

# Adaptation of Service Premises for Families with Children in the Context of Accessibility and Inclusivity

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**Abstract:** The arrival of children in a family significantly alters daily life, while public spaces such as service premises often remain inadequately adapted to the new needs of parents and their children. As a result, urban environments become less welcoming and more challenging to navigate, limiting opportunities for free movement and participation in social life. From the perspective of an average user, the absence of a changing table in a shopping centre restroom, a feeding table in a restaurant, or a play corner may seem like minor inconveniences. However, for parents with young children, these are essential infrastructure elements, whose absence contributes to the exclusion of this social group. This article analyses the accessibility and inclusivity of public spaces in terms of their adaptation to the needs of families with children, with particular focus on shopping centres, dining establishments, and cultural buildings. Based on a survey conducted among parents of children aged 0–7 years residing in Lublin, problematic locations and gaps in the existing infrastructure were identified. The research findings were compared with examples of solutions implemented in modern European cities, enabling the formulation of recommendations tailored to the local conditions of Lublin. The implementation of these proposed solutions could significantly enhance the comfort and quality of life for families in the city and support the concept of sustainable development.

**Keywords:** sustainable development, inclusivity, child-friendly architecture, gastronomy

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## Introduction

The degree to which public spaces are adapted for all residents is one of the key determinants of urban quality of life. Therefore, the primary role of architects is to analyse and identify the key issues and needs of various social groups and incorporate these elements into the design process. Families with children are one social group that is frequently overlooked in spatial planning. According to 2021 data from the Central Statistical Office of Poland (GUS), the number of people in families with children was approximately 7 million, of which children aged 0–7 constituted around 3 million [1]. Despite the dynamic development of urban planning and architecture, many modern buildings still fail to meet the basic requirements for accessibility and functionality for families with young children. Architects often focus on the needs of the working-age population, who encounter few significant barriers when using public spaces such as restaurants, rest areas, or commercial facilities. In contrast, the low level of inclusivity is particularly evident in shopping centres, dining establishments,

and cultural and service buildings [2]. The absence of appropriate infrastructure leads to the exclusion of families with children from everyday activities, restricting their participation in social life, access to culture, and utilisation of various services. Designing child-friendly public spaces not only benefits the children but also their parents. Universally accessible and inclusive spaces increase opportunities for children to play, socialise, and learn while enabling parents to enjoy public spaces on an equal footing with other city residents. It is also important to highlight that well-designed infrastructure elements, such as doors, ramps, spacious corridors, and toilets, enhance the inclusivity of public spaces as a whole. These elements create environments that are accessible to all social groups, regardless of age, mobility, or specific needs.

This article examines the adaptation of service premises in Lublin, with a particular focus on shopping centres, dining establishments, and cultural institutions. The study aims to better understand the needs of families with children aged 0–7 in terms of designing new inclusive buildings and adapting existing infrastructure. The primary goal of the research is to identify key barriers and infrastructural deficiencies in public spaces that hinder parents with young children from using these facilities.

The first part of the article discusses the factors influencing the design of inclusive spaces, the importance of adaptation for parents with children, and the social benefits of integrating this group into daily life, with particular emphasis on mothers. The following research questions are addressed: (1) What is the level of building adaptation for families with children in Lublin? (2) Which premises require special attention in terms of inclusivity? (3) What infrastructural elements are most commonly lacking in shopping centres, dining establishments, and cultural buildings?

Based on the results of a survey, practical solutions are proposed to significantly enhance the inclusivity of buildings in Lublin, thereby supporting the development of accessible and family-friendly public spaces.

## Cohesion and Comfort of Spaces for Both Children and Adults

The creation of public spaces that segregate users by age is not an optimal solution in the design of public buildings. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was a growing tendency to design such buildings for joint use by both children and adults. Examples of this trend can be observed in large cities, where shopping malls feature play areas for children, restaurants offer special children's tables, and other public spaces include additional amenities tailored to the needs of the youngest users. Nevertheless, the development of inclusive architecture has been relatively slow and remains in its early stages in smaller cities [3].

