



# Engaging Teenagers in Public Space

Presentation for WASLA Conference 2020  
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<https://www.biodesignstudio.com/>

# Brief Introduction

Kristi M. Park, PLA is the owner of BioDesign Studio, headquartered in Bellingham, WA. She is licensed landscape architect, urban designer and lecturer at the University of Washington and Western Washington University.

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<https://www.biodesignstudio.com/>

Bio  
design  
STUDIOS



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## **Research (in progress)**

This presentation is based on research in progress. Due to Covid-19, several research efforts have been indefinitely delayed.

Next steps include conducting additional interviews with stakeholders, an examination of factors such as race, gender, culture and religion, additional public surveys and data synthesis.

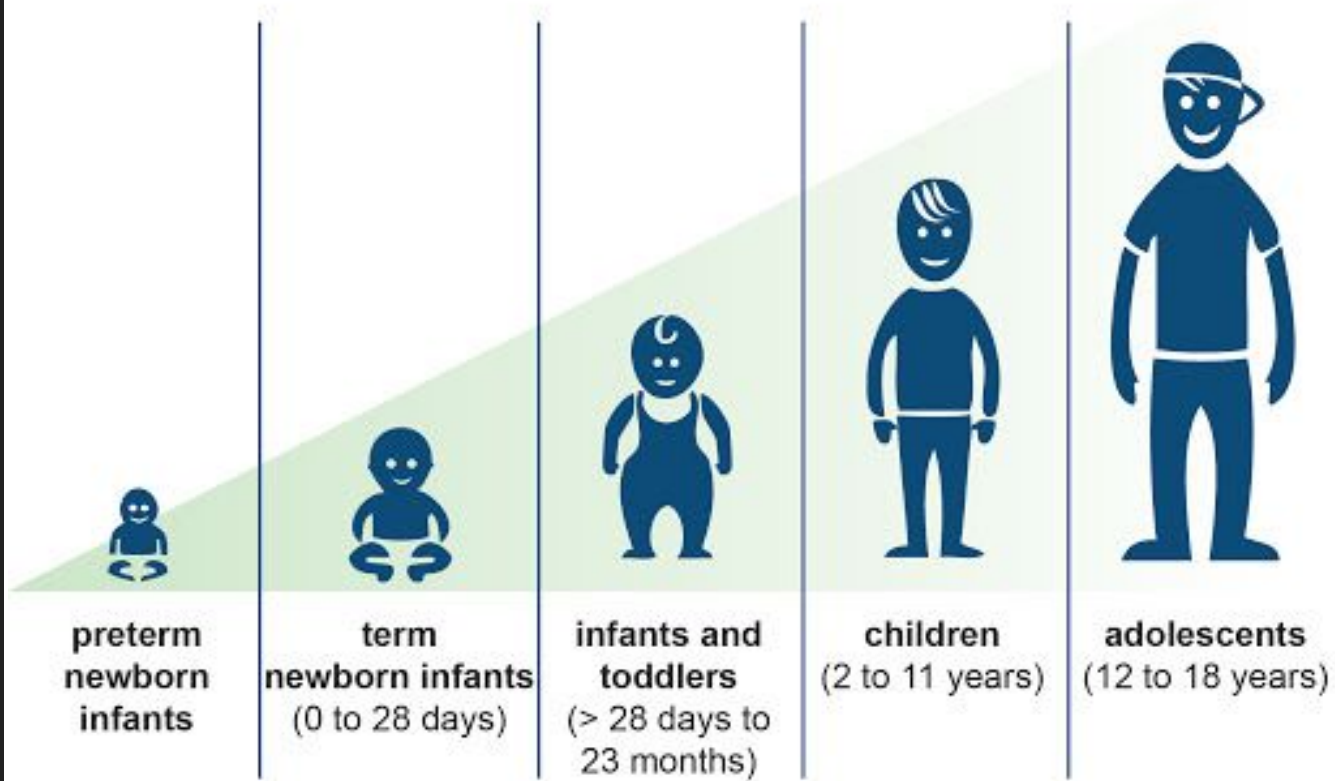
Stay tuned for more updates in 2021.

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## General Definitions

For the purposes of this discussion, *teens* are defined as 12 - 18 years of age. *Public space* is anywhere that would be considered not-private (streets, sidewalks, parks, alleys, plazas, etc.)

Diagram Credit:  
[Children and Clinical Studies > Home](#)



**This research started  
when several recurring  
themes kept popping up in  
my practice of landscape  
architecture.**



# Play Equipment

Consistently traditionally geared towards children under the age of 12 years old.







