

In Celebration of Play

**Edited by
Paul F. Wilkinson**





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In Celebration of Play

An Integrated Approach to Play and
Child Development

Edited by Paul F. Wilkinson

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To John and Ruth Wilkinson, and
Tony and Luella Ludwig,
in thanks for our childhoods

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PREFACE

This book, *In Celebration of Play*, and its companion volume, *Innovation in Play Environments*, were inspired by the Seventh World Congress of the International Playground Association,¹ held in August 1978 at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

The International Playground Association (IPA) was formed in 1961 as an interdisciplinary organization designed to exchange ideas and experiences in the realm of children's leisure and to work for the improvement of play opportunities and play leadership. It is important to emphasize that, despite the name of the association, it is not solely concerned with 'playgrounds' in the formal sense; rather, it is concerned with the wide range of play environments that are — or should be — available to children. It is recognized that play opportunities can exist for the child in and around the home (playrooms, backyards), the school and public park (traditional, adventure and creative playgrounds), the institution (day-care centres, hospitals), and the city *qua* city (the streets, museums, shopping centres). IPA is concerned with all of these environments and, in addition, with the roles that adults play in planning, designing, managing, and providing leadership for those environments.

The theme of the IPA Congress, 'Play in Human Settlements: An Integrated Approach', was directly inspired by the United Nations' Habitat Human Settlements Conference held in Vancouver, Canada in June 1976. One component of the conference was a workshop on 'Children in Human Settlements' sponsored by the Non-Governmental Forum and attended by representatives of a number of co-operating international organizations, including IPA who acted as the workshop organizers.² Consistent with the spirit of the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child Article 7 that 'The Child shall have full opportunity to play and recreation which should be directed to the same purpose as education. . . ' this multi-disciplinary group of experts, practitioners, and citizens concerned with the needs of children in human settlements formulated the following statement:

The child and youth population in human settlements is of prime importance. They are every nation's most valued resource. They comprise over a third of the inhabitants of this planet. Mankind

owes the child the best it has to give! Fully endorsing the *UN Declaration of the Rights of the Child* with its all encompassing principles, we emphasize the following points that focus on Habitat issues:

1. Every national government should have a *policy on children* which addresses itself to their total needs and includes the mechanisms and financial resources for its implementation.
2. By 1990 every child should have access to *clean water*.
3. By 1980 every child should enjoy *clean air* through the mandatory elimination of lead in motor fuel and other air pollutants that are known to cause serious brain damage and mutilation in the young.
4. Immediate steps should be taken to ensure *adequate nutrition* for children and mothers in order to eradicate the devastating physical and mental disorders caused by malnutrition.
5. Immediate steps should be taken to reduce the effects of the *killer car*. The child's right to play and move about the community free from danger must be ensured by public transportation solutions, appropriate design and planning, and innovative redevelopment of settlements. The subordination of man to machine must be treated as a disease. This lethal epidemic must be given top priority by all levels of government.
6. The development and redevelopment of settlements must be on a more *human scale*. Children suffer most from the effects of big cities, ghettos of poverty and shanty towns. Children must grow into the Habitat at their own pace — it must be a function of planning to ensure that this happens.
7. The creation of *better balanced communities* with a mix of social groups, occupations, housing and amenities is vital. We must ensure that the total settlement is designed with the child in mind.
8. Changes in *land use policy* should include, along with the essential municipal services, the laying out of spaces for play and family recreation, as well as pedestrian routes or play paths. These should be given the same priority as other elements of infrastructure. At the time of assembling land, moneys for development of play spaces should be set aside until people have moved in and can participate in the designing — children's contributions are particularly vital.
9. *Participation* by the community, including children, in

environmental planning, building and maintenance is the key to meeting the needs of neighbourhood users of different ages, interests and handicaps.

