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Re-visiting design games from a design anthropological perspective
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Design games as fieldwork
Re-visiting design games from a design anthropological perspective

This article explores how design games might serve as a form of design anthropological fieldwork drawing on examples from the project 'Changing Perspectives'- a social design project aimed at designing games to support family consultants in working with incarcerated fathers’ empathic understanding of how their children and family experience the collateral effects of imprisonment. In this design anthropological approach to design games, focus shifts from how games facilitate collaboration to how they can help design researchers understand the ambiguous roles of the design researcher vis-à-vis participants, the gap between research intentions and situated practices, and stakeholder agonism to help us discover and challenge implicit assumptions and roles embedded in the design project.

Keywords: Design methods, social design, design anthropology, participatory design, design research

In 2017 the Danish Prison and Probation service invited a design research team to investigate how games and playful materials could help prisoners assume their parenting role and increase their empathic understanding of how their children might experience the collateral effects of imprisonment. The idea was to co-design a board game used as a dialogue tool by family consultants in their therapeutic work with incarcerated fathers. One year into the project, a family consultant involved in this project outright rejects the assumption that games may serve as a tool for dialogue to help increase incarcerated fathers' empathic understanding of how their children and family experience the collateral effects of imprisonment by saying:

"...believing that the success of the game consists in its ability to increase empathy...would be a guarantee for failure..."

Not only is she sceptical about using games for this particular purpose; in the following conversation, she also questions the idea that empathy by any other means can be trained and learned. In so doing, she refuted the central aim and intention of the design research project she and
eight colleagues had taken part in. At this point, the family consultants had been involved in a participatory design process, where design games had been used in various formats supposedly to level expectations among practitioners and researchers, to obtain a shared understanding of family consultants' work with incarcerated fathers in Danish prisons, set common goals, let the family consultants have a say in idea generation and concept development, and so on. All the things that design games in the existing participatory design literature are often appraised for, which is commonly believed to heighten the probability of ending up with a "good" and well-grounded design project. However, even though design games had thus been used as prescribed "by the book," when we look at some design game sessions from a design anthropological perspective, they tell different stories than those usually foregrounded in participatory design games. Stories, for instance, about the inconsistencies between research agendas and social work practices, about the challenge of aligning design aims with the agonism found in social workers' non-shared understanding of their own practice; and stories about social workers contradictory view of the vulnerability of those people they care for. In order to account for these stories, we re-visit design games from a design anthropological perspective suggesting that design games should not only be seen as a method enabling multiple stakeholders and a design team collectively to engage in sense-making and early concept development, they might also serve as methods for inquiring into the ambiguous roles of the design researcher vis-à-vis participants, the gulf between research intentions and situated practices, and stakeholder agonisms – if we allow them to do so.

The games we present in this paper consist of the same empirical material as traditional design games. The difference lies in the perspective taken in the analysis and interpretation of the game sessions and the conversations with participants that these games may prompt. In a design anthropological approach to design games, the unit of analysis is shifted from how games facilitate collaboration to how they can help design researchers understand the messiness and contradictions inherent in doing socially responsive design research and challenge implicit assumptions embedded in the design project. When using design games as a form of fieldwork, we are therefore not simply concerned with learning about ‘users.’ Rather, we see design games as a form of inquiry into the dynamic, situated, and entangled relations, practices, and perspectives operating at the intersection between design and use. We understand this as a critical form of inquiry aimed at challenging pre-conception among participants, not least those of designers and researchers.

1. Design games re-visited
The origin of design games is often traced back to Habraken and Gross (1988), who used games as a research tool to study the collaborative practice in a design team working on buildings and urban environments. In participatory design, design games are usually extended to involve users and stakeholders in collaborating with designers to establish a mutual understanding of a developmental task. More specifically, design games are conceived of as playful material for letting users and stakeholders genuinely participate as co-designers in the early stages of the design process. In much related work, design games have thus been lauded for enabling designers to learn about users, contexts of use, and how design solutions should ideally be shaped to align with users' existing and future practices (Brandt 2006; Brandt, Messeter, and Binder 2008; Brandt and Messeter 2004).

Inspired by Ehn's notion of 'design by doing' (Ehn 1993), design games have been understood as providing a shared 'language-game' of design to facilitate the meeting and mutual learning between the people involved and the practices and perspectives they represent (Brandt 2006). Brandt et al. (2012) have suggested that design games might in fact be understood as a metaphor for the overall design participation process (Brandt et al., 2012).

