ISSUE 1 December 2024

play magazine

RIGHTS

ipa international play association
promoting the child's right to play



Scottish national instruments promoting play

Play sufficiency duty in Wales

Play Strategy for England of 2008-11

Play policies in the north and south of Ireland

Nurturing Neighbourhood Challenge in India

Multi-level play system in New Zealand

Policies for play

FOCUS ON NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

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ABOUT IPA AND HOW YOU CAN JOIN

The International Play Association (IPA) is a dynamic, cross-sectoral, membership-based international non-governmental organization founded in 1961. It has members in almost 50 countries and branches in 19 countries. It has active groups throughout the world and enthusiastically welcomes new members and new energy!

IPA is at the forefront of developing a global understanding and increased visibility of the child's right to play (article 31, UNCRC) as a fundamental human right. In 2013, IPA reached a significant milestone with its leading role in crafting the General Comment (GC) on article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). GC #17 deepens our understanding of article 31 as a whole, and especially of play as a child right.

IPA recognises that the well-being of children is a global issue, and that opportunity for play is an important element of well-being. Play is children's natural behaviour and their healthy development is dependent upon sufficient time and opportunity to play.

IPA is an interdisciplinary organisation that brings together people from all professions who work for and with children. For over fifty years, national groups have initiated various projects promoting the child's right to play.

IPA's worldwide network promotes the importance of play in child development, provides a vehicle for interdisciplinary exchange and action, and brings a child's perspective to policy development throughout the world.

IPA welcomes you, or your organisation, to join its international network and participate in its campaign to promote the value of play around the world. You can contact IPA through your national representative listed on our website.

Visit ipaworld.org, or email the IPA Membership Officer at membership@ipaworld.org.



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

We will highlight success stories from countries that have championed children's play rights and the challenges faced in regions where play is not prioritized. Together, we can advocate for a world where every child has the opportunity to play—an essential right that fosters joy, creativity, and the foundation for a healthy and fulfilling life.

As we navigate an increasingly complex world, the fundamental right to play remains a cornerstone of childhood development and well-being. At the International Play Association (IPA), we are committed to advocating for policies that recognize and protect this essential right. In recent years, we have witnessed a notable shift in how governments and organizations approach play, with policies emerging that either enhance or hinder children's opportunities to engage in play.

Across the globe, we have seen progressive policies that prioritize play in various contexts, such as urban planning that incorporates safe play spaces, educational reforms that integrate play-based learning, or health initiatives that promote active lifestyles. Countries that have embraced play as a vital component of childhood are reaping the benefits, witnessing improved physical health, enhanced social skills, and greater emotional resilience among children.

Conversely, we also observe the negative impacts of restrictive policies that limit children's access to play. In some regions, increased academic pressures, urbanization, and safety concerns have led to a decline in unstructured playtime, stifling creativity and exploration. The stark contrast between these two approaches underscores the urgent need for comprehensive policies that prioritize the rights of children to play freely and safely.

In this edition of Play Rights Magazine, we are delighted to introduce IPA World trustee Dr Sudeshna Chatterjee as our new Editor-in-Chief and our newly formed IPA Editorial Board. This issue explores how national policies and programs have facilitated play in cities and towns across the world and their implications for play globally. We will highlight success stories from countries that have championed children's play rights and the challenges faced in regions where play is not prioritized. Together, we can advocate for a world where every child has the opportunity to play—an essential right that fosters joy, creativity, and the foundation for a healthy and fulfilling life.

Let us commit to ensuring that play remains at the forefront of our policies and that every child, regardless of their circumstances, can experience the transformative power of play.



Yours Playfully

Robyn Monro Miller AM
President
Play Rights, IPA World

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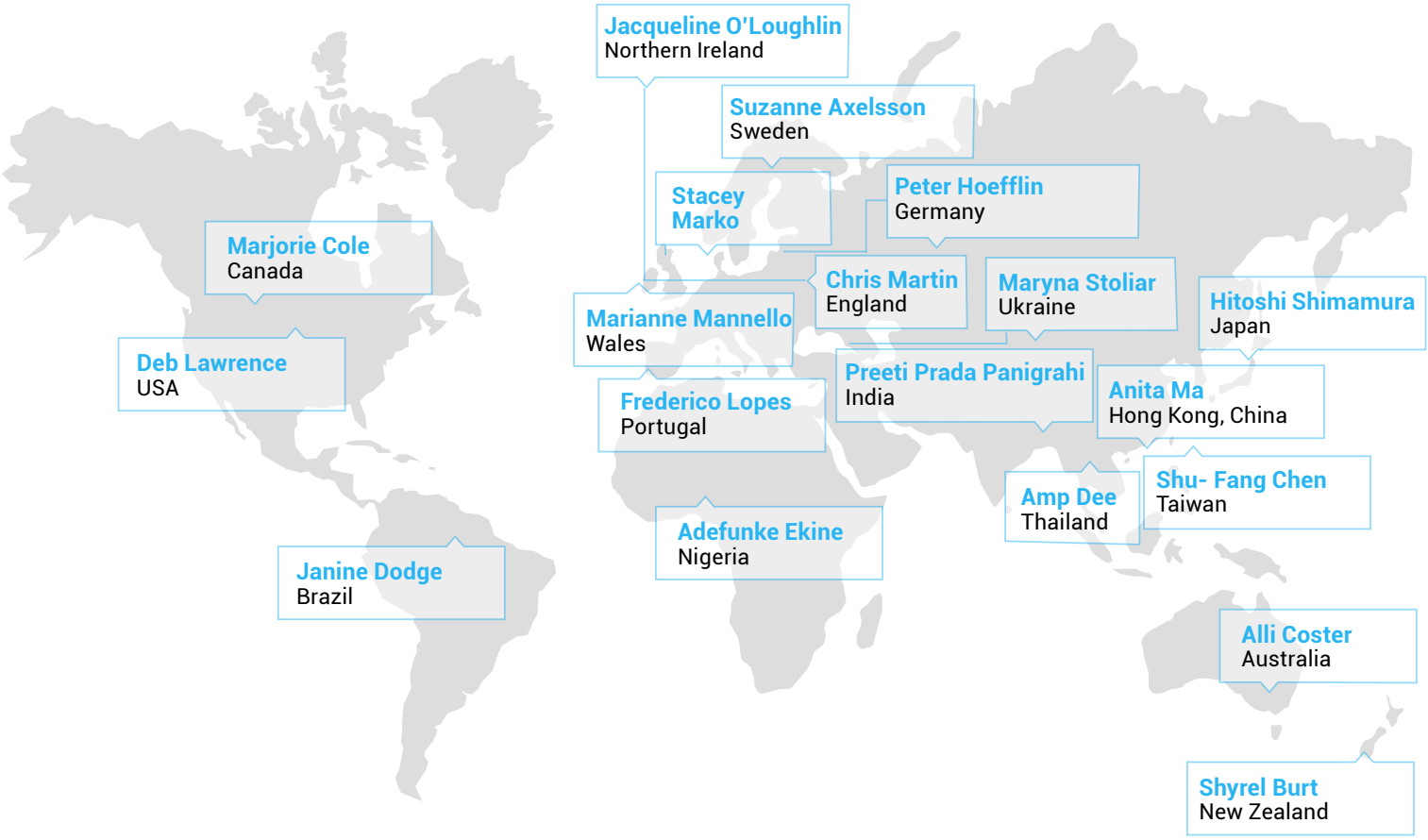

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EDITOR'S NOTE

National governments play a crucial role in framing policies for children's rights and guiding the development of comprehensive approaches to child welfare. They establish legal frameworks outlining the nation's responsibilities towards children, implement protective measures, and ensure compliance with international standards. But do national policies recognise children's right to play as a fundamental human right of children?

We wanted to deep-dive into this question and explore promising practices around the world where national governments have used various instruments to develop policies for play or addressed play as part of other sectoral policies, programmes, and plans focused on child well-being. We further wanted to understand how such policies cascade down to influence the opportunities for play in local neighbourhoods, the immediate context of children's everyday lives.

The rich collection of articles deepens our understanding of the value of national governments in promoting children's right to play and brings alive the potential of upstream policies by providing place-based examples of children's experiences and voices.

General Comment 17 (GC-17) of Article 31 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child provides the universal legal basis for the right to play and clearly states that play belongs to children, but adults have a crucial role in promoting, protecting, and preserving this right for them. The quality of children's environments influences play, and children's ability to play depends on access and availability of spaces in the local environment. National plans, programmes, policies, strategies, legislation, and grants affect children's everyday environments. Leveraging such national instruments, many cities have developed spaces for children at scale across the city and in many cities within the country.

Jenny Woods writes about several Scottish national instruments that promote play and children's rights and discusses tangible changes within local areas driven by the National Performance Framework, the Place Principle, the National Play Strategy, and the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, among others. Marianne Manello discusses the pioneering play sufficiency duty in Wales, in which the Welsh government, as part of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010, placed a statutory duty on local authorities to assess and secure sufficient opportunities for children to play. Adrian Voce draws lessons from England's Play Strategy of 2008-11 that sought to make England an exemplar of child-friendly planning and, in the changed political context, expresses a hope that the newly launched 'Raising the Nation Play Commission' will develop a new national play strategy by integrating better-informed perspectives of play and its role in children's lives and wellbeing. Alan Herron and Fiona Armstrong take a comparative approach to differentiate between the policies promoting play in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Suhani Gupta and Madhura Kulkarni share their experience of working with cities across India in the Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge that leveraged the national Smart Cities Mission to work in smaller cities to plan, implement, scale up, and sustain play opportunities for young children. And, finally, Scott Mackenzie writes about the multi-level play system in New Zealand based on the national child well-being strategy to ensure that play is considered cross-sectorally in legislation, policies, and budgets across plans and programmes at national, regional, local, community and family scales of interventions.



This rich collection of articles deepens our understanding of the value of national governments in promoting children's right to play and brings alive the potential of upstream policies by providing place-based examples of children's experiences and voices. Most importantly, all the articles in this issue are written by IPA members speaking to the scale of IPA's influence around the world and the depth of knowledge within its membership. I look forward to working with all our branches, members, friends of IPA and the editorial board to bring you many more insightful issues of the Play Rights magazine in the coming years.

Sudeshna Chatterjee
Editor-in-Chief
Play Rights, IPA World

Other Examples of National Policies Influencing Play

Aside from the countries featured in this issue, there are numerous notable examples from other nations where the national government plays a crucial role both directly and indirectly. They shape policies, laws, and programs that empower cities to enhance and expand opportunities for children's play. Four such examples are shared here.

MEXICO

The Federal Government signaled a policy shift for urban areas by highlighting the connection between public spaces and violence, emphasizing the need to improve and restore abandoned and deteriorating public areas.

Mexico's Social Housing Renewal and Revitalization Program (PROCHURA) engaged architectural firms to partner with local governments and communities to rejuvenate run-down neighborhoods across the country.

This programme allocated resources for participatory planning for the improvement of living conditions and physical improvement of public spaces, including places for play, recreation, and sports. Innovative play spaces were developed as part of housing redevelopment.

Source: Chatterjee, S. (2024, June 21). blog. Retrieved from thecityfix.com: https://thecityfix.com blog/4-examples-of-supporting-childrens-play-in-low-income-urban-neighborhoods/

ITALY

A national fund for childhood was created in Italy based on Law 285/97. It aimed to finance local projects enabling community-based public space planning for children's play and leisure activities.

These projects were coordinated at the municipal level through the Sustainable Cities for Girls and Boys national program,which leveraged the national fund. The local projects helped to create play centres for younger children, game libraries (for older children), youth centres for adolescents, and the promotion of temprary play streets.

Pop-up play opportunities in the public spaces of neighbourhoods through a play bus service (ludo bus) and a travelling extension of the neighbourhood game library reclaimed public spaces with the help of playworkers.

Source: Baraldi, C. (2005). Cities with Children: Child friendly cities in Italy. UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre Florence Italy.

CHINA

The Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development (2021-25) proposed the nationwide piloting of 100 child-friendly cities in China by 2025. Urban spatial planning-led public space development focused on promoting right to play is a major component of the action plans of participating Chinese cities.

The Chinese Ministry of Housing, Urban and Rural Development has created national guidelines to build the capacities of cities to deliver on urban planning and public spaces for children to improve walkability and provide greater access to nature, places of play, and social interaction.

Each city has developed strategies best suited to its realities for achieving citywide public spaces for children. Most notably, Shenzhen has revised the Shenzhen City Planning Standards and Guidelines to include new requirements for children's play spaces in parks and residential areas.

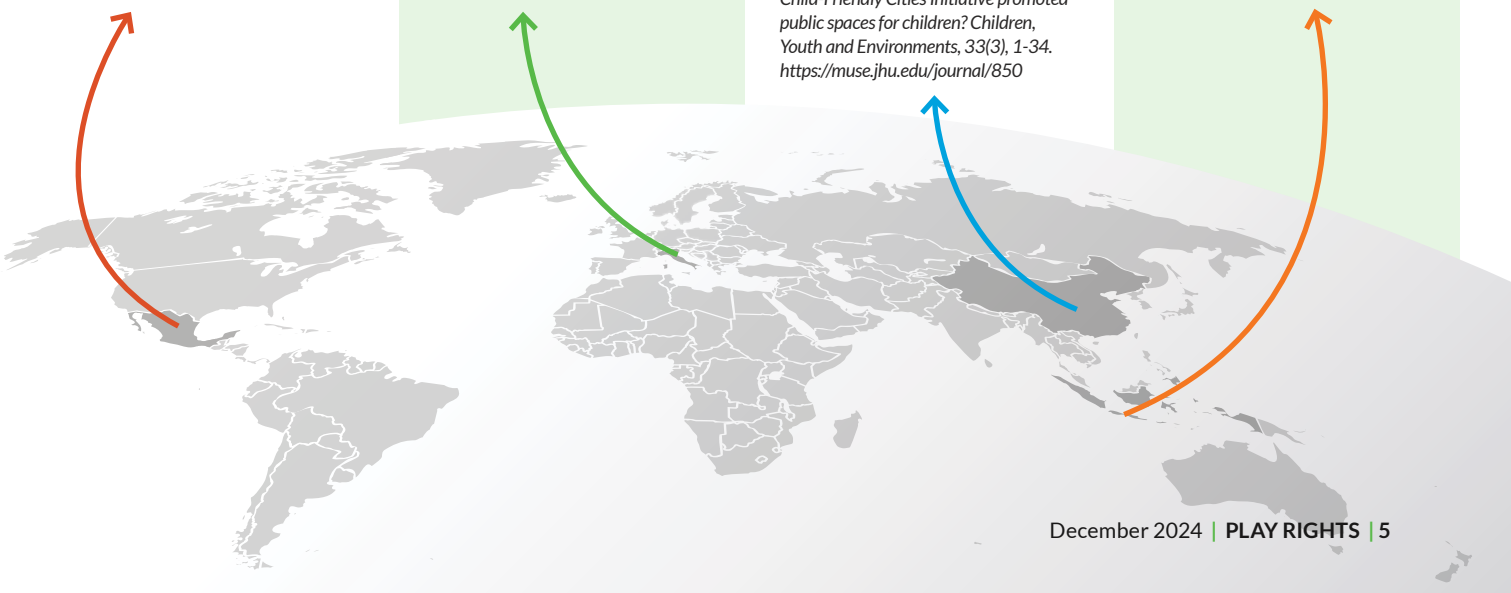
Source: Chatterjee, S. (2023). How has the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative promoted public spaces for children? Children, Youth and Environments, 33(3), 1-34. https://muse.jhu.edu/journal/850

INDONESIA

The Indonesia CFCI (Child Friendly Cities Initiative) over time became a nationally run program based on the UNICEF model but adapted to the Indonesian context. The national government developed the Child Friendly City/ District (CFC/D) policy to incentivize cities to create better living environments for children through a certification-based model.

