Transcript: Inclusive Spaces: Levelling the playing field

**SUMMARY KEYWORDS**

Play, Inclusive, Refugee, Accessible, Space

**SPEAKERS**

Kamna Patel, Marie Williams

**Kamna Patel 00:00:00**

Hello everyone. Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, welcome to you all, wherever you are in the world, to *The Bartlett and Inclusive Spaces*. This is our monthly seminar series where we're showcasing some of the work that is being undertaken by our staff, by alum and by our own PhD students, in areas to do with “building better” in the built environment in general. Today, it is my absolute pleasure to welcome Marie Williams, who's a doctoral candidate at the Institute for Global Prosperity. Before we get to Marie and the introduction that I want to give her, I’d like to remind you a little bit about housekeeping. So this session is being recorded and will be added to the faculty YouTube channel, The Bartlett EDI website and forwarded to registered attendees. We encourage you to submit a question for the speaker at any point during this lecture, by clicking on the Q&A function at the bottom of the screen. You can submit your own question or “up vote” others. We will hear from Marie for the first half of the session and begin the Q&A in the second half, before ending promptly at two o'clock, UK time. So my name is Kamna Patel, I’m the Vice Dean for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in The Bartlett. And it is my real pleasure to welcome Marie. Marie Williams is a Senior Product Development Engineer, Designer and Academic, who has adopted co-design principles to collaboratively create contextual solutions to a variety of social and environmental challenges in our world. A finalist to the Institute of Engineering Female engineer of the Year. A playful career has seen her collaboratively create innovative solutions within a range of industries, ranging from: aerospace, nuclear building design, to corporate social responsibility and, most importantly, play. In 2016, she launched *Dream Networks* and began a journey to enable inclusive play for all, all children, through the process of co-design. To date, *Dream Networks* has collaborated with businesses, schools and communities in the UK and East Africa to bring play to over 4000 children. She's a PhD student at The Bartlett Institute of Global Prosperity and an Exchange Scholar at the Yale School of Architecture. Through her situated participatory co-design research project, she hopes to generate accessible and tailored play solutions that enable children from the Kenyan and refugee community of Kitengela to thrive through play. Marie, can I pass over to you please?

**Marie Williams 02:36**

Of course you can. Thank you very much for that fantastic introduction. just about to share my screen. One second. I’m making sure it shares correctly. Right. So firstly, thank you all for taking out time at around two o'clock. I know it's a busy day for everybody, so thank you for taking out time to really start to understand this really important and pressing issue. So as you already know, my name is Marie Williams and my work focuses on developing inclusive spaces from the perspective of a child and really starting to look at play and how we can level the playing field. So we’re all really aware of the global refugee crisis. It’s potentially a crisis that we've probably all heard of again and again, so it becomes something that doesn't even feel as if it's an emergency, or something to be concerned about. But it is something that is affecting millions and millions of people around the world.

And as of 2016 there were about 10 countries hosting over 50% of the refugees across the world. These refugees aren't necessarily in what we call camps or in isolated places. A significant amount of refugees, particularly in Kenya, are urban refugees.

So these urban refugees live within host communities, so for example Kenya, and they may have, or may not have, legal status. So legal status covers things such as the right to work, the right to travel freely, except for Congolese people. Congolese people are the majority of refugees that are in the place that we're going to be focusing on today, Kitengela.

When they leave their home and they want to go and find a place of refuge and shelter, they often go to places where they know there are other people who speak the same language as them or have got similar stories. And they go to a place and expect it to be their refuge point. A place where they can have shelter, where they are going to have protection. As I mentioned, we've been Kenya, if you look at the image on your far left you'll see Green is the mass of Congo.

So for people to move from Congo to Kenya, they go across countries. When they get to Kenya, they typically stay in numerous places, Kitengela being one, which is on the outskirts of Nairobi, also places called, Kaio, Emojo, etcetera. And within Nairobi there's over 67,000 urban refugees and increasing in number. If you look at Kitengela itself, Kitengela used to be quite a pastoral land. It was it was mainly owned by Maasai people. From 2009 to 2019 it has tripled in population. The population now is over 155,000. So it may not seem like a significant number but imagine that triple over 10 years. And when that occurred, it's great that the refugees are able to live in the communities amongst the Kenyans, they live together in Kitengela and on the outskirts of Kitengela.

One of the key challenges that we all know with population growth, is that if it isn’t planned for it is potentially protracted people staying in Kitengela. So the refugees who come from the Congo to Kenya may have expected to stay one yeah but instead they stay five years, etcetera, it's hard to plan for. So when we are considering play and we're considering whether children should have access to play, a key thing to really focus on is space. Whether the space being planned for, like public space for children to be able to play and whether they have actually got capacity to have planned for it when it was potentially unexpected. And also considering the fact that in these environments that a lot of the refugees may come to, they are not the high-income areas, they are not in the poshest skyscrapers, anything like that.

It’s places that are typically lower income and poorer. So in those environments there is often limited capacity for the government to plan for certain things. But then, from the perspective of a child, when you recognise United Nations Conventions about the child, Article 13, a key factor is, “every child has a right to play and to recreation”. If they haven’t got space to play, how is that enabled? How is that enacted? And that's one of the key things we’ll focus on in this talk, as I’ve already spoken about the fact that, when they move from Congo to Kenya, they look for a place of refuge and shelter.

