PLAYFIELDS APP

A booklet for learners, facilitators, urbanists, roamers, detourers, explorers, alchemists and anyone interested in looking at environments in new playful ways

INTER-MISSION

We, the playful mapping collective, believe that play un-paves, and playful methods are the tools to wedge open outdated approaches in higher education. What is uncovered are new fields where unlearning and plurality can meet, where anyone can join in and collaborate, where difference is the norm. In these fields, philosophy is developed for good, fed by critical and lateral thinking. This is the space of what comes between – the intercultural, interdisciplinary, international, interpersonal and interstitial – the interesting. We believe that here, we can make room through making-do, taking radical action through everyday skills that everyone has.

THE EMPIRE AND THE COURT

We find ourselves in an interregnum. Behind us, empire-makers in ivory towers. In front of us, groundswells of curiosity, of the unofficial, unapprovable and un-assessable. In-between, a world of unaccountable – yet powerful – courtiers. To this we say: more jesters in the palace!

?-TERIORS

Play needs to be brought back into higher education. Not only by creating a more lusory attitude to learning, but also by rethinking and reshaping its architecture. The interior of the institution is not the only space for learning. Failures should not be banned to the exterior as a cache of lost opportunity. Collaboration and co-design

should not be obscured by an individualist anterior. Let's turn the chairs around, move and mobilise, bring the outside in and the inside out.

TERRAINS NOT TERRITORIES

All doors need hinges. Hinges mustn't be fancy new things. We do not wish to refurbish libraries, and other university environments. Instead, we wish to turn 'learning commons' into common learnings. We wish to produce fields, not disciplines. We wish to uncover and imagine terrains, not build, capture, or protect territories. For the bodies-minds that produce these spaces, play is not a lubricator but an instigator, a fumigator, an inciter, a spanner in the works.

LEARNING IS NOT A VENTURE. IT IS AN ADVENTURE

The languages of play have been co-opted, branded and gamified for too long. This is not the play that we envisage. It is exactly its ambiguous qualities that we want to celebrate. Playful learning incites creativity, cooperation and movement. It upsets disciplinary alliances, and invites us to reinvent and become critical thinkers. To embrace process as well as outcomes. To make teachers into learners, and learners into teachers. To un/do.

THE STRANGE AND THE WEIRD

Step outside and surprises stick out like blades of grass through the cobblestones. We believe playful interventions allow those seedlings to flourish: experiments, situations, eruptions and insurgencies. And we need to keep the thistles, the thorns, the weeds, the strange and the weird. Compost!

"THOUGH THIS BE MADNESS, YET THERE IS METHOD IN'T"

Trust us! There is method to be found in this madness! As alchemists we have a formula. Take the thistles and the thorns, mix the strange and the weird - experiments become method and method become experiments. We want to concoct a potent witches' brew. Let us warn you, it may be scary at first, but let's go and let go.

A MODEST INTERVENTION

Our intervention is a modest one, only a beginning. Let's just for a moment turn away from Moodles, MOOCs and Kahoots. Not because they don't work as digital means for learning, but because we need alternative instruments that make us unlearn and undo. We need to recognize that such digital tools never resembled 'the' world. Our intervention is not a smooth process; hinges creak and rattle, reminding us of the structures that we set in motion. So, let's develop tools to create a more open, diverse and creative space for higher and humble education.

PLAY/FIELDS

Playfields is just one possible, plausible, feasible attempt – an experiment, an app, an idea, a tool, a toy, call it as you want! If you don't look carefully, you might think we are just fooling around, that our terms seem undefined, ideas unrefined, and our words frivolous. But more closely, Playfields does. Under the guise of madness, and in-between the lines of code, play becomes a method of co-creating new ground together.

ABOUT PLAYFIELDS

Playfields is a prototype app for playful fieldwork. It can be used in different higher education settings and beyond, bringing creativity and inventiveness to how students think, do and learn. It can be applied to emphasise the notions of chance, serendipity and discovery in fieldwork, or as an introduction to creative and critical research methods. As a theme- and location-independent tool, it can accommodate different disciplinary, cultural, international and institutional contexts.