In line with participatory design's political commitment to empowering workers and marginalized social groups to influence power-holders and decision-making processes (Björgvinsson, Ehn, and Hillgren 2012; 2010; Ehn 1993), it has also been argued that design games have the potential to downplay or level out power relations among users and stakeholders in the design process (Brandt and Messeter 2004, 121; Eriksen et al. 2014). While, in early work, the role of the participatory design researcher was most often looked upon as the emancipator of oppressed workers or labor classes, increasingly over the years, critical reflection has been made on the design researchers' own values, agenda, and unspoken assumptions in using performative methods such as games to involve users in design (see, e.g., Eriksen et al. 2014; Vines et al. 2013). Hence, Blomberg and Karasti (2013) argue that design researchers should be "turning the mirror on themselves and asking what motivates their participation" (Blomberg and Karasti 2013:107:) in research projects. Interestingly, they point out anthropology and ethnography as central approaches for increasing design researchers' knowledge of these issues. In the same vein, Bødker (2009) raises concern that we need to be critically aware of how we as design researchers are "tacitly-but-tactically shaping the outcome of user involvement by allowing participants to speak or act through a particular set of very different artefacts." It is a matter of making explicit how participation inevitably is configured by the designer's intention and methods, as Vines et al. (2013) put it. Hence, when design games are
used as a central participatory method, the focus of attention should not only be on the method but equally on its enactment, i.e., 'the designer using the method' (Light and Akama 2012, 61).

Reflexivity is a term commonly used in participatory design literature to theorize on this topic. However, as Pihkala and Karasti (2016) point out, reflexivity must not just end up being a way of conceptually including the designer's role as an object of analysis; reflexivity should, in their account, be understood as firmly rooted in and contributing to situated design practices, for which they propose the notion 'reflexive engagement' (Pihkala and Karasti 2016). Our work is positioned along these lines of thought. In particular, we wish to introduce the notion of design games as a particular kind of fieldwork, allowing a more nuanced understanding of how users' involvement in design often entails a messy and inconsistent collision of assumptions, roles, intentions, and value-sets. Drawing on reflexive and critical anthropology (Clifford & Marcus 1986; Marcus & Fisher 1986), our notion of fieldwork differs from that of 'user observation.' We see fieldwork as a reflexive and critical practice exploring the practices and perspectives of 'others' in the attempt not only to understand 'foreign worlds' but also to be able to see, reflect upon, and question our own taken for granted understandings of reality.

In what follows, we explore how design games might serve as a form of design anthropological inquiry into 'what is' and 'what could be. Blending techniques of description and intervention to enable new forms of experience, dialogue, and awareness (Halse and Boffi 2016), we challenge the idea of fieldwork in design as being primarily about describing 'users' in 'the wild' (Ball & Christensen 2018) before and separate from the design process (Button 2000, Dourish 2006, Wasson 2000, Blomberg et al. 2003). Building on and extending ideas from previous work within the field of design anthropology (Kjærgaard 2011, Kjærsgaard & Otto 2012, Smith, R. C., & Kjærsgaard, M. G. 2014, Halse 2012, Halse & Boffi 2016), we suggest that design games might be understood as a form design anthropological fieldwork, that does not primarily provide user data and descriptions (Kjærsgaard 2011, Kjærsgaard & Otto 2012), as in the tradition of ethnographically informed design. Nor do they mainly offer methods and techniques for enrolling users and their knowledge and agendas directly within the design process as foregrounded in participatory design. Instead, we understand design games as a form of fieldwork operating at the intersection between the fields of use and design, re-framing and challenging understandings within and relations between them. Therefore, design games in a design anthropological context do not simply have the world of 'users' as their object but also the practices and contexts of design.
2. Case-project: Designing a board game to help fathers become better fathers

2.1 Changing Perspectives

The empirical material we use in this article is obtained from the design research project *Changing Perspectives* (2017-19). This project aimed to develop and implement a game for the Danish Prison and Probation Service's Parenting Program (see also Knutz and Markussen 2020). The game is to be used as a dialogue tool by family consultants in their therapeutic work with incarcerated fathers. The project has resulted in a board game "Dads Round" (see fig. 6), a game designed to help prisoners assume their parenting role and increase their empathic understanding of how their children might experience imprisonment's collateral effects. "Dad's round" is developed in close collaboration with the Danish Prison and Probation Service's Parenting Program and the family consultants who run this program. The program consists of 9 meetings with the so-called "father-groups", which are groups of incarcerated fathers whom the family consultants meet within the various prisons and detention centers. At each meeting, the family consultants and the prisoners follow a manual (with text, pictures, and guiding questions) that points to the challenges of parenthood, the father-child relationship, and the challenges prisoners experience in maintaining and developing their parenting role while serving time in prison. At these meetings 3-8 male prisoners are typically attending together with a family consultant. The parenting program runs for six weeks (one or two meetings each week) twice a year. Figure 1 below illustrates the Parenting Programme and the focus for each meeting.
The game "Dad's round" specifically targets the 7th meeting (see figure 1) focusing on parenting roles. Here the fathers are encouraged to discuss how to provide care and set boundaries as a parent. The family consultants found this 7th meeting particularly problematic and in need of tools to facilitate dialogues and enhance the notion of empathy. Empathy - understood as the father's ability to see things from the children's perspective - therefore came to play a central role in designing and evaluating the game. "Dads Round" (in Danish: Fars Omgang) was developed based on a series of participatory design workshops and meetings with family consultants and children who had a father in prison. The design process involved eight family consultants and eight children. Incarcerated fathers participating in father groups took part in evaluating the final game. The research team consisted of four design-researchers, a criminologist, an illustrator, and a product designer. The authors of this paper had different roles in the project. Authors 2 and 3 planned and facilitated all
design activities throughout the project, whereas author 1 mainly participated in the analysis of field and design material retrospectively.