Jakarta leveraged the national program to provide accessible public spaces for children called RPTRA on a citywide scale. 300 RPTRA sites created in Jakarta provide access to green, play friendly public spaces to children in high-density and low-income residential areas and also serve as evacuation centres during emergencies.

Source: Chatterjee, S. (2023). How has the Child-Friendly Cities Initiative promoted public spaces for children? Children, Youth and Environments, 33(3), 1-34. https://muse.jhu. edu/journal/850



EDITORIAL BOARD



Dr. Sudeshna Chatterjee (Editor-in-Chief)

Sudeshna has extensive experience as a globally recognised urban practitioner, researcher, and published author. She focuses on enabling inclusive, resilient and child-friendly cities and communities and advocating for including child and youth perspectives in urban policies, planning and urbanisation processes. Sudeshna has led IPA's Access to Play in Crisis research in six countries and was elected to the IPA World Board in 2017. She is the Programme Director (research) for Sustainable Cities and Transport at the World Resources Institute (WRI) India Ross Centre for Cities. She led the research and framing of the UN system-wide "Global Principles and Guidance of Public Spaces for Children" and an associated compendium of 50 case studies acting on behalf of UNICEF, WHO, and UN-Habitat.



Dr. Matluba Khan
Bangladesh

Matluba is a senior lecturer in urban design at the School of Geography and Planning at Cardiff University. Her research explores the connection between the natural and built environments and human behaviour, focusing on the impact of school ground design on pedagogy and play. She has studied the outdoor learning environment of children at primary schools and urban residential areas in Bangladesh and Scotland.



Dr. Chris Martin
England

Chris is a playworker, writer/researcher, and playwork activist. He is the chair of IPA England and Tiverton Adventure Playground. He wrote the UK Play and Playwork Education and Skills Strategy 2011-2016; facilitated the All Party Parliamentary Group on Play, and was National Playwork Convenor for Unite the Union.





Marjorie Cole
Canada

Marjorie is President of IPA Canada and focuses on the importance of play in education as an Education Coordinator for a non-profit dedicated to early intervention. She advocates for the transformative power of play and educates post-secondary early childhood educators about play. She also pursues graduate studies in counselling and psychology.

Dr. Helen Little
Australia

Helen is a Senior Lecturer in Early Childhood Education. Before entering academia, she was an early childhood teacher. Her main area of teaching is outdoor play, which, for her is a key context for advocating for children's right to play. She aims to support her students in becoming advocates for play.





Dr. Tolu Okoruwa
Nigeria

Tolu is a Chief Lecturer and researcher at the Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Nigeria, where she has taught teacher trainees to adopt various play-based strategies for teaching children. She has also published articles stressing the importance of play in children's all-round development.



Dr. Maria Nordström
Sweden

Maria is an associate professor in the Department of People and Society at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences. With a background in developmental psychology, she has collaborated with many urban planners on outdoor spaces for children over many years to promote children's right to play.



Dr. Anupama Nallari
India



Anupama is a member of the urban team at Save the Children where she supports knowledge and content development for the Global Alliance – Cities4Children. She received her doctorate in Environmental Psychology from the City University of New York. Her past work includes research on common space in informal settlements in India, facilitating child-focused participatory planning and design, and supporting the development of global guidance and principles for public spaces for children in both formal and informal contexts.



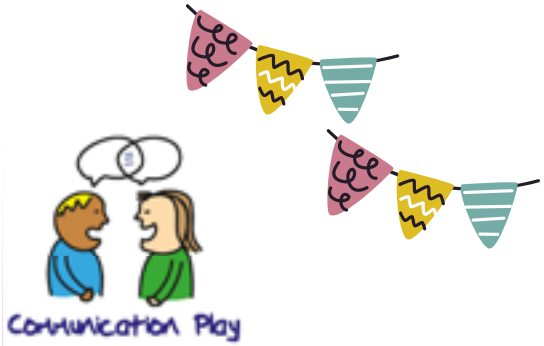
Tassy Ellen Thompson
Norway

Tassy currently practices as an artist-researcher and is a doctoral fellow and university lecturer at the Institute of Cultural Studies, University of South East Norway. Her work explores landscape and sustainability in relation to play, performance, and education.

Michael Dietrich
Germany



Michael is the artistic director of the improvisational theatre "Mixxit Theater" and the spinning theatre for children "Mit Zick & Zack auf Geschichtenreise". For 20 years he has initiated and organized media and theatre projects in the cultural education of children and young people, currently as managing director and board member of PA/SPIELkultur eV in Munich and for maninoy eV in the Philippines.





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Alan Herron

Alan is the CEO of PlayBoard NI (Northern Ireland), where he oversees the delivery of a wide range of services, including regional and local policy development, political advocacy, research, and the development and delivery of school—and community-based play programmes. Alan was centrally involved in developing Northern Ireland's first-ever Play and Leisure policy and implementation plan.





Adrian Voce

Adrian Voce OBE is head of policy and public affairs at Starlight Children's Foundation. Previously, after a long career in playwork, he was the last director of the Children's Play Council and the founding director of Play England (2004-11), where he led the campaign for a national play strategy for England. He was the key advisor to the UK government on the Play Strategy's design and implementation. He led the support programme for the strategy's delivery before it was terminated after the change of government in 2010.



Fiona Armstrong

Fiona is a paediatric occupational therapist with a special interest in early intervention. Fiona is a PhD researcher on the Play and Risk in Kids (PARK) project, which focuses on how children develop executive function and life skills by learning risk assessment, increasing self-awareness of strengths and abilities, and increasing safety awareness through play. Her study examines the current state of play infrastructure in Ireland, assessing parental attitudes towards risky play and investigating injury rates as a consequence of play in Ireland.



Jenny Wood

Dr. Jenny Wood is the co-founder and co-director of the A Place in Childhood (APiC) charity. She is a trained town planner who completed a PhD on children's human rights and the Scottish town planning system in 2016. Jenny leads various child and youth-centred projects through APiC, including youth panels, participatory action research, and plan co-creation. She also has a background in academic research, including nationwide studies on poverty, destitution, planning policy, and homelessness across the UK.



Madhura Kulkarni

Madhura Kulkarni is the Program Lead, Sustainable Cities and Transport program at WRI India. She plays a key role in leading the Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge program across 10+ Indian cities by supporting city governments to formulate and adopt children-centred strategies for implementation and long-term sustenance towards creating young children and caregiver friendly neighbourhoods.



Marianne Mannello

Marianne is an Assistant Director of policy, support, and advocacy at Play Wales, the national charity for children's play in Wales, UK. Marianne has worked with the Welsh Government to support the development of a toolkit to help local authorities undertake statutory Play Sufficiency Assessments. She is a member of the Wales United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child Monitoring (UNCRC) Group.



Scott Mackenzie

Scott Mackenzie is the current manager for Play & Tākaro at Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa. Sport New Zealand is a Crown entity responsible for governing sport and recreation in New Zealand. Scott has worked in the play sector for Sport New Zealand for just under a decade and now has four Play Leads working under his leadership in the Play Team.



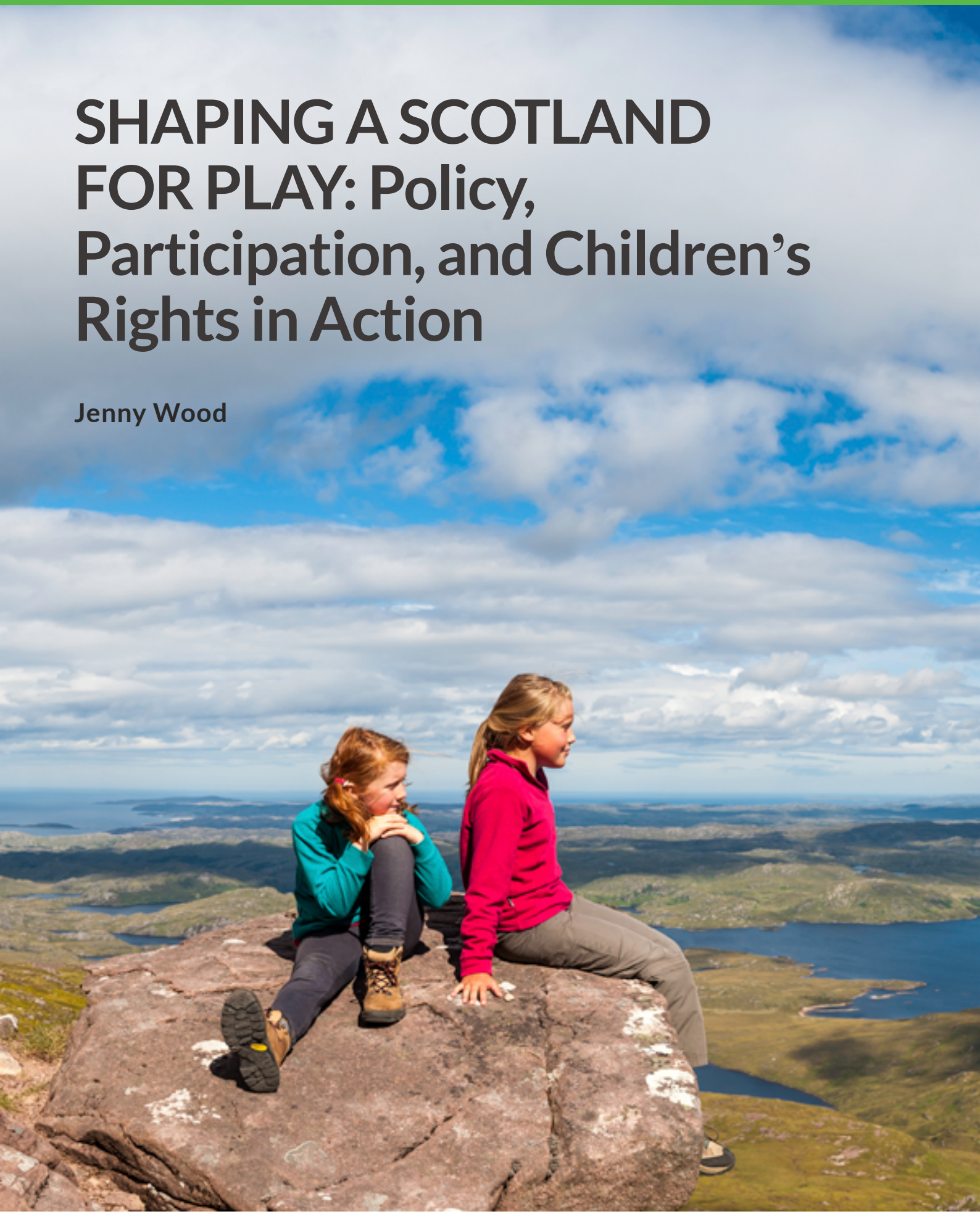


Suhani Gupta

Suhani is a Senior Program Associate for Sustainable Cities and Transport at WRI India and has played an important role in the Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge. She works closely with Indian cities to advance the agenda of young children and caregiver-centric development, prioritizing equity, stakeholder participation, and social behaviour change to implement responsive and sustainable solutions.

SHAPING A SCOTLAND FOR PLAY: Policy, Participation, and Children's Rights in Action

Jenny Wood





Scotland has several national instruments that support play and children's rights, driving tangible changes within local areas. This article discusses the role played by some of them, such as the National Performance Framework, the Place Principle, the National Play Strategy, and the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019.

Children of all ages rely on their local environments to fulfil their needs. However, access to environments that allow children to socialise, explore, play, and exercise is not always available in Scotland. For instance, city centres are heavily dominated by adult interests and needs, and you tend to see few (if any) unaccompanied children out on the streets. Meanwhile, children living in some of the country's many rural, remote areas may struggle to see their friends and to play out of the school environment.

Photo credit: FotoVoyager/iStock



Photo credit: Mediterranean/iStock

Children playing on the Royal Mile in Edinburgh.

Fortunately, the right to play is increasingly recognised in Scotland, and national and local leaders are looking to support a transition from a culture where play is often infringed to one where it is welcomed. While many laws and policies that govern Scotland are made at the UK government level, devolution means that some areas of policy and legislation are fully within the power of the Scottish Government. These 'devolved areas,' including education, public health, town planning, and some aspects of welfare, support play by working together to create environments that promote children's well-being and development. This article will explore how national-level policy brought in by the Scottish Government is helping to drive ambitions for a more play-friendly Scotland. I provide examples of what is beginning to unfold in practice, highlighting some of the developments and initiatives that are taking shape on the ground.

The National Performance Framework and the Place Principle

Scotland's support for play and children's welfare begins at the top of the National Performance Framework (Scottish Government, 2018). This is the guiding vision and blueprint for the type of country and communities the Scottish Government seeks to build. It stresses the importance of well-being and equality, supported by sustainable and inclusive growth that relates directly to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. The Framework acknowledges that the well-being of children should be the measure of Scotland's worth as a nation and sets out a national outcome that all children should be raised in an environment where they are loved, safe, and respected and have the opportunity to reach their full potential. This vision includes protecting children's health and wellbeing, rights and dignity, the provision of places where they

The right to play is increasingly recognised in Scotland, national and local leaders are looking to support a transition from a culture where play is often infringed to one where it is welcomed.

can flourish, and engaging them positively in planning and caring for the places they live. Two other national outcomes promote the development of communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient, and safe, and protect and improve the environment, health, and human rights.

In 2019, the Scottish Government published The Place Principle in support of the National Performance Framework's collective purpose, which states: "*Place is where people, location and resources combine to create a sense of identity and purpose, and are at the heart of addressing the needs and realising the full potential of communities. Places are shaped by the way resources, services and assets are directed and used by the people who live in and invest in them*" (Scottish Government, 2019).