Playfields allows groups to collaboratively design instructions for each other, which they can then perform in the field. Each set of instructions is guided by a distinct methodological approach originating from the social sciences and humanities, challenging students to think differently about their topic and method of study. The app includes a novel map-view as well as functionality for recording notes, images, audio and GPS tracks. As such, Playfields is not a game, but a tool to facilitate playful situated learning experiences, with great flexibility in how and where to use it.

There are three key tropes that are integral to Playfields and the philosophy behind it: digital mapping, the experiential qualities of fieldwork and 'bastardised' situationism.

Digital mapping was a starting point for devising Playfields. Maps, mostly now found on screens of mobile devices, have the potential to fix the world into a concrete and seemingly objective form. But their digital mutability also makes them the perfect canvas to subvert and challenge expectations about places and spaces. Their capacity for interactive place-making offers a strong potential for creative learning in the field for both students and facilitators.

However, maps are themselves situated which highlights the importance of experiental and emplaced learning. The field becomes a playground. Interdisciplinary encounters and sensory experiences can create a richer and more nuanced understanding of the field across which students and teachers move. Facilitating such moments therefore became central in our design decisions.

Finally, the app is based on what we have come to call a 'bastardised situationism': ideas and methods inspired by the situationist movement but updated in the light of contemporary and educational contexts. Most notably, we shifted the focus from collective action within urban everyday life to knowledge production in the field, with an emphasis on materiality and new modes of investigation instead of abstraction. This gives rise to a sense of hope: that new ways of playful (un)learning can indeed be constructed in an age of metrics, outcomes and commerce.
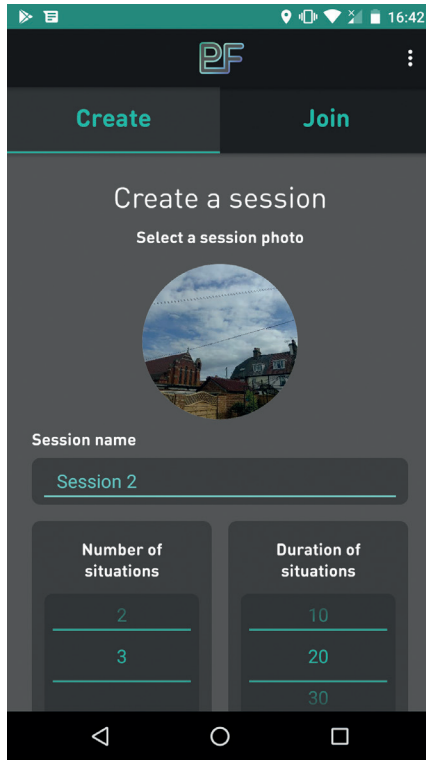
How **PLAYFIELDS** *works…*

