



UNIQUE PLAY DESIGNS INCREASE PLAY DURATION

Case study at Frimley Lodge Park, UK

Unique Play Designs - Increase Play Duration

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Executive summary

Playgrounds have been identified as the place within parks where children expend the most energy which is central to children's health and well-being. However, some playgrounds appear more visited and interesting to users than others.

This study was done to examine what makes a playground more visited and interesting from a user perspective.

The study investigated the retention qualities of the newly refurbished playground at Frimley Lodge Park in UK. 262 adults and 95 children were randomly interviewed at the playground, and approximately 700 people were observed during 6 days from September 17th – September 22nd, 2019.

The aim was to determine:

1. Retention – did users visit the park more after the playground refurbishment?
2. Importance of playgrounds to the parents
3. Main reasons for visiting the playground
4. Play location preferences of children
5. Primary users (age, gender)
6. Distance travelled to the playground
7. Average time spent in the playground per visitor

Main findings

- The playground was the main reason why 61% of the respondents visited the park.
- 59% visited the playground more often after it was refurbished.
- 78% find a playground unique when play equipment is different from other playgrounds e.g. Double Zipline vs. Single Zipline.
- The respondents spent an average of 68 minutes per visit at Frimley Lodge Park Playground.
- 76% of the respondents would travel up to 24 miles for a great playground if it stands out from other playgrounds.
- 98% of the parents said that the playground was very important due to their children's health benefits (75%), the fresh air (63%) and the ability to play freely (21%).
- 82% of the interviewed children said that they would rather play at the playground than indoors at home.
- 84% of the children were under 6 years old.



5 Recommendations

for designing attractive public playgrounds

There are many worthwhile recommendations for designing attractive playgrounds. The KOMPAN Play Institute has also published some. The Frimley Lodge park study reaffirms us in these and adds new insights. The new insights from the study reinforce five main recommendations for designing attractive public playgrounds:

1. Choose unique playground equipment, something that stands out from what other playgrounds nearby have.
2. Choose a wide variety of playground equipment for all ages and abilities, appealing to parents who influence their children's playground visits.
3. Remember playground equipment for the youngest children as most of the users were below 5 years.
4. Make sure the playground has WOW factor. People will drive a long distance to visit an innovative playground.
5. Have transparency in design to ensure easy parental supervision.

Frimley Lodge Park Playground **after** refurbishment



Key findings

Park use increased by 59% with the new playground

When you decide to invest in a playground, you want to be confident that people will use it. When asking the respondents "Why do you come to Frimley Lodge Park"? 61% answered "Because there is a playground".

The respondents were also asked if they visit the park area "More often than before", "The same as before" or "Less often than before" the refurbishing of the playground. 59% said they visit the area more often than before (Figure 1). Of those, 22% said it was because of the wide variety of equipment for all ages and abilities, and because the playground equipment was unique (14%).

98% of parents find playgrounds important

Almost all adults (98%) said playgrounds are important (Figure 2). Their main reason was the playground's positive influence on their children's physical and social-emotional development (76%). 63% said that playgrounds are important because their children get outside and get fresh air. Outdoor playgrounds are an important factor for their children's health and well-being.



82% of the children prefer outdoor playground play to indoor play

When parents find outdoor playgrounds important, it is interesting to see that the children in the survey prefer outdoor playground play to indoor play, too. 82% of the children said they exclusively preferred to play outdoors when they were asked where they would rather play (Figure 3). They indicated that they preferred the outdoor play over indoor play where they could play with tablets, other devices or toys. Only 2% of the children in the study said they would rather play indoors, and these were the children above 12 years old.

