

Let's Get Moving

New Directions in Sports Architecture and Urban Planning

Sarah Slattery





Perpetual

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As Lecturer-in-Charge of the architecture course at Sydney Technical College, Hadley built “one of the finest schools of architecture in the Empire” and is credited with gaining Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) recognition of the course, which gave post-1923 graduates exemption from the RIBA examinations.

As an architect in private practice, Hadley drew from a wide range of revival styles in his designs for significant urban and suburban commissions, which included two town halls, several multi-storey city warehouses, numerous suburban churches and Sydney University’s original Wesley College and chapel.

Hadley’s “greatest contribution to NSW architecture remains his insistence on the importance of travel in Australian architectural training.” In 1928 and 1929, Hadley sponsored two £25 scholarships through the Board of Architects of NSW. The success of these must have provided the catalyst for his 1937 bequest.

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INTRODUCTION

We are facing a crisis in Australia.

Lack of physical activity is leading to growing rates of chronic disease and mental health decline. We can see this impacting our health and education systems and incarceration rates across the country.

There is a growing gap between the sporting elite and the general population. Paris 2024 was the most successful Olympic games in Australian history, however, according to the National Heart Foundation of Australia nearly 6 in 10 adults, 3 quarters of seniors and over 8 in 10 children and young people are not active enough for good heart health. This ranks Australia among the world's most inactive nations.

Some young people are more affected than others. In data gathered in 2017 -2018, The Australian Institute for Health and Welfare found that, 2-17 year olds living in the lowest socio-economic areas were more than twice as likely to be obese as those living in the highest socio-economic areas (11% compared with 4.4%). The built environment plays a very important role in these health discrepancies.

The purpose of this report is to examine how we can improve rates of physical activity in Australia through architecture and urban design solutions.

We need to broaden our thinking about sport and start catering for more play and recreation spaces. With a more varied offering we can cater for more diverse interests and needs.

In early 2025 I travelled to England, Switzerland, Spain and Denmark -visiting inspiring sports and recreation projects and meeting with leading researchers, architects, community groups and government bodies to understand how the built environment can support more physical activity.

This report is structured in two sections:

1. The first section outlines twelve project case studies that I visited and summarises my observations and the conversations I had with the architects, operators and other stakeholders about the built outcomes. The end of this first section outlines the key findings for successful sports and recreation facilities.
2. The second section outlines six themes for systems and frameworks that can be applied in the delivery of sports infrastructure in Australia. These themes are illustrated by ten organisational case studies, outlining my conversations with researchers, government bodies, consultants and sporting clubs.

It was important to research both the buildings and the systems because it is evident that architectural innovation cannot occur in isolation. The built environment, programs, government policy and the community need to evolve together.

Like our diverse communities, sports facilities can come in many shapes and sizes. We need to deliver sports facilities that are appropriate for the communities that they serve. In a high-density urban context a vertical sports facility might help intensify sports offerings and free up open space, whereas in a regional area with smaller populations, multi-use facilities might be more appropriate to bring groups together.

The landscape and approach to sport and recreation is constantly evolving and we need to put systems and frameworks in place for the delivery of sports infrastructure in Australia so that more site and community specific design solutions can be delivered.

SECTION 1

PROJECT CASE STUDIES

Throughout my travels I visited a wide range of sports, recreation and play facilities. I was interested not just to understand the design outcomes and functionality of the buildings but more importantly to understand the design process that produced the built outcome.

My various conversations revealed that, while there were some key patterns for effective facility planning, it was the design process that was a key indicator for success. Designers and operators of the most well activated projects had engaged meaningfully with the specific user groups; they had a perception of their projects as growing and organically changing places and they relinquished some of the control of design to let the buildings form and transform naturally. The designers did not come with the answer; they acted as facilitators between what people said they wanted and what was built. It was clear through many of the discussions that the way people want to move will continue to evolve, and ensuring our facilities can adapt to changing community interests is essential.

There were also cultural nuances from country to country – from the Swiss sense of discretion to the Danish free entry policy. Design outcomes were a byproduct of social structures and the local perception of physical activity and community specific solutions were an important component of successful projects.

These case studies illustrate the many formats in which sport and recreation can be delivered in the built environment – standalone buildings, co-location with other community functions, adaptive reuse, vertical sports centres, activation of infrastructure and horizontal street formats. Understanding the diverse range of opportunities for sports and recreation infrastructure can help us to broaden our current offerings in Australia.

1

F51

Interview with:

Guy Hollaway
Principal Partner
Hollaway Studio

Folkestone is a small and picturesque seaside town in Kent, southeast of London. I met with local Architect Guy Hollaway who has been involved in several transformative projects for the town, including F51, a vertical skatepark, located in one of the most deprived wards. The client was Roger De Haan, a billionaire philanthropist with an ambitious vision for the future of Folkestone.

Social and Economic Regeneration

“Brain drain” is a major problem for the town, with bright young people leaving to chase high skilled opportunities and career paths that are not available locally. Currently only 10% of young people are reported to stay locally. De Haan aims to change this through “generational regeneration”. The target is to retain 20-40% of the young people within one new generation. De Haan’s approach has been multifaceted, with investments in education, sport and the arts.

The Vertical Model

Spaces for skate are typically sprawling parks often on the outskirts of town. They are not manned and this exacerbates their negative stigma. Gangs take ownership of these spaces and young people feel intimidated. In order to bring skate into the centre of town, a new vertical model was developed.

The building has three levels above ground floor. The flow park on level 3 (most accessible), the street park on level 2 (medium difficulty) and the bowls on level 1 (highest level of difficulty/professional standard).

While the building was originally intended to be open air, there were issues with safety, glare and water ingress. The result was an enclosed structure with distinctive trapezoidal window openings, with less glass at the lower level to maximise light out of eyeline and minimise impact damage.

Importantly though, the building is future proofed with large sections of flat slabs which would allow it to be converted for other functions as needed.

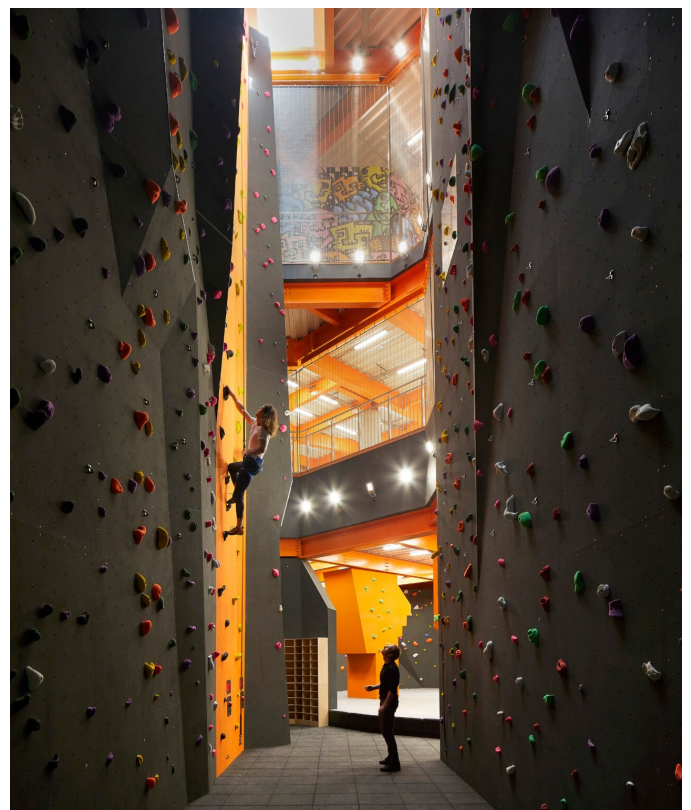


Fig. 1 Climbing wall (Hollaway Studio)