Although many spaces are ostensibly intended for different age groups, in practice they often fail to meet the needs of users other than the average adult without children, disabilities, or other factors complicating the use of buildings. As J. Lilius observes, becoming a parent completely changes one's perception and relationship with the surrounding environment, as more time is spent in public spaces with a child rather than with other adults. In a study conducted in Helsinki, parents identified dining establishments and small service outlets as the places they visited most frequently in daily life [4]. An individual entering a venue with a child may experience discomfort and a lack of acceptance, often caused by many minor yet significant details. The absence of a ramp, slippery floors, or heavy doors – all of these are immediately noticed by someone with a pram. Similarly, parents of infants will feel the lack of changing facilities in restrooms or the limited size of these spaces. In cultural buildings, the absence of interactive exhibits or play areas restricts the frequency of visits by families. Neglecting such details not only excludes parents from social life but also places pressure on children, who do not feel noticed or welcomed in these spaces.

Research by K. Mordyński on Warsaw museums regarding their ability to meet the physiological, psychological, and social needs of users revealed that too little attention is given to how spatial design influences decisions to visit such facilities. The findings indicated that one of the most common problems in museums is the lack of child-friendly toilets. Mothers with children should have access to amenities such as changing tables, automatic doors, low toilets, and dryers adapted to children's scale. Likewise, preschool and early primary school-aged children should have access to appropriate sanitary equipment. The absence of such adaptations complicates visits to buildings and may sometimes lead to decisions to forego visits altogether [5]. Managing a group of small children in an unsuitable restroom significantly hinders the experience, and the lack of child-appropriate facilities may even compel teachers or caregivers to abandon their visit plans.

Creating family-friendly spaces is a crucial direction for architectural development in Poland. This is particularly significant in the context of the low level of inclusivity of many buildings constructed before the introduction of relevant standards in 1994 [6]. The experiences of Europe's best-adapted cities provide valuable insights that can serve as the foundation for developing strategies to create spaces suited to the needs of families with children. According to UNICEF data, by 2050, as much as 70% of children will live in cities [7]. This forecast underscores the necessity for contemporary urban and architectural planning to consider the specific needs of parents and children. Family-friendly spaces, equipped with play areas and appropriately designed toilets, are becoming a priority in the design and modernisation of public utility buildings.

In their study on inclusive spaces for mothers with children aged 0–3 in Istanbul, the authors describe the phenomenon of “shared geographies” of mothers and their young children [8]. The daily lives of mothers, especially those working full-time, consist of numerous responsibilities, such as housework, childcare, and social engagements. This lifestyle requires mothers to use places adapted to the needs of very young children. Unfortunately, in practice, many of these spaces still fail to meet basic inclusivity standards.

The *Learning Landscapes* initiative proposes an innovative approach that combines the pursuit of educational equity with urban development. The project involves transforming public spaces into areas where children can learn through play [9]. The authors highlight that urban spaces can be utilised to create interactive and educational elements, particularly with families with children in mind. Implementing solutions such as *Urban Thinkscape* or *Parkopolis* allows public spaces to serve as learning hubs for STEM fields (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) while fostering social bonds between adults and children. Such initiatives demonstrate that even spaces for everyday activities, such as shops or shopping malls, can be transformed into centres that promote intergenerational communication and social integration. Creating spaces conducive to both learning and play contributes to strengthening family bonds and building a more inclusive society.

## Importance of Inclusive Spaces in a Social Context

In contemporary building design, increasing emphasis is placed on creating spaces that cater to the needs of diverse social groups, including parents and their children. The term *inclusivity* in the context of spaces refers to infrastructure that is accessible, functional, and aesthetically pleasing for all users, regardless of age, mobility, or special needs. Inclusive design extends beyond buildings – its goal is to ensure equal and independent opportunities for participation in everyday life, which is a significant element in fostering a sense of belonging and an engaged society. Buildings that fulfil these principles support the integration of parents into social life, allowing both adults and children to use spaces comfortably [10].

