



## ARCHITECTURE TO CHILDREN 2018 conference

### Child and the City/Play spaces

Play is essential for children's development. Through play, children learn about themselves and the world around them. **To a large extent the quality of play depends on the quality of the environment where it takes place.** The way children use public space has changed radically in recent years. Not a long time ago, it was natural for children to spend all afternoon outside. Nowadays their time is more organized; children are involved in numerous after school activities and also they spend more and more time by their computers.

A city nowadays tends to isolate children to designated places which are very often **prefabricated children playgrounds**. These are mostly fenced lots with a typical sandpit and several manufactured play elements, which are very often placed without a proper concept. Very often they lack natural and loose play elements. These places offer limited flexibility and creativity and usually children do not enjoy such spaces in a long-term.

More quality play as well as social and educational potential for children (and not only for children) is achieved by **custom made play spaces**. These **respond better to the needs of local users and at the same time they follow and adjust to the existing surroundings in a more suitable way.** In order to use the potential offered by play spaces, it is desirable **to design them by professionals in cooperation with children, youth and all local communities.** While doing so, one needs to focus on creating such recreational spaces where not only children of different ages and abilities but also members of different generation can find desirable activities (the so-called Shared space).

The process of design and realization of play spaces in the Czech Republic is **governed by CSN EN 1176 European playground Standard.** This Standard was put together as a set of recommendations and measures derived from good practice and it undoubtedly contributed significantly to reduction of serious accidents on playgrounds. The goal of the Standard was never to suppress child's play and creativity, which is unfortunately a side effect of its mechanical enforcement. In the foreword to CSN EN 1176 Standard **the need for balance between safety and play offer for play spaces** is emphasized. Play spaces should always **offer an appropriate level of challenge and stimulation to its users.**

In the Czech Republic, Standards (and thus safety) have become the sole measure applied on play spaces and individual play elements too often. The concept of **Risk-Benefit Assessment**, used actively in western Europe, declares the need of taking into account the risks while recognizing the benefits to children and young people of challenging play experiences.

**Schematic interpretation of Standards**, without holistic evaluation of a specific situation, **often makes it more complicated or prevents the origin of new inspirational play spaces**, beneficial for healthy development of children.

**Communication is currently missing** between those who fund children playgrounds, creative people who design them, experts who deal with Standards and specialists who deal with child's play. And above all, **the users of play areas, children, are not involved** in the process of creation of play spaces.



**2nd year of Architecture to Children conference's goals are the following:**

- To bring attention to **the significance of child play outside** – its benefits for children's development.
- To bring attention to the fact that **play spaces are an important part of** city infrastructure. They should be designed in a way to fit well into the specific surrounding and at the same time to serve well to their purpose, i.e. children's play. It is therefore **desirable for them to be designed by experts**.
- To show that **custom-made play spaces** have in comparison with common prefabricated outdoor playgrounds **greater social, play and also educational potential**. They can also better **respond to the needs of local community and at the same time to follow the existing environment**.
- To encourage **participation of end users – children, youth and all communities** – in the process of creating play spaces and play elements.
- To highlight the fact that parks and in particular school grounds are often one of a few opportunities of city children to be **in regular contact with natural environment**.
- To point out the need of designing public space and play spaces, where **not only children of various ages find their use but also members of different generations** (from toddlers to seniors) - the so-called Shared space.
- To promote the **application of Risk-Benefit Assessment**, which enables wider evaluation of the play area at stake not only in terms of its compliance with the standards but also in terms of its play value.
- To introduce **news in updated EN CSN 1176 Standard**, which comes into force from October 2018.
- And last but not least **to induce inter-disciplinary discussion of individual subjects which deal with child's play and play spaces. The goal is the formulation of a common long-term vision**, which will lead to gradual improvement in the process of design, realization, maintenance and inspection of play spaces to serve best to their users, i.e. children. **The vision will be drafted in a form of Declaration**.

**Guests from abroad who will help us significantly with these goals:**

**Helena Menezes** is General Director at H.Menezes Risk Vision. Consultant and trainer in child safety, risk assessment of built environments and their impact on health and inclusion; European Consumers (ANEC) representative in the European standardization committee for playgrounds since 2000.