CREATE

SEND

ENACT
PHOTOGRAPH
CHAT

PIN

REFLECT
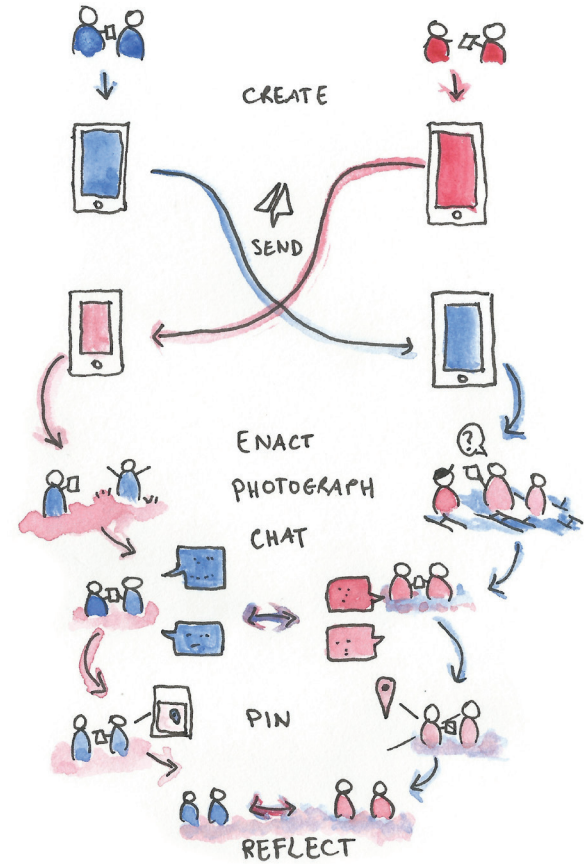
Create a bespoke local session

Instructors
create a session
with title and
image

You can adjust
time, number of
situations, trial
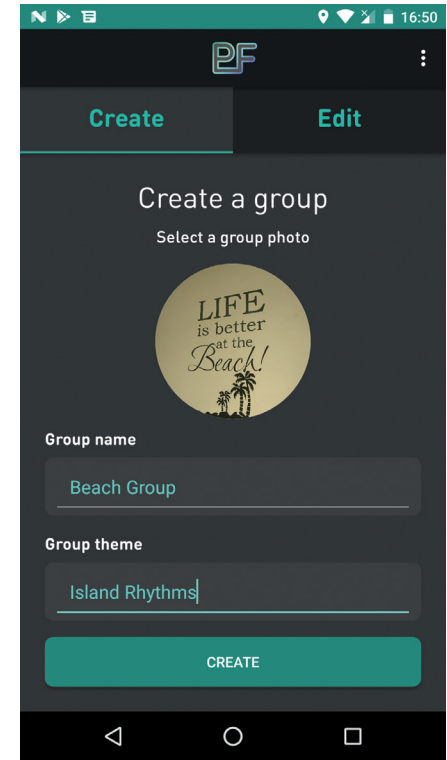and instruction
settings

Create and link player groups

Players set up
their groups
with image,
name and theme

They then link
with a partner
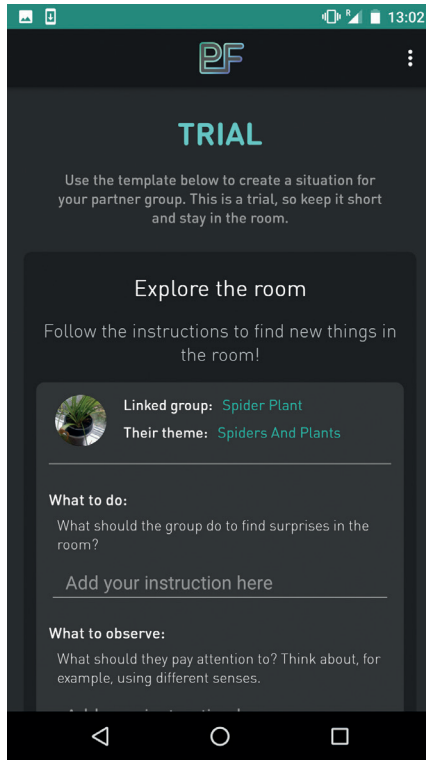group, who
they will design
instructions for

The tutorial

Groups try out the format by designing and playing a short situation

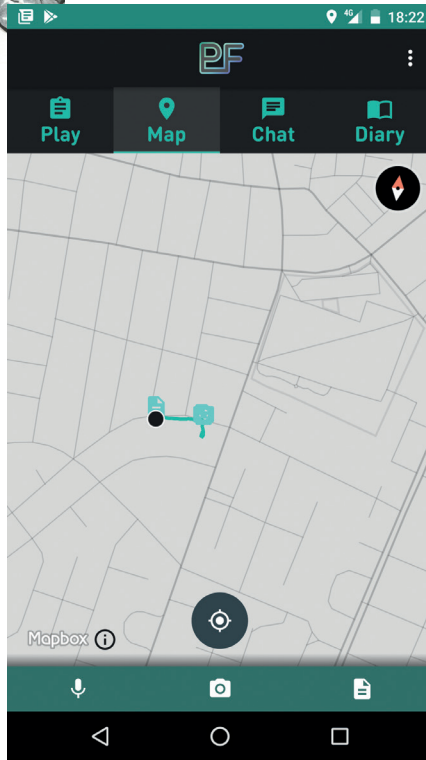The trial has example instructions and demonstrates the map interface

