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| Title | Having a say in places to play |
| Authors | Lynch, Helen;Jansens, Rianne;Prellwitz, Maria |
| Publication date | 2024-07-01 |
| Original Citation | Lynch, H., Jansens, R. and Prellwitz, M. (2024) 'Having a say in places to play', in Bishop, K. and Dimoulias, K. (eds.) The Routledge Handbook on the Influence of Built Environments on Diverse Childhoods. New York: Routledge, pp. 191-205. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003284406-17 |
| Type of publication | Book chapter |
| Link to publisher's version | 10.4324/9781003284406-17 |
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| Download date | 2026-11-06 03:13:18 |
| Item downloaded from | https://hdl.handle.net/10468/16246 |

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# Having a Say in Places to Play: Children with Disabilities, Voice, and Participation

**The Routledge Handbook on the Influence of Built Environments on Diverse Childhoods**

**Taylor and Francis**

**10.4324/9781003284406-17**

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## Introduction

Children's experience of their environments is a fundamental consideration among those who advocate for the right to play in child-friendly cities. Internationally, the child-friendly cities movement has progressed policy and structures to support child-centred participatory approaches in designing urban settings. However, engaging with children in urban design is challenging and even more so for children who are considered hard to reach and who are consequently identified as seldom-heard children, or marginalized, such as children with disabilities. This chapter explores experiences of children with diverse abilities in urban play environments followed by an outline of the existing knowledge base for seldom-heard children's participation in contributing to designing playgrounds for play. Potential ideas are discussed for enhancing participatory approaches in playground design, especially for children who are seldom heard.

It is important to recognise the diverse experiences and professional perspectives that are represented across this book and therefore we begin first by introducing our particular lens on play and children with disabilities as an important starting point. Coming from a background in occupational therapy, we have a long professional history in working with children and families to support inclusion in communities both in practice and as researchers. Occupational therapy is a profession that is underpinned by person-centred approaches traditionally for people with disabilities (Christiansen and Baum 2005). While this has usually been in the form of rehabilitation, more recently this has expanded to include addressing rights-based issues at a community level, to address disadvantage, exclusion, and marginalization. As a profession, we are informed by the basic science of occupational science, which is the study of what people need and want to do to live a 'good 'or happy life, such as cooking, washing, dressing, parenting, which we call the study of occupation (Yerxa 1993). Conceptually the study of occupation, requires an understanding of how what we do, is influenced by the person-environment relationship (Law et al. 1997). For children with disabilities, this means we work to address barriers in the physical and social environment that contribute to challenging childhoods, in order to enable occupation, and for children that includes the occupation of play (Ray-Kaeser and Lynch 2017).

Play is one of the most significant occupations of childhood that both shapes learning and development (Ginsburg 2007) while also reflecting a child's wellbeing (Moore and Lynch

2018). Play is heavily influenced by the environment in which play can or cannot take place. For example, it is well known that children raised in deprived contexts in Romanian Orphanages, displayed maladaptive behaviors and played less than other typically developing children due to the deprivation in their social and physical environments (Cermak 2001). Meanwhile, in other contexts where children live in richly resourced settings, play deprivation may also be seen where play is restricted due to fears for the child's safety, traffic concerns and stranger danger in urban communities (Tremblay et al. 2015), such that this restricted play is thought to contribute to the rise in psychopathology in childhood (Gray 2011). Meanwhile, outdoor play has been shown to be a significant positive influence on health and wellbeing, and in particular risky play and the need for risk-rich environments to enhance play (Brussoni et al. 2015; Tremblay et al. 2015). So, it is perhaps not surprising that play has been given status as a fundamental right in recognition of its contribution to a quality childhood, which has a significant role beyond learning and development (Lansdown 2022). Therefore, there is a requirement for professionals such as occupational therapists to include a rights-based approach in practice, rather than restrict themselves to a developmental or learning perspective, if the right to play is to be truly achieved. For this chapter the term 'children' is used to denote the age range from birth to 18 years, informed by a rights-based perspective and consistent with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [UNCRC] (1989).