For a child, what is a place of refuge or shelter? What is a place of community? And I would say that's a playground, or area to play, so how do we actually cultivate that in these spaces? So this quote is by Friedrich Froebel. Hopefully I pronounced that ok, forgive me the people who know how to say it better! So I’ll just read it out. So “play is the highest level of child development. It gives joy, freedom, contentment, inner and outer rest, peace with the world”. “Peace”.

“The plays of childhood are the germinal leaves of later life”. So play is fundamentally known as something that's important for development: physical, social, emotional and mental development. This picture, that hopefully will come up quite soon, yeah here we go. These are some children playing in Kitengela. And these are children who are playing in a public play space and from being able to play and being able to interact with the objects in that play space, they have been able to feel safe. They can speak to each other, to an extent create their own sense of community, have conversation, engage in language and start to get a sense of belonging to that space.

So when a child’s being removed from Congo to Kenya, or maybe they are first generation, so their parents actually moved and they are living in Kenya as a Congolese, they don’t necessarily feel as if they belong. But play areas create and cultivate a sense of belonging, for children. I love this image. The reason I love it is because, I think some people see it and they’re like “oh that’s a wonderful play area!”. I would question that. This is a fun place in Kitengela, it’s on the outskirts so firstly you would typically need to travel to get to this play area. It’s colourful, which is why for some people it’s considered to be a good play environment, but that actually is not the truth.

A good play area really enables children to enjoy and cultivate diverse play opportunities. So it's not just about aesthetics, in terms of what people may see it to look like or potentially they maybe think it’s beautiful. It’s actually what is in that environment that enables the children to be able to engage in play. So I’m going to talk about taxonomies. As was said in the intro, I’m an engineer so I like systems, so I like to look at the five taxonomies of play. This has been coined by Dr David Whitebird who used to be a Professor at Cambridge University and it's looking at the physio-social aspects of play and then grouping it in that manner.

So firstly, physical activity. Physical activity could be playing football, it could be dancing. Symbolic is being able to potentially pick up an object and from that object derive a different symbol. Imaginative is role play and imaginative is really fantastic when you consider children who are trying to get a sense of belonging or feel as if they want to manage emotional trauma. Games with rules, these can be games that children just create themselves, that image shows a hopscotch, hopscotch is something that I found in Dream Networks that I constantly see across the world. It looks different across the world, but it's constantly coming up. And playing with objects, objects can be something that is naturally found or it could be a synthetic material. It’s often looked to be used for doing constructive play, manipulative play, for creative play, it covers games with rules, it’s imaginative and one of the key things I’m going to talk about is actually playing with objects.

So play places, I already mentioned, can create a place of shelter, cultivate a sense of belonging and community. So I’m going to talk a bit about inclusive design, from the perspective of, just basically inclusivity from the perspective of design. So inclusivity from the perspective of design, I often think of as designing for the excluded. And then designing for everybody. So how do we design for the one that is often forgotten or excluded. And then from designing for them, how do we encompass, in these, everybody? So I’m just giving you some foundations in terms of what we're going to talk about in terms of being able to create inclusive space.

So, right now, if you remember to think of that lens, then I’m focusing on Kitengela and talked about the Congolese refugee children. The needs of the Congolese refugee children are apparent, but they are also significant needs for the Kenyan children themselves. We're not going to create a player that is fantastic for the children who are Congolese and leave out the needs for the children who are Kenyan. It’s imperative for all children, play is a right for all children, which I mentioned before, so when we're designing and we think of inclusive play, everybody should be invited to the party.

So in regards to what I’m doing at UCL, I’m working in the Institute of Global Prosperity with Professor Dame Henrietta Moore. And also Dr Clare Melhuish as my supervisors (who are fantastic by the way!) and I’m also working on several co-design projects. The main partners for the projects are a NGO in Arabia, who have a community-based organisation in Kitengela. So what we're doing in terms of co-design. Co design – I’m going to go through the system that we use. The key that that co-design does is that it takes away the, I guess the power, from the researcher or designer and it gives more agency to the user.And because I work with children, we take it a bit further.

We say to the children themselves, the user, and also the people around them that are stakeholders – so their parents or teachers – how can we collectively, using the tools that we have provided that are accessible, understand what the play needs are and how can we create a play area that is inclusive and fosters a place where children are able to come together and feel like they belong. And feel as if they have shelter and safety. So my research focused in three areas: public schools, private schools and free public spaces.

In Kitengela, actually the majority of schools are private, there is only one public school, which sounds pretty crazy! Actually it's not crazy, it works in that area, and particularly when we consider Congolese children are refugee children, I mentioned that the parents may not have the same rights to be able to access work or maybe potentially access lower income work. If they have to go to private school and pay, you recognize that they may be challenges potentially for Congolese children accessing those schools. And then you have the free public spaces. Every child can access a free public space.

In terms of the methodology that is being used, some of you may be familiar with design thinking. I’ve kind of adapted design thinking, based on what we do in *Dream Networks* and I’m trying to see how can we understand the problem from the lens of a child and from their stakeholders. So first thing we could say here is that we recognise that we need more space for play. But I also recognise I am not Kenyan and I am not the one who is able to solve the world's problems. I recognise there’s a problem, I want to work with the user, to work with communities themselves to really understand what they need.