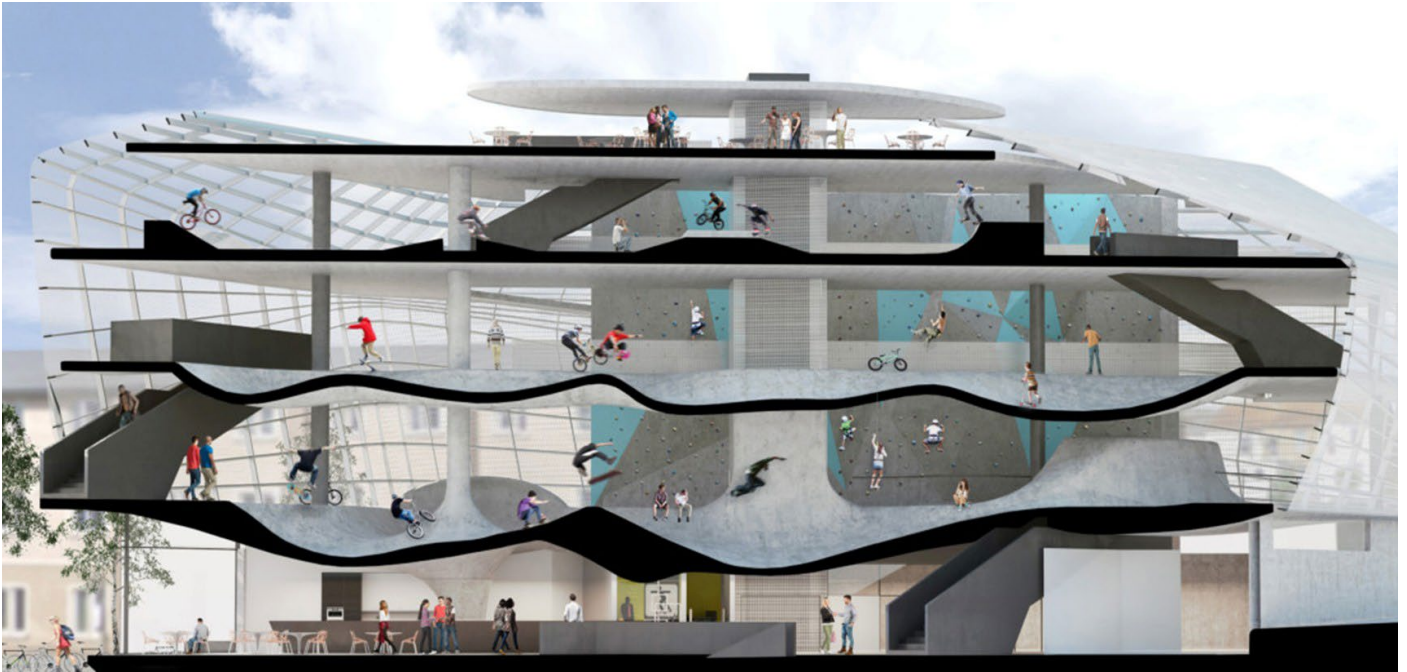


Fig. 2 Cross Section of building (Hollaway Studio)

Ownership by the Skate Community

Firstly, the team needed to engage with leaders in the skate community. As Hollaway so directly put it *“the building needed to be accepted by the skate community, or it was f**ked. If someone got online and said this building is not ours, it’s not cool, then you’re dead.”*

Autonomy for Youth

F51 is the first of its kind, located on the top of the hill it was originally proposed to be a carpark. But De Haan wanted something more significant. Hollaway said,

“he wanted to build something that said – young people, you’re the most important people in this town”

The beauty of skate is that it offers complete control and elasticity. While organised sport requires a team, commitment and arrangements, with skate there is freedom to turn up and leave at any time. As Hollaway pointed out, *“we have a tendency to wrap kids in cotton wool – they have no ability to fall over and find their boundaries”*. This is a space that gives young people the permission to take risks and have fun.

The programs extend beyond skate, also incorporating bouldering, rock climbing and boxing. Scootering on the skate bowls is also very popular and scooters can be hired at reception. They also offer outreach programs connecting with schools.

The centre also offers young people the opportunity to learn commercial concepts. A range of skateboards are available for sale in the ground floor cafe with artworks developed by local young people – hand sketches, photographs and graphic prints. This model helps build the connection between design and skate to inspire interest in careers in the arts.

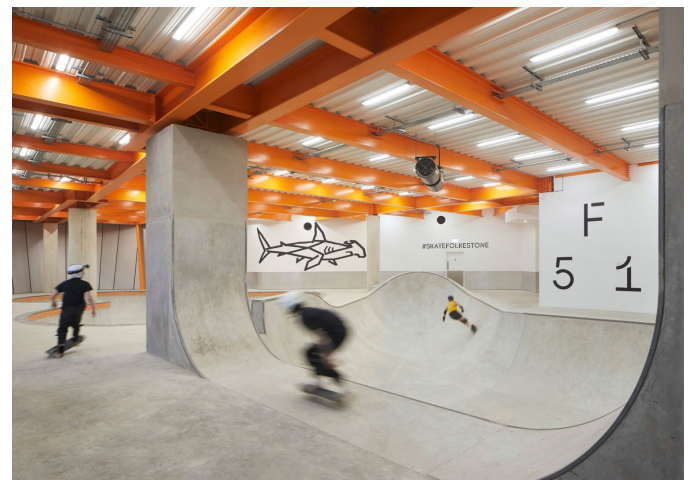


Fig. 3 Skateboarders in the flowpark (Hollaway Studio)



Fig. 4 Skateboards with graphic art on display (Sarah Slattery)

2 Hebburn Central

Interview with:

Mike Hall
Partner
Faulkner Browns

Irina Korneychuk
Associate Partner
Faulkner Browns

Nick Heyward
Senior Associate
Faulkner Browns

Hebburn Central is a community hub delivered in 2015 for South Tyneside Council, incorporating a library and sports facilities. In a deprived area, east of Newcastle upon Tyne, the construction of the leisure centre was intended to help generate development and growth for a town that has suffered from a decline in the region’s ship building and metalworking industries. The building’s panelised core-ten façade pays tribute to this history.

During my visit to Newcastle and the surrounding region in north eastern England, I had building tours with Irina Korneychuk of Faulkner Browns and shared discussions with several of her colleagues.

Combined Functions

The building incorporates a pool, sports courts, program and meeting spaces, a library and a café. The benefit of consolidating public services was twofold –it created a hub for health, learning and socialising and it also created operational efficiency. The success of the building is evidenced by the number of people using the facilities when I visited, mid-morning on a work day. The lobby and café were buzzing, the pool had an aerobics class running and several people sat using the library spaces. Heyward reflected on the benefit that the combination of programs offers,

“libraries are regularly frequented by parents and tots and retirees but they are really missing the teenagers –it’s a great way to connect people by combining the library with leisure”

Combining functions also requires training staff that libraries do not need to be temples of silence. There has been an increased trend in combining functions over the last 10-15 years with more Councils asking “what more can we have?”



Fig. 1 Library (Faulkner Browns)



Fig. 2 Swimming pool (Faulkner Browns)



Fig. 3 Panelised core-ten façade (Faulkner Browns)

Allow for Change

The architects anticipated change in their design approach, Korneychuk explained,

“the building was designed for future flexibility, a simple portal framed box with pods floating within allows programs to move and change as required”

I observed a new simulator room that had been built into the lobby space in recent years. Unlike some



Fig. 4 Library stacks within larger volume (Dezeen)

changes that are made to buildings post-occupancy, this addition was indistinguishable from the original pods to someone who had never visited before, a testament to the inherent flexibility of the design.

The building is surrounded by carparking, an interesting byproduct of the social context. While minimising carparking to encourage people to walk is preferred, it can be more complicated in disadvantaged areas due to safety concerns at nighttime.

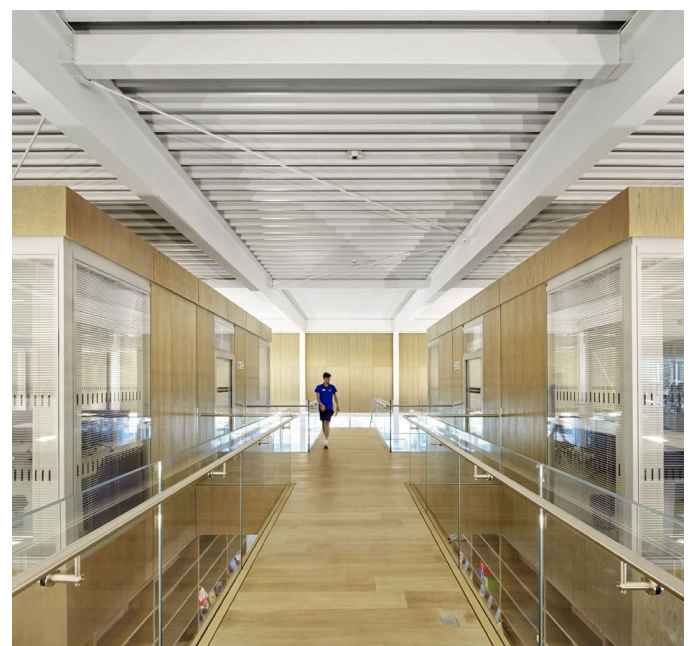


Fig. 5 Pods within portal frame structure (Faulkner Browns)

3 Temporary Sports Hall

Interview with:

Prof. Daniel Blum
Lead Architect, Design
Itten + Brechbuhl AG

Built on the campus of the University of Zurich, the Temporary Sports Hall is located on a highly visible site in the heart of the campus, with 270-degree visibility from the street. The Canton of Zurich was the client, the City of Zurich was the user representative and the University is the end-user. I met on site with Prof. Daniel Blum, Lead Architect, Design.

This competition winning project was designed for disassembly, with 70-80% of the materials able to be reused. The building was delivered as a design and construct model. A common delivery model in Australia, this was only the second contract of its type for the City of Zurich.

