#URBAN GIRLS HANDBOOK
A GLOBAL GUIDE TO PARTICIPATORY PUBLIC SPACE PLANNING & DESIGN

RESULTS FROM #URBANGIRLSMOVEMENT INITIATED BY GLOBAL UTMANING
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INTRODUCTION

People increasingly live in cities, by 2050 70% of the world’s population is expected to live in urban areas. This brings enormous challenges, not least in terms of inequality. Many city dwellers are subject to difficult living conditions, often without any social protection. This is not unique for low or middle-income countries. Unplanned urbanisation is often followed by increased segregation, inequality, and widened gaps between city centres and suburbs.

Girls and women belong to the societal group that are particularly vulnerable to uneven resource distribution, oppression and social exclusion. Few cities are designed based on girls’ and young women’s everyday life, and do not correspond to their needs. This vulnerability based on gender increases with factors such as age, socio-economic situation or disabilities.

We are convinced that prioritizing girls and young women in urban development will be crucial for public places and cities to become more inclusive and sustainable, and can thus be an effective tool against segregation and inequality. How cities and areas are planned is also crucial for people’s quality of life and can in particular increase girls’ and young women’s opportunities for health, education, work, and safety.

Against this background, the think tank Global Utmaning initiated #UrbanGirlsMovement to collect and map global good practices demonstrating how participatory feminist urban development can improve living conditions in society as a whole. It aims to inspire, increase knowledge and capacity, provide support in implementation, and show how a new approach to planning and design can be applied in practice.

The #UrbanGirlsHandbook is your guide to participatory urban planning and design: Dare to dream of cities for all.
RELATED SDGs

1. No Poverty
2. Zero Hunger
3. Good Health and Well-Being
4. Quality Education
5. Gender Equality
6. Clean Water and Sanitation
7. Affordable and Clean Energy
8. Decent Work and Economic Growth
9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure
10. Reduced Inequalities
11. Sustainable Cities and Communities
12. Responsible Consumption and Production
13. Climate Action
14. Life Below Water
15. Life on Land
16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions
17. Partnerships for the Goals
MULTI-STAKEHOLDER APPROACH

Based on a mapping of good global practices we developed a method and a range of tools for gender and age sensitive multi-stakeholder participatory public space planning and design. Together they provide a new multi-sectoral and multi-level urban governance model based on multi-stakeholder initiatives, citizens’ engagement, co-creation and co-ownership in the planning and re-design of public spaces.

The purpose is to bridge practice, policy and academia in the field of inclusive and participatory public space planning and design. The work has been conducted together with a range of partners and participants from academia, civil society, municipalities, international organisations and private sector such as Botkyrka Municipality, the Block by block Foundation, Changers Hub, Fryshuset, Global Utmaning, Iteam, Kounkuey Design Initiative, KTH, MethodKit, Mistra Urban Futures, Plan International, RISE, Sida, Stockholms University, Södertörn University, UN-Habitat, Uppsala University, White architects and WWF.

A research network with scholars from the academic institutions above, has been gathered to find synergies between various research projects in related areas as well participate in the innovation labs. The main purpose of the research network has been to gather ongoing research initiatives in related areas to feminist urban development and participatory processes in urban development, and to understand how #UrbanGirlsMovement can provide an opportunity to meet the actual need for new knowledge that practitioners in the field demand.
The initiative is grounded in a strong co-creative and participatory method whereby participating city representatives and a gathering of cross-sectoral actors participate in developing solutions for a specific area in the city. The final outcome delivers visionary and integrated solutions at the intersection of social, cultural, digital and nature-based innovation to increase citizens’ health and well-being in cities.

The cross-sectorial nature of the group of participants and a mainstreamed understanding about intersectionality and focus on equality ensures solutions that address social, cultural, economic and environmental determinants of health and well-being and support urban communities in reducing their exposure to environment and climate-related risks and social tensions.

Our #UrbanGirlsMethod consists of nine steps where girls and young women participate alongside other multi-stakeholders and experts (i.e. researchers, architects, planners, civil rights activists, landowners, etc.). In general, each step consists of a workshop producing concrete results which will be the basis for taking on the following step. Each step contains a range of tools and together these tools comprise an entire toolbox:

**Context** In the first workshop the concept of feminist urban development is introduced, we examine the relation to the Sustainable Development Goals, good examples and study the space we will be working with throughout the project. Our urban walk is inspired by the Plan International and UN-Habitat Safer Cities for Girls checklist.

