

# Making Space for Play in European Cities

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## **Outline of Presentation**

Introduction

A cautionary tale: *The Emperor's New Clothes*: a reminder for adults!

More than just a playground: the importance of play in children's lives

Play on the *Cities for Children* agenda: blueprint or red herring?

*Strengths*

*Potential strengths*

*Weaknesses*

Five goals for European cities

*What we should strive for 1: embrace diversity*

*What we should strive for 2: space standards*

*What we should strive for 3: design*

*What we should strive for 4: playFULL space*

*What we should strive for 5: playful cities*

Conclusion

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## **Reference**

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## Introduction

This paper aims to contribute to the debate on how to achieve child and youth friendly cities in Europe. The European City Network has drafted a *Cities for Children* strategy, in which an aim for play is articulated. The Network has also convened a Working Group to examine housing and outdoor activities.

This paper starts with a cautionary tale. Hans Christian Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes* is used to remind adult readers of the wisdom of children and the value of engaging children directly when planning for play. The importance of play in children's lives is often underestimated and thus the second section of this paper clarifies the nature of play and explains why play matters to all concerned with children. Attention then turns to the draft strategy of *Cities for Children*; strengths, potential and weaknesses are identified in the strategy as it pertains to children's play. Finally, it is argued that European cities should strive to achieve five goals if they are to realise their ambition of providing play opportunities befitting of a child and youth friendly city.

### **A cautionary tale: the Emperor's New Clothes: a reminder for adults!**

*The Emperor's New Clothes* is the story of a vain Emperor who is tricked by two crooks, Guido and Luigi Farabutto (Andersen, 1837). The crooks claimed that they could weave cloth so fine that the clothes which were made of it would be invisible to those without the wearer's intelligence, education and wisdom. Those who could not see the clothes woven from this cloth, it was explained, would not be fit to hold their position of office. After a considerable length of time and cost, the two crooks announced that the suit was ready. The Emperor, his High Minister, the Captain of the Guard, the Emperor's Court and his servants all remarked that this was indeed a wonderful suit, each of them too embarrassed into admitting that they could see nothing and too fearful of being declared not fit for office. A procession was arranged through the city and the townspeople too declared their appreciation of the Emperor's new clothes. The praise was fulsome until a young child exclaimed that the Emperor had no clothes on. This exclamation was whispered among the crowd, passing from person to person until everyone in the crowd was shouting that the Emperor had no clothes on. The Emperor tried to maintain his dignity and completed the procession ... although he knew that the child and the townspeople were correct.

The story is not without relevance to those responsible for providing play space in European cities. *The Emperor's New Clothes* acknowledges that, in offering opinion, children may be less inhibited than adults by deference and convention. The most critical judges of whether play space provision is fit-for-purpose are children, the primary users of these spaces. What politicians, planners, other professionals (and even parents) may consider to be adequate provision, may not necessarily meet the needs of children. It would be prudent for those responsible for provision to engage

children directly in an attempt to understand play from a child's perspective. After all, the ultimate objective of a child and youth friendly city must be to ensure that the city meets the needs of children.

## **More than just a playground: the importance of play in children's lives**

Two problems arise when attempting to demonstrate the importance of play in children's lives. First, there is no agreed understanding of what constitutes children's play. In the UK, for example, there is no single definition that is widely used by all those concerned with children's play. There is a favoured definition among playworkers - *play is freely chosen, personally directed, intrinsically motivated behaviour that actively engages the child* (attributed to Bob Hughes and Frank King in National Playing Fields Association, Children's Play Council and Playlink, 2000) - although even this definition has been amplified for clarification - *Play can be fun or serious. Through play children explore social, material and imaginary worlds and their relationship with them, elaborating all the while a flexible range of responses to the challenges they encounter. By playing, children learn and develop as individuals, and as members of the community* (National Playing Fields Association, Children's Play Council and Playlink, 2000). Furthermore, these definitions are not used widely beyond the UK. Thus, there are many definitions of play. Many definitions, lead to many understandings of play and, in turn, to many understandings of the importance of play.

Second, cross-cultural and historical evidence demonstrates that all children play. However, the omnipresence of play does not mean that play is understood to be important. On the contrary, the omnipresence of play means that it is taken-for-granted by those without a professional or a direct personal interest in play. Play becomes *just* what children do.

These two problems must be overcome if European cities are to provide adequately for children's play. Figure 1 draws from a range of key definitions and interpretations of children's play to propose an understanding of play and the importance of play that would benefit child and youth friendly cities in Europe. Play is important because it can enhance the quality of (city) life for children, young people *and* the wider community.