Create situations

Groups create situations for each other by building a set of instructions and choosing map interfaces
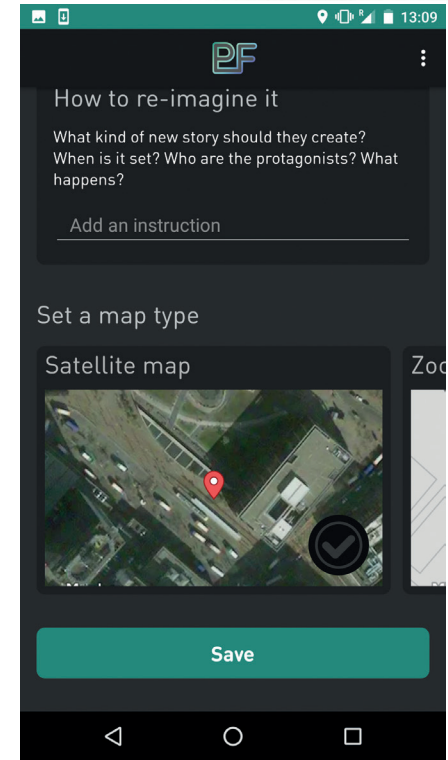
Play situations

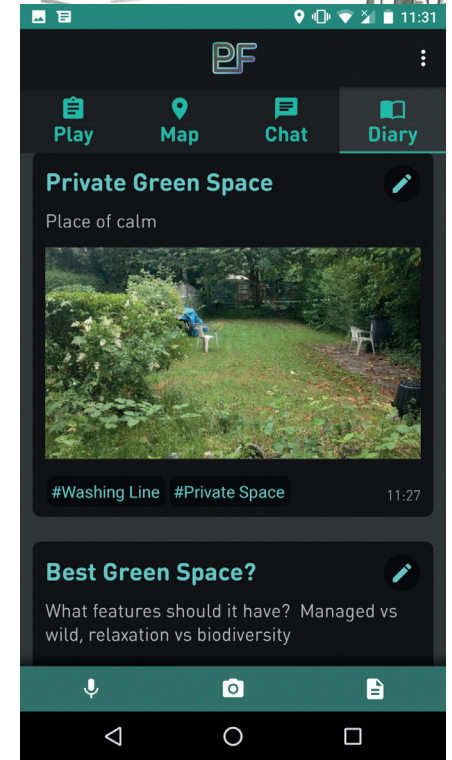Groups play the situations designed for them

They record their locations, actions and observations using the map and diary

Share and reflect

Groups can review and edit their records in the diary

All recorded material can be downloaded via a web tool

ABOUT The Playful Mapping Collective

The Playful Mapping Collective was initiated in 2016 when we were working on our final book *Playful Mapping in the Digital Age* for the ERC project *Charting the Digital*. The ERC team had at that point been working together for more than 4 years and became increasingly aware how difficult it was to claim ownership over certain ideas and how important collaboration is in 'good' research. Moreover, we wanted to acknowledge that we were also collaborating with people outside the ERC team.

On a more political level, we had our doubts about an academic system that constantly pushes us into thinking about how we can increase our visibility as individuals. All too often this obscures collaborative processes that have been crucial to the quality of results. We therefore decided to publish the *Playful Mapping* book — and now this booklet — as a collective, and as fully open access. For this booklet we are even going further, envisaging a collective publication that can change shape over the years depending on our collective input.

