

# making the public realm better for teenage girls



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# Who are we?

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- A charity campaigning to make our parks, recreation grounds, playing fields, meanwhile spaces and similar as welcoming to teenage girls as they are to teenage boys.
- It's about thinking about these spaces differently.
- It's about supporting everyone involved in the built environment to try something new.
- It's about starting the conversations early and engaging with teenage girls.

# Teenage girls are badly served by parks

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- When facilities are built for teenagers these almost always consist of:
  - Skate park;
  - MUGA or basketball court, or both;
  - BMX track
- All dominated by boys and young men.
- Often enshrined in play strategies, planning guidance and council practice

*“[Our aim is to] provide activity zones for young adults of 12+ years in all the major settlements (e.g. MUGA, skatepark, BMX track etc.)” : Council Play Area Audit and Action Plan, 2020*

*“[Play areas ] can be complemented by other facilities including Multi Use Games Areas (MUGAs) and skateboard parks etc.” Fields in Trust Guidance: Beyond the Six Hectare Standard*

# Current teen provision

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- Skateparks:
  - 85% of skateboarders are male and 80% of skateboarders are under 18.
  - Boys often drive girls away from the skate parks through exclusion and harassment.
  - US research: living near a park makes it more likely that a teenage girl will do exercise, but living near a skate park lowered the exercise taken.
- MUGAs:
  - hard surfaced play areas are used more by boys than girls.
  - girls play more actively in a playground without a MUGA.
  - Very open to territorialisation by boys.
  - Prescriptive; fenced; single entrances; chicanes.
  - Don't feel safe.

# what data do we have so far?

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- Glasgow research summer 2021: only 20% of women and girls who used parks felt safe in their chosen park.
- Rowntree Park, York: 90% of girls who were into skating age 10-17 felt uncomfortable on their local skate park.
- Research in Yorkshire published July 2022 (Make Space for Us):
  - Parks don't meet these needs for the majority of girls: 68% saying there is nothing for them to do and 50% reporting there are no sporting activities for them;
  - 49% of girls don't feel safe to exercise in parks compared to just 26% of boys;
  - 59% of girls don't feel welcome in parks because the spaces are dominated by boys.

# we need more data

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## **Issue:**

- We know boys and young men dominate skateparks, MUGAs and BMX: but by how much ?
- Base line data needed so we can measure what works.

## **Solution:**

Get people counting in the park.

National Parkwatch campaign- May 2023.

- Who is using the MUGA/Skatepark and BMX and how many are girls.
- Spot count.
- Use online form to record the data.

# Why change?

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- **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;
  - Equality Act 2010 and Public Sector Equality Duty

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# The Public Sector Equality Duty

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The PSED requires public authorities, when they are making decisions, to consider proactively:

- eliminating unlawful discrimination;
- advancing equality of opportunity between advantaged and disadvantaged groups; and
- fostering good relations between advantaged and disadvantaged groups.

Teenage girls are currently disadvantaged by provision for teens in parks.

PSED requires public authorities to proactively consider this.



# do girls want change to happen?

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- Women in Sport talked to 1,518 girls age 12-18 between October 2020 and Feb 2021
  - 82% of girls will put more effort into being fit and active after the pandemic;
  - 55% said being physically active makes them happier;
  - 54% said being physically active made them less stressed.
- In a Girlguiding survey, 82% of girls thought they should be more involved in designing parks and open spaces.
- *“Now, parks help me if I get upset or angry. As long as there is a light in the park, I am happy”*
- *“I realised...Oh my God, this is what parks used to be like when I was younger.”* [after visiting a great park]

# how can change happen?

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- Teenage girls are the experts on what will attract them to a space.
- Teenage girls are not homogenous: location and intersectionality...
- Seek out the voices of teenage girls in your area...
  - Avoid the error of only listening to the users - widens inequality;
  - Don't consult at the park if they aren't there;
  - Schools; Guides; Youth Groups; dance schools, roller skate rinks...carparks?
  - Make space to talk to the girls on their own;
  - Include the boys in conversations about the issues.