The Place Principle helps orient professionals to look at the needs of communities within their specific context, and come together around shared community aims. It facilitates the translation of the National Performance Framework into local-level collaboration and decision-making, creating more opportunities to consider the unique experiences of children within their communities.

Children's Human Rights

The UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (1989) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Disabled Persons (articles 7 and 30) reinforce the rights of all children to enjoy their right to play. Relating directly to the UNCRC, The Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 aims to 'make Scotland the best place to grow up' (Children and Young People (Scotland) Act, 2014). With this, the Scottish Government (2015a) introduced a policy to review whether there is a need for full Child Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessments (CRWIAs) on all new legislative and policy developments. These aim to embed the Scottish Government's 'Getting It Right for Every Child' (GIRFEC) approach to delivering services for children into legislation. The GIRFEC approach focuses on well-being and incorporates eight key factors, known as the SHANARRI principles, which aim to support every child and young person in being Safe, Healthy, Achieving, Nurtured, Active, Respected, Responsible and Included.



Risky play using the affordances of play equipment in the schoolyard.





Free and imaginative play outdoors.

SHANARRI: The eight wellbeing indicators

Pushing support for children's rights further, as of July 2024, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) has been incorporated into Scots law. The right to play (alongside all other rights) is therefore a key consideration in all future policy and practice (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Incorporation) (Scotland) Act 2024). It is too early to predict the impact this will have, but the lead-up to its enactment has galvanised increased discussion of the implications of children's rights across policy, including in areas that do not traditionally focus on children.

The National Play Strategy

The Play Strategy for Scotland (Scottish Government, 2013b) highlights the need to ensure all children have sufficient time and space (physical and social) for playing within their community and have contact with nature in their everyday lives. The Play Strategy Action Plan (Scottish Government, 2013a) intends more children to play more often in outdoor places, including green spaces, parks, and streets. Consideration needs to be given to the planning and design of public spaces, and children need to be able to find clean, safe and welcoming spaces to play and gather near their homes where they are not considered a nuisance by others in their communities. Play Scotland has been working with the Scottish Government and other partners over the last few years to review and push for a refresh of the strategy (Play Scotland, 2024). Their recommendations are to:

- Refresh the Play Strategy and ensure national and local leadership
- Renew and develop the national and local commitment to outdoor play
- Listen to children and act on what they say
- Ensure the inclusion of all children
- Ensure cross-sectoral and inter-professional approaches to play
- Sustain and support play provision through adequate funding
- Maintain a focus on playful learning and play in schools
- Strengthen the play sector nationally and locally.

Consideration needs to be given to the planning and design of public spaces so that children are able to find clean, safe and welcoming spaces to play and gather near their homes where they are not considered a nuisance by others in their communities.



Children's playground in Aberdeen.

Spatial and Land Use Planning

At the same time as further talk around children's rights and play has been taking place, The Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 was passed (Planning (Scotland) Act, 2019). The secondary legislation that supports this – The National Planning Framework 4 – sets out a range of policies that help support a more child-friendly approach than previous iterations (Scottish Government, 2023a). In particular, Policy 21 is entitled 'Play, Recreation, and Sport', and sustainable and local living are key themes throughout. The Act acknowledges the integral role and rights of children in this vision and includes a statutory right for them to participate in all stages of local development planning, as well as stipulating a 'Play Sufficiency Duty'.

The Play Sufficiency Duty requires local authorities to assess the sufficiency of opportunities for play in their area regarding quantity, quality, and access. The guidance stipulates that children should be involved in this process and that 'play' includes both formal and informal leisure activities that appeal to the full under-18 age group (Scottish Government, 2023b). Play Sufficiency Assessments must be included as evidence in the land use plans created by local authorities—Local Development Plans. The Planning (Scotland) Act also provides communities, including children with the opportunity to create their own Local Place Plans, which must be considered when preparing Local Development Plans.

Several Play Sufficiency Assessments have now been produced in Scotland, such as Glasgow (Glasgow City Council, 2024), and East Lothian (East Lothian Council, 2024). The latter assessment was a thorough review carried out by Play Scotland, which included evaluating all existing play areas while critically examining inclusivity and accessibility for disabled children, alongside extensive discussions with young citizens. The impact of these assessments on policy implementation is still uncertain, but they now provide a solid evidence base for understanding children's play needs in different contexts, something that has not existed before.

Case Study: The Children's Neighbourhood Festival 2024

In 2023/24, APiC (A Place in Childhood) worked across Scotland to cocreate five neighbourhood plans with children and teenagers. We were driven by the range of policy initiatives set out above that, for the first time, enabled us to put forward a solid policy case for finding pathways to bring children's voices and rights squarely into town and community planning. As a result, we partnered with the charity - Paths for All - and the local government to identify areas with potential for impact, where we could test different engagement methods and approaches in various contexts. From this, we co-produced a Children and Teenagers' Neighbourhood Plan, which included maps, priorities, and the outcomes of joint discussions between children and adult stakeholders in each area. We also produced a 'How to Guide' for co-creating neighbourhood plans (A Place in Childhood, 2024) to help spread this work further.

These children and teenagers' plans are now being taken forward into a range of policy and action initiatives. Each local authority has its own approach and objectives,

but in all cases, these efforts contribute to ongoing community planning and serve as evidence for local development plans, and potentially, Local Place Plans. In Falkirk, for example children's identified priorities (see map below) are included in the updated Community Action Plan and are integrated into the efforts of other NGOs in the area working on local climate resilience and nature restoration projects. The local play park is also currently undergoing a revamp, with the design brief and final design impacted by the views of the local children and teenagers.

Furthermore, one of the priorities identified by children in Falkirk was to co-create a Children's Neighbourhood Festival to celebrate what matters to them. We secured funding to take this forward in September 2024, again supported by Scotland's progressive policies on children's human rights, play, and participation. The festival planning was also aligned with Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence (Learning Teaching Scotland, 2011), promoting key skills such as teamwork, creativity, and leadership. We adopted a Play Pedagogy approach throughout all stages, which is also officially promoted by Falkirk Council.

The festival allowed children to translate their neighbourhood plans into a celebration of community spirit. The young organisers chose the festival location, vendors, food, themes, and activities and took roles on the day to ensure everyone felt welcomed and the event was a success. The festival also provided a platform for residents to vote on future projects, underscoring the children's active role in shaping the neighbourhood's future.



Map Credit: Jenny Wood

An experiential map produced by primary school children in North Falkirk.



Boys playing with wheels.

Conclusion

Scotland's national policies on play and children's rights are driving real change, working to ensure that more children have access to play opportunities. It is also promising that play is increasingly linked with children's participation in decision-making. The introduction of Play Sufficiency Assessments as part of the planning system is particularly welcome. They will help to shape a broader understanding of responsibilities towards play in every area and translate into planning policy that better serves the needs of our youngest citizens.

There is still much work to be done due to the legacy of car-dominated environments, a wide range of environments children grow up in, an increasingly risk-averse culture, and entrenched (and growing) inequality across the country. While it may take time to achieve the progress outlined in the national play strategy, the growing number of positive examples is helping to drive and inspire further change.

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Photo credit: Play Wales

Play sufficiency duty in Wales:

How has it enabled planning for play at the local level?

Marianne Mannello

The author reflects on interrelated international and national play policy and explores the links between play sufficiency and planning in Wales.

Wales, one of the devolved nations of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, was the first country in the world to legislate for children's play. The Welsh Government has been committed to children's play since devolution when the Government of the United Kingdom transferred legislative power for self-governance to Wales in 1998. At the forefront of play policy in the UK, the Welsh Government published the world's first play policy in 2002 – the Play Sufficiency Duty. As with all Welsh legislation and policy regarding children, this too is rights-based.

The United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child's General Comment no. 17, which gives governments additional information, guidance, and recommendations on Article 31, encourages national governments to consider legislation to ensure the rights under Article 31. It advises that legislation should address the principle of sufficiency – all children should be given enough time and space to exercise their right to play. It also stresses that such legislation should recognise that creating environments that support children's self-directed activity is as important as the provision of facilities and opportunities for organised activities.

In 2010, as part of the Children and Families (Wales) Measure 2010 (CFWM 2010), the Welsh Government placed a statutory duty on local authorities to assess and, as far as is reasonably practicable, secure sufficient opportunities for children to play. This part of the Measure has become known as the 'Play Sufficiency Duty'.

The Play Sufficiency Duty

The Play Sufficiency Duty is part of the Welsh Government's anti-poverty agenda, which recognises that children can experience poverty in various ways. Play deprivation can affect children from all social, cultural, and economic backgrounds across Wales.



Photo credit: Play Wales

Play, Spatial Justice and Play Sufficiency

General Comment no. 17 states that "children play anywhere and everywhere." This contributes to the understanding that play is more than an activity in designated spaces and at designated times. This is acknowledged in the Welsh play sufficiency legislation, which recognises the need for both specific play provisions and the ability for children to play in their neighbourhood.

Importantly, General Comment No. 17 stresses that play is naturally spatial, so there is a need to build stronger links to spatial policies. At the heart of Planning Policy Wales is the principle of achieving well-being through placemaking. This principle offers an opportunity to think explicitly about how spaces work for children.

Additionally, Public Health Wales has issued a resource for supplementary planning guidance on Planning and Enabling Healthy Environments, aimed at supporting planning authorities in their Local Development Plans. This document explicitly talks about child-friendly neighbourhoods that can support play, in terms of specific play areas, streets that are safe and playable, and safe, active travel routes. At the local level, as local authorities prepare Local Development Plans, there is a real opportunity for them to make more use of these national resources.



Photo credit: Play Wales

In assessing both quantity and quality of the sufficiency of opportunities to play, local authorities must consider the nine Matters which are described in Wales – a Play Friendly Country (Welsh Government, 2014), statutory guidance :

Matter A
Population

Matter B
Providing for diverse needs

Matter C
Space available for children to play
- Open spaces
- Outdoor unstaffed designated play spaces
- Playing fields

Matter D
Supervised provision
- Playwork provision
- Structured recreational activities

Matter E
Charges for play provision

Matter F
Access to space and provision, including road safety measures, transport, information and publicity

Matter G
Securing and developing the play workforce

Matter H
Community engagement and participation

Matter I
Play within all relevant policy and implementation agendas.

Four small-scale research studies, commissioned by Play Wales (Lester & Russell, 2013 & 2014; Russell, Barclay, Tawil & Derry, 2019 &2020), have been undertaken since the commencement of the Play Sufficiency Duty. The studies draw together the successes and challenges facing local authorities in implementing the duty.

Leopard Skin Wellies, a Top Hat and a Vacuum Cleaner Hose: An analysis of Wales' Play Sufficiency Assessment duty (May 2013)

- Explores how local authorities responded to the first part of the Play Sufficiency Duty to assess whether their area provides enough play opportunities for children.

Towards Securing Sufficient Play Opportunities: A short study into the preparation undertaken for the commencement of the second part of the Welsh Government's Play Sufficiency Duty to secure sufficient play opportunities (2014)

- Looks back over the first year of the statutory play sufficiency process and forward to the commencement of the second part of the Play Sufficiency Duty.

Children's Right to Play in Wales: Six years of stories and change since the commencement of the Welsh Play Sufficiency Duty (October 2019)

- Explores the perceptions of how children's opportunities to play have changed since the commencement of thePlay Sufficiency Duty

Making it possible to do Play Sufficiency: Exploring the conditions that support local authorities to secure sufficient opportunities for children in Wales to play (July 2020)

- Focuses on the conditions that help local authorities in taking action in support of children's opportunities to play. It makes 13 recommendations for actions that can help local authorities meet their Play Sufficiency Duty responsibilities.

Across the studies, there is recognition that the Play Sufficiency Duty, regulations, and statutory guidance determine that:
"Play is not only an activity that takes place in discrete spaces and at prescribed times; it is not something that can simply be 'provided' by adults but is an act of co-creation that emerges opportunistically from an assemblage of interdependent and interrelated factors." (Lester & Russell, 2013, p. 1).

Ministerial Review of Play

Between 2019 and 2022, the Welsh Government undertook an in-depth and collaborative review of its play policy work. The review had two aims:

- To assess the Welsh Government's work relating to play policy
- To help the Welsh Government's work relating to developing and progressing the play agenda.

The review identified and analysed six key themes, including one which explores play as a matter of spatial justice. The Background Paper, which supports a Ministerial Review of Play notes that:

"The Play Sufficiency Duty has enabled local authorities to explore and address issues of spatial justice for children. Key partnerships are with planning, housing, highways, active travel, green infrastructure, open spaces, town centre managers, town and community councils, police and other professionals whose work involves the design, management and organisation of public space."

(Welsh Government, 2023a, p.27)

The Ministerial Review of Play steering group report calls for stronger and more explicit reference to the Play Sufficiency Duty in the guidance relating to spatial policies, including the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 20159 (WBFGA 2015). This could potentially make working through partnerships at the local level much easier.

In October 2023, the then Deputy Minister for Social Services responded to the recommendations in the Ministerial Review of Play steering group report (Welsh Government, 2023b)– the culmination of the three-year collaborative review of the Welsh Government's play policy work. In her response, the Deputy Minister explains how the Welsh Government intends to make the 15 recommendations set out by the steering group a reality – or in some instances - explore further. Implementing the recommendations will improve opportunities to play for children across Wales.

MINISTERIAL REVIEW OF PLAY THEME 3: SPATIAL JUSTICE

Key recommendation 7
Ensure the right to play is sufficiently incorporated into strategic policy instruments and decisions.

Key recommendation 8
Ensure that the principle of play as a matter of spatial justice is recognised and understood throughout Planning Policy Wales.

Key recommendation 9
Ensure that the views and experiences of children inform the ways in which neighbourhoods are planned and managed.

National and International Policy: making some links for play spaces

In 2023, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child released its Concluding Observations for the United Kingdom. Every five years, the UK Government and devolved administrations must report to the committee on their protection of children's rights. The committee then issues Concluding Observations, highlighting concerns, and providing recommendations for the State Party.

The Concluding Observations are published following a detailed reporting process, which includes receiving a range of written and oral evidence. In Wales, the Wales United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Monitoring Group gathered evidence through workshops and written submissions. Although the Welsh Government is still working on its response to the 2023 UK Concluding Observations, some links between the Ministerial Review of Play and the Concluding Observations relate to play.

The UN Committee recommends that measures be strengthened to ensure that all children, including disabled children, young children, children in rural areas, and children in disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, have access to accessible, safe, public outdoor play spaces. Like the Ministerial Review of Play steering group, the UN Committee also advises that efforts should be made to involve children in decisions regarding urban planning processes.

