



Capital funding for play: the forgotten issue



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Typology of play

Children's play differs in respect to adult involvement and use of material objects:

- Free, unstructured and unsupervised play
- Free, unstructured, but supervised play
- Heuristic play
- Structured and adult-mediated play

Different types of play need different materials and different spaces

Outdoor spaces where children play

- Private space: gardens, private grounds
- Public space not designated for play: streets, waste ground
- Public spaces designated for play: playgrounds, parks
- Local authority adventure playgrounds, after-school clubs
- Schools and children's centre grounds
- Maintained nursery grounds
- PVI nursery grounds
- Voluntary sector after-school and holiday clubs, adventure playgrounds

Ownership matters as it determines how funding is raised.

Ownership of daycare and childcare provision

Daycare for under fives: 59% private sector, 30% voluntary sector, 12% maintained sector.

After-school clubs: 38% private, 28% voluntary, 35% maintained

Public spaces designated for play: parks, playgrounds and urban green spaces

Major reduction in capital funding 1976-2000, increase to 2010, now reduction again. Management of these public spaces outsourced in many local authorities.

Capital funding for public parks and playgrounds usually funded by local authority general revenue budget. Other funding for parks has sometimes come from:

- Playbuilder Scheme (now moth-balled)
- Targeted funds, for example, Sure Start Capital
- Neighbourhood renewal funds
- Private developers (through Section 106 of the Town and Country Planning Act 1990) rare
- Heritage Lottery and Big Lottery (this forces a local authority play strategy)
- Other charitable trusts and private endowments

Public spaces designated for play: parks and playgrounds

Issues

- Parks and playgrounds not a statutory service
- Funding in general revenue grant not ring-fenced
- Future funding for parks and urban green space likely to suffer, although some buffering in places, due to out-sourced contracts.
- Funding from targeted and renewal funds also hit
- Big Lottery, Heritage Lottery, charitable and private endowments cannot compensate
- Some London local authorities have little child friendly green space
- Parks' workforce ageing and now experiencing a lack of horticultural and entrepreneurial skills

Local authority adventure playgrounds, after-school clubs

Capital funding from different sources:

- Local authority general revenue
- Parental payment
- Extended schools grant (now moth-balled)
- Playbuilder Scheme (now moth-balled)
- Neighbourhood renewal funds
- Heritage Lottery and Big Lottery (this forces a local authority play strategy)
- Other charitable trusts and private endowments

Again, local authority and neighbourhood renewal funding cut.

School and children's centre grounds

Mostly funded through schools capital expenditure from DfE (Building Schools for a Future programme now ended). Sure Start capital funding stream now ended.

Some voluntary aided schools funded through endowments

Recent review of school capital expenditure – 2011 James Review - highlighted for example, the confusing array of funding mechanisms for capital expenditure, inconsistent building condition data across local authorities and poor building and landscape design. Proposed merger of discrete and ring-fenced aspects of capital expenditure into a single flexible budget.

School and children's centre grounds

- Capital funding for English schools now cut to £182 million for 2011-12 and unlikely to grow much
- Expenditure determined locally, loud voices win
- Rolling programme of buildings conditions assessments won't finish until 2017
- Government envisages standardised school design templates. Good landscape design for outdoor play will suffer

PVI nursery grounds

- We have limited evidence about the conditions of outdoor play areas in PVI nurseries, but we know that a disproportionate number of PVI nurseries in London have no outdoor play areas.
- Private sector can borrow money or use its own equity to invest in outdoor play space
- Voluntary sector cannot borrow money and rarely has its own endowments. Difficult for organisations to apply for charitable funding
- Sure Start capital funding was meant to be available for PVI providers, but very variable access to these funds across local authorities. Loudest voices get money
- In many areas main aim of early years capital funding is now to secure enough spaces for 2 year olds who will qualify for free offer

Voluntary sector after-school and holiday clubs, adventure playgrounds

Losing statutory funding

Limited capacity of charitable trusts to make up funding

What can we do?

- Raise profile of our organisations locally – we need to have loud voices too
- Get hold of LA accounts
- Lobby to ensure that both early years and parks get some capital investment
- Make links with health sector
- Make an economic case for outdoor play re: behaviour, learning, childhood obesity
- Lobby local authorities to use Section 106 more
- Research local trusts
- Ensure that national organisations campaign on capital issues
- Campaign ourselves – contact MPs