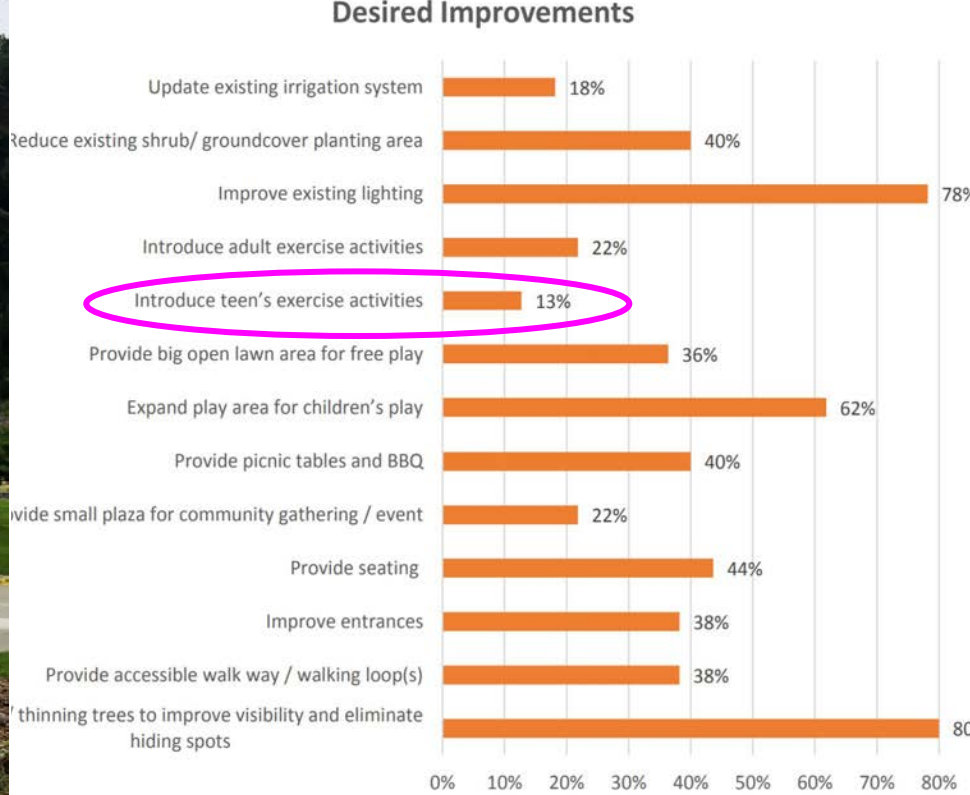
# Public Perception

Conversations often either ignore the teenage age group or actively discourage the gathering of this age group.









Baker Addition, Ballard Seattle: Public comment regarding the current park: *“Right now it is filled with teenagers and transients so often it isn't safe for families with small children.”*

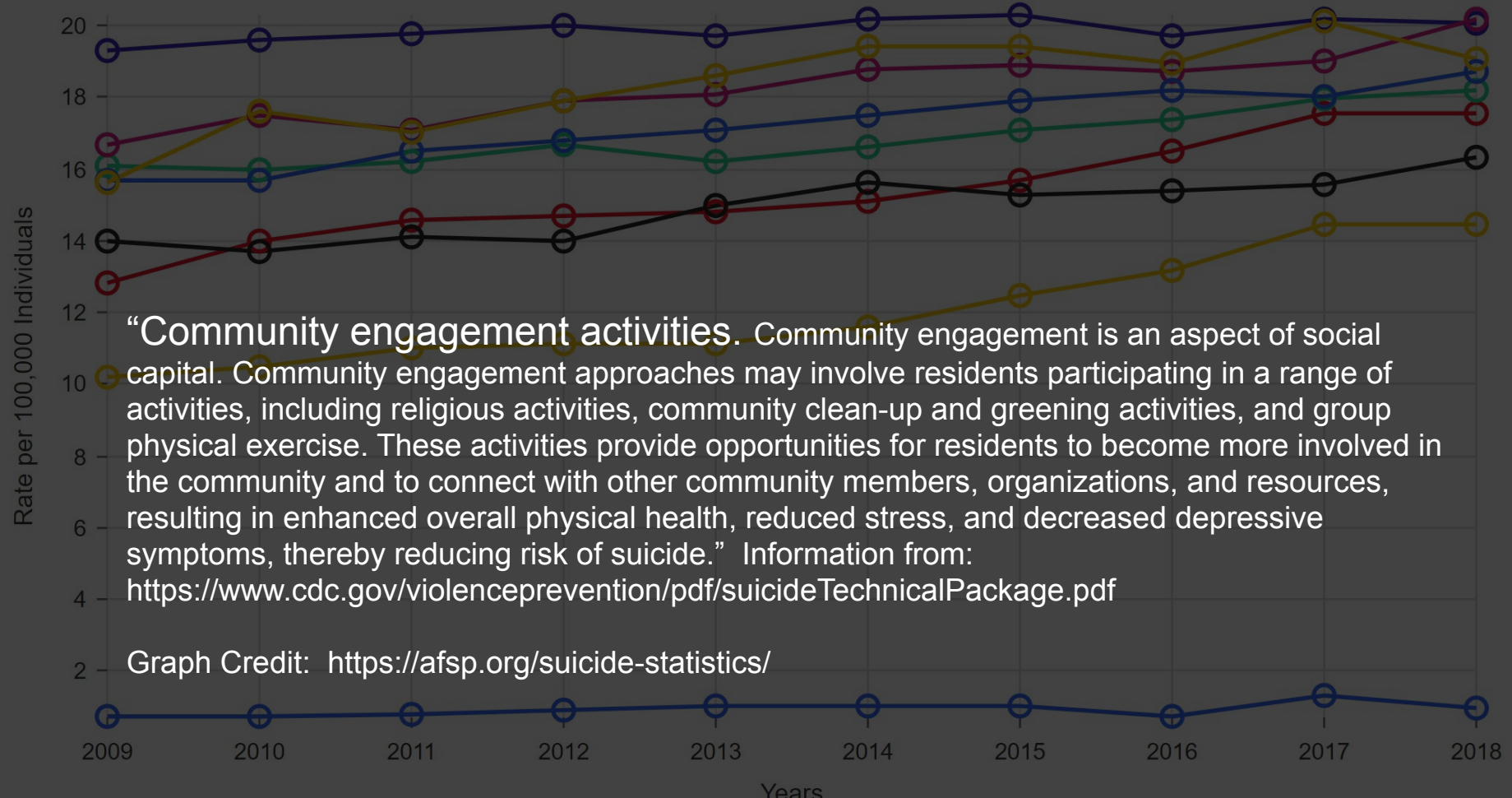
# Health statistics

Suicide was the second-leading cause of death for people aged 10 to 24 in 2017.