Asking What is Needed

Rather than coming up with a design concept to have the consultants overlay their requirements, Blum turned up to the first consultant meeting with a blank

sheet of paper and said, “*I want you to tell me what you need*”. From this initial conversation the concept of the building of three parts was developed, based on functional requirements. The positive, Blum explained, was that

“the engineers felt they were the authors of the building”

Part one was “The House”. This contained the smallest spaces with mid-range spans, spaces where high thermal comfort was needed. These spaces were all heated and cooled. Part two was “The Hall”. With long spans and access to northern daylight, the thermal comfort did not need to be too high, so this part receives spill air from “The House”. Part three was “The Shed”. This included technical installations, including plant and equipment and storage spaces. It had no thermal requirements.

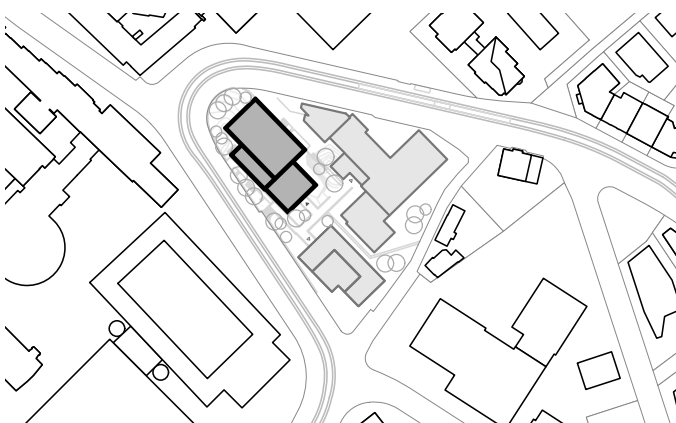


Fig. 1 Site context plan (Itten+Brechbuhl AG)



Fig. 2 Services exposed (Yohan Zerdoun for Itten+Brechbuhl AG)



Fig. 3 Timber façade with main entry facing the courtyard (Yohan Zerdoun for Itten+Brechbuhl AG)

Giving Back to the Surrounding Area

The building sits adjacent to a heritage listed building and responds thoughtfully to its context. The vertically stacked programs free up space at ground level for a plaza to the southeast and a pedestrian link to the northeast of the building. The entrance is located on the side of the building, drawing people through the new plaza. The design team wanted to add something to the urban fabric and make the site more permeable. I observed many people take shortcuts through the site, in line with this design objective.

Design for Disassembly

The project was built as part of a long-term masterplan for the University campus. Located between the IT faculty and the future University Hospital, the site will likely be used for laboratories in the future. Blum said *“the land is so expensive, I don’t think a sports hall will be enough”*. The building can easily be deconstructed and reassembled elsewhere.

All timber in the building is untreated. As Blum explained *“treating timber is the worst thing you can do for the environment”* as the timber is no longer able to decompose. The façade is larch and the flooring system is made from timber cassettes. The cassettes were efficient to install and cost effective, however they proved challenging acoustically as impact sound travelled easily from one level to the next. Gravel was placed between the joists in an effort to minimise noise transfer.

The ability to disassemble parts in the future was important. Services are all fully expressed and separated to ensure pipes can be easily reused. Designing for disassembly inevitably means more care and time is needed through construction. Rapid fixing methods like staple guns and adhesives are not acceptable; every item needs to be screwed in place.

Cultural Nuance

Swiss attention to detail was evident in this building with the heavy entry door featuring a custom timber handle with a soft chamfered edge on the back side. This detail was not obvious on approach, until your hand pulled the door and was gently met with a smooth and soft edge.

The building is civic in nature, with a strong and tectonic façade that will look almost like stone as the timber turns grey. Despite the visibility of the site and opportunity to showcase the activity within, all the glass was screened with timber battening. Blum explained this was to protect from solar heat gain but also it reflected the Swiss sense of discretion and privacy,

“it’s a very Swiss thing not to expose”

This was a reminder that each culture and place has a unique relationship with sport and physical activity that needs to be considered.

4 Skillspark

Interview with:

Edina Banyoczki
Owner and Operator
Skillspark

Dave Mischler
Head of Sports Office
City of Winterthur

Located in the town of Winterthur, north east of Zurich, I visited Skillspark a former factory building that has been converted into 6,000m² of space to play, be active, train and exercise.

It is located in the Lagerplatz, a former industrial area, used for making boat engines and other equipment. In the mid nineties when local manufacturing and locomotive production shut down, the town went into decline. Tenants lobbied to re-open the area and it has been developed into a hub with a range of uses – a small cinema, food offerings, cafes, a brewery, a gallery and a library, are co-located with the Skillspark.

Access for School Students

Winterthur is a relatively poor town so there are not enough sporting facilities for schools to use. To help support more physical activity for children, the local Council has subsidised entry to Skillspark for local schools. Two sport classes are run per week at school and one per month at Skillspark. Edina Banyoczki, one of the owners of Skillspark said *“it was important to work with the schools. The main purpose of school is to see lots of new things. School has a duty to open up the world for children.”*

Introducing Children to New and Diverse Activities

The large open plan warehouse has a range of play zones organised around a central circulation spine. Trampolines, BMX ramps, climbing equipment, a small soccer pitch, ropes to swing and climb, skate bowls,

obstacle courses and more. It gives children ample choice and allows them to discover their interests and talents. The owners also change over one area per year to refresh the facility. For example, they have noticed a decline in popularity in Ninja Warrior in recent years, so this area is due to be replaced.

Egalitarian Environment

A wide range of children and adults use Spillspark. Their oldest member, Freddy, is 63 years old and he is attending skateboarding classes. They have TikTok influencers and professional athletes, but Banyoczki emphasised to me,

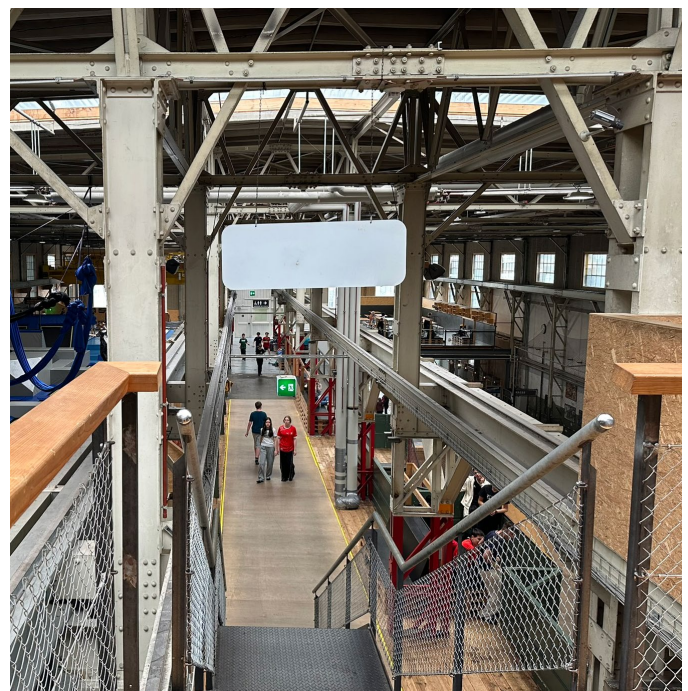


Fig. 1 Central circulation spine (Sarah Slattery)



Fig. 2 Young people using the trampoline area (Sarah Slattery)

“nobody is special at Skillspark, everyone is equal”

A small child can ride down the BMX ramp right after a professional BMX rider practices her tricks. People of all ages and abilities will share high-fives to celebrate their achievements.

Regional female talent use the facility and this inadvertently sends a message to younger children about what women can achieve.

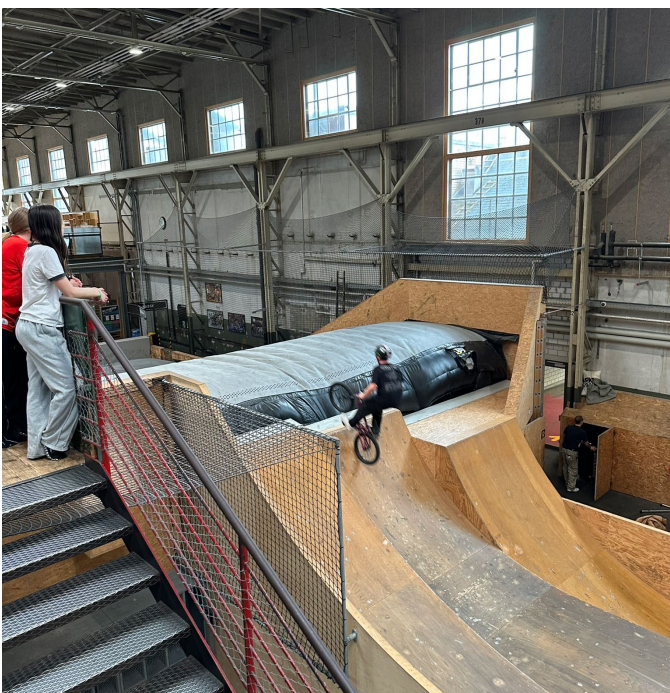


Fig. 3 Young people using the BMX ramp (Sarah Slattery)

The design also includes a café with affordable hot meals as well as a secondary open dining area where people can eat meals that they bring themselves. It recognises that not all visitors can afford to purchase a meal.

