

# From Policy to Play Provision

*Inclusion by design – Design by inclusion*

*Outdoor play and early learning Policy Research Symposium,  
October 24<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup>, Toronto*

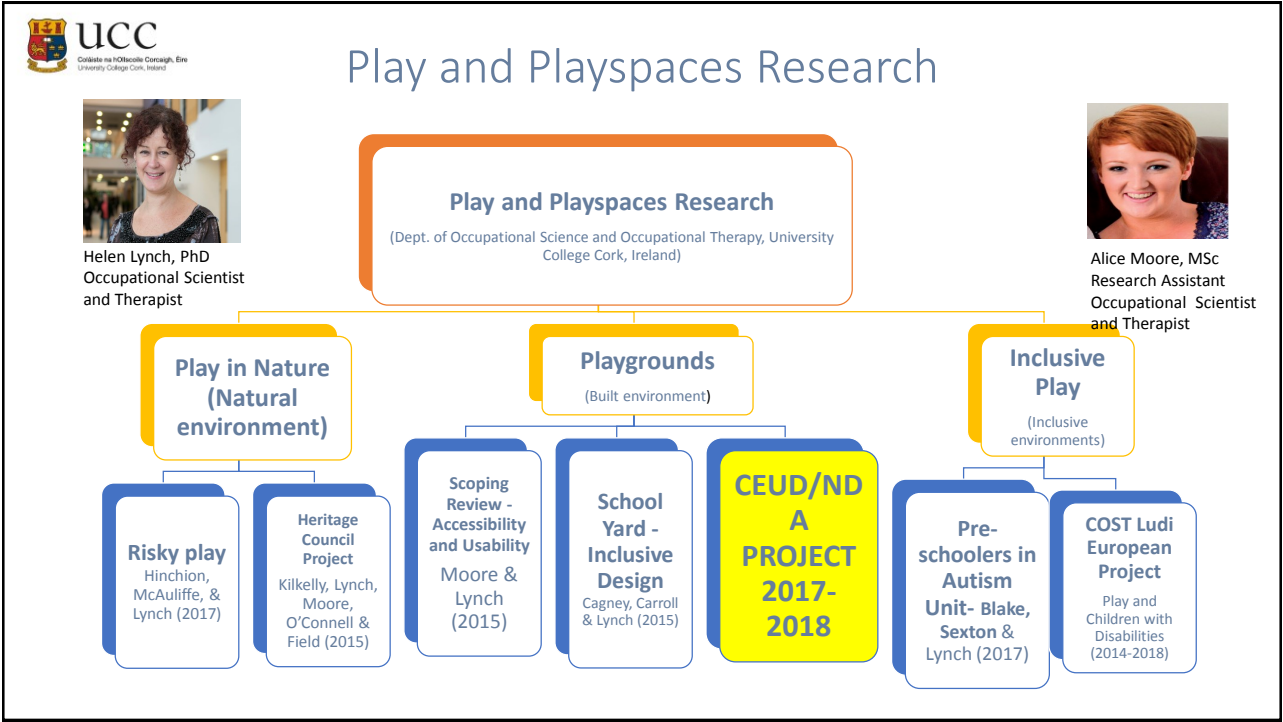
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## Plan for today's presentation

1. Introductions and context
2. Provide a brief background to the research project
3. Describe design and phases
4. Summarise key findings
5. Provide a rationale and significance for policy
6. Identify key questions





**DE GRUYTER OPEN**

Caral Barron, Angharad Beckerli, Marieke Coussens, Anemie Desoete, Nan Cannon Jones, Helen Lynch, Maria Prollwitz, Deborah Fenney Salkeld

**BARRIERS TO PLAY FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

**COST** **LUDI** **COST**

Scandinavian Journal of Occupational Therapy 2015; Early Online, 1-14

**informa** **healthcare**

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 isolation 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. **Methods and results:** 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 five 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

**Children and the Outdoors**

CONDUCT WITH THE OUTDOORS AND NATURAL HERITAGE AMONG CHILDREN ACROSS TO 12: CURRENT TRENDS, BARRIERS AND RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

