

Preface

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Play is a children's right, enshrined in several international conventions. Many research studies show how much play for the sake of play, i.e. play 'only' for recreational pleasure and fun, without any secondary goal, is important for children's wellbeing and development. However, in today's society, play is often considered unproductive and a waste of time. Children with disabilities in particular face many barriers to fully enjoy their right to play, including attitudinal, organizational or systemic, architectural or physical, and technological barriers.

Although play in general is an established research area and children with disabilities' play has been addressed by several studies, there is a lack of a multidisciplinary and integrated perspective on the theme, focusing on play for the sake of play. This called for the need of joining together psychiatrists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, psychologists, pedagogists, childhood educators and teachers, assistive technology practitioners and developers, engineers, designers, architects, disability studies' scholars and activists, policy makers, young persons with disabilities and their significant ones to jointly address the subject of Play for Children with Disabilities.

COST is the longest-running European framework supporting trans-national cooperation among researchers, engineers and scholars across Europe. It funds pan-European networks, called 'COST Actions', of scientists and researchers across all science and technology fields. The COST Action TD1309 | Play for Children with Disabilities (LUDI) (2014-2018, www.ludi-network.eu | www.cost.eu/td1309) is a network involving more than 100 persons from 32 European countries, including all the groups listed above, working towards the creation of a novel and autonomous field of research and intervention on play for children with disabilities. Three main objectives were set for the COST Action LUDI:

a) Collecting and systematizing all existing competence and skills, such as educational researches, clinical initiatives, know-how of resources centres and users' associations;

b) Developing new knowledge related to settings, tools and methodologies associated with the play of children with disabilities; and

c) Disseminating the best practices emerging from the joint effort of researchers, practitioners and users.

Overall, LUDI aims at spreading awareness on the importance of giving children with disabilities the opportunity to play, ensuring equity in their exercise of the right to play, by putting play at the centre of the multidisciplinary research and intervention on children with disabilities.

This book encompasses all the work done within LUDI on play for children with disabilities. It aims to provide, in layperson's language, pragmatic, ready-to-use information for all of those interested in the theme, from scholars to parents looking for solutions on how to enable and support children with disabilities' play.

More specifically, the objectives of these 'Guidelines for supporting children with disabilities' play', are

a) Develop an understanding of what is play and its importance for child development (Chapter 1);

b) Identify specific play challenges in different disability groups (Chapter 2);

c) Raise awareness on play as a right for every child and on the barriers that children with disabilities may face when exercising their right to play (Chapter 3);

d) Provide tools for assessing children's play (Chapter 4);

e) Discuss methodologies for adults to facilitate children with disabilities' play (Chapter 5);

f) Guide adults when considering assistive technology to support play and when selecting toys, physical or digital games, or playspaces for their children (chapters 6 to 9);

g) List the key ideas around children with disabilities' play (Chapter 10); and

h) Enumerate a vast series of resources where one can find more information on play for children with disabilities (Chapters 11). Bibliographic references for the literal quotes included in the book can be found in this Chapter 11.

This publication was only possible thanks to each chapter's authors, which selflessly contributed with their work and expertise, willingly and patiently accommodating our comments and suggestions.

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Finally yet importantly, we would like to thank all the children who made beautiful drawings to illustrate the book.