Source: [CDC: The suicide rate for young people rose 56% this decade](#)



# Suicide rates by age



# Ben Shirtcliff

Landscape Architecture  
Iowa State University

*The Routledge Handbook of Designing Public Spaces for Young People* is a thorough and practical resource for all who wish to influence policy and design decisions in order to increase young people's access to and use of public spaces, as well as their role in design and decision-making processes. [Research explores how youth are excluded from public spaces, design practices • News Service • Iowa State University](#)

*“The ability of youth to freely enjoy public spaces, and to develop a sense of belonging and attachment to these environments, is critical for their physical, social, cognitive, and emotional development,” according to the book. “Young people represent a vital citizen group with legitimate rights to occupy and shape their public environments, yet they are often driven out of public places by adult users, restrictive bylaws, or hostile designs.”*



# Teenagers’ Perception of Public Spaces and Their Practices in ICTs Uses

Marluci Menezes

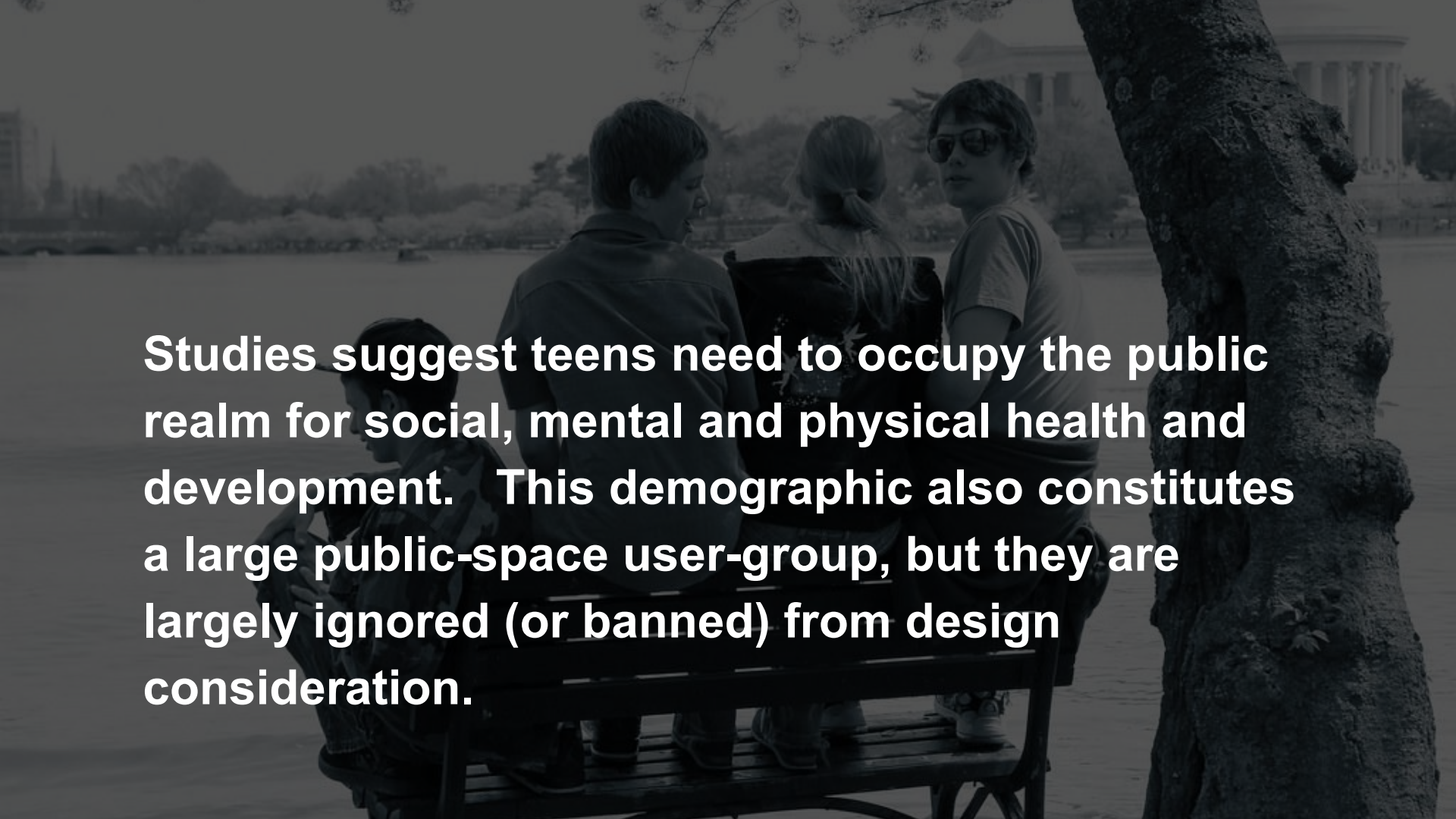
Paschalis Arvanitidis

Carlos Smaniotto Costa

Zvi Weinstein

*“For many readers it may come to a surprise that young people are among the most frequent users of public space (Travlou et al. [2008](#)). This is partly due to the fact that, as minors, they have no formal (legal) rights to spaces of their own (Childress [2004](#)), something that makes them to depend on public space both for their isolation and social interactions (Lieberg [1995](#); Worpole [2005](#)). Thus, parks, squares, alleyways, sidewalks, and the like, become the appropriated places whereby adolescents resort to stay private, as well as to meet and to interact with their friends and peers (Matthews [1995](#); Depeau [2001](#)). As a result, these places are imbued with their own cultural values and meanings. This suggests, at least, the need to examine public space in the way young people understand, approach and appropriate it.”*

