Sport SPOTS FOR Girls

RESEARCH REPORT:

NEEDS AND BARRIERS FOR GIRLS AND YOUNG WOMEN IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT

SOUTH DISTRICT, PLOVDIV



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1. CONTEXT AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The "Sport Spots for Girls" (SSG) initiative is a strategic project aimed at transforming public spaces in the South district, Plovdiv, into safe and inclusive zones that stimulate physical activity among girls and young women. The project is directly aligned with the values of the New European Bauhaus (NEB), integrating sustainability through eco-design, inclusion by removing gender-oriented barriers, and aesthetics as a tool for social impact. The main objectives of the project (O1 – O4) include:

O1: Identifying barriers and actively engaging the community.

O2: Creating a conceptual model for "female urbanism" and designing active furniture.

O3: Pilot transformation of two public spaces in the South district.

O4: Monitoring the results and creating a methodology for replication at the national level.

2. METHODOLOGY AND PARTICIPANT PROFILE

The study bases its findings on quantitative surveys (214 respondents) and qualitative analysis through focus groups and interviews with experts.

Women/Girls

95.3%

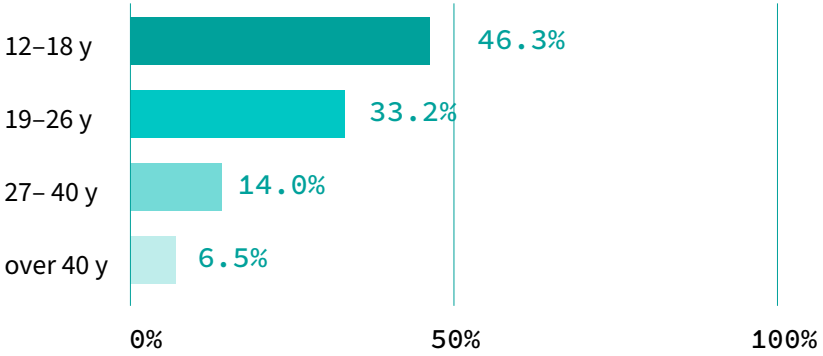
Men/Boys – 4.7%

connected to the South district

73.8%

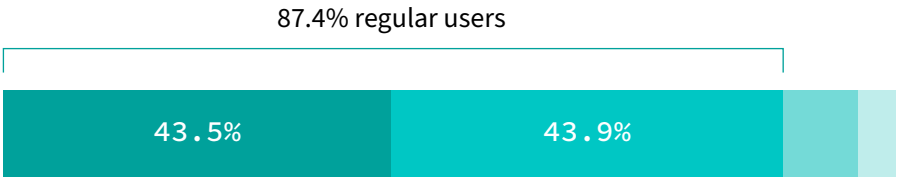
This ensures that the data reflects the pressing needs of the local community, rather than abstract theoretical models.

Age distribution



3. FREQUENCY AND PATTERNS OF USING THE PUBLIC ENVIRONMENT

The data confirms the critical importance of urban infrastructure for women's daily lives:



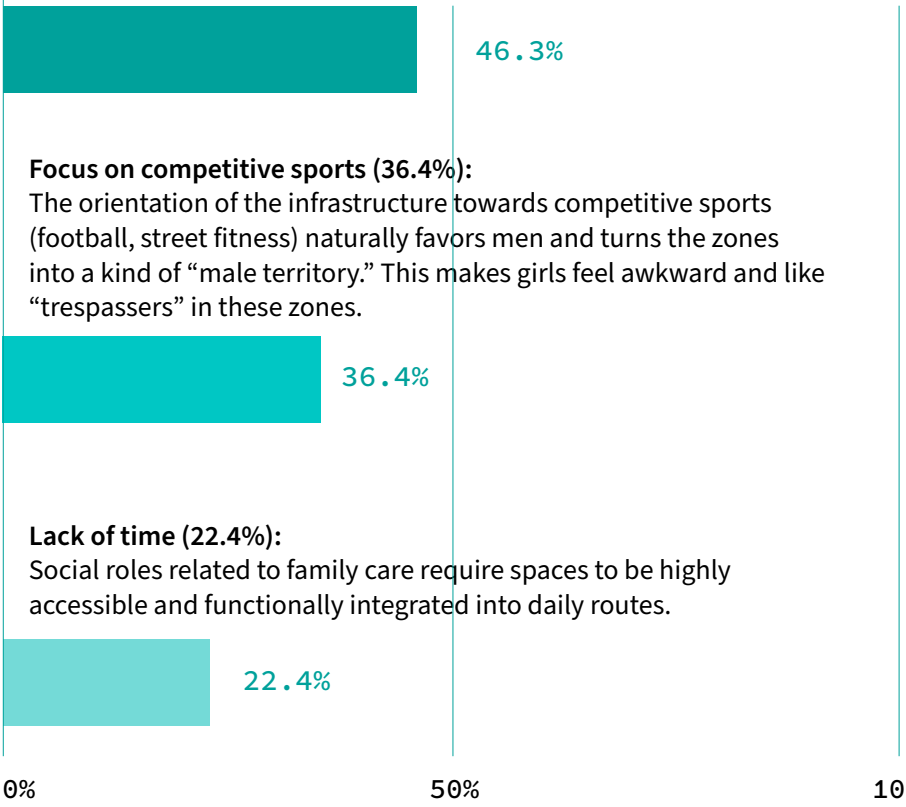
- Every day: 43.5%
- Several times a week: 43.9%
- Rarely (1-2 times a month): 8.4%
- Almost never: 4.2%

Conclusion: With a total share of 87.4% regular users, public spaces serve as the main setting for the social life and health of women. The high frequency of use correlates with a high degree of criticality towards existing deficits.