Commissioned Report by the Heritage Council

**Heritage Council**

Examples of play research papers

# Background: Play policy review



- Combination of methods was employed to identify relevant national policy that address play:
- Survey distributed to Ludi members to elicit information on National Policy and relevant Ministries
- Search of internet-based sites; websites of national ministries of health, education, children, culture, sports; health promotion agencies

## Play Policy Survey – RESPONDENTS

	Bulgaria	Estonia	Germany	Iceland	Ireland	Italy	Malta	Netherlands	Poland	Portugal	Romania	Serbia	Spain	Sweden	Switzerland	Turkey	Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia	United Kingdom	
What national Government department is responsible for children's play? (Tick all that apply)																			
Education																			
Children and Youth																			
Social Inclusion																			
Health																			
Other																			
Does your country have a national play policy for children's play?																			
Yes																			
No																			
If your country has a national play policy, are children with disabilities mentioned?																			
Yes																			
No																			
Not Applicable																			
Does your country have a national policy or guideline for children's involvement in designing for play?																			
Yes																			
No																			
Does your country have national universal design/ anti-discrimination policy or guidelines for play provision? (e.g. for playgrounds)																			
Yes																			
No																			
Does your country have a national website for play? (e.g. Play England)																			
Yes																			
No																			

18 Responses in total representing:

- Bulgaria
- Estonia
- Germany
- Iceland
- Ireland
- Italy
- Malta
- Netherlands
- Poland
- Portugal
- Romania
- Serbia
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland
- Turkey
- Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia
- United Kingdom



## Community Parks and Playgrounds: Intergenerational Participation through Universal Design

(Ireland, 2017 – 2018)



## Introducing the research team



Helen Lynch, PhD  
Principal Investigator  
Occupational Therapist



Alice Moore, MSc  
Research Assistant  
Occupational Therapist



Linda Horgan, MSc  
Access Auditing  
Occupational Therapist



Claire Edwards, PhD  
Social Policy

## Background rationale for the project

- **ISSUE OF SOCIAL INCLUSION:** Accessible and inclusive community environments are fundamental for enabling social inclusion.
- **FIT FOR PURPOSE?** Community environments such as parks and playgrounds have received little attention in relation to designing for diverse groups of users.
- **INCLUSION BY DESIGN:** The purpose of this research project was to analyse public parks and playgrounds in one local council area (Cork City Council), as part of a study on intergenerational use of local parks and playgrounds. determine the policy-play-provision connection, from a UNIVERSAL DESIGN perspective.



Universal  
Design (UD)

Universal design means the design of products, environments, programmes and services to be **usable by all people**, to the greatest extent possible, **without the need for adaptation or specialized design**

(UNCRPD, 2007, p. 4)

7 PRINCIPLES OF UD  
(Connell et al, 1997)

# Research Design

## Phase 1:

Review of literature and policy

## Phase 2:

Analysis of international guidelines for the design and provision of inclusive community playgrounds

## Phase 3:

Developing the PlayAUDIT

## Phase 4:

Exploring the perspectives of users and providers and conducting PlayAUDITs



**Phase 1:** Review of literature and policy

### Children's Rights



#### UN Convention on the Rights of the Child

- Right to have a voice (article 12)
- Right to play and access nature (article 31)



#### UN Convention on the Rights of People with Disability

- Children with disability have a right to be treated equally to others
- **Equal access to play**
- Participation **and inclusion in the community**



#### GENERAL COMMENT 17

- Children with disabilities at risk for play deprivation
- States need to provide **sufficient play opportunities** for all children
- Children should be **involved in planning and design** playspaces
- **Universal Design**: 'investment in universal design is necessary with regard to play'
- Municipal planning: Availability of **inclusive parks** and playgrounds



#### Irish Play Policy

- Right to play for play sake- **sufficient play opportunity**
- **Universal design**

## Findings from the review of literature

- International literature recognises that outdoor spaces such as parks and playgrounds are **important sites for** community integration, belonging, social cohesion, health and wellbeing.
- **No studies** were found that explored the **application of Universal Design to the design of playgrounds**, for effectiveness or impact on use.
- **Few studies have explored diverse-users' perspectives** on intergenerational use of parks and playgrounds from a.
- There is **no research to date from Irish children with disabilities**, on their experiences of community inclusion in parks and playgrounds.