Since access to the actual father groups and visiting rooms were not allowed, fieldwork and participant observation in a classical sense was not an option. Instead, we used design games to help us understand existing practices and perspectives of consultants, children, and fathers and how they might be changed through game design. Figure 2 below provides an overview of the process and the activities involved.

Figure 2: Activities in the design research project Changing Perspectives (2017-19).

In the following, we present examples of different types of design games used at 3 different workshops: the doll scenario workshop (activity 1, fig. 2), the story-card game workshop (activity 2, fig. 2), and the game-rehearsal workshop (activity 5, fig. 2).

2.2 Doll scenarios – Agonistic practices and design assumptions

Access to observe and study family consultants’ in-situ practices and dialogue with incarcerated fathers in prison was not approved, which made it impossible to conduct any form of traditional ethnographic fieldwork. Instead, we used doll scenarios as explorative design games in a co-design workshop to learn how family consultants facilitate a dialogue with prisoners to address dilemmas
related to family issues and parenting. Eight family consultants were paired in two and asked to play scenarios in front of the design team. They could choose to either enact a family story that prisoner fathers had told them or a situation they had experienced with the father groups. The original intention was two-fold: (1) to collect stories as design material to be integrated later in the game-based conversation tool; and (2) to generate insight into family consultants’ practices and contextual setting.

![Fig 3.Doll-scenario: Toolkit and scenario examples. Photo credit: Eva Knutz](image)

In the following examples, we draw on video recordings of scenarios and discussions from the session. Several scenarios were performed and video recorded for further analysis, but here we wish to re-visit two of them to explore how design games can be approached from a design anthropological perspective. The first scenario, called "the Fun Fair" ("Tivoli-turen") was performed by the family consultants Richard and Susan. This was a story about a father who had taken his son to a funfair on his 24-hour permitted leave from prison. Richard plays the father and Susan the son. The son wants to ride a carousel repeatedly, and the father is unable to say no because he wants his son to have a good time. At last, he runs out of money; the boy gets upset, and this one day where they were supposed to have a good time was ruined. Having performed the story, Susan explains:
It is the 6th or 7th time we meet, I believe, we are talking about parental roles, and how to be clear and set boundaries and things like that, and then this father starts giggling a little and then he tells the group this story about how he spent 500 kroner on a carousel that kept turning and turning, and how it did not end until he had no more money, and then he [the kid] just cried anyway... it was really a tragi-comical story that sparked laughter and recognition among the other fathers in the group.

In the discussion that follows, the family consultants and the design team decided that this particular story is a good example of what the family consultants refer to as 'core stories,' i.e., stories that work well in therapy sessions because they deal with problems or dilemmas that are recognizable to the other fathers while touching upon a central theme related to being a good parent – in this case being able to be clear and set boundaries for the child.

The second story was performed by the family consultant Jake. It refers to an episode he experienced with a father group. On the wall, Jake has written 'fathers inspire fathers.' Jake is playing himself and the fathers in the group, while his colleague acts as an omniscient narrator of the story explaining moods, inner emotions, and states of mind. Three prisoner fathers and Jake are present. Jake has just served coffee and cake. A father, Asger, has noticed that one of the other group members, Benjamin, has started training and stopped smoking weed. The group members are quite impressed and tell him that it is really cool what he is doing. Kim, who works out a lot himself, says how important it is for him to be fit because he believes that this will allow him to regain some of the time he has lost with his kid while being in prison. This statement makes an impression on all of them. When Jake returns the following week, the men refuse to take the coffee and cake he offers, bringing water and fruit instead. Even Asger, a big guy weighing 140 kilos, has decided to join them in their pursuit of a healthier life that might give them more time with the kids 'in the other end.' So, Jake is told to stop bringing "all his cake-shit!", and they stick to water and apples in the subsequent sessions. After the performance of this scenario, one of the designers asks: "So what happened to Asger? Did he end up losing weight?" To which Jake replies: "Well, I could not really tell the difference, but that is not the point. The point was to show what groups are capable of. I could have told Asger a million times how wise it would be for him to start living a healthier life; it would have had absolutely no effect, they would have given me the finger."

