

# Activating public playgrounds through organized sports activities

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# Introduction



Playground usage among children is often influenced by various physical factors such as the overall design, or availability of playground structures.

Social factors, like organized activities led by a neighborhood sports coach, can also play a vital role, particularly during after-school hours and weekends. These activities create a safe and accessible environment for kids to engage in physical and social interactions.

However, more research is needed to understand the effectiveness of this approach in increasing playground usage and physical activity levels, as well as understanding potential gender differences.

This brief presents key findings from a study by Sander Bli-ekendaal & Joske Nauta (2024) investigating children's physical activity levels and playground usage.

The study evaluated playgrounds with organized School Playgrounds Sports (SPS) activities to similar playgrounds without SPS programs. Among the offered SPS activities were, for instance, soccer and flag football.

The objective of this study was to evaluate the impact of organized sports activities on children's playground usage and physical activity intensity.

This brief is particularly relevant for local sports providers, policy makers, and other professionals involved in playgrounds and city policies related to sports and physical activity in public areas.



## Results

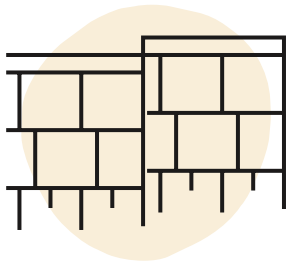
The study found that School Playgrounds Sports (SPS) led to a **53%** increase in playground usage. However, this boost was mostly due to a **91%** rise in boys using SPS playgrounds.

## Key take home message

Drawing from the insights of this study, policy makers and other professionals involved in playgrounds are advised to consider organized sports activities as a strategy to **activate** playgrounds.



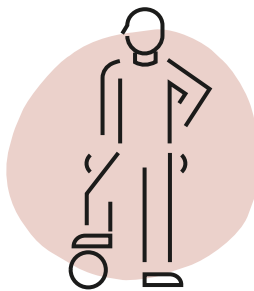
## Why use organized sports activities to activate children's playground usage?



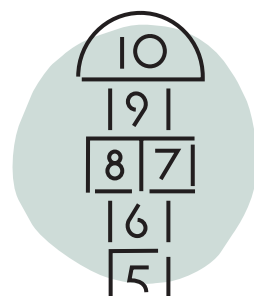
→ Organized sports activities may be particularly relevant in urban areas with a relatively high proportion of children or deprived neighborhoods with limited opportunities for (safe) outdoor play.



→ Providing sports activities on public playgrounds could be a viable approach to increase public playground usage by boys. To increase playground usage by girls, a different approach is needed.



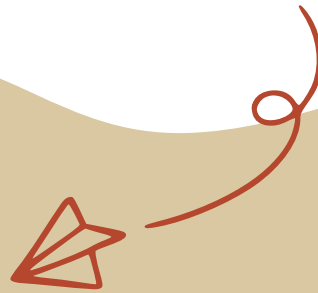
→ Regarding playground (re)design, local sports providers (i.e. the sports neighborhood coaches) can be considered important stakeholders. They can provide practical insights to ensure that playgrounds are (re)designed to be suitable for organized sports or play activities.



→ Furthermore, care is advised for tailoring the organized playground activities to the local situation and, preferably, obtain balanced participation of boys and girls.

## This brief is based on

Bliekendaal, S., & Nauta, J. (2024). Promoting public playgrounds usage and children's physical activity with sports activities: A quasi-experimental study. *Health & Place*, 87, 103248. Advance online publication.



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All briefs focus on topics related to the development and design of playground as well as the impact of playgrounds on children's physical activity, mental and social health and motor skills.

To access our briefs, simply visit our website at [www.playgroundresearch.org](http://www.playgroundresearch.org).

# Contributors

## External collaborator

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## Editor

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