From: Chapter 2 Teenagers, Information Technologies and Public Space, excerpt from Teenagers’ Perception of Public Spaces and Their Practices in ICT USEs



**Studies suggest teens need to occupy the public realm for social, mental and physical health and development. This demographic also constitutes a large public-space user-group, but they are largely ignored (or banned) from design consideration.**

As this research evolves, four areas of inquiry are being pursued:

- Surveys
- Interviews with organizations that work or are affiliated with teens
- Case Studies
- Informal Observation







# Online Survey

# Survey - February 2020

## 73      **Total Responses**

Survey Notes: Distributed primarily via social media to a nation-wide platform including design-oriented social groups, parks and recreation departments, parent groups, and general facebook and instagram platforms.

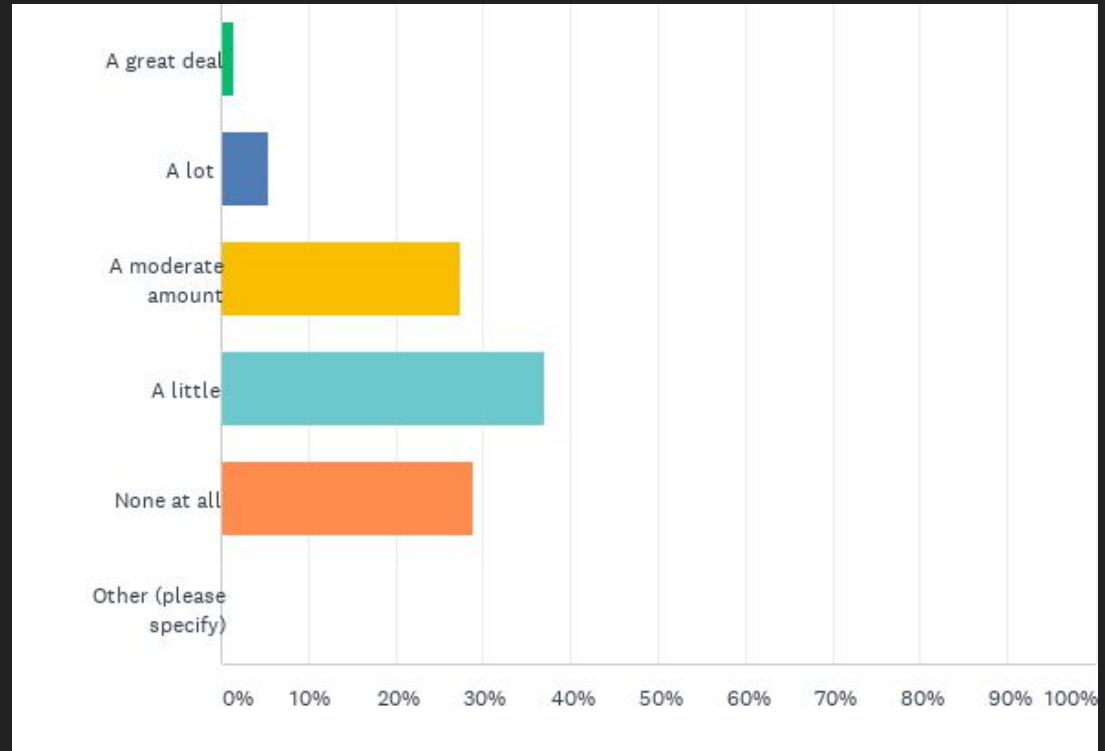
The survey was intended to provide a preliminary platform for public feedback. It is not scientific research and it is not focused on obtaining opinions and statistics from minors.



