



The Corona pandemic shows: playgrounds and exercise areas are indispensable

The German federal registered association of the playground equipment and leisure facility manufacturers (BSFH) demands from municipal authorities, state governments as well as from the German Federal Government a strong and sustained promotion of modern public playgrounds and outdoor fitness facilities in the coming three years.

The high importance of modern play and exercise facilities was already known long before the Corona crisis started. Especially in urban areas with their growing population and the dwindling number of leisure areas due to inner-city densification, it is of utmost importance to provide a sufficient offer of such areas with attractive facilities.

Based on the following knowledge we thus demand your profound support in the next three years:

1. **JOY OF LIFE:** Playing, sports and physical exercise are elementary components of life for every human being and are to be promoted, especially in public spaces.
2. **HEALTH:** Physical activities practised outside bring joy and benefits for physical health.
3. **PREVENTION:** Outdoor exercise is beneficial for individual persons, regardless of their age, and the society as a whole in terms of preventive health effects.
4. **PROTECTION AGAINST INFECTION:** Outdoor exercise offers advantages compared to indoor exercise, especially with regard to epidemiological factors.
5. **DEVELOPMENT:** Playgrounds enable children, that is to say the youngest members of society, to develop their cognitive, social and physical skills.
6. **SOCIAL ASPECTS:** Outdoor exercise - informally organised - has an enormous impact on social well-being and promotes positive social behaviour.
7. **CLIMATE PROTECTION:** Area-wide outdoor exercise provides opportunities for meaningful leisure activities without serious ecological effects, especially if these opportunities are provided close to home.
8. **PRIORISATION:** Reduced budget appropriations must not lead to reduced investments in social and health-related areas but, on the contrary, to their prioritisation.

For most people of our society, playing and physical activities such as sports and exercise are the most popular and important leisure activities. Even children have a great urge to move and develop their physical and mental skills while they are playing. They enjoy playing and many of them retain this joy even into adulthood. Physical activity also plays a key role in many game forms. From frolicking children, and recreational athletes to senior citizens playing bowls - they all combine physical activities with specific games and enjoy having the opportunity to do so. Exercise, games and sports are good for body and soul and also have a great influence on the overall well-being. It is therefore important that people have the opportunity to practise these forms of leisure activities in their immediate environment. Hence, a good infrastructure of play, sports and exercise facilities is deemed necessary in our cities and municipalities. The respective areas should be attractively designed, publicly accessible and for everyone's benefit by providing a wide range of options through modern leisure equipment suitable for all age groups and social classes. Regardless of whether children's play worlds for climbing, balancing hand-over hand, frolicking or swinging, or exercise areas, for example in the calisthenics or obstacle course sector for teenagers and young adults, or fitness areas with generation-specific exercise possibilities for the general population - there is a great variety of design options available focused on an exercise and game-friendly infrastructure. In addition to sports and health benefits, **the joy of movement** should be the main focus when planning and designing fitness facilities. We firmly believe that such possibilities will be needed to an even greater extent in the future.

In the recent past, numerous scientists have pointed out that there is an evident lack of exercise in our society. This is true for many adults, but - and this is the particularly worrying fact - it is also true for many children and young people. Leisure activities are increasingly taking place on electronic platforms and in the social media sector - which, as a result, leads to a significant increase in civilisation diseases such as obesity, high blood pressure, heart problems and diabetes. Moreover the patients are becoming younger and younger. The restrictions associated with the Corona crisis have further worsened this critical situation. Fitness studios, public sports grounds, swimming pools, amusement parks and also playgrounds were closed due to the general public lockdown and even after some of them have been re-opened they are not fully available and can only be restarted slowly under certain conditions. It was already at the beginning of crisis that several scientists drew attention to

the consequences: in the long term, the initial restrictions will lead to a further increase in civilisation diseases. It is therefore essential to take decisive action to counteract this worrying development and to comprehensively promote the possibilities of an exercise-friendly and activating infrastructure in cities and communities. Moreover, exercise benefits **one's own physical health** while at the same time regularly practised physical activities have positive effects on mind and soul, the fact of which has been proven.

The health benefits of an exercise-friendly and activating infrastructure in cities and municipalities are thus undisputed. More physical activity benefits both individuals and the general population as well as various institutions such as health insurance companies. If sports and exercise can thus be used as **preventive measures** in many places and are practised more frequently, massive costs in health care could be saved in the future. Hence both the insurance companies and the society as a whole and ultimately every individual person will benefit from appropriate outdoor fitness offerings.

However, it is important that everyone - from children to senior citizens - is provided access to their own individual physical activity. This means that public sports facilities are not only made available in schoolyards or sports clubs, but directly in the personal environment, as close to home as possible. It is important to create areas which provide both opportunities and incentives for physical activity. The Corona crisis has shown that in such times publicly available outdoor offerings have specific advantages compared to indoor activities.