The two scenarios are quite different. Richard and Susan construct a doll scenario that, at a distance, narrates and re-enacts a situation memorized by a prisoner father to exemplify how the consultant's facilitation of the group sessions lead to prisoner fathers gaining insight into their need of setting boundaries for their children. In the conversation with the performing consultants following
immediately after their scenario, it becomes clear that they conceive of themselves as experts whose task it is to foster dialogue around what they call 'core stories' - real stories and situations, which are recognizable to all members of the group and representative of the dilemmas the family consultants work with in their practices. To use a notion from Thorpe & Gamman (2011, p. 220-221), such a perspective on relational work can be termed 'paternalistic' in the sense that it is based on the consultants having identified a need of the participants, they know what should be done and intend to fulfill it through their practice. However, in Jake's story, the family consultant places himself in a ridiculed position downplaying his role as a consultant by saying that 'the power of the group' is essential for his approach to the father groups. When Jake is playing himself and the men, we get a glimpse of the way he speaks. The doll scenario shows us something about the setting's informality and the conversation that takes place there. Jake's perspective on the value of relational work could be described as what Thorpe & Gamman (2011, p. 222) refer to as a 'fraternalistic approach,' which foregrounds the asset of the people taking part in the participatory process rather than their needs.

We might say that the doll scenarios use playing of scenarios to generate ethnographic-like insights on situations and fields we do not have direct access to (and cannot simply observe). The telling, selecting, and performing of these scenarios do not simply provide us with such stories as design material to be used in the final game-design; it also makes visible the family consultants' different approaches and agendas in their discussion, choices of scenes, and in their performances. Thus, our analysis of this game focused more on creating ethnographic insights and seeing the world from 'the native point of view' than on collaborative design. Through the doll scenarios, the design team could 'participate' to some extent in the consultants' world. Using doll scenarios as a kind of fieldwork obviously do not provide us unfiltered access to their world; it is not a way of observing what goes on in the fathers' groups as such, rather the scenarios provide a lens through which we get a glimpse of how the family consultants understand father groups and their own role and practice in this context – 'core stories' and 'the power of the group' can be seen as 'insider language' or 'emic' concepts (Headland, Pike & Harris 1990) that are essential in understanding the family consultants' different perspectives on their practice, and eventually also in speculating about the possible roles and forms a game might play within that practice. When reflecting upon these insights into the various ('native') perspectives at play in the family consultants' practices, it becomes clear that they challenged our original design assumption, namely that family consultant practices could be supported by a single game-based conversation tool. Instead, to accommodate the
difference and friction between a paternalistic and fraternalistic approach, we needed to work with the idea of multiple tools that could be adjusted and customized according to the family consultant using it. Therefore, the value and potentials of this design game were not simply found in the scenarios ability to produce design material, but more in their ability to: 1) serve as a kind of fieldwork eliciting insight into the perspectives at play in this process and 2) challenge implicit design assumptions about family therapy as a homogeneous practice in need of a one-fits-all solution.

2.3 The story-card game – The child perspective and how we might understand it

Whereas the doll scenario-game focused on collecting stories and dilemmas that were central to the family consultants’ experience of working with the father groups, the story-card game workshop focused on collecting and identifying stories and dilemmas that were central to the children and reflected their perspective and experiences of having a father in prison. The intention was to include some of these stories in the final game to help the fathers better understand the child-perspective. This was very much in line with the intention of the Parenting Program itself and the therapeutic material used in the father groups today, e.g., the ‘parent book’ where the importance of listening to children’s stories is stressed. The story-card game-workshop took place at a center for family counseling in Denmark. Eight children of prisoners (age 9 -14 years) participated together with two family consultants and two design researchers. The research team's role was to make something ‘fun and meaningful’ with the children and to include a playful activity that made sense to the consultants (in a therapeutic sense) and the children (in a playful sense). In this way, the design game workshop became both a therapeutic activity, an entertaining activity, and a design research activity. For ethical reasons, audio- and video recordings were not possible at this workshop. Hence the examples we present here are based on material produced at the workshop and resumés of the workshop written by the design researchers immediately after the event. We also draw on interviews with the family consultants (Activity 4, fig. 2)

The story-card-game focused on children's stories about what it is like to have a father in prison. The stories all had a standard cartoon-like form, using 4 frames each with a drawing and some text to convey the message. During the workshop, the children told their own stories using empty card templates to form part of a simple card-game (see fig 4). Stories from other children with fathers in
prison were available for inspiration. They could either choose another child's story and tell it from their own perspective or create a new story.