**Challenges** In the second workshop we consider concrete tools available within urban development, identify challenges, highlight needs, and brainstorm around the potential of the space. We use Method Kit’s decks of cards as guidance in the discussion.

**Possibilities** In the third workshop we explore the existing potential of the space, with the goal of formulating a vision for the space, sketching concrete ideas and initiating the process of illustrating our ideas. Again, we use Method Kit.
**Illustrations** The fourth workshop focuses, based on the outcome of the three first participatory problem-solving workshops, on testing solutions, illustrating them in 3D and further developing the details. We work with the Block by Block tool developed by UN-Habitat and Mojang inspired by the computer game Minecraft.

**Input** The fifth step usually takes the form of a presentation of results or an exhibition with the aim of sharing the mid-term results and draft designs. We collect more knowledge about the local area that needs to be addressed through the valuable input from citizens and additional experts.

**Recommendations** In the sixth step we discuss what is required for the proposal to be implemented. The target group of young girls and experts work together to develop concrete policy recommendations for decision-makers at different levels as well as supporting guidelines for implementation.

**Plans** The seventh step takes the external input and recommendations into consideration and continues to work on the proposals together with the architects, starting to turn the draft solutions into sketches, models and plans for the area. We use Sketchup, 3D glasses and 3D prints and build models of the space.

**Sharing** The eighth step presents the final outcome to local, regional, national decision-makers and stakeholders. Other national and international actors are invited to discuss and take part in the lessons learned in order to maximise the reach of results and up-scaling.

**Evaluation** In the last and ninth step we evaluate the process, report the project, perhaps relate to indicators, and make sure that the lessons learned are shared with others.

In short, the ultimate goal of this method is to offer capacity building, providing different solutions to relevant actors with diverse needs. The method allows target groups, stakeholders and experts to meet, in order to produce solutions together to jointly identified challenges. The tools in the toolbox are of such nature that they empower the weakest groups in society but at the same time facilitate communication and collaboration between decision-makers and these vulnerable groups.
By putting girls at the centre of urban development, we facilitate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) locally, building “cities for all” leaving no-one behind. The approach is developed to fit any public space regeneration project but particularly meets the needs of deprived neighbourhoods, focusing particularly on health and wellbeing (SDG3), gender equality (SDG5) and reducing inequalities (SDG10), through multi-stakeholder participation and partnerships (SDG17) in public spaces in an urban community (SDG11).

During one year, girls and young women have contributed with sustainable solutions to fight challenges in the public spaces in the Fittja area, in Botkyrka municipality, on the Stockholm region. We engaged girls from the area in developing innovative designed visions for a more inclusive and equal city. In the long term these can create conditions for reduced segregation and inequality.

The starting point for #UrbanGirlsMovement is “plan the city for girls, and it will work for everyone”. The hypothesis has now been successfully tested in a pilot in Botkyrka municipality in the larger Stockholm region in Sweden. During one year, girls and young women have contributed with sustainable solutions to fight challenges in the public spaces in the Fittja area, in Botkyrka municipality, on the Stockholm region. We engaged girls from the area in developing innovative designed visions for a more inclusive and equal city. In the long term these can create conditions for reduced segregation and inequality.
LAB 1: CONTEXT

The main goal of the first workshop was for the participants to get an understanding of the project and the concept of feminist urban development. The participants were introduced to gender perspectives in urban planning and were given inspiration from both initiatives in Sweden and the Global South. This introduction was important in order to give all participants, no matter their previous knowledge, a clear overview of the project’s purpose and goals. The workshop proceeded with the Girls’ Urban Walk, a city walk where the participants assessed the different public and semi-public spaces around Fittja.

“The overall design of the place does not meet my needs or make me feel included.”
LAB 2: CHALLENGES

Building upon the data collected during the first step, the main goal of the second workshop was to identify challenges and opportunities. With help of the tool MethodKit for urban development, the participants identified specific challenges and needs in Fittja, as well as brainstormed around the potential of the space. Additionally, the participants analysed and discussed what privileges prevail in the space today, and what the they dream about for the future. The second lab was exploratory and circled around the themes: Fittja today and Fittja tomorrow.