10. *Planning consent* and *financial subsidies* should only be given to family housing composed of suitable housing types which have adequate provision for play and child safety. There is growing substantial evidence that high-rise living and inadequate play provision produce damaging physical and mental effects on children and their parents.
11. All levels of government should recognize that provision for the *out of school* life of children is as serious as formal education. Play is the child's way of learning about, adapting to, and integrating with his or her environment.
12. In addition to adequate sports and recreation facilities, children and youth need a wide variety of opportunities, choices and raw materials that they can use as they see fit for *free, constructive, creative play*.
13. The need for *leaders*, the training of leaders and the stressing of the importance of their role as facilitators for children's play, must be the concern of public authorities. People rather than hardware are what is needed.
14. Child development and environmental planning for children's play must be included in *educational programs preparing people* for all professions concerned with or affecting children in the design and planning of human settlements.
15. *Environmental education* should be an integral part of the school curriculum, to ensure that the citizens of tomorrow do not repeat the mistakes of today.
16. Problems caused by *large concentrations of children* must be dealt with positively, not by imposing additional constraints, guards, locks, etc. . . . but by supplying creative alternatives to boredom, mischief-making and outlets for plain exuberance.
17. *Bold new solutions* that reflect children's real development needs must be found through experimentation, demonstration, adaptations of successful solutions, etc. Not only sewage needs recycling! Unused, poorly designed, static play environments must be recycled into living, learning, happy places to explore.
18. *The cost* of the proposed program can be met by decreasing the current expenditure on arms by 10 per cent.
19. We wish to fully endorse the International Year of the Child. Vitally needed is an advocacy for, and a focus on, the total needs of children and youth on our planet.

The statement endorsed the 1979 International Year of the Child (IYC), which was later formally proclaimed by the United Nations in a General Assembly Resolution of the 31st Session in December 1976. Broadly speaking, IYC aims to provide an opportunity to emphasize the intellectual, psychological, social, and physical development of all children in all countries — rich as well as poor. The Year differs from other recent UN 'Years' in that there will be no UN world conference in 1979. This 'innovative' omission has been widely acclaimed by many who feel that a year-long programme of activities and contributions by people and countries throughout the world without a peak event would better serve the aim of IYC than a jamboree of national delegations. Rather, IYC will consist of a world-wide network of national activities concerning and involving children.

Already committed to holding its triennial world conference in Ottawa, Canada in 1978, IPA decided to adopt the title 'Play in Human Settlements' as the theme of the conference using many of the issues that were highlighted in the Habitat Statement as the organizing framework for the content of the conference. While some of the issues noted in the statement were only dealt with peripherally at the IPA Congress (e.g., pollution, nutrition), most of the issues became foci for papers and discussion sessions at the congress and for contributions to these volumes, including such topics as national policies for children, urban planning, housing design, community involvement in planning, non-traditional play environments, formal and non-formal educational opportunities, environmental education, and implementation strategies. The congress was to serve as IPA's contribution to the preparations for IYC.

This dedication to the aims of IYC was highlighted and reinforced by IPA's 'Malta Declaration of the Child's Right to Play', formulated at a consultation in preparation for IYC held in Malta on 11 November 1977. The declaration stated:

The Malta Consultation declares that play, along with the basic needs of nutrition, health, shelter and education, is vital for the development of the potential of all children.

The child is the foundation for the world's future.

Play is not the mere passing of time. Play is life.

It is instinctive. It is voluntary. It is spontaneous. It is natural. It is exploratory. It is communication. It is expression. It combines action and thought. It gives satisfaction and a feeling of achievement.

Play has occurred at all times throughout history and in all cultures. Play touches all aspects of life.

Through play the child develops physically, mentally, emotionally and socially.

Play is a means of learning to live.

The Consultation is extremely concerned by a number of alarming trends, such as:

1. Society's indifference to the importance of play.
2. The over-emphasis on academic studies in schools.
3. The dehumanising scale of settlements, inappropriate housing forms; such as high-rise, inadequate environmental planning and bad traffic management.
4. The increasing commercial exploitation of children through mass communication, mass production, leading to the deterioration of individual values and cultural tradition.
5. The inadequate preparation of children to live in a rapidly changing society.

