

Make Space for Girls

Everything you need to know
in one (relatively) easy document

Susannah Walker & Imogen Clark
December 2020

**why would I go to the park? there's nothing
there for me.**

Lily, 14

**[MAKE
SPACE
FOR
GIRLS]**

Gender and public space

There is an increasing awareness that planning and public space are dominated by men and built for the 'default male' citizen. Many cities across Europe and beyond are now adopting the idea of 'gender mainstreaming', i.e. making sure that urban spaces are designed to meet everyone's needs rather than just being designed for half the population.

These ideas are now starting to be explored within the UK, but there is one area in which the default male is still very much to the fore, and that's parks, play equipment and public spaces designed for older children, teenagers and young people.

Provision for young people is seen almost entirely in terms of facilities such as skate parks and football pitches. These are seen as meeting the needs of all young people when in fact their usage is dominated by boys. Girls feel that parks are unsafe, and offer nothing for them, but these issues are never acknowledged, never mind addressed. Most of the time they have never even been asked what they want.

It's essential that ideas from the gender mainstreaming movement are brought into the decision making, design and planning process in the UK out of a need for equality, and to enable girls and young women to take part in public space. They have a right to play and to have areas which respond to their needs as well as those of teenage boys, and which can be used in a much more equitable fashion.

This is more than an ideal, it is a legal requirement. The Equality Act 2010 prohibits direct and indirect discrimination on grounds of sex¹ in many fields, including in the provision of services and facilities by public authorities; there are many types of services where striving to ensure compliance with these principles has become part of everyday life for public authorities (eg the provision of public toilet facilities – no one now would dream of providing public toilets that served only men²). But there remain areas of where public authorities have yet apply these principles, including the provision of parks and similar facilities. The law is not without mechanisms to support (and indeed compel) public bodies to bring the necessary focus to the issue.

Specifically, the Equality Act 2010 mandates the Public Sector Equality Duty, the main purpose of which is "*to bring about a culture change so that promoting equality becomes part of public bodies' core business*".³ This requires public authorities in the exercise of their function to have due regards to the need to eliminate discrimination and advance equality of opportunity. It is clear that in the provision of parks and similar facilities many public authorities have simply failed to comply with

¹ The Equality Act deals with most aspects of gender related discrimination through the lens of biological sex, rather than gender, and hence we are required to use the binary terms woman/man/girl boy when dealing with the legal framework, rather than the social and more fluid concept of gender.

² Although as everyone know from seeing the queue for the "Ladies" there still remain significant issues around meeting women's toilet needs.

³ Government Equalities Office (2009b) *The Equality Bill: Making it Work. Policy Proposals for Specific Duties* (London GEO)

the Public Sector Equality Duty, and as a result have failed to provide facilities that meet the needs of girls and young women. The current state of affairs is not compliant with the law.

There are obviously many other issues at stake here as well. Race, culture, disability and deprivation all affect girls' access to public spaces. It's also true that many boys are not interested in the facilities which are on offer⁴. Furthermore, improving parks could have benefits for many other groups too, such as older people, women and the disabled.

However, at the moment there is one very clear inequality, which is the difference between what is provided for older boys vs what is provided for older girls. In our case study, a town council had spent £127,000 on facilities used predominantly by boys and were contemplating part funding another £350,000 of investment in similar infrastructure. Precisely nothing had been spent on facilities used mainly by girls. This is a manifest inequality, and this is what we are campaigning to redress.

⁴ muf, Open Spaces that are not Parks, 2004

Parks

As children get older, parks are used much more by boys than girls, and girls use them with less confidence.⁵ A Swedish architectural firm's research in 2015 showed that from the age of 8, the imbalance between boys and girls was 80/20, and that teenage girls felt ten times more unsafe in public spaces.⁶

This doesn't happen by accident. It has been shown that boys tend to dominate the space in existing play areas, and that this is often done by deliberately excluding girls.⁷

Girls are less active when there are groups of boys present. A number of reasons have been put forward for this: that boys tend to use larger spaces for their games, that girls are deliberately excluded with dismissive behaviour or even that they are bullied out of being there.

