

Equalizer: Developing Equal And Inclusive Physical Activity Places In Collaboration

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Aim

The presentation takes as its starting-point the unequal and gender-coded use of public activity and sport places and discusses methods to create more inclusive places with basis in the collaborative project *Equalizer*.

Background

In Swedish cities as well as cities in other countries a lot of new public physical activity places, such as outdoor gyms, themed playgrounds, skate parks and small-scale ball pitches, have been developed recently in order to meet new activity preferences and activate new groups. They are in many ways interesting in a current sport and urban development context. The current urban development includes a growing urbanization, densification and segregation. The sport development is characterized by a decreased interest in organised sport activities, increased interest in flexible, individual and self-organised activities as well as activities provided by commercial actors, the rise of 'new' activities like parkour and lifestyle sports and a growing activity segregation (Book, 2015). However, the new activity and sport places are not as inclusive and open as they were meant to be. For example, most of the places are dominated by young, male users. The share of women visitors is often low.

The project *Equalizer — a tool for equal and inclusive activity places* focuses on the potential in transforming existing activity places through fairly inexpensive and workable measures in order to attract more users, irrespective of gender. The project connects theory and practice and uses the city as a living lab (see for instance Evans, Jones, Karvonen, Millard & Wendler, 2015; Leminen & Westerlund, 2015). The project is performed as a collaboration between researchers with expertise in norm criticism, sport studies and urban geography; architects; the City of Malmö; and users. An important part of the project is dialogue processes and involvement of potential users, mainly girls/women. Keywords are norm criticism, intersectionality and accessibility in connection to public activity and sport places, as well as participatory planning.

Research design

In order to test new ideas and create changes, the empirical part of the project is carried out in the form of a living lab with several steps:

- Groups of women are identified and dialogues with these groups and representatives for the leisure department are initiated in order to select places.
- Groups of women become active users of male-dominated activity places at hours when boys/men are present in order to gather experiences and create "disturbances" in the usual user patterns through their presence and activities. These actions take place at several occasions. At this point no changes of the places have been made.
- Group interviews with the women involved in the step above in order to discuss experiences and identify obstacles and opportunities for using the activity places -> Based on this, tools and measures to create more equal and inclusive places are discussed.
- Changes of or in connection to the places are made. These could be physical, organizational etc.
- The transformed places are used and evaluated by the women.

The aim of the steps could be summarized as follows: to disturb the patterns of dominance at existing physical activity places — to support changes — to sustain a higher inclusivity.

Researchers will be involved as observers and interviewers in all steps.

At this point, the selected places include one outdoor gym located in an urban recreation area, one small-scale ball pitch and two places used for youth summer activities organized by the city. The groups of women at the moment involves about 20 girls/women aged 14–20. Later on, a group of middle-aged women will also be involved.

Results

During the spring and summer user dialogues will be carried out and during late summer and early autumn three places will be object to change through different measures. At the conference the process so far will be analyzed embedded in the theoretical background.

References

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