

OUTDOOR PLAYSPACES AS SITES OF SOCIAL INCLUSION: THE CHALLENGES OF PLAY PROVISION IN IRELAND

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Content of presentation

- Background to Irish context and outdoor playspace research: sample projects
- Introduction to 4 exploratory projects
- Current gaps and plans for future

Background

When all else is equal, children prefer to play outside, with nearby friends (Kilkelly et al., 2015)

- HOWEVER: Changing nature of childhood:
 - Shrinking **horizons** of childhood (Gill, 2005)
 - **Play** deprivation (Bundy et al., 2011)
 - **Nature** deficit disorder (Louv, 2005)
 - Erosion of everyday **social participation** (Hart, 2016)

Outdoor designing for play: Issue of social inclusion

The Nature of the Irish Outdoors



Playspaces in Ireland



Better Outcomes Brighter Futures: searching for outdoor play 2014-2020

• DATA SOURCES: GUI/HBSC

- 47% of 9-year-olds were involved in structured cultural activities, such as dance, ballet, arts and drama. More than twice the number of girls (65%) than boys (31%) took part in these activities. Participation was also significantly related to maternal education and family income (2009).
- 97% of 9-year-olds reported playing sport at least once a week. Boys were significantly more likely to play sport every day (61%) compared to girls (52%) (2009).
- Participation in structured sports or organised activities was related to social advantage at both 9 and 13 years of age (2012).

50

• GOVERNMENT COMMITMENTS:

- 1.6 Continue to support accessible and affordable youth and sport activities, which encourage young people's overall personal and social development including healthy behaviours and engage young people who might be at risk of early school-leaving or engaging in criminal activity and anti-social behaviour. (DCYA, DTTS, DH, HSE, Tusla, AGS)
- 1.15 Continue to develop play and recreation spaces for both children and young people, from playgrounds (for multiple age ranges) to youth cafés, sports and leisure centres, and where possible look to weatherproof these spaces³⁶ (DCYA, DECLG, DH)

Children's Participation: Putting 'VOICE' in Context

- **Children will have a voice** in matters which effect them (UNCRC, 1989; Children's Strategy, 2000)
- This includes being heard in relation to **places for play** (UNCRC, 1989; General Comment, 2013)

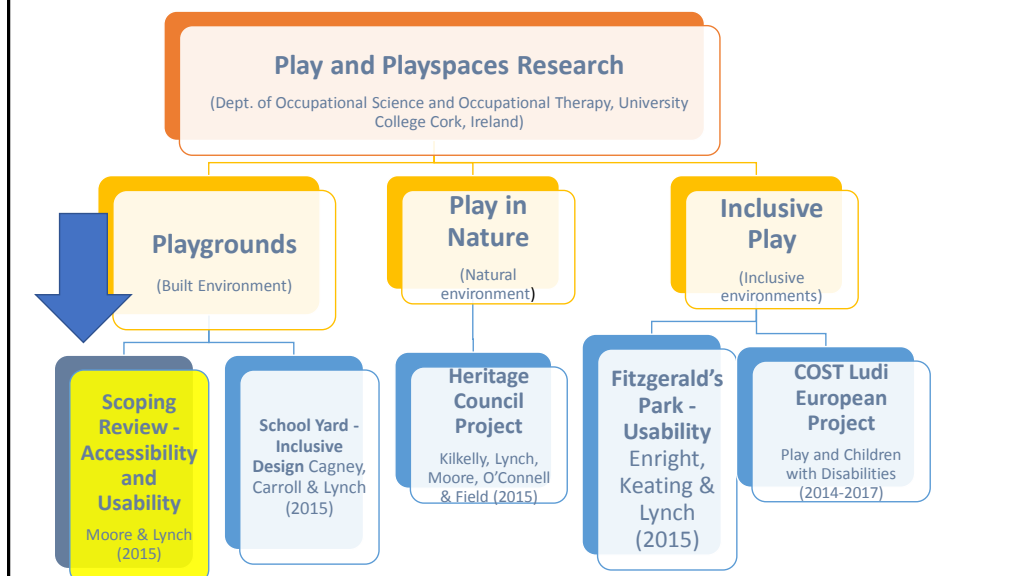
**Children Communicate in MULTIPLE ways
VOICE ≠ VOICE!**

Typology of Designed and Planned Places for Children: guiding our starting point..