Girls themselves report that their use of space is determined and regulated by the presence of boys. They don't use spaces when boys are present and avoid these areas at certain times of day only going to some spaces when they know they will be empty.⁸

Another study found that the single biggest barrier stopping teenage girls exercising was boys taunting and shaming the girls, and the boys, when interviewed, confirmed this.⁹ The researchers suggest that public playgrounds need to provide more smaller areas to prevent girls becoming marginalised in big open spaces.¹⁰

As the Swedish research showed, a sense of safety is an important part of this problem, and it is true in the UK as well. A recent Girlguiding survey showed that over 40% of girls aged between 11 and 21 feel unsafe when they go outside, and a third are worried to do things outside on their own.¹¹

Safety isn't just something which teenage girls worry about; often adults see parks and public spaces as dangerous spaces for girls and so forbid them from going there or move them on. Girls, as one academic described it, are seen as being the 'wrong' gender in the 'wrong' space.¹²

⁵ Gender and Spatial Planning, Good Practice Note 7, RPTI/Oxfam, 2007.

⁶ White Arkitekter. LFA: Flickrum – Places for girls. 2018

⁷ 'We cannot use girls. Girls do girl things and girls are stupid'. Children's Use of Public Space, Lia Karsten, Childhood, November 2003.

⁸ 'They don't like girls hanging around there': conflicts over recreational space in rural Northamptonshire, Faith Tucker and Hugh Matthews; Area, 2001

⁹ Listening to Girls and Boys Talk About Girls' Physical Activity Behaviours, Maihan Vu et al., Health Educ Behav 2006 Feb

¹⁰ Physical Activity and Outdoor Play of Children in Public Playgrounds – do gender and social environment matter?, Anne K Reimers et al, International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, June 2018.

¹¹ Girls' Attitudes Survey 2020, Girlguiding UK.

¹² Tucker and Matthew, op. cit.

This can be magnified in some cultures where there is a pressure on girls to stay at home. Research in Newham found that Asian girls would often seek out hidden places to meet.

For these young people their desire to be out on the streets is curtailed by the disparaging remarks from their male peers (out on the streets these girls are always 'hos') and by the protective family¹³.

It's essential that councils and planners engage with the girls in their area – both the ones who are in the park already and those who are not, to find out what the specific issues are.

Feeling safe in public space has health implications too. One study found that it wasn't access to parks per se which encouraged physical activity in adolescents, but access to a safe park.¹⁴

Some parks do work. Girls are much more likely to use well-kept play areas which supply the kind of experiences they want, and they are more likely to linger in this kind of play area.¹⁵

This is perhaps the key to why older girls don't use parks. There's nothing there for them. The whole public space is designed to attract boys and to give them space for the sports and activities which they are interested in. These fall, almost entirely, into three main types: skate parks, BMX and pump tracks and multi-use games areas, or MUGAs.

¹³ muf, *Open Spaces that are not Parks*, 2004

¹⁴ Physical activity among adolescents – when do parks matter?, Susan H Babey et al, *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*, Vol 34, issue 4, 2008.

¹⁵ Karsten, *op.cit.*

Skate Parks

Gender issues have been studied most fully in skate parks.

Academic research is consistently clear that skate parks are highly male places.

Skateboarding has long been recognized as reflecting and reproducing patriarchal norms with skateparks often criticized as only serving young men.¹⁶

...skateboarding seems to be overwhelmingly male pursuit. It was not rare for several weeks, or a month to go by without the sight of a female skating at the park. Females were often present, but were usually moms, girlfriends, or friends of males skating at the park.¹⁷

...we came to realise that none of us had ever witnessed more than one woman in any group of skaters in our work in the USA; we certainly had never seen a group of women skating in urban spaces. From our near daily experience of watching young men use urban spaces such as streets, curbs and public parks to skateboard, we had taken it for granted that men occupied these spaces and marked (i.e. 'grinded' or 'carved') them as their own.

What's more these spaces are 'exclusionary', working to keep out women and girls.