In her trainings Helena demonstrates how European playground Standards can be a useful tool for risk management when designing play spaces, throughout their whole life cycle, from pre-design stage until post-occupancy, allowing for free and challenging play in inclusive and safer environments.

**Nicola Butler** is the Director of Hackney Play Association, a children's charity that runs 3 adventure playgrounds in disadvantaged parts of East London. Adventure playgrounds originated in Scandinavia and are based on the idea of providing children with scrap materials that they can play however they choose, using their imaginations. Hackney Play Association also runs the Hackney Play Streets project, supporting residents to have temporary road closures for children to play in the street.



**Tim Gill** is an independent scholar, writer and consultant based in London, UK. He is a global advocate for children's freedom to play and explore, and for a balanced approach to risk in childhood. His work cuts across education, child care, recreation, planning and urban design. It speaks to decision makers, academics, commentators, practitioners and the wider public. The New York Times described Tim's 2007 book *No Fear: Growing up in a risk-averse society* as "a handbook for the movement for freer, riskier play." In 2017 he was awarded a fellowship from the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust to study child-friendly urban planning in Canada and Europe.

Tim holds degrees in philosophy and psychology from Oxford and London Universities, and an honorary doctorate from Edge Hill University. A former director of the Children's Play Council (now Play England), in 2002 he was seconded to Whitehall to lead the UK government's first comprehensive review into children's play.

**Elger Blitz** is founder, and senior designer at Carve. He got involved in designing playgrounds in the early nineties, which gives more than 25 years of experience in relevant projects in public space.

His cross-disciplinary and renewing approach to designing urban spaces from the perspective of play has proven to anticipate on actual demands and trends, with a result that extends beyond the relevance for urban spaces for children and youngsters alone.

He handles design tasks in a very integral manner, switching easily between different scales and disciplines. His unconventional approach and distinctive ideas on designing for kids and teenagers makes him a guest lecturer at different universities in the Netherlands and abroad.

**Julien Richter** is carpenter, founder of Richter Spielgeräte GmbH company which has been on the market for more than 50 years. He developed his company from a "little carpentry" to one of the leading playground equipment manufacturers worldwide.

From the 70ies on he was involved in actually every development of playground safety standards, first in Germany, then in Europe. The Commitment for the children was always his mantra when being part of or leading the committees for developing the standards (first DIN7962, then the European wide harmonized EN1176 and 1177). "As much play value as possible - as much safety as needed" is one of his favourite sayings.

As chair of the CEN committee TC136 SC1 he achieved an acceptance for the consideration of "safety in a different way" which means: Not just regarding technical rules literally from written standards but having a deeper look into the risks.

**Harry Harbottle** has experience of working at a high level in statutory, voluntary and private sectors so he is well placed to understand the benefits and frustrations of working in all three when it comes to generating quality public places.

For 20 years he was appointed as an expert to the European Commission in consumer safety and child safety, sitting as an independent member of the European Standards Organisation (CEN) technical committee on the safety of playground equipment. He is also a co-author of a guide to the European Standard for the Safety of Playground Equipment. He more recently sat on a CEN working group looking at playground safety in relation to children with special needs.

In Scotland Harry has his own company, CATE Consultancy. He co-authored the book "Free to Play - A guide to creating accessible and inclusive play spaces". He is currently the chair of Play Scotland, a national organisation lobbying on the child's right to play.



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The conference is planned to be a two-day event.

These will be filled with lectures of selected professionals that will introduce different viewpoints of child's play and play spaces. The objective is to involve different subjects participating in the whole life cycle of play areas from design and planning through approval, realization, maintenance and use. During the second day there will be time for a **panel discussion with speakers and participants in the conference where more into depth topics will be discussed**. The result should be a greater mutual understanding of standpoint of individual parties and starting their further communication and cooperation.

**A memo will be drafted at the end of the** conference, whose goal will be to contribute to gradual improvement and a more efficient process of design, realization and inspection of play spaces in the Czech Republic.

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