<u>INSTITUTIONAL PLACES</u> Day-care Schools Schoolyards Sports parks Theme parks <u>PUBLIC PLACES</u> Streets Sidewalks Parks Trails Malls Waterfronts Beaches	<u>PRIVATE PLACES</u> Home Cars <u>FOUND PLACES</u> Vacant lots Natural areas Waterfronts Street corners <u>FOUND/OFF LIMITS PLACES</u> Discovery/adventure places Vacant lots	<u>WILDERNESS</u> Urban wilderness Natural areas <u>NEW AND INNOVATIVE</u> Community gardens School gardens City farms Greenways Skate parks Town trails Front porches Cyberspace
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(Francis & Lorenzo, 2002, p. 158)

Overview of Play and Playspaces Research



Scoping Review: Accessibility and Usability of playgrounds 2015

Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 2015; 22: 331–344



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Accessibility and usability of playground environments for children under 12: A scoping review

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Abstract

Background: Playgrounds are important outdoor environments in many communities during childhood. However, playground spaces often do not meet the needs of typically developing children or children with disabilities, resulting in social exclusion for many children. **Aims/objectives:** This study explored the evidence regarding accessibility and usability of playgrounds for children of all abilities, to identify factors that enable or constrain social inclusion in community playgrounds. **Materials and methods:** A scoping method was used as little research in this area has been collated and synthesized. Scoping reviews are effective for exploring and synthesizing broad and varied methods of inquiry around a phenomenon of interest. **Results:** A total of 14 key articles were identified and two major themes emerged: (i) accessible playground environments – features and factors; (ii) from excluding to including – making playground environments usable. Findings indicate that numerous environmental barriers contribute to making playground environments inaccessible and unusable for many children, particularly children with disabilities. However, playground design is identified as a significant factor in enabling inclusion. **Conclusion:** Occupational therapists are in an ideal position to advocate for children's occupational right to play, by combining knowledge of environmental barriers with an understanding of disability and specific knowledge of occupation. Through focusing on advocacy and change at policy and community levels, therapists can work to maximize social inclusion in playground settings.

Key words: Children's rights, health behaviour, occupational justice, play spaces, universal design

Moore, A., & Lynch, H. (2015). Accessibility and usability of playground environments for children under 12: A scoping review. *Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 22(5), 331-344.

Key Findings

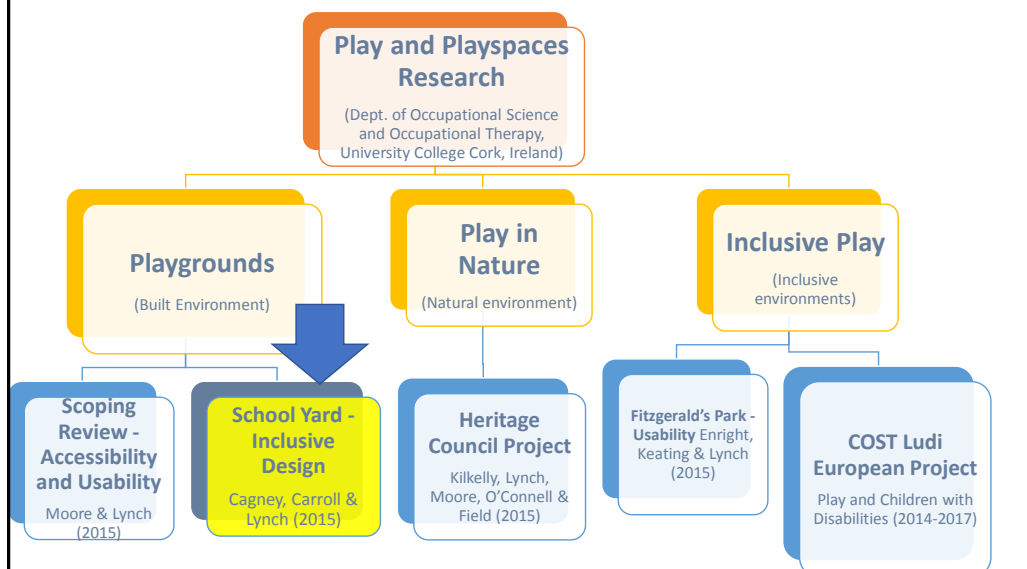
- The physical, social, political environment present barriers to participation in playground settings, particularly for children with disabilities.
- Children's voice is absent from the majority of research on playspaces.