And co-design is wonderful for that, because if you want to have empathy, a great way to have empathy is actually to work with the user themselves, to understand their needs and to understand the environment. So the work that I’m doing, in Kitengela, works with what we call local researchers. So I’ve trained two fantastic researchers who weren't researchers before, but they completely have the skills and you can see them working as researchers to come. They’re currently working in Kenya, right now, when I’m not able to travel. And they are fantastic, they understand the Community, they speak the languages, one of them speaks the Congolese dialect, speaks French. One of them speaks English and speaks Kiswahili, so it’s really fantastic in terms of being able to speak the language of the people they’re working with.

Then we've been working with children, as young as actually four, to actually understand what are their needs, what’s stopping them from playing, what's enabling them to play, what’s their idea of what is a great play area to them. And you can see, this image of a range of children looking down on a piece of paper and they’re sketching out how they like to play and then after, they’re explaining. So it’s about creating research methods that are accessible, so they potentially like the sketch, so we enabled them to sketch, the sketch doesn’t need to be fantastic (we told them that!)

And after they then say, “this is what we like to play”, “this is how we like to play”, “this is what’s stopping us from playing”, so that’s how again we're able to have empathy and start to get more ideas. And I’ve got this image, which is one of the methods we use as well. Basically, you have a camera and the children go outside and say how they like to play in their actual spaces, situated in the space they have and you see a child there, she's playing with her ball, she's playing netball potentially. And they also drew pictures, to say how do they like to play, so you can see this as an image of I think it's the girl who did this as well, and she likes to play with her ball, but she said she liked to play football.

And she also showed how her face looked (and I remember speaking to her about this) so that's a happy face, I thought it was a scary face but it’s a happy face! So the focus of the work we've been doing so far has been going through the stages of empathy, understanding ideas and designing. The stage after, which I won’t discussing this talk, which is what we're working on right now until the end of August, is designing an experiment and prototyping different ideas and testing out that play area for a temporary play station in Kitengela.

So I mentioned the work we do works really with users themselves, it's really participatory and it's, like I mentioned, adopting co-design. So these are some images of us working with a group of parents afternoon. Because it's important to understand, creating workshops that are created in times when people can access it. So this is one that's in the afternoon, the next one's later in the evening, that's why you can tell slightly different colours, it's not just the quality of the camera! And the picture on the left is us trying to understand what is enabling the children to be able to play and then grouping it according to environmental, social and economic. And there is a similar picture on the right.

In one picture in one of our meeting’s we’re working with Congolese and with the Kenyan and the next session was purely with the Congolese. And in both sessions, we spoke the same language, Kiswahili and that was seen to be accessible. Some of the things I thought was interesting that came out: It's a lot of work that's been done, when they consider you know, the people who removed in this challenging environments and they say “parents really don't value play, they want their children to be working really hard, they don't recognize to be something that's going to help their development”. We found this not to be true at all for a lot of the work we did.

We found that the parents themselves felt that actually they do value play, they want their children to play and they think that there should be a space to play. Obviously our sample size doesn't cover all the parents, but by working with the Xavier Project, we were able to work with actually potentially parents which would not normally go to community consultation. And lower income parents, and this is what their view is.

And it was a key thing that also came out that when they were looking at children playing they felt that there was no difference between Kenyan and the refugee children, they’re able to access the same space, they’re able to play together. And I’ll challenge that further down the line.

So some preventative factors that were raised by the community. So, one of the key things was that a lot of the community members felt as if there wasn't enough materials or resources to be able to play, and also the fact that they needed a designated space that was safe. I think that something I felt was to be preventative was how some people potentially assumed play, what play needs to be.

If you remember I showed you the image of that fun space, which looks like a great play space, but actually that’s not necessarily all the that play is. And something that a teacher said was “I have seen multipurpose fields for football and netball, badminton table tennis”, so these are sports, they're great, but they’re sports, and if play is to be inclusive, it should cover the other factors like I mentioned before.

Another thing to talk about again is safety, I am concerned with my child’s safety and health when they’re playing. And this is something that I think is really key, I’ve talked to you really briefly about the fact that the Congolese have left the Congo to go to Kenya, about recognising that they’ve left the place where there was political violence. There was a lot of conflict, they potentially have seen deaths and they're worried about their child’s safety. That's potentially a Congolese story.

In Kenya there's high rates or growing rates, in newspapers they often talk about kidnapping, so actually also Kenyan parents themselves are worried about their children’s safety. Worried that they might be kidnapped. So parents of both sides collectively are worried for their child’s safety.

One of the things that the children, say, is, “I have too much school work” and in reality, a child in the UK can say that as well. “What’s stopping you from playing?” “I’ve got too much homework”. But one thing that has changed with Covid has been that we’ve seen that children who were potentially going to the private schools, because of the fact that schools had been closed in Kenya for a significant period of time from March 2020 up to April 2021, actually a lot of private schools have closed down.

And this is very important for us to consider, because our work wants to create a play space that is inclusive. And part of inclusivity, like I mentioned, is being able to design for everyone, it’s being able to create a play space where people can go to. Regardless of whether they can afford to go to school or not. So the research initially was really focused on how we could potentially create play in a private school.

There are limited private schools. A good amount of Congolese do still go to private schools, but now with Covid, we've actually seen that the neighbouring schools are potentially a limiting factor, in terms of creating inclusive play spaces. Which is also challenging when you're considering safety. Because in a school, you can imagine that the parents feel their child’s chance of safety is significantly reduced compared to public space, so over 50 million children weren't able to attend school. And then, when we talk about 50 million children who weren’t able to attend school, we could also really start to consider what are the issues. That have arisen. So there have been a lot of physiological issues have arisen, this is what I found out from speaking to the community through my local researchers.Things such as lack of resources, lack of indoor entertainment, the children doing tasks that are I guess you'd call it quite solitary.

