

MAKING SPACE FOR GIRLS

*Have girls been designed out of
public space?*

LSE
Cities



What is the project?

- + LSE Cities and Make Space for Girls coming together to conduct a researcher-in-residence style peer research programme
- + Involved nine 17-21 year olds who identified as girls and young women
- + Investigated local areas (Crewe and Trowbridge) using various research methods taught through a curriculum across 7 weeks

What are the aims of the project?

- + To answer the question -‘**have girls been designed out of public space?**’
- + To investigate, first hand from the perspective of girls, what it is that girls need and want from public spaces
- + To have suggestions for what can be implemented into the transformations of real life parks and public spaces

What did we do?

- + Each week was split into 3 sections:
 - Lecture/video
 - Reading
 - Activity
- + Followed by an hour long meeting at the end of each week.
- + Each week had a different focus:
 - What is a public space?
 - Why does design matter for thinking about public space?
 - Have girls been designed out?
 - How can we research and analyse public space?
 - How can we design a public space that meets our needs?
 - Why does design matter for us?
 - Reflections

What did we do?

We also went on several site visits with Olivia and Julia from LSE to various sites in Crewe.

- + Crewe town centre (including the Market Hall)
- + McLaren Park
- + Joey the Swan



What did we find?

The 12 key findings. We found that young women:

1. Do not feel safe in public space
2. Feel that public spaces are not 'for them' and they do not cater to their needs
3. Do not use and do not feel welcome in existing youth facilities
4. Use public space in varied ways
5. Value green open spaces as places to 'relax' 'detox' 'get calm' 'get over stresses' and to hang out with friends, however they have safety concerns
6. Value highstreets and retail areas that are affordable, that target their demographic, and that are conducive to socialization
7. Feel stigma and judgement in public spaces
8. Have mixed feelings about security and surveillance (e.g. security guards, CCTV)
9. Value public space for its ability to grant privacy and autonomy
10. Have local travel and mobility that is greatly impacted by their gender, age or life stage, socioeconomic situations, and perceptions of safety
11. Are impacted by poor city/town maintenance
12. Are deeply affected by changes and developments (especially large-scale) to their local areas.

Therefore...

Have girls been designed out of public space?

- + Unfortunately, yes we have
- + 'Designed by men, for men'
- + Both our age and gender was a barrier to enjoying public spaces
- + Local spaces are exclusionary - they are designed with boys and men in mind
- + We feel unsafe, judged and unwelcome
- + Amenities were insufficient
- + We lack representation and the opportunity to have our voices and opinions heard

*"All design elements should have gone through gender mainstreaming and they [designers and planners] should give girls the option about whether they **want** to use a space, rather than whether they **can** use it."*

Key theme: Safety

Young women do not feel safe in public space

- + We perceive safety as a baseline for whether a space is used and enjoyed.

The presence of other people such as the elderly, children, pet-owners (for some), and groups of women; and aesthetic and well managed public space (facilities are not broken, there is no litter, etc) make us feel safer.

- + Feeling unsafe in public space, often stems from a fear of being assaulted.

Dead ends, low lighting (natural and artificial), minimal footfall, and groups of boys and men exacerbate our feelings of unsafety and vulnerability.

2 out of 3 girls have been sexually harassed in public places. - Plan International UK (2018)

What did we find?

Crewe town centre

- + Heavily dominated male spaces
- + A close police station made us feel safer
- + Lack of shops
- + Uninviting bus station
- + The market centre is a safe space for us



"I get off my bus ...one stop early [...] before the station, that way I don't have to go to the bus station... Especially in winter. It's a sketchy place. There are homeless people and alcoholics there... you wouldn't want to be alone"

What did we find?

The Market Centre

- + Open and bright
- + Clean toilets
- + Suitable for EVERYONE to use
- + Variety of options



What did we find?

McLaren Park

- + MUGA
- + Small children's play area
- + Poor lighting and paths
- + Lack of benches



“There’s nothing stopping us going through the gates [MUGAs] but we don’t feel we should.”

What do girls want?

To feel safe,
welcome and
unjudged

Free, green
and clean
spaces

Accessibility
for everyone

Comfortable
and social
seating

New and improved
recreational
facilities for young
women

For our voices
to be heard

Recommendations – Our top tips



Safety is a top priority

Lighting

Wide, accessible paths
No hidden, unlight areas
- visibility is key!

More entrances and exits



We value being able to socialise with our friends

Benches that are circular and can include everyone in the conversation.

Recreational facilities where we can have fun, together.



We want to be able to use the space all the time

Lighting
Shelter



Our voices and opinions need to be heard and represented in the changes implemented into public spaces

Final message

- + The changes and solutions that girls want, but also need, work for **everyone**.

We are not asking for girls to be designed in and boys designed out, but instead spaces for everyone.

- + Public spaces have the power to improve both physical and mental health, so implementing these changes can be beneficial for all.

To read more about the research project, you can read the following article:

<https://www.lse.ac.uk/research/research-for-the-world/society/are-girls-being-designed-out-of-public-spaces>

To view a short film about the research project in Crewe, you can watch the following video:

<https://youtu.be/DGY0arU-U2U>