## Findings from the review of policy

- A **lack of national and regional policy on inclusive outdoor play** compounds the exclusion of children with disabilities and their families from playgrounds.
- However, even where policy exists, **a lack of guidelines can also contribute to poor play provision**, and although a UD approach has been promoted, **little is known about how to apply UD in playground design**.
- There is a need to review, analyse and synthesise good practice in inclusive policies and guidelines for outdoor playground design and provision in order to design for inclusion more effectively.



**Phase 2: Analysis of guidelines for inclusive community playgrounds**

Country	Guideline
Ireland	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Access inside out: A guide to making community facilities accessible (DESSA, 2005)</li> <li>2. Play for all: Providing play facilities for disabled children (DESSA, 2007)</li> </ol>
Europe (UK)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Developing accessible play space: a good practice guide (Dunn, Moore, and Murray, 2003)</li> <li>4. Can play, will play: disabled children and access to outdoor playgrounds (John and Wheway, 2004)</li> <li>5. Design of play areas (RoSPA, 2004)</li> <li>6. Inclusive play (The Sensory Trust, n.d.)</li> <li>7. Design guidance for play spaces (Houston, Worthington, and Harrop, 2006)</li> <li>8. Design for play: A guide to creating successful play spaces (Shackell, Butler, Doyle, and Ball, 2008)</li> <li>9. Inclusive design for play: Mainstreaming inclusive play good practice briefings (Play England and KIDS, 2009)</li> <li>10. Playspaces: planning and design (Play Wales, 2012)</li> <li>11. Developing and managing play spaces (Play Wales, 2016)</li> <li>12. Creating accessible play spaces: a toolkit (Play Wales, 2017)</li> </ol>
Australia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. The good play space guide: "I can play too" (State of Victoria, 2007)</li> <li>14. Inclusive playspace guidelines: The principles for inclusive play (Touched by Olivia, 2012)</li> <li>15. Space for active play: Developing child-inspired play space for older children (Jennings and Carlisle, 2013)</li> </ol>
USA	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16. EveryBODY plays! (PlayCore, GameTime, and Utah State University, 2008)</li> <li>17. Playground accessibility – ADA compliance (Assistive Technology Partners, n.d.)</li> <li>18. Me2: 7 principles of inclusive playground design (PlayCore and Utah State University, 2010, 2016)</li> <li>19. Play for All Guidelines: Planning, design and management of outdoor play settings for all children (Moore, Goltsman, and Iacofano, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1992)</li> <li>20. Inclusive Play Design Guide (Inclusive Play Design Guide Work Group, Playworld systems, 2012)</li> </ol>
Hong Kong	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>21. Inclusive Play Space Guide (Playright, 2016)</li> </ol>

## Findings

- Although **international rights-based documents promote Universal Design** as a means of ensuring accessible and inclusive environments are provided:
  - **Universal Design is under-represented in the 21** international and national guideline documents.
  - There is a **gap between the promotion of Universal Design, and guidelines on how to operationalise** it in parks and playgrounds.
  - There is also a **gap in knowledge on how to include users in** a process of community **consultation**.

## 8 Principles

- **Principle 1:** A rights-based perspective, underpinned by inclusive social policy
- **Principle 2:** Respect for diversity of age, gender, size, ability, socioeconomic, ethnicity and cultural differences
- **Principle 3:** Intergenerational spaces: Incorporating amenities as well as play opportunities
- **Principle 4:** Play value
- **Principle 5:** Positive approach to risk and challenge in policy and provision
- **Principle 6:** Design by inclusion: Involving users in the design process
- **Principle 7:** Inclusion by design: Universal Design
- **Principle 8:** Designed for inclusion but 100% accessibility and usability is not the goal

