

## POSITION STATEMENT

### The right to play is for children with disabilities too!

Play is the most important and natural activity in childhood, and as such it is a right enshrined in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Art. 31). Play is amusing, complex, unpredictable but also repetitive, banal and at the same time challenging; it develops together with the growing child. In educational contexts, it often takes the characteristic of play-like activity, being used as a way to catch the child's attention in difficult tasks, to make learning more appealing and interesting. But play for the sake of play, without any additional purposes than play itself, spontaneously arises in the child's life and connects them to their peers, it transforms their daily world (the objects, the events, the environments) into something new, different, imaginary and at the same time concrete.

Children with disabilities may encounter barriers to play due to their cognitive, sensory or physical impairments, and to unfriendly and inaccessible contexts (social and built environments); and they may not be afforded sufficient opportunities for play given that their time is often highly devoted to rehabilitation and educational activities. In this sense, they are all too often deprived of the fundamental engine for physical, cognitive and social development, and also of the possibility to exercise their right to play, with potentially negative consequences throughout their life.

According to the UNCRPD Article 30 (point 5 [d]) State parties are required to 'ensure that children with disabilities have equal access with other children to participation in play, recreation and leisure [...] including those activities in the school system'.

Giving children with disabilities the opportunity to experience play for the sake of play, autonomously driven, is today urgent and indeed mandatory.

Play for children with disabilities is not an insignificant or marginal issue.

Play matters for **all children** – and for humankind – and consequently for *children with disabilities* since primarily they are *children*. Play matters for **human development in society** – growing, learning and socializing – because this is what play supports during childhood.

This ultimately concerns the **future of us all**, because happy and well-rounded children will go on to be the best citizens we can envisage for the future world.

## WHAT DO WE NEED

We must start today to create the humanity of tomorrow. This demands that we take the following steps.

- Different **ways to play** need to be sustained and improved thanks to new knowledge, accessible tools and environments. This *requires* the affirmation of new conceptual frameworks in research and development, where diversity of users' needs and flexibility of envisaged solutions become the norm and not the exception.
- All children must be allowed to exercise their **right to play**. This *demand*s in-depth study and knowledge of the individual. The World Health Organization's bio-psycho-social model of functioning should be fully understood and concretely applied without any unbalanced interpretation: because the essence of the human being is situated at the crossroads of these three domains.
- Adults need to become more able to support children in expressing their potential abilities and their preferences in **play**, while educational contexts should become more and more **playful** and lively places to spend time in. This *calls for* a change to education, which needs to consciously support not only play-like activities but also play for the sake of play.
- All children should **play** together and enrich their capacities through imitation, collaboration and acceptance of diversity. This *may be obtained* only via the spread of an overall inclusive attitude, involving culture, policies, institutions, human relationships, which acknowledge the advantage of challenging differences to find more and better solutions.
- **Play and leisure activities** bring to everyone's life certain irreplaceable and unique moods and experiences, vital for the individual – lightness and happiness, bewilderment and concentration, as well as insights about and pleasure for human interactions. This *emphasizes the need for* an overall change of attitude towards play, as an activity with an end in itself strictly belonging to the constructs of "quality of life" and "wellbeing".

- Last but not least, a substantial breakthrough in policies at national, European and international level is necessary, which concentrates – more stably than today – efforts and resources in this respect and places on the agenda themes and funding related to **children** – and to **children with disabilities too**: their wellbeing, their rights and the world in which they are to live.

#### WHAT ARE OUR PROPOSALS

- That, in keeping with the above statements, new attention is devoted, in all relevant policy fields to children, their specific characteristics, their quality of life and wellbeing.
- That there be greater engagement of relevant bodies with existing research and increased resourcing of research into childhood and the worlds in which children live.
- That research and interventions in the field of children with disabilities might experience a renaissance, revealing their fundamental right to be respected, well-treated, considered and consulted, because they are, first of all, our children and they belong to the world.

**LUDI – Play for Children with Disabilities**

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LUDI – Play for Children with Disabilities is a COST Action (2014-2018) devoted to supporting the play of children with disabilities; it fosters these actions in Europe, involving 32 countries and more than 100 practitioners and researchers.

