

The right to play, the right to forget for a moment, the right to be child again... the right to smile!

Lenneke Broekhof*

Introduction

Leisure, or in other words recreational activities, are an important component of anyone's life. For children it even is a vital part of their human development via adolescence to adulthood. Through participation in recreational activities like sports, games, theatre, art, music ...etc children play. Free and organised play are proven to be necessary in the life of a child. Important values are contributed to activities in which a child has a space to play. Any child needs to play! The definition of play includes *absolutely everything*. Everything can be turned into a play activity. In this paper I treat a very different amount of activities, from clowning to more serious competitive sports games.

In their normal lives, under normal circumstances, all children and youngsters try to organise their own leisure activities or take care that they participate in them. Leisure, any kind of leisure, is a way to spend the spare time you have in a nice way; laugh, have fun with fellows and friends, simply having a nice time. People, including children and adolescents, can live in abnormal circumstances when their lives have changed so much that it is very difficult, sometimes even impossible for them to continue the life they used to have before. Victims of war and conflicts, like refugees and internally displaced people, are examples of people whose lives have changed drastically. Many of these displaced people end up living in a camp. This forced 'new way of life' can take months, sometimes years. My interest went to the leisure opportunities of these refugee and internally displaced children and youngster who live in camps. How can these children play?

How can they have fun? Knowing that many of these children are forced to make a big step towards adulthood, I wondered if they have space to feel child again and forget the situation in which they are living for at least some moments.

Therefore I chose to focus on the simple, but so important, need to play of any child in this world. I would even say that especially children and youngsters affected by war or conflict need these moment of leisure so much in their daily lives. They have often seen and experienced terrible events, losing family, home, friends, personal belongings: those things that are important for any individual. My hypothesis is that one of the needs of displaced children is to play and participate in sports, games, music, dancing, singing and many other possible recreational activities to feel child again for a moment, be able to laugh, and forget the situation in which they are living.

In this paper I do not focus on recreational activities with explicit mental health objectives. The various forms of therapeutic leisure and creative therapies are destined to a smaller group of beneficiaries: the mentally ill or traumatised. I do not want to exclude any refugee or internally displaced child from the joy to play and the joy of leisure.

There are a different ways approaching leisure and children in a refugee or IDP camp. One could analyse leisure from a judicial point of view: every child has the right to play. Another approach is recognising the necessity of play and its benefits for the (psychological) development of these children. Finally, a more specific approach could be analysing the therapeutical use

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of leisure with traumatised children. For this paper, I have chosen to focus on the second option: refugee children, like any other child in this world, need to play. In refugee situations where it is impossible to set up professional psycho-social, psychological or psychiatric assistance programmes for those children in need, it is important to offer them at least a space to participate in simple recreational activities. Creating a little bit of normality in their lives. Implementing these broad kind of activities no refugee child should be excluded, all children should be given an opportunity to play. For this paper the most important to realise is that above all, refugee and internally displaced children are children and all children need to play.

First I focus on the mental health situation of displaced children and youngsters. Then I treat play- and leisure theories to analyse the function and benefits of play. Finishing with the reality of leisure in refugee and IDP camps, the contributions of the international community to the organisation of recreational activities for displaced children and youngsters.

Let them be child again!

Lenneke Broekhof

Part I. The mental health of displaced children and adolescent

1.1. *Mental health condition of children and adolescents in a refugee or IDP camp*

At this moment between 40 and 50 million people in this world have been forced to flee their homes, of which half are children and adolescents under 18. These people had to cross borders or where displaced within their own countries. The majority flee their homes because of war. UNHCR cares for 22.3 million refugees including around 10 million children¹.

Many IDP and refugee populations finish their flight in a camp where they have to live in an artificial environment. With respect to their lives before everything changed; nothing is the

same anymore. Nowadays' widespread philosophy is that refugees and internally displaced people are normal people living in abnormal situations and conditions. Living in a camp is one of them. It is impossible to continue the normal rhythm of life which can prejudice gravely the (emotional) development of the children and youngsters. Conditions in a camp are normally poor, children can not move freely and have few things to do. Refugee children almost all suffer severe deprivation, sometimes for long periods, in the form of insufficient food or water, lack of medical care, and inadequate housing².

Refugee children live in very different situations according to their culture, socio-economic and educational backgrounds, nation of origin and the specific circumstances surrounding their forced relocation³. Wars, violent conflicts or natural disasters have different impacts all over the world. This does not take away that many refugees, adults and children, have experienced traumatic events. When a child suffers trauma he or she has a psychic wound that has been caused by a terrible, well-defined, accident in which the child was involved or witness to⁴. In addition to this definition by Trapman we can add that they are overwhelming terrifying events and never normal life experiences. These experiences can lead, they do not have to, to a post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Examples of traumatic events are witnessing murder, exposition to torture or physical abuse, witnessing torture or physical abuse, exposition to rape or sexual abuse, witnessing rape or sexual abuse, abduction from their families and forced participation in violence (not to forget the child soldiers in this world). Warchild reports that in the past decade 1,5 million children have died in wars, 4 million have ended up disabled and another 10 million children are traumatised⁵. However, it is easy to stigmatise refugees by assuming that a traumatic experience will always result in a mental health problem. As well the awareness of trauma and PTSD can easily prejudice the expectations humanitarian workers have on refugee children. Not all refugee children are traumatised, and if they are so they can suffer trauma on different levels. Important is that every child reacts in a different

¹ www.unhcr.ch/children.

² KORBIN, Jill E. in: AHEARN JR., F.L and ATHEY, J.L (eds.), *Refugee Children*, 1991, p. 8.

³ KORBIN, Jill E. in: AHEARN JR., F.L and ATHEY, J.L (eds.), *Refugee Children*, 1991, p. 45.

⁴ TRAPMAN, M.J., *Suggestions for Games and Activities for Suncokret*, 1995

⁵ www.warchild.org.

way and with different severity to a negative event. The way a child experiments and internalises trauma is related to the «age and developmental stage of the child, the degree of violence, presence or absence of personal injury and access to family support»⁶. UNHCR recognises that a lot of refugee children have lived traumatic events, but states that just a small proportion needs mental health assistance⁷.

Graça Machel in her follow-up report on the impact of armed conflict on children explains the different psychological and social effects of conflict; «“Psychological effects” are those which affect emotion, behaviour, thoughts, memory, learning ability, perceptions and understanding. “Social effects” refer to altered relationships due to death, separation, estrangement and other losses, family and community breakdown, damage to social values and customary practices and the destruction of social facilities and services. Social effects also extend to the economic dimension, as many individuals and families become destitute through the material and economic devastation of conflict, losing social status and place in their familiar social network»⁸.

Like all children, refugee children are going through a developmental phase. This process does not permit interruptions. The child’s developmental needs do not wait until the emergency or refugee situation finishes⁹. Life goes on day by day. The tensions and insecurity related to the refugee situation can prejudice severely the physical, intellectual, psychological, cultural and social development of the children. An important remark by UNHCR is that the refugee children are not only affected by what happens to them, but also by what is deprived to them. The examples given are not being able to enjoy things that are essential for their development like going to school and play.

Trapman in his *Suggestions for Games and Activities for Suncokret (1995)*, a Croatian NGO working with children in refugee camps, describes the overall situation of the children

in the refugee camps Suncokret (Croatian NGO) was working in. Taking into account that the author’s observations were based on the Yugoslavian conflict, it is still interesting considering the results as there is very few literature written about the mental health- and psychosocial conditions of children *in* refugee camps. *All* of the refugee children suffered the consequences of war or conflict in one way or another. Most of the refugee children were less, or more severely, traumatised. In case of collective trauma, children automatically take part in it. The children suffered great losses and many of them were in the process of mourning. They lost everything that defined their identity and personality. The refugee children lost their feeling of security, which can cause a feeling of loss of control and a feeling of helplessness. All of the children were living the coping process. Most of the children had a bad physical condition. Apart of all this, children have advantages with respect to adults as they are in a continuous process of development and therefore well equipped for recovering by themselves. Although some phases of this development can make a child or adolescent very vulnerable. Trapman stresses that above all refugee and internally displaced children are children. This may seem a logic statement, but the situation in which a displaced child lives (war, conflict, instability, insecurity, living in a camp, etc.) makes it very hard to be a child.