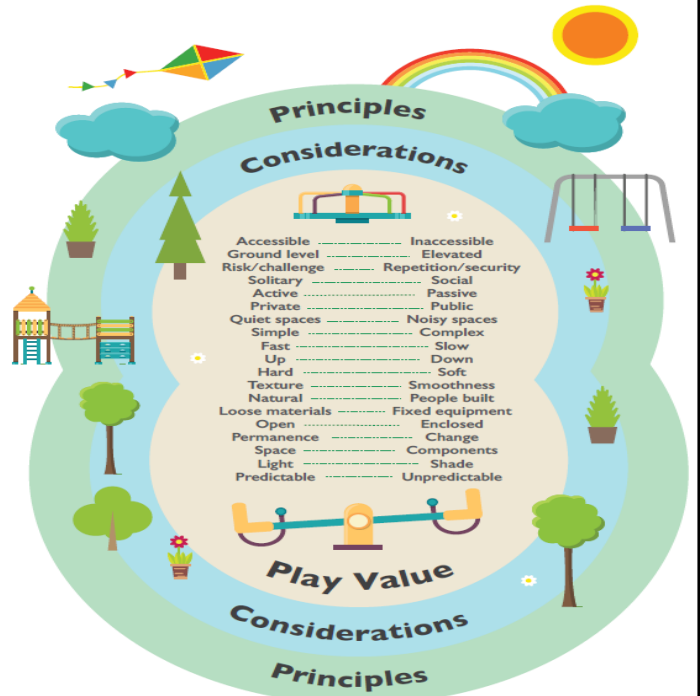
## 21 Core Considerations

- **Consideration 1:** Free access/ Entrance fee
- **Consideration 2:** Maintenance/ Vandalism
- **Consideration 3:** Fencing
- **Consideration 4:** Surfacing
- **Consideration 5:** Play sufficiency
- **Consideration 6:** Cost-effective design
- **Consideration 7:** Capacity building
- **Consideration 8:** Inter-professional working
- **Consideration 9:** Flow/ Layout
- **Consideration 10:** Segregation/ No segregation
- **Consideration 11:** Local policy for inclusion
- **Consideration 12:** Play component selection
- **Consideration 13:** Ground level/ Elevated
- **Consideration 14:** Making the 'cool' piece most accessible
- **Consideration 15:** Location
- **Consideration 16:** Character
- **Consideration 17:** Meeting the needs of the community
- **Consideration 18:** Funding
- **Consideration 19:** Sustainability
- **Consideration 20:** Size
- **Consideration 21:** Storage

## Playability Model

*Integrating principles, considerations and play value for good practice in Universal Design play provision*

*Play Value at the center*



**Phase 3:**  
Developing the  
PlayAUDIT

# PlayAUDIT: Playground Assessment of Universal Design and Inclusion Tool

## Step 1: Play Value audit

- Based on an observation of the playground
- Assess play value of playground through analysing play types and potential affordances

## Step 2: Universal Design audit

- Based on observation of park-playground unit
- Accessible routes to and from the park
- Accessible pathways within playground
- Accessible components
- Adheres to national standards for accessibility
- Incorporates best practice guidelines for Universal Design

## Step 3: Usability audit

- Based on a walk-and-talk audit with users
- Personal experiences of barriers and enablers
- Routes, pathways, usability of play components
- Personal play preferences
- Subjective play value identified



## Phase 4: Conducting the PlayAUDITs

## Introducing the park-playground units

Fitzgerald's park



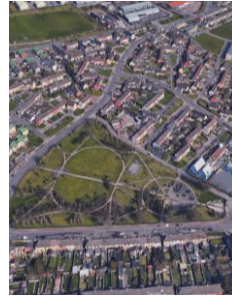
Lough Mahon park



Tory Top park



Gerry O Sullivan park



Glenamoy Lawn park



5 park-playground units, from Cork City Council area

**Data generation**

**Step 1:**

5 Play value audits

**Step 2:**

5 Universal Design Audits

**Step 3:**

Usability Audits with child-adult units

**Step 4:**

Interviews with park and playground providers

# Step 1: Findings from the Play Value Audits

Characteristics of the playground (informed by Woolley & Lowe, 2013)