Fig 4: The story-card-game-workshop: The empty playing-cards are being filled-in with visual narratives. Stories about having a father in prison. Photo credit: Eva Knutz

All stories were told from the children's perspective, using their experiences and "voices" to shed light on the many difficult, emotional, and serious issues children experience during parental imprisonment. One story was about a child and a father who invent a new tradition, called a "Halloween Christmas," because the father does not like to celebrate Christmas [see fig 5]. Another story concerned a boy who has to say goodbye to his father at the airport because his father is expelled from Denmark. A third story deals with a child who shows up for a prison-visit to realize that his father has been moved to another prison, and a fourth story concerns a child who experiences his mother being rushed to the hospital and who afterward has to spend Christmas with his uncle and aunt. (We later learned that the father had committed serious violence against the mother).
After completing their stories, the children, the family consultants, and the design researchers played a trick-taking card game called 'Go Fish' (in Danish 'fisk') using the children's story-cards. In the game, the players were to collect all four cards in a story to take a trick. During the game, the children had lively discussions about the stories. The family consultants facilitated the conversation and supported the children in formulating topics, all of which referred to "having a father in prison". At the time, it seemed to us like a successful co-design game activity, providing not only design material in the form of story-cards for the parent game but also valuable insight into the children's situations and perspectives. As such, the story-card game became a tool for conversation and a way of getting access to these children's worlds, which the design researchers did not have access to otherwise. Letting the children tell and share their stories through the game enabled a conversation where the children could set the agenda, telling the stories relevant and central to them. Thus, providing the researchers a glimpse into these children's lives and perspectives.

The stories were subsequently presented to the family consultants. Even though the design researchers found all stories equally valid and assumed that they would eventually be implemented in the final game, only one of the eight stories collected at the story-card game workshop was evaluated as "useful" by the family consultants. This came as a huge surprise to the research team, as it seemed to conflict with what they believed was the essence of the program. If, in the midst of
the co-design process, the family consultants began to reject a large part of the children's stories - how could they argue that they had listened to their voices, stories, and challenges?

Whether children's stories counted as 'good enough' to include in the final game remained a recurring point of discussion between researchers and consultants throughout the project. In a group interview with the family consultants, the stories were discussed. Analysing the interview retrospectively, the research team tried to understand why the family consultants had rejected so many of the children's stories - and their motive for choosing precisely the stories they refer to as being somehow "constructive" for their practices. Here are some examples of what the consultants said:

"...it is important to have a balance between prison-stories and everyday stories."

"be careful that the stories do not become too stereotypical or focus too much on the fathers as criminal fathers. It is important [in narrative therapy] to look at the positive exceptions, for example, the importance of playing with the child, or the value of being able as a father to reflect on one's own history and upbringing."

"... it is important to downplay 'imprisoned' and emphasize 'father'...Generic stories that everyone recognizes – it is important that the fathers see themselves as parents, rather than inmates."

The interview-excerpts indicate that the family consultants are looking for particular stories; stories that "do not focus too much on the fathers as criminal"; stories "that do not portray the fathers as stuck in a particular role" and stories that "downplay" imprisoned" and emphasize "father." They refer to such stories as "constructive stories," as "universal stories" or as "core stories." What appears in many of the children’s’ real-life stories do not match what the consultants feel they need in their therapeutic practice, namely, stories that are generic and edifying for "men as fathers" - rather than "men as inmates." The child perspective that the consultants found relevant was a more generalized generic perspective than the individual child perspective embedded in the real-life stories from the story-card game. Contradictory views of the identity role of the father also became visible here; whereas the research-team collected stories that connect to fathers as both parent and inmate, it was important for the consultants to separate "men as fathers" from "men as inmates."
However, at the time, design researchers and family consultants were unaware that when speaking of 'the child perspective,' they meant different things, as the term's everyday use differed from its use in a therapeutic context.

Our examples from the story-card game workshop provide a glimpse into the complexities, difficulties, and potentials of using design games in participatory design research. The story-card game's intention was quite simply to co-design stories with children that could be included in the final parent-game to help fathers understand 'the child perspective.' In some ways, the workshop was successful in doing so, as stories were created and insights into children's life, experiences, and perspectives with incarcerated fathers produced. Nevertheless, the workshop also led to frustration and confusion in the design team when the family consultants did not embrace the material and insights from the design game. To make productive sense of it all, it is useful, we find, to approach the design game as a form interventionist fieldwork, where the focus is less on the design material itself and more on the issues and frictions elicited in the process. In this case, it turned out that the children's story-cards did not only provide insight into the children's experiences and perspectives, the frictions produced as these stories entered the design process could also be used to shed light on the family consultants' perspective, and how their concepts, 'classifications' (Bloor 2017) and ways of ordering and making sense of the world were surprisingly unfamiliar and different from those of the design researchers.