The spatial justice theme of the Ministerial Review of Play explored why and how the Welsh Government needs to make neighbourhoods and other public spaces more encouraging and welcoming for play. Discussions included key national policies that impact children's ability to play in their neighbourhoods and public areas. Key messages from the steering group include ensuring:

- The way children move around their communities for play is considered when guiding neighbourhood planning.
- The views and experiences of children inform how neighbourhoods are planned and managed.

Children's Voice

The Play Sufficiency Duty recognises that respecting children's right to play and upholding this right is linked to upholding other rights including:

- **Article 15 (Freedom of association):** Children have the right to meet together and to join groups.
- **Article 12 (Respect for the views of the child):** When adults are making decisions that affect children, children have the right to say what they think should happen and have their opinions taken into account.

Seeking children's views on their right to play is an important component of gauging how these rights are respected, protected and fulfilled. With Dr. David Dallimore, Play Wales has analysed surveys completed by nearly 7,000 children across Wales as part of statutory Play Sufficiency Assessments undertaken by local authorities in 2022 (Dallimore, 2023).

'I am disabled & use a wheelchair. Most places don't have good enough paths for my wheelchair so it's difficult to get out on my own.'

'There are a lot of children in my street and we are all good friends. My parents can see through the window and keep an eye on us.'

'It's a nice street not many people there, me and my friends like to just walk around exploring and we don't get into trouble.'

'The parks and skate park are really poor and unsafe. Adults are always shouting. It's really scruffy where I live.'
'Cars go too fast. I'm deaf and can't hear them.'

'It has been very difficult during Covid to be able to meet up with my friends. It made me feel very upset and frustrated that I could not make any arrangements to see anyone and I felt very lonely. I feel I have missed out on lots of things and new opportunities that could have happened, including trying new activities, making new friends and learning new skills.'


Photo credit: Play Wales

Other engagement with children indicates that their access to outdoor space for play and enjoyment differs across Wales, and this was heightened during lockdown conditions (Children in Wales, 2021). Those living in overcrowded or temporary accommodations often have little access to spaces for playing, compounded by the limits of their accommodation. (Russell, Barclay, Tawil, & Derry, 2019)

Concluding Thoughts

Through the General Comment, the UN Committee raises concern that children are not always considered in policies and practices that affect the organisation of public spaces and the built environment. Play is so closely related to wellbeing (physical, social and emotional) that almost all policy areas can have an impact on children's satisfaction with their opportunities to play but policy makers need to have access to information that supports good decision-making – including current and strong evidence from children.

There is no doubt that the Welsh Government has much to be proud of in terms of policy development for children and their play. Twenty years ago, the Welsh Government published the world's first play policy, followed a decade later by the commencement of statutory Play Sufficiency Duties. It is crucial that this internationally ground-breaking progress on behalf of children is maintained and nurtured. The work now for legislators, municipalities, planners and urban designers needs to be on a commitment to the continued implementation of inter-related play and planning policy and legislation.

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OPINION | ADRIAN VOCE

As a new play commission is launched, in this opinion piece the author writes about the lessons that can be learned from the pioneering Play Strategy of 2008-11.

Is it time to go back to the future for children's play in England?

A key aim of the new UK government, elected in July 2024, is to 'raise the healthiest generation of children ever' (Labour Party, 2024), but the initial assessment of the man tasked with scoping the challenge for health policy is not good. Lord Darzi's (2024) report on the state of the National Health Service in England concludes, 'There are real concerns about the NHS' capacity and capability to deliver high-quality care for children … at the moment, too many are being let down'.

A Historical Perspective on the Play Strategy and Its Impact

Those with long memories will have heard an echo of an earlier promise made by Labour's last Prime Minister, Gordon Brown and his close ally, Ed Balls, in Labour' s election pledge. In 2007, Balls restructured the former Department for Education and Skills to become the Department for Children, Schools and Families and announced the government's ambition to make England the 'best place in the world to grow up' (Balls, 2007). This recognition that the national government had a broader responsibility to children than just keeping them safe and educating them for the future led to the pioneering Play Strategy for England (DCSF/DCMS, 2008).

Fast-forward 16 years, and the former Children's Commissioner for England, Anne Longfield, and the entrepreneur and children's campaigner, Paul Lindley, have launched the 'Raising the Nation Play Commission' (Centre for Young Lives, 2024) with the explicit aim of proposing a new national play strategy to the first Labour government since 2010. Perhaps there are lessons to be drawn, for England and more widely, from the ambitious if short-lived plan of 2008, not only for specific public policy on children's play but for how strategies in public health, spatial development, education, and environmental sustainability can be made more effective by integrating better-informed perspectives of play and its role in children's lives and wellbeing.

The first Play Strategy was a bold 10-year plan to make England an exemplar of child-friendly planning by realising an ambitious 'vision for play', including that: 'in every residential area there are a variety of supervised and unsupervised places for play, free of charge; local neighbourhoods are, and feel like, safe, interesting places to play; routes to children's play space are safe and accessible for all children and young people' and that children and families 'take an active role in the development of local play spaces', which 'are attractive, welcoming, engaging and accessible for all local children and young people, including disabled children, and children from minority groups in the community (DCMS/DCSF, 2008)'.

Over its initial (and ultimately only) three years, the Play Strategy was supported by £235 million in new funding, supplemented by a £155 million lottery programme for play initiated in 2006. This significant investment was primarily directed towards building, renewing, and reimagining 3,000 municipal playgrounds (Shackell, Butler, Doyle and Ball, 2008). It marked an unprecedented commitment from the national government to enhance play opportunities for children.

But perhaps the more exciting part of the Play Strategy for those interested in systemic change for play in public policy was its requirement for local authorities who wanted



A boring Kit-Fence-Carpet (KFC) playground

Photo credit: Wajar/iStock



A nature-based, affordance-rich playground with loose parts

Photo credit: bankkgraphy/iStock



Photo credit: Pixabay



Photo credit: Pixabay

to access their share of the funding to create cross-cutting play partnerships involving planning, housing, streets and parks, to work together with play teams to produce long-term, area-wide play strategies. These groups were supported by a government-funded programme led by Play England. The aim was for local play strategies to become part of the broader children's and young people's plans required for the recently reformed statutory children's services. The significance was that planning for children's play, including playwork provision, was to become integral to both spatial planning and children's services commissioning at the top tier of local government.

The Decline of Play Provision and the Consequences of Austerity

Sadly, for children, embedding the Play Strategy (2010), the government's guidance to local authorities on how they should implement this vision barely saw the light of day. Soon after its publication in 2010, Labour lost the general election in the wake of the global financial crash. What remained of the Play Strategy funding was withdrawn, the long-term evaluation of its impact was cancelled, and the guidance documents were archived as part of the broadest and deepest cuts to the public sector since the Second World War.

With very few exceptions, play did not become an integral part of the strategic planning for local areas. Indeed, the general austerity imposed on local authorities and the withdrawal of central funding from the Play Strategy saw a steady decline in play provision in England. The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC) was moved to express its 'concern about the withdrawal of a play and leisure policy in England, and … insufficient places and facilities for play and leisure for children' (CRAE, 2016). The CRC noted that disabled and disadvantaged children were especially affected.

Advocating for Legislative Change and the Role of the Play Sector

One of the remaining challenges for play advocates in England is that there is no statutory duty for play provision beyond a broad requirement for schools to offer extra-curricular activities. The pioneering play sufficiency legislation of the devolved Welsh government, now being emulated in Scotland[1], is far removed from the 'back to basics' child policy introduced by the Conservative-led coalition in 2010, which conceived the Play Strategy as an example of the overreaching 'nanny state'. Play advocates in England must hope that a new Labour government will signal the return to a more progressive approach.

Play England is focusing its new strategy on a campaign for the UK government to follow the lead of Wales and Scotland by adopting play sufficiency into law for England. However, although the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH, 2024), the health play charity Starlight (2024), and others have echoed the Liberal Democrats' call for a return to a secretary of state for children, not just education – the structural change that opened the

[1] Health, education and planning policy – and therefore children's play – are powers devolved to the three smaller British nations, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These powers for England remain with the UK government in London, although some of the larger regions, such as London and Greater Manchester also have significant devolved powers, e.g., for planning and transport.

door for a play strategy in 2007 – there is no indication yet that Keir Starmer's government is moving in that direction. As Paul Lindley (2024) says, the 'unforgivable absence of a vision for optimising opportunities to play isn't being talked about'. Perhaps his play commission will shift the dial.

A key part of making the case for the Play Strategy in 2008 was an extensive literature review, commissioned by Play England. Play for a Change (Lester and Russell, 2008) examines, through a multi-disciplinary lens, the crucial role of play in children's lives and its major contribution to their resilience. It critiques how public policy has tended to respond, if at all, primarily from the developmental and educational perspectives and concludes that '(playing) gives rise to emotional and physical health, wellbeing and resilience, as well as laying the foundations for cognitive functioning and social competence' (Lester and Russell, 2008, 221). This was a major part of the evidence base that persuaded ministers for children, culture, and sport to intervene, as well as those for health.

This year, an update on that seminal work will be published. Playing and Being Well (Russell, Barclay and Tawil, 2024) adapts the relational capability approach of Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum (2011) to draw an even more compelling narrative of the connection between children's play, the social and environmental contexts that support it, and their holistic health and wellbeing; this time specifically in the context of the statutory play sufficiency duty in Wales and what is being learned from it about policy for play.

Renewed Calls for Leadership and a Comprehensive Play Strategy

The government's reasons for introducing a Play Strategy in 2008 – rising levels of childhood obesity and declining mental health in children and young people arising from sedentary, screen-based lifestyles and a public realm increasingly out of bounds to them – have only become more pronounced in the intervening years, accelerated by the pandemic. In looking for a persuasive narrative for a serious government play policy, maybe there is a clue in the fact that it is paediatricians making the call for cabinet leadership on children. With the NHS needing to become more genuinely a health service, not just a medical service – investing more in prevention, public health and early intervention – and with growing evidence of the role of play in mitigating the risk of trauma for children who are in acute care (Starlight, 2023), there is a stronger than ever argument, this time round, for the department for health and social care to take the lead on play.

Policy theorists (e.g., Crow and Jones, 2018) identify the importance of clear, relatable narratives that identify proposed solutions to widely perceived problems. Perhaps the most persuasive case for a renewed government play strategy is to point out that Labour's two most recent grand narratives for children, 'to be the healthiest generation of children ever' and to live in 'the best country in the world to grow up' are, in fact, interdependent. A cross-cutting strategy for play should be an essential part of a renewed vision for children's healthcare, overall health, and well-being.

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BORDERLINE PLAY: Policy differentials between North and South in Ireland

Alan Herron and Fiona Armstrong





The authors discuss the development of play policies across the island of Ireland in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. They take a comparative approach to differentiate between the policies of the two countries, both of which share a common goal for play.

The international community has acknowledged the importance of play and recreation in the lives of every child and young person, and it is afforded protection under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC,1989). The UNCRC (1989) is the first legally binding international instrument recognising human rights for children. At the state level, recognising the rights contained therein is the first step towards providing environments and opportunities that enable children to fully realise their right to play. To that end, state signatories create policies and strategies to support and realise the right to play and recreation, providing periodic progress reports to the Committee on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Fitzgerald Park in Cork, Ireland.
Photo credit: Guven Ozdemir/ iStock


Photo credit: scruplesnoregrets.com

Geographical Context

Ireland, an island located to the northwest of Europe, is divided into two political jurisdictions. The Republic of Ireland (RoI), to the south of the island, with a population of 5.15 million people, of which 24% are children (CSO, 2024), ratified the UNCRC in 1992. To the northeast of the island is Northern Ireland (NI), the smallest country in the United Kingdom (UK). With a population of 1.9 million, 23% under 18, the UK government ratified the UNCRC in 1991 (NISRA, 2021; Office for National Statistics, 2022).

Northern Ireland (NI): From Conflict to Stability

Perhaps best known internationally for 'The Troubles', a period of sectarian conflict that began in the late 1960s, Northern Ireland's journey from conflict to stability began in 1994 with the announcement of ceasefires from Irish Republican and pro-union Loyalist paramilitary groups (McKittrick & McVea, 2012). The impact of the troubles was significant at both a humanitarian level, with an estimated 3,500 deaths over its duration, and in terms of policy development—or lack thereof. This was in large part due to the system of direct rule government through which policy development and decision-making were driven by UK government-appointed Secretaries of State, who, given the impact of the conflict, focused primarily on security-related matters (Mitchell, 1999). Following the ceasefires, a series of political negotiations culminated in the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, which established the Northern Ireland Assembly, aiming to restore power to locally elected representatives (Arthur, 2000). While Northern Ireland has made significant progress since the dark days of 'The Troubles', the path to stability has often been uncertain. In the 25 years since its creation, the Assembly has functioned for only 14 years, with political disagreements causing periods of institutional collapse and resulting in inevitable policy stagnation (Northern Ireland Assembly, 2023).

The Troubles and Play Deprivation

By 1985, it was increasingly evident that instability, violence, and cross-community divisions were profoundly affecting children, particularly in terms of play (Connolly & Healy, 2004). Parental fears about children playing outside, combined with limited access to play spaces due to community divisions—both psychological and territorial—significantly restricted safe and accessible opportunities for developmentally crucial play. This was especially true in parts of Belfast, where physical walls separated communities (Smyth & Hamilton, 2003).

Increasing awareness of the detrimental effects of the conflict on play led to the founding of PlayBoard NI in 1985, now recognized as the leading charity dedicated to promoting play. The organisation's raison d'être was to advocate for the Right to Play whilst delivering practical action at the community level, helping to create safe, accessible, high-quality play opportunities that bridged the community divide and brought children together through play. Since the end of 'The Troubles', PlayBoard has



The refurbished playground in Merrion Square, Dublin is inspired by the novel 'The Selfish Giant' by Oscar Wilde.

remained dedicated to addressing the challenges children face in exercising their right to play. While some of these challenges still stem from the conflict and ongoing community divisions, others have emerged from the persistent social and economic difficulties affecting children and families (PlayBoard NI, 2014).

Delivering the Right to Play – National (RoI) and Regional UK (NI) Policy

The Republic of Ireland (RoI)

The Irish government, in recognition of the child's right to play, developed a national play policy, Ready Steady Play! (2004) and a National Recreation Policy for Young People (2007). The overarching vision was of a 'country where the importance of play is recognised so that children experience a range of quality play opportunities to enrich their childhood'.

Within the Irish government, multiple departments share responsibility for addressing children's needs across areas such as education, health, disability, equality, housing, local government, and heritage. However, no single department is clearly designated to oversee these efforts. This lack of clear accountability creates challenges in advancing children's right to play, as highlighted by the Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) in their sessional report to the UNCRC in August 2022.

The Irish government established Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) in each county to improve outcomes for children and young people. By fostering inter agency collaboration at local and national levels, with a focus on accessible play, these committees align with the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014–2020). They provide a platform for service providers

CHILDREN'S VOICES FROM THE 2021 SURVEY

"I have the freedom to play outside … and I feel safe in my community."