Development of Skills

As the name suggests, Skillspark’s focus is on building skills. Young children start with mini-skills, learning confidence with motion and movement. Hessian sacks are available for small children to ride down the BMX ramp.

The centre has a partnership with top skateboarder and national coach Simon Stricker, who runs camps and training.

Autonomy and Socialising

Free play is a key principle of Skillspark. While originally this applied to children of all ages, some parents began to use the centre as a form of free childcare so now children under ten require supervision.

The centre is open 365 days a week, even on Christmas Day, as it provides a way for children to expend their energy when they are excited.

On Friday nights the centre is open until 10pm and it becomes a safe place for teenagers to go out and spend time with their friends.

5 Pavelló Illa

Interview with:

Anna Noguera
Founder Architect
AAN

Pavelló Illa is a new sports centre located in the dense urban fabric of Les Courts, Barcelona. Architect Anna Noguera has maximised this narrow trapezoidal site, with a new vertical sports facility that serves local schools and the community. The design was the winner of a design competition run by the City of Barcelona. I visited the site under construction.

Intensification of Use

The project site previously had one sports court with little site presence and a narrow site entry. Given the density of the area, there was a significant need for intensification of recreational use. As Noguera explained,

“the neighbourhood demand was for much more recreation space”

Urban integration was incredibly challenging. North of the project site is the award winning L’Illa Diagonal, a 300m long shopping centre, hotel and office building described as a “skyscraper on its side”. To the south and below the site are two schools, both of which are accessed from the same entry point as the sports hall.

While the former sports hall was demolished, the existing school below needed to be retained and all loads from the new sports hall transferred through the school building. Despite the significant volumes of the two new sports halls, the structure needed to look light to ensure it did not compete with the neighbouring shopping centre.

The services and multipurpose spaces are located on the diagonal, intersecting with the larger sports hall volume to the south. Noguera described the design solution as follows: “Designed as a light, translucent volume nestled between local schools and the massive Illa Diagonal shopping complex, the building acts as a mediating element — functioning by day as a sunlit interior and by night as a luminous urban lantern.”



Fig. 1 Lightbox glowing at nighttime (Anna Noguera Architects)



Fig. 2 Players in the light filled interior (Anna Noguera Architects)



Fig. 3 Arrival plaza with the entry to the sports facility to the left and the school to the right (Anna Noguera Architects)

The design not only increases functional recreational space on the site, it also gives back to the public domain. A generous plaza at the front of the building draws people into the site and creates a clear sense of arrival for both the sports buildings and the school below. The reception, located at ground floor has clear sightlines over the forecourt and the school entry. Noguera explained that the “*creation of landscape and urban place*” was key to the design solution.

The design also considered how to improve the experience for school children playing on the hard paved outdoor courts to the south of the site. The southern façade of the new building is covered with plants, offering a new natural green outlook from this play area.

Structural Solution

The structural solution was carefully considered given the very challenging site constraints. The preference was to use a timber structure because it was sustainable, lighter, less noisy to construct for neighbours and faster to assemble. However, ultimately a hybrid structure was used, maximising the properties of both steel and timber for the specific site limitations.

Steel columns with trusses kept the structural footprint on the floor plane minimal and allowed the column spacing to be coordinated with the school structure below. Timber beams, closely spaced at 2.5m centres, rather than the usual 5m centres minimised structural depth. Acoustic insulation between the floors prevents reverberation between levels.



Fig. 4 Building cross section showing entry plaza (Anna Noguera Architects)

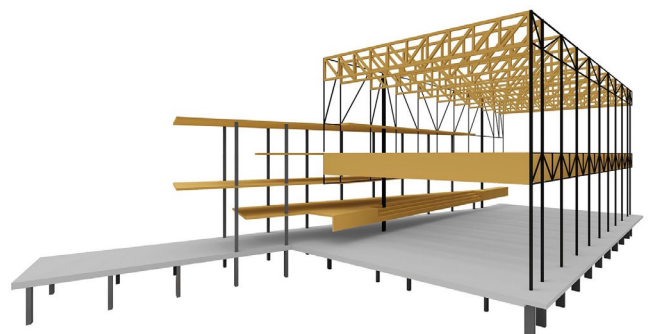


Fig. 5 Axonometric view of structure (Anna Noguera Architects)

6

Camp del Ferro

Interview with:

Cristina Villanueva
Architect
AIA

Marta Roqueta Montesinos
Junior Project Engineer
AIA

Hermes Solé Higuera
Institut Barcelona Esports (IBE)
Barcelona City Council

Camp del Ferro is a multistorey brick sports facility located in the Sagrera neighbourhood of Barcelona, a key growth area for the city. The centre is located around 10 minutes' walk from the new La Sagrera Station. This major rail upgrade with intermodal transport will significantly improve connectivity to the area, freeing up industrial land for development.

The project was developed as a collaboration between architects, AIA, Barceló Balanzó Arquitectes + Gustau Gili Galfetti. A group of key project stakeholders provided a tour of the building and explained the project drivers.



Fig. 1 Aerial view showing entry plaza (Simón Garcia for AIA)

Stack and Submerge

The design concept won an open competition assessed by a jury of architects and representatives of the Barcelona City Council.

The proposal partially submerges two of the sports courts underground and stacks a third hall on top. This massing strategy reduces the bulk and scale of the facility from street level and creates a large open plaza elevated slightly above street level. The plaza serves as an outdoor foyer for large visitor groups and offers additional public domain to the street.

The decision to submerge the courts significantly improves the energy efficiency of the building. As Roqueta Montesinos put it,

“it’s better energetically, to be underground”

With far fewer exposed surfaces it is much easier to maintain temperature control, a very important consideration for large sports hall volumes. The project was awarded a LEED Gold Certification for its suite of sustainability measures which include solar protection, cross ventilation, natural lighting and the use of renewable energy.



Fig. 2 Brick façade to the street (José Hevia, Guiding Architects Barcelona)

Local Character

The building draws on many references to its surrounding context. I was surprised to discover that the striking brick façade was also budget friendly. Brick is a commonly used traditional Catalan material which was easily accessible, cost effective, low maintenance and durable. The monolithic brick façade pays tribute to the old warehouses, factories and workshops of the surrounding area. A custom breezeblock was designed by AIA. It has a diagonal cross piece which shades from direct light acting as a sun screen. The combination of solid brickwork and breezeblock creates a textural and light façade which is suspended from the roof. The gentle curves on the roof/parapet are a common industrial roof form for the area, as seen in the school located next door.



Fig. 3 Detail of the custom breezeblock (José Hevia for Dezeen)

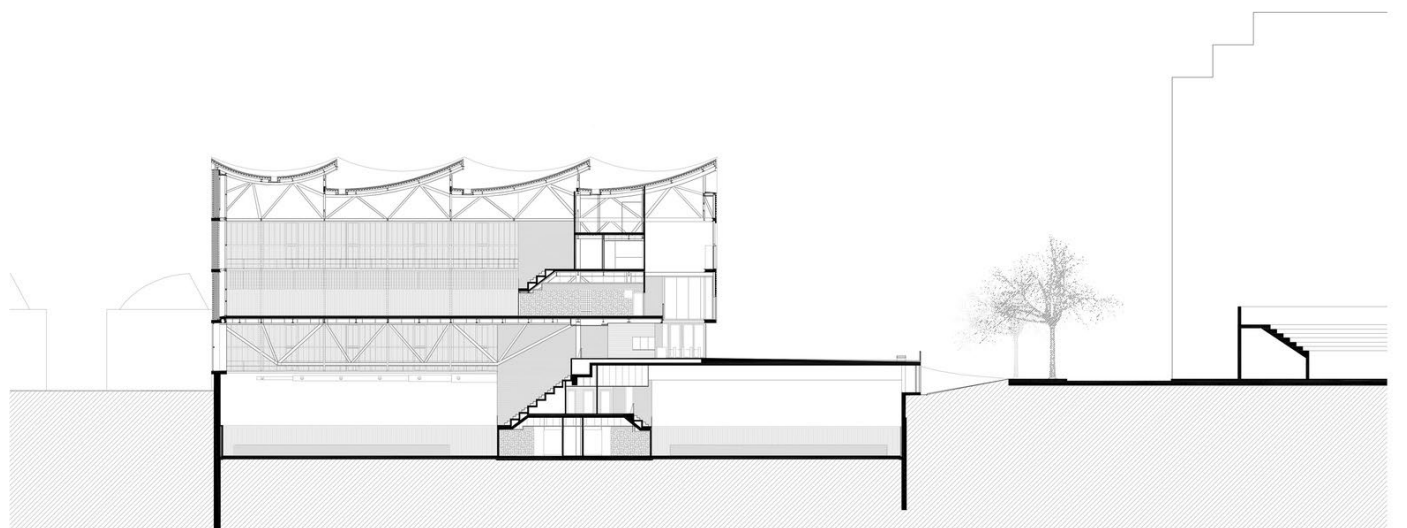


Fig. 4 Cross section showing stacked and submerged courts (AIA)