Re-vising the story-card game workshop from a design anthropological perspective; with a fieldworker's curiosity, reflexivity, and ethnographic sensibility turned frustrations into wonder and made it possible for us to use the friction between the radically different perspectives and design agendas at stake to reveal central assumptions among researchers and participants. As such, this workshop challenged a central notion behind and premise of the project by suggesting that it was not simply about daring to listen to children's stories and learn from them, but equally about understanding why family consultants curate and redesign the stories as they do. Here it becomes apparent that games do not simply generate data or facilitate design collaboration but may serve as a tool for exploring, challenging and 'changing perspectives' of both researchers and participants.

2.4 Rehearsing the future – design games as future-oriented fieldwork
Our third example concerns a game workshop that took place towards the end of the project focusing on game-play as a way of ‘rehearsing the future’ (Halse, Brandt, Clarke & Binder 2010). Here we explored the family consultants’ appropriation of the game-prototype. All family consultants participated in this workshop, together with the research team. We draw on two types of material in this case (1) video observations of the game rehearsal session itself and (2) recordings of the family consultants’ discussions of the potentials for using such a game in their future practices.

The co-design activities had so far resulted in a board-game named “Dad’s Round.” This board-game was presented and explored during the workshop.

Fig. 6: Game prototype “Dad’s Round” (in Danish: Fars Omgang), 2019. Photo credit: Eva Knutz

'Dad's round' consists of a board, 48 colored cards (12 sets of 4 cards), a cube, and a book (see fig. 6). The 48 colored cards contain 12 small cartoon-like narratives of a father-character facing a challenge concerning his parenting role. The narratives are derived from previous co-design activities (the doll scenarios and the story-card game) and re-drawn as cartoons (see figure 7 & 8). The board game is a turning table. Inspired by the parent book currently used in the father groups, it has five removable bricks that relate to five different parenting-roles; Giving Care (Omsorgsgiveren); Building Relations (Relations-byggeren); Showing Love (Kærligheds-giveren); Setting Boundaries (Ramme-sætteren) and Giving Value (Værdi-sætteren).

The players of the game can use the turntable to pick a random parenting role. Hereafter a story card can be selected, either by chance (picking a random story card), or the family consultant can act as "game-master" and pre-select stories that he or she thinks fits with the fathers' challenges.
The story cards include small narratives that the father group can use as a starting point for a discussion. One set of story cards is called "the fun-fair" ("Tivoli-turen") and is based on Richard’s and Susan's doll scenario described earlier. This story can be used to discuss how to set boundaries and why that is not easy when you only see your children once a month on supervised release.

Fig. 7: Story-cards: The fun-fair. Photo credit: Eva Knutz

Another visual narrative called "Christmas Time" is based on the 'Halloween Christmas" story (see fig. 5) from the children's story-card game workshop. This row of cards can be used to discuss how to deal with holidays (which are very valuable for the child) during imprisonment.

Fig. 8: Story-cards: Christmastime. Photo credit: Eva Knutz

Apart from the turntable with parenting roles and the story cards, the game also contains a cube with six pre-defined characters: mother, siblings, grandparents, child, dad, or others.
The cube is co-designed with the family consultants to train what they refer to as the ability to "mentalize." Mentalization is a psychological concept (Asen & Fonagy, 2012) referring to the ability to understand the mental state of others and oneself. It is a form of imaginative mental empathy activity to interpret human behavior in terms of other people's feelings, needs, believes, desires etc. When using the cube, the family consultants can bring the stories one step further in this direction. For instance, the story called "Christmas-time" can be discussed from both the father's perspective (why might Christmas be difficult for a father in prison?), from the child's perspective (why is Christmas important to the child and what might the child feel about exchanging it for a 'Halloween Christmas'? ) and from the mother's perspective (what does she think about the father not being around for Christmas?).