There have been issues with their emotional development and their social development. And this is where I’ve started to believe that you start to see where there is a difference between the Kenyan and the refugee children, because more of the refugee children aren’t able to access play areas. So I put this image here just to let you know, this is something that isn’t just localised to Kenya. Across the world, children’s have been hit by Covid-19. Children who would typically access play through schools.

Even myself, I live in Brockley, London, wonderful area, and actually the majority of children in my area, particularly BAME children, access play at school. In terms of having a safe area that's known. So with Covid there’s been a lot of challenges regarding accessible play to all. And play that's inclusive, so again, think about how do we need to potentially look at a public space and what challenges does that bring?

So with regards to Kitengela, I mentioned there's one public school that's called “Prisons”, you can see that on the left. Our research focused in one area that was about a radius of just over a mile and we wanted to understand how are children playing in that environment? And how can we understand it and provide it to them? By doing workshops but also by doing observations. So what we observed, is that there are significant difference box spots for children’s play.

Unlike in the UK where you don’t often see a lot of street play, in Kitengela there's a lot of street play occurring. And when I say street play, it’s not just on the roads, it can be play that’s also in an open field that is potentially mixed-use, it could be played out in the market space, that again it's mixed-use. But also, it's in open fields that are not necessarily designated to play, in churches, in footpaths as well as schools.

So I’m going to talk a bit about some of the spatial characteristics of all these different spaces that I’ve talked about, because it’s great that you want to create a play space. You want to work with the community, you’re doing co-design that’s inclusive, but actually, practically, an engineer in me says “how does this actually work?”. So some characteristics that have been developed by X & Y, we started to look at in terms of the relevance and so touch on two of the key ones. So looking at having obvious physical boundaries and having supervision, or links to the concern for safety. And having shaded areas to pay and having open space for different activities for groups and individual, enables you again to cultivate diverse play. One I really liked, that was already created, and it's “is the play area enticing?”. I think that's dependent on who you're speaking to.

But these are some of the characteristics we’re considering. So looking at some schools, so we worked with a range of private schools. And to understand like play and working with children there. So this is a school in Kitengela called Kitengela Academy. As you can see, the tree, it’s got shaded areas to play. This is an open field in another school called Springfield. A grassy area with different, I guess heights, of typography is varied so that affords even more play opportunities. And this is the area that is in the public school Prisons, which has a really large field. And you can see there’s a range of play that can occur there. But recognise we’re not actually seeing equipment, but a lot of play occurs there. Through objects.

So I told you, I mentioned our work with the Xavier Project. I’m going to let you listen to an audio.“Safety in the school will depend on the status of the school”. “But outside the school, like the children who are playing outside the buildings”. “Maybe more unsafe than the children being in the school compound”. “So it will depend on their safety, it will depend on where the children are. In terms of space, one thing that you need to agree is that most of the schools in Kitengela do not have enough play space”.

So the concept of play space is a limiting factor to both the school in school and for outside the school.” So what's been highlighted here, is numerous things have been highlighted, but a key thing was the fact that potentially space for war is a limiting factor. That's key to know. But actually we have to work with the spaces that we do have, and even outside of schools there's potentially more space to be able to grow your play, to have a larger environment where you're able to cultivate play.

And actually I found within schools it was really varied. Within public schools, where you don’t have to pay, this play area was immense. But the one public school was actually created on an area in a prison, it’s actually called Prisons Public School, and there was a lot of land. Yeah so I spoke a bit about some of the schools. So looking at the public spaces, so there's a range of public spaces really varied in terms of wherever they have grass or whether it’s just bare ground or whether it's gravel. That affords different sensory engagement with children’s play, but also potentially has safety challenges if a child falls on gravel.

Comparing it to (you can see my expression!) but, oh that could be a bit scary. Or if a child is able to be in the place where we have grass, there is potentially a softer landing. The mixed-use open space I mentioned before. There's quite a few of those, but there may have challenges, more with litter and also with a walkthrough (so in terms of people using as a footpath) and then roads. Roads, children are actually seen playing on them. And I remember speaking to quite a few parents and they would say “the children never play on roads, never play on roads”. We observed children playing on roads quite a lot.

But one thing that was interesting is thinking about public space, the way that you can consider the safety in a public spaces quite different, because in these public spaces they are residential buildings. There are businesses, there are places where there is supervision. So that you’re starting to cultivate space without necessarily having a fence. Because one of the people we were working with said “you need to have a fence”, but actually there's different ways to cultivate safety, through objects, outside objects. So I’ve highlighted this already in terms of the play culture, the play culture being different in terms of, potentially there are more children on the road. But it's not necessarily something that the parents want at all. The parents do want safety, similar to the UK where they want children play more, they want them to be on the roads. But they, in the UK, maybe they've been able to have planning, been able to close off the play area. Close off the road, that's not something that's likely to occur in Kitengela.

So really understanding how the culture can influence what is enabled and how potentially the actual people being in that community working around that space, being able to provide an amount of safety. Being able to cordon off that space for certain times, through code-design with them, how can I potentially create a space that is playful and also safe?