Although male skaters denied that skateboarding is a "male only" activity, these patriarchal discourses directly impacted Beale's female interviewees. These young women uniformly reflected upon the many barriers that male expectations and framings placed upon their participation, self-presentation, and performance while skateboarding.¹⁸

How this kind of barriers operate is illustrated by anecdotal evidence passed on by an urban planner:

I was chatting recently to a female ramp skater, in her early 20s, she very casually mentioned, as though it was of no consequence that she only uses the ramps early morning, or odd times. Because of the large groups of boys and young men that she feels makes for a hostile atmosphere. It seems that individually the lads are supportive, to a female practicing but she still feels unable to practice in front of them as a group.

I know the park she uses, and it is one large half pipe, and a couple of slide rails. Anyone

¹⁶ Skateboarding in Dude Space, John N Carr, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 2017, 34, pp25-34

¹⁷ Skate Parks: A guide for landscape architects and planners, Desmond Poirier, MA Thesis, Rhode Island School of Design, 2008.

¹⁸ Carr, *ibid.*

sitting on the top of the halfpipe has a view of the whole skatepark, so big groups of non-skating hangers on tend to hang out there heckling¹⁹.

In Britain, the only survey we could find of skate park use suggested that 90% of those who used a park in Nottingham were male; another piece of research in Australia found that 95% of those who attended were male, and those females which did were either spectators or parents. Not one of them brought a skateboard²⁰.

Where the skate park is part of a wider landscape of park and leisure equipment, it's possible that a skate park could actually make the environment worse for girls, by bringing in boys from outside the area. One thing that is clear from the consultations and reports is that boys, particularly older ones, are willing to travel some distance to use a skate park which is larger or better than their local facility. In which case the local girls will face an even more intimidating atmosphere in their local park.

An American research project has proved that this intimidation is a factor. Overall, living near a park makes it more likely that a teenage girl will do exercise, but living near a skate park actually lowered the amount of exercise taken.²¹

Yet skate parks are commonly seen as 'good' provision for all young people, and being expensive to build, also take up a very considerable share of any overall budget.

It is difficult to square the disproportionate spend on skate parks and similar facilities with public authorities properly discharging their obligations under the Public Sector Equality Duty. This duty applies whenever public bodies take decision about spending on park and similar facilities. Larger bodies routinely carry out equality impact assessments to support them in discharging this duty, which are publicly available. However, a review of equality impact assessments for a sample of skate parks shows that the majority focus on the impact on disabled users and very few consider the impact from a gender perspective.

For example, most skatepark proposals either do not have an equalities assessment as part of the process or conclude that it is not needed. Where equalities assessments do happen, they are usually cursory.

The northern side of the facility outside the main bowl of the skatepark could be accessible to people with disabilities²².

¹⁹ Senior urban planner, UK, personal communication.

²⁰ Skate parks as a context for adolescent development, Graham L. Bradley, *Journal of Adolescent research*, 2010.

²¹ Public Parks and Physical Activity Among Adolescent Girls, Deborah A. Cohen et al, *Pediatrics* 118, November 2006.

²² Report on Eastwood Skate Park, Nottinghamshire County Council, April 2015.

We have not yet found a single one which considers sex equality, and where consultations are undertaken, the results are almost never analysed by sex of respondent. These decisions are therefore truly blind to the disadvantage that they create for women and girls and despite the clear inequalities that we have highlighted above, the needs of girls are almost never considered.

A small number of skate parks have tried to address this gender imbalance – sometimes as a condition of their funding – by holding girls only sessions. However, this is usually only possible at closed, indoor skate parks which can control admission. Even where these measures are practicable, it's only a small part of the answer, because once again girls will be getting the message that if they want to use the park, the only way is to do what the boys do.

It's worth noting here that one of Sport England's key principles for getting more women engaged in exercise and sport is 'don't expect women to change to fit sport and exercise'.²³ The same principle must be applied to parks and similar facilities for girls- don't try to "fix" the girls so they can use the facilities- fix the facilities.

This is not to say that skate parks should not be built, far from it. But their impact and usage need to be considered properly and they should not be seen as a provision which 'solves' the issue of facilities for young people. And if that much money is going to be spent on a facility which is predominantly used by boys, then similar amounts of money should be spent on facilities which girls use as well.