# Survey Results

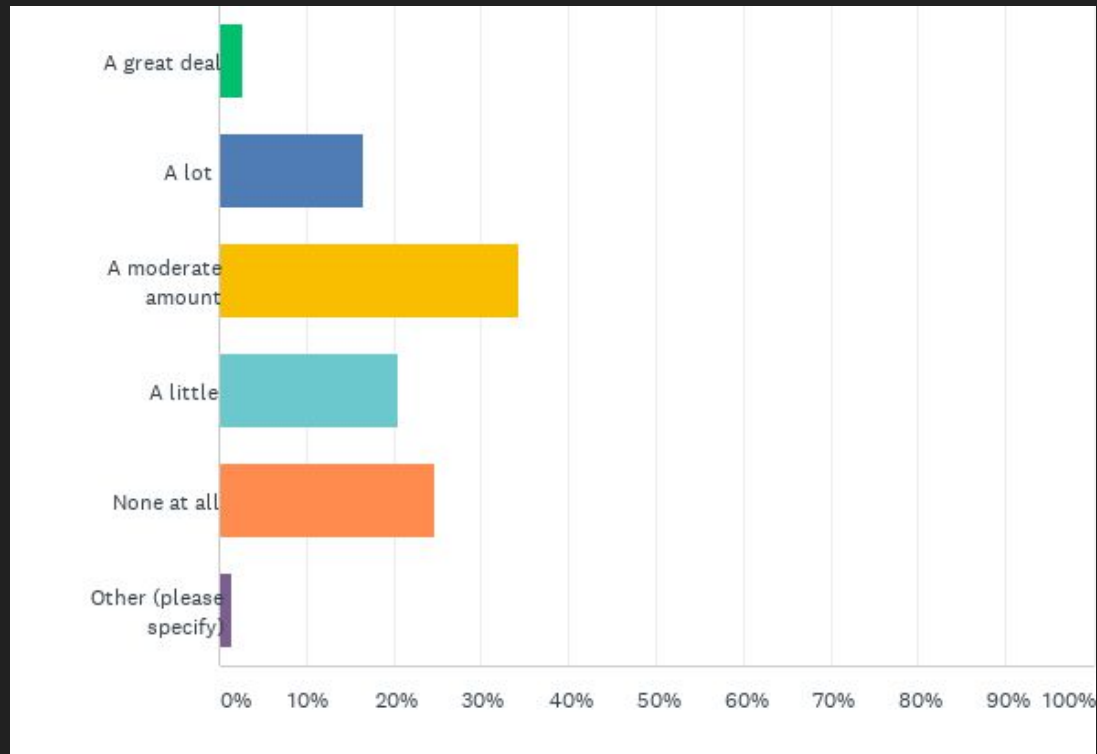
## Question #1

Utilize play equipment in public parks?



# Survey Results

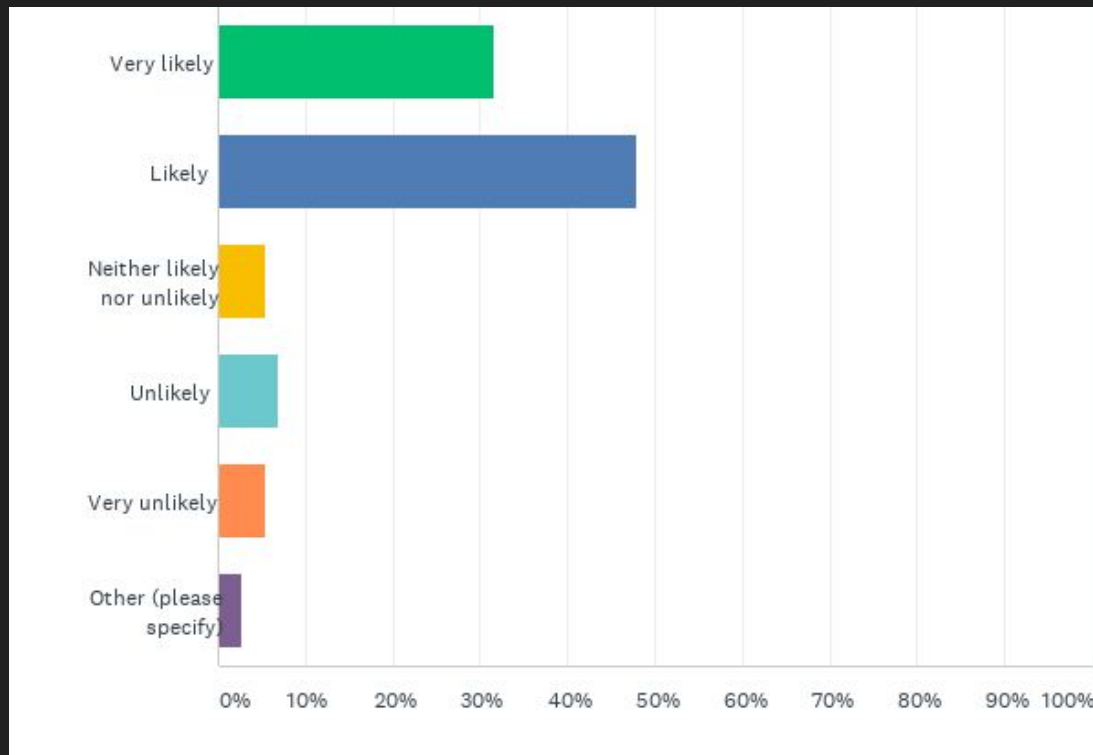
## Question #2 Utilize skate parks?