## Figure 1: An Understanding of Children's Play for the European City

### What is Play?

First and foremost, play is a range of activities, undertaken for their own interest, enjoyment and the satisfaction.

A range of activities which can enhance the quality of children's lives, as lived.

A range of activities, some of which can be undertaken alone, with other children or with adults.

A range of activities which are most closely associated with young children, but whose qualities are also characteristic of activities undertaken by older children and adults.

All children play, although the nature of the local environment/society in which they live will shape the character of their play.

A range of activities, the quality of which can be enhanced and the opportunities for which can be extended, through the careful design of space and intervention of adults.

Sources: International Play Association (2007a), Lindon (2002), National Playing Fields Association, Children's Play Council and Playlink (2000), Play Scotland (2007), Play Wales (2005)

### Why is Play Important?

First and foremost, children enjoy playing.

Although not essential for physical survival, children have an innate impulse to play.

Although undertaken for interest, enjoyment and satisfaction, inadvertently children's play supports the child's physical, emotional, intellectual, social and cultural development.

Play can humanize neighbourhoods and other city spaces, enriching community life by asserting that public spaces are for the enjoyment of people

To acknowledge that play is an integral part of a child and youth friendly city, would be to align the European City Network with the growing number of global and national initiatives, which promote awareness of the importance of play in children's lives. For example, in 1961, the International Association for the Child's Right to Play (IPA) was formed. In 1977 the IPA agreed the *IPA Declaration of the Child's Right to Play*, which was subsequently revised in 1982 and 1989. Most significantly, in 1989 the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* asserted the child's right to play through Article 31. More recently, in 1996 the United Nations' *Child Friendly Cities Initiative* accorded a central place for play in its' vision of a child friendly city.

The development of national initiatives is equally striking. For example, a wide range of initiatives to promote children's play have recently been introduced in the UK (Figure 2).

### Figure 2: Promoting Play in the UK

- 1925 Establishment of the National Playing Fields Association (known since 2007 as **Fields in Trust**)
- 1985 Establishment of **Play Board**, to promote the child's right to play in Northern Ireland
- 1988 Establishment of the **Children's Play Council**, an alliance of organizations to promote children's play in England
- 1988 The first annual **Playday** is held. Playday is the annual celebration of children's right to play, comprising of local play events on a designated play day.
- 1998 Establishment of **London Play** to promote play in the city of London.
- 1998 Establishment of **Play Scotland** to support the child's right to play in Scotland
- 1998 Establishment of **Play Wales**, to promote children's play in Wales
- 2001 The **University of Gloucestershire** (then Cheltenham And Gloucester College Of Higher Education) validates its portfolio of Playwork qualifications by Distance Learning. The University now offers a Degree in Playwork.
- 2002 The Welsh Assembly Government publishes their national **Play Policy for Wales**
- 2004 **National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs)** for Playwork at Level 3 and Level 4 are introduced
- 2004 Publication of **Getting Serious About Play**, the national play review chaired by Frank Dobson MP.
- 2004 London hosts the **Second bi-annual European Child in the City conference**. The conference culminates with the signing of the **Declaration of London** by the European Network for Child-Friendly Cities.
- 2005 **UK Strategy for Playwork Education and Training** (2005-2010) is published.
- 2005 Publication of **School Grounds in Scotland** by Play Scotland, the first national survey of the use of school grounds for children's play.
- 2006 £155 million pounds (around Euro 230 million) is invested in children's play in England through the **Children's Play Initiative** (2006-2010). The CPI comprises three projects; £124 million for the Children's Play Programme (for local authorities to invest in local opportunities), £16 million for the Playful Ideas Programme and £15 million for the Play England project
- 2006 The **Play England** project starts as part of the BIG Lottery funded, *Children's Play Initiative*.
- 2006 Local authorities in England start to develop and publish **local play strategies** in response to the *Children's Play Programme*.
- 2006 The Welsh Assembly Government publish their **Play Policy Implementation Plan**

Although there would appear to be growing recognition of the importance of play at international and national levels, play is not universally welcomed or understood. In particular, five problems should be overcome if European cities are to be truly 'play friendly environments'. First, there needs to be a consistent message promoting and encouraging children's play in cities. Too often, a concern to provide for children's play sits uncomfortably with the loss of playing fields and play areas to urban development (MacLeod, 2005), attempts to remove older children from public space (Central Scotland Police, 2006), signs in residential neighbourhoods advising children to refrain from playing ball games in public spaces (although these notices are advisory and are not legally enforceable, they convey an air of authority and rules) and the closing off of school grounds to children after school hours (McKendrick, 2005). A more coherent approach to promoting children's play in their neighbourhoods and in the wider city is required.

