family. Every weekend or vacation day, the park is invaded by Marseille’s families. The traditional Sunday “promenade” takes place on the walkways and pathways of the park. A bike ride, a picnic on the lawn, a boat trip on the lake, a drive in a pedal car along the paths: Most young people who go to the park have had such “experiences,” as Jerome calls them. He remembers the first walks taken with the family in the park: “I used to come with my parents. It was just the way we spent Sunday in our family. I have fond memories. Yeah, with the ducks and all.” Emmanuelle would come every Sunday: “I usually went to bike with my brother or walk with my parents.” Now that they are on their own, these teenagers move about the park in a different way. They drop their childish habits. Ludovic explains this redefining of the space:

Yes, we already used to come when we were little, with our parents. They brought us here, and then later when we started to get older, we came on our own. When I came with my family, it was more to go for a walk. . . . Now, most of the time, we come for sports. But if not, we also come to get away, to spend time with girl friends, we find a spot, and . . .

Thus, the past has had a strong influence on why these young people come to the park today. They come because the childhood moments spent there with the family take on a symbolic value as time goes by. Yet while striving to break away from their earlier experiences, they want to claim their new status, that of an adult or, in any case, an independent individual. As Jerome said, his experience of the park today is that of “a grownup.” Becoming independent means freedom to act as one wishes and choos-

ing one's own schedule for leisure activities. Marc tells us, "Before, I had to come with my parents. My parents were always there telling me not to go over there, not to do that. Now I can do what I want, when I want." Hutchison (1987), who studied the impact of leisure activities on social relations, concluded that the "regular and systematic use of public parks was structured to reinforce family and communal ties." The reports we collected from the park users support this idea. Their testimonies show that early memories of good times spent in the park with the family are indeed what prompted these now-independent adolescents to continue coming to the park. The experience of sharing public space together contributes to the formation of a privileged relationship among peers, and helps them develop a positive feeling about the place being shared. The recreational use of the park is part of a familial and cultural tradition.

Escaping Urban Life: Scenery, Space, Sun, and Sea

Jerome remembers his first outings. "The first time, my parents said 'Come, we're going out for a while.' They told us we were going to see the countryside. We saw grass, we got a ball, and we started to play." In discussing what location to choose, users highlight the natural virtues of the park. It is a place where "you come to get a breath of fresh air" (Caroline), a place with "clean air" (J-B), a place where there is "space, no pollution, no traffic" (Arnaud). Cedric summarizes the park's attractive features: "You come here because there's nature. It's more fun to run here, there aren't any cars, whereas downtown there are cars, there's no greenery. It's pretty here. There are trees."

The recreational role of urban space has often been neglected in the development of cities, where the possibilities for leisure activities are limited by traffic, air pollution, noise, and the growth of business (Williams, 1995). Public parks offer an alternative to city life. As Ludovic said, we come here "to relax, to relieve some of the stress generated by the city." Looking at the reasons why the park is so widely used by Marseille's inhabitants, particularly its youth, we find certain motives common to all. For example, one goes to Borely Park to be amid nature. Several subthemes are associated with the theme of nature seeking. One is the scenery. The domain offers visitors a variety of decors rich in color: vast lawns, clumps of flowers, tropical trees, a lake, and woods. Teenagers like to take walks in this pleasant place that triggers aesthetic judgments: "It's beautiful, there are trees, lawns, it's a little bit of nature. And then when the rose garden is open, we go see it because it's pretty" (Cedric). These young people pay attention to things one would not imagine they would sense.