The unique playground has WOW factor

To know more about perception of a unique playground, we asked the respondents "What makes a playground unique?" 78% said, "If the playground equipment stands out from what other playgrounds nearby have". Uniqueness was described as the play equipment's quality, colorfulness, remarkability in visualization, unique features with lots of play value (also ground level play) and that play equipment was different from equipment in other playgrounds nearby. Within play value the respondents described tactile play activities like the treasure box and jail window on ground level of the large Castle on site. "These small tactile activities keep my child interested for long time", a parent said. The Double Zipline was also described as unique. No other playgrounds nearby had a Double Zipline which increased the play value by adding the opportunity to do races, play more together and side by side. The You & Me swing, trampoline, and sand pit were also described as being unique, as they stood out from what other playgrounds nearby had. These products, the Castle with wild slides and ground level activities, the Double Zipline, You & Me swing, the trampoline and sandpit clearly inspired the users of all ages and abilities to play together. These features made it an attractive playground to revisit, which is why 30% visited the playground more than once a week.

Figure 1: Visits to the playground before and after the refurbishment

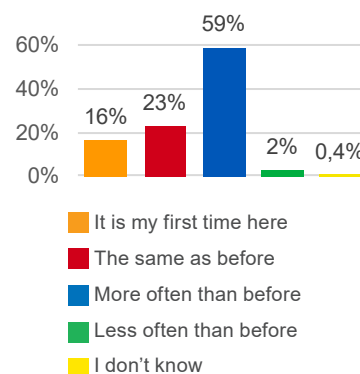


Figure 2: Are playgrounds important?

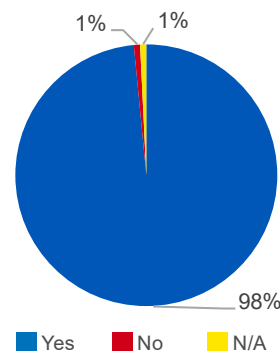
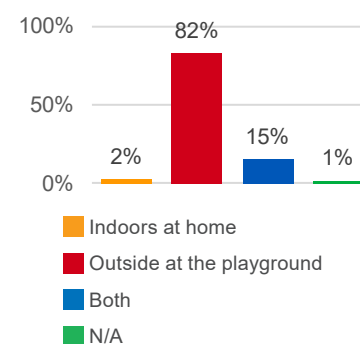


Figure 3: Where would you rather play?



Frimley Lodge Park playground - A healthy lifestyle influencer

In average, all the respondents spent 68 minutes at the playground (Figure 4). 58% stayed for more than 60 minutes at the playground, and of those, 21% stayed for more than 90 minutes (Figure 5).

The fact that the respondents spent on average 68 minutes at the playground is very positive. *The Center for Disease Control and Prevention* recommends that children of 3-5 years should have 180 minutes of physical activity per day of varying intensities. Children of 5-17 years should have as a minimum 60 minutes moderate to vigorous physical activity per day. The average of 68 minutes spent at the playground shows that Frimley Lodge Playground is a healthy lifestyle influencer.

“ I rather like to play outdoors at the playground than indoors at home

- Child interviewed

Unique playground equipment - more important than proximity for longer stays

Having a park within short distance has proven to help increase physical activity. Park access for residents within a ten-minutes walk of home is an initiative many cities worldwide have committed to. However, with many playgrounds within short distances, the playgrounds still need to be unique and high quality to retain people and so increase physical activity.

The study shows that proximity as reason for visiting a playground, is less important to the respondents who stay for a longer time at the playground, than for those who stay there for a short time. Of those who stayed between 16-30 minutes at the playground, 21% said that distance to the playground

was important to their visit. For those who stayed more than 90 minutes at the playground, only 13% said that distance to the playground was important to their visit. Instead the unique playground equipment was more important in attracting them to the playground. This importance increased with the user's time spent at the playground. Of those who stayed between 16-30 minutes at the playground, 8% said that unique playground equipment was important to their visit. In conclusion, of those who stayed more than 90 minutes, 19% said that the unique playground equipment was important to their playground visit. When attracting people to stay for a longer time at the playground, the study shows that unique playground equipment should be given high importance (Figur 6).