Children, as future users of urban spaces, should have the opportunity to experience city life positively from an early age. The example of the city of Bilbao in Spain demonstrates the importance of incorporating the perspectives of children and their parents into the process of planning public spaces. In this case, during city workshops involving over 1,000 children, suggestions were collected to adapt public spaces and buildings such as sports centres, libraries, and schools. Based on the feedback provided, all necessary amenities were ensured, resulting in the creation of spaces that are welcoming for both children and their parents [11].

Research has shown that poverty and disability are often interconnected [12], as are social isolation and parenthood [13]. This analogy highlights the underrepresentation of certain social groups in the planning of inclusive urban environments. Dining establishments, shopping centres, and cultural institutions – the focus of these studies – are key spaces for social communication, where friends meet, social gatherings are held, exhibitions are visited, and other forms of social interaction take place. The lack of adaptation of such spaces leads to their avoidance by parents with children. Therefore, attention must be paid to their adjustment to the needs of this group. Creating inclusive architecture that incorporates amenities such as:

- spacious toilets,
- ramps and inclines,
- lifts and other facilities,

allows parents to use public spaces without barriers. Such places become family-friendly, encouraging families to spend more time there. Additionally, diverse forms of activities for children – for both play and learning – prevent boredom among the youngest, while enabling parents to participate more actively in social life.

It is also worth noting that spaces adapted to the needs of parents with children often meet the requirements of elderly individuals, people with disabilities, and others with mobility limitations [14]. Accessible public spaces promote the independence of users, enabling them to work, function autonomously within society, and freely utilise urban buildings. At the same time, such spaces enhance the tourism appeal of cities, contributing to their economic development. Eliminating architectural barriers supports the creation of accessible spaces, further advancing cities towards inclusivity. According to research conducted in 2024, the Old Town in Lublin is characterised by significant accessibility limitations for people with disabilities and families with children using prams. These problems stem primarily from inadequate paving, steps at building entrances, narrow doors, and the absence of ramps. The lack of handrails, parking spaces, and appropriate adaptation of dining and service venues in this part of the city further hampers the use of public spaces [15].

In line with the United Nations' 11<sup>th</sup> Sustainable Development Goal, cities and human settlements must become safe, inclusive, resilient, and sustainable [7]. By 2030, universal access to public spaces must be ensured, particularly for women, children, the elderly, and people with disabilities [6]. This underscores the necessity of including every social group, including parents with children, in the opportunity to use public spaces freely. Identifying missing elements of comfort and implementing them in urban infrastructure supports the development of cities in a manner consistent with sustainable development principles. Adapting public spaces in Lublin to the needs of various user groups, including families with children, represents one of the most significant challenges for the city authorities.

## Methodology

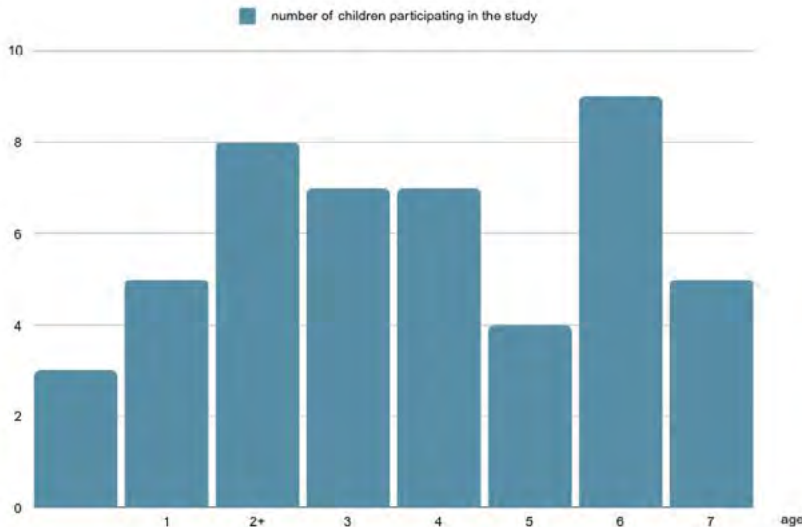
To gain a deeper understanding of the issue, it is essential to examine the topic from the perspective of the residents themselves. It is necessary to determine which buildings in the city are most frequently visited by families with children, identify the existing infrastructural shortcomings, and assess how the needs of these users can be met. The survey aimed not only to identify existing problems related to accessibility and the comfort of using public spaces but also to highlight specific amenities suggested by parents that could significantly improve the functionality and user-friendliness of these locations. Particular attention was given to the impact of insufficient solutions on parents' participation in social life and the potential for adapting proven solutions from other cities and countries.