Proposals for Action

Health. Play is essential for the physical and mental health of the child.

1. Establish programmes for professionals and parents about the benefits of play from birth onwards.
2. Incorporate play into community programmes designed to maintain the child's health.
3. Promote play as an integral part of the treatment plan for children in hospitals and other settings.
4. Provide opportunities for initiative, interaction, creativity and socialisation in the formal education system.
5. Include the study of the importance of play in the training of all professionals working with or for children.
6. Involve schools, colleges and public buildings in the life of the community and permit fuller use of these buildings and facilities.

Welfare. Play is an essential part of family and community welfare.

1. Promote measures that strengthen the close relationship between parent and child.

2. Ensure that play is accepted as an integral part of social development and social care.
3. Provide community based services of which play is a part in order to foster the acceptance of children with handicaps as full members of the community so that no child, whether for physical, mental or emotional reasons shall be detained in an institution.

Leisure. The child needs time to play.

1. Provide the space and adequate free time for children to choose and develop individual and group interests.
2. Encourage more people from different backgrounds and ages to be involved with children.
3. Stop the commercial exploitation of children's play, e.g., manipulative advertising, war toys and violence in entertainment.

Planning. The child must have priority in the planning of human settlements.

1. Give priority to the child in existing and projected human settlements in view of the child's great vulnerability, small size and limited range of activity.
2. Ban immediately the building of all high-rise housing and take urgent steps to mitigate the effect of existing developments on children.
3. Take steps to enable the child to move about the community in safety by providing traffic segregation, improved public transportation and better traffic management.

The Malta Consultation

1. believing firmly that the International Year of the Child will provide opportunities to arouse world opinion for the improvement of the life of the child,
2. affirming its belief in the United Nations' Declaration of the Rights of the Child,
3. acknowledging that each country is responsible for preparing its own courses of action in the lights of its culture, climate and social, political and economic structure,
4. recognizing that the full participation of people is essential in planning and developing programmes and services for children to meet their needs, wishes and aspirations,

5. assuring its co-operation with other international and national organizations involved with children,

Appeals to all countries and organizations to consider seriously the implementation of measures to reverse the alarming trends, some of which are identified in this statement, and to place high on its list of priorities the development of long-term programmes to ensure for all time *the child's right to play*.

These three actions — the UN Habitat Statement, the Proclamation of IYC, and the IPA Malta Declaration — were, therefore, the impetus behind 'Play in Human Settlements', the Seventh World Congress of the International Playground Association. These two volumes, *In Celebration of Play* and *Innovation in Play Environments*, are a result of that congress, with most of the papers being formal written versions of presentations made in Ottawa. It should be noted, however, that other papers were solicited by the editor to fill gaps recognized after the conference or to replace contributions from conference participants who were unable to submit formal papers. The volumes have been organized along the lines of the three sub-themes of the congress. *In Celebration of Play*, dealing with 'The Social Significance of Play', concentrates on the developmental aspects of play for the individual child and the importance of play in a social context. Topics explored include: the importance of play, development through play, leadership training, special groups, the role of play beyond the playground, and children and the future. *Innovation in Play Environments* concentrates on the planning and design of play programmes and play environments. It focuses on two of the sub-themes: 'Toward the Perfect Play Experience' deals with such topics as historical approaches to play, play in the home environment, play in institutional settings, handicapped children, planning for play in extreme climatic conditions, and play environments beyond the traditional playground; 'Urban Planning with the Child in Mind' focuses on the child and the urban environment, high-rise residential environments, and the street and the city.

In conclusion, these volumes, therefore, represent not only the personal contributions of the editors and authors to the International Year of the Child, but also the contributions of the International Playground Association, the Canadian Delegation to the International Playground Association, the Ontario Ministry of Culture and Recreation, and the Faculty of Environmental Studies, York University.