**Play for Children with Disabilities from a Rights-based Perspective.**

From a rights-based perspective, there is a vital issue that arises when it comes to thinking about play and children with disability. As a group, children with disabilities are known to be at a higher risk of deprivation regarding their rights to play compared to others, due to the barriers they experience in trying to access equitable play opportunities in their communities ( Lynch et al. 2019; Prellwitz and Skär 2016). In this regard, children with disabilities are doubly disadvantaged (Moore et al. 2020). Yet, the focus on play provision for children with disabilities seems to be largely ignored in policy and government level at least in Europe (Bantula Janot and Paya Rico 2020; Lynch et al. 2018). So, when the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child [CRC] agreed that a General Comment on Article 31, (the right to play) was needed, many of us who worked and researched with children with disabilities were elated (CRC 2013). Key experts in play from the International Play Association had been to

the fore in pushing for this to happen and submitted a formal request in 2008. They said at the time that play was "one of the least known, least understood and least recognized rights of children, and therefore one of the most consistently ignored, disdained and violated rights in the world today" (cited in Casey and McKendrick 2022: p4). From our experiences across many health and education settings, the right to play was rarely taken seriously (Lynch, et al. 2018) and given scant attention by states and municipalities with responsibilities for provision of child-friendly environments and from a play advocacy perspective, it was clear that more official support was needed from the UN (Casey and McKendrick 2022).

General Comments are a mechanism through which the UNCRC provide more detailed interpretation and advice from experts, to support states to implement a particular right. Hence, General Comment no. 17 was developed to ensure that states could find ways to prevent play deprivation and implement play provision as a fundamental right for all children including hard to reach, seldom-heard children, which includes those who are marginalised such as those with disabilities (McKendrick et al. 2018). Within this general comment, two key issues are raised that are closely related to the topic of this chapter: that children with disabilities are known to be at a higher risk of play deprivation than others; and that children should have a say in matters that affect them, including the design of playgrounds and facilities with urban planners, and policy makers and those who are responsible for play provision in communities. This is the starting point for this chapter.

***Outdoor Play, and Playgrounds***

Within the General Comment no. 17, outdoor play is given particular importance as having an important role in childhood particularly as it has significant influence on children's resilience, sense of belonging in communities, and how they become part of civil society (CRC 2013). Outdoor play refers to play that takes place outside in designated or non-designated play areas (Francis and Lorenzo 2002), with a higher degree of freedom and unstructured active play (Tremblay et al. 2015). However, when it comes to urban living and play provision, the most common place for play is arguably the community playground which is a common facility included in urban planning globally (Pitsikali et al. 2020). Playgrounds are built by municipalities for use by local communities, and a place where children and families are welcome, yet when it comes to children with disabilities, this is often not the case. Playgrounds can be sites of social exclusion rather than inclusion ( Lynch

et al. 2019;Prellwitz, Moore and Lynch 2018; Prellwitz and Skär 2016; Wenger et al. 2021). From research conducted so far in trying to understand why this might be the case, it seems that across many countries (e.g. Australia, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland, UK), there is a general lack of awareness and knowledge among municipalities on how to design and provide for inclusive playgrounds ( Moore et al. 2022; Prellwitz and Lynch 2018; Sterman et al. 2019; Wenger et al. 2022 ). This is concurrently exacerbated by a general lack of insight across societies into the importance of play in children's lives. Play advocates find that a lot of effort needs to go into reminding adults of the need to make space for play (McKendrick 2007).

**Hearing from Children and Families about Playground Experiences**

One approach that is advocated as essential in designing and planning for play, is to engage closely with children themselves (the playground users), to understand their play experiences in playground environments. From a children's rights perspective, this is about listening to the voices of children, to hear about their experiences (Davey and Lundy 2011) and to take this insight on play and use it to inform practice and to influence design. When it comes to playgrounds, users are also caregivers; family members and friends who often bring the children to these playspaces. We also need to include families and other carers and visitors and consider playgrounds as intergenerational spaces (Lynch et al. 2019).

