



EQUALITY IN PLAY

Survey on playground use in children with disabilities

Equality in playground for children with disabilities

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Equality in physical activity – why?

„Physical activity (PA) participation is widely recognized as a critical component of health and development for disabled and non-disabled children.“

Frontiers in Public Health, National Institutes of Health, USA 2016.

Today, politicians and tycoons alike voice their support of social equality. They do so on an informed basis: Equality is the way to healthier and more sustainable societies and one of the 17 global goals of the United Nations. But not everyone is equal when it comes to outdoor play.

Leisure activities are the hardest to access and use by citizens with disabilities¹. Children with disabilities use public sports facilities far less than their typically developing peers. A nationwide Dutch study concluded that 74% of the total population of 5-17-year-olds with disabilities are physically inactive². Since physical inactivity³ is one of the four biggest contributors to premature death⁴, the accessibility to public leisure areas such as playgrounds, is crucial. Apart from the obvious health benefits, there are considerable social-emotional benefits: Play between children with disabilities and typically developing children support the areas of self-efficiency, tolerance and empathy of both user groups⁵.

Survey of outdoor play and playground use and preferences

Playgrounds are well-known to motivate physical activity in children efficiently, in a fun way. The KOMPAN Play Institute wanted to know more about children with disabilities and playground play. We cooperated with parents of the pupils at Nørrebro School for children with

disabilities on a survey. 54 families with children aged 6-16 years from across the island of Funen, Denmark, participated in the survey. All the children had cognitive disabilities, 11% of the children used walkers or other assistive devices for walking, and 26% of the children were wheelchair users. 36% of the wheelchair users could move around without a wheelchair (e.g. using other assistive devices such as walkers).

The main target of the survey was to: establish an understanding of children with disabilities and

1. the extent of playground use and its affiliation with playground proximity
2. the accessibility and usability of favourite playground activities, and
3. the success criteria for the preferred playgrounds

Inequality in proximity and playgrounds 57% of the wheelchair using children never or rarely visit a public playground. 43% of the non-wheelchair users never or rarely visit a playground. 47% of all the families visited a public playground less than once a month. The proximity of the playground is decisive for the frequency of use. Most respondents use the playground 1-4 times a month, and 71% of them live within 5 minutes walk of the playground. 6% never visit a public playground. All of those who never play in a playground live more than 15 minutes walk from it.

Playground accessibility and usability

Children in wheelchairs have less than half the chance of their peers of being able to access and use their nearest playground. 71% of the wheelchair users found their nearest playground

almost inaccessible, and 86% of them found their closest playground to be below average accessibility. 46% of the total group of respondents found the accessibility of their nearest playground to be below average.

The inequity in access is grim. But the usability of the actual play equipment is worse. 93% of the wheelchair users estimate the usability of the play equipment in their nearest playground to be below average. In comparison 59% of the total respondents score the usability as below average. Again, wheelchair users have less than half the chance of their peers to find the playground equipment of their nearest playground usable.

“ *Play between children with disabilities and typically developing children support the areas of self-efficiency, tolerance and empathy of both user groups⁵*

The most popular play activities and their usability

Swings and slides are the top scorers in popularity. Seesaws and sand play come second and are both equally interesting.

When asked what activity their child would like to do but could not access in the playground closest to home, 43% answered swings or slides. There can be more reasons for this, one of them most probably being the inaccessibility of the playground in the first place. But a lack of swing seats that can hold children lying down may very well be another reason.

1 Disability Statistics - Barriers to Social Integration, Eurostat 2015

2 Physical Activity Card, the Netherlands, Active Healthy Kids, June 2017, www.activehealthykids.nl

3 Physical Activity for Health, World Health Organization, 2010, The WHO definition of physical inactivity for children aged 5-17 years is less than 60 minutes a day moderate to vigorous activity.

4 The Lancet Series on Physical Activity, 2012

5 Frontiers in Public Health, Sept. 2016, vol. 4, art. 187, Ross et al.

6 The Relationship between built park environments and physical activity in four park locations. Journal of Public Health Management and Practice, 2008; 14(3): E9-E16, Shores KA, West ST.

7 54 families with students aged 6-16 years from across the island of Funen participated in the digital survey. All the children had cognitive disabilities, 11% of the children used walkers or other assistive devices for walking, and 26% of the children were wheelchair users. 36% of the wheelchair users could move around without a wheelchair (e.g. using other assistive devices such as walkers).



Favorite playground characteristics

When choosing what playground to visit, a decisive factor is accessible surfacing. It is almost equally important that the child has favorite play activities in the playground. Additional well-liked playground characteristics are the variety of play equipment, and the fact that the whole family has something to do in the playground.

Concluding on equality in playground play

The surveys give us a good insight into some of the driving factors for playground success for families and children with disabilities.

1. Proximity plays a huge role in playground use for the children with disabilities and their families. The closer these families live to a playground, the more prone they are to use it. Distances of more than 10 minutes' walk to the nearest playground are prohibiting for use.
2. On a scale from 1 to 10, 71% of the wheelchair users find their nearest playground almost inaccessible. 86% of them find their closest playground below averagely accessible. In weighted numbers, wheelchair users are less than half as prone to find their nearest playground both accessible and usable (Fig. 1 & 2).
3. Access is a success criterion for the choice of playground, but the variation in play activities and the fact that the child likes the playground are almost equally important. Something to do for the whole family is another important point.

Success criteria for equality in outdoor play

57% of the children in wheelchairs rarely or never visit a public playground. When it comes to their local playground, 86% of them cannot use the playground equipment. In weighted numbers, wheelchair users have only about half the chance of their peers to find the play equipment usable.

If that should be changed, the KOMPAN Play Institute survey reveals some success criteria:

1. For increasing the frequency of use, local playgrounds should be accessible.
2. Playgrounds generally should have accessible surfacing. This additionally helps care givers or grandparents with mobility impairments who bring children to the playground.
3. Playgrounds should have accessible play equipment that is usable for children with disabilities. A KOMPAN Play Institute study shows that this means ground level based activities⁸.
4. The variety of play activities and activities for the whole family make playgrounds additionally attractive to visit and use.

Figure 1: Weighted average score of 'Accessibility' to the nearest playground for users with and without wheelchairs. 10 being fully accessible.

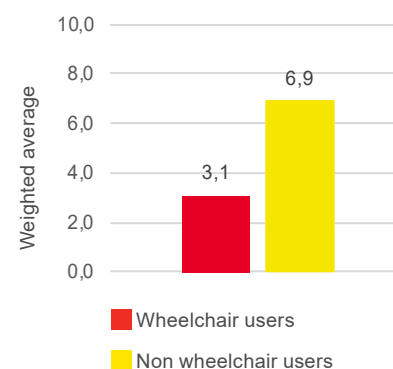
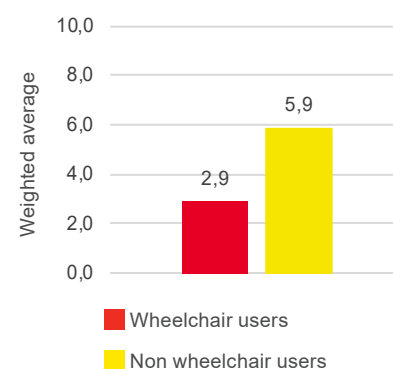


Figure 2: Weighted average score of 'Usability' to the nearest playground for users with or without wheelchairs. 10 being fully usable.





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