4. MAIN BARRIERS FOR GIRLS AND WOMEN

The analysis identifies structural and psychological obstacles that turn the urban environment into a transit zone rather than a place to stay:

Lack of suitable facilities (46.3%):
The lack of material comfort (benches, furniture, and equipment tailored to the needs and usage patterns of girls and women) is the leading reason for avoiding these spaces.



Focus on competitive sports (36.4%):
The orientation of the infrastructure towards competitive sports (football, street fitness) naturally favors men and turns the zones into a kind of “male territory.” This makes girls feel awkward and like “trespassers” in these zones.

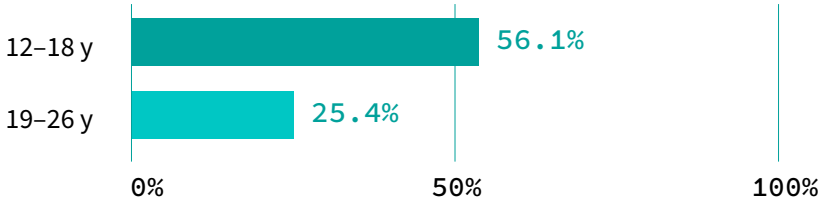
Lack of time (22.4%):
Social roles related to family care require spaces to be highly accessible and functionally integrated into daily routes.

5. SAFETY ANALYSIS: THE AGE PARADOX AND "CONDITIONAL SAFETY"

The perception of safety in the evening reveals significant discrepancies between age groups:

The age paradox

The 12-18 age group feels safer (56.1% giving ratings of 4 and 5), while for the 18-26 age group, this share drops to 25.4%. One possible interpretation of this result is that younger girls more frequently use public spaces in the presence of family or friends, whereas young women between 18 and 26 navigate more independently and use the city in a wider range of situations, which may lead to a more critical assessment of safety.



Critical levels of insecurity

44.5%

In the most vulnerable group (18-26 years), a full 44.5% give the lowest safety ratings (1 or 2).

Psychology of stay

31.8%

of all participants indicate a rating of 3, defined as a state of "constant vigilance". This is a state of conditional safety, where the user is in continuous internal tension and cannot achieve relaxation in the environment.

6. SPECIFIC NEEDS BY AGE GROUPS (FOCUS GROUPS)

GROUP 13-14 YEARS: SOCIAL-SPORTS SPACE

For this group, movement is a function of socialization. The ideal design includes elements that allow "simultaneous movement and socializing": trampolines, "large swings" (nest type), and active zones. A key factor is "safety by design" – full visual transparency and the absence of isolated, dark corners.

GROUP 17-19 YEARS: ATMOSPHERE AND STAY

Here, the focus shifts entirely to comfort and the quality of the stay. Leading needs are gazebos for large groups, game tables (chess, table tennis), shade, and charging stations for mobile devices/Wi-Fi. The atmosphere, created through decorative lighting, is more important than the presence of sports equipment.

7. EXPERT PERSPECTIVE AND SYSTEMIC PROBLEMS

Interviews with urban planners and architects emphasize the need for a paradigm shift in urban planning:

- **Public spaces must be viewed as a connected system:**
  Experts emphasize that safety is not solely determined by the quality of a specific space, but by the overall user experience. Access to it, illuminated routes, good visibility, and the presence of active zones along the way are just as important as the place itself.

- **A new type of public space needs to be created:**
  According to experts, current planning is mainly focused on playgrounds and sports facilities for traditional competitive activities. This leaves limited options for girls and young women. The "Sport Spots for Girls" project proposes exactly this missing type of space – a place that complements existing infrastructure, rather than replacing it.

- **Comfort is a prerequisite for the active use of the space:**
  Experts point out that a quality public space is not limited to sports equipment. Access to drinking water, sanitary facilities, shaded areas, comfortable seating, and good maintenance determine whether people will stay in the space for a longer period.

- **Aesthetics affect the sense of safety and belonging:**
  A well-maintained green environment, quality design, lighting, and visual identity create a sense of care, safety, and attractiveness. According to experts, these elements are especially important for girls and young women when choosing whether to use a given space.

- **The participation of future users is key to successful planning:**
  All interviewees emphasize that involving young people early in the design process improves the quality of solutions and creates a sense of belonging to the future space. Co-creation should be seen as a fundamental principle, not as a subsequent consultation.



8. VISION FOR THE "IDEAL PLACE" AND DESIGN RECOMMENDATIONS

To be recognized as inclusive, the SSG model must integrate the following elements:

- **A cozier and visually attractive environment (67.3%):**
  High aesthetics are not a luxury, but an indirect marker of safety – a well-maintained environment signals the presence of social control.

- **Opportunities for non-competitive and playful activities (52.3%):**
  Focus on dancing, balance, and yoga.

- **Active public furniture (44.4%):**
  Flexible seating (circular benches) allowing for group dynamics.

- **Hygiene comfort:**
  Providing accessible toilets and places for personal belongings.

- **Better lighting and open visibility (29.4%):**
  Eliminating "blind spots" in the landscape.

9. CONCLUSION AND REPLICATION POTENTIAL

The South district in Plovdiv provides favorable conditions for the initial testing and physical construction of the "Sport Spot for Girls" concept, before it is expanded to other parts of Plovdiv or other cities. The study proves that investing in spaces for girls is not an act of segregation, but a tool for achieving functional equality. **The successful implementation of the SSG model in Plovdiv will create prerequisites for adapting and applying the model in other Bulgarian municipalities, turning the city into a leader in inclusive urban development.**

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