NEED FOR **DATA**
ON CHILDRENS
LIVES: THAT
INCLUDES THE
CHILDS VOICE
IN
RESEARCHING
PLAY NEEDS/
PREFERENCES



Just because a person can't speak
doesn't mean they have nothing to say

Overview of Play and Playspaces Research



Traditional Irish School yard..

<http://www.silvabuild.ie/index.php/component/content/article?layout=edit&id=19>



Where the children currently play at break-time in the Cork city school

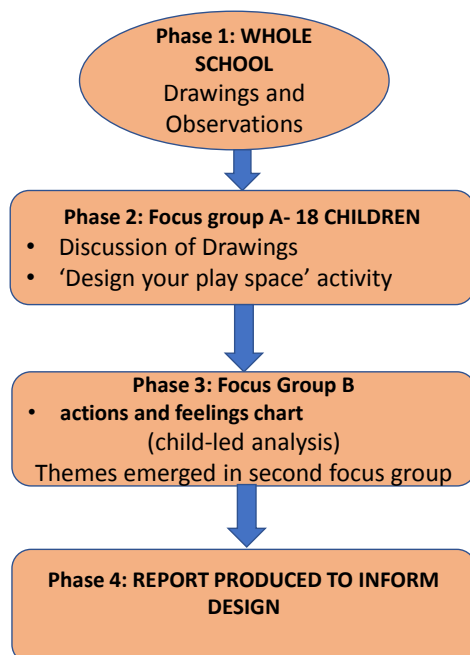
From December 2014 – June 2015

- 125 CHILDREN in total
- 18 children in 3 focus groups


Methods:	Why?
Drawings of their ideal play space/favourite thing in the play space. (Each pupil in the school took part in this activity).	Visual data and medium for children to think and describe their thinking. Promoted thought and discussion.
Actions & Feelings Chart (as part of focus groups)	Allowed researchers to gain better understanding of the affordances provided by the different pieces of equipment, nature and space and what the children liked about these. It gave the school more freedom to look at the play, behaviour and feelings afforded by other possibly cheaper options.
Designing your Play space Poster (as part of focus groups)	Gave the researchers understanding of the children's understanding of layout and if it was important to them. Also assisted children to choose between similar affordances e.g. twisty and straight slide. Demonstrated children's value of different affordances i.e. nature, sitting areas, open spaces and physical equipment.
Photographs (as part of focus groups)	Photographic data of the children's posters for the designing your play space activity.
Observations	Provided researchers with insight into the children's play habits in their schoolyard. Discussed their play in their current yard during the focus groups.
Field notes	Recorded initial thoughts, notes and insights of observations and focus group sessions. Also after meetings and discussions with teachers, principal and landscaper.



Clark & Moss, 2001. Listening to Young Children – The Mosaic Approach

THE CONSULTATION MODEL



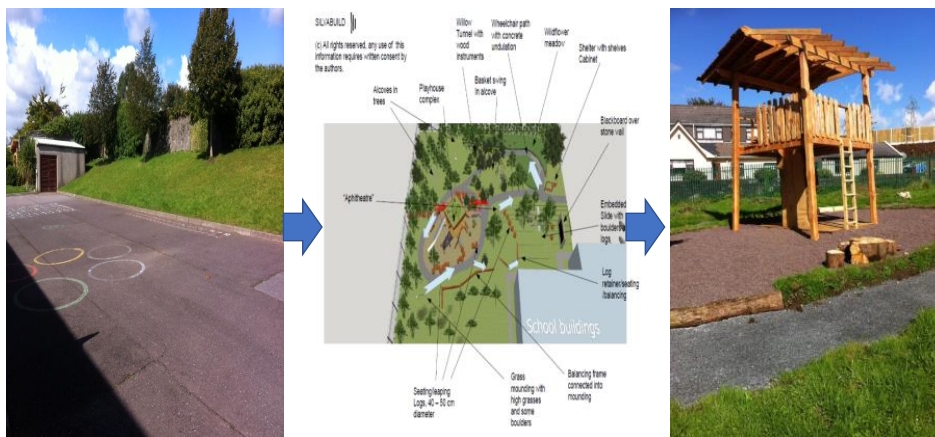
FROM DESIRE TO DESIGN- WHAT THE CHILDREN WOULD LIKE