Opportunities for different types of play	Fitzgerald's park	Gerry O Sullivan park	Lough Mahon park	Tory Top park	Glenamo y Lawn park
Moveable equipment	5	4	3	1	2
Different sizes and types of spaces	5	3	1	1	3
Landform	5	2	0	1	2
Natural materials	4	2	1	2	2
Obvious physical boundaries such as fencing	5	5	0	3	3
Range of surfacing materials	5	1	1	1	2

Affordances for play types in the playground

	Fitzgerald's park	Gerry O Sullivan park	Lough Mahon park	Tory Top park	Glenamo y Lawn park
Running	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Jumping/ bouncing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Swinging	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sliding	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rolling	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spinning	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Rolling	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Movement and balance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Affordances for social play	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interplay with adults	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Play components that require two or more people to operate it	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Affordances for sensory play	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sand	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Earth	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Texture experiences	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Visual stimulation/ to explore light experiences	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Accessible places to play around natural areas	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
To learn/ practice skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Open space for imaginative games	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Incorporate a variety of colours	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spatial awareness and planning skills	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

# Step 2: Findings from analysis of the physical environment: Universal Design Audits

- Playgrounds are **not designed to be used by all ages.**
- Pathways in playgrounds are **not designed to lead equally to all components.**
- Pathways and surfacing are **typically not differentiated using colour or texture.**
- Playground components are **not easy to use independently** for children with physical, sensory, and/ or emotional difficulties.
- Few playground components have **ramps or platforms** for ease of transferring.

## Size and space for approach and use but not low physical effort

An example from the CEUD project shows different climbing components that accommodate users of different skill level.

However, not all users can access these climbing structures as a consequence of disability or undeveloped climbing skill.

Further accessible routes (for example, ramps), foot supports and accessible handgrip handles (on the climbing wall) that accommodate users of different sizes and abilities could be considered so that all users can access the highest point in the playground. Such design solutions would facilitate greater inclusion and maximize play value.

CYE page 17



## Step 3: Findings from the Usability Audits

- Usability was assessed by conducting **walk-and-talk interviews** in the playgrounds or an alternative site of choice for the participants:
  - 10 child-adult units
    - 32 participants overall, including diverse ages, genders and abilities: from 3- 68 years
    - 4 of these participants were responsible for park/playground provision
    - Child-adult units included adults and children with varied physical, sensory, cognitive and emotional characteristics that translate into specific restorative environmental needs
- In general, the users **reported feeling welcome** in their local park but not enjoying being there at certain times when it is busy or when gangs of teenagers gather.
- The playgrounds were identified as being **most stimulating and enticing for younger children** rather than 9-10-year-olds, and **not at all accessible for children with significant mobility or visual impairments.**

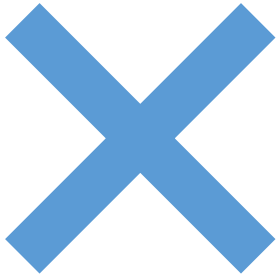
## Overall playability

- Although the playgrounds appeared to provide stimulation and challenge, the children and adults who used these spaces told us a different story:
  - **Only one site was designed with inclusion in mind**
  - **Components did not provide** enough height, speed, or challenge
  - Poor accessibility to the play **opportunities in all sites- specially for children with visual, social and physical impairments**
- These five parks and playgrounds were **used frequently but were not always the most favourite** or important playspaces for these users.

## Summary of child perspectives

- ***Seeking a place for play and restoration***: the main reasons children used their local playground was because an adult brought them there, and this was associated with wanting to play and have fun.
- ***Affordances that met their play needs***: Children reported on their favourite play activity, which most commonly was climbing on climbing walls and slides.
- ***Not a place of inclusion***: for children with mobility or sensory impairments, most playgrounds were not places of fun.