This next section takes us into the lived experiences of some children and families who wish to engage in play in their communities in a similar way to other families, however, do not get the opportunity to participate. These stories are from two different countries (Ireland and Sweden) and gathered from children with diverse communication, mobility, and cognitive abilities.

1. Stories from Mary, John, and Ken from Ireland: Firstly, three short stories are shared by three children of their diverse experiences of play.
2. Elliot's family story as told by his mother: The second story from Sweden started when Elliot and his twin brother were five years old and were both looking forward to the new playground that his 'child friendly municipality' had built.

(Note pseudonyms are used for the children and families, and insights on play experiences boldened)

## *1. Stories from Mary, John, and Ken*

*Mary's Story About Her Playground Experiences*

This story was from a child who uses a wheelchair and shares the play activities that they really want to engage in yet faces many barriers due to poor design.

> I love them I really **love** playgrounds. I would love to hang out and **meet friends** there. I love to swing high, now I am too tall, and my feet touches the ground, so I do not go on the swing anymore. I saw a swing for two people once in a playground. We sat on it and went back and forward, back and forward. I also love to go **fast on the pathways** especially if they slope a bit. Most pathways are flat that is both good and bad. It is good because that is the only place on the playground I can use, bad because I can´t go fast.
> I really like the zip line, but I do not use it anymore I **am too heavy** my mom says.
>
> Meeting friends at the playground is the best but at the special playground we **must drive to** and **there I do not know anyone.** It is good that there is a special playground, but I know it is for children like me.
>
> I **love little playhouses;** we went to a playground once that had a playhouse. In a playhouse you can sit and chat with friends or play shop. My parents took me to one of these special parks, **I got so scared when I got stuck in the bark mulch stuff**, it is frightening. It is the most scariest thing ever. I don´t want to do that ever again. In my local playground there is a wheelchair roundabout. It is very fun. One time in one place there was a wheelchair swing it was fun as well. But I was nervous at first it did not feel safe, but I got used to it. I felt a bit shaky (Mary aged 10).

*Ken's Story About His Playground Experiences*

This short story told by a child with severe visual impairment and is also an example of commonly requested play affordances in a playground for example loose objects to use.

> I like to go on the swing mostly in my backyard, I don't go to playgrounds much. I do not like **to test** anything at the playground, I just want to **sit and talk**. Sometimes I can hear cars nearby I do not like that. I **like colors** on the playground, but most things are grey. I would like a house on the playground to play shop. I would use **pinecones for money**. I did that with **my mom. There is nothing good on a playground and I do not like playgrounds** (Ken aged 11).

*John's Story About His Playground Experiences*

This story is from a child with a cognitive impairment who still enjoys some simpler ways of playing but due to their physical size is too big for the children's playground.

> I like playground, where else would I go when I am outside? There is a big playground not far away **I could go there by myself**. I like the big playground, but I have to stay in the small one. Daddy says the big one is too hard. I wish they had more **fun things that I could push like a wheelbarrow** like Dad's or a house. I used to go with my Mom and Dad to another big playground but not anymore. My Mom says I´m too big. **I liked the slide there, I used to sit under the slide and talk**. In the small playground there is nothing to do and none of the kids wants to play with me and I do not want to play with them. **I want to climb high up and sit on the roof** and have a carousel that goes fast. I like to be by the trees and stand by the bushes and eat the berries. Daddy says I have to be careful (John aged 9).

Based on these three short stories there is substantial information and insight that is of value when building playgrounds. For example, playgrounds are not always about running or climbing but are also a place for socializing and sitting to talk. One recurrent theme when interviewing children is also that playgrounds are a place where you meet friends. The idea that playgrounds are foremost a social place for children is supported by many studies (e.g. Moore and Lynch, 2018; Prellwitz and Skär 2007; Wenger et al. 2021). Across these studies, some of the most frequently identified places to meet were playhouses or swings close together where the children could sit and talk.