7 GAME Streetmekka

Interview with:

Signe Larsen
Booking and Event Manager
GAME

Jan Yoshiyuki Tanaka
Partner
JaJa Architects

Oliver Vagnes
Development Specialist
The Danish Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities (LOA)

GAME is an organization that was founded on the street. It recognises that not all young people are from homes where parents can take them to sport, so it brings sport to them and provides a positive community. Signe Larsen who met me at their Copenhagen facility explained,

“street sport is a tool for social change – sport is the communication tool”

GAME began as an outdoor street sport organisation in Copenhagen but because of the weather, events kept being called off. They decided to utilise an empty warehouse, converting it to a GAME House and now they offer a facility that is open seven days a week. Larsen explained *“GAME is about bridge building to show that sport is more than just the local football club”*.

Building Design

I visited their first facility, GAME Streetmekka København. It is contained within an industrial area close to a high security prison, a creative school, an indoor skateboarding facility and admin offices for the Municipality.

At the front of the warehouse there are three infill levels – a multifunction space at ground level that connects from inside to out, a DJ school on the middle floor which also opens to both inside and out and the

administrative spaces on the top floor, with views to the sports court and entry.

Several lessons learned about the layout and design of this flagship facility have been implemented in later facilities.

Overlaps and Ambiguity

JaJa Architects designed the GAME Aalborg facility. As compared to the Copenhagen facility that I visited, which had distinct spaces for defined functions, the Aalborg project introduced the idea of sharing and overlapping spaces. Described as “spatial experiments”, the large volume is filled with sculptures for climbing, jumping, running and hanging out. The programs overlap and create an urban melting pot for free play. The design blurs the boundaries of ownership and *“embeds the idea of sharing in the design”*, as Yoshiyuki Tanaka explained.

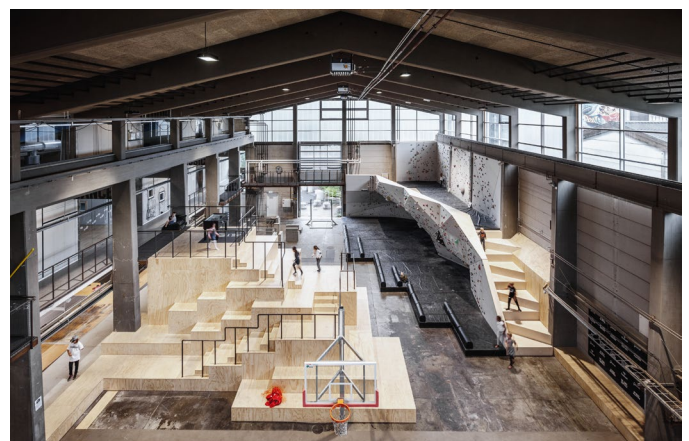


Fig. 1 GAME Aalborg (Rasmus Hjortshøj for JaJa Architects)



Fig. 2 Meeting space overlooking the courts at GAME Streetmekka, København (Sarah Slattery)

Youth Empowerment

Staff are trained to set the environment and the values for the place. Larsen explained, *“they welcome new people and explain that the way you act, the way you speak and the way you behave is important”*.

Youth empowerment is a key objective of the organisation. The programs at GAME are led by Playmakers – youth from within the community who are invited to volunteer on a Friday night. They lead weekly training sessions in street basketball, street soccer, street dance, parkour and other sport disciplines.

Local Culture

At its core GAME is about culture. It works internationally in Africa, Europe and the Middle East but always with local partners. They are often approached to partner with organisations with similar



Fig. 3 Photographs of staff displayed in the entry lobby (Sarah Slattery)

values. Larsen reflected that *“it needs a sense of local culture and that might even be neighbourhood specific”*. While some cultures may have different views on gender equity for example, the message can be shared in different ways. Equal representation is everywhere at GAME, it is even written into their music policy.

An Alternative to Organised Sport

The GAME House provides a unique offering, a way to move and play that is different from organised sport. Larsen explained,

“we cater to a lot of people that have been turned off organised sport”

With an increased interest in autonomous activity, some kids simply are not interested in the progression or commitment of organised sport. Others come to the GAME House to throw around a ball and have fun, in addition to their involvement in organised sport. What GAME offers is a different format of physical activity focused on play, an experience similar to young people playing together in the street in years gone by.

8

Superkilen

Interview with:

Mikkel Marcker Stubgaard
Project Architect
BIG

Located in the centre of Norrebro in Copenhagen, Superkilen is a public park designed by BIG Architects, TOPOTEK 1 and Danish art group SUPERFLEX.

Copenhagen's most culturally diverse neighbourhood, Norrebro faced social challenges, including high rates of crime and violent riots. The City of Copenhagen and Real Dania proposed an urban renewal project to upgrade a 750m strip of former tram tracks and industrial land to create a meeting place for the local community.

The competition winning design proposed a park with three key zones, each with a different focus. The Red Square for urban uses like skate, cafes and sport, the Black Market for an urban meeting place and the Green Park for typical recreation such as picnics, sports and dog walking.

Visting the project in the late afternoon it was humming with activity, people playing chess, participating in dance classes, rollerblading, and cycling. I was struck by the vibrancy, with people sharing space and enjoying a sense of community together.

Extreme Participation

I met with Mikkel Marcker Stubgaard one of the architects at BIG responsible for the project. He explained the extensive consultation and co-design process that shaped the final design outcome. This is what artists SUPERFLEX describe as “*extreme participation*”.

A local board of people interested in the project was gathered. Surrounding organisations were contacted to share their ideas, including schools, the library and local housing estates.

The community engagement strategy had four key pillars:

1. Advertisements in the local newspaper
2. A website, with a place for people to make suggestions
3. A physical model was set up in the neighbouring library, with a suggestion box
4. Targeted hearings at various locations such as the school, and a local social housing block



Fig. 1 Mounded landscape (Jens Linhe for BIG)



Fig. 2 The red square (Iwan Baan for BIG)

By offering so many avenues to share ideas, the design team maximised opportunities for people to contribute, not just the people who had time to share their opinion. As Stubgaard explained,

“it was important to tell the story constantly that everyone is part of it”

Cultural Collage

Representatives of the 57 different nationalities who lived in the area suggested objects to be included in the design. These were a Moroccan fountain, exercise equipment from muscle beach, a playground from India and an Elephant slide from Chernobyl. SUPERFLEX explain on their website, “five groups travelled to Palestine, Spain, Thailand, Texas and Jamaica in order to acquire five objects of their choice. These have since been installed in the park. In total, the park now contains more than 100 different objects from more than 50 different countries.”

The project took around 11 years to be delivered and materials have been modified and changed along the way. The collage-like nature of the project means that it can easily morph and change, continuing to grow and transform with the surrounding community.



Fig. 3 Players using the basketball hoop (Iwan Baan for BIG)



Fig. 4 Thai boxing ring (Torben Eskerod for BIG)

9 KU.BE House

Interview with:

Simon Lyager Poulsen
Partner
ADEPT

Located in Frederiksburg, a central part of Copenhagen, KU.BE is a Centre for Culture and Movement. The town already had handball, badminton and other more traditional facilities. While the Municipality could have offered more space for typical sports, it chose for KU.BE to focus on catering for people who are not already active, or those involved in niche sports, through providing spaces for movement, relaxation, reading, eating and more. They wanted to create a public attraction that would be a life giving facility.

ADEPT partnered with MVRDV in an invited design competition. They put forward a unique strategy, three dimensionally collaging the different functions with a focus on creating points of interaction.

I visited the project and met with Simon Lyager Poulsen, Partner at ADEPT in their Copenhagen office. He explained that a detailed brief for the project was provided, outlining the overall vision and approximate sizes for each function. The client expressed a desire to rethink how the spaces were put together and the design team delivered.