Not just trauma, but also loss and severe deprivation place children at a particular mental health risk. The concept of loss is related to being refugee. Forced to flee their homes children lose their home, possessions, friends, pets, and often parents and family. A death of a parent is the most terrible event for most children. Factors increasing the risk of psychological problems are the mode of death of the parent, lack of family or community support, an unstable (family) environment, and the surviving parent’s psychological situation¹⁰. Deprivation of basic necessities of life is closely related to mental, cognitive and emotional damages.

⁶ KORBIN, Jill E. in: AHEARN Jr., F.L and ATHEY, J.L (eds.), *Refugee Children*, 1991, p. 6.

⁷ OMS en colaboración con la ACNUR, *La salud mental de los refugiados*, 1997, p. 68.

⁸ MACHEL, Graça, «The impact of Armed Conflict on Children», *A critical review of progress made and obstacles encountered in increasing*

protection for war-affected children, International Conference on War-affected Children, Winnipeg, Canada, September 2000, Chapter 7.

⁹ ACNUR, *Los niños refugiados, directrices sobre protección y cuidado*, 1994, p. 40.

¹⁰ KORBIN, Jill E. in: AHEARN Jr., F.L and ATHEY, J.L (eds.), *Refugee Children*, 1991, p. 7.

1.2. Coping and family- and community support

Child refugees face very different family and community situations based on whether they are alone as unaccompanied minors, with non-related individuals, or with some or all of their family members¹¹. It is widely recognised that family and community are the most important factors that influence the ability of a child to cope with the situation in which it is living and the suffering the child experiences. Unfortunately the traditional ways of raising the children, family support and stability, can change because of the refugee situation. Families and communities suffer a brutal change of life. Replacement of people due to conflict, war or natural disasters like famine changes the functions that men, women and children have and the roles they play in daily life. People lose work and cannot continue their habitual daily tasks. In many cases family structure weakens as family members have died or disappeared. These changes affect the family members who survived, for example in the case of women-headed families, who now have more difficulties taking care of their children the way they used to do before. Due to their psychological and socio-economic situation the adult family members are unable to satisfy all the physical and emotional needs of their children. On a community level conflict, war or natural disaster can have the result that the community does not function like before anymore. Its disintegration is related to individual dysfunction¹². Community activities like markets, education of the children, cultural or religious acts have been suspended¹³. In the case of forced displacement children and their families suffer the disintegration of their home community, losing a supportive environment. In a refugee or IDP camp a new temporary community is created, that eventually will also break apart. When children lose family and community stability they lose an important supportive emotional environment that does not benefit their mental well-being. Stimulation of family and community activities through leisure can be a way to involve the surviving family members and the community with the daily lives and emotional needs of their children.

1.3. Special needs of displaced children and adolescents

Although the refugee or IDP community can help itself and their children if they are given a chance, there are basic needs that have to be satisfied in order to improve the mental health and the well-being of refugee children: not just only the satisfaction of the material necessities (food, water, medical attention), but also attention to no material necessities (emotional, cultural and spiritual), a safe and stable environment, security of familiar ties and familiar stability, and an opportunity to complete all the normal phases of child development¹⁴.

Children need a stable environment, including family and community being the most important factors in the life of a refugee child. Therefore the timely provision of food, material, or other cash-generating forms of assistance can assist vulnerable families in their own efforts to maintain a regular income and to continue supporting themselves and their children¹⁵. Refugee children can be exposed to social cultural risk¹⁶. This is the case when the environment of the child is lacking the basic social and psychological necessities for life. Then the child risks psychiatric problems, dysfunctional behaviour or incapacity in work, love or play. Satisfying these basic social and psychological necessities in a child's life, a lot of problems can be prevented.

In general the main necessity is preventing that a child's situation gets worse. Primary prevention activities are activities that prevent diseases or mental disorders attending the most basic needs of the refugee community. Williams argues that in addition to the specific prevention programmes for diseases, primary mental health prevention programmes should be developed in the refugee camps of first asylum. Mental health programmes often take place in the second phase of the emergency, the so-called post-emergency phase. This phase begins when the excess mortality of the emergency phase is controlled and the basic needs (water, food, shelter, etc.) have

¹¹ KORBIN, Jill E. in: AHEARN Jr., F.L and ATHEY, J.L (eds.), *Refugee Children*, 1991, p. 45.

¹² KORBIN, Jill E. in: AHEARN Jr., F.L and ATHEY, J.L (eds.), *Refugee Children*, 1991, p. 16.

¹³ OMS en colaboración con la ACNUR, *La salud mental de los refugiados*, 1997, p. 72.

¹⁴ OMS en colaboración con la ACNUR, *La salud mental de los refugiados*, 1997, p. 69-70.

¹⁵ BOOTHBY, Neil, in: MARSELLA, A.J et al (eds.), *Amidst peril and pain: the mental health and well-being of the world's refugees*, 1994, p. 250.

¹⁶ KORBIN, Jill E. in: AHEARN Jr., F.L and ATHEY, J.L (eds.), *Refugee Children*, 1991, p. 4.

all been addressed¹⁷. Mental health primary prevention activities include any kind of play, games and other recreational activities.

In this chapter we have seen the psychological and social situation of refugee children and we have considered their need to normalise their lives and prevent their situation from getting worse while living in the artificial environment of a refugee camp. Free play, participation in games and other recreational activities form part of the normal life and development of every child and adolescent. By offering all the refugee and IDP camp children participation in recreational activities, without stigmatising them in a way that they would all suffer trauma and PTSD, a little step is made in normalising their lives. Restoring normalcy is crucial in the life of refugee children. Children will then find a space to have fun, forget their suffering for a moment, escape the daily routine and boredom of camp life, and socialize in the refugee community.

Part II. Leisure and the well-being of displaced children and adolescents

2.1. Any child needs to play

Free play and playing games form part of the normal development of any child. Playing has a clear function in the process of growing up from a child to an adult and so forms a vital and necessary part of human development. Without play children lose an important tool in understanding and discovering the world around them. If a child plays unforced and freely it is interpreting reality, representing roles and tasks that the child observes in daily life. During childhood, a child learns to play and plays according to this or her knowledge about the things and the world around them. Reality and play can therefore not be seen separately and are interrelated. Everything that exists or happens can form part of the world of play, in other words, can be represented by the child. A child is able to interpret anything that happened at a certain moment,

to him or herself, or to a person around. Barnett, investigating the benefits of play for children, cites Bruner (1974, 1983) who considers various crucial functions of play; «in play there is an underlying scenario in which children create a rich and idealized imitation of real life... children use play to transform the external world according to their own perceptions and wishes»¹⁸. Schiller (1875) considers play as a medium through which the player can transform and transcend reality, thereby gaining an appreciation of culture and of the world¹⁹.

Martínez Criado mentions that an older child can even suffer of play because he or she feels closely related to the represented situation²⁰. This concept is closely related to the practices of therapeutic leisure, where children with mental health problems express their emotions and suffering through different forms of art. These kind of psychological therapies form more and more part of mental health programmes for traumatised refugee children.