# Survey Results

Answered: 73 Skipped: 0

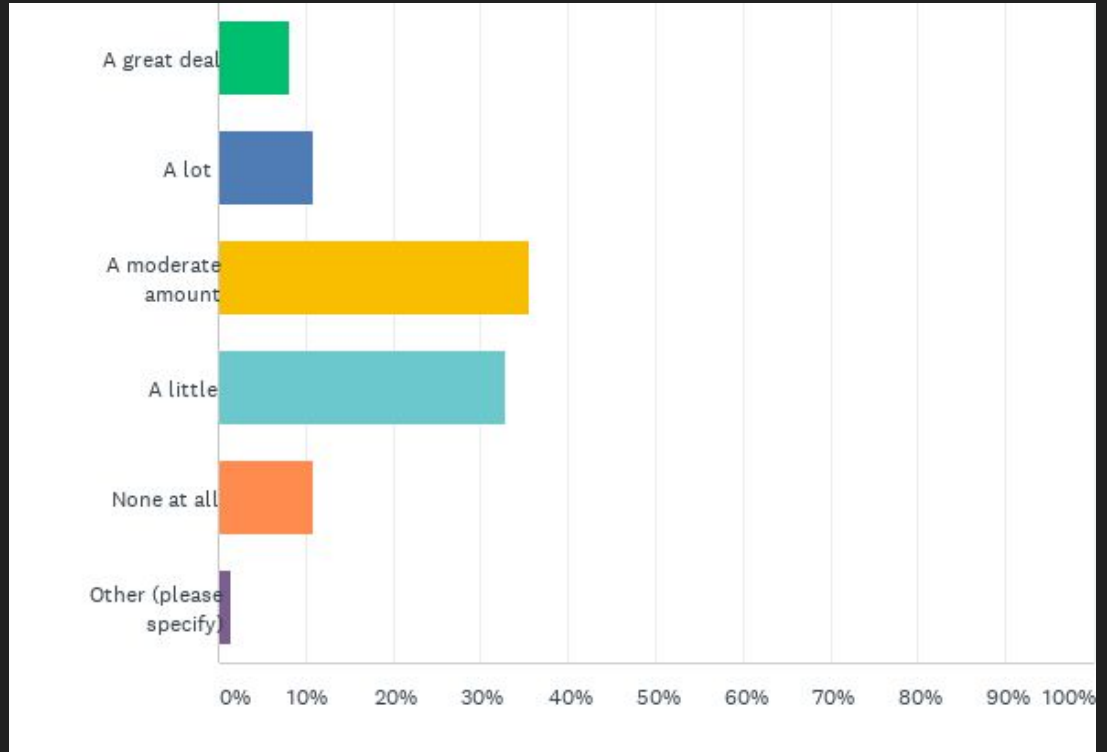
## Question #3 Utilize basketball courts?



# Survey Results

## Question #4

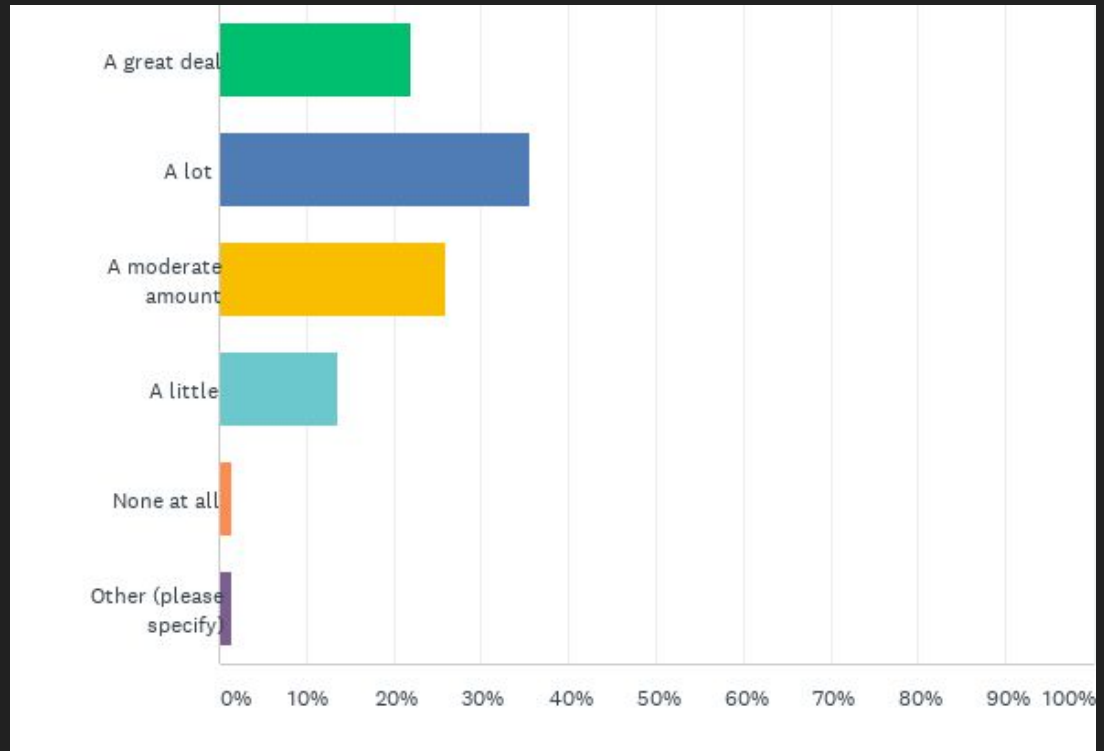
Utilize trails and/or walking paths?