84% of the children were younger than 6 years old

Most of the children in the playground were below 6 years old (84%). The young children and their parents (mostly mothers) primarily visited the playground in the mornings. Older children visited the playground less frequently, and later in the day (after school hours). However, quite often families brought children across the age ranges to the playground. More male parents and school age children were observed during the weekend.

Playground equipment for toddlers should be given special attention when designing an attractive playground, as this age group is of great influence to parent's visits. But as the younger children are followed by their parents and often older siblings, a wide variety of playground equipment ensures a play area that is fun, safe, and attractive, to the greatest extent possible for all ages and abilities. 20% of the parents interviewed said that the wide variety of play equipment for all ages at the playground was their main reason for visiting the playground.

Figure 4: Relation between age groups and time spend on average at the playground (min.)

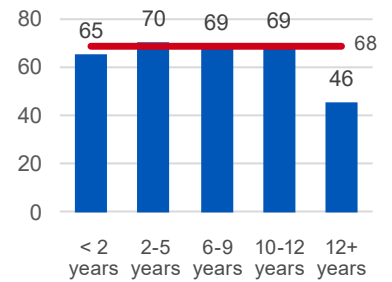


Figure 5: How long, in average, do you stay at this playground?

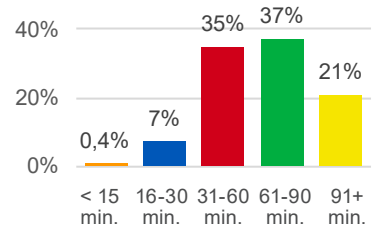
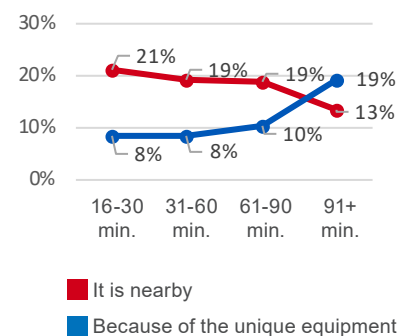


Figure 6: Relation between duration and reason for visiting the playground



Conclusion

The study showed that the playground at Frimley Lodge Park in UK is a great success. It is being used by people of all ages and abilities. After refurbishment of the playground, 59% of the users increased their visits to the park area. 22% said it was due to the wide variety of equipment, that there was something for all ages and abilities. Almost all respondents find playgrounds important (98%), mainly because of children's physical and social/emotional development, but also because of the ability to be outside and get fresh air.

The World Health Organization recommends play to increase physical activity. By offering children outdoor play facilities we respect important health requirements, but also children's opportunities and rights to play. Happy children today will ensure healthy adults tomorrow.

Unfortunately, many children today are not allowed to go outside and play on their own. In the study parental anxiety was observed, as the parents expressed their fear when asked at what age they thought it was okay for children to go outside and play on their own. This parental caution is a trend worldwide. Therefore, it is important

to pay attention to what attracts parents to a playground as well, as they are decision makers for their children's playground visits. In the study 57% of the children were between 2-5 years old, which is why playground equipment for this age group seems to be very important. As the 2-5 years old were followed by their parents and sometimes older siblings, there needs to be playground equipment for the older children, too. When designing an attractive playground, playground equipment should therefore be appealing for all age groups, both toddlers, preschoolers, tweens, teens, and adults.

Park access for residents within a ten-minutes' walk of home is an initiative many cities worldwide have signed up for, to help increase physical activity and to give the children the opportunity to go outside and play on their own.

The study found that those who stayed for a long time at the playground (90+ minutes) rated unique playground equipment as being more important than the distance to the playground when choosing to visit the playground. Therefore, unique playground equipment should be given high importance when aiming to contribute to physical activity and children's opportunity to go outside and play on their own. The importance of unique playground equipment was also confirmed by the respondents' willingness to travel to visit a great playground. In average, the respondents spend 68 minutes at the playground which is very positive according to WHO's recommendations for physical activity through play. This shows that the playground at Frimley Lodge Park in UK is a great success as a healthy influencer.