<u>Action</u>	<u>Learning/developmental benefits</u>	<u>About this Equipment:</u>	<u>Affordances that provide this:</u>
Climbing	<p>Climbing is challenging and exciting for children. It presents a physical challenge encouraging physical development in strength and coordination.</p> <p>The children emphasised that climbing equipment such as climbing frames has a competitive element which is also important as it is fun and promotes positive self-esteem when they have succeeded.</p> 	<p>This climbing frame would suit all ages of children would hold challenge for every child as it is numerous different levels.</p>	<p>Monkey bars climbing frame pyramid climbing frames climbing wall ladders tree stumps</p>

Place to chat, pretend play, use as a base	<p>Throughout every age group the idea of a house on stilts or on the ground was very popular.</p> <p>This was in the top 5 most popular items for the play space.</p> <p>The younger and middle age groups wanted to use the house for pretend play e.g. 'Mums and Dads'.</p>		<p>Tree House (on stilts) Wendy House Shelter</p>
	 <p>The middle group also thought it would be good to use it as a base when playing team games such as 'Capture the Flag'. The picture below shows teepee style frames with area to sit in on top which could be used for bases.</p> 	<p>Some of these play/tree houses come with an area underneath suitable for play. For example, having a sand pit underneath where it could be sheltered from the weather. A picnic table and seating could also be fitted in the level underneath.</p> <p>The ground level of this playhouse has been fitted with a sand pit (sand has not yet been filled in the photo). This house also has a draw-bridge style entrance as well as a ladder. <i>Bennett Wood Products</i></p>	

School Yard – Inclusive Design

FROM DESIRE TO DESIGN



Place for climbing, jumping,



Outcomes:

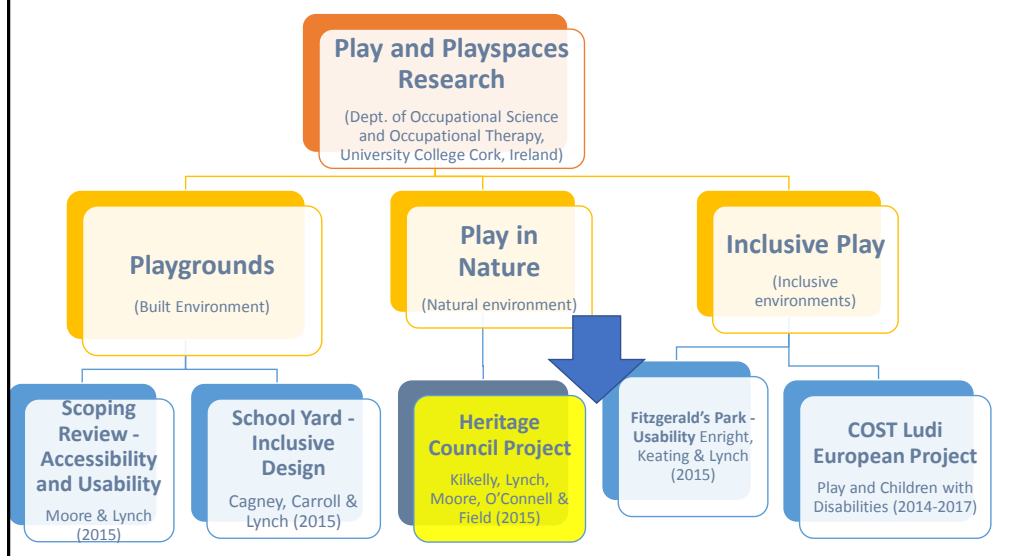
- Increase in resilience
- Increase in social inclusion
- Sense of ownership

Place for socialising, talking



NEED FOR GUIDELINES ON CHILD PARTICIPATION IN DESIGNING FOR PLAY *(not just consultation)*

Overview of Play and Playspaces Research



National Heritage Council Project 2015-2016



The Heritage Council of Ireland commissioned research report to conduct a review of **contact with the outdoors and natural heritage among children aged 5-12.**

http://www.heritagecouncil.ie/content/files/children_%20outdoors_commissioned_report_26mb.pdf

Irish Heritage Council

Purpose: to explore children's experiences of nature and natural heritage

- University College Cork: Law and Occupational Science

Project:

- review evidence, law, policy
- Children - 3 schools - city, town and country
 - 123 children contributed pictures
 - 39 children took part in focus groups

Review of evidence of benefit of children's engagement with nature

Gill (2014):

- Rapid evidence assessment-due to disparate nature of evidence
- Acknowledging challenge of gathering robust evidence
- The environment under study included:
 - Woodlands
 - Urban green public spaces
 - Outdoor green domestic spaces
 - School grounds, including school gardens
 - "Wild areas" that may be found in or near urban areas
- 61 studies met the criteria for inclusion

General benefits identified: majority in area of health....

Table 3. Typology of benefits

General benefit	Specific benefit	Number of relevant studies ^a
Health (physical, emotional and mental)	Physical activity	16
	Mental and emotional health	11
	Healthy eating	3
	Motor development	2
Well-being	Quality of outdoor play	2
	Psychosocial health ^b	1
Cognitive	Scientific learning	4
	Environmental knowledge	2
	Language and communication	2
Social	Social skills	4
Emotional/behavioral	Self-control	2
	Self-confidence	1
	Self-awareness	1
Ethical/attitudinal	Concern for the environment	13
	Connectedness to nature	5
	Sense of place	4

'The significance of playfulness as an engagement style is perhaps this reviews most important contribution to the literature'

Gill, 2014, p. 19

Children prefer to be outside

- Children report preferences for being outdoors rather than indoors.
- Location, weather and having friends nearby are strongly linked to the attractiveness of being outdoors.

I prefer outside because with your friends you've got like, so many options to do outside. And like, even you can just talk outside and it's being nice, and you get some sun, except for when it's raining.

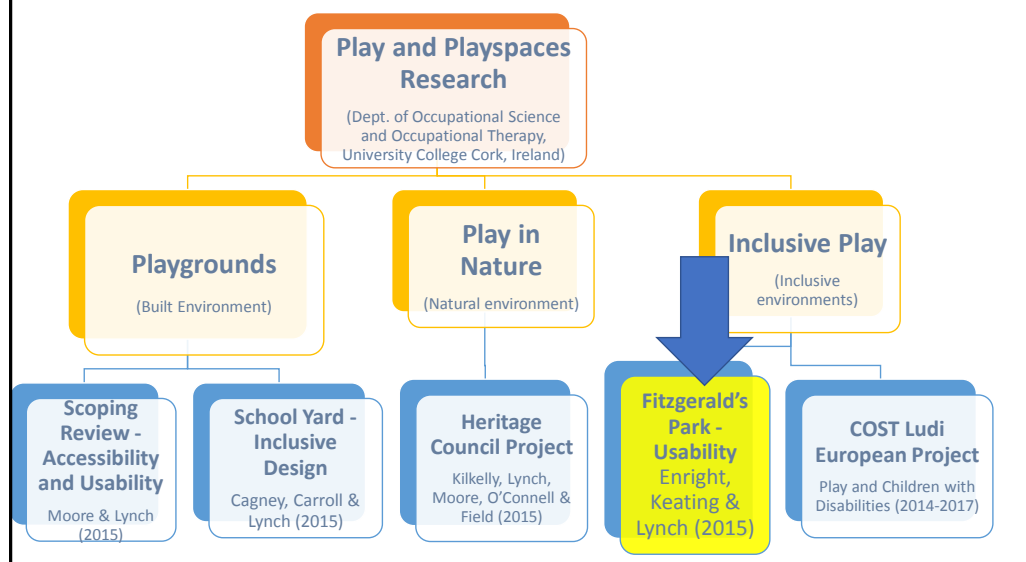
(Girl, 10-12 years)

NEED TO
INCLUDE
NATURAL
ELEMENTS IN
OUTDOOR
DESIGN FOR PLAY

Children prefer to play outdoors, when they have:

1. **Safe** places to play (places that are welcome/comfortable);
2. Access to **nearby nature**; and
3. Close proximity to **friends**

Overview of Play and Playspaces Research



Fitzgerald Park playground project 2015-2016

Press Release: Cork's First Inclusive Playground

Press Release: 18th June, 2014

Cork's First Inclusive Playground Announced

for Fitzgerald's Park, Cork, in June 2015

Cork City Council has today announced the development of Cork's first inclusive playground that will enable children with disabilities to play alongside able children. The new playground will be located within the site of the existing play area in Fitzgerald's Park in Cork and will open in June 2015. It is intended to become a national model in best practice for the provision of inclusive playgrounds in Ireland. A total of €300,000 will be invested in this new playground facility.