The weather conditions are another consideration that strongly affects visits to this nature-filled space. Only adult joggers remain faithful to the park in inclement weather. Basking in the sun is an ongoing attraction for the park's regulars. The chance for exposure to the sun, and to the light and heat it generates, thus seems to enhance the desire to go to the park. But even more, the very mood of the Marseillais is contingent upon the climate. Love of the sun is in the mentality of the inhabitants of southern France. For these people, the sunlight has a highly symbolic value; it is an integral part of the Mediterranean life style. Like many others, Emmanuelle comes "when it's a nice day. . . . Usually we stay over here or over there: in the sun. It's often sunny here. For me, this is important. I live a lot by the weather. When it's sunny out, I feel great. When it's raining or whatever, my mood, well, it's just not right. . . . I know I could never live in a place like Paris."

Another point common to everyone's explanations of why they go to Borely Park is its closeness to the sea. The story of the Borely domain would not have been the same had it not been near the sea. Proximity to the sea is what provided its first owners with the incentive to purchase the land. The Borely family wanted a pleasant second home that fit with their line of business: shipping. Later, when the domain was bought by the City of Marseille, it was again the estate's seaside location and its salty emanations that halted the municipal plan to build a botanical garden. Thus, the presence of the sea has been highly instrumental in determining the future use of the Borely domain as a public park. Today, in the imagination of the locals, this place is inseparable from the Mediterranean Sea itself, close enough to offer opportunities for suntanning, swimming, and water and beach sports in hot weather. "It's great, that way we can hop over to the beach," Baptiste tells us. Teenagers like Garry appreciate the park precisely because "it's next to the sea." In the same way as fountains and ponds in city centers entice urban dwellers (Whyte, 1980), the closeness of the sea at Borely Park gives it an attractive quality of its own.

Note that Marseille has always revolved around the sea. However, after the decline of the shipping industry, which went from transporting passengers to fishing and then to trade, the utilization of the coast became largely geared to recreation and entertainment. Whether for water sports (surfing, yachting, wind surfing, water skiing) or beach sports (beach volleyball, beach soccer, sandball), the seaside is undeniably leisure oriented. Close to the coast, Borely Park has been marked by this orientation, but it nevertheless has an aura of its own, a special atmosphere. One of the notable features of the park is its contrasts. Being in a maritime area that opens up onto the sea, it lets in the seaside air and offers a wide-open view of the Mediterranean. But it is also a place that evokes the forest, with its landscaped garden dotted with groves and trees of dense foliage, and its cool air and earthy smells. This atypical scenery surprises walkers as they amble through the undergrowth, tread on moist green grass, or are gripped by the cold held in by the lindens, oaks, and thickets under the tall trees. They forget they are in Marseille. The cry of seagulls, that wild sound in the background so familiar to the Marseillais, suddenly reminds them of the presence of the sea.

A Place for Meeting Friends and Sharing Experiences

Today, a sunny Wednesday in January, the park is very lively. The scene takes place on the walkway that crosses the landscaped garden. Three 16-year-old boys are talking about soccer: "The coach really blew it," one of them exclaims.⁶ A girl passes by. The three boys are no longer talking about soccer. In fact, they stop talking altogether and simply admire the girl's physique, making comments about her, loud enough to be heard. She looks back and smiles. A little farther away in a large grassy area, 10 or so boys are engaged in a soccer game. The group is made up of several young adolescents and one adult who is organizing the game (the father of one of the players). Taking advantage of a ball that goes out of bounds, two boys in soccer jerseys approach the group and ask if they can join in. The answer is yes. Each team gets a new player. These two scenes are good illustrations of the frequent interactions that take place at Borely Park. It may be a simple case of talking or calling out to someone you don't know: "There are other people who go running that you can talk to," says Fabrice, a young jogger and habitué of the park. But it may be more than just talking. One can also do

activities and experience things with new people. As Thomas said, "You can meet people to play with, and there you go. For example, just three of us came. With only three people, we might have gotten bored. But then we saw another guy."