Conducting surveys to analyse accessibility and comfort issues in larger cities has repeatedly demonstrated its effectiveness. For instance, in Wrocław, similar studies provided valuable insights that enabled the improvement of urban spaces' functionality [16].

As noted by the Van Leer Foundation [17], the voices of young children, their parents, caregivers, and pregnant women are often underrepresented in the design processes of buildings and public spaces. Furthermore, even when city authorities consciously decide to engage children in consultations, the majority of research focuses on older children (above the age of five). As a result, a significant social group – younger children, who struggle to navigate urban spaces not adapted to their needs – is often overlooked. This group frequently remains “invisible” in design processes, which hinders their full inclusion in social life [18]. The conducted survey enabled a detailed identification of the challenges faced by parents with children in public spaces, such as:

- dining establishments,
- shopping centres,
- cultural institutions.

The study was carried out on a group of 30 respondents, including 25 women and 5 men, representing various age groups (from 22 to 47 years old) and having children aged between 0 and 7 years (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Chart illustrating the age of children participating in the study Source: own elaboration

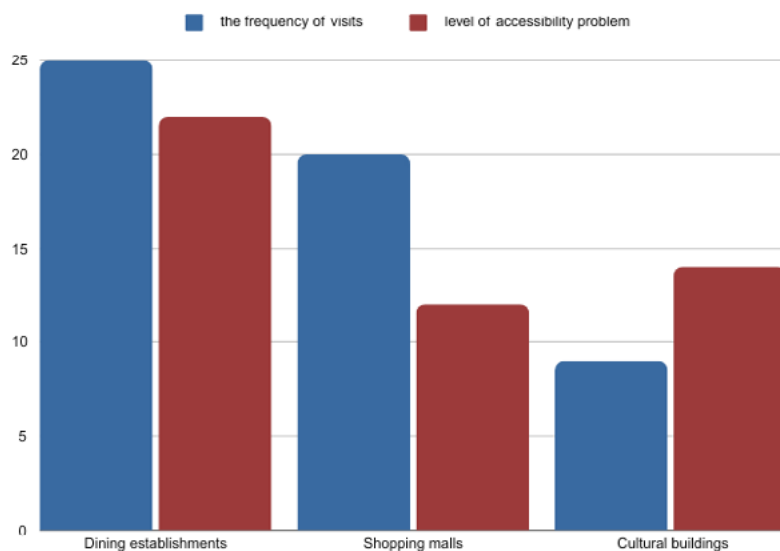
The respondents, who were parents or guardians of children, answered the following questions:

1. What types of places do you visit most frequently with your children?
2. In what types of places do you most often encounter difficulties when using them with children?
3. What elements of equipment are most commonly missing in the places you visit?
4. How do you rate the accessibility of service venues in Lublin in terms of visiting them with children? (On a scale of 0 to 5)
5. What amenities are most important to you in public spaces?
6. Has the lack of child-friendly places in your area affected your participation in social life?
7. Have you noticed any child-friendly amenities in venues in other cities or countries that you would like to see in Lublin?
8. How do you assess your comfort when staying in public places with children? (On a scale of 0 to 5, where 0 means no comfort at all and 5 means full comfort)

## Results

The conducted analysis among parents with children allowed for an assessment of the level of accessibility of service venues in Lublin. The overall accessibility rating, expressed on a scale from 0 to 5 (where 0 represents no comfort at all, and 5 represents full comfort), was 2.6 across the three main categories: dining establishments, shopping centres, and cultural institutions.