Another insight from these stories is related to what is often referred to as ‘risky play’ (Sandseter 2009). Studies show that children with disabilities are often excluded from risk taking play opportunities by parents or other caretakers and instead of learning how to negotiate risks are inadvertently at risk of surplus safety (Wyver et al. 2010). According to a study by Beetham et. al. (2019), children with developmental disabilities are at a higher risk of injuries, and this has been attributed to the fact that children with disabilities are not exposed to risky play situations and thereby lack essential skills in risk taking assessments and management.

As researchers, we have noticed several less obvious issues that in fact tell a more significant story. In our interviews with children with disabilities we have noted that they often start by saying, “once I was” … This “once I was” phrase often refers to once-off incidences such as that they made a friend at the playground or went to a specific playground where there was equipment that they could access and use. This experience usually reflected something that only happened once or twice however was an experience that appeared to have been of great importance in their experience of playgrounds. Analysis of the data has identified a key reason for this playground experience not occurring more frequently could be explained with the fact that the only accessible or ‘special’ playground was often far away and a place that was only visited once or twice a year. This is in stark contrast to experiences reported by other children without disabilities who could play in any playground anywhere near or far. Such special playgrounds end up being places of stigmatization for many of the children when they get older and thereby, they stop asking to go there. Yet overall, a clear finding emerging from interviews with children with disabilities about playgrounds is that even children who rarely or never go to a playground due to having a disability seem to be aware of these places and have some sort of ‘love hate’ relationship with them (Prellwitz and Skär 2007). This idea of playgrounds being special places to love, but yet being denied access to the fun experiences there appears to be a common phenomenon and aligns with ideas of an absent presence documented by researchers exploring marginalized children in the public realm (McKendrick et al. 2022).

***2. Elliot’s Family Story***



<Insert Figure 1 here>

Figure 1. Elliot's family story from 2019 (left aged five) and 2021(right aged seven) (Photographs by Maria Prellwitz)

Elliot's Mother:

> A new playground was built in our neighbourhood (2019) and the boys were very much looking forward to going there. When we, the family, got to the playground there was not one single playground equipment that Elliot could use. He could not even enter the playground. He turned to me and said, "How am I supposed to get in?" Then he just stood there watching his brother play (2019, see Figure 1.).
>
> I had even before the playground was built sent in suggestions to the municipality about how important it was that the playground was accessible for ALL to play on. Realizing that this was not a playground Elliot could play in, I complained to the municipality and even went to the local paper (picture 1). The response from the person in charge was that "one cannot expect to be able to use all spaces". It was a harsh answer that showed he didn't care. People who don't see the importance of play for everyone shouldn't be in charge of play for anyone.

> Two years later the municipality tried to make the playground a little more accessible by adding a sort of ramp (2021, see Figure 1.). This so-called ramp was to sharp and not usable for a child using a wheelchair or walker. There is still sand everywhere and the playhouses are too small to fit a wheelchair. Therefore, we do not go there at all and now we are putting our hopes to another playground that will be ready this summer. For this playground, we again offered suggestions and also that they could come and talk to us, but we never heard from anyone.
>
> For us as a family it is important that Elliot can be where his friends are. What equipment that is on the playground is not as important. It is to be part of something. If a playground had a surface that was good, equipment that could be used where they had thought about participation that would mean so much. The playground is a fantastic and unique place for children to learn social interaction, challenge themselves, build their imaginations, discover movement, release emotions, and develop. And we all know that play shapes and strengthens. But it sometimes feels like children who need support are given up on, as if they don't need this vital play.

