

**“Why would I
go to the park?
There’s nothing
there for me”**

Lily age 14

**[MAKE
SPACE
FOR
GIRLS]**

Why do we need Make Space for Girls?

- Teenage girls are very badly served by public parks;
- When facilities are built for teenagers these almost always consist of:
 - Skate park;
 - MUGA or basketball court, or both;
 - BMX track;
- All of these are almost entirely used by boys;
- BUT it doesn't have to be that way.
- Case studies in Europe show that parks can be built better for girls;
- AND, councils and other public bodies are legally obliged to consider girls in their planning.

What is Make Space for Girls about?

- Part of the wider conversation on women and girls and the design of public space;
- Part of the wider conversation on sustainable movement through walking and cycling
- Part of the wider conversation on women and girls and safety in the public realm
- BUT a very specific focus: making parks and similar public spaces welcoming to teenage girls
 - Not just the big parks; forgotten/unloved spaces
 - Local community approach to solving problems
 - Engagement with teenage girls; they must be front and centre to identify and solve the problems

Why should people be looking at this?

- **Fairness:** why shouldn't girls have facilities in parks that are designed to meet their needs?
- **Health:** we know what inactivity does to people's physical and mental health
- **Safety:** teenage girls should grow up believing that they have a right to feel safe when they go outside
- **The law.....**
 - Article 31 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
 - Laws against direct/indirect discrimination: Equality Act 2010
 - Public Sector Equality Duty: Equality Act 2010

The Public Sector Equality Duty

A legal requirement under Equality Act 2010; with the main purpose of bringing about “..... *a culture change so that promoting equality becomes part of public bodies’ core business*”.

The PSED requires public authorities, when they are making decisions, to have due regard to the need to

- eliminate unlawful discrimination;
- advance equality of opportunity between advantaged and disadvantaged groups; and
- foster good relations between advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

PSED doesn’t dictate an outcome; but it should be more than a process; it should create more equal outcomes.

It's sexist
to assume
girls don't
skateboard...

Common responses when we raise the issue:

"We never consider investment in our parks to be for either boys or girls."

...so who do you have in mind?

"Why are you assuming girls don't want to skateboard?"

.... we aren't, but why don't they use the skate parks?

"Some girls love football. Not sure what your gripe is here."

...many girls have excellent ball skills but they still struggle to get a kick around on the MUGA.

What the research tells us: Use

- A Swedish study in 2015 showed that from the age of 8, the imbalance between boys and girls in parks was 80/20,
- Boys dominate the space in existing play areas, often by deliberately excluding girls
- Girls don't use spaces when boys are there; only going to some spaces when they know they will be empty.
- Living near a park makes it more likely that a teenage girl will exercise...
- ...but living near a skate park actually lowered the amount of exercise teenage girls take.

What the research tells us: Safety

- The same Swedish study in 2015 showed that teenage girls felt ten times more unsafe in public spaces.
- 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.
- A study has shown that study found that it isn't access to parks per se which encouraged physical activity in adolescents, but access to a safe park.

What the research tells us: Health

- This stuff is seriously scary – (this is all pre pandemic data)
- only 10% of girls between 13 and 16 are getting the recommended 60 mins activity per day;
- 44% of girls 13-15 are overweight;
- By the age of 14, one in four girls report experiencing high levels of depressive symptoms compared to one in ten boys;
- And things aren't getting any better.... In 2011 38 % of teenage girls reported that generally they were very happy; this dropped to 18% by 2016.

Let them do Sport!

- For teenage girls who see themselves as “sporty”, sport is fantastic
- But... Women in Sport talked to teenage girls who identified as “non sporty” and their perception of sport was
 - It’s judgemental;
 - It’s rules driven;
 - It can be stressful;
 - It feels like another way to fail
- Make Space for Girls isn't about sport... its about play.
- And play = increased activity levels

Play.....

- Self directed
- Sociable
- My choice
- Feeling good
- Freedom
- Time out
- Lurking and loitering...

What would better look like?

- Three cities have tried to make a difference: Vienna, Malmo, Barcelona;
- Different approaches but common themes:
 - Better lighting;
 - wider entrances to play areas;
 - smaller, subdivided sports areas, or adding a second more open court;
 - seating areas which are arranged in groups rather than lines;
 - circular paths around the perimeter of the park;
 - more swings;
 - good quality toilets.



Vienna: Einsiedler Park

Location: a small enclosed square; ethnically mixed neighbourhood;

Problem: research showed

- the girls often passed through the park on the way to school, but didn't stop;
- the girls felt that there was nothing there for them;
- the girls were afraid to enter spaces which already had groups of older boys, and were often rebuffed when they did;
- a first step: hammocks to get the girls to linger...



The Games area

Countering the dominance of the boys in this area:

- Increased entrances; wider entrances;
- Dividing the play area;
- Creating a divider with multiple uses;
- One side pitch marked, the other plain



Accommodating
the needs of
teenage girls as
carers...





Barcelona: Plaça d'en Baró

- A new feminist park; wide perimeter; different interconnecting areas; multiple focusses.

Malmo: Rösens Rodda Matta

The only park in Europe designed by, with and for girls:

Location: old car park in disadvantaged suburb;

Design Process: in consultation with a group of girls from the area, aged 16-24.

The result.... was an urban activity park with:

- a climbing wall;
- a stage for performances – organised/impromptu performances/classes;
- a set of bars for climbing and gymnastics;
- a series of smaller spaces so that no one group can dominate.





Location, location location...

(or engagement, engagement, engagement...)

- Teenage girls are not homogenous
- Intersectionality
- Site specific concerns
- Community specific concerns
- Making sure the voices of teenage girls can be heard
 - Consulting at the park if they aren't there;
 - The trap of the skateboard petition...

How do we propose to make change?

- Raising awareness and helping to amplify the brilliant work that is already out there.
- Making connections between people who are interested in this stuff
- Influencing at a strategic levels: Let's get some of those funders who like to fund skate parks to try something different; let's also get councils to start thinking about their Public Sector Equality Duty at the beginning of the process, not at the end (or not at all...)
- Creating some pilots:
 - let's talk to girls to understand their experience of specific locations;
 - Do a pilot of low cost interventions in existing spaces and measure what changes;
 - Design a park specifically with teenage girls at the heart of the process (Malmo).

A final (important) thought

- Teenage boys are not a homogenous group;
- There are lots of boys who don't use the skate parks, pump tracks and MUGAs;
- Challenging the dominance of the version of young masculinity we currently promote in our parks wont just be good for girls.

Contacts



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