“Women, children and elderly, are still navigating in the inherited urban environments that were built without their input and consent”
LAB 3: POSSIBILITIES

The third lab focused solely on opportunities, and the participants brainstormed about possible changes that could be implemented in Fittja. The brainstorming session was divided into three stages using MethodKit forms. The participants were asked to provide their craziest ideas, quick fixes, and most inclusive ideas. All ideas were connected to the four locations in Fittja identified during the Girls’ Urban Walk in the first lab - the station, the shopping centre, the main square and the backside of the shopping centre. The girls outlined suggestions on how the places could become more inclusive and sustainable.

“We dare to dream of cities for all”
LAB 4: SOLUTIONS

The fourth lab was a two-day workshop where the participants visualized their ideas from the previous workshop with the use of Block by Block, a method for civic dialogue and co-creation developed by UN-Habitat. The participants digitally developed solutions using the computer game Minecraft, best described as “digital Lego bricks”. The workshop allowed for a lot of creativity and the solutions from previous workshops functioned as a starting point. In the end many of the previous suggestions were amended, developed further and improved.

“I thought they would be more boxed in... but it was really cool to see their ideas and designs! I think you choose the right adults”
INPUT: MID-TERM EXHIBITION

The improved proposals made in Minecraft during previous tep were presented in a unique exhibition that was showcased in three locations in Fittja; the citizen’s service center in Fittja Centrum; the youth recreation centre Fittja Pulsen; and in the Botkyrka municipal hall. The exhibition was also available in a digital form, where visitors could go on a virtual tour of the models in virtual reality. The aim with the exhibition was to gather additional knowledge about local needs. The mid-term results were also presented to the municipality’s urban planning committee.

“No one took us for granted. You feel that you have an influence, you feel like part of something bigger.”
LAB 5: PLANS

The fifth lab was housed by White Arkitekter. The overall aim of the fifth workshop was to modify and develop the proposals from the fourth step using different architectural techniques. By applying these techniques, the proposals could be seen through new perspectives, creating an opportunity of making them more realistic. The participants worked in groups and were assigned a thematic focus to work with at three different workshop stations; a computerized sketching program called Sketchup, a physical model of Fittja and a virtual reality room where they could walk around in the Minecraft model.

“...you get to feel the power of being heard. It is something that I will bring with me for the rest of my life.”
LAB 6: RECOMMENDATIONS

During the final lab, the girls and experts continued working on the proposals developed throughout previous steps. In order to realise the designs they formulated policy recommendations to be presented to decision-makers at different levels and developed guidelines to support the implementing actors. A particular emphasis was put on prioritizing challenges, existing opportunities, and principles using a tool developed by Global Utmaning. The groups pinpointed crucial issues in terms of budget, responsibility issues, partnerships to be developed, timeframe and the first steps for both individuals and organisations to be taken in order to realize the proposals.

“Girls were given a safe space without being condemned as ‘pffft, do you really think you can do this?’"
TEST: #URBANGIRLSCUBE

In consultation with the girls, White architects and the municipality of Botkyrka designed a temporary pop-up to test some of the elements from the project. The pop-up #UrbanGirlsCube was built on Fittja square in August 2019 by a group of young seasonal workers. The cube was a combination of several of the public space solutions from the #UrbanGirlsMovement workshop series. The purpose of the pop-up installation was to see how the local community would react to the innovative solutions that emerged from the project, and show how the results in a simple way can be incorporated in the urban planning process. The pavilion was built entirely of wood and is now reused at preschools in the municipality.

“We should inspire other places to do the same as we have done here”
SHARING: FINAL CONFERENCE

On UN’s World Cities Day, an international conference was organised to share the final results with Swedish and international stakeholders. The results in form of policy recommendations and guidelines were handed over to decision-makers. In a range of seminars the solutions, lessons learned, future opportunities, global dissemination as well as upscaling to other cities were discussed.
EVALUATION: WAYS FORWARD

We are now evaluating our process with the aim to create an open source interactive digital platform to gather all tools for the use of others, creating a digital user friendly #UrbanGirlsToolbox. We have also gathered all detailed knowledge in the #UrbanGirlsCatalogue which is a complete collection for anyone interested in building cities for girls collecting good practices, lessons learned, methods and tools, guidelines for implementing actors and policy recommendations for local, regional, national and international authorities. We also intend to scale up the initiative, facilitating the process in other cities wishing to implement similar projects globally.
#URBANGIRLSPRINCIPLES