Girl aged 11 living in town

"I want to be able to cycle more and safely. I want to be able to play outside safely without my parents having to watch me."

Girl aged 10 living in city





Loose parts play in schools.

to engage in joint planning and coordination. These principles are embodied in the Republic of Ireland's National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF, 2014–2020). The framework unites government departments, agencies, statutory services, and the voluntary and community sectors in pursuit of its shared goals.

Raising awareness and understanding of the importance of play is essential to advancing any play policy. The "First 5, A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2019-2028)" and the "National Policy Framework for Children and Young People (BOBF)" share common goals for children and young people, which are supported by all government departments, agencies, statutory services, and the community and voluntary sectors in Ireland. These initiatives aim to enhance the effectiveness of existing policies, services, and resources, ensuring a unified national response for children and young people. The framework is underpinned by three key strategies: the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making (2015–2020), the National Youth Strategy (2015–2020), and the National Early Years Strategy (2019–2028).

Growing Up in Ireland (GUI), a joint project between the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO), is a national longitudinal study that tracks the development, progress, and well-being of children and young people in Ireland. The study includes children's perspectives on their lives and provides valuable data to inform the creation of effective policies and services for children and families.

In 2021, the Office of Children's Ombudsman (OCO) conducted an online survey asking children what they enjoy about being a child in Ireland. While many children highlighted positive aspects of their lives, a common response also pointed to what was lacking: opportunities for play and leisure activities, limited access to playgrounds and play spaces, and safety concerns, particularly regarding cycling.

Northern Ireland

With the establishment of the NI Assembly in 1998, PlayBoard embarked on a campaign aimed at securing a strategic regional approach to play[1]. This culminated in 2006 with the first Play Policy Statement for Northern Ireland, which emphasised the importance of play in terms of the development, and overall well-being of children, particularly in the context of a post-conflict environment (PlayBoard NI, 2006). Building on the 2006 statement, the Northern Ireland Executive introduced a Play and Leisure Policy in 2009, followed by an Implementation Plan in 2011. The aim was to drive targeted cross-departmental and cross-sectoral action in three key areas:

- Places and Spaces for Play
- Access to Play and Leisure, and
- Championing Play and Leisure with a focus on prioritising the child's right to play as a fundamental aspect of childhood (Northern Ireland Executive 2009).

Although the Statement (2006), Policy (2009), and Implementation Plan (2011) marked a significant policy milestone in recognizing the importance of play, a subsequent assessment by PlayBoard (PlayBoard NI, 2014) found that none of the key impact areas had progressed to a satisfactory



Fixed play area upgrade under play policy at Armagh Banbridge, Craigavon Council.



Den building within communities.

level in the years that followed. The core issue behind this failure was the absence of a lead department with clear responsibility for ensuring implementation and the lack of a built-in system for monitoring progress and reporting. Despite the well-intentioned nature of these developments, their impact has been negligible in advancing the child's Right to Play (Lester & Russell, 2010).

In the subsequent period, at a policy level, the focus on children's rights has shifted towards a broader approach aimed at establishing an overarching rights-based focus on children's services. This was most apparent in the Children's Services Cooperation Act (2015) and the Children and Young People's Strategy (2020-2030), both of which established eight common outcomes for children's well-being, the second of which is 'Enjoy Play and Leisure' (Children's Services Cooperation Act, 2015; Department of Education NI, 2020).

While it would be premature to assess the success of the Children and Young People's Strategy, given that it is still in the early stages of implementation due to delays caused by the Covid pandemic, the impact of the Children Services Cooperation Act has so far been minimal in advancing the Right to Play and its broader outcomes (PlayBoard NI, 2021).

Local Policy Approaches

Northern Ireland

If progress on developing and enhancing regional policies for play in Northern Ireland has been largely ineffectual, at the local level, a number of councils have sought to fill the regional policy gap by developing play policies and strategies that have at their core Article 31 of the UNCRC, the child's Right to Play (UNCRC, 1989). Supported directly by PlayBoard, these councils have developed play strategies that focus not only on improving the play value of fixed play parks through capital investment but also on enhancing access to play, increasing inclusive play opportunities, and developing community-based play programmes that do not rely on the presence of equipped play parks (PlayBoard NI, 2014). As a result, significant steps have been taken towards realising the child's right to play at local levels (PlayBoard NI, 2021).

The relative success of different play policies at the council level in progressing the right to play serves to further highlight the absence of a regional policy framework that would deliver a common approach across Northern Ireland beyond councils to include schools, youth services, health providers and community services (Lester & Russell, 2010). Outside of councils, in the absence of a regional play policy, the onus for progressing the child's right to play has fallen largely on the voluntary sector (PlayBoard, NI, 2014).

Republic of Ireland

Since its publication, the Ready Steady Play policy has faced challenges such as insufficient national play infrastructure, uneven development of play facilities, unclear responsibility for play, and inadequate funding. The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage (2024) issued guidelines for local authority planning focusing on people, homes and communities, and quality of life. Play is a key consideration within these



Young people from Dublin City Comhraile na nOg

policies, with plans for child-friendly and child-accessible built environments, additional playground provision, facilitation of active travel, provision of destination playgrounds (flagship/themed playgrounds), and amenity infrastructure for recreation. There is an acknowledgement of the recreational potential of the natural landscape across the country, which will be further utilised to support play and recreation opportunities for children and adults.

In the first National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision Making (2015-2020), the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Inclusion, and Youth established a national hub to give children and young people a voice in decision-making on issues that affect their lives, with a particular focus on those that are seldom heard. Comhairle na nÓg is a group representation of the child and youth councils in the 31 local authorities of Ireland, which gives children and young people the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies. The group provides formal submissions on local policies and participates in public consultations.

Children's voices from NI

In the lead up to National Playday on 7 August 2024, PlayBoard NI asked children and young people about the importance of play in their lives, what they like to do when they are playing, and what, if anything, stops them from playing as much as they would like to. The survey was completed online by 182 children and young people living in Northern Ireland aged up to 18 years old (PlayBoard NI, 2024).

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY INCLUDE:

- **90%** of children and young people said that play was an important part of their lives.

With regards to what children and young people like to play:

- 76% like to be active, and 57% enjoy wheeled play.
- 43% enjoy playing in natural spaces,
- 41% enjoy creating and making things during play,
- 38% enjoy hanging out with friends while 27% enjoy tech-based play.

When asked why play was so important:

- 85% said it made them happy
- 82% said play was fun while 52% said play was important for making friends
- 58% said play helped them stay physically active
- 50% enjoyed the opportunity play gave them to be outdoors in fresh air.

Regarding the factors that limit how much children and young people can play as they wish:

- 47% stated that they did not have enough time for play
- 33% said there were very few places for them to play where they live
- 31% highlighted that they had very few other children to play with in their area
- 26% highlighted traffic concerns, saying that increased traffic prevented them from playing in their local area and on the streets near their homes.

As part of the survey, children and young people were asked what could support them in playing more frequently.

- 47% said more time to play
- 46% highlighted the need for additional spaces or locations to play in their community, while 31% emphasized the importance of safer play areas.
- 28% highlighted a need for easier ways to travel and access spaces for play

Concluding Thoughts

While there has arguably been some progress towards realising the right to play at a policy level within both jurisdictions across the island of Ireland, significant work remains. At a national (RoI) and regional UK (NI) level, both governments have developed policies that have undoubtedly placed an enhanced focus on the importance of play, leading to increased

awareness amongst statutory, community and educational service providers. While raising awareness is appreciated, there has been a tangible lack of concrete impact and action at the grassroots level to strengthen children's right to play and improve access to play-friendly environments.

At the local level in Northern Ireland, councils have implemented more targeted policy interventions, driven by the absence of an effective regional play policy. This has led to substantial investments in both fixed and non-fixed play initiatives in some council areas. Despite such progress, the lack of a regional play policy in Northern Ireland has led to inconsistency of approach, meaning that for children, the degree to which their right to play is realised will be largely dependent on the area they live. In the Republic of Ireland, progress at the local level has been less pronounced. However, government departments are actively considering the provision of inclusive public play opportunities and improvements to the quality and safety of play spaces, which could be further advanced through dedicated funding allocations.

From a participation standpoint, the active engagement of children and young people has become increasingly apparent in both jurisdictions. Examples include consultative efforts in Northern Ireland to shape the Children and Young People's Strategy and the establishment of Comhairle na nÓg in the Republic of Ireland, which provides a platform for children and young people to participate in public consultations.

Despite policy gaps in both jurisdictions, recent years have seen a shift towards greater cross-border collaboration. Initiatives such as PlayBoard's support for developing council play policies and delivering play training in the Republic of Ireland, along with strategic engagement between play advocates on both sides of the border, demonstrate a united effort to advance the right to play. This shared commitment is highlighted by the partnership between PlayBoard and the National Childhood Network, which has resulted in targeted play program development in border counties and all-Ireland research exploring the ongoing challenges children and young people face in exercising their right to play.

[1] Authors note on the use of the term regional in the context of NI despite it being a devolved nation of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland: "As with many things in NI, the reason why the term regional is used rather than national stems back to NI's history of community and political division. As a divided society, there is arguably no one single NI national identity – the term regional is therefore used as a neutral term to avoid straying into inevitable debates that would arise about 'which national identity' a policy refers to."

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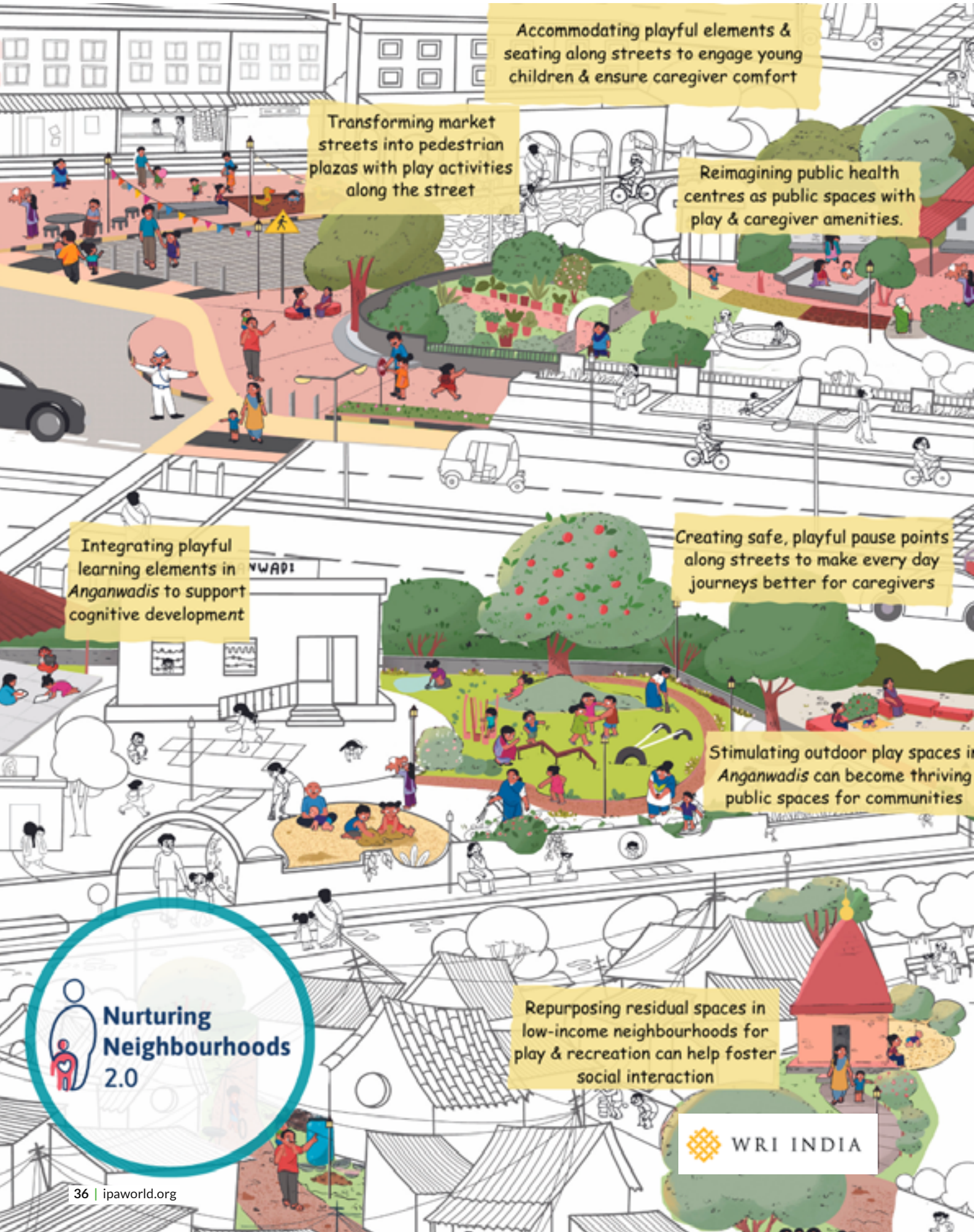
Accommodating playful elements & seating along streets to engage young children & ensure caregiver comfort
Transforming market streets into pedestrian plazas with play activities along the street
Reimagining public health centres as public spaces with play & caregiver amenities.
Integrating playful learning elements in *Anganwadis* to support cognitive development
Creating safe, playful pause points along streets to make every day journeys better for caregivers
Stimulating outdoor play spaces i
Anganwadis can become thriving
public spaces for communities
Repurposing residual spaces in low-income neighbourhoods for play & recreation can help foster social interaction
Nurturing Neighbourhoods 2.0
WRI INDIA



PLANNING FOR PLAY IN INDIA:

National Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge

Suhani Gupta and Madhura Kulkarni

In this article, the authors discuss the Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge in India, which uses urban planning to work in smaller cities to plan, implement, scale up, and sustain play opportunities for young children by leveraging the National Smart Cities Mission and by converging funds from diverse government programs.

The Crisis of Public Spaces for Children in India

India's rapidly expanding cities are facing a crisis of public spaces in general and insufficient local play spaces in particular. The master plans of cities, the only statutory urban plans in Indian cities, typically only designate space for parks, open spaces, and playgrounds as part of the land use plans they prepare. However, planning and design guidance for play provisions in public spaces are not sufficient. Implementing planned play provisions is often problematic due to unclear land ownership and contested occupations of land, the most contested resource in Indian cities. The problem gets worse when local governments allocate land for public spaces far from where children live to develop facilities for them. Morever, many parks and open spaces in Indian cities actively discourage play as these are perceived as peaceful restorative environments to be protected from the nuisance of children's play. When play is allowed, it is strictly defined and controlled through long lists of prohibitions (Chatterjee, 2022). Lack of accessible public spaces robs children of everyday opportunities for playing out and inturn hinders children's well-being and development.