## Findings: children with physical, social, cognitive & visual impairments



- **Nowhere to go-** no ramps or poor ground surfacing
- **No way in-** raised kerb edges- no access
- **Nothing to do-** accessible route to playground, but no accessible playground components
- **Nowhere near-** no inclusive playground nearby
- **No challenge-** does not provide risk-rich play experiences
- **No safe boundary-** no fencing in inclusive playground to prevent children running away
- **No- one size does not fit all!** designs that assume all children with same size have same play preferences and abilities



## Key recommendations

# Balancing the 7 Principles of Universal Design with Play Value Principles

7 Principles of UD	Principles for play value
<b>Equitable use</b>	There is a need to design for challenge and complexity that caters for people of different ages and abilities, resulting in equality of experience.
<b>Flexibility in use</b>	There is a need to design for variety in order to cater for people's individual play preferences and play styles.
<b>Simple and intuitive use</b>	Challenge is an integral part of children's play. As such, there is a need to design stimulating playspaces that offer opportunities for adventure and excitement.
<b>Perceptible information</b>	Discovery and imagination is an essential part of children's play. As such there is a need to design playspaces that encourage user's natural curiosity.
<b>Tolerance for error</b>	Risk is an integral part of children's play. As such, there is a need to design risk-rich playspaces that afford users the opportunity to participate in challenging and risky behaviour without being exposed to overly dangerous activities or risks.
<b>Low physical effort</b>	Physical effort is integral for children's active play. There is a need to design playspaces to provide for active play, while minimising unnecessary fatigue.
<b>Size and space for approach and use</b>	People of different ages, abilities and sizes participate in play. Thus there is a need to design playspaces that offer appropriate size and space to accommodate everyone and facilitate participation in the playspace.

1

Establish international good practice on applying Universal Design to playgrounds

**PLAY VALUE AT THE CENTRE**

2

Establish standards and guidelines for the Universal Design of inclusive community parks and playgrounds

**TAILOR 7 PRINCIPLES**

3

Develop guidelines for engaging in community consultation with diverse user groups, including children

**DESIGN BY PARTICIPATION**

## To conclude

- **Applying a universal design approach to designing for play is complex and somewhat obscure** when we consider the need to also provide for high play value.
- **Further work is needed to translate universal design principles into a design approach that ensures high play value** for as many children as possible.
- It is clear **that there is a need to develop space-oriented children's policy that specifically addresses play and playspace design** as a fundamental aspect of socio-spatial inclusion (Gill, 2008; Prellwitz & Lynch, in press; Yantzi, Young, & McKeever, 2010).

*Children, Youth and Environments 28(2), 2018*

### **From Policy to Play Provision: Universal Design and the Challenges of Inclusive Play**

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Citation: Lynch, H., Moore, A., & Prellwitz, M. (2018). From policy to play provision: Universal design and the challenges of inclusive play. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 28(2), xx-xx. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublication?journalCode=chlyoutemv>

#### **Abstract**

*Outdoor environments for children are important sites for social inclusion and play. In the European context, outdoor play provision is typically governed by regional or national policy and informed by international conventions that specifically state that inclusive environments must be made available for all children for their rights to be met. Specifically, universal design is proposed as a way to achieve this goal. However, little is known about national play policy in general, nor the extent to which universal design informs local play provision. This paper focuses on a review of play policy and guidelines carried out in 18 European countries and a national universal design study in Ireland in 2018. Findings identified an overall lack of play policy internationally, and when policy exists, universal design is under-represented. The potential application of the seven principles of universal design to playgrounds is discussed alongside play value principles to maximize successful playspace design. Further exploration of the child's voice in designing for play is warranted to strengthen socio-spatial inclusion and diminish the poverty of experience that many children with disabilities experience in their communities.*

**Keywords:** children with disability, accessibility, play policy, inclusive design, universal design

Citation: Lynch, H., Moore, A., & Prellwitz, M. (2018). From policy to play provision: Universal design and the challenges of inclusive play. *Children, Youth and Environments*, 28(2), xx-xx.

## Design for Social Participation

Three  
questions  
for  
discussion

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***How can outdoor play be a reality for children with diverse abilities and their families/carers?***

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***Can Universal Design support effective outdoor play provision for all or are there other approaches that merit greater focus of study?***

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***What can we recommend to policy makers, to strengthen a rights-based approach to outdoor play provision, and design for social inclusion?***



**Thank You!**

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