2.2. Play and Games

Apart from free play children also organise games or take part in them. Free playing and games have in common that children research reality, with the difference that in games children play according to rules²¹. But what is play? Martínez Criado proposes a broad definition of play based on various historical theories about the world of play. According to the authors analysis playing mainly consists of an unending series of actions and activities of *which literary anything can form part*. Through play children take part in physical and mental exercise, obtain new information, interpret and transform reality, and assure themselves what they know although what happens during play is a result of imagination. A condition to be able to play according to the author is the fact that a child needs to feel comfortable and safe before he or she dares to play freely. Children cannot play under external pressure²². Iso-Ahola defines play as «behaviours and activities which tend to reduce

¹⁷ Médicins Sans Frontières, *Refugee Health, an Approach to Emergency Situations*, 1997, p. 243.

¹⁸ BARNETT, L.A., Developmental benefits of Play for Children, in: DRIVER, B.L. et al. (eds.), *Benefits of Leisure*, 1991, p. 229.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ MARTÍNEZ CRIADO, G, *El juego y el desarrollo infantil*, 1998, p. 27.

²¹ TRAPMAN, M.J., *Suggestions for Games and Activities for Suncokret*, 1995.

²² MARTÍNEZ CRIADO, G, *El juego y el desarrollo infantil*, 1998, p. 26-29.

excessive uncertainty and to increase minimal incongruity to the level optimal for an individual»²³. This means that children tend to avoid too much or too little incongruity in environmental stimulation and approach play and games in which they can achieve the feeling of being effective human beings. The relation between the environment and the child is very important and children need a certain level of stimuli from their environments. According to Iso-Ahola's incongruity theory too much stimuli make the child withdraw from the environment, while a lack of stimuli (in its most extreme case called stimuli deprivation) causes effects varying from boredom, (physical) developmental delay and damage, to a sense of lack of control and helplessness. Applying this theory at a child living in a refugee camp we have to know which kind of environmental stimuli reach, or not reach these children. In the beginning life in a refugee camp is a lot more limited than a normal life. Children are less free to move and go where they want, there are less public places to play and the children have lost almost all their personal things to play with. Apart from this children have lost their former way of spending their free time. Comparing with their lives before according to the Iso-Ahola theory we can speak of a low level of environmental stimuli for children living in refugee camps. In this way play and participation in games or other recreational relieves boredom and helps them to achieve the feeling of being more effective human beings. WHO in a manual about refugee mental health elaborated in collaboration with the UNHCR define play as a way to relax and interact with other children in order to have fun as well as a way to develop physical, mental, emotional and social strengths²⁴. «Do children have possibilities to play?», is one of the key points in the evaluation list about the psycho-social well-being of children living in refugee camps created by UNHCR²⁵. Play activities form part of their direct attention policy to children. UNHCR considers play fundamental for a normal development of children. They define it like an infantile way to face everything that happened, to relax, relieve tensions and assimilate what they experienced and learned²⁶.

Martínez Criado argues that play is incompatible with situations of severe vital deprivation or disease. Playing, according to him, is a characteristic of a healthy being²⁷. This can be a dangerous and excluding vision. These kind of perceptions can contribute to the stigmatisation of refugee children whose general situation is not favourable to their physical, social and mental well-being. Refugee children who suffer daily or are (mentally) ill are maybe not the first in line to participate in leisure activities, but with a little bit of external help they can be stimulated to play or to participate in games. Trapman's findings in a Croatian refugee camp with traumatised children were that these children are the most in need to play and participate in games and other activities, but the least interested and when they participate in games they seem to be partly absent, not interested. They can react scared to sudden unexpected sounds and impulses, be tired because they sleep bad, memorize more difficult and perform badly in games that require excellence. However, Trapman stresses that organising recreational activities in a refugee camp all refugee children should be included, not excluding the visibly traumatised, withholding them from an opportunity to relax, laugh and forget reality for a moment.

2.3. *The benefits of play and other recreational activities*

The 1991 published «Benefits of Leisure» (Driver et al. eds.) is said to be the 'bible' of studies related to the benefits of leisure. It gathers many different leisure investigations from all over the 20th century compiling a complete album of the benefits of leisure / recreational activities, between which the editors do not distinguish. The chapter «Developmental benefits of Play for Children» by Barnett investigates the relationship between a child's play and his or her cognitive, social, emotional and physical development²⁸. Through play children develop social skills like «cooperation, helping, sharing and success at solving social problems through acceptable means». Several

²³ ISO-AHOLA, S.E., *The social psychology of leisure and recreation*, 1980, p. 85.

²⁴ OMS en colaboración con la ACNUR, *La salud mental de los refugiados*, 1997, p. 83.

²⁵ ACNUR, *Los niños refugiados, directrices sobre protección y cuidado*, 1994, p. 53-54.

²⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 42.

²⁷ MARTÍNEZ CRIADO, G., *El juego y el desarrollo infantil*, 1998, p. 28.

²⁸ BARNETT, L.A., *Developmental benefits of Play for Children*, in: Driver, B.L. et al. (eds.), *Benefits of Leisure*, 1991, p. 228-231.

studies link fantasy play with the emotional development of anxiety-reduction; for a young child play can be important in successfully dealing with unpleasantness in his or her environment as play is thought to provide an avenue for the weakening of childhood tensions, anxieties, and aggressive impulses. As far as the physical benefits are concerned play experience is likely to improve physical ability by enhancing strength, endurance and skill. These are the *main* results of the authors' studies on the areas of social, emotional and physical benefits of play. Iso-Ahoa adds that through play children achieve the feeling of being more effective human beings²⁹.

In his work «Play and Child Development» (1998) Martínez Criado analyses several benefits of play; «During childhood and adolescence play has repercussions in the changes which a young human being goes through (motoric, communicative, social relative, and rational comprehensive aspects). Playing gives children the opportunity to develop skills which they will need later in the world of social relationships. Play can facilitate the forgetting of vital situations for a moment (evasion) and play can make situations of reality more lively (projection). Through play, using fantasy, a child can imagine solutions to stressing situations or situations that are difficult to solve. Through play a child enters in a world of fantasy and unreality. Then a child has the opportunity to stay to the margin of the every day reality. For a moment the child lives in a divergent way, for a moment the child lives in freedom. Through play a child has the opportunity to relax. Through play a child learns to compete in a healthy way. Through play a child practices and learns the process of decision making. Through play a child is able to reduce anxiety associated with troublesome social interaction».

Referring specifically to refugee children, Trapman finds that «through games children learn social behaviour, feel security and warmth, and experiment great freedom as nothing in the game is "real"»³⁰. As far as sports activities for children in refugee

camp are concerned sports have shown to have supra-national, -ethnic and -cultural powers. In the Kpomasse refugee camp in Benin 22 refugee nationalities participated in sports competitions. By organising the activities between the refugee population and the local community a step towards mutual integration was made. As well gender obstacles were over won as the girls in the camp organised their own competitions³¹. Sport and play benefit the physical health of refugee children, foster resilience, create a meaningful connection to adults through the coaching relationship, provide a sense of safety and security through regular activity, serve as tools to teach important values and life skills including self confidence, teamwork, communication, inclusion, discipline, respect and fair play³².

Laughing and smiling are external manifestations of a «state of joy»³³. Playing is related to the expression of emotions; when speaking about positive emotions laugh, happiness and delight are examples of that. Laughter is how the body responds when it finds something funny. The benefits of laughter are enormous. On a physical level; it can help the heart beat easier and the blood run smoother, it can help the body feel more relaxed and less tense, it can help the body fight diseases, it can help lessen pain, it can help breath better, it can make a person feel good all over³⁴. On a psychological level; it can help a person see his or her problems differently, it can help take the mind off the problems, it can help a person not to take things so seriously, it can help a person feel better about him or herself³⁵. The Clowndoctors, for whom laughter is basic in their job, define laughter is a «wonder drug» that: «combats stress, reduces pain by releasing endorphins the body's natural painkiller, has a positive effect on the cardiovascular & respiratory systems, relaxes muscles, boosts the immune system by increasing the level of T cells & lowering serum cortisol levels, helps promote a positive outlook, helps people cope with difficult situations, helps creative decision making and creates bonds between people»³⁶. Médécins sans Frontières (MSF)

²⁹ ISO-AHOLA, S.E, *The social psychology of leisure and recreation*, 1980, p. 85.