Second, there is a need for the wider public to accept that proportionate risk is an integral part of children's play. The risk-safety balance has shifted towards safety promotion in recent years. This pre-occupation with safety in play has forced play providers to be more cautious in provision and for the assumption that it is primarily the play provider who has responsibility for ensuring safe play to proliferate. Although all play providers must ensure that reasonable steps are taken to ensure children's safety, there must be a wider recognition that children and their parents are also partly responsible for their own safety and that for European cities to pursue safety at all costs will only reduce the quality of play for children and young people.

Third, there is a need to acknowledge that play is not only the preserve of young children. Teenagers are equally entitled to play, although the descriptor "leisure" may be one that is more appealing to them. Indeed, it has recently been argued that a 'play ethic' is as important for adults and enterprise in the modern economy as it is for children (Kane, 2005).

Fourthly, and as the three aforementioned points suggest, there is a need to educate the wider public as to the importance of play. Public support for children's play cannot be assumed; there is a need to convince the public that play is beneficial for children, families, communities and the city as a whole.

Finally, there is a need to acknowledge that children's play is about more than providing equipped play areas or grounds for play. There is widespread public support for playground provision. This is, of course, to be welcomed. However, it tends to ignore the realities that children spend more time playing outside playgrounds than within them and that equipped play areas do not meet the needs of older children. As the sub-title suggests, play is much more than playgrounds.

### **Play on the *Cities for Children* agenda: blueprint or red herring?**

The *Cities for Children* strategy of the European City Network is a progressive initiative which recognises the need for proactive intervention to counter the demographic changes which threaten the viability of cities in Europe (European City Network, 2007). A collective approach between cities, patrons and partners is

envisaged to make cities more child and youth friendly. It is envisaged that more child and youth friendly cities will, in turn, facilitate family life. In short, the number of children living in cities throughout Europe is set to fall and the strategy aims to make European cities more attractive places in which raise a family. It is acknowledged that making European cities more child and family friendly could reap economic benefits as, “The conditions for families, children and young persons are an important locational factor for European cities and companies in global competition” (European City Network, 2007, p.3).

The *Cities for Children* strategy comprises six aims for children, young persons and families (Figure 3).

**Figure 3: The Aims of the *Cities for Children* Strategy (emphasis added)**

1. Each child should be supported according to its talents and receive an education providing him/her fair chances in the future.
2. Families with children should be provided with affordable housing and **formal and informal public space to play.**
3. Health prevention, healthy eating and medical services for parents and children as well as the safety of our children in traffic and their protection against crime should be realized at the highest possible level.
4. The compatibility between family and profession, children and career, is to be improved for parents by adapting working conditions of families and by providing high-quality affordable child care according to the needs of families.
5. A new “local contract between the generations” should support the interaction between old and young with new networks of mutual assistance and aid in a structured way.
6. Participation of children and young persons in decision-making processes and public life should be encouraged. In this context, youth initiatives should be supported and the activities of youth organizations should be promoted. Further, children and young persons should be made aware of the challenges of sustainable development and become actors of sustainable development in cities.

Source: European City Network, 2007, pp. 2-3

## **Strengths**

With regards to play, *Cities for Children* should be applauded on two grounds. First, the strategy acknowledges the importance of play in children’s lives by including a play goal among the six aims (Aim 2, Figure 3). Second, the strategy acknowledges that providing quality play opportunities involves more than providing designated sites for play. That is, the strategy seeks to ensure that families with children are

provided with formal public space for play (such as playgrounds) and informal public space to play. As explained earlier, providing spaces in which children, youth, professionals facilitating play and families can make their own play is as important as providing formal play spaces.

### ***Potential Strengths***

However, all strategies are open to interpretation and *Cities for Children* is no different to other strategies in this respect. Thus, within *Cities for Children* there are three ambiguities, which may or may not be suggestive that a progressive approach to children's play is envisaged.