Relationships of different levels develop at Borely Park: Some are anonymous, that is, occurring at a particular moment and ending there and then; others are more deep-rooted (Goffman, 1973), growing gradually within the confines of the park. The youths who come to play here together have the same idea of fun. Like the tribes, networks, little groups, and short-lived effervescent assemblies that Michel Maffesoli (1995) presents and believes to be characteristic of our times, the players at Borely are united by the same sensibility. They share a culture of their own, comparable to the idioculture defined by Fine (1979) as "a system of knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and customs shared by members of an interacting group to which members can refer and employ as the basis of further interaction" (p. 734). The park is a highly attractive place for multiple and varied encounters: "There are lots of people: it's just plain great," as Olivier put it in a nutshell. The movement, the density, and the heterogeneity of the users give this public space its vitality.

Despite the opportunities the park offers for meeting people, it is also a place for intense moments shared with friends. Adolescents rarely go there alone but come instead accompanied by friends from school or from their neighborhood, or by members of the same sports club or cultural group. For Baptiste, being accompanied "is important. You bring your roller blades, you can do it for a while by yourself, well . . . it's fun at first. But after a while you get bored. You have to talk, kid around with your buddies."

Moments of relaxation may be experienced among friends or shared with strangers. Accepting strangers into the group, or joining in with a gathering of unknown persons, expands the habitual circle of relationships. Ludovic expresses this by saying, "We're already looking for people we can play with, because



Figure 3. A Rider Community

Source: © Olivier L'Aouset

spending time together is okay but after a while, always seeing the same faces. . . . We want to create a meeting place." Lieberg (1995) differentiates two types of space in public areas: places of interaction where adolescents are confronted with the adult world, and places of retreat where, on the contrary, the youth can withdraw into an environment reserved solely for peers, where adults are prohibited. Borely Park provides an intermediate place between these two spaces, an ambivalent area that mixes opening up and intimacy. It is conducive to encounters between peers and adults and

experiences shared among friends. It creates continuity between generations at the same time as it reinforces ties between peers.

A Space for Living in the Present

An integral part of any city's lifeline is its unexpected component (Hannerz, 1980). Trying to program a city leads to its death. The fact of discovering something by chance, "serendipity," is what affords the city dweller the opportunity to break away from humdrum routines. Borely Park offers this feature. Behavior is not preprogrammed here. The youth live this leisure time in the present, in a kind of "time" that is new and "fosters the excitement of uncertainty, the creative possibilities of beginning from the present" (Simpson, 2000, pp. 688-689). A bike ride that stops abruptly when the cyclists pass by a group of pretty girls, a soccer game that ends in an amicable group squabble—these are just a few of the many examples that show how happenstance can dictate the time spent in the park. Adolescents let themselves be guided, without really foreseeing what they'll do. Quite often, even the very fact of going to the park is unplanned. Emmanuelle insists on the spontaneity of her decisions: "Sometimes, I'm in the city with my girlfriends, and we don't know what to do. It's a nice day, so we take the bus and come here." As for Jonathan, the telephone is his route: "We call each other up and say, 'What're we doing this afternoon?' We throw out some ideas, look at the weather. Like today, it was hot, we could wear tee shirts, it was a nice day, so we said, 'Let's go play soccer at Borely.' If not, you end up trapped in the house on the computer."

Once on site, young people get fully involved in playing, and they live these highly intense moments of recreation detached from all pressures: "Here, there's nothing we have to do. We don't go home until one p.m.: so what, so we eat a little later," says Cedric. Stewart (1998) describes this optimal experience as "absorption-in-the-moment" (p. 392). Coming to the park also means forgetting oneself in the game: The world of play encloses the player in a sphere that captures all his or her attention and places him or her in a universe shielded from all outside demands and constraints. The place where the action unfolds becomes unique and transforms this intense moment into "an eternal instant" (Jeu, 1977). This playing time is a compelling alternative to the mechanical, strictly linear and projective time of the modern world, bounded by a beginning and an end. Belonging to this universe generates a "feeling of experiencing the exceptional together, of sharing something important together, of separating ourselves from others together, and of escaping from general norms" (Huizinga, 1951, p. 33; authors' translation).