²³ Go Where Women Are, Sport England Report,

MUGAs

The most often installed piece of equipment for older children, there are thousands of these all over the country but how they are used, and by whom, is almost never considered.

It is generally accepted that multi use games areas are predominantly used by boys²⁴, and are 'places for young men to engage in active and exuberant forms of play²⁵'. Studies elsewhere have shown that hard surfaced play areas generally are more used by boys than girls,²⁶ and that where one is provided, it seemed to deter girls, who played more actively in playgrounds which did not have such an area.²⁷

BMX / pump tracks

There seems to have been no research undertaken into how pump tracks function or who their main users are. However anecdotal evidence seems to suggest that they operate in very similar ways to a skate park, with boys dominating the space, and girls and younger children only using it when they know the older boys will be absent.

²⁴ Making London Child-Friendly, GLA, 2020; Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning, City of Vienna, 2013,

²⁵ Sports Cages and Multi Use Games Areas, Luke Billingham, Hackney Quest, November 2020.

²⁶ Physical Activity and Outdoor Play of Children,

²⁷ Playground usage and physical activity levels of children based on playground spatial features, Anne Reimers and Guido Knapp, J Public Health 25.

Why this matters

Spatial Equality

This situation creates a fundamental inequality. Girls are designed out of public spaces at a crucial stage in their development, when they should be increasing their autonomy and developing an independent life. But the architecture of public space tells them that they, unlike the boys, are not welcome and should be at home. Yet the ability to use public space is a basic right.

Parks and public spaces are also crucial in establishing a sense of belonging and community. The less women and girls use them, the less they are involved in public life, and the more insecure this makes them feel.²⁸

Health

The lack of park facilities for girls, and the barriers excluding them from current provision do not just raise issues about equality and public space. The lack of consideration of girls' needs causes situations which are already of significant concern for public health authorities.

From age 10, activity levels drop significantly in girls, until by 13-15, only 8% of girls are meeting activity guidelines.²⁹ By age 16, someone's pattern of exercise is usually set for life, so this has lifetime impact. Regular exercise also has a major positive influence on mental health, which is currently a significant cause for concern in teenage girls.

The long-term implications have costs in terms of both obesity and other health issues for women. A study in Gothenberg concluded that if 18% of the city's sports budget was ring-fenced to encourage girls to do more sport, the reduction in osteoporosis and fractures in later life would more than repay the investment³⁰.

Any interventions are generally seen as getting women involved in 'sport' rather than a more general 'being active' that a park can provide. Sport may not be what is wanted. One project in Wales asked teenage girls what would make them become more active and two of the main answers were to make activities more locally accessible and to provide teenage girls with the kind of activities they want, which were 'fun, sociable and not competitive sport'.³¹

²⁸ Public spaces in Mexico as social cohesion promoters: an structural modeling perspective. Vargas, D., and Merino, M., *Well Being Soc. Policy* 9, 157–177.

²⁹ Puberty and Sport: An Invisible Stage, *Women in Sport*,

³⁰ *Invisible Women*, Criado Perez

³¹ Teenage recommendations to improve physical activity for their age group: a qualitative study, Todd et al, *BMC Public Health*, 18, 378.

The role of play and playgrounds in meeting this need, however, has not been much studied, but they are a free setting for physical activities which don't have to be competitive. There is also evidence that spending time outdoors on its own has benefits for health.³²

Girls are aware of the situation, and don't like it. Girlguiding surveyed 76,000 of their members and parks and the lack of opportunity for physical activity came up as one of their main concerns³³.

Safeguarding

Increasingly, bodies involved with child safety, such as social services, councils and charities, are moving towards seeing safeguarding as not just something which looks at a child's home life. Harm can come in many other ways, such as from peers or adults outside the home, and public space is an important aspect of these considerations.

Hackney Council's new Child Wellbeing Framework includes as contributing factor for intervention that:

Child/young person feels unsafe to go into neighbourhood spaces beyond their immediate environment.