³⁰ TRAPMAN, M.J., *Suggestions for Games and Activities for Suncokret*, 1995.

³¹ For more information about sports activities in the Kpomasse camp: Refugees Magazine, Issue 126, *Women - Seeking a Better Deal*, UNHCR, April 2002.

³² www.righttoplay.org/ www.olympicaid.org.

³³ SULLY (1902), in: MARTÍNEZ CRIADO, G., *El juego y el desarrollo infantil*, 1998, p. 2.

³⁴ Jackson Health System: *laughing is healthy*: <http://um-jmh.org/HealthLibrary/Lifestyle/Laughter.html>.

³⁵ Ibidem.

³⁶ www.clowndoctors.com.au.

recognises the benefits of laughter. An example is a MSF campaign based on the idea «We, who have combated so many epidemics, know that there only exists one invincible, laughter»³⁷.

2.4. Factors related to play and games for displaced children

THE FACTOR AGE

Age is one of the factors to take into account when organising activities. Playing is closely related to age, although there does not exist an exclusive relation between the games played and age. A same game can be played by children of different ages, but they will act differently. The following text of this paragraph is a summary of Martínez Criado's analysis of play through the ages³⁸. Although 'age' has to be interpreted relatively. Another point to take into account is the fact that the author's work is based on rather occidental theories of play (Spencer, Lazarus, Groos, Hall, Sully, Piaget and Vygotsky). The first two years of a child's life play is fundamentally individual and explorative. Between 2 and 4 years a child participates in all kind of play activities. The children of this age group already play intentionally. Imitation games and activities in which the child reproduces real life are played with great precision and replicate their own lives. Its explorative attitude brings a child of this age to resolve, through imagination, certain resistances of his or her environment. The child starts to observe other children and, bit by bit, starts to play in mixed groups. Children of 5 and 6 years can already play in groups of 8 up to 10 fellows, manage all kinds of materials and start to distinguish between sexes and ages. They prefer to play in groups of their own sex and in the group play children start to have different roles and functions. From 7 up to 12 years old children can participate in competitive group games according to the rules. Children of this age clearly express their motives to play and how to play a certain activity. Children who know the rules teach the others who do not know. Personal preferences dominate the group objectives. During this primary school age

period children explore roles, popularity, acceptance and integration into groups. Hierarchy and inter group relations represent the adult world of social relations. Playing converts into a competitive activity. The struggle for group recognition can cause conflicts and aggressions. The strongest and most skilled children gain social prestige. From 12 to 14 years and onwards adolescents have developed a broad range of capacities as well as the need for moments of intimacy. Personal aptitudes, skills and sensitivities are closely related to the broad kind of leisure activities in which the adolescent chooses to participate. Activities that attract the most are those that have the purpose to know, understand, evaluate and think about other persons and themselves. As far as group activities are concerned, adolescents need above all a sense of friendship and pertinence. For young people of this age group the results of play, for example the results of a football match, pass to a second level.

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL FACTORS

The definition of play is related to attitude³⁹. There are games that can be played with a playful attitude, as well as there are games (for example those that require strict rules) which obligate the participants to behave seriously. Speaking about games that result in a playful interpretation and behaviour of the child, it is important to realize that every child expresses his or her internal spirit and state of mind in a different way. Child behaviour related to a certain phenomenon can vary greatly. Culture, society, religion, individual character and aptitudes are factors of influence in the way a child interprets reality. Apart from these factors, in the case of refugee children the conflict, refugee and family situation are other crucial elements to take into account. Here we enter in the area of the psycho-social and mental health impact of war and conflict on the refugee child, that requires a more careful choice and planning of the activities. Trapman advocates a critical view towards games for children in a way that working with refugee children in special circumstances, games and activities need therefore to be organised and evaluated with *special* attention⁴⁰.

³⁷ GONZÁLEZ, M., *El Ocio prosocial y solidario*, in: Csikszentmihalyi, M., et al, *Ocio y Desarrollo, Potencialidades del Ocio para el Desarrollo Humano*, Documentos de Estudios del Ocio, n.º 18, Instituto de Estudios del Ocio, Universidad de Deusto, 2001, p. 159.

³⁸ MARTÍNEZ CRIADO, G., *El juego y el desarrollo infantil*, 1998.

³⁹ MARTÍNEZ CRIADO, G., *El juego y el desarrollo infantil*, 1998, p. 44.

⁴⁰ TRAPMAN, M.J., *Suggestions for Games and Activities for Suncokret*, 1995.

The cultural experience is closely related to a population's perception of the meaning of the conflict, the ways they express psychological and spiritual distress, as well as their coping strategies⁴¹. A child's attitude cannot only be understood and responded in a universal way as many behaviours have a cultural background that has to be understood by the persons who work with refugee and displaced children. The role children play in family and community life is influenced, sometimes even determined, by culture. The way children are treated according to gender or age is important and can limit a child's access to leisure. Some questions to discover the position children have are: What do parents or other family members expect from their children in relation to age and gender? Which domestic contribution is expected from their children? Do older children have to take care of their younger brothers and sisters? Which child behaviour is (not) culturally accepted?⁴² The cultural boundaries of play and games have to be discovered by the persons organising recreational activities in a camp. When children normally play, how much time they can spend on playing, the vision of their family and the community on play, the boy-girl relations, and of course the way the children play. Which activities, which materials, which background or meaning does an activity have, which symbolism, etc. In order to take culture into account, working with the proper refugees and locals is indispensable. Kleiber mentions a 1962 study of John Roberts and Brian Sutton-Smith in which 56 different native cultures were studied in relation to children and game involvement⁴³. They found a relationship between a culture's specific way of raising their children and the games children preferred.

The refugee situation itself can limit a child's access to leisure. The family and community situation can have been disrupted and the children are assigned, or take new roles and functions. Many families are broken, children being cared for by only one parent, or without either parent. Sometimes a child has to act as head of family, trying to care for its younger siblings. In camp situations, children also lose role models to

guide their development. Even where both parents are present, these children grow up under abnormal conditions. Children in camps are growing up in conditions which do not permit their socialisation according to the values of their own culture⁴⁴. The life in a camp is a great conditioner on how the children play. Besides suffering the aftermaths of a crisis and suffering the precarious conditions in the refugee camp, the children go on with their life in a camp. This means that they have to find new friends, gain new positions in a new community etc.

2.5. *Therapeutic leisure, psycho-social assistance or simply play?*

Refugee children live in a very complex reality. To a less or more extreme extend many terrible things have happened to them and to their families. Life in a refugee camp does not make the situation easier. Without having a tool to interpret and understand what has happened to them, children can have great difficulties handling their reality. Like we have seen, play is widely recognised as a tool for understanding reality. A simple example can be the images of little children in war torn areas playing with fake, hand made arms... Apart from this function of understanding reality, play and playing games have the opposite function of forgetting this reality for a moment and feel child again. Through play children discharge energy, have fun, laugh and socialize with other children. On the range of these different functional ways of play, children play freely (spontaneously, without external stimulation) or participate in organised play and games. Organised leisure can have different goals: therapeutic, psycho-social or simply having fun. It is not the aim of this paper to enter in the world of (1) therapeutic leisure - occupational, creative and arts therapy, and (2) psycho-social assistance, but the differences and common points between these two areas and the organisation of leisure (3) in a refugee camp have to be cleared.

The three areas have in common that one of their compounds of work is leisure (play, (sports) games and arts) in

⁴¹ BOOTHBY, Neil, in: MARSELLA, A.J et al (eds.), *Amidst peril and pain: the mental health and well-being of the world's refugees*, 1994, p. 251.

⁴² OMS en colaboración con la ACNUR, *La salud mental de los refugiados*, 1997, p. 71-72.