So this is a star diagram I’ve already mentioned. I’m quite a detailed engineer. I won't go into too much detail, but we're just talking about the material characteristics of play areas. One of the things I really want to highlight is where we’re looking at changes in land form which is stimulating engagement and challenging. So what you actually do find is in open fields and also in mixed-use public spaces there are quite often different changes in ground. And often people say “no, I want to level the ground, that's perfect, that makes a really safe place for children to play” and actually if a child wants to jump, wants to dance, wants to do role play, actually having different heights is really useful. And I think we need to consider access to natural materials and access to synthetic materials.

Depending on the kind of space you're in. And again, you have to consider safety in terms of what kind of material is safe to touch. So opportunities for play. So I already mentioned that the community value play, they recognise that children develop. But one thing I really liked is that in certain schools they’re really starting to highlight how important play is. So one of the mums told me that her child had said “don't you know, I have a right to play” when she said “do an errand, or do some work” that was really fantastic to hear. Another thing was the fact that children themselves like to play with objects and they like to play with their friends, so moving away from that idea of having to have fixed equipment or looking at what I showed you in GMC.

But how can we use objects and how do children play to develop their talents, to help them grow, to help them develop and help them to feel as if they have a community. So I’m going to tell your story of a boy who I do not actually know, but we were doing observations, and I first saw him on the road. He was playing with this tire. The tire was like his friend, he was rolling it and holding it like a stick so it's like a dog because I saw a dog. And then he sat down on a tire, it became his seat. And then when he was sitting on a tire, he started to play with the brick wall next him, as you can see in that image there is a little hole next to the, if you look along the base of the wall there’s a little hole, he started playing in that hole.

He got a plastic bottle, filled it with water from muddy ground, which is again not the safest, and put that in that area and started to do manipulative object play. Fantastic! And from then, actually some children joined him. They started talking (I don't understand Kiswahili) so clearly the local researcher said they were just basically doing, she didn’t tell me the details whilst they were talking to talking, they were socialising and getting to know each other. Both of these two groups of children are outside the school and the school is on. So they're able to use their little objects and the environment around them to create a space of play where they feel that they can belong when they are actually meant to be in school, but they're actually not able to go to school. And these children are actually Kenyan. But also, so many Congolese children are not able to go to school.

So I won't go into too much detail here, but what we've started to do was start to map the different children’s behaviour in terms of play. Of playing in different spaces. And what we found is that actually objects were something that was a really key factor in terms of what enabled children to play. Either it would be a ball and its physical play, you might be manipulating the ground like I mentioned. This space is actually next to where I showed you the boy and it's next to next to schools, it's next to homes, so potentially has supervision, but there's a big challenge: litter. So that place is quite a messy space, so wouldn't be necessarily deemed as typically safe.

So I’ve talked to you a bit about the objects that the children are playing with, so I’m going to show you some more, so obviously, like a tire I mentioned it before. The tire, the children are able to socialise, they’re able to develop their gross motor skills which is really important for children at that pre-operational stage. From the age of like four to seven. Also they're able to roll play, this girl is pretending to sweep by moving a magazine. The children are playing with a ball, playing with skipping ropes, being able to cultivate play in this environment that typically people may not see as playful. Using a culture of play. I showed you the taxonomies, they're able to cover all the taxonomies through using these objects.

So accessible, in all play spaces, is what I see as inclusive, so a play that is accessible, objects that can be used in different spaces, is a way to go towards inclusivity. And also having multiple uses of the object, enables you to have more diverse ways to play, and enables more people to engage in the play. These images are showing an example I mentioned before of object play. Object play, playing with the material around them and able to create a space where they’re able to play. So I’ve showed this image before, it’s a boy playing with a branch, but actually again the space that he’s playing in isn't safe, so we need to really think about how to cultivate this place that is safe.

And there are simple methods to do that, such as having supervision, such as involving the community in co-design in a space where they believe children can play. Through working with them to understand more about what play is, outside of badminton, outside of football. Again I showed him manipulating play, which is similar to what you just saw in that video, using local environments, using synthetic materials. Then I’m showing a slide, which people typically think it's fantastic for play. As you think about it, actually the main taxonomy for this is physical activity. I love a slide, don't get me wrong. But actually, you don't necessarily need to have a slide, or fixed equipment, to be able to play. So the cultural perceptions of safety and quality and what you need to have for a quality, high quality play space really can be shifted when you look at objects and when we look at what people have access to. And when we’re able to co-design with the users and with the parents and even work with stakeholders, such as UNHCR, which is United Nations Refugee Agency, working with the NGOs, working with the local chief, working with the local planners. And community groups, that can be the community themselves.

How can we start to look at what should safety look like and how can we create more access to play? So my closing slide is really thinking about free places as being a space where you can cultivate equity and equality through who can access the play, and who can access the materials. Understanding that safety is really imperative, across a range of contexts, but it doesn't need to equate to a fence, it can be things such as cultivating an environment where the ground is cleared. Frequently, understanding rather that people need to be paid for that, and what challenges that may bring, but really thinking about safety not necessarily needing to be a fence, it can be even be a cumulus of people together. Co-designing spaces that are safe and socially resilient by working with the community themselves, putting the play space in an area where they believe there is a value, where people can access it, where children don’t need to pay money to travel to get there. So it actually is engaging and is used. And lastly, creating an enticing play space that actually considers the child’s perspective in terms of what objects they like to play live, whether they care if their play is colourful, encouraging them to play a lot and really understanding their perspective.

Understanding the local culture in terms of the time for children to play. In terms of whether they like to socially piece together, whether dancing and sound is important to them when they're playing, how can we create space that enables that to be fostered and also using local materials. So yes, I just want to thank you all for taking the time to listen to this conversation. Hopefully over the next 20 minutes, we can talk about how we can level the playing field. And if you want to contact me I’ve provided some of my social media contacts below and also my email address. Thank you all very much.