# What do teenagers say?

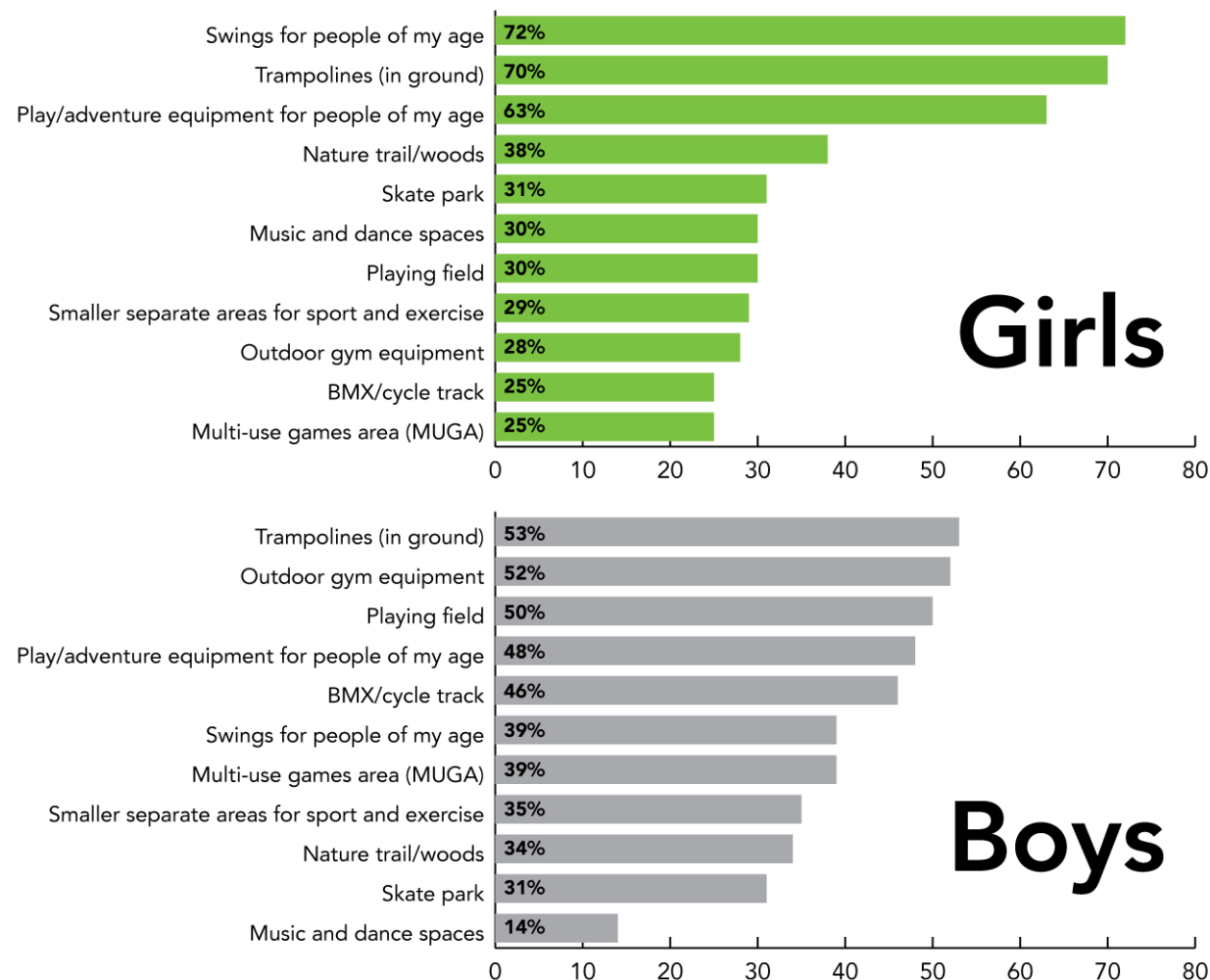
- a space that is ours;
- to be hidden but seen;
- where we can be kids without little kids being there;
- many areas instead of one space that can be territorialised.



# What do teenagers want?

In a recent survey for Yorkshire Sport:

- Girls want swings, trampolines, play equipment;
- Skate parks and MUGAs are well down the list for boys too;
- Spaces to play as well as do sport.



# what does change look like?

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- Need to create parks that work better for teenage girls, non binary young people and those boys who do not use MUGAs, skateparks and BMX tracks.
  - Not about painting things pink or separating boys and girls.
  - Not about getting rid of MUGAs, skateparks or BMX tracks.
- Creating other spaces more inclusive for all:
  - Thinking about these spaces differently
  - Engaging with girls and minoritized genders
  - Supporting people to do things differently
  - Generating social value

# What would better look like?

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- Most of the work has been done in Europe – especially Sweden and Vienna
- Different approaches but common themes:
  - better lighting and circular paths;
  - smaller, subdivided sports areas; wider entrances/less enclosed;
  - sociable seating, relaxed, active, adventurous;
  - hanging about: swings, gym bars and hammocks;
  - performance spaces;
  - good quality toilets.

# Malmö

## Rösens Rodda Matta

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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.





# Stockholm Bredäng

Doesn't tell you what to do

Takes the space of one pitch

Social seating and shelter



- Shelter is integrated into the park
- A range of spaces for different groups



Photo: Robin Hayes/Nivå



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## Copenhagen Superkilen

- Designed as an inclusive space, so works for teenage girls
- Lots of shelter, seating and non-prescriptive spaces
- Path running through the whole park means that there are no isolated corners

Also has  
brilliant social  
swings!



# Vienna

## Madchenbuhne

### Reumannplatz

- Local school girls requested an outdoor performance space;
- Also a community asset



(Photo: Christian Fürthner)

# Moscow Gorki Park

- Swings are one of the most common requests;
- Clearly not for the little kids;
- Great sight lines
- Well lit.



Photo: Anton Donikov

# Umeå Frizon

Co-designed with teenage girls:

- Space to hang out
- Curved for good sightlines
- Ergonomically designed to fit teenage girls
- Can play music





**[MAKE  
SPACE  
FOR  
GIRLS]**

# **ParkWatch**

**27 | 28 | 29 May**