First, although the strategy is labelled as *Cities for Children*, the articulation of the strategy makes it clear that the goal is to provide child friendly and youth friendly cities. More generally, the strategy acknowledges the "plurality of family forms" (European City Network, 2007, p.2). This is suggestive that *Cities for Children* will acknowledge and attend to the diverse needs of people aged less than eighteen years of age. If this approach is taken to its logical conclusion, play provision will be concerned with more than providing playgrounds for young children; the 'play' needs of older children will also be considered, as will the array of ways in which family circumstance shapes opportunities to partake of play. The goal of *Cities for Children* should be to formulate a comprehensive play strategy, which meets the needs of all people less than eighteen years of age.

Second, although Aim 2 articulates a goal for play, play is implicated in each of the other five Aims of *Cities for Children*. First, play is the means through which much of children's early learning is gained (Scarlett et al. 2005a) and many educationalists would argue that play can continue to facilitate learning beyond the early years (Scarlett et al. 2005b) (Aim One). There is growing recognition of the role of play in enabling children to lead healthy lives (Parish and Rudisill, 2006) and of the need for safe play opportunities to protect children from social dangers (Cunningham, 2002) (Aim Three). The growth of childcare, breakfast clubs and after-school care to facilitate the participation of parents in the labour market has raised concerns about the quality of care environments and the opportunities for play afforded therein (Smith and Barker, 2002) (Aim Four). Reflecting on play, past and present, has been proven to be an effective means of facilitating intergenerational contact to promote a climate of greater understanding in local areas (Childhood in Possilpark Study Programme Group, 2001) (Aim Five). Finally, there is growing recognition that children and young people should be involved in decision-making that pertains to play and the design of play spaces (Gladwin, 2004) (Aim Six). Thus, there is the potential for play to fulfil an expansive role within the *Cities for Children* initiative.

Finally, *Cities for Children* is described as being "connected to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child" (European City Network, 2007, p.2). This 'connection' is to be warmly welcomed if it implies that the strategy will be adhering to the principles of Article 31 of the Convention (Figure 4). Adhering to Article 31 of the UN Convention would be to acknowledge: the free will of children to participate; that different groups of children have different needs; the role of cities in promoting play; the role of cities in providing for play; and the need to provide an array of opportunities for play. It could even be argued that the requirement in Article 31 that

the child should “participate fully in cultural and artistic life” promotes the need for play to be considered as an integral part of city life.

**Figure 4: Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**

1. States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.

2. States Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.

Source: United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989

Thus, *Cities for Children* could be an effective instrument to advance play in European cities. For this to be achieved the potential of strategy must be fully realised and the many ways in which play can assist in achieving these goals must be fully articulated. However, there are also clear weaknesses in how the *Cities for Children* strategy is intending to attend to play.

**Weaknesses**

Three clear weaknesses can be identified in the *Cities for Children* strategy. The problems they present are not insurmountable, but they should be addressed if European cities are to meet children’s needs for play.

First, *Cities for Children* seems to have undervalued the importance of play by articulating its play aim in conjunction with another service (affordable housing provision). Play is central to the quality of children’s lives as lived and it necessitates the articulation of a separate aim for play. The conjunction of play and affordable housing may not be so problematic in practice if play is also understood to be a wide-ranging, cross-cutting activity that is central to status of a child friendly city. However, if the aim is suggestive that play is to be understood *only* in relation to housing provision, then *Cities for Children* will be pursuing an overly narrow vision of a play for a child friendly city. It is vitally important that in play is considered in relation to housing provision, e.g. to ensure that all children have ready access from their home to sufficient, quality play space. However, it must also be acknowledged that play is much more than this.

Second, the *Cities for Children* aim for play is only articulated in terms of provision of space (albeit both formal space and informal space). Although, it could be argued that the primary responsibility of cities is to provide quality play space, it must also be acknowledged that this alone will be insufficient to ensure that children are afforded

a quality experience of play. Skilled professionals can assist children to maximise the opportunities afforded to them (youth workers, play workers, etc.), the wider public must be supportive of the child's right to play, and the truly child and youth friendly city will acknowledge children's right to play beyond those spaces formally designated as sites for play. Play should be an integral part of city life and not merely an activity that occurs in designated spaces.

Finally, the unit of analysis for the play aim is "families with children". The acknowledgement of a role for parents, other adults and siblings in children's play is to be welcomed. However, play provision should be targeted first and foremost at children. Aiming to meet the needs of "families with children" assumes that everyone in the family shares the same understanding of play. In its most literal form, attending to the needs of "families with children" may be suggestive of prioritising provision of play which involves the whole family. It must be acknowledged that their parents may not always share children's play preferences and there is an important role for cities to play in facilitating the independent play of older children, in particular.