**Kamna Patel 36:41**

Thank you very much Marie, that was fascinating, can I ask you to stop sharing your screen, just so that we can see each other? Perfect, thank you. There are a few questions here and I’d like to... we will get through them, but I don't want to start necessarily with the order that they present in. I want to go back to your methodology. There’s a big part of your presentation that focuses on participation or child participation and you use the term “co-design”. And I’m curious as to how much of that is “co”, like what's the partnership equivalence in that? Because notoriously working with children is difficult. Meaningful child participation often means having to guide children. I mean, my discipline is development studies they're coming from different perspectives. There can often be quite a lot of coaxing of young people to really draw out from them what you need, in that context.  So bearing that in mind, with the co-design principles, how is it (and I’m speaking here to Bridget’s question) how is it that children are enabled to participate fully in that co-design process?

**Marie Williams 37:57**

That’s actually a fantastic question and I think a key thing you mentioned really draws upon tokenism and power dynamics and I think if you remember the image I showed you at the beginning, all we have done in the beginning, is state that we have observed that there's a problem. You need to play. We haven't said “and you must play on the swing”, we’ve said “let me know how you want to play”, we haven't prescribed what is required, we’ve been quite open. Firstly, starting to empathize with them, by being able to do things such as interviews, workshops and observations, but beyond that really trying to use methods that are levelling the playing field in terms of access to child’s participatory tools. So it means that children can engage through speaking, through drawing, through acting. And asking questions that are really open and enabling them to change the structure. We don’t just have a method of question and answer, and not everybody wants to read a question or not everyone can read a question and maybe not everyone understood. So we use a range of different methods that really enable children to engage in different manners so they're able to have a voice and in the beginning, we don't prescribe a really closed question or say we know the full answer. The problem is, we believe you need more access to play. We're going to work with you, we’re going to explore it, you can challenge us and, as you can see, in that model, hopefully, see in the work, my thoughts in the beginning have really changed since working with the children. So yeah, I think it's really just using methods that are more accessible and not prescribing what the answer is, or what the question should be. Okay, let me ask a little follow-up question to that from Hannah here. Can you expand a little bit on those spatial characteristic categories that you gave and how those came about within design? They came up through William Rouse, I can potentially send that information.

In terms of trying to characteristics in terms of play value in environments, I then took that down a range of factors and assessed which of them are special.  And which of them are relevant to the community, based on our discussions with them. So if you may notice, I put a ranking in terms of relevant effects derived from previous academic work. Then it was filtered through, because a lot of them were working with the community, and then we also said what was relevant. And the reason I even focused on the one which was “is this area enticing” because actually, maybe is it even that relevant to our community? And what is “enticing”? That’s really vague. So yeah, hopefully that’s answered, it’s come from academia and it’s been tailored to our community.

**Kamna Patel 40:29**

Okay, thank you. There's a question here from someone who hasn't left their name, but it's still a really good question, about children with disabilities, and how they're able to access play. And I want to piggyback something else onto that. I mean, you spoke that in the community that you're working with has a lot of refugee children. I’m going to presume that these are children that are processing trauma in some way, perhaps from the context that they're coming from? Where, in the co-design process, in the act of playing, what allowances are there that are made for different types of children, whether they have physical disabilities or mental disabilities, perhaps coming from the fact that they come from a context where they may have seen violence?

**Marie Williams 41:14**

So I will touch upon firstly in terms of like special education needs, if that's ok, and then I’ll talk about trauma. I think that's really relevant and I’m a very honest and transparent person. We're trying to have more empathy with the children themselves and trying to work with different schools. Firstly, the school we go to is already limited by who will be open to us being able to do workshops with them.You know the children are limited in the way they can be studies. Even the work I do UK is limited. Actually, in the UK more schools are open to taking out time to be able to have a  playground. But in this environment, we’re limited by where we can go. So one school that we were working with to make observations, I thought about special educational needs and I didn’t see it. I kept on actually saying to my local researchers “I’m not really seeing it”.I only met one autistic child. And what the what the local researcher said to me, and some of these are anecdotal, but some of these are actually factual. In that environment, they felt as if the children see that Autism is an issue, but this Autism isn't necessarily something that schools think they can manage, so I don't see them. So what I’m really trying to say is, in regards to my sample size and the work I was doing, I recognised there was need. But I wasn't able to really see or even have time to be able to engage. The parents didn’t necessarily want to speak to me and beyond that I haven't got background in SEN. So I mentioned that designing for accessibility is for maybe another session, it’s very different to designing for inclusion and I am not someone who can design for accessibility, because I haven't got a skill set to really focus on design for autistic children or a school for children with special education needs.

But we did start to think about what factors can be put in place, through methodology, to say how can we design for all. So how can we use more sense engagement? Either not saying that is needs to be oversensitive, using extreme senses, because that's not true, in terms of autism. Not saying you have to have loads of senses, but how do we engage the senses? So there's different forms of children to be able to engage in our process of co design, if we do have someone with special education needs. And also, when we are considering access, how do we create space that enables there to be more consideration for people who have got physical mobility challenges and that's more of a design issue. But I would have loved to work with more children who had those challenges, but actually I didn't have access to them. And that I think is quite fair and I don't even know if I’m that skilled as a PhD researche4 to be doing all that work.