In practice, by gathering knowledge about how the built environment affects most vulnerable and marginalized populations’ access to the public space, the aim is to identify opportunities and provide useful tools for practitioners to improve the health, well-being and living conditions for these groups in particular, and society as a whole in general. A good city is balanced, where there is space for people to live, work and play in equal measure. These guidelines could be argued to be a global view of what is considered good, inclusive, and equal public space. Public space characteristics that meet the needs and wishes of girls and young women in include:

1. **Good footpaths and public mobility** - provides connectivity to important sites in a city. For example, a majority of the population does not own a car, but a majority of public space is often taken up by roads.

2. **Places for women, children, and elderly to hang out** - women are usually limited to having a purpose when using the urban public space, in comparison to men that loiter in a higher regard. For example, seating facing each other make it easier to talk to one another.

3. **Good lighting and visibility** - makes a place less threatening during dark hours of the day for. A city where women cannot access the city at all hours of the day is not an equal city.

4. **“Eyes on the streets” and authorities** - contribute to the conception of safety. The feeling that everyone can see all activities carried out in a public place encourages positive activity and behaviour.

5. **Open access** - semi-public or semi-private spaces, such as parks with fees, museums or restaurant terraces, are exclusive to certain parts of the population. Places that are not open access for free, systematically exclude the poorer part of the population.
6. **Human scale design** – the human-scale is a well-adapted design and urban form to the user. A human-scale design automatically becomes an attractive meeting place as it imposes feelings of a public space being a living room merging a feeling of home to the public.

7. **Manifestation of local values** - a place that is beautiful and differs in design from the majority of the city is less likely to get vandalized and will help strengthen the conception of safety. Enhancing local values contribute to a sense of pride, belonging and well-being.

8. **Flexibility, multi-purpose and multi-function** – an element must meet several purposes and functions. It should attract different audiences at different times of the day. A staircase is a good example, as it can be a place to walk, to sit, a meeting place, a training venue, a playground, a stage for performances, etc.

9. **Well working infrastructure, water and sanitation** - women are more vulnerable than men when there is insufficient or lack of toilets and sanitation facilities.

10. **Proximity to services** - girls and women often need, to a larger extent than boys and men, a proximity to services. Regrouping of various services such as community centres, predominantly benefit this population.

11. **Mixed use and populations** - girls benefit especially from areas with a mixed population as it enhances a sense of safety and the level of security.

12. **Green spaces** - integrating greenery into the urban form. Green walls and roofs, as well as bushes, trees and bodies of water have positive effects on the environment and physical and mental health.

13. **Representation** - for girls to use a space, other girls need to already be present. For girls to be present in a space they need to feel welcomed, safe and as though they have things to do in that space.
Scholars have defined that key factors for development processes to have a positive impact on gender relations include: community knowledge by collaboration with local NGOs, presence of high-level officials throughout the process, advocacy for policy recommendations, and that a gender analysis is central through all stages. All these can be identified in #UrbanGirlsMovement. These are our lessons learned for setting up inclusive and sustainable urban development and design processes:

**Facilitating multi-stakeholders** Prevent each actor from guarding their own interests rather than serving for what is best for the project. A facilitator with as little self-interest as possible will provide a neutral platform for landowners, political interests and inhabitants.

**Supporting co-production** Making sure the relationships between different stakeholders are functional and beneficial to the process is key to inclusiveness. Facilitating participatory processes with marginalized communities requires special skills, most importantly active listening.

**Making girls the experts** Involving marginalized actors and all relevant stakeholders early creates both legitimacy and quality. It helps understand the local context and build on rather than reinvent previous efforts.

**Co-creating a shared vision** Formulating a shared vision is important in order to provide a joint platform before sketching concrete ideas and initiating the process of illustrating solutions.
Adapting the tools We used various tools, including digital, to help map, assess, crowdsource and co-create public spaces which was proven very helpful.

Crowd sourcing extended input Collecting input from a larger user group is key in order to maximise knowledge about local needs.

Developing concrete advise for action We developed policy and strategic recommendations for decision-makers at different levels and supporting guidelines for implementing actors and representatives from various sectors.