The public, outdoor playground will be an age-appropriate and safe environment that will encompass sensory rich structures to encourage play for all children, but especially those with developmental disabilities. It will also create a fun space for fostering friendships and understanding among children of all abilities.

Cork City Council is seeking landscape architect-led design and project management teams to tender for the contract to bring this concept to life. (see etenders.gov.ie)



Figure 1. The children's perceptions of components of play.

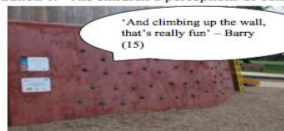


Figure 6. The Climbing Wall



Figure 7. The Springer



Figure 8. Balance Poles



Figure 9. Slide

**11 children
with disabilities
aged 9-16 years,
7 boys and 4 girls**

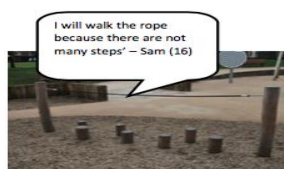


Figure 10. Balance Steps



Figure 11. Sound Wheel

Usability: What the children said...

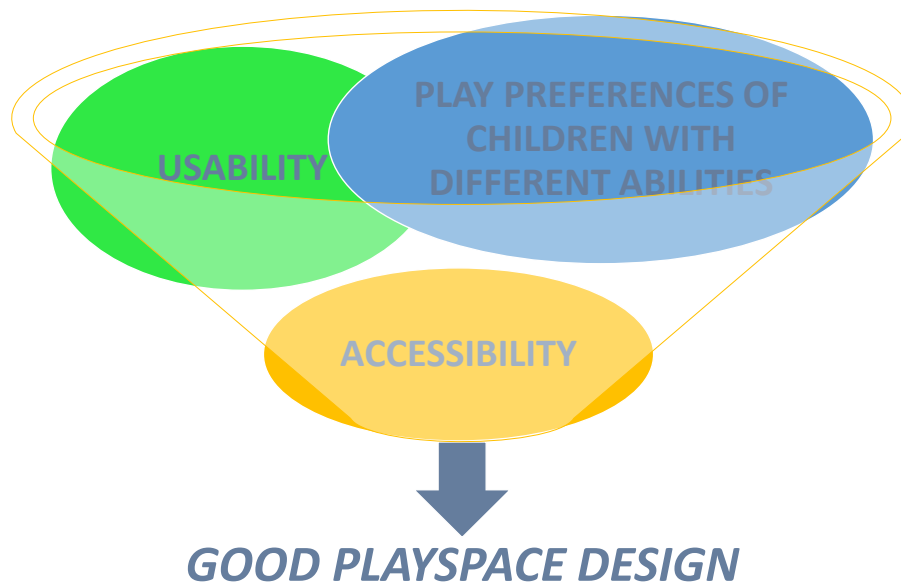
Table 8.

Playground component and use.