**Kamna Patel 43:42**

Ok.

**Marie Williams 43:44**

So through design we account for them and that’s very key, so really recognising that is really important to us, but I didn't say within our participatory research we’d been able to engage with those children. So I want to be really clear on that. And in terms of trauma. That's something I thought would be something that we’d really want to focus on, and again when I was looking at the different taxonomies of play, particularly object play, symbolic play and even role-play, people attribute to managing trauma. Managing past experiences. So using taxonomies to be able to design space that is inclusive by showing it has that diversity. But actually, the children in Kitengela who come from Kenya, often they are first generation. So they may not necessarily have seen all of the trauma. But their parents may have.

So challenges, like I mentioned tend of not be concerned for their safety, etcetera, because of what they're seeing. And then, if they are children who have gone across from Congo, which is countries away from Kitengela, they're often older. So they are often more youth and I met a lot of them in the Xavier project. But in terms of working with them if the child has a trauma, in our work we have already started to develop a method so that if there is a trauma, and the children bring it up in our next stage of research, how can we signpost? I think that’s really important in co-design – you’re not an expert in everything. But you need to be able to feel as if the people can come to that space, feel included and know they can be helped. So how do we create signposting mechanisms? And that's what we're doing.

**Kamna Patel 45:16**

Ok. Thank you. Let me move ever so slightly into who is playing in the space and who is it that we are working with. So of course children are rarely “single agents”. They are often with families, they’re with adults, they're part of a network. So in designing these spaces and thinking about the design of play spaces, is there something in your work that has led you to think about how adults might also...engage with play, to increase their own sense of belonging, or to introduce something of their own culture and cultures of play into new communities? And that's a question that's picking up from Anisa.

**Marie Williams 45:57**

This is a controversial answer. I can give the answer that I’m meant to give but I’m going to give the one that comes to my heart. The first question: child participatory. When we’re working with children, what do the children feel as if they need and want in their space. So dependent on the age of the child, a younger child may feel more safety potentially by their parents being around and it's not like the rest. In context, I think often we think we need to have benches. And they've got parents that are able to watch their children and supervise. That isn't how we see it in the context of Kitengela, so in terms of the role of the parents, then, for me, the main thing that the role of parents do bring to the table is recognising that a lot of children learn play and play through with their parents, up to a certain age.And then after a certain age, maybe the children do not necessarily want their parents to be there. So I think when we’re creating a plac space and the work we're doing is really concerned with, and you may remember some of that I think are the spatial characteristics. We’re saying if for instances you have spaces to play, whatever space you have, are we able to cultivate an environment for different ages of children to play and that were for different types of parental needs. I do not want to focus my research on creating a space where parents come and play, they manage trauma, they socialise. Actually, there's a marketplace for that. And if the children potentially are going into the play area with their parents and their parents then commune, great, but that's not the focus.

**Kamna Patel 47:22**

Okay. Thank you for that, I’m hoping that that's also addressed the question about parents and children playing together. Let me ask something else and come back to the UK temporarily, because I think James’ question might… I think it’s a little bit about the UK. And that's, how do we encourage local councils to open locked entrances. And I presume here, might mean to playgrounds, or play spaces, to enable more access to them. Specifically, ones that have been locked through, ostensibly, security concerns.

**Marie Williams 48:02**

I would think that less as an academic, but more as CEO of Dream Networks and I guess play practitioner. Actually it's not just about safety, beyond safety it’s maintenance. So these play areas that have been closed in certain local councils, potentially they haven't actually allocated funding and time to be able to maintain that play area. And the reason the play area is closed is because of maintenance, so that's part of the richness and beauty of the work that's been done in Kitengela, in my opinion. It’s actually seeing how can we create play that doesn't necessarily require the kind of fixes equipment we see in the western culture, which needs to be heavily maintained which have numerous things which potentially the playground equipment provider says “you must do this”. Because they are over-assessing their work, because they want to, first of all, make sure things are safe, so even maybe taking it too far.

Some of the work I’m even doing in an area in Birmingham, I’ve worked with the safety inspector to design materials for natural play areas and it looks great and from a safety perspective it’s fantastic, but a playground provider ask me why you're not putting down hard ground, and you know that hard stuff (I’m trying to remember the word) and really challenged my design, but actually the design was created by the children, we co-designed with the children. We’ve given it to the safety inspector, we’ve been able to develop it so it’s safe. This is how it can look. But actually, local councils don’t necessarily have the time to be able to do that. So they may get their structure from an equipment provider, which is fantastic, but then being able to maintain is challenging, so I would say, actually really starting to think with local councils. How can they reconsider how they design their space for play, and if not, how can they plan better so that they are able to have enough money to be able to enable the play area to be maintained. Or would they work with the community to be able to maintain that play area so they're less likely to close it.

**Kamna Patel 49:58**

I wonder if learning from the work you’ve been doing there might be something about re-thinking what is a play area? That the player is not that one bit of the park with a piece of equipment in it. That's what I was getting from your research.

**Marie Williams 50:11**

Yeah and it's challenging for me, but the great thing about co-design and working with children is that you're not really sure what's going to occur. But actually the driver for the Dream Networks team that works on my particular research is being a designer who's able to navigate through their ideas and develop a method that actually hopefully is safe. But actually really account for the existing play culture but it's challenging because I think perceptions of quality of play areas and safety of play areas are often that standard slide swing, etcetera. Which I think are fantastic, but like the person mentioned there's issues with maintenance and there’s issues with closure.