Family value and agency around engagement with local government needs to improve when designing public outdoor play spaces according to results from an Australian study (Sterman et al. 2019). Sterman et al.'s study is referring to a community in Australia, yet Elliot's story above is from Sweden. Perhaps there are places where children with disabilities and their families are listened to, however this is unlikely to be common. For a family of a child with a disability, there are few options for environments that accommodate the disability and provide choices for play. As Elliot's mother states, Elliot's participation in play would mean so much to her, but she feels that those who need support for this to happen seem to be 'given up on' by the municipality. In most communities playgrounds are planned for children living in the local neighbourhood. However, when these playgrounds are not built as accessible places for children with disabilities, this in turn can result in children being *involuntarily absent* in playgrounds or as stated by McKendrick et al. as being "the absent presence" in community playspaces (2022: p1).

## Children's Play Experiences and Perspectives Differ from Adults' Views

From the stories of the children with diverse abilities in the previous discussion, it is clear that children can express their play needs, and these are often different from adults' perspectives. We can see from these short stories for example, that adults influence the child about where not to play or tell them that they are too big to play in some places, yet the children would choose to play there if given freedom to do so. Similar findings of child-adult differences were documented elsewhere for example in the United States, where researchers found that children had a different perspective or desire for play than the adults. In Nicholson et al.'s (2015) study children clearly favoured connecting with other children, being outdoors and playing with open-ended toys while adults in contrast viewed children's play as being associated with poor quality, (passive and with little outdoor engagement) and considered children to lack motivation, ability and intention to play compared to when they themselves were young. This evident difference in attitude towards play between adult and child is significant as unless we strive to understand a child's perspective, we are in danger of contributing further to the child's risk of play deprivation. Playing differently does not imply playing deficiently and ongoing research demonstrates that children's inner drive to play, that is self-controlled and internally motivated is the cornerstone for children to flourish (Gill, 2014; Moore and Lynch, 2018). Adults need to learn to view children as competent and capable and to understand that they know best themselves what their play needs are, and in turn rely on children to inform good playground design in their communities.

### *Children's Participation in Designing a Public Playspace*

As noted, playgrounds are recognized as important outdoor environments, but the design of inclusive playgrounds is complex and involves professionals from different backgrounds bringing diverse perspectives regarding priorities and practices, e.g., landscape architect, urban planner, manager of the municipality's department, park manager or technician, children services' representatives and ideally include children as users. These responsible adults are challenged to align differing visions of their disciplines and perspectives with the respective departments of the municipality to address play provision. Listening to the users about their play values and preferences is a vital step in the design process, alongside playground professionals such as occupational therapists, as an inclusive playground requires

interaction between the built environment and social inclusion and therefore it is a broader understanding than a space with play equipment (Moore et al. 2020; Moore et al. 2022).

A key challenge is to know where to begin with implementing a user's perspective more effectively and adopting participation practices of children with diverse abilities and disabilities. Article 12 and GC no. 12 of the UNCRC provide direction regarding user involvement: "individuals or groups of children having the right, the means, the space, the opportunity and, where necessary, the support to freely express their views, to be heard and to contribute to decision making on matters affecting them, their views given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity" (UNCRC 2009). Here, the concept of participation is addressed across several articles including Article 12 (to be heard), Article 13 (to seek or receive information), Article 15 (to assemble) and Article 17 (to have access to information from different sources). Together they bring multiple dimensions to the child's right to participation.

Play as a fundamental occupation in all children's daily lives can be considered as a matter that affect them and therefore children's participation in play provision, for example in designing a public playspaces, should be evident and a common practice (Horgan et al. 2017; Lynch et al. 2019). However, operationalizing children's participation in designing a public playspace is not yet common practice internationally in local municipalities, for all children, let alone for seldom heard or marginalized children. For example, in a recent report, Schoeppich and colleagues (2021) reviewed studies about developing playgrounds informed by children's participation processes, and identified gaps and inconsistencies in children's right to share their views. Barriers to participation included adult-driven recruitment procedures with marginalization of groups of children including young children, children living in low-income communities and children with disabilities, which were accompanied by common experiences of the adults feeling compromized in their expertise (Schoeppich et al. 2021). Yet evidence shows that young children from the age of two and children with disabilities are equally capable of expressing their experiences and needs for play. However, their agency is often neglected when peers or adults' perceptions prevail (Colliver and Doel-Mackaway, 2021; Graham et al., 2017).

