

Growing up in the city

Youth in public space

Irina van Aalst & Kirsten Visser

Inclusive urban public spaces require not only an understanding of use, desires and experiences, but also participation and new forms of development. In our projects, young people are not just the informants but **active citizens** whose voices provide possible solutions for the future design of inclusive and sustainable places that meet the needs of all.

Play space

How can we stimulate risky outdoor play? Playing outside is an essential part of growing up actively, socially and healthy. Children are particularly attracted by, and benefit from, **risky play situations**, such as great heights, high speed, or playing with dangerous elements. In today's increasingly dense cities opportunities to engage in (risky) play have **declined**. Playgrounds are often deemed boring and parents and municipalities are **risk-averse**. We therefore interviewed children, parents, play professionals and policymakers to understand challenges and opportunities for risky play in urban public spaces and semi-public playgrounds.



Deprived space

How do young people experience growing up in a deprived neighbourhood? It is often assumed that growing up in deprived neighbourhoods pose serious **risks** for young people. What is largely missing from these studies are the **experiences of young people themselves**. Through interviews and visual methods, we investigated how young people use and experience their deprived neighbourhood. While the respondents were aware of problems in public space, such as crime and violence, they also pointed to several **positive aspects** of their neighbourhood. In the eyes of the young people, their neighbourhood has both **instrumental and affective meaning**. Neighbourhood effect research might benefit from paying more attention to the idea that place can have multiple meanings, and from looking at the perceived neighbourhood strengths instead of only focusing on the deficits.

Her space

How are urban public spaces produced, experienced and narrated by girls? What challenges do they face and what spatial interventions can contribute to make it more inclusive spaces? **Public spaces are not used equally by teenage girls and boys**. Although girls are equally entitled to these places, they are much less visible and present, both during the **day and at night**. Research on **gender inequality** shows that girls **do not feel welcome** because the design does not match their needs and behaviours, and they **do not feel safe**, face catcalls and sexual harassment. Therefore, they often use different **strategies to cope with the male gaze** in the city, e.g. staying at home, avoiding places, taking a detour, or sending a live location when they are on the go. This is an **urgent issue** as more and more young people grow up in cities and the current pressures on public space, due to urban densification and commodification, have major implications for their everyday lived experiences.