Celebrating the In-Between Space

Six defined program spaces were established, which followed the programmatic requirements set out in the brief. These six volumes were then assembled with the introduction of overlaps and intersections. The volume in-between was the grey zone which Poulsen described as *“the glue between the functions”*. This is a free play zone for informal movement. Visitors do not need to enter a room to use this space. As a child, it is possible to move up and down all the levels via a playground type design. There are netted floors and tunnels, a tetris of interconnected platforms, a sloped climbing wall and a twisting metallic slide that lands on a large cushion in the centre of the lobby. Poulsen described the centre as,

“a place for all generations to meet and be part of a community”

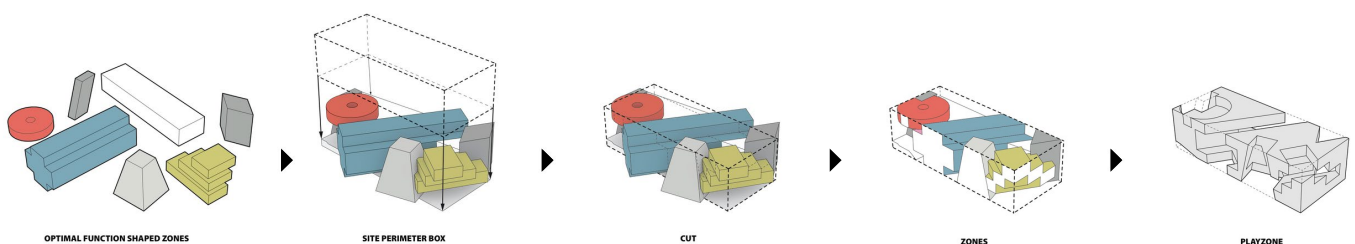


Fig. 1 Axonometric diagrams showing spatial relationships (ADEPT)



Fig. 2 Children using the climbing wall (Adam Mørk for ADEPT)

Stakeholder Engagement

The design team spent months speaking with sport associations, future operators and owners. They created a dialogue between different groups which meant everyone understood the challenges and the needs of others. Groups were willing to make compromises about the spaces they were provided, because they understood it was a building to be shared. The result, Poulsen explained is “*an anchoring to what has been created*”.

Acoustics

Given the overlapping of so many activities, acoustics was a key consideration for the project. Not having any built precedent for such a project was a challenge. The design team invested thoughtfully in specific acoustic treatments for key spaces. The performance hall has high quality acoustic treatment and the sense zone is soundproof. However, it was hard to know how the in-between space would work.

When I visited the busy facility, the hum of chatter and laughter was delightful, making the environment feel fun and welcoming. However, Poulsen acknowledged there are some parts of the play zone that could have been designed differently. The climbing wall, for example, is generally packed around midday on a winter’s day. With so many excited young children in that area together it can be a problem acoustically. The expected popularity of specific spaces is an important design consideration.

This willingness to experiment and then to openly reflect on how things could be improved was something I noticed in many of the best projects I visited, particularly across Denmark.



Fig. 3 Central void space with metallic slide (Adam Mørk for ADEPT)

10 Park N Play

Interview with:

Jan Yoshiyuki Tanaka
Partner
JaJa Architects

During my time in Copenhagen I visited Park N Play, a project which utilises the rooftop of a carpark as a playground and workout space. The building was designed by JaJa Architects, a Danish Architecture firm of just under twenty people with a focus on activity in broad terms – movement and public life. JaJa’s practice has three key agendas; biomaterials, reuse and mobility which I discussed with Partner, Jan Yoshiyuki Tanaka.

Understanding Existing Behaviours

Reflecting on the Park N Play project, Yoshiyuki Tanaka said, “*good people had come before us*”. Key urban design principles were already set for the area, which meant that the project was required to provide a certain amount of public open space. The client had noticed in other car parks that people would run up and down the ramps for fitness. They decided to build on this opportunity and include a bold set of stairs on the side of the carpark for runners to train, including timers installed at the top and bottom. A designated playground on the roof has a range of equipment and views over the waterfront. This project takes a building with a purely infrastructure function to create community benefit.

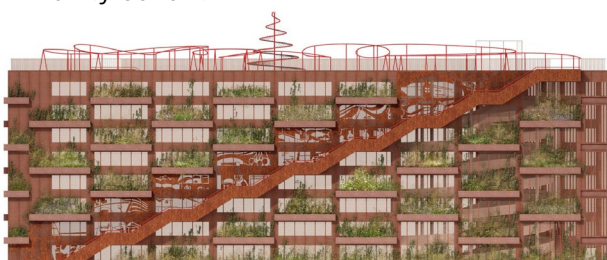


Fig. 1 Building elevation (JaJa Architects)



Fig. 2 Rooftop play equipment (Rasmus Hjortshøj for JaJa Architects)



Fig. 3 Rooftop play equipment (Rasmus Hjortshøj for JaJa Architects)

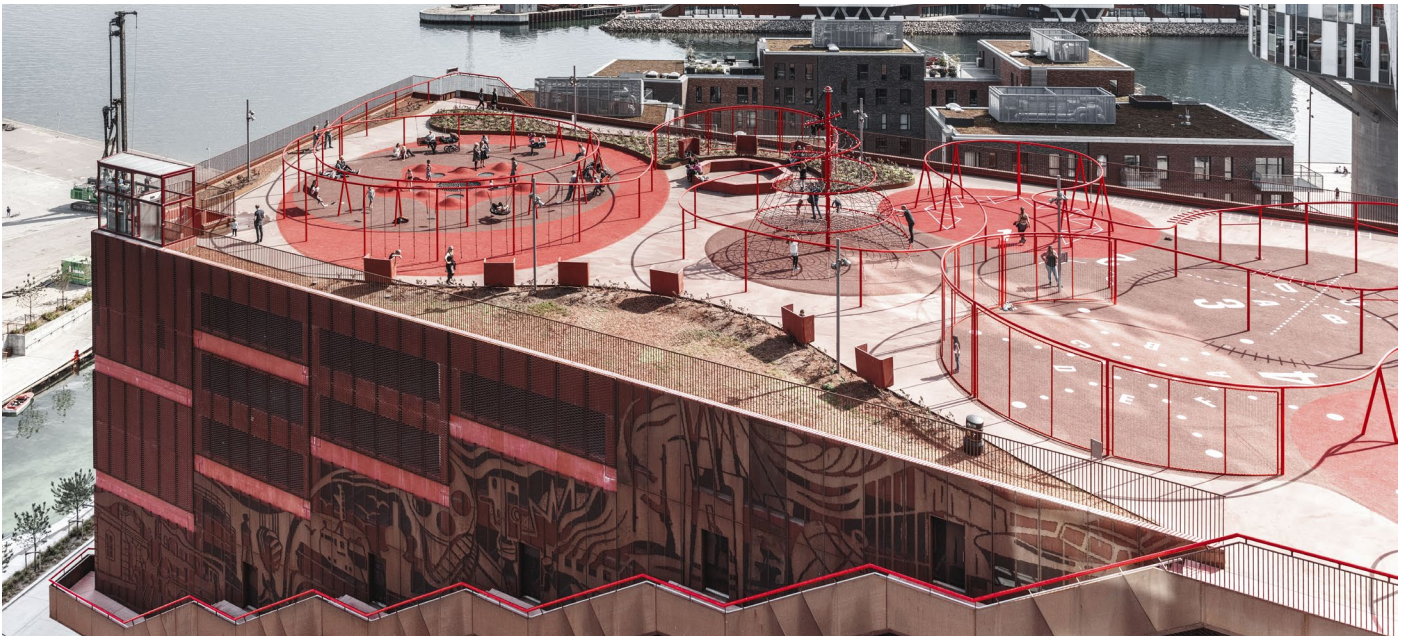


Fig. 4 Aerial view showing rooftop play equipment and stairs for runners to train (Rasmus Hjortshøj for JaJa Architects)

Mobility Pyramid

The creation of Park N Play is part of a broader commitment by JaJa Architects to rethink mobility. Their philosophy is beautifully captured in the Mobility Pyramid they have created. The image, which plays on the globally recognised food pyramid, creates a hierarchy of transit, encouraging people to

“move most from the bottom – least from the top”

With one simple and playful image, JaJa have created “a diet to reduce our environmental footprint, create more liveable cities and improve public health”.

Social Context and Innovation

The work being delivered in Denmark was particularly inspiring. There was a consistent commitment to innovation and experimentation in design. Yoshiyuki Tanaka explained that his willingness to take risks, to dream big and share ideas was tied to the safety he felt in being Danish. “I’m never afraid it’s going to go wrong because I have a social network that will catch me.” This illustrates what an important role social structure plays in design innovation.



Fig. 5 Mobility pyramid (JaJa Architects)



Fig. 6 Rooftop play equipment (Rasmus Hjortshøj for JaJa Architects)

11 Athletics Exploratorium

Interview with:

Maria Keinicke

Owner

Keingart Space Activators

Located adjacent to the Department of Sport Science and Biomechanics at the Southern Denmark University (SDU) campus in Odense, the Athletics Exploratorium transforms the concept of a traditional running track into a place for all types of movement and play. The project was designed by Keingart Space Activators (Keingart) and was jointly funded by the Municipality, SDU and The Danish Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities (LOA).