Many parks and open spaces in Indian cities actively discourage play as these are perceived as peaceful restorative environments

Through its technical partners, NNC has adopted a three-pronged approach to create accessible play spaces.

Unlocking Land

Mapping, identifying, and converting underutilized government-owned vacant land into parks and gardens to create a city-wide network of smaller, strategically placed play areas within neighbourhoods.

Reclaiming Liminal Spaces through Design

Transforming leftover, informal spaces, typically known as liminal spaces, as identified within neighbourhoods, into play spaces. Through strategic design and community engagement, these reclaimed spaces are being revitalized to provide much-needed play areas for children.

Optimizing Existing Facilities

Integrating play within city parks, healthcare centres, and other government facilities for children, such as the extensive network of early childhood development centres (ECD). By optimizing such existing facilities within neighbourhoods, cities are increasing access to play opportunities without a significant need for additional land acquisition.

Despite national guidelines recommending 10-12 square meters of open space per person in cities, as set by the Urban and Regional Development Plans Formulation and Implementation (URDPFI) framework, large metropolitan cities like Bangalore and Mumbai fall short, offering only 2.01 and 1.24 square meters per person of open space, respectively (Ministry of Urban Development, 2014). A 2019 study by the National Institute of Urban



Photo credit: Indian eye/iStock

Only 16 percent of children can access nearby planned play areas in Indian cities.



Reclaiming underused spaces for play in a neighbourhood park in Warangal, Telangana.

Affairs (Gudgudee and NIUA, 2019) found that only 16 percent of children can access nearby play areas in Indian cities. Young children require a safe and stimulating physical environment to support their rapid growth and development. According to research from Harvard University in 2007, play is especially crucial to brain development for young children, as 90 percent of brain development occurs by the age of five, with meaningful neural connections forming in the growing body (Centre on the Developing Child, 2007). However, young children have limited independent mobility and depend on caregivers and mobility aids such as strollers and bikes that need safe, short paths to everyday play spaces. The lack of proximal play provisions near homes thus hinders young children's access to play.

Urban planning in India is starting to recognize the importance of public spaces. However, it needs to understand better the significance of having different play spaces for children of various ages and gender in close proximity and address the lack of planned provisions for children's play across Indian cities. To tackle these issues, specific strategies are required to ensure that high-quality play spaces are evenly distributed and easily accessible for young children within walking distance. The Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge (NNC) in India is a national initiative under the Smart Cities Mission, involving at least ten cities planning to create better play opportunities for young children in local areas using local area planning strategies (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, 2024).

Nurturing Neighbourhoods Challenge

The NNC is a 3-year initiative hosted by the Smart Cities Mission, Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA), Government of India. It is in collaboration with the Van Leer Foundation and with the technical support of WRI India. Launched in 2020, this challenge is a competition for 100+ cities nationwide and is a unique initiative. Often, the specific needs of young children (aged 0-5) are not recognized by policymakers or are grouped with the needs of older children. NNC emphasizes the urgent need to acknowledge and integrate the specific needs of young children into neighborhood-level planning to ensure that all young children have access to suitable play and learning environments near their homes (Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs, Bernard van Leer Foundation, WRI India, 2022).

The state governments typically undertake

Neighborhood-level planning to ensure that all young children have access to suitable play and learning environments near their homes



Residual space along a street transformed into a play space at Forest colony park, Kohima, Nagaland.

urban planning in India through their development agencies, as local governments lack adequate planning capacity. Still, designing, implementing, and maintaining play spaces becomes the responsibility of local governments that lack adequate resources for these functions or guidance to do the right thing. NNC is supporting cities by providing advice and inputs such as project identification and formulation, young-children-centric design guidelines, and stakeholder mobilisation.

Cities have adopted these strategies and are developing contextual plans for scaling play spaces. We discuss a few examples below.

KOHIMA

Doorstep play space in every community

Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, is a mountainous city in northeast India. It has a population of approximately 100,000 but is witnessing rapid urbanization. Kohima has retained its unique tribal heritage while embracing urban amenities and infrastructure, making it a vibrant and dynamic city. However, due to its hilly topography and the fact that most of its land is privately owned, Kohima faces constant challenges in acquiring land to develop parks and play spaces.



Naga hospital courtyard and waiting area enchanted for play in Kohima.



Photo credit:WRI India

A new play space in the heart of a marginalized leprosy community in Rourkela, Odisha.

But Kohima recognizes the importance of play in young children's lives and play areas close to homes and encourages caregivers of young children to spend more time outdoors, closer to nature. To implement this vision, the city has been working towards providing one pocket park in each ward by reclaiming residual spaces in neighbourhoods and developing them into play spaces, redeveloping schools and healthcare centres with exciting play spaces, reclaiming rooftops of public facilities and opening them to the public. Since most of Kohima's land is privately owned, the Kohima Municipal Corporation (KMC) engaged with local community members through workshops and forged partnerships with ward-level governments to identify potential sites for developing pocket parks in each ward. KMC sent letters to ward committees in all 19 wards, requesting they identify potential areas for development and explore financial collaboration. Subsequently, ward committees responded with identified land and are working with KMC and Kohima Smart City Limited (KSCL) to develop those into pocket parks. Kohima's strategy of co-creating pocket parks with the community has ensured that the community takes ownership of the upkeep of these places, resulting in high use by caregivers and children. This also leads to on-ground demand generation for play spaces in neighbourhoods, with communities collectively supporting the local agencies in their development.

ROURKELA

Equal play opportunity across the industrial city

Rourkela, in the northwestern part of Odisha, India, is a major industrial city with a population of 600,000. Despite its economic significance, about 55% of the city's households live in vulnerable settlements. Through NNC, Rourkela has improved play spaces in underprivileged neighborhoods by renovating Early Childhood Development (ECD) facilities and primary health centers (PHCs) and creating new public spaces. The city has identified and mapped existing public spaces and facilities that children use to prioritize them in development efforts. Rourkela Smart City Limited (RSCL) and the planning cell of Rourkela Municipal Corporation (RMC) have institutionalized this mapping process and are using it to enhance play spaces in 81 locations across the city.

In Rourkela, the Ruputola Slum has been transformed into a multi-functional public space, focusing on providing specific play opportunities for young children and women in this vulnerable community. The city created a cluster of facilities, including mobile libraries, play areas for children, and micro-community centers for women's self-help groups. This community-driven transformation was funded by various government programs at national and state levels, providing essential services for marginalized communities and renovating existing child care centers. The convergence of funds

Rourkela has established 'play' spaces and provided basic services in vulnerable settlements, including those housing the most marginalized communities, such as those with a history of leprosy.



A vacant land transformed into a government childcare centre with a play garden in a low-income neighbourhood in Indore.

from multiple levels of government has assisted the city in establishing play spaces and providing basic services in vulnerable settlements, including those housing the most marginalized communities, such as those with a history of leprosy. The process involved community-led construction of new child care centres or anganwadis and renovating existing ones.

INDORE

Network of green play havens

Indore is a bustling metropolis in the central state of Madhya Pradesh. It is known for its rich history, vibrant culture, and thriving industrial landscape. With an estimated population of over 3.5 million, it is one of the largest cities in the state. Indore has witnessed rapid development in recent years, with a focus on infrastructure, education, and healthcare.

Indore aims to develop a network of blue-green infrastructure across the city. Under NNC, they identified 500 parks across the city, promoting the use of natural materials to develop play spaces for young children. The city has created a plan to scale open spaces and play opportunities by converting government vacant land into parks and gardens, adopting data-driven mapping, and identifying potential spaces. City officials from Indore Municipal Corporation (IMC) identified citywide vacant land verified ownership and feasibility for development. They prioritised the conversion of government-owned lands into parks and play areas. During this process, they collaborated with and mobilized Resident Welfare Associations (RWAs) of all wards, inculcating a strong sense of ownership and making them custodians of protecting the spaces.

To support the establishment of these spaces, city-level programs such as *'Ahilya Van'*, which focuses on developing 400+ nature-based open spaces, and '*Umang Vatikas*' (Gardens of Joy), which aims to develop 40+ all-ability parks, are being implemented across the city. These open spaces create a conducive environment for young children and families to thrive in the city. Additionally, the city has established a carpentry workshop and allocated dedicated funds in the municipal budget of 2023-2024 to upcycle excess felled local wood for the development of age-specific, customized play equipment for public spaces. This sustainable model helps mitigate expenses and ensures a sustained supply of natural play equipment and materials for all the city's play spaces and public space projects. To institutionalize this approach, the city has created 'park design toolkits and checklists' for the city's garden department.

Sustaining and scaling play spaces created by NNC

Under NNC, 10 Indian cities are developing a promising approach to scaling and sustaining play opportunities for children (WRI India, 2023). The strategies that have allowed cities to succeed in their mission include:

■ **Setting up a Nurturing Neighbourhoods cell in each city:** A group of officials is responsible for coordinating, planning, and monitoring public spaces for young children across the city. The group includes representatives from different departments such as education, health, and horticulture within municipal corporations, the state Department of Women and Child Development, and the traffic police. The heads of the Urban Local Body and the Smart City lead the group. These cells are the main drivers of inter-departmental coordination and are instrumental in laying out a plan to create more public spaces for young children across the city.

■ **Strengthening Internal Stakeholder Capacity:** The NNC program provides technical capacity building, supports the design of pilot projects, facilitates city officials' exposure visits to other cities nationally and internationally, and shares data collection tools, design guidelines, and resources with participating cities. Through these trainings, the NNC program has sensitized and equipped over 2000 officials and 1000 frontline workers to address the specific needs of young children and caregivers.

■ **Building Partnerships and Strengthening Engagement with Local Stakeholders:** Involving community members, including caregivers of young children, early childhood educators, and healthcare staff in various stages of the project cycle has ensured that the projects are responsive to user needs and has enabled the community to develop a sense of ownership. This, in turn, has positively impacted the maintenance of the transformed public spaces. Over 7,000 young children and caregivers have been directly involved in the process through campaigns, focused group discussions, engagements, and capacity-building sessions.

■ **Leveraging convergence with other national, state, and city programs:** This has emerged as a critical strategy for cities to implement and scale interventions. For example, the city of Warangal leveraged budgets allocated under its 'greening fund' to scale parks and open spaces for young children and their caregivers, the city of Jabalpur leveraged funds under the National Clean Air Program to implement green open spaces, Rourkela leveraged state funds from the JAGA Mission (a slum upgrading programme of the state government).

The cities discussed in this article adopted data-driven decision-making processes to assess and plan for play spaces across targeted play-deprived neighbourhoods. The NNC experience demonstrates that local area plans are more suitable than city master plans for promoting play opportunities for local children. Master plans often focus solely on land use planning, whereas local area plans facilitate the creation of demand-driven, co-designed play spaces. This approach encourages communities to work closely with local governments, especially in smaller cities across India, to ensure the needs of children are effectively met. Going forward, the NNC cities plan to forge partnerships with various local organisations, including non-governmental organisations, and community groups and conduct play-based activities, events, and programs to build a stronger culture of outdoor play.

Involving community members, including caregivers of young children, early childhood educators, and healthcare staff in various stages of the project cycle has ensured that the projects are responsive to user needs and has enabled the community to develop a sense of ownership.

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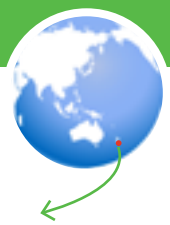
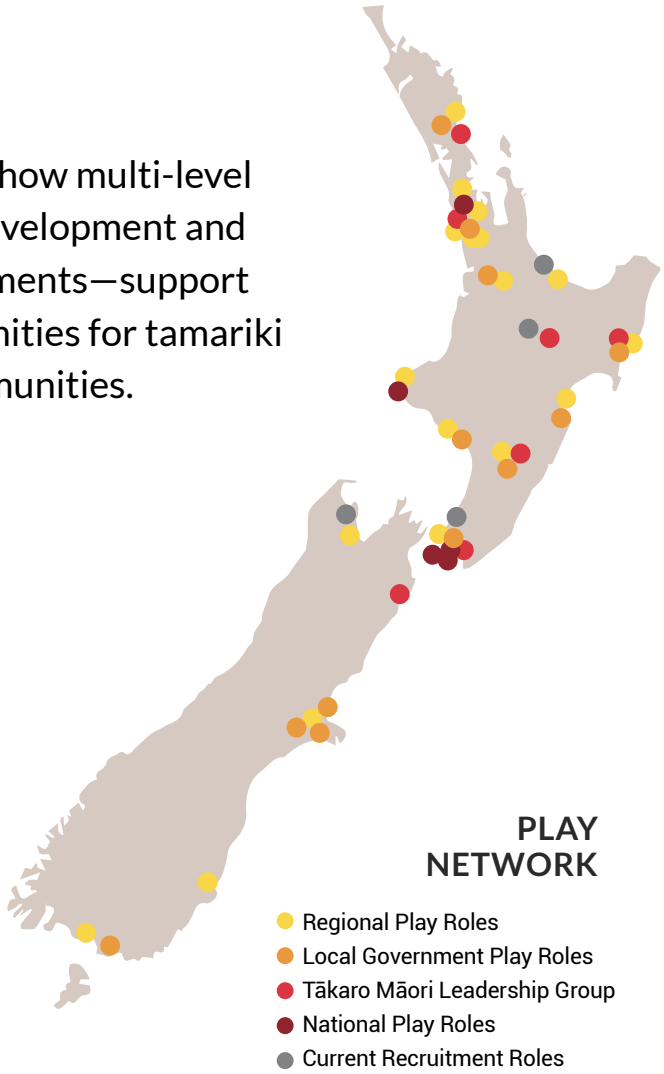


A MULTI-LEVEL PLAY SYSTEM IN AOTEAROA, NEW ZEALAND:

Enriching Community Play Opportunities

Scott Mackenzie

In this reflective essay, the author discusses how multi-level investments in play—including workforce development and partnerships with regional and local governments—support local area planning to increase play opportunities for tamariki (children) in their neighbourhoods and communities.



If you asked New Zealanders what their favourite play memory was, they could easily recall it and know what you mean by 'play'. However, it has never been as synonymous with 'sport' or 'active recreation' as it is today. Increasingly, play initiatives are receiving funding, and regional sporting bodies, councils and even major event organisers are incorporating play into their outputs. This is a direct result of the investment in play by Sport New Zealand, the governing body for play, active recreation and sport.

Play is essential for tamariki's physical and cognitive development, helping to build skills and attitudes needed for an active life. However, as tamariki grow older, they spend less time in play—19 percent less time playing alone and 6 percent less time playing with others—highlighting the need for systemic support (Sport New Zealand, 2021). In response, Sport New Zealand has developed a multi-level play system through a strategic pathway from the government's child well-being strategy, taking a whole-of-government approach that incorporates the National Physical Activity and Play Plan as well as the Sport New Zealand Strategy for Play, Active Recreation, and Sport.