Perhaps these barriers are not so surprising when we realize that children's participation in decision-making in general is underdeveloped (Lundy and O'Donnell 2022) and studies have found that children's participation is more evident at home, compared to participation in school or in the community (for example, Horgan et al. 2015). From this study, Horgan and colleagues recommended that there is a need to create more everyday spaces where children and young people can practice participation and active citizenship and grow in these roles, before moving to more formal participation processes.

Key to doing this is to consider the role of the adult. It is necessary to put mechanisms in place in the community and for the community to involve children in decision-making processes regarding their daily occupations including play, which requires a shift in the mind-set of the responsible adults (Jansens et al. 2023). In this scoping review, Jansens identified that the experience of engaging with children itself is a key contributor to supporting this change in mind-set among the adults who play a pivotal role as the 'bearers of the duty to implement the rights of the child' (Jansens et al. 2023, p. 1). This change of mind-set in adults supports the evolution of power-sharing in the adult-child relationship which is required. This is because it has also been found that many efforts in children's participation are adult-expert driven processes whereby the adult does not approach the child in a child friendly way, and proceeds without due regard for child-empowerment, which can result in the use of inappropriate approaches that are not truly child-centred ( Horgan et al., 2017). When we think of seldom heard and marginalized children this issue is even more important, as we need to draw from diverse methods to access children's views and this means going beyond the reliance on voice, and focus also on the ***doing*** of occupation (Lynch 2018). This calls for adults to advocate for eliciting children's everyday participation in the community as their right, and take on a particular dedicated effort to engage seldom heard and marginalized children, in particular young children, children with a disadvantaged background and children with disabilities as they are often underrepresented in decision-making processes (McEvoy 2015). Ultimately, a key consideration for adults is to realize their important role in partnering with children in community contexts if participation is to be meaningful (Lundy and O'Donnell 2022)

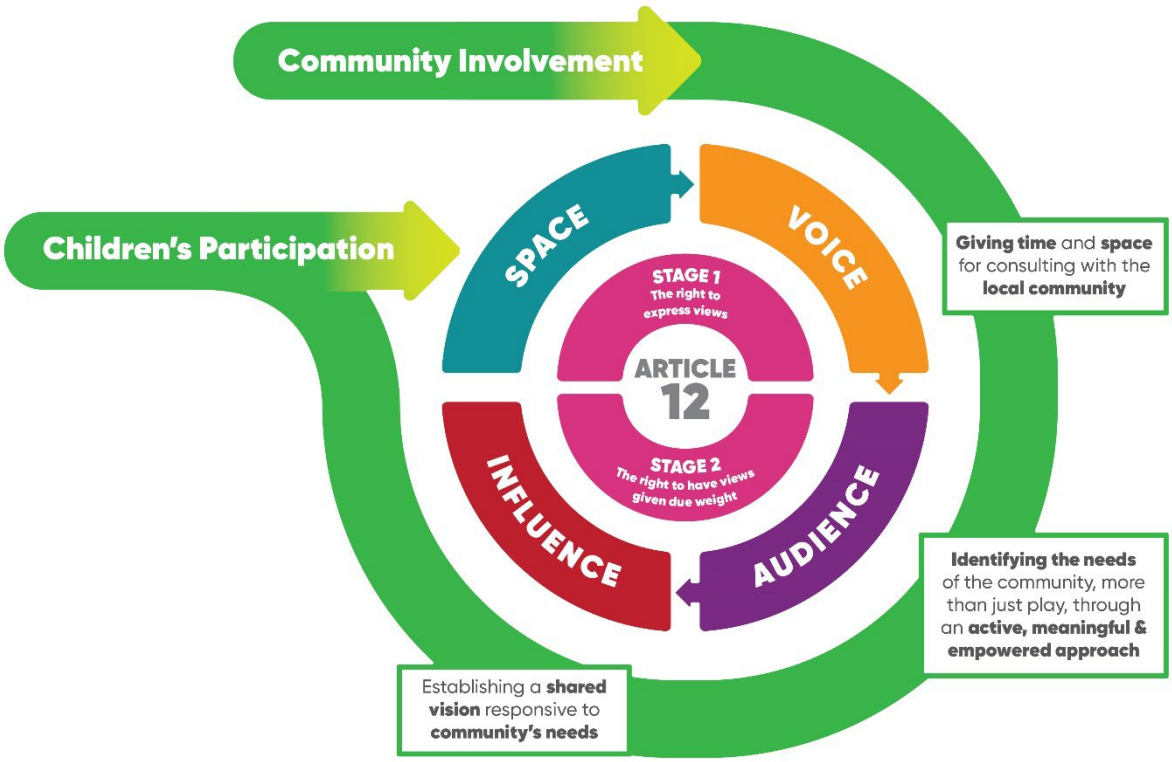
Positive examples do exist of typically developing children's participation in urban planning and in designing public playgrounds. In some examples, the outcome is clear that children add different perspectives to the design compared to park managers or playground designers