# Survey Results

## Question #5

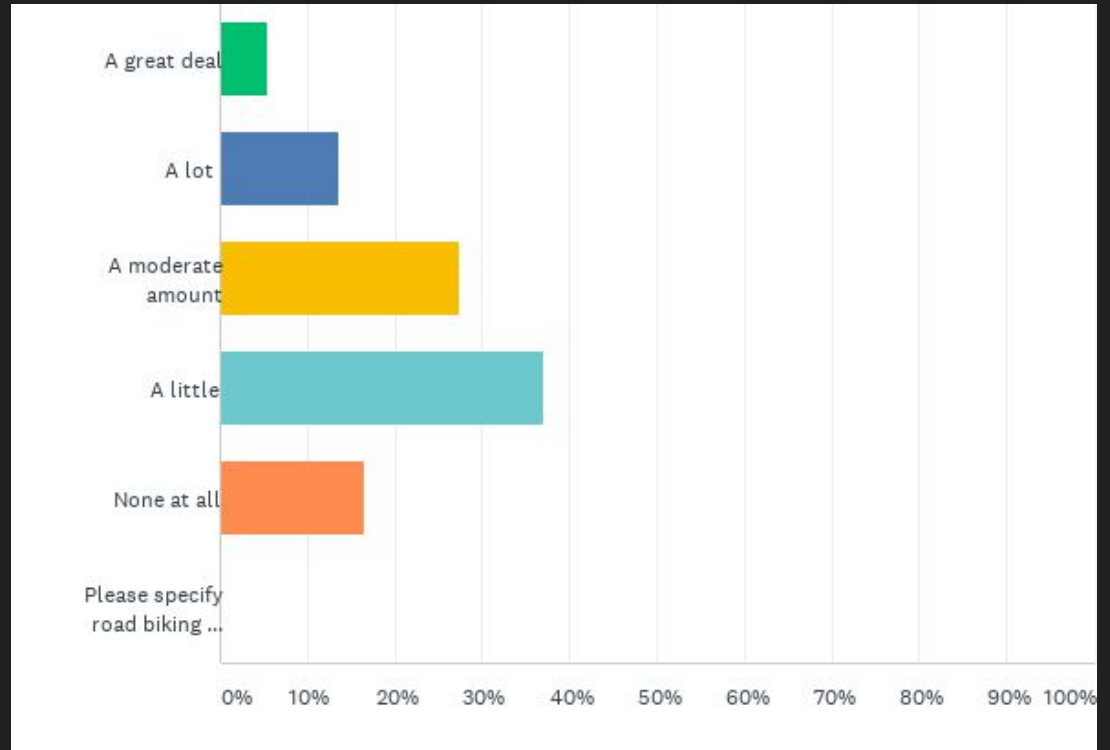
Utilize swim public beaches or pools?





# Survey Results

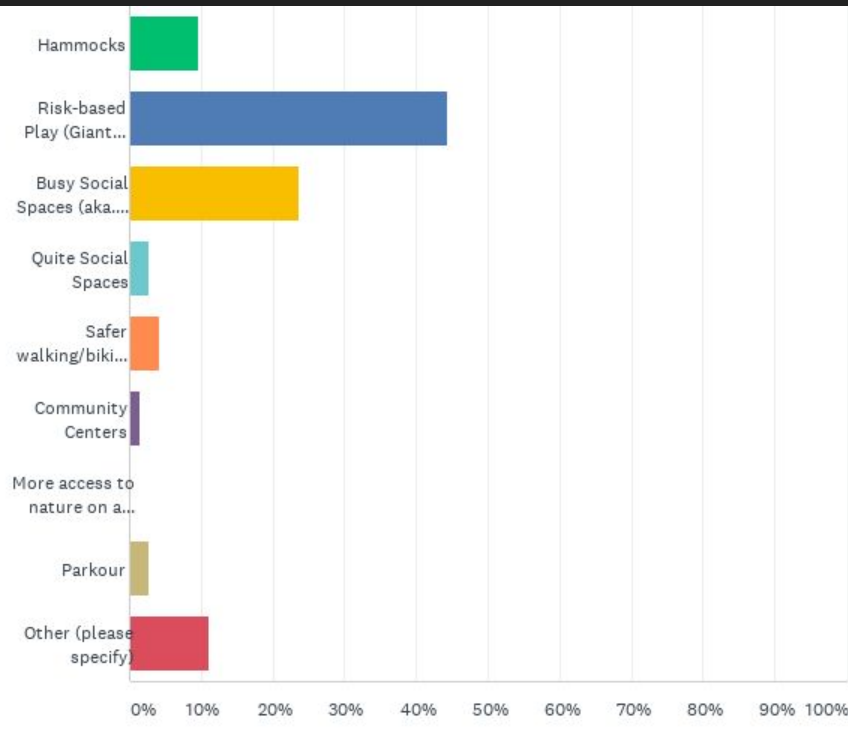
**Question #8**  
Participate in  
mountain biking or  
biking activities?



# Survey Results

## Question #9

Out of the following list of activities, which do you think would gain the most participation by teens?



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## Additional Feedback

### What else do Teens want to do?

- Teens want to be seen and be seen.
  - “Hanging out” is a highly sought activity.
  - Access is important, being able to walk to a destination is critical.
  - Commercial opportunities such as coffee shops and stores offering small purchases attract teens
  - Perceived risk is desired.
-

A photograph of Barack Obama and a woman sitting in chairs, facing each other in an interview setting. Barack Obama is on the left, wearing a dark suit and a blue striped tie, gesturing with his right hand. The woman is on the right, wearing a black top with a white collar and a light pink skirt, holding a folder. The background is a blue wall with shelves holding various decorative items, including potted plants, a lamp, and framed pictures. The word "Interviews" is overlaid in the center in a large, white, sans-serif font.