The multi-level play system is in response to concerns that many Kiwi kids do not have the same playful upbringing enjoyed by previous generations, mainly due to reduced free time in which to play, more limited access to traditional play spaces due to changes in both the built and natural environments and lack of parental permission for independent mobility. To ensure young people have the best possible start in life and develop a lifelong love of community sport and physical activity, the play system embeds play champions drawn from different areas of government across five levels to ensure that play is considered cross-sectorally in legislation, policies and budgets.



Photo credit: Sport NZ Ihi Aotearoa

The five levels of the system are: 'Government Play System', where Sport New Zealand anchors a play plan linked to the strategy; 'Regional Play System', managed by regional sports authorities across 14 regions; 'Local Play System', organized through councils; 'Neighbourhood Play System', involving various community, neighbourhood, and school groups; and 'Family Level', supported by parents, caregivers, and other adult enablers.

A Unique Bicultural Context

It is important to reflect on the distinct and unique bicultural makeup of Aotearoa, New Zealand. Māori or Tangata Whenua (people of the land) have a word non-Māori have used as a literal translation for the word play: tākaro. Tākaro, however, encompasses much more than the English word 'play'. It is movement; it is connecting with the taiao (nature); it is a sport; it is active recreation; it is the act of kapa haka, to name a few examples of Takaro- it is uniquely Māori.

In the 1970s, Sport New Zealand had roles dedicated to play, but the focus shifted as sport and active recreation grew. In my role, I collaborate with others within the organisation, across government agencies, and in the private sector to elevate the value of play within Aotearoa. The first significant milestone achieved as part of having a dedicated play team at Sport New Zealand under my leadership was developing the first Sport New Zealand Play Plan. With a commitment to biculturalism and honouring Te Tiriti O Waitangi (the Treaty of Waitangi, New Zealand's founding document), the new play plan – Kia Hianga – was developed with a unique bicultural approach.

The name of this plan, Kia Hīanga, is inspired by the role of tamariki (children) in exploring boundaries through play. Hīanga is often associated with the nanakia (tricky), haututū (mischievous), curious, cheeky and fearless nature of play. These attitudes and behaviours are inherent in our tamariki and are vital as they learn their place in this world. Kia Hianga aspires to bring both worldviews of Play and Tākaro, fostering their simultaneous flourishing to benefit the tamariki of Aotearoa, New Zealand. Neavin Broughton and Nikki Penetito-Hemara are te ao Māori (Māori worldview) advisors and were key in shaping and designing this approach.

Developing a Play Workforce

The Play Plan led to the creation of two Play Consultant roles to pilot and prototype programmes that increase the awareness, knowledge and understanding of play at both national and regional levels. Sport New Zealand



Photo credit: Sport NZ Ihi Aotearoa

invested in dedicated play roles across their investment partners, the Regional Sports Trusts. This approach quickly expanded the regional play workforce to 18 people across the country, dedicated to delivering play in the regions and pushing for more local investment into play.

The Play Plan also supported the Local Play Workforce Project. The Tangata Tiriti (people of the treaty/non-Māori) arm of the project invested in dedicated Local Play Advocate roles within local councils. The Tangata Whenua arm of the project represented a unique investment in existing tākaro Māori providers, enabling them to collaborate and continue growing tākaro Māori across Aotearoa. These not only create opportunities for tamariki to be active but also provide an opportunity for tākaro to be ignited in a 'by Māori, for Māor'i approach by revitalising, reclaiming and restoring Māori language and customs. Today, we have 18 Regional Play Leads at Regional Sports Trusts, 18 Local Play Advocates at Local Councils and seven organisations specialising in Tākaro Māori as part of our growing play workforce.

Having a dedicated workforce who work uniquely in their own regions and within their own organisations, with another arm extending into the Sport New Zealand play unit, brings many advantages. As a governing body, Sport New Zealand invests in the leadership and development of the workforce to ensure that they are continuing to grow and develop their skills and share a

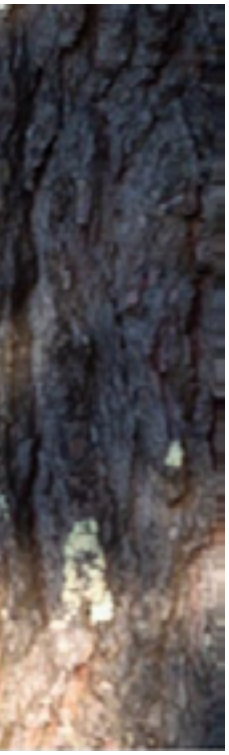




Photo credit: Sport NZ Ihi Aotearoa

common understanding of play. Sport New Zealand Ihi Aotearoa also hosts an online community platform to connect with the workforce that allows them to connect with each other, share insights, and learn from play/tākaro mahi (work) across different regions.

Neighbourhood Play System (NPS)

The Neighbourhood Play System is an exciting approach to urban play design that places the key stakeholder – tamariki – at the centre of the process. Through this system, tamariki can share where they play, how they play, and what prevents them from playing more at school and in their neighbourhood. Supported by Sport NZ, the Neighbourhood Play System brings together a school or kura, local organisations and community groups who work together to bring to life play projects that suit the needs of their tamariki and communities.

Through the workforce, a unique initiative was created, Neighbourhood Play System Reports. Neighbourhood Play System (NPS) Reports look at a local school and the area within a 500m-1km radius surrounding it to understand the play opportunities available for tamariki and whānau (family) in the neighbourhood. The need for this project arose from the understanding that children and young people today are much less active and less likely to participate in unstructured play.

With compulsory schooling between ages 6 and 16, the best place to offer play opportunities to tamariki and rangatahi is in the schoolyard. Through the NPS reports, we gain insight into the play opportunities at school and engage directly with ākonga (students) to understand what they like, dislike, or want to see around play. Casting a wider lens at the community enables evaluation of play opportunities for children outside of school grounds. This includes the safety of the streets, the number of parks and playgrounds within walking distance, the level of neighbourhood maintenance by local boards or councils, and more. Combining insights from both spaces allows for the creation of a neighbourhood portfolio approach, containing short, medium and long-term actions that can be provided to decision-makers in schools and local government to bring to life the aspirations for more playful neighbourhoods and schools.

Neighbourhood Play System (NPS) Reports look at a local school and the area within a 500m-1km radius surrounding it to understand the play opportunities

Click here to view all published Neighbourhood Play System Reports, or visit: *https://sportnz.org.nz/get-active/ways-to-get-active/play/the-neighbourhood-play-system/*



Photo credit: Sport NZ Ihi Aotearoa

Play Streets

Play Streets are a great way of ensuring community play opportunities. They temporarily restrict vehicles on quiet local streets so that tamariki, whānau and other residents can be active, socially connect, and play in their neighbourhood. These are small, resident-led, local gatherings held on quiet neighbourhood streets during daylight hours only. They are not publicly promoted events. The 'Play Streets Aotearoa Toolkit', developed by Sport New Zealand and Waka Kōtahi, the NZ Transport Agency, provides communities with the knowledge to successfully run a Play Street.

> *'I was new to the community, and this [play street] has fast-tracked my connection to the people in the street. As a single parent that is gold! My daughter feels connected with the children and we both feel safe.'* – Auckland resident

Focus on schools

The 'Play Friendly Schools' programme, in its pilot phase, is a collaboration between Sport New Zealand's play and education teams. It aims to educate the Healthy Active Learning (HAL) and Play teams at Regional Sports Trusts. Through 'Play Friendly Schools,' the HAL and Play teams can report on play within school grounds using a reporting and monitoring tool currently in design and prototyping.

The HAL and Play teams support schools by identifying unused spaces on school grounds and suggesting ways these areas can be used for unstructured play. The teams regularly engage with the teachers and school leadership to help them understand the value of more play opportunities within the school gates.

For instance, Sport Auckland's Healthy Active Learning team and Regional Play Lead, Matthew Johnson, worked closely with Onehunga Primary School to identify spaces that could be repurposed for play. Through this approach, they encouraged more risky play for tamariki, developed a school Play Strategy and transformed previously ignored spaces into areas for unstructured play, with the full support of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT).

Spaces throughout the school have been opened up for play, with many corners and crevices available to tamariki to engage in unstructured, child-led play without adult supervision. Working within a small footprint, the school had to be creative to make this happen. There is now a mud kitchen beside the school field, hula hoops and balls are available throughout the grounds, and the sandpit has been transformed into a pirate ship at the tamariki's request. Initially considering removing the sandpit, the school retained it after the children's input. Teachers report that allowing tamariki more freedom to play has reduced behavioural incidents during breaks, positively impacting learning outcomes in the classroom.

The approach to play at Sport New Zealand with the growing workforce has been primarily focused on schools and neighbourhoods within proximity to schools.

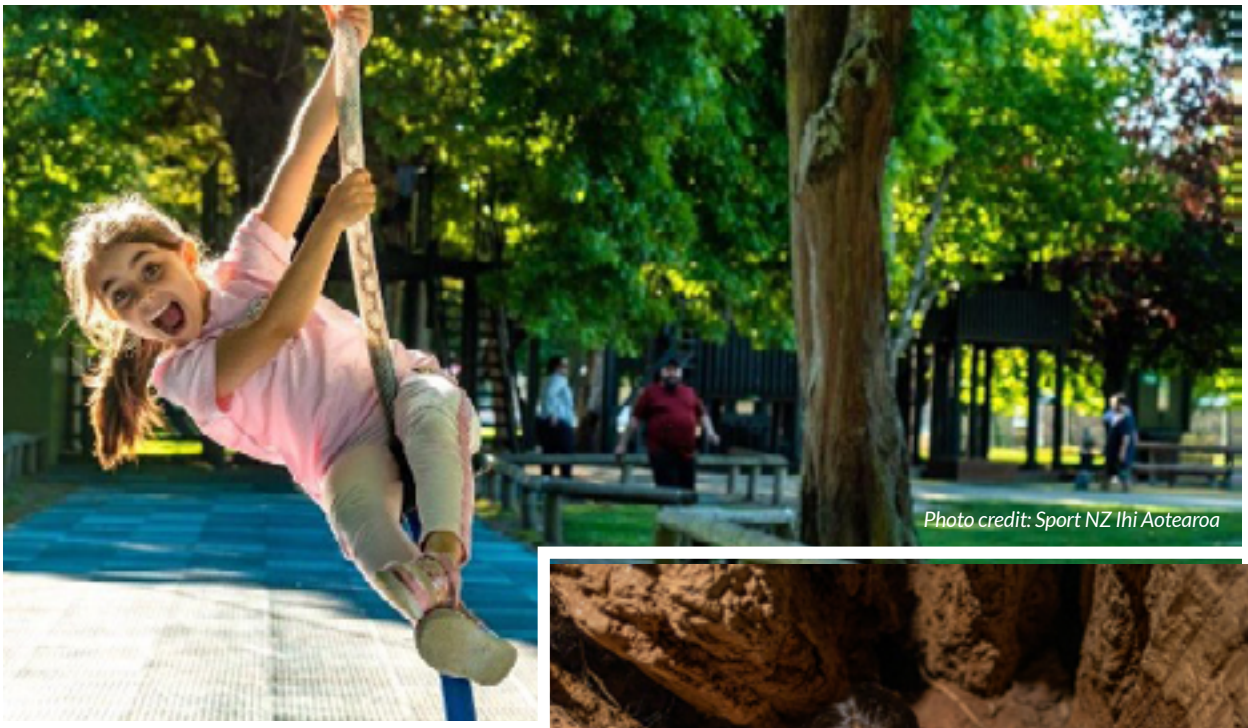


Photo credit: Sport NZ Ihi Aotearoa



Photo credit: Sport NZ Ihi Aotearoa

With Playback (an ongoing monitoring tool in the prototype stage at present) and NPS reports, real insights are gathered, allowing for the identification of trends across regions.

The two individual reports, one focusing on schools and one focusing on the neighbourhood, will combine to create a Neighbourhood Portfolio, which will enable decision-makers to make more informed, targeted investments into change. By combining these reports, we will build short-, medium- and long-term actions for better play opportunities within these neighbourhoods.

Concluding thoughts

Our regional partners and local governments play a vital role in shaping the environment and planning for play within our neighbourhoods. With Sport New Zealand's investment in a dedicated play workforce, we've seen a significant increase in play opportunities across the country, offering tamariki and rangatahi (young people) more chances to engage in joyful, playful experiences.

As the Tākaro Māori investment matures, we look forward to further expanding tākaro opportunities across Aotearoa. Whether it involves integrating play and tākaro into the strategic priorities of local boards and councils or collaborating closely with schools to embrace new play possibilities, our regional workforce remains committed to shared goals. Together with support from Sport New Zealand's National Play Team, we aim to foster a more play-rich environment for all communities.

The approach to play at Sport New Zealand with the growing workforce has been primarily focused on schools and neighbourhoods within proximity to schools.

Reference:
Sport New Zealand. (2021). *Active NZ: Spotlight on tamariki.* Wellington: Sport New Zealand.

International Engagements by IPA World in 2024

RENEWING COMMITMENT TO CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

100th ANNIVERSARY: In 2024, the world is celebrating 100 years of child rights since the 1924 Declaration adopted by the League of Nations.

To celebrate, a 2024 renewed commitment to children's rights was unveiled on 20 November by the City of Geneva. Co-signed by notable persons in a symbolic replica of the original Declaration, including the current chair of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, who has agreed to sign, and former chairs. The document is a new landmark in children's rights. IPA President Robyn Monro Miller was in Switzerland and was present at the time and represented IPA World at the signing.


Déclaration de Genève

(Adoptée par le Comité général de l'Union Internationale de Secours aux Enfants dans sa session du 23 février 1923, telle définitivement par le Comité exécutif dans sa séance du 17 mai 1923, et signée par les membres du Comité général le 28 février 1924.)

Par la présente Déclaration des Droits de l'Enfant, dite Déclaration de Genève, les hommes et les femmes de toutes les nations, reconnaissant que l'Humanité doit donner à l'enfant ce qu'elle a de meilleur, affirment leurs devoirs, en dehors de toute considération de race, de nationalité et de croyance :

1. L'Enfant doit être mis en mesure de se développer d'une façon normale, matériellement et spirituellement.
2. L'Enfant qui a faim doit être nourri, l'enfant malade doit être soigné, l'enfant arriéré doit être encouragé, l'enfant dévoyé doit être ramené, l'orphelin et l'abandonné doivent être recueillis et secourus.
3. L'Enfant doit être le premier à recevoir des secours en temps de détresse.
4. L'Enfant doit être mis en mesure de gagner sa vie et doit être protégé contre toute exploitation.
5. L'Enfant doit être élevé dans le sentiment que ses meilleures qualités devront être mises au service de ses frères.