**Kamna Patel 50:49**

I want to link that to the question that Paul has asked here and that's around density; greater urban density in the built environment. So essentially, there might be less space. That exists and is open and has some of the safety features and the safety characteristics that you're describing in your talk, so what might be some of the challenges about finding spaces to play in areas that are becoming more populated? I mean denser.

**Marie Williams 51:18**

I think one of the key things is really depending on the context you're in. Seeing who has the control of what is planned, because I think with a lack of knowledge you're unable to develop well. So I think a challenge that you have when there is an area where it's potentially lack of planning and it's consistent urban development. And that's the reason that we are co-designing and we're working with the community themselves. Who are, I really dislike the word “underground”, but in that community. And be able to say, actually this is what's been used in this space, this is what we can do, and they can be responsive, but then we also need to work with the planning organisation to say actually what is potentially being planned to be designed in different spaces. I think a key thing in what you mentioned is if you can start to see where are the pockets and pathways to play and that requires a certain level of observation and then certain level of working with the community. But also, if you maybe take some of the methodologies I’ve mentioned, even having like a systematic approach in terms of these are the key qualities that potentially, basically, can afford play in terms of space, safety, typography. How am I seeing that in the Community around me and how can I protect and potentially cultivate play more. So yeah I would say, adopting a systematic approach, considering designing for the community and thinking about who has control and how engaged you are with them in terms of what's being planned and what's allowed.

**Kamna Patel 52:41**

We’ve only got a few more minutes left, so I want to turn to some of the more factual questions that there are a few clarifying questions here. In your slide you mentioned, you had a slide about percentage of refugees and someone's asked whether of the 10 countries that are on that slide hosting 56% of refugees, does that include environmental refugees.

**Marie Williams 53:05**

As of the time of 2016 it did, so it was anybody who was a forced refugee, whether it's based on political unrest, conflict or environmental. As you probably know, environmental refugees can come often hand in hand of political violence, so yeah.

**Kamna Patel 53:25**

And can you give us, in the context of your research, the difference between public schools and private schools.

**Marie Williams 53:33**

So a public school is a school that it is free to go to.

**Marie Williams 53:37**

And it's a great question, because I realise that depends on where you're from. And a private school is a school you have to pay fees to attend.

**Kamna Patel 53:47**

And with the children that you're working with, were you aware of any that were affected by HIV or AIDS?

**Marie Williams 53:53**

That touches on the SEN kind of question. I wasn't, but it wasn't a question that was relevant. But that wasn’t something I was given evidence of. Or something that was told to me. I think it's interesting as one of the things that you can touch upon. Particularly SEN needs is something that's really important in terms of. Particularly what is often seen as a challenge of people being excluded, it sounds like HIV and AIDS.With regards to, I think, maybe your concern could be maybe that other children wouldn’t play with them, but I think that’s a really old literature and old fairy. In terms of maybe people in Kenya thinking their children will catch it, that's not that is definitely not what I see to be what is seen.Or said, so I think it's more actually seeing where children’s access and their physical mobilities or their mental abilities are preventing them from play. How do you create a space as inclusive for that? And again you don't necessarily need to have engaged with children, there are design methodologies that you can use to actually ensure that you design that space in that manner.

**Kamna Patel 55:02**

And then a question from Gabriella which is specifically about your research. In your experience, does the physical environment have a specific role in play?

**Marie Williams 55:15**

That was closed question, so I can say yes, but I can expand. But yeah definitely, without a doubt, yeah there’s just numerous reasons why and so it's kind of what I touched on in terms of material characteristics and also special characteristics. In terms of what's available in that space, how large that space is, whether it’s shaded, whether it's well-lit, whether it's inviting for the child to go into that space, whether they're allowed to get into it. And it would be outside this physical environment, the access around that physical environment also impacts play, so yeah I think that's a really important factor.

**Kamna Patel 55:50**

And in terms of your final thesis, the end output of your work, is that going to be the design space? Are you actually going to produce that space, or is it going to be more theoretical research?

**Marie Williams 56:01**

I am a design engineer so it's going to be designed! And we’re going to do a temporary installation. And it’s going to be called a play intervention. And we’re even thinking about that in terms of ethically, I don't think it's good to go into space and say I’m going to co-design with you and the children come up with something and nothing’s created. And what's fantastic is that a lot of it has been object play. It potentially affords less financial importance, but the play space will be temporal because we haven't put in things such as a being able to work with local planning organisations about whether that space can be maintained or whether it can be kept safe. So it’s just going to be a temporary play installation and then from that we’re going to see what impact does that intervention have on the community, and what are their views and potentially the dream would be that we’ll leave and they’ll see that we were just their helpers. It’s been created, and they will keep it going, but we can't create a permanent space, but nor would I want to just design and then leave, we want to create something.

**Kamna Patel 57:00**

Thank you very much Marie, that's all we've got time for for the session, and please come back when you finished your results come back! And please tell us how it went to show us with your designs, as I think everyone here would be really interested to find out. Thank you for your talk, thank you for your insight. Best of luck with the research and thank you to everyone who's joined us this afternoon. The talk will be made available on our YouTube channel and will be available on The Bartlett EDI web page. Thank you and I look forward to seeing you on next *Inclusive Spaces* seminar.

**Marie Williams 57:37**

Thank you all very much for attending, it's been great to hear your questions and been great to answer them. Some of them have challenged my thoughts and my methods as well, which is always good.