⁴³ J.M. ROBERTS and B. SUTTON-SMITH, Child training and game involvement, in: *Ethnology* 1 (1962), pp. 166-185, in: Kleiber, D., 1999, p. 70.

⁴⁴ HARREL-BOND, B., *Are refugee camps good for children?*, The Journal of Humanitarian Assistance, New Issues in Refugee Research, Working Paper N.º 29, August 2000.

the most broadest sense to reach specific goals. The goal of any kind of leisure therapy is to treat and heal specific mental health pathologies (like trauma and PTSD) with children. The goal of psycho-social programmes is much broader as it relates to addressing the psychological needs (emotions, learning capacity cognitive development) and social needs (interaction with family and community, participation in social environment) of individuals and many times the whole refugee community⁴⁵. The goal of the organisation of recreational activities with the refugee children is that they simply will be having a nice time, have fun, laugh, forget, and so on, responding the child's natural developmental need to play. As the benefits of all leisure activities have repercussions on the psychological and social level *in theory* we could say that, by nature, recreational activities are subordinated to, or form part of, the mental health and psycho-social interventions. Until now, as we will see later in part III, many international organisations organising recreational activities in refugee camps implement them under the umbrella of mental health- or psycho-social programmes.

For the different kinds of *leisure therapies* (occupational, creative, etc) the monitoring of a mental health professional is indispensable. For some mental health pathologies refugee children are stimulated to express their feelings and emotions by drawing, painting, create things or represent their worries through drama. This is a very serious job. The emotions of the children have to be handled carefully and professionally in order for the child to find his or her way manage them, and eventually heal.

Psycho-social programmes are based on the idea that the psychological and social dimensions of suffering are interrelated⁴⁶. The term psycho-social can be freely interpreted to cover any situation (related to an individual's well-being, health, stress, treatment, problems, vulnerability, rehabilitation

and competence) in which psychological and social factors play a role. For the International Conference on War-Affected Children Graça Machel defines psychosocial support consisting of «structured activities designed to restore children's psychological and social development and to mitigate the adverse effects of armed conflict»⁴⁷. McDonald adds that until today there remains a lack of agreement and cohesion within and among international organisations with respect to the interpretation psycho-social assistance.

International organisations organising *recreational activities* for children in refugee camps can have psychologists, social workers or community workers in their team, but many organisations work with non- professional volunteers. In practice the main (organisational) difference between the three mentioned areas is that mental health and psycho-social programmes are always supervised by professional mental health or social workers, while the organisation of recreational activities in a refugee camp can be implemented by anyone (including professionals, international volunteers, locals, to the proper refugee community). Hereby comes that therapeutic leisure is destined to children and adolescents with mental health pathologies, while psycho-social activities and simple recreational activities (should) include all the children in a refugee camp. Suncokret, a NGO created and composed by Croatian young adults, works in the area of primary mental health care for refugee and displaced children. Trapman, working with Suncokret felt tensions between professionals of other IO's towards the «non-professionals» of Suncokret working in the field. All of its workers are «non-professionals», «relatively untrained volunteers»⁴⁸. Although in the region there were not enough professional mental health workers to deal with the enormous demand. Trapman's vision is that no refugee child should be excluded from play and games in a refugee camp. This implies that anyone who is working on a leisure

⁴⁵ «Psychosocial Care and Protection: Children in Armed Conflict,» Conference Report, in: McDonald, Laura, The International Operational Response to The Psychological Wounds of War: Understanding and Improving Psycho-social Interventions, FEINSTEIN INTERNATIONAL FAMINE CENTER, WORKING PAPER NO. 7, 2002, p. 10.

⁴⁶ McDONALD, Laura, The International Operational Response to The Psychological Wounds of War: Understanding and Improving Psycho-social Interventions, FEINSTEIN INTERNATIONAL FAMINE CENTER, WORKING PAPER NO. 7, 2002, p. 7.

⁴⁷ MACHEL, Graça, The Impact of Armed Conflict on Children, *A critical review of progress made and obstacles encountered in increasing protection for war-affected children*, International Conference on War-affected Children, Winipeg, Canada, September 2000, Chapter 7.

⁴⁸ This was at the time of the author's (Trapman) writing. His *Suggestions for Games and Activities for Suncokret* were written in the year 1995. I am not up to date with the actual functioning of the organisation.

basis with refugee children has to realize that many children will have emotional distress, through some form of behavioural change, developmental delay or disturbance as a result from exposure to traumatic events⁴⁹.

Part III. Leisure for children and adolescents in refugee or IDP camps: Who does What?

3.1. Which kind of play, games and other recreational activities?

A key principle and success factor is that the children and youngsters themselves have to participate in the organisation and planning of the activities

In his suggestions for games for refugee children in the ex-Yugoslavian conflict the author explains «when organising games for children in refugee camps it is important to realise that all games are social devices, developed through the ages, in which the children explore in a metaphorical way the social reality», which means that through games refugee children feel and experience the reality and the emotions which belong to that reality⁵⁰. The World Health Organisation gives importance to the benefits of group play and teamwork. Apart from other benefits of group play, from a mental health point of view being part of a group permits a child to see that there are other children with similar problems and feeling.

The choice of the activities depends on the background of the conflict and refugee situation, culture, presence of division around ethnic lines, religion, gender, human resources, availability of material and money, and not to forget the proper wishes of the participating children and adolescents. The activities do not have to be different than the ones children would develop in normal circumstances⁵¹. Simple playing activities and games, and sports are examples. For these activities materials do not have to

be complicated. As far as the materials used are concerned WHO makes an important remark stressing that aid workers need to be «careful not to falsely raise the local population's expectations by handing out types of recreation materials (i.e., football jerseys, modern toys) that were considered luxury items in the local context before the emergency»⁵². Another factor to take into account is that the most simple play or game can have severely negative consequences. In general before organising a game the consequences, positive and negative, have to be tried to be predicted. Trapman had a negative experience at a basketball game in the Veli Josi camp, Savudrija, August 1992⁵³. Italian young scouts played a match against Bosnian young refugees. Before even starting the game it turned out in an exciting yelling of Bosnian nationalistic yells and emotions quickly arose.

The different organisations that I have analysed for this paper (see section 3.3 of this paper) have been organising the following activities for refugee and internally displaced children:

- Create play facilities: playgrounds, footballfields, volleyballfields, basketballfields, a place to organise the «in-door» activities, etc
- Organise summer camps (where of course recreational activities are organised)
- Encourage the organisation of workshops given by older refugees in order to teach traditional handicrafts, songs, dances, ... etc. to the children
- Organise workshops to make toys and other play materials for children
- Creative activities (draw, paint, create, construct, sculpture etc)
- Paint their accommodation (for example paint the walls of their eating room)
- Photography
- Video / film making

⁴⁹ NYLUND, B.V., LEGRAND, J.C., HOLTSBERG, p. , *The role of art in psycho-social care and protection for displaced children*, Forced Migration Review, n.º 6, December 1999, p. 17.

⁵⁰ TRAPMAN, M.J., *Suggestions for Games and Activities for Suncokret*, 1995.

⁵¹ WHO, *Mental Health in Emergencies, mental and social aspects of health of populations exposed to extreme stressors*, WHO, Geneva, 2003, p. 4.

⁵² WHO, *Mental Health in Emergencies, mental and social aspects of health of populations exposed to extreme stressors*, WHO, Geneva, 2003, p. 4.

⁵³ TRAPMAN, M.J., *Suggestions for Games and Activities for Suncokret*, 1995.

