

# P4PLAY: RESEARCHING PEOPLE, PLACE, POLICY and PRACTICE for PLAY from the LENS of OCCUPATIONAL SCIENCE

## Oh' The Places You'll Go: Adventures Outdoors and in Digital Playgrounds

Fiona Loudoun, Ines Wenger, Supervisors: Dr Bryan Boyle, Prof Maria Larsson-Lund, Dr Maria Prellwitz, Dr Helen Lynch, Prof Christina Schulze

These two projects are anchored in the concept of PLACES exploring children's participation in play in digital spaces and the design of community play spaces incorporating universal design and natural elements.

### Background

The P4Play Marie Skłodowska-Curie (MSC) Training Network is an innovative European Joint Doctorate (EJD) programme in Occupational Science for Occupational Therapists. This EJD was established in 2020 when 2.2 m was awarded to a consortium of researchers and play advocates, in the highly competitive Horizon2020 scheme. P4play is a collaboration between 4 academic universities in Ireland, Sweden, Scotland, and Switzerland, and 15 partner organisations in Europe and the USA. The P4play programme adopts a child's rights-based perspective and aims to investigate the nature of play through the lens of People, Place, Policy and Practice (P4Play). A refocus on play as a right requires further study as a central concern (or occupation) in children's lives. Occupational Science, a science dedicated to the study of humans as doers or as occupational beings, offers a unique lens to explore play as an occupation.

### Introduction

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen one of the most significant shifts in digitalisation with the accessibility of technology and digital devices. As a result, children are increasingly playing in digital spaces; using computers, tablets, smart phones or game consoles to engage in a variety of play occupations (1). Despite the social discourses that exist there is a coherent lack of research to understand the occupation of play in digital spaces from the perspective of children.

Nevertheless, children still report outdoor play spaces are one of the most important play environments for them (2). However, not all these outdoor play spaces are accessible and usable for all children. As a result, children with disabilities are often excluded from playing and meeting friends in playgrounds (3, 4). Thus, there is a need for inclusive play spaces that embrace the needs and wishes of children with and without disabilities.



### Methodology

The centrality of participation is acknowledged by positioning children as active and agentic individuals with a right to engage in play (4). By conceptualising children as the holder of rights, participatory methods will be utilised throughout the research to explore children's experiences and subjective understanding of play outdoors and in digital spaces.

#### Play in Digital Spaces

A scoping review will be initially conducted to identify and examine the literature exploring children's perspectives of play in digital spaces for children from infancy through to adolescence. This research will consist of 3 participatory studies which will involve children across the trajectory of childhood. Age appropriate methodologies such as observation, photo-elicitation interviews, and storyboard collage groups will be used throughout data collection.

#### Play in Outdoor Play Spaces

This research will consist of four studies, investigating the perceptions of playground users (children with and without disabilities aged 7-12 years and their parents), playground builders (e.g. architects, landscape architects), and experts of Universal Design regarding inclusive playgrounds through multiple methods (interviews, focus groups, observations, Delphi study). A synthesis of qualitative evidence will be conducted to investigate children's perceptions of factors enhancing play value and inclusion on outdoor play spaces.

### Results

#### Play in Digital Spaces

An increased understanding of the occupational characteristics of digital play will inform a continued examination as to how participation for children can support health and wellbeing. New knowledge and understanding will be generated to explore the form, function and meaning of play in digital spaces from an occupational perspective.

#### Play in Outdoor Play Spaces

The research aims to contribute to the understanding of inclusion on play spaces and the perceptions of inclusive playgrounds from builders and users. Furthermore, it should contribute to the understanding of how Universal Design could be applied to outdoor play spaces.