Soccer Playing at Borely Park

In Marseille, soccer is at the heart of many preoccupations. A passion that attaches Marseille's people to the OM, the pennant team of the city.⁷ The infatuation and the fervor of the "Phocaeen" city's inhabitants are nationally recognized.⁸ Symbolically anchored in Marseille's culture, soccer is practiced in its stadiums and streets alike. At Borely Park, it is undeniably the activity that brings together the greatest number of adolescents. On Wednesdays, Saturdays, and Sundays,⁹ the lawns are literally swarm-

ing with addicts of the black and white ball.¹⁰ Groups of soccer players occupy every spot in the park suited to the game. The number and age of the participants, the extent of physical involvement, and the way the playing is organized vary across groups.

Looking for Fun

Cedric is a sports fiend. He practices track and field with a club and spends the rest of his free time playing soccer. He comes regularly to Borely Park with two of his classmates. Together, they look for partners:

We ask them if they want to play with us. If they do, we mark off a larger playing area and start a game. We make teams out of the groups, hopefully mixed ones. Well, some don't want to. But at least we don't always play with the same people. Things usually go smoothly. Once things went wrong but . . . there was a quarrel. They didn't agree on things so they wanted to start a fight. We left without asking for anything because we didn't want to fight. We went to play somewhere else. They didn't agree on the refereeing, they wanted to fight about it, we didn't really want to fight, so we went to play a ways away.



Figure 4. Soccer in the Park

Source: © Olivier L'Aoustet

Cedric adopts this fleeing behavior to be able to keep on playing.

During the time we were on site, no physical fighting was ever observed between two soccer players. Participants who feel they are victims of a violent act—a behavior which in an organized sports event would be penalized—may raise their voice, but conflict stays at the verbal level and the game goes on. Unlike organized sports, which require conscientiousness,

work, and progress, soccer playing in the park is not goal oriented. Sami compares sports club practice and “free” practice: “I like both. When you have a coach you train better and you improve more, and when you’re here you have a little more fun, sometimes in just any old way.” Thus, engaging in informal sports cannot be seen as an opposition to organized sports. Free play develops side by side with organized play, but in a different mode motivated solely by the search for fun. The rules of the game are not determined in advance but are defined jointly as the play unfolds. Games that mix persons unaccustomed to playing together often get interrupted. But then, as more and more meetings take place, the players agree on a set of rules that are accepted and shared by all. Newcomers to the group need only be informed. But the underlying principle is always the same: We’re here to play (Travert, 1997). These two forms of sports (formal and informal) coexist in France today, and there is no empirical data

suggesting a drop in fondness for organized sports. However, it seems that informal sports take up a large part of urban leisure time. Borely Park is one of the places where this is apparent.

An Illegal Practice

To get into the park from the south, the chateau side, one must go under a large stone archway. Past the archway on the left, there is a sign indicating the park regulations. They call for public-spiritedness and are composed of several sections aimed at all potential park users. Section 5 stipulates: "Activities likely to cause accidents, deteriorate the grounds, or disturb the peace of users are prohibited, in particular, various types of ball games, lawn bowling, and skateboarding." How could one believe that soccer is prohibited at Borely Park? The head officer in charge of the park system informed us that this clause is aimed at preserving the park lawns. The heavy daily traffic, which he estimates to be about 2,000 to 3,000 persons on weekdays and 8,000 to 10,000 persons on weekends and holidays, is a threat to the park and a hindrance to proper maintenance. For this reason, "We prohibit all soccer games," he said. We asked a second, lower ranking officer whose job involves circulating throughout the park on an electric scooter, "Is there any soccer in the park?" He replied, "Very, very little. Soccer is forbidden in the park, but we do tolerate it. . . . When the games are too big, we ask them to move to other places, to the beach at the landing [a very popular grassy area along the coast where soccer playing is common]." According to this officer, his function is limited mainly to keeping dogs out of the park and finding lost children. It seems, then, that chasing away soccer players is not a high-priority task for the park police.