- Poetry
- Storytelling
- Donation of toys and teddy bears
- Organisation of Olympic Games
- Soccer
- Basketball
- Volleyball
- Swimming
- Water fights
- Gymnastics and aerobics
- Make-up
- Body-painting
- Make music instruments
- Make music
- Singing
- Children's choir
- Dancing (traditional, disco)
- Juggling (and other acrobat activities)
- Theatre/ Drama (perform)
- Theatre/ Drama (assist as audience)
- Make and wear outfits and costumes
- Puppetry - playing with puppets
- ... *What they want themselves!!!*

3.2. *Human resources: which persons should organise and lead the activities?*

First we should not forget that refugees are normal persons in abnormal situations. There will be always people (adolescents, adults, elderly people) who will have the interest, capacity or profession to identify, organise and lead the recreational activities. Recruiting of personal among the (adolescent) refugees and displaced persons is widely seen as very important. The proper refugee community has great capacities to teach or show their children many traditional crafts and other forms of traditional leisure. Therefore people from outside the refugee community (foreign volunteers, personal of NGO's) have to find, encourage and respect these proper strengths of the community. Although traditional and communal structures of leadership and status have to be maintained. This shows an experience from ENOA, European Network of Animation, working in a refugee camp close to Sarajevo. A young adult boy in the camp showed a lot of interest voluntarily working with

ENOA on the organisation of recreational activities. ENOA, on the other hand, also showed interest in his initiatives, capacities and energy. Later it turned out that this young boy did not have any status in the community before the project started and the organisation asked themselves if they did good giving this boy so many attention.

After the refugees themselves, the local workers from local organisations are the second group of people closest to the community. They might speak the same language, know the culture, know the background of the conflict and displacement situation - as they might even have been living it. Trough the things they have in common with the refugee or IDP population, they might have more facility discovering the needs of the community. They are more close to the community than the foreign workers. As well for the continuity of the projects started the collaboration with local personal is very important. Their organisations might continue the projects after the international organisation has gone. As far as the international organisations are concerned I think that the most important in their work must be the idea that, with little bit of initiative and few financial resources, can do a great job for the well-being of refugee children. Recreational activities can be organised by organisations that especially work in that area, but also by any other humanitarian organisation giving in a little bit of their time and energy encouraging the refugee population to organise themselves, or organising simple play activities for the children. Trapman adds that for workers who are not trained in psychology it is better that they do not create situations in which they handle the children as traumatised. Any child should be given the chance to participate.

3.3. *The international response to the need to play of displaced children and adolescents*

United Nations and the organisation of leisure in refugee and IDP camps

During the acute emergency phase, the World Health Organisation advices to organise these kind of social interventions that do not interfere with the organisation of basic needs such as shelter, food, clothing and primary health care services like disease control. According to WHO valuable early social interventions may include the creation of religious, cultural and

recreational spaces in the design of the refugee and IDP camps, as well as encourage the organisation of normal recreational activities for children⁵⁴.

At the level of other UN agencies recreational activities form part of psycho-social assistance programmes. Through psycho-social programmes UNICEF seeks to create conditions of normalcy in the lives of children affected by conflict in order to «ease trauma healing, facilitate communication and interaction among children, present opportunities for expression of children's thoughts and feelings, and provide them with psychological counselling and support»⁵⁵. Recreational activities and resumption of cultural activities and traditions are two of the six areas of psycho-social well-being interventions. Creating safe playgrounds and providing recreational materials and toys in IDP camps helped to create a sense of normal life in Eritrea during 2001. As far as child and youth networks are concerned, sports, art, music and play are considered key points. Although UNICEF aims to normalise the children's lives, these kind of activities are not seen separated from the psycho-social goals for which they are organised. Examples are sports, games, books, dramas and other creative arts activities organised in Sri Lanka. They were designated to help to relieve children's stress and trauma.

Adolescents are not overlooked by UNICEF. UNICEF realizes that in situations of distress the youngsters may lose hope in themselves and in their communities. Adolescents have proved to have great capacities to survive and have great potential for the rebuilding of their lives, community and society. UNICEF, in a participative way, helps them to organize youth clubs and committees, that then again organize sports and other cultural and recreational activities in their countries. Summer camps are organised in the Occupied Palestinian Territory to give children and youngsters an opportunity to play. In Somalia UNICEF supported the establishment of community based groups for highly disadvantaged youth that organised sports and recreation activities. FIFA, the world soccer federation and national football federations organise soccer competitions for youngsters in

zones of conflict. UNICEF negotiates days of tranquillity so that the competitions can take place and humanitarian assistance to children can be provided without problems.

Refugee children are a policy priority for UNHCR. UNHCR's 1993 Policy on Refugee Children and the 1994 Refugee Children: Guidelines on the Protection and Care provide the overall protection and assistance framework for meeting the needs of children under the age of 18⁵⁶. Chapter four of the 1994 Guidelines deals specifically with the psycho-social well-being of refugee children. One of the pillars of UNHCR's childcare is direct attention to the child. Here we find activities related to play and play zones. The organisation considers play fundamental for a child's normal development. It is seen as a mean through which a child is able to cope with the situation which it is living or has been living. Therefore refugee camps have to dispose of play zones from the first moment. These zones have to be secure and integrated with the rest of the community. Proposed activities for (professional) social workers working in refugee communities are: games, dancing, music, drawing, painting, storytelling and singing for children between 5 and 10 years. For the adolescents between 11 and 17 years sports activities, debating groups and community projects are examples of activities in which friendship spirits are stimulated. Reference is made to a WHO/UNHCR 1997 publication Mental Health of Refugees in which a section is dedicated to assistance to refugee or internal displaced children. Different kind of play activities and games are proposed with the aim to discover which children have mental health problems, treat children who are recovering malnutrition, disease or developmental delay, and treat children and adolescents that have mental health problems. Children who do not suffer mental health problems are not included in these activities.

Since seven years ago, UNHCR has organised sports activities for more than 3.5 million refugee children in around 1,000 camps and settlements in 16 countries of Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe⁵⁷. For the funding of these activities UNHCR depends wholly on the financial donations of its main partners:

⁵⁴ WHO, Mental Health in Emergencies, mental and social aspects of health of populations exposed to extreme stressors, WHO, Geneva, 2003, p. 4.

⁵⁵ *Children affected by conflict: UNICEF actions*, UNICEF, New York, May 2002, p. 76.

⁵⁶ *Summary Note on UNHCR's Strategy and Activities concerning Refugee Children*, Refugee Children Co-ordination Unit, UNHCR, Geneva, May 2002.

⁵⁷ UNHCR press release: *UNHCR to expand sports programmes for refugee children*, May 2002.

Right to Play (the former Olympic Aid), the International Olympic Committee and the International Volleyball Federation. Through these sports activities UNHCR wants to give refugee children the carefree joy of a simple childhood game, the sense of accomplishment that comes from teamwork, let children be child again, and restore normalcy in the alien environment of a refugee camp⁵⁸. Play and teamwork are considered to help heal their emotional scars, and are good for health. For children and youngsters camp life is boring and monotonous. Sports can break the spirit. By organising regular and structured recreational activities are a first step towards the rebuilding of a destroyed society and the individual healing process. Football, basketball, volleyball, netball, track and field, karate and gymnastics are examples of the activities organised in the refugee or IDP camps. Experiences show that gender can cause problems at the time of girls' participation in sports activities⁵⁹. Girls usually have much less time, as they have other more important tasks to fulfil. This limits them from participating. As well the idea that girls and women do sports is sometimes not really understood by their male counterparts. A factor that can make a difference is having female coaches.

International NGO's and the organisation of leisure in refugee and IDP camps

As I did not want to focus this paper on the work done by non governmental organisations in the field of psycho-social and professional mental health assistance, it was hard to find NGO's working on recreational activities with refugee and internally displaced children without a direct therapeutic aim. There do exist many international NGO's who justify their recreational activities under «psycho-social and mental health interventions». I got in touch with a few organisations who just focus on giving the children a nice time, time to have fun, laugh, relax and forget their problems and worries for a while. Although many of them collaborate with other NGO's and incorporate the activities in their psycho-social or mental health programmes.