As a collective we have a dynamic structure. Sometimes some of us are taking more of a backseat, and new people join. The members of **The Playful Mapping Collective** are (in reverse alphabetical order):

CW Clancy Wilmott

JW Jana Wendler

**CP** Chris Perkins

KM Kate McLean

SL Sybille Lammes

SH Sam Hind

AG Alex Gekker

EF Emma Fraser

DE Daniel Evans

TIMELINE

'Islands: Paradise or Prison?'
University of Manchester final year Geography course to Maltese island of Gozo

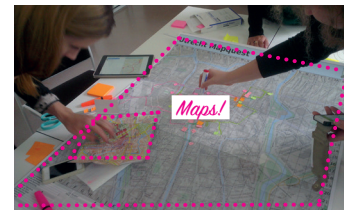Introduced dérive as a methodological approach: a game of open drifting facilitated by randomised commands, juxtaposed with more competitive exploration games

SWIM TO MALTA

LEARN A GOZITAN SONG
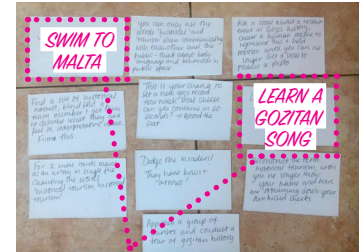
Commands created by one group for another

'Playing with maps'
Workshop at Games and Play summer school, Utrecht

Maps!

Maps as playful and collaborative interfaces: using shared maps to record tracks and comments by participants of an urban explorative walk

AG **CP** **CW** **SH** **SL**

Preludes and prototypes

Go Go Gozo/The Enact Game

Erasmus+ 'GoGoGozo': interdisciplinary field course on mobile and playful methods

Frenc

Re-enacting the legend of Frenc, the saintly healer of Gharb

Dérive attempts become 'Enact' game: shift from open wandering and exploration towards performative interventions, students become active agents

New technologies introduced into the assemblage: different modes of recording and documenting research journeys

Video

Conceptual literature

Notes & sketches

Photography

Maps (analogue and digital)

(AG) (CP) (CW) (SH) (SL)

2nd 'GoGoGozo' course: expanding the idea of interventions. Individual commands become connected instructions that form extended 'situations'

1st paper prototype/The Situation Game

SITUATION 1: FOLLOW THE THING

Trace material objects through their assemblages

The situation needs to have some instructions on:

An object: how will the group identify and choose their object to follow

Example: Blindfold a team member, get them to walk into a shop and point to a product. This is now your object.

A mode: What aspect of the object should they follow? And how?

Example: Get each team member to write a list of ingredients. Pick the second-most common one and follow its movement across the island.

A direction: In which direction should they follow it? This can be literal (N,S,E,W), temporal (past / future) or more abstract (to its origin, as far as it goes)

Example: Follow the ingredient into the past.

A mode of recording: how should the experiences, observations and outcomes be recorded? Think of the workshops and other exercises we have done.

Example: Record your journey using photographs and sound recordings.

A duration: when should they move on to the next situation? This can be temporal, or triggered by an event.

Example: Move on when you have reached the edge of the island (depending on your understanding)