On the players' side, not all players are aware that ball playing is forbidden. In the course of our conversations with the teenage soccer enthusiasts, we mentioned that the park rules prohibit soccer. Many faces showed surprise: "If we're not allowed to, I didn't know it. Nobody ever told me so I thought it was allowed." However, most of the youth who play soccer at Borely know it's against the rules, but they consider it a minor offense, claiming that "everyone plays, so . . ." (Jonathan). Soccer is so common that it seems authorized. Like the justifications given by adolescents surprised to learn that it was illegal to play in a sports field reserved for the schools (L'Aoustet & Griffet, 2000), the perceived legitimacy of park utilization is founded on the example set by adults and the precedent set by peers. When soccer players are called over by a park officer, they temporarily accept the penalty (stop the game). Sami has experienced this situation: "One day there were guards who came to see us and to ask us to stop. They told us to quit playing. We waited for them to leave and started up again." Sami's method is effective, and is in fact the one most often used. The players all know that this approach worsens their case should the officer come back, but they also know that the consequences are never serious: If the officer returns and finds them playing again, he gets angry and expels them. There are guards stationed at the park gate to prevent the entry of large groups of what is (or appears to be) soccer players. The youth try to find a way to get into the park: "When there are too many of us, they won't let us in. That happened to us once. There were 10 of us, we arrived with a ball, and they told us, 'No, there are too many of you, you may not enter.' But then later we split into little groups and got in," admitted Ramzi.

Although by their illegal soccer playing, the youth are putting themselves in a rule-breaking position, they do not represent an antiauthority or deviant subculture because of it. Their behavior is tolerated by the park police, even accepted and reproduced by the rest of the population. This originally prohibited activity has become normative and legitimate. Etzioni-Havely (1975) calls this a “semi-deviant” attitude or behavior.

Rethinking Leisure Activities

Clawson and Knetsch (1966) proposed a sequential framework for analyzing leisure activities: (a) anticipation and planning, (b) travelling to the site, (c) on-site activity, (d) return travel from the site, and (e) recollection of the trip. One of the strengths of this model is that it considers the person’s state of mind and atmosphere to be a fundamental part of the experience. It also breaks away from a “frozen” view of leisure, where it is presented as a snapshot taken at time *t*, or as a still-life painting. Supplementing the study of leisure time—which is traditionally based on quantitative surveys (questionnaires)—with the analysis of the participants’ discourse and the observation of their activities as they occur, helps paint a clearer picture of the experiences actors undergo in this highly particular setting. The methods used so far to understand leisure activities do not describe this setting. The characteristic features of the activities themselves—here, the influence of the family, the relationship to nature, the seeking and sharing of experiences, the search for fun by the persons who carry out those activities, and the strategies devised to deal with the forbidden—are highly crucial in understanding recreation and leisure in today’s society. The ethnographic approach allows us to break away from a predetermined view of leisure that sees it as detached from all context and occurring in a time of its own (Stewart, 1998). Insight into the meaning granted to activities by the people who accomplish them helps make these practices understandable.

Conclusion

In its initial conception in the 19th century, the public urban park was seen as a place to take a break from the hustle and bustle of the surrounding city. Its function was to break with a rational time and space of the world of production. The public park seemed to attract nature lovers that devoted their time in the park to rest and strolling around. This pocket of quietude could be seen as approaching a dreamlike state of contemplation and meditation. The ethnographic descriptions of the park show that this space, initially conceived as a place for rest and relaxation, is now largely consecrated to playing wide and varied sports. The leisure activities—which are physically demanding and largely exceed the sphere of childlike games—complement inner activities such as daydreaming. This diversification of activities leads to a broadening of an aesthetic park’s function. The place is not exclusively a space of peace and tranquility but also affords this kinesthetic experience.