The following text analyses the work and aims of some of these organisations dedicating their efforts to giving children and youngsters a nice time through various forms of leisure. I am perfectly aware that there will exist many more NGO's in this world doing similar jobs, but as there does not exist any international forum on this theme, it is impossible to create an overview.

Clowns without Borders

«YOOWHO!!» is the 'slogan' of Moshe Cohen, clown and one of the founders of the international Clowns without Borders organisation⁶⁰. They have organisations in the US, Sweden, France, Belgium, Canada (Quebec) and Spain. Bringing laughter to refugee camps and conflict zones, is their most known task and 'the clown' is their main tool. One of their fundamental objectives is to better the situation of children who live in crisis situations of whatever type (conflict, natural disaster, social inequalities, etc.) in whatever part of the world. The overall objective is the creation of laughter in the communities that they visit⁶¹. Laughter is the main intervention line⁶². It facilitates collective psychological re-equilibration of refugee, internally displaced, returned, or socially excluded communities. Laughter is instrumentalised like a recovery mechanism for values like tolerance, diversity, community participation, gender and peace. The shows and performances that the artists realize help to unblock psychologically the population through laughter.

Apart from organising workshops for local teachers and social workers, the recreational activities that they organise in refugee or IDP camps are clown shows and street performances for a large audience of children, and many interested adults. The clowns are also engaged in visiting children in hospitals. Apart from clown artists, they work with jugglers, acrobats, puppeteers and marionette players, musicians and entertainers.

The clown-theory explains a lot about the beneficial work a clown can do. Historically, the clown had a clear role: to

⁵⁸ Words from the UN High Commissioner of Refugees Ruud Lubbers at an Olympic Aid form at the Salt Lake Winter Games of 2002.

⁵⁹ Refugees Magazine , Issue 126: «Women - Seeking A Better Deal», UNHCR, April 2002.

⁶⁰ For his personal website: www.yoowho.org.

⁶¹ Visit their website: www.clownswithoutborders.org.

⁶² Visit the Payasos sin Fronteras' website: www.clowns.org.

entertain, make fun, relax, cheer the spirit and make laugh. In the clown our most market features are synthesized; the ones we show with more facility as well as the ones we hide or suppress for personal, social or cultural reasons. The clown offers a series of emotions that form part of the essence of human beings. His faces and grimaces reflect pain, illusion, scepticism, mischievousness, sadness, love, anger, joy and happiness. Clowning is a form of direct expression and communication, spontaneously and primary, through which anyone can recover the pleasure and joy of play, let him or herself take away and through which a person reaches states of maximum sensibility; we feel and react beyond conventionalisms and costumes⁶³.

They collaborate with other international NGO's in the field like: Médicins sans Frontières, Save the Children, Enfants du Monde and Wise Fool⁶⁴. In 1999 the Spanish Clowns without Borders worked together with MSF Spain in Gjakova Kosovo/a, in a mental health project contributing to the healing release of laughter. This was a long-term 6 month mission, the first in the history of Payasos sin Fronteras (PSF). About this mission a PSF volunteer writes the following: «Our work consisted in giving a series of socio-educative workshops, destined to the local social workers, and realize shows / performances in schools and refugee camps with the intention to relieve the psychological situation of the population in general. (...) The main beneficiaries of our project and our work were the children, who turned out to be very difficult to reach. Even though they knew who we were, they kept distance and before any brusque movement they ran away or started crying distressed of fear. This just happened during the first ten minutes though. Soon after starting the show the contrary effect was produced, like it was magic. They rushed on us, the show transformed in an animation play with

children around our necks, legs. All of them wanted to play with us. We proposed games in which everybody could participate. Their need to learn, look, talk, ask, ask you for things, and reclaim affection was overwhelming. (...) The shows made it possible that the children, for one day, stopped being adults and joined to play and laugh with us. Our presence like clowns broke their routine and made them see things differently. (...) We did not just do spectacles for kids, the adults, from their position, integrated with great facility to our proposals, took up the laughter and played like they were some children more»⁶⁵.

European Network of Animation

The European Network of Animation (ENOA) is an international network of people from six different European countries, created in march 2000⁶⁶. Their aim was to create and develop a network based on the concept of animation, sharing basic concepts of social development. ENOA started an animation programme for children and adolescents (and any adult interested) in two refugee camps, Gornja Kolonija and Ijunkara in Jablanica, 80km from Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina during ten days in September 2001. Their aim was working on activities that would have a future after the international team had gone as they just stayed ten days to encourage people to organize activities in the community. ENOA explains animation as the following: «To use the skills of the individual to work with them in the public spaces to create activities that they will continue to organize themselves»⁶⁷. At the time of the planning of the project «animation in refugee camps» ENOA recognised that they could not play a role in the emergency relief work, but they did feel that there was place for animation in the future

⁶³ GONZÁLEZ, M., *El Ocio prosocial y solidario*, in: CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, M., et al, *Ocio y Desarrollo, Potencialidades del Ocio para el Desarrollo Humano*, Documentos de Estudios del Ocio, n.º 18, Instituto de Estudios del Ocio, Universidad de Deusto, 2001, p. 158-159.

⁶⁴ Wise Fool New Mexico is a nonprofit theatre arts project created and staffed by four women artists of diverse backgrounds (Chicana, Native, Anglo and Jewish) who are dedicated to art as a means of changing our world. They believe in the power of laughter to heal; of celebration to strengthen community; and of art to build bridges. In the folk traditions of storytelling, puppetry, circus arts and public spectacle, they create accessible, highly visual and participatory performances and lead hands on workshops. In April of 2000 Wise Fool New Mexico

collaborated with Clowns Without Borders (an international organization which sends clowns as relief into war torn communities) to journey to Chiapas, Mexico, to perform clowning and circus shows and teach puppetry workshops in remote war torn communities. For more information visit their website; http://www.wisefoolnm.org/about_history.html.

⁶⁵ Free translation of: GONZÁLEZ, M., «El Ocio prosocial y solidario», in: CSIKSZENTMIHALYI, M., et al, *Ocio y Desarrollo, Potencialidades del Ocio para el Desarrollo Humano*, Documentos de Estudios del Ocio, n.º 18, Instituto de Estudios del Ocio, Universidad de Deusto, 2001, p. 163-164.

⁶⁶ Visit their website: www.enoa.de.

⁶⁷ ENOA, Full report on the action training in Bosnia-Herzegovina, project «Animation in Refugee Camps», September 2001.

lives of the people living in the camps. The aim of animation is to discover the skills artistic, intellectual, social, practical and physical skills and competences of individuals and encourage people to use these skills bringing them in practice. Through animation leisure time can be used in a meaningful way and the activities and projects that result from the animation process improve the quality of lives of the people. ENOA stresses that although displaced people might have lost their homes and their jobs, they have certainly not lost their education, knowledge and skills.

In ten days they tried to stimulate and encourage the people, children and youngsters, to organise their own leisure activities. The camps existed already for 9 years and they were the first organisation doing something like that, listening to their needs. To make the first contact with the people in the camp they used street-animation techniques organising public spectacular actions like playing funny games with the children and youngsters. ENOA sees this kind of activities as a starting point as they did not want to fall in the risk that animation would become a form of entertainment where people expect proposals of activities rather than taking initiative and creating their own. When the inhabitants of the camps and the ENOA team were more used to each other they organised open workshops, brainstorm sessions to discover the skills of the participants. Skill categories may include sport, music, theatre, circus, artistic traditional crafts, cooking, manual work, but important to realize is that there are no skills that cannot be used. Question that form the basis of this brainstorm process were. «What are my skills? How can I use them? How can I integrate these skills into projects and work in the camp?

The organisation decided to work with cheap and local materials, as the proper refugee community did not have much money itself. Making toys with the materials around them is a long lasting activity. In the case that the things they have made would break, people are able to repair them, or make new toys themselves. If you introduce expensive foreign materials, the activity would have less possibilities to continue when something would break after the organisation would have left the camp.