“ Short distance to the playground doesn't do it alone when attracting people. The choice of play equipment is equally important.

- Janne Eilsø, KOMPAN Play Institute



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1. Choose unique playground equipment, something that stands out from what other playgrounds nearby have.
2. Choose a wide variety of playground equipment for all ages and abilities, appealing to parents too, as they are of great influence to their children's playground visits.
3. Remember playground equipment for the youngest children as most of the users were below 5 years.
4. Make sure the playground has WOW factor. People will drive far to visit an innovative playground.
5. Have transparency in design to ensure easy parental supervision.

Introduction to Frimley Lodge Park playground

Frimley Lodge Park is a 24 hectare (59 acres) recreational park located in Surrey Heath, UK. Today it boasts a range of facilities for all ages including lots of open space and woodland, picnic areas, several football and rugby fields, a trim trail, miniature railway, and meadows.

The refurbishment of the playground at Frimley Lodge Park is a part of a wider Playground Improvement Scheme across Surrey Heath. It was developed through a public consultation involving park users, schools, and residents

and was chosen via a public vote held by Surrey Heath Borough Council at the end of 2018. The council wanted a playground that was robust, with minimal maintenance, had “WOW” effect, inclusive, inviting and playful for children ages up to 14 years, and for all abilities. The council was applying for funding for an additional inclusivity grant for a Castle unit to include a ramp and a wheelchair swing. However, they didn't manage to get it. Instead KOMPAN included as many inclusive products based on universal design principles as

possible to cover the inclusivity aspect within the original budget. Next to the playground the respondents can buy food, coffee, and snacks in the Frimley Lodge café. Restrooms are easily accessible as is music classes for toddlers and free parking. In July 2019 the innovative outdoor area celebrated its grand opening, revealing inclusive equipment that encourages social interaction as well as the children's physical and cognitive development.

Methods

The study examines the retention of people by a newly refurbished playground in Frimley Lodge Park, UK. The playground was refurbished with new equipment that was robust, needs minimal maintenance, is inviting, playful, and inclusive of people with disabilities. Data was collected using anonymous questionnaires and brief interviews, as well as observations of the environment at the park for a period of 6 days, from September 17th – September 22nd, 2019. 262 adults and 95 children were interviewed and observed at the playground.

The general conditions during the fieldwork were mostly sunny with a gentle breeze (temperatures in the 20°C (68°F)).

The questionnaire was created online, with closed-ended questions that could be used in face-to-face interviews on site. Although the questions were closed-ended, the interviewers gave the respondents an opportunity to be as open in their responses as necessary. This was to avoid constraining the respondents' answers, and to allow for a range of input in regard to the questions.



262 adults & 95 children were randomly selected for interview



Interviews were conducted during 6 days from 17th – 22nd September 2019



Approximately 700 people were observed at the playground

Ethical considerations

All data was collected with the consent of the participants. The researchers made all participants aware that they worked for the playground manufacturer, KOMPAN and that no personally identifiable information would be collected, and that the information would be

used to better understand playground use. Parents were asked for consent to ask their children about the playground, and if they agreed, the children were also asked for their permission to be interviewed. The researchers explained the

purpose of the study, in a manner that was understandable to the children. The researchers were careful not to interrupt the play or the safety of the children during the interview process.

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82%

Of the children
prefer outdoor
play to indoor play

98%

Of the adults find
playgrounds
important

78%

Find playgrounds
unique when different
from others nearby

59%

Increased their
playground visit
after refurbishment

58%

Spend more than
60 min. on the
playground

57%

Of the users
are between 2-
5 years old



262 adults and 95 children
were interviewed



Approximately 700 people were
observed at the playground

KOMPAN
Let's play