

Involve the Target Group

Process for identifying needs when redesigning a playground

Before we start...

Why is play crucial for children?

Play is an essential part of child development. Children learn through play. They try out skills such as language, coordination skills and consolidate experiences they have seen. They understand how the world works, learn creative thinking and social behaviour. Children's natural curiosity is supported in play. They can try out themselves and their abilities, test new things and interact with others. Play is therefore a child's basic need.

What are the functions of playgrounds?

Playgrounds open up a variety of learning experiences for children. They can try out their physical abilities on a wide range of equipment of their own choice, as well as acquire and develop social skills through playing with others. Creativity, problem-solving skills, self-confidence and imagination are also trained. In the best-case scenario, they are also outdoors and in nature on playgrounds, which is not least beneficial for health. Learn more about the reasons why playgrounds are important for children at [Playground Professionals](#).

What is there vs. what is needed?

What needs do children have and are these met by current playgrounds? Talk to children and their parents and develop an overview of existing places and a list of improvements.

What is needed?

You know the importance of playgrounds for children, but how can children's needs best be met through playgrounds? What does a good playground need? What playground and recreational needs do children have and at what ages? Use the experience of parents to explore these questions in more detail and engage in a conversation with them. Collect their experiences and opinions.

What is available?

In the next step, look together with parents and children which facilities are currently available in your city (your neighbourhood, your municipality) and which target group they are aimed at. Create a map that gives an overview of activities and places for children. The marked places do not necessarily have to be designed as children's playgrounds. Also, freely available places like fountains with the option to splash around, climbing paths in the forest or football fields can be listed. Discuss together which of the previously mentioned needs of children are met by these places. Which needs remain unfulfilled? Compare your prepared overview of needs with the results of the availability map and mark very good places as well as places in need of improvement.

To engage with parents on this topic, you can run a workshop. In the overview of this Quest you will find links with tips on workshop design and facilitation techniques.

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What gaps are there?

After the workshop, draw up an overview of the results: What are the discrepancies between the stated needs and the actual situation? Which target groups have hardly been reached so far? Draw up an overview and involve stakeholders in order to develop measures to close these gaps.

Involve the target group!

What do children want?

Be sure to let the target group have their say. Initiate conversations with children about their thoughts and wishes for playgrounds and recreational facilities. Let children have a look at the map, they might have a different opinion about the places.

Organise a workshop in a school class and work out their wishes together with the children. The ideas can be painted, crafted or written down. Ask questions to stimulate children's creativity:

- What kind of playground equipment is absolutely necessary?
- What kind of environment should the playground be in so that you feel comfortable there?
- How should the area around the playground equipment be designed?
- Where should the playground be located so that you can reach it easily? (Bus stop, close to the city centre, residential area)
- What else does it need? Benches? Fences? Picnic areas? Bicycle stands? Trees and shrubs?
- Think also about smaller children or children with physical disabilities, what do they need?
- Who might feel disturbed by a playground? What could you do to avoid this?

This work can be continued in cooperation with educators. A final presentation with the participation of the mayor or neighbourhood manager gives the children a platform to present their ideas.

Give an impulse for change

Stakeholder Workshop

Finally, bring together the stakeholders needed for successful implementation (funding, urban planning etc.) and discuss the results gathered. Create space to develop joint measures for remedial action. In addition to the children's wishes, discuss issues of accessibility, safety or potential disturbance in order to define a suitable location.