# Interviews



**Dr. Laura Fox**

Family Care Network  
Bellingham, WA



**Wa'Lynn Sheridan**

Whatcom Family and Community  
Network, Mt. Baker Community  
Coalition



**Kai Schwartz**

City of Redmond  
Youth Program Administrator

## Answers reflected survey with emphasis on:

- Accessible (walking distance)
- Risk play
- Places to gather (see and be seen)
- Opportunities for small-purchases shopping opportunities
- Social/Private
- Seating

## Questions:

The interview included several questions, with one key question that is pertinent to this presentation:

*What type of opportunities do you think would benefit teens to get them engaging socially and recreationally in a positive fashion? (High risk play, social spaces with phone plug-ins, coffee shops)*





# Case Studies



# Fairhaven Green, WA

Bellingham, WA

- ½ mile walking distance from Fairhaven Middle School
- Small purchases opportunities
- Square shape allows for “see and be seen” opportunities
- Ample seating + seating choices, including covered seating.
- Tolerant businesses





# Fremantle Esplanade Youth Plaza, AU

Photo via [City of Fremantle](#)

- A world-class skate park with facilities to cater for all ages
- A parkour park, fit for all skill levels
- A shipping container turned mini rock climbing wall
- Ping pong tables
- A stage for presentations, music, and performances
- Shelter from the weather (both heat and rain)
- Plenty of seating
- Lighting and access to power



Text (left) from article: [Young People and Placemaking: Engaging Youth to Create Community Places](#)

# Factoria Joven Skate Park, Spain

Photo Credit: [Design Milk: Interior Design, Modern Furniture + Home Decor](#)

- Graffiti walls for urban art workshops
- Shelter from the rain and heat
- Skate and bmx ramps, bowls and rails
- A rock climbing wall
- A stage for performance
- Lighting throughout
- Facilities for tightrope walking
- Group counseling sessions
- Internet access
- Music and dance workshops



Text (left) from article: [Young People and Placemaking: Engaging Youth to Create Community Places](#)



# Artists at Play, Seattle

Photo Credit: [Wikimedia Commons](#)

- Access, centralized location accessible by foot or public transit
- Perceived risk taking with height of equipment
- Places to gather/variety in seating.
- Close proximity to small-cost food items/retail opportunities
- Part of a larger public/private space area that is iconic to Seattle.
- High volume of people - lots of opportunities to see and be seen!



# Parasite DIY Skatepark, New Orleans

Photo Credit: [Parasite DIY Skatepark: Home](#)

- Originally designed and constructed by teens
- Initial build destroyed by local authorities
- Rebuilt by community support gained worldwide support through social media
- Demonstration of a positive shift from exclusionary practices to embracing the ideas and visions of the youth.

Points summarized from Shirtcliff's article: [Research explores how youth are excluded from public spaces, design practices • News Service • Iowa State University](#)



# Suggestions of teenage appropriate elements

## Project for Public Spaces

<https://www.pps.org/article/young-people-and-placemaking-engaging-youth-to-create-community-places>

- Basketball courts
- Legal graffiti walls
- Rock climbing walls
- Access to local transport
- Parkour park and facilities
- Skate ramps, rails, half-pipes and bowls
- A stage, or area that can be converted into a stage
- Ping pong tables
- Wi-Fi connectivity
- Access to power,
- Shelter from the weather
- Lighting
- BBQ facilities
- Frequent youth events
- A blackboard and chalk available





Swings - Risk, Wicksteed Co.,  
UK



Swings - Gather, University of  
Washington

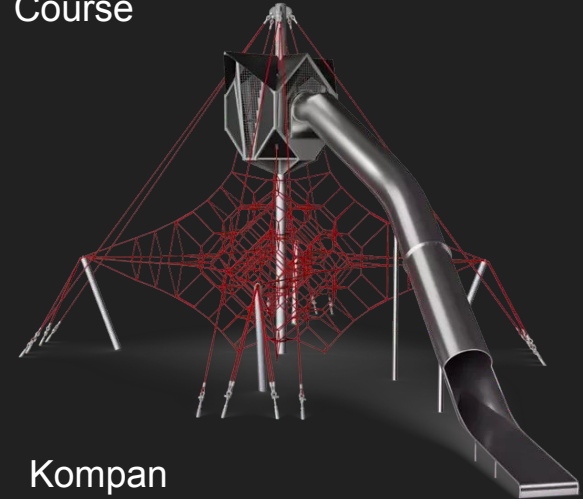


Obstacle Course LSI Play, Nija  
Course

# Equipment Ideas

Reference article of Wicksteed + LSI Images:

<https://www.activeoutdoors.info/playground-equipment-for-teens/>



Kompan





**SITE:** Configure space to allow teens to gather in small groups, but to have views of the other small groups/public action. Opportunities to “see and be seen.”



**URBAN/RURAL DESIGN:**  
Consider access, how do teens who can not drive or don't have access to a car get to places to “hang out?”



**CHOICE + SAFETY**  
Work with local businesses, police forces and organizations to encourage teenager to gather near the shops and make small purchases. Offer demographic specific programming and events.

# Spatial + Community Ideas



**SOCIAL MEDIA:** Today's teen is fluent in technology and social media. When conducting online surveys and engagement, heavily utilize apps and social media.



**ACTIVELY CONSIDER:** With public perception barriers discouraging or ignoring teens in design feedback, actively engage the topic and engagement efforts with public education.



**GO TO THEM**  
As cool as we designers think we are, we are NOT cool to teenagers. Work with local middle schools and high schools to create design charrettes to gain feedback. Incorporate their ideas and insight into the design process.

# Engage in the Design Process



# Next Steps in Research

- Secure funding
- Additional Interviews
- Gain a better understanding of the implications of race, religion and gender in the encouragement (or discouragement) of teens in public space.
- Apply and gain approval to study human subjects under the age 18 to talk with teens directly.

# Bio design STUDIOS

**Comments?**

**Questions?**

**Ideas?**

I would love to hear from you:

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