Even if the crisis is over, this development will certainly continue, due to the fact that a much stronger perception of infection hazards and hygiene will remain with large segments of the population. As long as climatic conditions allow to do so, a strong emphasis will be placed on outdoor exercise, because here it is much easier to **protect oneself against infection**. For this reason, the adequate availability of outdoor leisure offerings should be particularly prioritised.

Several scientific studies have shown how elementary playing and physical activities are for the **development** of children. While children are playing or becoming physically active both their motor and cognitive skills are developed and improved, while at the same time their language acquisition and social interaction are promoted already at an early age. Thus at playgrounds designed in an attractive and challenging way, children can develop while playing. By providing them with numerous exercise opportunities which offer mental and physical challenges and interaction with other children, they can learn and develop many skills at the playground, whereas such results can only be achieved to a very limited extent at home.

Another important **social factor** is playing and practising sports together with others, because in most cases joint playing and exercising increases both the motivation, duration and above all the enjoyment of the activity. This is one of the reasons why many amateur sportsmen and women are organised in smaller or larger groups outside the club world in order to be active together outside. Publicly accessible exercise areas and playgrounds enable social and communicative participation among all population groups within these spaces. They prevent the exclusion of children and young people due to the lack of financial opportunities. They enable participation, involvement and equal opportunities for physical activities in everyday life outside commercial offers. Attractive and needs-oriented exercise and play areas can thus lead to the revitalisation of residential areas, upgrade city and town centres and contribute to an improvement of the living environment. These areas are thus an indispensable contribution to a good quality of life in the context of urban development. It has been proven that play and exercise facilities help to improve infrastructures suitable for both children, families and senior citizens while at the same time they increase cohesion in the district and help to improve the

integration of disadvantaged population groups and people with a migration background. Such facilities are therefore an important component of an integrated urban development concept and district work. They thus have an extraordinarily high and positive spatial planning steering effect and increase the citizen's identification with their urban districts.

However, an exercise-friendly infrastructure in the municipality means more than just the development of pedestrian and bicycle paths. In order to meet the needs of a large part of the population, it is important to make **stimulating areas for physical activity available as close to home as possible**. To give large parts of the population the chance to promote their own physical activity through these facilities, their easy accessibility is thus very important. The shorter the distance from the home to a physical activity area, the more frequently they will be used. **It should however not be the case that citizens have to search for exercise spaces, but that they encounter fitness areas as often as possible in public spaces**. If travelling to distant places is not possible, our citizens must find attractive places for games, sports and exercise „at home“, in their home town. **And this should be possible everywhere and for everyone without the individual having to bear additional costs**. Independent health care must also be possible for everyone - equal living conditions should play an important role in our society. Fitness facilities close to the home have also further benefits. **They also offer ecological advantages** if the users don't have to travel far for their leisure activities. In addition, urban play and exercise areas with green spaces make an important contribution to the urban microclimate. They enable air exchange, reduce urban overheating, decrease the degree of sealing of urban ground surfaces, improve the water storage capacity of the ground, provide shade by their tree populations and can furthermore be a contribution to networked vegetation islands in the midst of urban areas. In times of increasing structural densification of urban spaces, play and movement areas can secure the availability of essential green spaces. These green areas play an important ecological role for all living beings, air quality and the quality of life in urbanised areas. **Experience in urban development shows that once green spaces have been planned for other purposes, they are lost forever as play and exercise-areas!**

It is therefore even more important in the future to ensure the availability of a good exercise-friendly infrastructure in our cities and communities. Playing and exercise areas must not be the victims of the Corona crisis. On the contrary: if municipal budgets come under pressure due to a lack of tax revenue, the expansion of sports and exercise opportunities for the general public must be ensured. The crisis has shown the importance of outdoor activity for large segments of the population. It is therefore essential to promote this area. **Thus the local authorities must both be given targeted support and appropriate subsidies while, at the same time, action plans must be developed and made available.**

If a new „Golden Plan for Sports“ of the Federal Government, the realisation of which was envisaged before the crisis had begun, should again become the focus of attention, it must be ensured that both the competitive and sports club sectors benefit from it as much as the general public by providing them with sufficient and attractive offers for physical activity. The costs of the health consequences based on the lack of physical activity without further developing and offering sufficient outdoor sports opportunities would be many times higher than today's investment in a modern expansion of an exercise-friendly infrastructure in Germany.

Games, sports and exercise must be elementary components of the life of every person in our society. That is why cities and local authorities must not restrict these areas through cost-cutting measures. There will be no losers in the promotion of play and exercise friendly infrastructures - only winners!