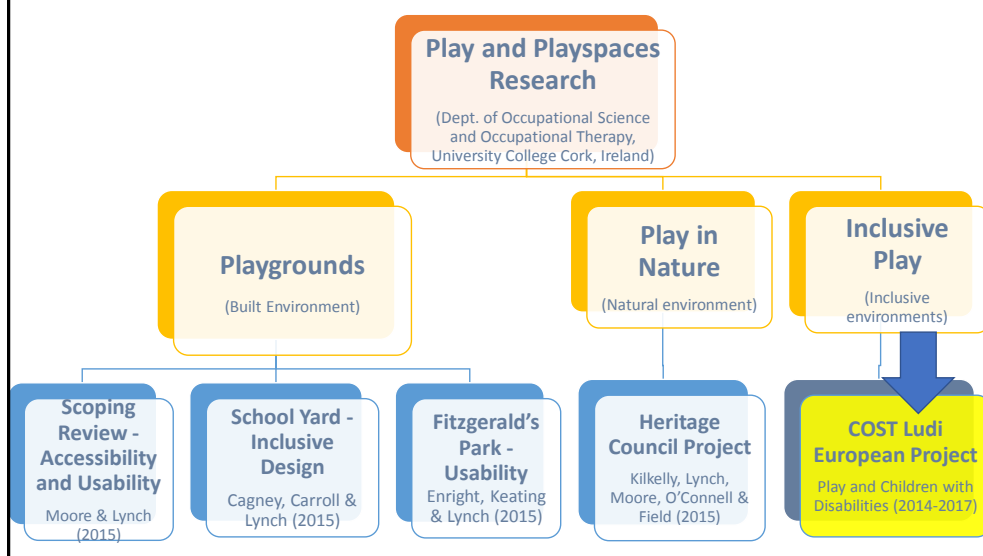
Component	Intellectual Disability (I.D)(7)	Autism Spectrum Disorder and I.D(1)	Down Syndrome and I.D(1)	Physical Limitation and I.D(2)
Sound Wheel	✓	✓	✓	✓
Visual Wheel	✓	✓		✓
Bench/Seats	✓			
Ladder	✓			
Basket Swing	✓	✓	✓	✓
Swings (3-12)				
Swings (4+)	✓			✓
Triple Bars	✓			
Pyramid	✓		✓	
Climbing Wall	✓			
Balance Poles	✓			
Castle	✓	✓	✓	✓
Slide (Wide)	✓	✓		
Slide (Enclosed)	✓		✓	✓
Springer	✓	✓	✓	✓
See-Saw	✓		✓	
Free Running	✓	✓	✓	
Ship	✓		✓	
Sand Play	✓	✓		
Wobbly Jetty	✓	✓		

Although this table does show component use, it does not show difficulty or challenge faced in using these components. It is evident from this table that the children's physical limitations create a significant barrier to usability in the playground. The components used were in line with the traits associated with their condition, for example, the child with ASD displayed a preference to sensory and lone play. This table was constructed using only what the children described using in their interviews with the use of pictures.

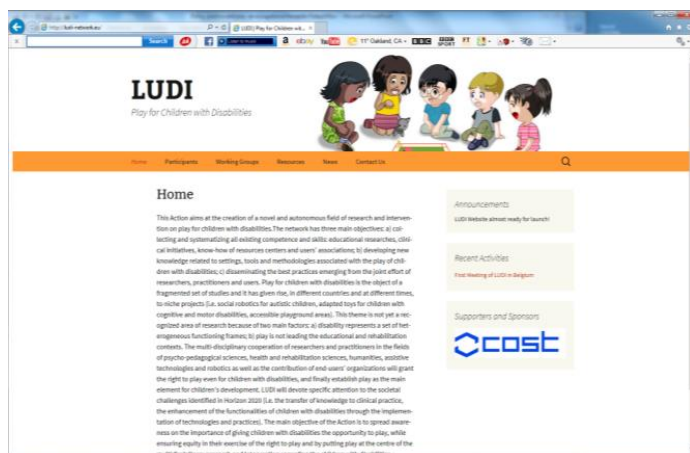
Need for research on



Overview of Play and Playspaces Research



European COST Action: Ludi TD1309 (2014 – 2017)

