



OVERVIEW

IN RECENT YEARS, NEW PUBLIC HEALTH CHALLENGES HAVE BROUGHT THE ISSUE OF THE DECLINE OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES. SEVERAL FACTORS HAVE PAVED THE WAY FOR THE DECLINE OF OUTDOOR PLAY, AND THUS CONTRIBUTED TO THE GROWING PROBLEMS ARISING FROM YOUNG PEOPLE'S SEDENTARY LIFESTYLES. IT IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY CLEAR THAT EVERY EFFORT SHOULD BE MADE TO HELP YOUNG PEOPLE TO DEVELOP HEALTHY LIFESTYLES, AND THIS INCLUDES INCREASING THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITY. A LARGE BODY OF RESEARCH SUGGESTS THAT THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT CAN PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN PROMOTING PLAY AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES. IT WAS PROPOSED THAT NETWORKS OF WELL DESIGNED STREETS AND PARKS ENCOURAGE PEOPLE OF ALL AGES TO BE PHYSICALLY ACTIVE. THIS PAPER DISCUSSES THE ROLE OF INCLUSIVE DESIGN OF OUTDOOR SPACES AS A VEHICLE TO PROMOTE PLAY AND TO OVERCOME SOME OF THE BARRIERS THAT INHIBIT OUTDOOR PHYSICAL ACTIVITIES. IT EXAMINES THE LIMITATIONS OF PREVAILING PLANNING AND DESIGN APPROACHES INVOLVED IN THE PRODUCTION OF OUTDOOR PLAY AREAS, AND PROPOSES EFFECTIVE STRATEGIES TO ENCOURAGE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES.

Activities

The cluster's objectives were achieved through several parallel streams of activities. Focused workshops and an international conference were designed to engage participants in debates and discussions of key research issues. The conference, which takes place on 5 July 2006, will be used as a forum to synthesise the salient research issues and prioritise action strategies, identified during the cluster events and activities. It will also offer support for an international comparison of experiences and the dissemination of the outputs/activities of the cluster. In addition to these activities regular discussions, an exchange of ideas and network meetings have taken place.

Insights

Cluster activities generated a lively debate between disciplines and professions, revealing new lines of enquiry. These activities highlighted some health, social, cognitive development dimensions and their impact on outdoor space design. Innovative strategies to counteract the deficiencies in the fitness of young people were also recommended. This led to the emergence of a new approach to planning and designing outdoor public spaces for young people.

Some key research questions relating to the role of design of outdoor spaces in helping to alter the levels of fear and anxiety experienced, arising from the perception of risks. It emerged that it was important to accommodate parents and adults in the design of outdoor environments, in such a ways that they can contribute to the informal supervision of children. However, it was also recognised that adults' supervision need to be confined to avoid interfering with play negatively. Overall, more work is needed to achieve a better understanding of the influence of the built environment on young people's physical activities and outdoor play.