## **Five goals for European Cities**

The previous discussion of the strengths, potential strengths and weaknesses of how play is considered in the draft strategy *Cities for Children* identifies some of the key factors that European cities should address when providing for children's play. In addition to these issues, this paper makes five firm recommendations to assist European cities to achieve the ambition of becoming truly child and youth friendly through play.

### ***What we should strive for 1: embrace diversity***

*Cities for Children* is sensitive to diversity issues; e.g. it recognises the need to ensure gender equality (European City Network, 2007, p.1) and it acknowledges the pluralism of family forms (p.2). This sensitivity is welcomed, although it must also be ensured that the full range of diversity issues is acknowledged (e.g. in addition to gender and family form, recognition must also be made of the importance of family income level, ethnic background, age and disability status). Furthermore, there is a need to acknowledge the specific ways in which diversity issues impact upon children's play to ensure that all children are afforded equivalent opportunities to partake of play in cities.

There is a need for the European City Network to draw from the experience of European research on children's play. For example, Lia Karsten's observational study of children's use of eight playgrounds in Amsterdam demonstrated how gender, social class and ethnicity shaped the extent to which, and the ways in which, playgrounds were used by children (Karsten, 2003). Karsten concluded that girls were marginalised in playgrounds (especially among those of Turkish and Moroccan descent) and that girls used the playgrounds differently and at different times than boys. More generally, a consistent finding of research is that girls (compared to boys) play closer to home. Thus, if European cities are to provide equal opportunities for girls and boys to play, there is a need for local provision to ensure

equal access for girls. More generally, differences in how children play must be understood if European cities are to provide adequately for play.

### ***What we should strive for 2: play space standards***

European play standards have already been established to ensure children's safety at play; Standard EN116 concerns equipment (with specific recommendations for swings, slides, runways, carousels and rocking equipment) and Standard EN117 concerns playground surfacing (RoSPA, 2007). However, there are no European standards that set minimum expectations for the provision of play space. Nevertheless within Europe, individual cities, regions and voluntary sector agencies have taken a lead in establishing standards for open space and play space provision. Thus, there is evidence of support for the principle of play space standards in Europe, although there is no overarching framework to set European standards.

In the UK, *Fields in Trust* (previously the National Playing Fields Association) have been the driving force behind setting play space standards with their *Six Acre Standard*. The recommendation is that there should be a provision of 2.4 hectares (6 acres) of outdoor play space for every 1,000 people. The standard breaks this play space into 1.6 hectares for outdoor sport space and 0.8 hectares for children's play space. Furthermore, a hierarchy of children's play areas are recommended - LEAPs (Local Equipped Areas for Play), NEAPs (Neighbourhood Equipped Areas for Play) and LAPs (Local area for Play) – which acknowledges that children need different types of play space in their neighbourhood. Ironside Farrar (2005) produced a comprehensive review of space standards being used in Europe and in the UK in their report for the Scottish Executive on play space standards in Europe.

It is recommended that the European City Network sets play space standards for cities in Europe. It should be acknowledged that cities in Europe currently afford children different levels of access to play space. Thus, it would be preferable if this European standards set different levels of provision – e.g. Gold, Silver and Bronze – to give all cities some incentive for improving their play space provision.

### ***What we should strive for 3: design***

*Cities for Children* acknowledges that child and youth friendly cities will be achieved by city authorities working alone (European City Network, 2007, p.1). Designing the child and youth friendly city – and more specifically designing spaces for play – must be a partnership between city officials, representatives from private sector companies which supply play equipment and, of course, children as users. Although the primary purpose of the private sector is to generate profit and to sustain livelihoods, private sector companies have been very supportive of wider developments to advance good practice in provision and playwork practice, and to promote wider understanding of play in society. For example, in the UK Sutcliffe Play has provided financial support for regional playworker events, and the landmark *Best Play* publication (National Playing Fields Association, Children's Play Council and Playlink, 2000).

The importance of good design should not be underestimated. Not only does good design reduce the risk of playground injuries (Mowat *et al.*, 1998), but research has demonstrated that, for example, design can reduce conflict in playgrounds (Edwards,

2006) and increase physical activity levels (Stratton and Mullan, 2005). The finding that well designed playgrounds can encourage higher levels of physical activity is a common finding of research; the Scottish School Grounds Survey found that levels of active play among school children were considered to be higher when the playgrounds had permanent playground markings (80% of schools with such markings reported that most children were engaged in active play, compared to 66% of schools without such markings), temporary playground markings (81% versus 72%), fixed play equipment (81% versus 71%) and mobile play equipment (81% versus 66%).