Obviously this can be caused by a wide range of factors, including racism and gang membership. But it is also true, to some degree, for almost every girl, who will not go to certain parks, or areas within the park, and would almost certainly be very wary of them at night. Peer-on-peer abuse can often be sexual, with girls most often the victims.

Parks are one of the key areas where peer-on-peer abuse happens, and this means that it is important for councils to consider safety and access issues in parks as part of a safeguarding approach. Design is a key part of this. Are there large clumps of bushes and trees which could provide cover for illegal or inappropriate activities? Is the visibility good all across the park, enabling both a feeling of safety and an environment which contributes to safeguarding across the board?

It's likely that spaces designed with the needs of young women in mind will also contribute to safeguarding more generally.

A rights based approach

Improvements in spatial equality, health and safeguarding are all beneficial outcomes that can flow from equality of treatment for girls and young women in the provision of parks and similar facilities.

³² Using Systematic Observation and Polar Co-ordinates Analysis to Assess Gender-Based Differences in Park Use in Barcelona, Perez-Teja et al., *Frontiers in Psychology*, 27 November 2018

³³ Girls Attitudes Survey 2019, Girlguiding. 62% of girls did not have access to an outdoor facility which felt safe to use; 35% felt that there was nothing for them to do.

But we would argue strongly that it should not be necessary to justify equality of treatment for girls and young women by reference to secondary beneficial outcomes. Equality should not be seen as only justifiable by reference to functional terms and the outcomes it produces: girls and young women have a right not to be disadvantaged when compared to boys and young men, irrespective of the secondary benefits that accrue.

By ensuring that the work of Make Space for Girls includes a right based approach we will recognise that the goal of gender equality does not need to be justified by reference to other factors, any more than equality based on race, nationality or religion needs to be so justified. The goal of achieving equality between boys and girls is sufficient in and of itself to require action.

A rights based approach is founded on the following:

- Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (right to play);
- The obligations with regard to direct and indirect discrimination in the Equality Act 2010;
- The Public Sector Equality Duty.

The child's right to play.

Article 31 of the UNCRC requires the recognition of the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child; and to encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activities. The focus of our work at Make Space for Girls is on the right of girls and young women to parks and similar facilities that provide equal opportunities appropriate to their age.

Discrimination contrary to the Equality Act 2010

It is important to understand that the discrimination that girls and young women face in relation to play, leisure and recreational facilities is a mix of direct and indirect discrimination (as those terms are used in the Equality Act 2010). Where the disadvantage occurs because of the actions of boys and young men using the facilities, the action is frequently directly discriminatory. For example, the minority of boys and young men who indulge in taunting and shaming behaviour towards girls in parks do so because their targets are girls.

In contrast, the discriminatory actions of the public authorities who provide the facilities are not directly discriminatory: the public authorities do not impose any express prohibition on girls and young women using the facilities. But discrimination can manifest itself in more subtle and invidious ways, and the concept of indirect discrimination in the Equality Act 2010 calls out and renders unlawful this more subtle discrimination. Indirect discrimination on grounds of sex arises if an apparently neutral provision, criterion or practice in fact disadvantages one sex more than the other and the public authority cannot show that the provision, criterion or practice is a

proportionate mean of achieving a legitimate aim. This is the situation with the relevant play facilities: the provision of a skate park, MUGA and Pump track is apparently “neutral”: there is no sign attached saying “GIRLS KEEP OUT”. But it is clear from the evidence cited above that these facilities in fact disadvantage girls and young women. Girls and young women are put off from using the facilities.

The Public Sector Equality Duty

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a suite of specific legal obligations (usually referred to by the umbrella term as “the Public Sector Equality Duty” or “PSED”) intended to create a culture in which promoting equality becomes part of the authority’s core business. The broad aim of the PSED is to integrate consideration of the advancement of equality into the day to day business of authorities.

The PSED requires all public authorities when exercising key functions (including the commissioning and development of public areas such as parks and leisure facilities) to have “due regard” to the need to eliminate discrimination and to advance equality of opportunity between girls on the one hand and boys on the other.