“By 2030, provide universal access to safe, inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces, particularly for women and children, older persons and persons with disabilities”

“Girls were given a safe space without being condemned as ‘pffft, do you really think you can do this?’ I often feel suppressed because I’m a girl… #UrbanGirlsMovement has helped us show that we can”
RECOMMENDATIONS

The boundaries between municipal organizations and the surrounding society is changing. The business sector, academia and civil society have different roles in different urban projects and areas. Civil servants and politicians are becoming increasingly keen on collaborating outside their own organisations. Such aspects of inclusion and participation can be viewed as an overall positive development but also comes at the price of increased conflicts with regards to interests, resources and values. Here are our recommendations for each actor playing a role in co-creation processes. What can you do?

If you are a civil society actor...
... guard the voice and wishes of the community you represent. Bring in the accumulated local knowledge you have gathered and test solutions based on that place specific experience. Consider yourself an educator and message carrier in the group.

If you are a civil servant...
... think about how you can “serve” in this context. How can your knowledge contribute to increased capacity and improved decision-making in your home organisation? What story will you tell your co-workers and political representatives? What are you learning about your community here? Which tools can you give the place experts so that they can help you make more successful decisions? Take the opportunity to build relationships and trust to the citizens and actors you serve.

If you are a politician...
... be visionary. Even if it seems costly in the short term, dare to plan ahead and think about the long-term gains in terms of sustainability. To do so, trust your civil servants. Provide space for them to execute and inform the agendas you have set for them. Think about how you can bridge the project’s local experiences to national government, civil society, businesses and inhabitants in a way that supports the networks needed for increased value output. Take the opportunity to build relationships and trust to the citizens and actors you serve. Cherish this trust.
If you work in the private sector...
...learn the advantages of adopting a shared vision together with your project partners and discover how a thriving, equal, peaceful and sustainable urban neighborhood is good for business in the long run. Also, dare to engage in co-production even if you do not necessarily have to. You might learn that it enhances the quality of your offer and makes you an attractive business partner.

If you’re a researcher or work in academia...
...practice research in close collaboration with the change-makers of the societies you are investigating. Team up with other researchers and decide how you can create impact based on academic output from the project, both in academic circles and elsewhere. Remember that decision-makers will look to you as legitimisers of the project. Be aware of the power structures enacted in these settings; be observant and give space to the place experts.

If you’re an urban inhabitant or citizen...
...your own local #UrbanGirlsMovement innovation hub can become a space for you to meet, network, learn, grow, use your voice and co-create your habitat. Involvement in the design and evolution of your neighborhood helps not least youth prepare for active citizenship and accountability. Active citizens are responsible citizens; what we create, we take care of. Practice seeing challenges in your neighborhood from diverse perspectives by listening to not least your local “girl gang”.

If you’re somewhere in between...
...help bring the aggregated learnings to relevant platforms and bring critical feedback to the facilitators. Who should talk to whom about what? What is the meta-reflection and synthesis of the project that should be disseminated in and across innovation gaps and landscapes?

This is our call for action.
CONCLUSION

#UrbanGirlsMovement seeks to improve girls’ and young women’s living conditions in rapidly growing, socio-economically vulnerable urban areas, through feminist urban planning techniques. The fundamental idea of the project is that urban planning is an underutilised tool for bringing about more equal societies. The need to map global examples and spread the knowledge has been striking.

The initiative is based on the notion “plan the city for girls, and it will work for everyone”. We are convinced that prioritizing young women and girls in urban development is crucial for cities and public space to become more inclusive and thus more sustainable.

Throughout the local innovation labs, young girls are given the opportunity to design and realize visions of a more equal urban public space. They are given an official voice in urban planning for a more equal urban environment.

We contribute to several global goals; SDG 3 on health and well-being, SDG 5 on gender equality, SDG 10 on reduced inequalities, SDG 11 on sustainable cities and communities and SDG 17 on partnerships, both locally in our municipalities, nationally, and for international learning.

We have also seen a positive impact on other goals that need local implementation. This is our gathered knowledge from the #UrbanGirlsMovement that we feel responsible to share with you. We are here to engage with any actors willing to create-change in any community. But finally, our most important message to you is: dare to dream of cities for all. We do.
REFERENCES

IMAGES
Cover image: NN/Unsplash
Introduction, page 4:
Botkyrka Pilot, page 10
Lab 1, page 12: Mimmi Thorneus
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