Situations inspired by different methodological approaches

Guiding framework with prompts for instructions

Examples to inspire creativity
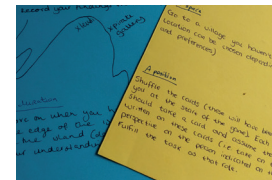
Visual and material design recognised as a way to communicate complex ideas: separating concepts, instructions, hints and inspirations; introducing flows
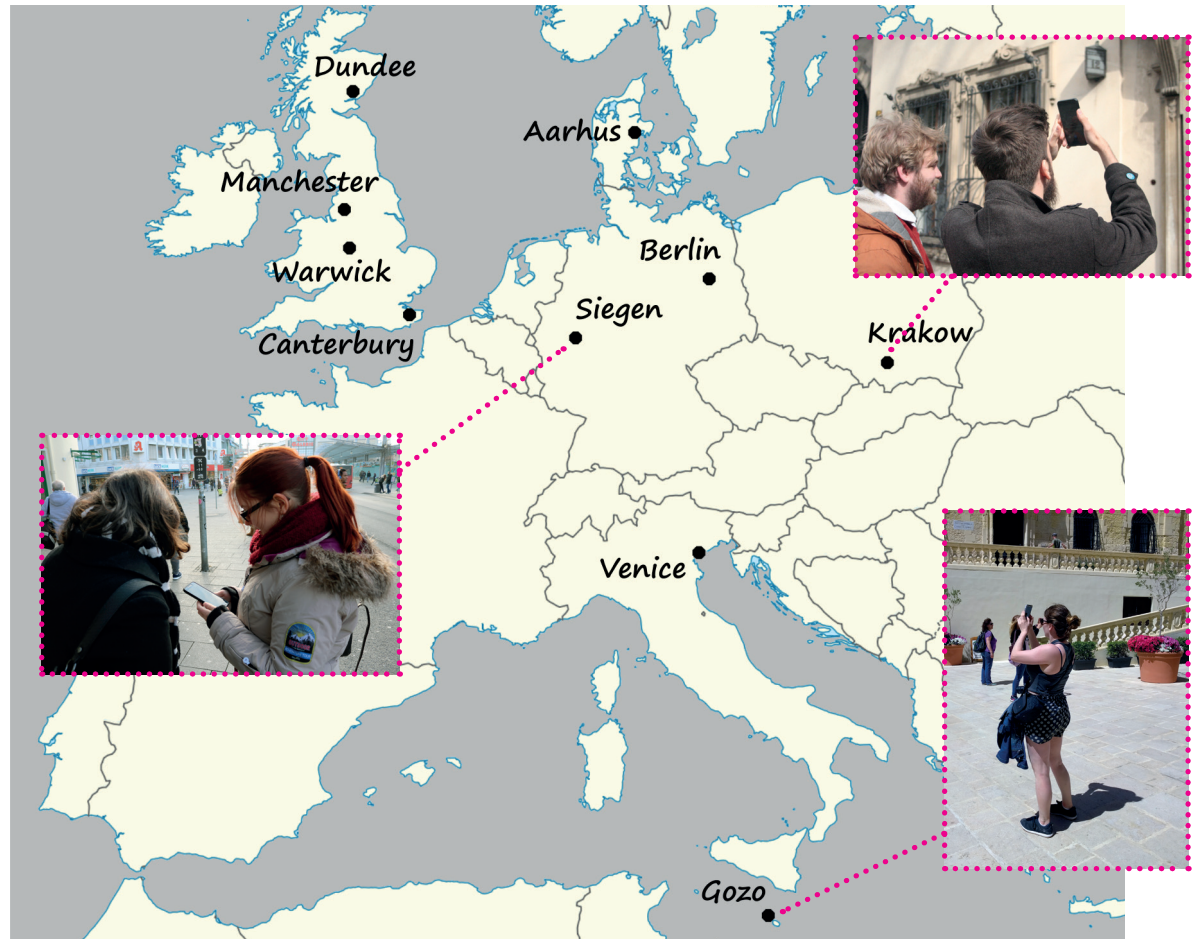
(AG) (CP) (CW) (JW) (KM) (SH) (SL)

Tests with students of:

- Graphic Design
- New Media Studies
- Game Design
- Cultural Studies
- Urban Design
- Geography
- Earth Systems
- Development Studies

Demos and talks at:

- CounterPlay, Aarhus
- Institute for Digital Games, Malta
- Multiplatform Symposium, UK

- **228 playtesters over 10 months**

Dundee

Aarhus

Manchester

Warwick

Berlin

Siegen

Canterbury

Krakow

Venice

Gozo

Playtesting and development

AG CP CW JW KM SH SL with JD

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

playfields.org