The most frequently visited venues identified by the study participants were dining establishments (25 responses), which also accounted for the highest number of accessibility-related issues (22 reports). Shopping centres ranked second (20 responses), with the highest level of accessibility among the categories assessed (12 responses). The least frequently visited venues were cultural institutions (9 responses), which also received a relatively low accessibility rating (14 reports) (Fig. 2).



**Fig. 2.** Chart showing the frequency of venue visits and the level of its accessibility Source: own elaboration

## Deficiencies and Desired Amenities

During the study, respondents identified a wide range of missing amenities that significantly affect the comfort of families with children using public spaces. The most commonly mentioned amenities included:

- larger toilets,
- ramps at entrances and internal lifts,
- play spaces and play corners,
- quiet and clean feeding areas,
- changing tables in toilets,
- children's tables in dining establishments,
- pushchairs available for hire,
- other amenities.

Separate spaces for children and play corners were highlighted by 26 respondents as the most desirable amenities. This is because such areas allow children to spend time actively and creatively, while providing parents with the opportunity to comfortably use dining establishments, shopping centres, and cultural institutions.

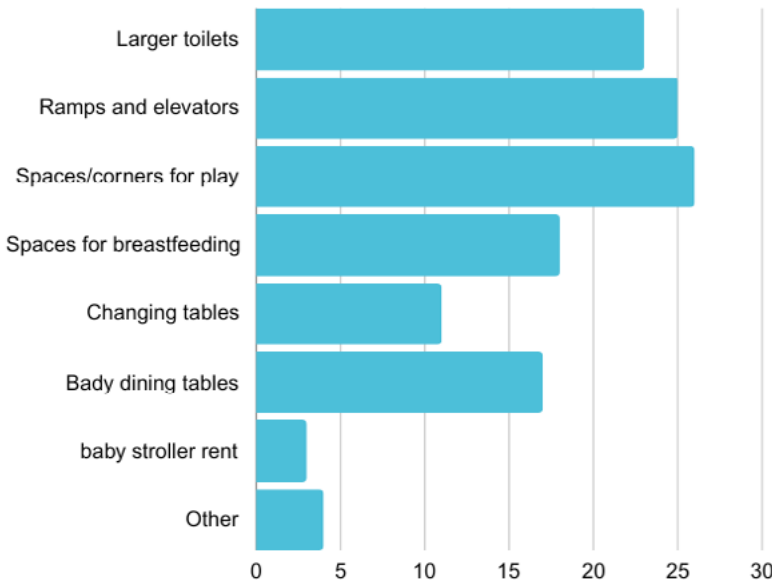
Another significant problem, reported by 23 survey participants, was the insufficient size of toilets. This issue was particularly problematic for parents with pushchairs or those with more than one child, who face difficulties manoeuvring in cramped sanitary spaces. Ramps and lifts were cited by 25 respondents as key infrastructural elements that should be adapted to the needs of parents with children.

For lifts, the most frequently reported problem was their inaccessibility – they were located far from entrances or were out of service. Women, in particular, drew attention to the lack of suitable ramps for pushchairs. It was noted that steep angles and slippery surfaces significantly hinder the usability of these features.

Feeding spaces were indicated by 17 respondents, while changing tables were mentioned by 11. Their absence was particularly noticeable in dining establishments, often discouraging parents from visiting these venues. Seven female respondents reported being forced to breastfeed in standard toilets, which caused significant discomfort. It is important to emphasise that service venues frequented by families with children should provide quiet and private feeding spaces that are not part of public restrooms. Furthermore, the provision of changing tables is crucial, as infants require frequent changes of hygiene products.

