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#fsb

Inclusion in playgrounds and leisure facilities - an important design consideration today

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Inclusion is now a fundamental element of the planning process for many sports and leisure facilities and playgrounds. After all, it's important that all children and young people have opportunities to play and exercise in public spaces. The inclusive design of playgrounds and recreation spaces will also play a major role at this year's FSB trade fair in Cologne (28-31 October 2025), with many of the exhibits addressing this issue.

In the past - perhaps 30 to 40 years ago - inclusion was, unfortunately, not a major factor in playground design. At best, play areas tailored to the needs of disabled people were only found in specialised settings. The equipment that they contained often really only had play and recreational value for users with certain impairments - everyone else would usually find playing in these areas rather boring. It took some time before wheelchair-accessible play equipment began to appear in public playgrounds. Although this equipment was often only of interest to disabled users, at least there was something specifically designed for them. Back then, around the year 2000, the guiding principle was to integrate people with disabilities into public life, and the approach pursued was to take them into account in playground design by offering them a dedicated area.

It wasn't until after 3 May 2008 that real progress began to be made. This is an important date for many people, as it marked the entry into force of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which defined **inclusion as a human right**. From that point on, disabled people would have the right to full and effective participation in society "on an equal basis with others". This meant that, rather than simply taking disabled people into account or seeking to integrate them, public spaces would need to be designed in such a way that they could be used by all members of society - with accessibility being a particularly important factor.

Of course, it took some time for the topic of inclusion to find its way into mainstream thinking and into the mindset of planners and decision-makers. Although this process is still far from complete, awareness of the need for inclusion has grown significantly within the field of public space design, and playgrounds and leisure facilities are no exception.

It follows, then, that inclusion plays a key role in the planning process for many



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current projects in public spaces - but what does that mean in practice? The term “accessibility” often initially brings to mind wheelchair users. However, this is just one of many groups that need to be taken into account, as there are countless other forms of impairment that must also be considered - people with vision or hearing difficulties, for example, or people with intellectual disabilities. An inclusive playground should be for everyone, and everyone should feel comfortable there and, ideally, encounter both activities with high play value and challenges they can master using their motor skills. And while children and young people are naturally the primary focus of playgrounds, the adults accompanying them should also be taken into consideration. They should be able to reach their children on the equipment and have opportunities to play with them. “Playing together” is a very important concept and the basis of inclusive playground design. It’s not just about everyone finding something fun to do, but also about everyone being able to interact and play together. Children and young people with and without disabilities, regardless of gender, origin or cultural background, should be encouraged to cooperate, communicate and have a good time together. To ensure that this is possible, it’s fundamental that playground and leisure facilities of this kind are designed and planned appropriately.

One key element in the inclusive design of playgrounds and recreational spaces is the choice of ground/floor covering and fall protection materials. Sand, which is commonly used in Germany, is difficult or even impossible for many people in wheelchairs or with limited mobility to walk or move around on. Plastic surfaces - especially when installed in situ - are a good solution, but wood chips can also be suitable as a natural fall protection surface. However, as sand is used not only for safety reasons but also as a play material in its own right, it shouldn’t be omitted when designing inclusive facilities. A range of sand tables and mud “kitchens” are now available that allow children to play standing up or while seated in a wheelchair. The units are wheelchair-accessible and can also be connected to water play areas, as the combination of sand and water is extremely popular with children.

Many surveys have found that swings are the favourite piece of playground equipment for children and adults alike. When planning an inclusive play area, it’s a good idea to include different types of swing seats and swing elements. For example, there are special designs for people who cannot sit independently and options that allow children to swing together with accompanying adults.

Slides and climbing frames are also key features of many playgrounds. When it comes to inclusive design, the first priority is to ensure accessibility, i.e. the ability to get to the equipment. A ramp with a gentle slope, which should also be suitable for wheelchairs, is ideal for accessing slides. Preferably, climbing frames should offer different levels of difficulty so that every child has the chance to play and enjoy a sense of achievement.

Wheelchair-accessible roundabouts are a classic example of inclusive playground design. However, in order to do justice to the principle of playing together, it’s important that modern equipment allows children who aren’t in wheelchairs to enjoy playing with it, too. What’s needed is a roundabout for all users. Successful

installations in particular clearly demonstrate how children cooperate to get the roundabout moving and all enjoy themselves.

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The development of inclusive play equipment is currently experiencing a boom, and many companies in the playground industry are continuously developing new play concepts that embody the principles of inclusion. Many of these manufacturers and their products will be on display at **FSB, the International Trade Fair for Public Space, Sports and Leisure Facilities, from 28 to 31 October 2025 in Cologne**. The topic of inclusion will be a particular focus at this year's leading trade fair for playground and recreational facilities. In addition to a great many renowned exhibitors and innovative examples of playground equipment, further highlights will address inclusion in the design of playgrounds and sports and leisure facilities. For example, there will be a special inclusive zone in the STADT und RAUM area in Hall 9.1 where visitors can experience for themselves what playgrounds and play equipment are like from the perspective of a person with disabilities. Furthermore, the programme for this area of the trade fair will feature a series of talks covering key considerations, options and examples from real practice relating to the topic of "inclusive playgrounds and recreational spaces".

With a host of new products and design options to discover as well as comprehensive information on inclusion in the planning process, a visit to the FSB trade fair is clearly worthwhile for all professionals involved in the planning, construction and maintenance of playgrounds and sports and leisure facilities. In addition to the programme of talks, the many specialist companies exhibiting at the trade fair will be offering their expertise and support in the design of inclusive play areas. And since this topic will continue to play an increasingly important role in the future, a visit to Cologne at the end of October should be fixed in every diary. For more information about the FSB trade fair, exhibitors, programme and much more, visit <https://www.fsb-cologne.de/>.

Koelnmesse - Global Inspiration for Living, Contract and Public Spaces

Koelnmesse is the world's top trade fair organiser for the areas of Living, Contract and Public Spaces. Alongside the new trade fair duo imm cologne and interior design days cologne (idd cologne), other formats hosted at the trade fair hub of Cologne such as ORGATEC, interzum, FSB, spoga+gafa and aquanale are among the most internationally renowned and established industry gatherings. These fairs comprehensively represent the interior and design segment, the furniture and interior construction industries' supplying sections, the kitchen world, all topics for the modern working world, garden lifestyle as well as modern work environments, the garden lifestyle, public spaces, sports and leisure facilities, along with saunas, pools and wellness centres. To complement the events in Cologne, Koelnmesse is constantly strategically expanding its portfolio in key growth markets around the globe. Its foreign trade fairs include La Feria De Diseño Medellín - powered by imm cologne in Colombia, the shows of the ORGATEC brand family with ORGATEC TOKYO in Japan, ORGATEC India in Mumbai and ORGATEC WORKSPACE Saudi Arabia in Riyadh, as well as the trade fairs of the interzum brand family: interzum guangzhou in China, interzum bogota in Colombia, interzum jakarta in Indonesia and interzum forum italy in Bergamo. The "Living, Contract and Public Spaces" portfolio also includes the FSB Sports Show Riyadh in Saudi Arabia.

Further information: <https://www.fsb-cologne.com/trade-fair/fsb/fsb-worldwide/>

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