The game is flexible to accommodate the different practices and wishes of the family consultants. There are no fixed or prescribed rules for how to use the game; the family consultant is free to leave out elements and thus increase the focus on either the parenting role (the board); the different type of parent-challenges seen from a narrative perspective (the stories) or the ability to mentalize (the cube). During the game rehearsal-session, the family consultants were introduced to several different ways the game might be played and encouraged to find the one(s) most appropriate for their practice. In groups of 4, the participants took turns being the group leader deciding how to play the game whilst the rest would act as 'fathers.' The intention was to use this session to familiarize themselves with the game before testing it in their practice. During game-play, implicit ideas - of the fathers, the children, the game situation, and the role of the game - embedded in the game design became visible and negotiable as the consultants discussed how to play the game while
moulding it to fit their particular idea of what is central and important when working with father groups.

For example, while playing a father, family consultant Susan realizes "that when it becomes all about other peoples' stories [referring to the story cards], then I lose interest, but when it is about us [the fathers in the group], then it becomes interesting." Another consultant, Lars, feels a little vulnerable when he has to present and reflect upon a story that he struggles to understand. As the family consultants experience the game (and the therapy) from the father's perspective, they start to question and redesign the game elements with their perceived father-perspective in mind. For instance, Susan suggests that the therapist as a 'game-master' takes control and becomes the one who presents the stories and asks questions to secure less pressure on the fathers and make sure connections are made to the fathers' own experiences. Likewise, reading the keywords on the game board – as fathers - leads to discussions among family consultants of whether the language used might be too difficult. Realizing that the board's words are copied from their existing material (the parent book) make them consider a revision of the game as well as the materials they currently use in their practice. As such, both game and players are changed as a result of the game-play. The players did not simply rehearse the game during this session but also developed and re-designed it whilst playing, providing insights into its possible uses and challenges, as well as how it might change and be changed by the practices and contexts it would become part of.

Again, we might understand this game-play session as a particular form of fieldwork exploring both current and potential future practices. Even if the game-play focused on 'the future’ exploring how interactions between family therapist and the father groups might eventually be affected by the game, it also showed us glimpses of current roles, practices, and perspectives of the family consultants. In their somewhat caricatured versions of imprisoned fathers and their displaced versions of themselves as group leaders, practices, understandings, and issues that are normally invisible and taken for granted suddenly became perceptible and negotiable - if in a somewhat distorted form. As outsiders, we got a glimpse of how both fathers and family consultants might speak in group sessions and how their language reflects particular understandings of the world, each other, and the father groups. In the game-play, fathers were portrayed as slightly negative, always on guard, and having difficulties understanding stories from other perspectives than their own. Whereas the family consultants were caring, attentive listeners always in control and ready with constructive questions to move conversations and reflections in the right direction. Thus, making
the father able to see stories and situations from other perspectives than his own, and based on that, reflect on his own role and potential actions in a particular situation. The fathers’ ability to ‘mentalize’ – as the consultants call it - seemed central to the consultants’ approach to their practice and how they played the game. They were generally quite fond of the cube as a tool for exploring different perspectives, even if they could not help themselves attempting to control the outcome somewhat, as when the consultant Peter makes sure the cube land on ‘child’ when he finds it appropriate to introduce a child perspective into the game. Therefore, the design researchers are quite surprised when the prospect of training the fathers’ ability to ‘mentalize’ and be empathic is suddenly questioned as the consultants attempt to make sense of the game vis-à-vis their own practice. Below is an excerpt of a discussion between the consultants Susan and Jake, who have slightly different views on their role as a therapist:

Susan: I believe that most fathers in a group will be able to understand someone else’s perspective when it is presented to them, so when I say: ’if you see this through the eyes of the mother it will look like this,’ then most of them, when it is explained, will be able to understand that with their heads. But what happens when they are under pressure or in affect? Are they then able to make the emotional connection [to what others might be experiencing and feeling]? …it is not possible to always have someone there to translate: ’so in this situation it looks like this, through the eyes of the mother.’ So, do they actually develop their ability to ‘mentalize’ to the point where they can connect emotionally? To be able to feel it themselves …as that is a completely different ball-game.

Jake: But isn’t it rather about ’loving actions’, whether they originate from the head or a deeper emotional recognition of someone else’s needs – which I realize is harder – one can always hope that more ’loving actions’ and the responses they generate will keep them [the fathers] going.

Susan: Well, thinking about it, I guess what I am really questioning here is this game project, which I think might be too ambitious for what can be expected … to me, it would be aggravating if we break our necks by believing that the success of this game consists in its ability to increase empathy because it would be a guarantee for failure. However, one might succeed with a game like this if the success criteria were different.”
Here the game design and speculations about what 'could be' elicit discussion about what the father groups are really about and what role the game might play there. Is it about training the fathers' empathic ability? Is that even possible? The discussion does not only reveal different professional positions on the matter; it places the game and its design right in the middle of a central discussion about what father groups and therapy is all about. In the frictions (Tsing 2011: Kjaersgaard & Boer 2016) between the assumptions embedded in the game and the family consultants' experiences, we get a glimpse of their perspective and what is at stake for them in their practice. Having to make decisions about the game becomes a way of rendering visible what was previously taken for granted in their practices and perspectives – if we allow ourselves to see it. Perhaps that is exactly the challenge. Using design games as tools to facilitate collaboration and early concept development, we might overlook their potentials for prompting rich insights into and critical reflections upon situated entangled practices and perspectives at the intersection between design and everyday life.