IPA endorsed this Declaration and has its logo on the website. We will be circulating more information to members to support them in also endorsing the renewal of this commitment and raise awareness of it in the general community.



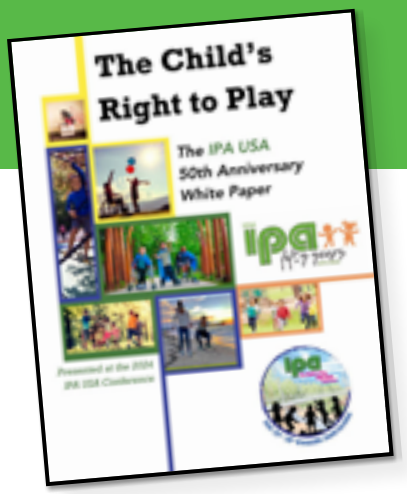
In June 2024, at our Triennial Conference, IPA World members voted unanimously to support advocacy for a UN Day of Play. To drive this ambition forward, the IPA World was part of a dedicated network of global organisations, play experts, and most importantly, children and youth, who called on UN member states to support the resolution for an International Day of Play. On Tuesday 26 March 2024, the UN General Assembly adopted this resolution and proclaimed June 11 to be celebrated annually as the International Day of Play.

Whilst for many, The International Day of Play will be a celebration, it will be more than just a celebration for IPA World and its membership. The International Day of Play will be for IPA World a catalyst for us to engage more organisations and governments with our mission and to share our vision of a world where play is valued and supported.The International Day of Play will be an annual day of opportunity to deliver key messages about the importance of play. Each year it will guarantee a spotlight will shine on play and the work being done across the globe. IPA World will use this opportunity to showcase powerful examples of play making by our members in every country. Our members will be able to use a day of play to introduce new concepts and ideas to families and decision makers at local levels, to demonstrate how play can be supported for every child. The Day will also provide an opportunity for people to see play as important in its own right.

We recognise that a challenge will be to preserve the day as one for play, play in its simplest and purest form, and not allow it to be hijacked by other adult agendas. Finally, The International Day of Play will also be an opportunity for us to hold ourselves and our local and national governments accountable - a time to reflect on the work that has been undertaken over the past year and what further action needs to be done. We welcome and celebrate the global commitment from the UN, partner organisations from both corporate and civil society organisations and from children and youth to promote play as fundamental to the health and wellbeing not just of our children, but for the global community. Our coming together as a strong and united force, sends a powerful message to the global community that PLAY is important and must be respected, preserved and protected for the global good.


IDOP 2024, India


IDOP 2024, Portugal



BRANCH ACTIVITIES: 2024 SPOTLIGHT

USA

IPA USA has published 'The IPA USA 50th Anniversary White Paper' comprising 57 articles by 59 authors across eight categories focused on the child's right to play.

These can be downloaded here: https://ipausa.org/whitepaper/





HONG KONG

Play right Children's Play Association, IPA Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong Institute of Landscape Architects partnered to host the Playful City Symposium on December 5-6, 2024.
A number of our IPA Members participated—**Sudeshna Chatterjee** and **Marguerite Hunter Blair** were keynote speakers **Mary Jeavons, Tim Gill, Hitoshi Shimamura,** and **Helen Dodd** were panelists on different sessions.
International Play Association (IPA World) proudly supported the event. Over 150 participants, including policymakers, design professionals, child development experts, health professionals, and community advocates, attended the conference.

THAILAND

On November 11, 2024, the Thai Health Promotion Foundation, in collaboration with the Let's Play More network, hosted **the opening event of the International Play Association (IPA) Thailand Branch.** The event featured a panel discussion on "Play, Heal, Restore Power: Helping Children Overcome Crisis—Play More, Play Now." During the event, participants from various child and youth organizations exchanged ideas and shared lessons about play. These insights will inform the future project designs and operations of IPA Thailand.







WALES

Play Wales celebrated the launch of their latest publication, Play and Being Well, a review of recent research into children's play, social policy, and practice, focusing on Wales. The literature review investigates the connections between play sufficiency and children's wellbeing. It draws mainly on academic research across a range of disciplines but also draws on professional, advocacy, and practitioner literature where appropriate. The review focuses on the role of play in children's wellbeing, children's play patterns, and adult support for children's play.

For more information about Playing and being well, please visit:

www.play.wales/playingandbeingwell

Play Wales is hosting four free Exploring Play Sufficiency webinars in early 2025. The topics include:

1) Introducing play sufficiency: why and how,
2) Play sufficiency at national level,
3) Play sufficiency at local authority level, and
4) Play sufficiency at neighbourhood level.

For more information see:

https://play.wales/events/



INDIA

IPA India member aProCh, an Ahmedabad-based community initiative that works on transforming public spaces into child-friendly zones keeping play at the center, won the Innovation Award at the 2024 Smart Cities Expo World Congress (SCEWC) held in Barcelona, Spain, between November 5 and 7.



In 2025, the Opentree Foundation (TOF), an IPA India member, has intensified its commitment to Play advocacy in India through impactful events driving dialogue and action. The year culminated with TOF's Play Summit on December 14, a landmark event bringing together over 150 educators, practitioners, and experts united by their passion for the transformative power of play in shaping children's lives.

IPA Membership Benefits

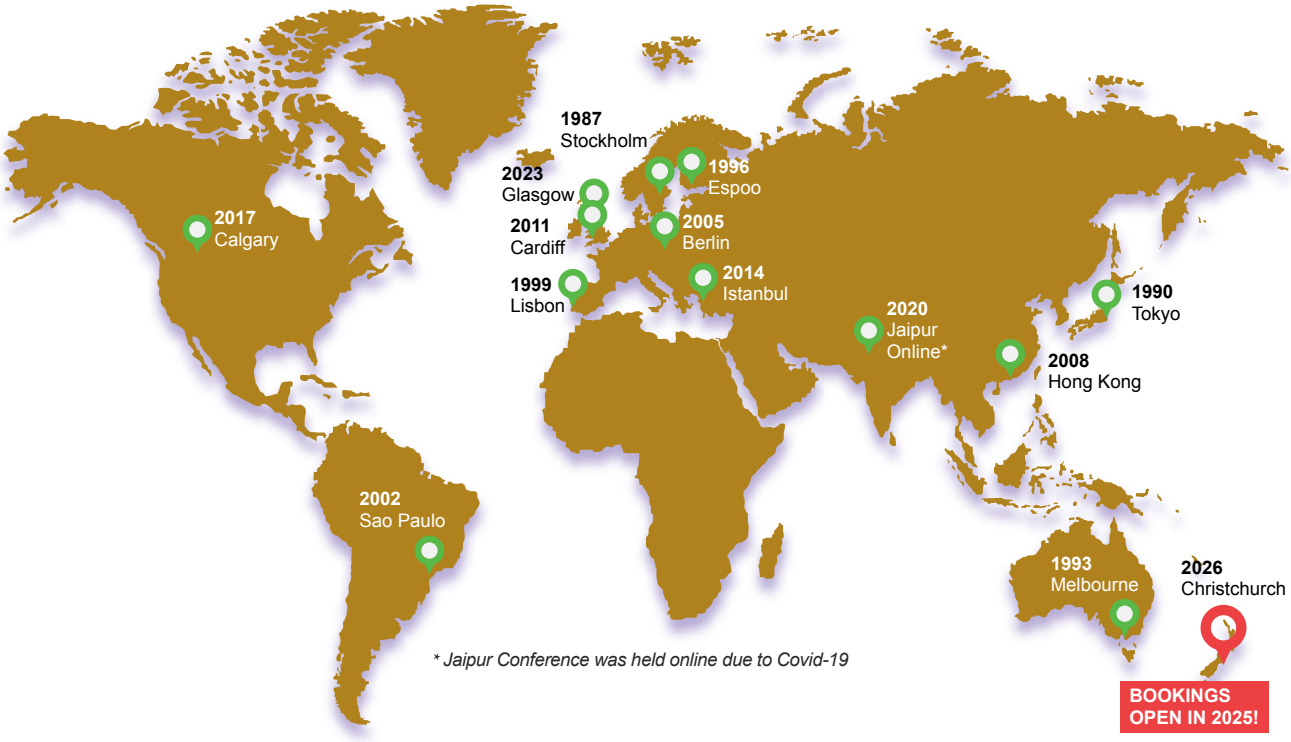
When you become a member of IPA, you will connect with a global network of passionate individuals advocating for the child's right to play. Additionally, you will have the opportunity to participate in global conferences and projects, and you can write for us and have your work featured in the IPA magazine.



IPA Triennial Conferences

Conferences are a primary means by which IPA seeks to fulfil its purpose of maintaining an international cross-sectoral forum to protect and promote a child's right to play, facilitate the exchange of experiences, disseminate information, and influence society. Every three years, the IPA holds a world conference. It is always a powerful and motivating experience with people engaged in creating a world where all children have the right to play and come together to learn from each other. **Members enjoy a discounted rate to participate.**

Previous IPA Triennial World Conferences have been held in the following countries.



** Jaipur Conference was held online due to Covid-19*



IPlay Rights Magazine

The Play Rights is a multi-disciplinary, online, print-on-demand magazine published by the International Play Association (IPA). It highlights the importance of play in child development and disseminates knowledge on the child's right to play by connecting the worlds of research, policy, and practice. The current board is committed to publishing two high-quality issues per year showcasing distinct viewpoints on children's right to play and varied approaches embedded in diverse cultures, disciplines, and regions worldwide. **The magazine is circulated for free among all financially viable members of IPA.**



Webinars

Did you know that IPA World has its own YouTube Channel? You can catch our latest recorded webinars at https://www.youtube.com/@internationalplayassociati5755

In 2025, starting February 12, we will host free member webinars on the second Wednesday of each month. These **"Webinar Wednesdays"** are wonderful opportunities for members to share their projects, research, and the latest initiatives.

Sessions are one hour long and start at 12 p.m. London time.
Do you have a presentation or idea for a webinar? Email us your bio and a brief 200 summary of the topic you want to share secretary@ipaworld.global

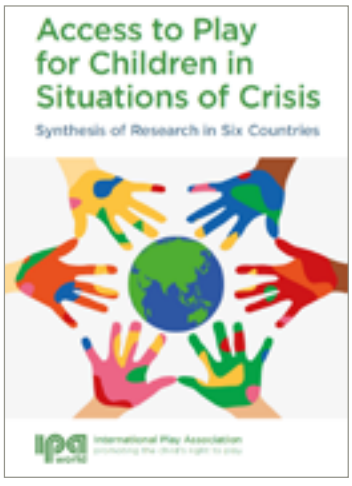


Special Projects

IPA undertakes special projects to deepen our understanding of Article 31 and play as a child right. IPA branches, members, and trustees participated alongside invited experts in many significant projects.

• **General Comment No. 17 on Article 31 of the UNCRC:** In 2013, the IPA reached a significant milestone when the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted the General Comment (GC) on Article 31 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). **IPA spearheaded the GC-17 effort and positioned the forgotten right of children, the right to play, more centrally within the fuller context of the UNCRC for the benefit of States Parties worldwide and increased opportunities for its compliance.** IPA Executive and Council are currently reviewing how countries have used the document and preparing a report on recommendations for further action to support the use of the General Comment to inform and educate the community and policymakers on implementing Article 31. A formal report will be released in early 2025.

• **Access to Play in Crisis:** IPA shared the Committee on the Rights of the Child's concern that in situations of conflict or disaster, the child's right to play is often given lower priority than the provision of food, shelter, and medicines despite play being crucial to children's well-being, development, health, and survival. In 2016, the **IPA engaged in an international research project called Access to Play in Situations of Crisis in India, Japan, Lebanon, Nepal, Thailand, and Turkey** to address the gaps in knowledge and programming for promoting children's right to play in situations. **IPA also developed the Access to Play in Crisis (APC) tool kit to provide a practical document for those who work with children in challenging circumstances or situations of crisis** (humanitarian, natural, and man-made disasters) to support children's opportunities for play. Our national IPA branches and members participated in both APC projects.



Warming up for IPAChristchurch2026 in the Asia Pacific!

The First Asia Pacific Conference Melbourne, June 25-27, 2025

With the world set to land on our Asia Pacific doorstep in 2026, we are getting organised and hosting a halfway conference in 2025 to ignite and inspire interest in play and how we can effectively implement Article 31.



The inaugural **IPA World Asia Pacific Conference on Play** will be a significant event in Melbourne, Australia. It will unite various stakeholders from the region to explore the impact of play. Participants, including government representatives, NGOs, educators, and health professionals, will exchange ideas and develop strategies to emphasise the essential role of play in fostering healthy human development and vibrant communities.

THE CONFERENCE GOALS WILL BE:

- To raise the profile of play and its importance for healthy children and communities in the Asia Pacific.
- To provide an opportunity to showcase and learn from the play initiatives in the Asia Pacific
- To influence and educate policymakers and government decision-makers across the Asia Pacific and provide an opportunity to build networks and partnerships between our governments to influence policy around play.
- To expand the IPA World membership base in the Asia Pacific, particularly with engaging countries not already included in IPA.
- To increase profile and interest in participation and sponsorship opportunities for the IPA World in Christchurch, NZ, in November 2026.

Keynote speakers and panellists, comprising leading experts and passionate advocates from various fields, will illuminate the latest research and trends in play-based initiatives. These sessions are designed to challenge conventional thinking, stimulate dialogue, and inspire action, empowering participants to become champions of play in their respective domains. Topics will range from the role of play in early childhood education and urban planning to its impact on mental health and community building.

Contact **ceo@playaustralia.org.au** for more information or to express interest in attending.
Check out the website **https://nscevents.com.au/ipa-asia-pacific-play-conference-2025**



IPA 2026 WORLD CONFERENCE

At Christchurch, New Zealand



You are invited!!

A message from **Shyrel Burt**
President of Play Aotearoa

"We're looking forward to you joining us for five days to hear about play, learn about play, play, and participate in a programme of social and cultural events. We have a unique play environment here in Aotearoa, New Zealand. We enjoy playing in bare feet in the bush and at the beach, and we love the outdoors, and all things play. Our play sector is on a journey of change and discovery, and we're ready to share it with you. We can't wait to see you and hear what you've been doing since Glasgow last year. We will release submission and booking dates in early 2025.
Save the date in your diary now, and we look forward to seeing you in November 2026!"

Play Aotearoa is excited to invite you to Christchurch, New Zealand, for the IPA World Triennial Conference from **Monday, November 2, to Friday, November 5 2026.**

Days one to four will be held at **Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre** in central Christchurch, and day five will be field trips in the Christchurch area.



international play association

promoting the child's right to play

ipaworld.org