The facility was built in 2013 to replace a rundown soccer pitch and running track. The new running track now surrounds a range of opportunities for alternative movement – grassed mounds, a sunken running bowl, bridges, stepping logs, balancing beams and more. It serves as a playground for people of every age. The facility is free to all and is used by students, local sporting groups, aged care residents, families, teenagers and young adults alike.

I met with Maria Keinicke, owner of Keingart to discuss the project and her approach to design and learning. Keingart's practice was founded in research with a strong focus on creating opportunities for groups that are not being catered for in current sports facilities. Their process focuses on user participation in the early phases, fostering an open and transparent design dialogue.

Stakeholders and Compromise

Keingart also have clear structures for running focus group sessions. A balance of voices is important, each

organisation is limited to a maximum of two attendees at a consultation session, and they cannot sit together. Discussing the project with others and understanding their needs helps *“bridge the gap between different user groups”*. When successfully structured, focus groups foster more willingness to share and compromise.



Fig. 1 Aerial view of the Exploratorium (Rune Johansen for Keingart)

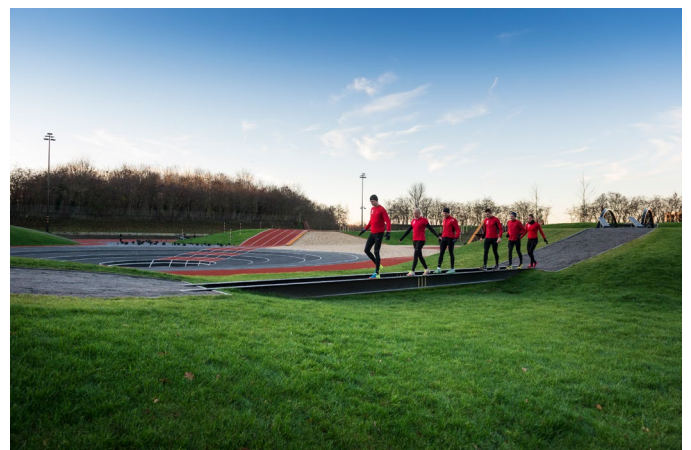


Fig. 2 Visitors using the balance beam (Rune Johansen for Keingart)



Fig. 3 Visitors running up the mounded landscape (Rune Johansen for Keingart)

Diverse Activities

Another important part of Keingart's approach is about offering new and diverse ways of being active that are *"more compatible with everyday people"*. At the Athletic Exploratorium this meant offering many fun activities that improve balance, coordination, muscle strength and endurance. While jumping across logs or walking across a suspended bridge can simply be done for enjoyment and play, these activities also act as gateways to running, as people are building skills without really noticing. Sharing is both socially and environmentally sustainable. As Keinicke said,

"we are in a world that we can't keep adding things – we need to share what is already there"

Design like a City

Keinicke insightfully likened the design of sport and recreation projects to designing a city, citing Jan Gehl's work as a key inspiration. Gehl, acclaimed Architect and Urban Consultant said in his book *Cities for People*, *"a good city is like a good party – people stay longer than really necessary because they are enjoying themselves"*.

Keinicke's model for design includes four key considerations:

1. Be inviting (is it clear that I can go inside?)
2. Be able to stay and watch (can I watch what other people are doing?)
3. Be active on the sidelines (can I play alongside others?)
4. Innovate the organised activity (what's stopping people taking part?)

Facilities and Programming

Another key takeaway from our conversation was the interdependency of recreational facilities with the way they are programmed. Facilities cannot be separated from the organisation, their activities and communication strategies.

Key questions to address this issue include:

1. Organisations – how do you run it? Who is working there? When is it open?
2. Activities – what things are happening? What new activities are on offer?
3. Communication – how are you sharing the message? Social media/webpage etc.

12 The Prism

Interview with:

Oliver Vagnes
Development Specialist
The Danish Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities (LOA)

Constructed almost 20 years ago, The Prism was delivered for the Municipality of Copenhagen and LOA, designed by Dorte Mandrup Arkitekter and collaborators – yet it still feels delightfully experimental.

The Indoor Common

The project was one of the first LOA projects built on the idea of an indoor common. The concept takes reference from the Danish outdoor common, a place where people in towns and cities would meet and participate in many different, often self-organised activities.

The building includes a central handball court connected to a series of break out spaces which overlook the main field. These are flexible spaces used for climbing, ping pong and a range of informal activities. A continuous green floor covers all the activity areas which unifies the building.

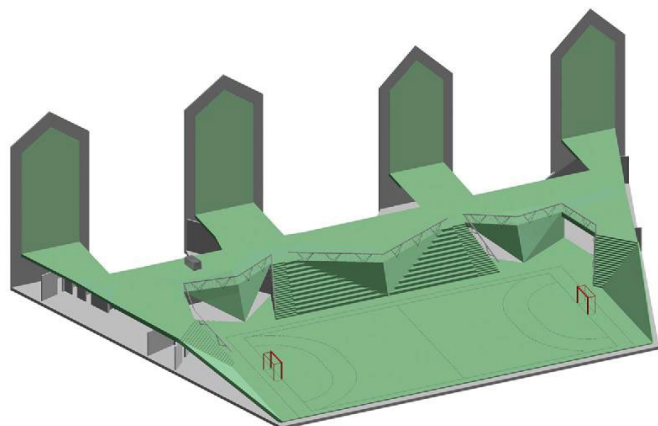


Fig. 1 Diagram showing the main court and breakout spaces (HIC)

The level changes are utilised for play as well. Some areas have a stair connecting the handball court to the multifunction space. Other parts have sloped surfaces that are informally used by children as slides or rope climbs.

The spaces are all interconnected which means the sounds of the activity all combine. The hall felt vibrant and fun during my visit but I imagine acoustically it might be challenging with all activities running simultaneously. The lack of barriers or separable spaces in the design made it clear that the building was to be shared by everyone.

The activity spaces are placed underneath a polycarbonate canopy which has led to the building being affectionately named “the crystal”. The building glows soft green at night, exhibiting the landscape of activity within.

Social Zones

The indoor common is an idea that LOA has continued to refine and develop through the many projects they have delivered. They have a strong focus on creating social zones. These are places for people to be part of the activity without necessarily participating in an organised sport. There are areas to observe or play beside the main activity space. LOA has gone on to apply this idea to a range of adaptive reuse projects.



Fig. 2 Main handball court under polycarbonate canopy (Torben Eskerod for Dorte Mandrup)

Their projects all recognise the significance of social zones in conjunction with sport, to create meeting places. Vagnes explained,

“social zones are really important, they let people come in discreetly – to be part of it but not part of it”



Fig. 3 Building glowing at night (Torben Eskerod for Dorte Mandrup)



Fig. 4 Visitors playing chess in a breakout space (SUBTILITAS)



Fig. 5 Child playing on the stairs (Torben Eskerod for Dorte Mandrup)

Key Findings



Fig1. Child playing on equipment at Superkilen (Iwan Baan for BIG)

Exploring these buildings and sharing conversations with the architects and operators was inspiring. Through this experience I observed six key ingredients for successful sports and recreation projects.

1. Co-Creation

The most successful facilities were not created via a traditional stakeholder consultation model but with a far more involved engagement process and ongoing dialogue among multiple user groups. It was not only valuable for the design team to understand what each user group needed. It was also important that groups understood the needs of one another, to help them compromise among themselves. As Keinicke said,

“you need to bring people out of their echo chambers. It helps for them to see that someone else has other demands and other needs, that there are people apart from me.”

2. Intentional Overlaps

Rather than dividing all programs into separate rooms with four walls, successful projects consciously loosened the boundaries and overlapped functions to encourage interactions. Natural transitions from one space to the next broke down barriers for participation. There was not an expectation of ownership but a comfort in sharing. As Poulsen explained,

“this was everyone’s building”.

3. Autonomy

These projects generally offered diversity and a sense of freedom and independence for visitors. The programs were not all formal activity programs with set start times and finish times. They offered people an opportunity to choose, to spend time on the activities that interested them, to take risks and find their own limits. As Hollaway put it,

“the kids get a sense of control -you’re not letting anyone down”.

4. Designing for Change

These projects showed that community interests and activities will continue to grow and change and that these facilities need to be able to transform too. The goal is not to create buildings that are static masterpieces but buildings that can be moulded and modified over time. As Banyoczki stated,

“if you don’t reinvent, people get bored”.

5. Giving Back

In many of the buildings I visited the built form enriched and gave back to the community either through design or through an operational strategy. There was a sense that these buildings were in service of their community, whether they provided a plaza or a green façade for neighbours to enjoy, or whether they provided a home away from home for young people –there was an underlying goal to enrich the broader community. As Larsen put it,

“there is a sense of pride in being a part of it”.