The concept of having due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between boys and girls is fleshed out in a little more detail in the Equality Act 2010. Most relevant in the context of park and other public space facilities for boys and girls are the following obligations imposed by the PSED:

- The need to take steps so that the facilities meet the needs of girls that are different from the need of boys;
- The need to encourage girls to take part in activities provided via those facilities

Examples

Frome is a town in Somerset with a population of 25,000, and areas of deprivation as well as prosperity.

It currently has three significant pieces of equipment which are used by young people. The skate park and Multi Use Games Area pitch are in the main Mary Bailey park while the BMX pump track is at Welshmill, next to a play area for younger children.

As far as can be ascertained, no gender or other equality assessments were undertaken for any of these developments. Nor has there been any enquiry into which groups use the facilities once they were built. In practice, it seems to be common knowledge that all these three areas are predominantly used by boys³⁴.

There were two other pieces of play equipment which were used evenly by boys and girls: a zip wire and a large bucket swing. Both of these have been taken out of use and not replaced.

- The skate track was built in 2009 at a cost of £34,000, which came from S106 money from a new estate adjacent to the park.
- The BMX pump track was built in 2012 also at a cost of about £34,000. and cost £9,000 to resurface in 2015
- The MUGA was installed in 2015 for a budget of £50,000.
- The council is now considering a refurbishment of the skate park at a cost of up to £350,000.

In total the council has spent £127,000 on facilities predominantly used by older boys and £0 on either facilities which serve the needs of girls, or on improving girls' access to the current equipment, and it plans to continue this inequality by spending more on upgrading facilities predominantly used by boys

When the council was approached about this, their response was that 'we never consider investment in our parks to be either for boys or girls'. Which pretty much sums up the problem.

³⁴ As a side note, the MUGA in Frome has been provided, at extra cost of almost £12,000, with facilities for 'street snooker', a game which is envisaged can be played by mixed ability and mixed age players. This demonstrates the limitations of simply building facilities without considering the additional barriers to entry. To play this, a group of players would have to organise themselves and turn up, but there are no facilities for booking the pitch, so they would have to either hope that it was empty, or ask other users to leave. All of these are 'invisible' barriers to entry, just as the behaviour of boys and the facilities and layout of a park can create barriers for girls.

This kind of discrimination can also be built into policy. Ipswich Council rewrote their Play Strategy in order to take into account that older children had different needs. Their assumptions as to what these needs might be is written into the strategy.

“For the purposes of this assessment, provision for young people is taken to include the following types of provision:

- multi-use games areas (MUGAs);
- skate parks;
- basketball courts;
- youth shelters;
- informal kickabout areas; and
- BMX tracks.”

Similarly a review of play provision in Chester and Cheshire West found only skate parks and BMX tracks present when they evaluated ‘Teenage facilities’; projected provision was almost entirely skate parks and MUGAs.

The needs of young people are seen as a homogeneous whole, and the end result is that they are used, in the main, by boys.

next steps

So, how to deal with the inequality?

There are a few central ways in which the problem can be addressed by councils, planners and designers.

One is to improve the design of existing parks to make them more welcoming to girls, and to prevent boys from dominating the spaces. Proven ways of doing this include:

- better lighting;
- pathways all around the perimeter of the area;
- more seating areas, preferably with seats which face each other;
- more swings;
- wider entrances in and out of areas;
- breaking down play areas into smaller spaces;
- Good, safe toilet provision.

It is also possible to design skate parks and MUGAs in such a way as to make them more accessible for girls. Again this often included not creating one large open space which a single group can dominate, and also widening entrances.

Surveillance is also important in helping girls feels safe, and so the presence of play workers and park staff can also be a big factor in creating parks which are used by girls more equally, but this is an expensive solution and so not generally feasible.

Even so, all that these interventions are doing is giving girls access to the activities which have been designed for the default male and/or trying to ameliorate the ways in which boys occupy and dominate public spaces and thus exclude girls.

The third and most important strategy is to ask girls what they want and provide facilities which they are interested in and will use. Only by doing this can councils, designers and planners find out what girls want from parks, and what the problems are with the current provision. And girls do want to be involved. 82% of girls thought that they should be more involved in designing playgrounds, parks and outdoor facilities in a recent Girlguiding survey³⁵.