The example from the game-rehearsal session initially focused on design games as prototype and 'product,' using game-play to rehearse possible futures. By exploring 'what could be,' we simultaneously understood more about 'what is.' Speculating about and working with possible futures and practices through game-play provided a glimpse into the family consultants' worlds and showed us what is at stake. When rules changed (through the game), the family consultants' priorities and taken for granted practices and perspectives stood out much clearer to us - and perhaps also to themselves. Intervening in existing practices through playing games may thus be used as a kind of interventionist fieldwork that does not simply help us understand the 'users.' It also serves to challenge our own interpretations and agendas, as implicit ideas and preliminary understandings embedded in the game are negotiated and made visible through play.

3. Design games and the changing of perspectives

Through examples from 'Changing Perspectives,' we have shown how design games may not merely serve as tools to facilitate design collaborations and future-oriented idea generation. They might also be understood as a form of design anthropological fieldwork generating insights into the practices and perspectives of 'others' and challenging taken for granted design practices. In this project, design games were not only useful in terms of supporting imprisoned fathers in 'changing
perspectives,' but they also changed perspectives within the design research team – and possibly also among the family consultants.

With limited access to 'the field,' we were forced to rethink the role of fieldwork within this project. Fieldwork became less about conducting 'user observations 'to inform design about a prior reality 'out there' and more about using design games as a form of inquiry into current and possible praxes. Consequently, the design anthropological contribution was more in the framing and analyzing of design games 'as fieldwork' than in the game activities themselves. Extending the fieldworker's sensitivity, curiosity, and reflexivity into the analysis of design games (as well as the activities they facilitated and the material they generated) enabled us to contextualize and critically re-frame practices of 'use' and design in order to disclose and destabilize established frameworks, assumptions, and agendas embedded within the design project. In our examples, critical, reflexive, and holistic (Otto & Bubandt 2011) analysis is a central aspect of working with design games as a form of design anthropological fieldwork. The analyses we share in this paper were primarily conducted retrospectively. However, we see potentials in exploring how design anthropological frameworks and analyses may be better integrated within co-design practices to help us discover and collaboratively recast assumptions and implicit frameworks embedded in design processes as they evolve. We suggest this might entail:

1. **Framing the design process as a continuous process of field intervention and analysis** to help emphasize and better integrate design anthropological analysis within co-design processes. For example, in *Changing Perspectives*, this might have allowed us to understand and make constructive use of the frictions between our different notions of 'the child perspective' and challenge taken for granted ideas of both researchers and consultants. Hence, making room for more imaginative design solutions.

2. **Developing a materially engaged reflexivity based on a dynamic contextualization of things, activities, and relations throughout the design process** to ensure that critical, reflexive, and holistic field inquiry and analysis evolves as an integral part of the very fabric, materials, and activities of the design process. Our example from the game rehearsal session hints at the potentials of a more integrated approach beyond user research and design evaluation. The consultants' discussion of the fathers' ability to 'mentalize' is an example of the need to understand how implicit perspectives, practices, and relations among participants are
shaping and shaped trough materially engaged activities at the intersection between 'what is' and 'what could be.'

Based on the examples presented in this paper, we suggest that design games do not (or not only) serve as a 'shared language-game' mediating between use and design (Brandt 2006). Instead, they might be understood as a particular kind of design anthropological fieldwork exploring and challenging entangled practices, perspectives, and positions at the intersection between design and everyday life. As Kjærgaard and Otto propose:

"...design anthropologists not only co-design, and participate in the material design interventions, they also study the whole design process from a critical holistic perspective in order to identify and articulate its underlying assumptions." (Kjærgaard & Otto 2012: 177)

The design game might not only allow 'language games' and agendas to meet and merge as foregrounded in the tradition of participatory design. It may also - in the spirit' of reflexive and critical anthropology (Marcus & Fisher 1986, Clifford & Marcus 1986) - allow the unfamiliar practices and perspectives of others to challenge our habitual ways of thinking and help us question what we as designers, researchers, and participants take for granted both in terms of 'what is' and 'what could be.' Design games are, therefore, as we see them, not only tools for participation and co-design but also tools for exploring and changing (taken for granted) perspectives in the field and within the design team - if we allow them to.

Bibliography


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