At first glance, the park engenders promiscuity. It seems to be the juxtaposition of the cohabitation of small worlds and spheres. The soccer players occupy part of the lawns and the bowl players use the rough surfaces, whereas walkers, joggers, and

rollers occupy the paths and tarred walkways. In fact, several of these worlds communicate and give the population a homogeneity that exceeds the simple fact of sharing the same space. The frequentation of the park, largely ordered by family traditions, expresses a historical continuity founded by the practices of several generations. The specific requirements of the games and practiced sports also contribute to the creation of ties and bring about a mixture of populations which usually live in geographically separate spaces. If the lawns offer the surfaces that privilege the playing of soccer, the collective structure of the game encourages the participants to gather and form teams. The physical and group constraints inherent to the practice of soccer contribute to the validation of the “green magnet” theory (Gobster, 1998), which sees the public park as an active agent destined to promote social relations. In tandem with these objective conditions that favor the mixing of different populations are the emotional conditions that likewise emerge. The participation in a game confines the player to a present instant and reduces the space to the limits of the activity at that moment in time. This aspect undoubtedly contributes strongly to the temporary forgetting of differences in ethnic background, generation and/or class, and help make the park one of the most liberating places in the communication of a city.

Guided by the search for fun and play, youth interact with each other and with the entire population. In the heart of Marseille’s wealthy neighborhoods, Borely Park is a place of leisure that blends individuals of diverse social and ethnic backgrounds. Sometimes against instituted norms and rules, in a place marked by the history of progress, the Mediterranean climate, and closeness to the sea, people continue learning to live together without really realizing it.

Notes

1. In Provence, the term *bastide* means a farm or country home.
2. Algerian-born French people forced to return to France with the independence of Algeria in 1962.
3. In Marseille, the best example is without a doubt the broad esplanade located at the entrance to the stade vélodrome (the emblematic soccer team Olympique de Marseille’s home stadium). It is a great place with a smooth surface, a few benches scattered around, and is lit in the evening by two rows of standard lamps. The aesthetic function of this vast space is the development of the stadium as a modern emblem. But this place is not only limited to the contemplation of the magnificent stadium just beside it, nor is it a space for resting; instead, this esplanade has the appearance of a playground in the heart of the city. On these aesthetic and symbolic grounds, young skaters and rollerbladers gather to skate and mix with the passersby in search of a few minutes rest and the groups of mothers with their young children.
4. A type of lawn bowling played in the South of France.
5. This term is to be understood in the sense developed by Weber (1920) and especially Simmel, *vergesellschaftung*, which literally means entry into a social relation.
6. Like the *Tour de France* at the national level (Sansot, 1989), the soccer team of the City of Marseille is a local myth. The soccer club offers the Marseillais many moments of collective exhilaration and “an extra boost of life” (p. 95).
7. Marseille’s soccer team, the OM (*L’Olympique de Marseille*), has more fans than any other French team, averaging 50,755 spectators at home games and 25,537 at games in other cities (2000-2001 season). The team has always had many supporters, not only in periods of victory (champions league in 1993) but also during more difficult times (lowering to second division, legal problems). Through the OM, the Marseillais claim their singularity and affirm their op-

position to the rest of France, especially to their sworn enemies, the Parisians. Games between Marseille and Paris are always tense and event-packed. They call for extreme vigilance on the part of game organizers.

8. Marseille came to be in 600 B.C. following a love affair between a Greek sailor from Phocaea and the daughter of a local king.

9. These are the 3 days when French children have time off from school.

10. Statistical analyses were conducted on a sample of 66 randomly selected soccer players to supplement this study with numerical data. The results showed that most players are boys with an average age of 14.7 years. All social classes and backgrounds are represented. The players come from all neighborhoods of Greater Marseille, but the areas closest to the park have the largest number of participants.

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