Finally, is the most basic step, which is to ensure that any provision for older children and teenagers is considered, before anything is designed or built, through the lens of equality and the right to play. Not a single more skate park or MUGA should be built without an equalities assessment, and not one more play strategy written without consideration of what girls might want from public space. Boys have dominated the landscape for too long and it's time we made space that works for girls.

³⁵ Girls' Attitudes Survey 2020, Girlguiding UK

case studies

There have been several schemes which have successfully consulted with older girls in order to create parks which work for them as well as boys, and they have come to a remarkably similar set of results. It is possible to make a park much more appealing to girls without incurring vast cost. But the key conclusion from all of these is that they should not be taken as a template because the most important step of all is to ask the girls what they want from the places in which they live.

Vienna

The flagship project in terms of creating a more equal space is Einsiedler Park in Vienna. This was redesigned to encourage more girls to use it, and the numbers were significantly higher a year later³⁶.

The work was done as part of a more general campaign of 'gender mainstreaming', making sure that these considerations are at the forefront of all of their design decisions. They have produced a set of planning recommendations for parks as a result. Some of these are quite simple interventions which could be applied across a range of settings:

- better lighting;
- wider entrances to play areas such as courts, or adding a second more open court;
- smaller, subdivided sports areas;
- seating areas which are arranged in groups rather than lines;
- circular paths around the perimeter of the park;
- more swings;
- good quality toilets.

However they also stress the need for an expert consultation process, done with a close awareness of the equality issues³⁷.

Barcelona

The city of Barcelona has been working in a similar way, and a couple of park areas have been remodelled to be more egalitarian, in particular Plaça d'en Baró. This was designed as a feminist park, in collaboration with the children of the area, and a lot of the design solutions are very similar to those in Vienna, including the wide perimeter, and the provision of a variety of different interconnecting areas rather than everyone seated around the outside of the football pitch³⁸.

³⁶ A good case study of the park is [here](#):

³⁷ Gender Mainstreaming in Urban Planning, City of Vienna, 2013, pp 82-5

³⁸ [There are no reports on this in English, but the BBC featured it in this piece: https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-50269778/what-would-a-city-designed-by-women-be-like](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/av/world-50269778/what-would-a-city-designed-by-women-be-like)

Malmö

The rethinking of play areas in Malmö was in result to a slightly different issue, where they had been designing areas for older teenagers but realised that there was a problem with what they were doing.

The usual procedure was to create spaces for skating, climbing and painting graffiti. The trouble was, it wasn't the 'youth' as a whole who were participating in these activities. It was almost exclusively the boys, with girls making up only 10-20% of those who used the city's youth-directed leisure spaces and facilities.³⁹

Rather than building another skate park and graffiti wall, used primarily by boys, a new public space, Rosengårdsstråket, was created by consulting girls and young women, who wanted more space for music and dance, so the former parking lot now has a range of smaller spaces, as well as a climbing wall and bars for exercise⁴⁰. The girls were so enthused by this opportunity that they started their own advocacy group to help other girls implement their own ideas.

A second consultation process in Sweden hasn't as yet resulted in any playgrounds, but the architects did a lot of workshopping and consultation, which resulted in prototypes designed by girls and a set of recommendations⁴¹:

“What the girls wanted from their play spaces became clear: sheltered places that felt comfortable to sit in, spaces close to other people but not at the centre of a crowd from where they could see but not necessarily to be seen. They also wanted places where they could co-create to reflect their own experiences and make an impact on their urban environment. The outcome was three interactive spaces with an intimate scale and strong identity. The girls created sheltered spaces where they could meet and engage eye to eye, rather than sitting on benches in a row – hang-out spaces that didn't immediately demand physical activity.”

One very noteworthy thing about the consultation process, and in particular about the last two examples, is that there is also a value in girls' needs being given actual physical space and form.

Otherwise they are walking round an urban environment that, literally, marginalises them. Which is quite a lesson in itself.

³⁹ Invisible Women, Criado Perez.

⁴⁰ <http://nosegregation.tilda.ws/segregationrodamatta>

⁴¹ Whitearkitekter, Places for Girls, 2017.