The weight of research would seem to suggest that good design could make a difference to how children make use of playgrounds. Thus, there is a need for European cities to commit themselves to sharing good practice and to showcase excellence in design wherever it occurs.

### ***What we should strive for 4: playFULL space***

The spaces for play provided for European cities should present opportunities for the full range of play types. Too often the objectives of play space provision are defined in terms of locomotor play. While it is important to present opportunities for children to develop their physical capabilities (and to improve their physical health) through play, it must be acknowledged that play comprises much more than this. Bob Hughes' taxonomy of play types (Figure 5) could serve as a useful checklist or point of reference when considering provision for play in the European city. If our cities are to be playFULL, then our cities should afford children the opportunity to partake of the full range of play experiences.

### ***What we should strive for 5: playful cities***

Finally, not only should our cities be playFULL, but they should also be *playful*. Play should be an integral part of city life. Play should not only be an activity that is restricted to specific sites known as playgrounds. A truly child and youth friendly city would provide opportunities for play throughout the city in spaces hitherto not associated with play. The assertion is not anarchic or unrealistic. There are examples of seemingly 'adult' city spaces welcoming play. For example, the Königstrasse, one of the main shopping thoroughfares in the city centre of Stuttgart provides open spaces and street furniture which afford opportunities for play. Town centre retail stores occasionally provide opportunities for play as a supplementary services to consumers (e.g. play tables in banks). The challenge is for cities to fully embrace play as an integral - and most welcome – part of the fabric of city life.

The worst case scenario is when there is no play space provision and play is not considered to be important. Thankfully, this does not apply to cities in Europe. Most cities in Europe provide spaces for play, although these tend to be set apart from other aspects of city life. At the current time, the provision of play space is to be encouraged. However, European cities should strive for a new play ethos – one in which there is less demand for designated play spaces as the whole city welcomes play and play is woven into the fabric of city life.

### **Figure 5: Play Types**

Symbolic Play – play which allows control, gradual exploration and increased understanding without the risk of being out of one's depth.

Rough and Tumble Play – close encounter play which is less to do with fighting and more to do with touching, tickling, gauging relative strength. Discovering physical flexibility and the exhilaration of display.

Socio-dramatic Play – the enactment of real and potential experiences of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature.

Social Play – play during which the rules and criteria for social engagement and interaction can be revealed, explored and amended.

Creative Play – play which allows a new response, the transformation of information, awareness of new connections, with an element of surprise

Communication Play – play using words, nuances or gestures for example, mime, jokes, play acting, mickey taking, singing, debate, poetry.

Dramatic Play – play which dramatizes events in which the child is not a direct participator

Deep Play – play which allows the child to encounter risky or even potentially life threatening experiences, to develop survival skills and conquer fear.

Exploratory Play – play to access factual information consisting of manipulative behaviours such as handling, throwing, banging or mouthing objects.

Fantasy Play – play that rearranges the world in the child's way, a way that is unlikely to occur.

Imaginative Play – play where the conventional rules, which govern the physical world, do not apply.

Locomotor Play – movement in any or every direction for its own sake.

Mastery Play – control of the physical and affective ingredients of the environments.

Object Play – play which uses infinite and interesting sequences of hand-eye manipulations and movements.

Role Play – play exploring ways of being, although not normally of an intense personal, social, domestic or interpersonal nature.

Recapitulative Play – play that allows the child to explore ancestry, history, rituals, stories, rhymes, fire and darkness. Enables children to access play of earlier human evolutionary stages.

Source: Hughes (2003)

## Conclusion

The European City Network should be applauded for taking positive steps to transform our urban areas into child and youth friendly environments. *Cities for Children* acknowledges that play opportunities must be provided if cities are to be truly child and youth friendly.

However, this task must not be underestimated. Play is vitally important to children for a number of reasons, play takes a number of diverse forms and many people are involved in children's play. This paper has outlined some of the challenges that must be faced. Potential strengths must be realised and evident weaknesses and oversights must be overcome. Specifically, five goals have been identified; European cities must acknowledge diversity and cater for diverse needs, define European standards, promote excellence in design, be playFULL and *playful*. It is a challenge that must be met, for no city can justly claim to be child or youth friendly if it is not play friendly.

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