The lack of children's tables in dining establishments was identified as a challenge by 17 respondents, highlighting the need to adapt spaces to the youngest users. Less frequently mentioned amenities included the

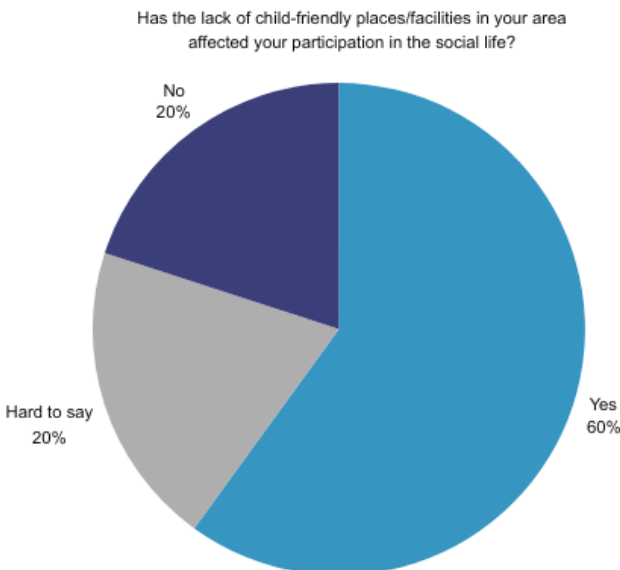
availability of pushchairs for hire (3 mentions) and other elements such as easy-to-open doors in all venues or rooms with interactive exhibitions for children in cultural buildings (4 mentions) (Fig. 3).



**Fig. 3.** Chart of missing amenities  
Source: own elaboration

### Impact on Social Life

The conducted study enabled an assessment of how the lack of inclusivity in public spaces affects parents' participation in the social life of the city. Among the 30 respondents, 60% (16 individuals) stated that the absence of appropriate infrastructure for children in dining establishments, shopping centres, and cultural institutions discourages them from visiting these places. A negative response was given by 20% of respondents (6 individuals), while the remaining 20% (6 individuals) found the question difficult to answer (Fig. 4).



**Fig. 4.** Chart illustrating the impact on parents' social life  
Source: own elaboration

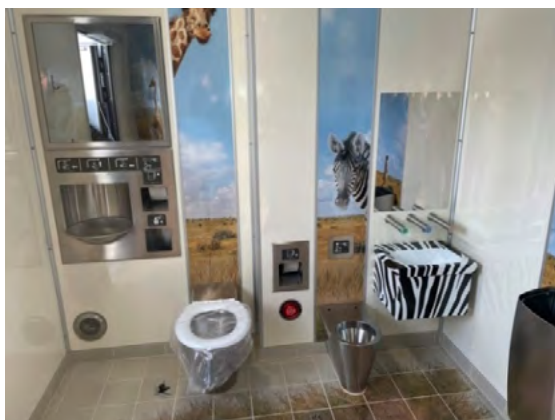
All responses confirming that the lack of suitable amenities restricts social participation came from women. An example can be seen in the account of Respondent No. 8 – Mrs Katarzyna, who described her experiences as follows:

*Whenever I have to choose whether to go to a restaurant, an exhibition, or anywhere else, I always have to consider the enormous effort involved. First, dressing the children, carrying the pushchair down the stairs – unfortunately, there is no ramp in our building. And at the venue? If the child gets hungry, the only option is the toilet, which is usually so small that I can barely fit inside. I always end up deciding that it's easier to stay at home and cook something myself.*

A different perspective emerges from the responses of men. Four of them stated that the lack of amenities for parents does not pose any difficulties, while one participant had no opinion on the matter. Analysing the results, it can be concluded that the difference in responses stems from the traditional division of social roles, where women are more often responsible for childcare. This leads to a greater awareness of, and sensitivity to, the difficulties associated with the lack of adaptation in public spaces. Furthermore, during the survey, respondents frequently mentioned that before becoming parents, they did not pay attention to amenities for families in public spaces. This phenomenon highlights the importance of changing user perspectives as their life situations evolve, which should be taken into account in the design processes of inclusive spaces.