(Jansson & Ramberg, 2012) . Furthermore, evidence shows that user involvement in the different stages of designing and constructing a public playspace elicits ownership, more intense use and better maintenance (Matthews 2003). When such participation in decision-making is effective, children report enjoying the collaboration with peers and adults and believe that their ideas are heard (Schoeppich et al. 2021). Likewise, adults' perceptions are often also positive and, interestingly, those adults who feel challenged in their expertise and the sense of messiness characterizing the children's participation process, report changes over time such as seeking children's views about designing and maintaining a playspace (Schoeppich et al. 2021).

### *Tools for Children's Participation in Designing a Public Playspace*

In recognition of the challenges for adults in partnering with children for decision-making, many efforts have gone into developing tools to support adults to support children in decision-making in recent years led by organizations such as Council of Europe, Government of Ireland, UNICEF, and Save the Children [a list of example tools to assist with children's participation is available at the end of this chapter].

Many of these tools are based on the Lundy model (see Figure 2 the two inner circles), conceptualizing the characteristics of children's participation in two key elements with four distinct facets (space, voice, audience and influence) in a legally sound and user-friendly format (Lundy 2007). According to the Lundy model, for the right to express their view children should be afforded space and time to contribute their views (*space*), and children should be supported with accessible information to form their views and facilitated in different ways to express these (*voice*). For the right to have the view given due weight children should be heard by those people with the power and authority to act on those views, (*audience*), and the views are given consideration and children will be informed about what has been done with their views in explaining how and why the decision was taken (*influence*) (Lundy 2007).




<Insert Figure 2 here>

Lundy's model of children's participation extended to community involvement for designing public playspaces (Jansens et al., 2023).

So, how do we employ this approach from the Lundy model to the design of a public playspace? Designing a public playspace is a process which requires forming a team of experts with know-how, responsibilities, and authority, finding the appropriate resources and location, and taking a systematic approach in planning, design and construction alongside knowledge and skills in child participation. Diverse guidelines for designing a public playspace are available to support these processes. These tools are often developed by local authorities, child/family organizations or play equipment companies and only some tools describe the importance of participation and how to realize children's participation (and their parents) in this process and including seldom heard children (Jansens et al. 2023).

However, even where participation in decision-making is included, most guidelines only describe a limited approach for implementing participation strategies. In a review of sample guidelines for planning and designing public playspaces, Jansens et al. (2023) examined the evidence for participation strategies for seldom heard and marginalized children and to date,

they found that while the idea of providing the space and time to express views is often included, most guidelines do not consider how the children's perspectives influence the outcome. In addition, the local community needed to be consulted first as they need to be heard about their ideas for the playspace seen as a community space and adults are gatekeepers to children's participation (Jansens et al., 2023). Therefore, from these findings it is proposed that the Lundy Model needs to be adapted when used in relation to designing for outdoor public playspaces, in order to maximise the potential for children's participation in decision-making. This model outlined in Figure 2 provides a useful framework within which all professionals [including occupational therapists], can come together with the local community to maximise not only community involvement but also to embed children's participation. Figure 2 shows the process of community involvement that precedes children's participation.