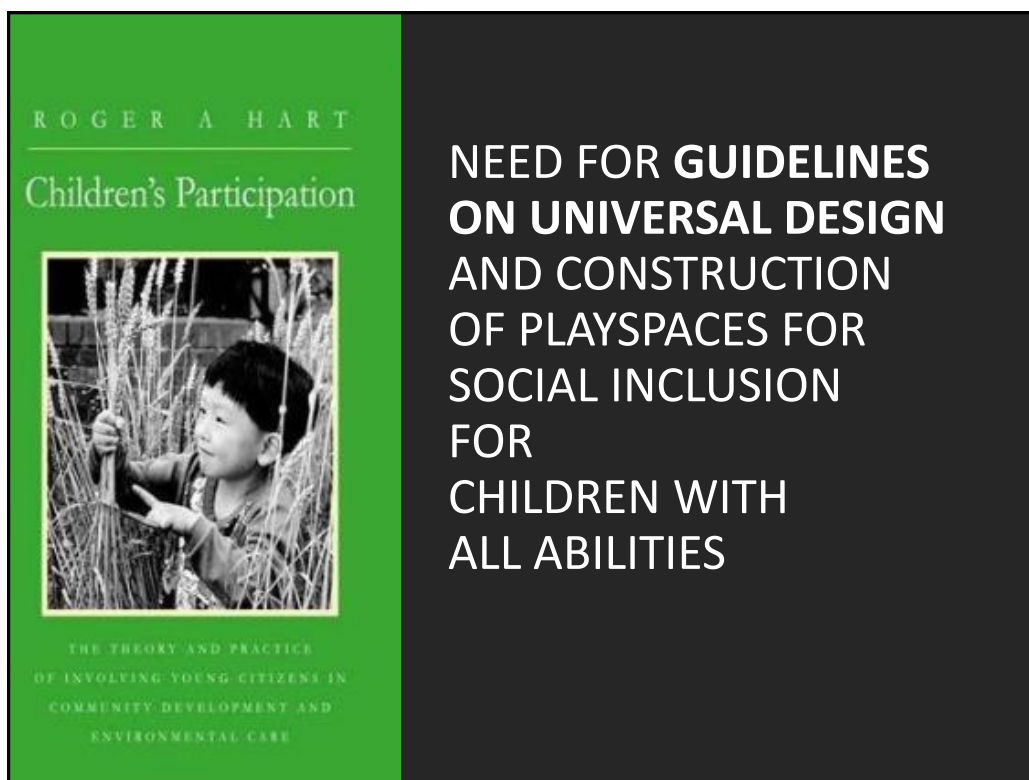


37
countries
across
Europe

<http://ludi-network.eu/>

Brief summary of the research

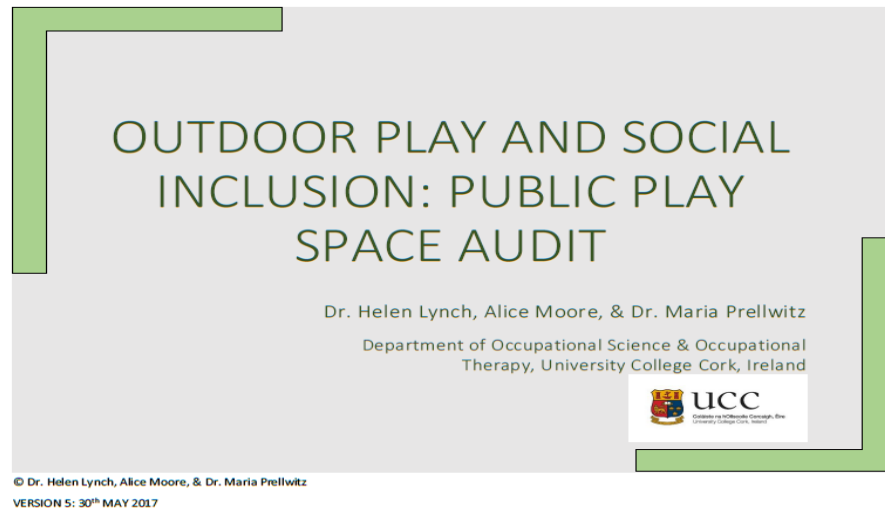
1. Children prefer to play outdoors, when there are **safe places to play, nearby nature and friends**
2. However, children in general and children with disabilities are **rarely included** in research on usability and accessibility of outdoor playgrounds
3. There are **no national guidelines** on designing playspaces for inclusion in Ireland- and few guidelines in Europe
4. **FEW POLICY GUIDELINES combine NATURE- ACCESSIBILITY-USABILITY- CHILD PARTICIPATION**



Current Research Priorities – Good Playspace Design



In Development.....



Research Grant
September 2017 – March 2018

***National Research Grant
commissioned by the National
Disability Authority (NDA) and the
Centre for Excellence and Universal
Design (CEUD), IRELAND***

**Progressing Lifetime Communities through
Universal Design**



- A special thank you to the children and staff of schools in the southern region of Ireland, without whom these research projects would not have been possible.
- A thank you is also extended to colleagues and friends that have offered insights and experiences to inform our works.

Thank you!
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Useful resources



- PlayEngland organisation:
<http://www.freeplaynetwork.org.uk/pubs/design-for-play.pdf>
- Learning Through Landscapes network-video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13-BGhXQG20&app=desktop>
- Malone, K. & Tranter, P. (2003). Children's Environmental Learning and the Use, Design and Management of Schoolgrounds. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 13 (2), 87-137