## Examples of Child-Friendly Solutions in European Cities

The *Family Toilet*, designed by the company Danfo in Sweden, is an example of an accessible and child-friendly space that caters to both children and adults (Fig. 5, 6). Inside, in addition to standard facilities, there is an additional sink, toilet, and hand dryer adapted for children. The tiles, wall panels, and façades (if installed outdoors) are decorated with animal images that can be tailored to suit the theme of the location. The project was created to ensure that using the toilet is both safe and pleasant for children. Parents are provided with space for a pushchair, while automated doors facilitate opening and closing. This type of toilet is particularly useful near playgrounds, in city centres, and within large multifunctional facilities.



**Fig. 5.** The Family Toilet interior; Source: danfo.co.uk



**Fig. 6.** The Family Toilet outside; Source: danfo.co.uk

Another example is *Kylil Kids Creative Play Areas* from France. The French company *Kylil Kids* specialises in designing interactive playgrounds and children's corners (Fig. 7). Their offerings include free spaces in restaurants and service buildings, as well as paid spaces in shopping malls and parks. The projects have already been implemented in over 20 countries, gaining popularity. The ergonomic furniture is designed with children's safety



in mind – rounded edges, waterproof screens, and stain- and fire-resistant materials ensure durability and functionality. The aesthetic and child-friendly appearance promotes comfort for both children and their parents.

*Designmuseum Denmark*, a non-profit institution, undertakes numerous initiatives aimed at inclusivity. Children visiting the museum receive an interactive guide with tasks, simplifying exhibition concepts and encouraging creativity. The museum courtyard hosts an exhibition of wooden sculptures, allowing children to play and interact with art. Family workshops are organised on weekends and public holidays. The museum café offers a children's menu and highchairs. Changing facilities are available in the lobby, and breastfeeding is allowed throughout the museum. Due to safety regulations, personal pushchairs are not permitted in the exhibition areas, but pushchairs can be rented at the information desk (Fig. 8). The toilets are spacious and equipped with changing tables and other amenities [19].



**Fig. 7.** Interactive play corners by Kylii Kids; Source: kylii-kids.com



**Fig. 8.** Interactive exhibition at Designmuseum Denmark; Source: designmuseum.dk

## The Future of Lublin and Directions for Inclusive Architectural Development

To position Lublin as a city that addresses the needs of all its residents, including families with children, actions must be taken in the following areas:

- adapting existing buildings, with special consideration for the unique needs of the Old Town, which holds the greatest tourism potential;
- implementing ecological and universal solutions in line with sustainable development principles;
- regularly surveying residents, including families with children, to understand their current needs;
- adopting best practices from cities such as Copenhagen, Stockholm, and Amsterdam;
- investing in projects that promote inclusivity.

The systematic introduction of amenities in both existing and newly designed buildings will enhance residents' quality of life, increase the comfort of families with children, and encourage greater participation in the social and cultural life of the city.

## Conclusions

The conducted study identified issues related to the accessibility of public spaces in Lublin for families with children. Dining establishments, shopping centres, and cultural institutions received an average accessibility rating of 2.6. The most frequently visited venues were dining establishments (25 mentions), followed by shopping centres (20), and least frequently cultural institutions (9). At the same time, the most significant accessibility issues were reported in dining establishments (22 reports), followed by cultural institutions (9), with the fewest in shopping centres (12).

The most commonly reported issues by respondents included: the lack of play corners (26), ramps and lifts (25), spacious toilets (23), feeding areas (17), changing tables (11), children's tables in dining establishments (17), pushchairs for hire (3), and other amenities (4).

The study results indicate that the lack of inclusive infrastructure significantly limits the participation of parents with children in the social life of the city, often forcing them to remain at home. As many as 60% of respondents confirmed that the low level of public space adaptation negatively affects their social lives. The absence of family representation in building design processes also impacts children, limiting their opportunities for socialisation and participation in social life. It is worth noting that amenities such as ramps, lifts, and spacious toilets not only improve the quality of life for families with children but also benefit the elderly, people with disabilities, and individuals with mobility limitations.

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