Unfortunately, it is not yet common practice to represent user involvement in design guidelines for playspaces, specially for seldom heard children, evidencing the challenges to operationalize children's participation. However, it is hoped that through further work to build on this research, many ideas, approaches, and strategies to maximize participation will be identified.

**Conclusion**

To summarize, the deployment of the child's right to participation (Articles 12, 13, 15 and 17) is important for children and young people as well as for society. Although many efforts are being made for children's authentic participation in decision-making, the implementation is still challenging, certainly in community life and in particular in involving seldom heard, marginalised children including those with disabilities. Connecting children's right to play and their right to share their views in the design of public playspaces is an important consideration for implementing children's rights, to enhance their active citizenship. Playgrounds created with involvement of children and other community stakeholders are more often used, better maintained, and are places that facilitate social cohesion. However, the complexity of designing a playspace for children of different ages with all kinds of (dis)abilities requires intense intersectional professional and voluntary cooperation which can be most successful if adults are open to listening to the unique voices of children. This requires adults to act as champions for children and view them as agentic community

members with their own rights, their own interests, and their play valued occupations. Within this context, special efforts should be made to enable children with disabilities to have a say in design playspaces in their community. Occupational therapists play a key role in this regard as catalysts for action on participation. With their particular lens on the relationship between the person-environment interaction, on understanding how the environment influences play occupation, and on the use of universal design, occupational therapists are well positioned to contribute significantly to the municipality teams in solving many of the challenges outlined in this chapter. With this expertise occupational therapists can support children with disabilities in practicing their participatory rights as acts of doing and navigating the power relations in the complexity and situatedness of children's participation.

Play is a fundamental occupation in all children's lives often performed at home and in the nearby community in the NOW of childhood (Fahy et al., 2021). Enhancing children's participation within the processes of (re)designing a public playspace with a design team now and not in the future, presents us with just the right opportunity to adopt and implement a rights-based approach enabling children to share their views in matters that affect their daily life. This requires a physical and social environment which facilitates children, including seldom heard children to develop participation competences and active citizenship.

**Examples of tools to enhance child participation in decision-making:**

Council of Europe Children's Rights Division and Youth Department. (2021*). Listen-Act-Change. CoE's handbook on children's participation for professionals working for and with children.* https://rm.coe.int/publication-handbook-on-children-s-participation-eng/1680a14539

Government of Ireland. 2021. Participation framework. National framework for children and young people's framework in in decision-making. https://hubnanog.ie/participation-framework/

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The Save the Children Fund. (2011). *Every child's right to be heard a resource guide on the UN committee on the rights of the child general comment no.12.* https://www.unicef.org/files/Every_Childs_Right_to_be_Heard.pdf

**Examples of freely available playground guidelines for designing a public playspace including children's participation:**

Playworld Systems (2019) Inclusive Play Design Guide. https://playworld.com/blog/playworld-announces-updated-inclusive-play-design-guide/

Play England (2008): Design for Play: A guide to creating successful play spaces. https://www.playengland.org.uk/members-resources

Real Play Coalition (2020): Reclaiming Play in Cities. https://www.realplaycoalition.com

Wexford County Council (2018): Developing a Play Area in your Community A Step by Step Guide https://www.wexfordcoco.ie/sites/default/files/content/Community/Developing-a-Play-Area-in-your-Community-A-Step-by-Step-Guide-2018.-V.3.pdf

Rick Hansson Foundation (2020): Development of an inclusive playground with involvement of children and the local community. https://www.rickhansen.com/sites/default/files/2020-03/sch-35913-guide-creating-accessible-play-spacesen2020web.pdf

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