Suncokret

Suncokret (Sunflower) - Centre for Grassroots Relief Work - is an organisation of young Croatian adults who work in the field of primary health care for refugee and internally displaced children⁶⁸. It was founded by a group of young people, mainly students, in response to the huge number of refugees in Croatia in the summer of 1992. Suncokret currently works in 20 refugee centres with approx. 15.000 exiles and refugees. They have about 60 co-workers and a variable number of volunteers, domestic and foreign. Suncokret is mostly financed by the UNHCR and other international organizations. Besides many other tasks they provide psycho-social assistance in refugee centres. It aims to address negative psychological, social, and cultural consequences of the social upheavals in the region, to improve the quality of life for all, but especially for deprived members of the society. Suncokret implements a broad range of programmes and initiatives in local communities, resettlement areas, and refugee camps, primarily for the youth and children, but also for women, elderly, and persons with special needs. In 2002 it was continuing to provide programs for refugee children, youth, women, and elderly in Vara_din and Pula, organising educational, creative, recreational, and social activities for them. They also work with children in schools (Prevention of Children's Behavioural Disorders Project) and have set up 5 community youth centers in Croatia providing free time creative, educational, recreational, and social activities for local and refugee children and youth. Marc-Jan Trapman, working with them during 1993-1995, advised them about the organisation of games and other play activities for refugee and IDP children resulting in a draft handbook that has been a great resource for this paper⁶⁹.

Balkan Sunflowers

Balkan Sunflowers is an international network of voluntary organisations for the reconstruction in the Balkans⁷⁰. The organisation works in the post-emergency phase when emergency aid efforts like basic food, medical and housing

⁶⁸ Visit their website: www.suncokret.hr and about Suncokret: <http://www.city-net.com/~wmsch/sunf/index.htm>.

⁶⁹ TRAPMAN, M.J., *Suggestions for Games and Activities for Suncokret*, 1995.

⁷⁰ Visit their website: www.balkansunflowers.org.

needs are fulfilled. Balkan Sunflowers wants to restore community life and renew social integration. They work with international young volunteers who aim to integrate, live and neighbour with the people they are going to work with. Groups of Balkan Sunflowers volunteers are now working in Kosovo/a, Albania and Macedonia. Volunteers come for at least four weeks, and establish themselves in war-torn towns, refugee camps or vulnerable communities. Apart from organising workshops for adults, teaching courses and provide information, their work is mainly focussed on the organisation of children and youth activities. They aim to make life easier and more fun, and to contribute to a climate of trust and self-confidence in which people will more easily discern the opportunities open to them. Balkan Sunflowers activities are intended both to achieve concrete results and to enliven and empower the participants and their communities. Through play, art, sport, work and celebration, and in compassionate response to traumatic experiences, they aim to serve the communities with whom they live. During the Kosovo/a Refugee Crisis in 1999 Balkan Sunflowers organised children, art, sport and other social activities. Daily children's activities, specifically games and recreation for children ages 5-15, had remarkable positive influence; progress is evident among all age groups regarding areas of discipline, patience and compromise. The children and youth have grown more receptive to the volunteers, and parents and teachers have also commented on the improved behavioural and organizational skills of the children. They coordinate and collaborate a lot of their work with a large number of different international NGO's in the field, especially during the Kosovo/a crisis. These coordinated acts resulted in an incredible and impressive number of activities, mainly recreational activities for children and youngsters, that are resumed under the various geographic project areas on the Balkan Sunflowers' website.

Conclusions

The objective of this paper was to analyse the needs for and benefits of recreational activities for refugee and internally displaced children and youngsters living in refugee or IDP camps, as well as the efforts made by the international community encouraging and organising these activities. In order to study the possibility of leisure for the displaced youngsters and children knowledge of their emotional and psychological

situation is required. Any person working in the field of leisure should know in which conditions the beneficiaries are. Although many children and youngsters in a war or conflict situation have lived terrible events, just a small proportion needs mental health assistance. For the provision of leisure it is important not to stigmatise these children based on the expectations we have of their mental health condition; any child or youngster should have the chance to participate. At least from the point of view presented in this paper; the opportunity to play and enjoy recreational activities without a direct therapeutic goal, without supervision of mental health professionals, but with the aim of simply enjoying a nice time, enjoying their right and need to play.

Play and participation in games and recreational activities is proved to be a vital human developmental need in the lives of any child and adolescent. Children are also affected by what is deprived of them. Special needs of refugee and internally displaced children are; opportunity to go through all the normal phases of childhood and adolescence, normalise their lives, creating regularity and stability, receive support from family and community, a feeling of safety, being effective human beings, and prevent their situation from getting worse. Recreational activities can contribute to these needs in a way that they offer structured daily activities in which the children feel that they are spending their time in a useful way, feel secure, give family and community the relieve to see their children having a nice time, and prevent their emotional and psychological situation from deteriorating. Through play children receive stimuli from the environment, socialize and learn social behaviour, are less bored as they spend their free time in an effective way, laugh, do physical exercise and have mental tools for understanding the reality in which they live and express their feelings and emotions about that, or find space to let their minds blow and forget this reality for a moment and feel child again.

According to the play definitions anything can form part of play. «Play» can be free play, games, theatre, art, music etc. This is an «open door» for the organisation of recreational activities in circumstances where money, facilities and material are scarce. With simple materials and a lot of creativity nice leisure time can be organised. Participation of the proper refugee or IDP community is very important for the success of the activities. This evites the «humanitarian dependence syndrome», gives the people a feeling of having more control in

their own lives and means that activities will be organised around their own needs. The situation of the forced displacement, culture and gender, traditions and costumes, and religion are important factors of influence in leisure.

The international community recognises the need of displaced children to play and enjoy a nice leisure time, but easily mixes up this need with mental health and psychosocial objectives. Speaking about the provision of recreational activities without these specific objectives, sports and playgrounds are the main activities that UN agencies provide. Other kind of recreational activities like theatre, arts and music are included in special designed psycho-social programmes. Some international non governmental organisations, like the ones I have analysed in section 3.3, specifically pay attention to the need of children and adolescents to play. Their projects are directed at *all* the children of the refugee and internally displaced communities they visit, without making distinction between the beneficiaries.

Personally I am of the opinion this idea must become more widespread under the organisations working with displaced children and youngsters in camps. Recreational activities for everyone, the way themselves want it to be, and encourage them to participate actively in the process.

Recommendations

What do we have to take into account when organising activities in a refugee camp? Make a Checklist

—What are/were the traditional ways of leisure of the children? (before the displacement and in the camp)

—Which leisure needs do the refugee children have (according to age and gender): needs assessment

—How do the children in the camp organise themselves and their spare time?

—How does the refugee community organise themselves?

—What is the family and community status (complete or disrupted, who is the head of the family, which role does the child play now in family and community) of the refugee child?

—How does the family and community opinate about leisure and spare time of their children?

—Which members from the proper refugee community can organise and lead the activities?

Conditions for the people who are going to work with displaced children and leisure

—Basis knowledge of cultural, spiritual and religious traditions of the refugee community

—Basic knowledge of the background of the refugee situation

—Basic knowledge of the impact (physical, psychological, emotional, social, etc.) of the conflict, war and refugee situation on children and adolescents

Consciously Plan, Implement and Evaluate the activities

Although one might think that we just treat non serious playful games and activities, their impact on the children must be continuously and seriously observed. Child behaviour is a tool to detect possible mental health problems so that you can alarm a professional on that area. As well the activities themselves may never harm the individuals and the community. They may never cause disturbances, but should bring relieve, good moods, and many smiles. The type of activity, and its possible consequences, must be perfectly analysed beforehand. More research should be done on the impact of recreational activities on refugee and internally displaced children and youngsters living in camps.

Key factor

Participation of the children and youngsters in the choice, planning, organisation and implementation of the activities.

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