6. A Sense of Delight

The most successful projects had a sense of joy about them. This was achieved in many ways –whether through a playful and bold colour palette that a child might have chosen, a gentle mound to climb or simply a snapshot view into another space to meet the unexpected. These projects looked for ways to bring out your inner child, inviting you to observe, to be surprised and to find delight in movement. As Reed said,

“it’s about enjoying yourself”.

SECTION 2

SYSTEMS AND FRAMEWORKS FOR DELIVERY

In addition to visiting buildings and learning about how they were designed, I also met with a range of organisations that are helping to promote physical activity through working together, sharing knowledge, developing policies and funding key initiatives. These can inform thinking for the systems and frameworks for delivery of sports infrastructure in Australia.

Many decisions are made before architects, and other designers begin their work. Understanding and discussing the drivers behind decision making is essential to improving outcomes in the built environment that promote physical activity. By improving our existing frameworks, we can allow design thinking to be more expansive and innovative, to promote more active people and places.

This section identifies six key themes that have emerged from my research, illustrated by ten organisational case studies. These themes should assist in strengthening our current offering for delivering sports infrastructure in Australia. Rather than reinventing the wheel, we can find many valuable ideas from colleagues across the globe, working with the same objective, to get more people active.

A National Database

A national database of knowledge for sports and recreation design can ensure all designers have easy access to up-to-date research and ideas for integrating physical activity in the built environment. Sport England (1) and The Knowledge Centre (2) in the Netherlands have both built databases that make information easy to access. They demonstrate how well constructed databases can assist anyone from architects to local councils to developers to discover ideas to integrate movement into their projects.

Making Research Accessible

Where significant innovation and improvement was occurring, there was ongoing dialogue and a clear feedback loop between research organisations and real-world applications. This was seen in the work underway at John Moores University (3) and Southern Denmark University (4). Researchers are collating data and presenting it in ways that are practical and accessible to those outside the academic sphere.

A Long Term Vision

Big changes were enabled where groups from different sectors – health, government, private sector, research and more, came together with a clear shared vision. This was evident with Liverpool Active City (5) and the Catalan Plan (6). These are long term plans that have remained in place for decades to guide positive change. These systems were not tied to a particular political agenda; they were consistent and enduring because they mattered to so many stakeholders.

Incentivising Innovation

A unique model in Denmark is the concept of funding tied to innovation in sports planning design. The Danish Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities (7) builds on a large portfolio of past projects to push Councils, architects and others to be more experimental in their design approach.

Bold Planning Policy

To create space for people to be physically active, a bold planning approach is required. As densities in our cities increase, the demand for recreation space also increases, so rethinking the role of the car becomes an essential consideration. The Barcelona Urban Mobility Plan (8) sets the way by slowly eliminating the private vehicle from parts of the city and prioritising active transport.

Social Purpose

In communities that are challenged with social issues, physical activity is an excellent tool to unite and a potential catalyst for change. Social enterprises like GLL (9) and Everton in the Community (10) offer more than a place for physical activity; they are committed to social change. They treat health holistically and support people, particularly those that are more disadvantaged, to look after their physical, mental and emotional wellbeing through a range of programs.

1

A National Database Sport England

Interview with:

Tom Pinnington
Director
The Sports Consultancy

Sport England offers a suite of resources to assist in the design and delivery of sports and recreation projects. Tom Pinnington from The Sport Consultancy (TSC) shared some of the work they have done across the industry working with Sport England, clients and architects to help demonstrate the value of sport and support successful project delivery.

Resources and Support

Sport England acts as an advisor and provides a range of resources to help promote best practice. As Pinnington explains, “they are setting a standard for the sport and leisure industry, making sure the quality of work in the sector is good”. The support they provide in the design and delivery of sports facilities, especially for more technical projects like swimming pools, is a key point of difference from Australian practice.

Some examples of what they offer include:

- A database of consultants that meet the standards expected to deliver sports and recreation projects, including price, quality and experience, as part of a technical assurance framework
- Paying for technical peer reviews of designs
- Creation of standard management contracts for facility management to alleviate the cost of each Council needing to “lawyer up”

Sport England act as a facilitator to ensure knowledge is shared, distributed and disseminated effectively. The contribution and support they provide in the

development and delivery of sports facilities is a valuable consideration for Australia.

Value

The challenge with sports buildings when compared to other building types is that the value proposition is not immediately clear. In the UK, Sport England and their partners are working to change this. Sport England has invested in a three-year research project to understand how the social value of sport and physical activity is distributed between different people, places, activities and stakeholders.

In 2023 they published “The Social Value of Sports and Physical Activity Report” which found that the total annual social value of sport and physical activity in England for 2022/23 was 107.2 billion dollars. The webpage also includes an interactive map showing the financial benefit per region, illustrating the differences across the country.

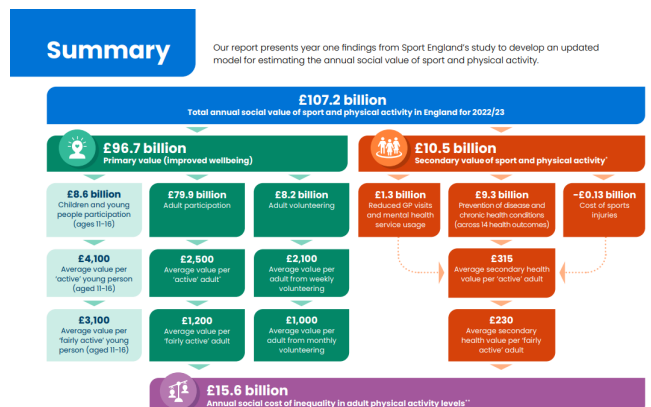


Fig. 1 Social Value of Sports and Physical Activity (Sport England)

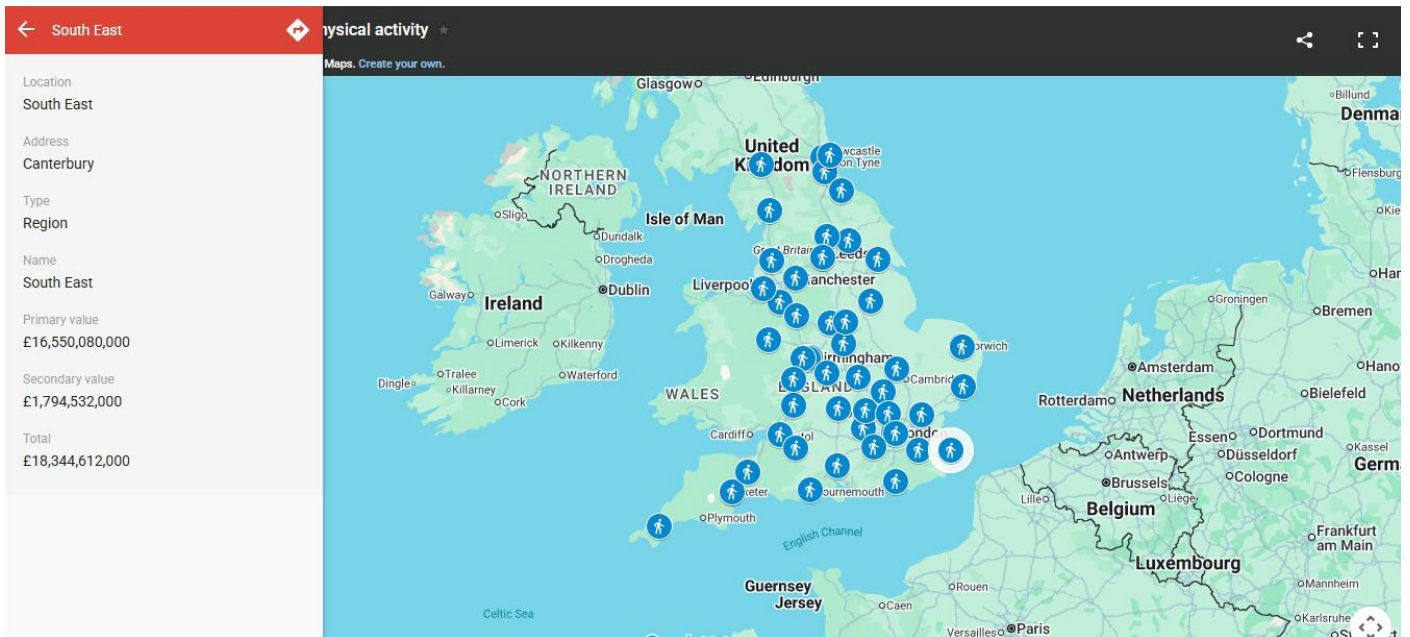


Fig. 2 Interactive map showing the financial value per region (Sport England)

Pinnington explained that government funding grants in England now require the social and economic value of sports projects to be quantified.

Following the report on social value, in January 2025 Sport England released a report on value for return on investment. On behalf of Sheffield Hallam University, TSC worked with consulting firm Deloitte to produce the financial models. The headline finding was that

“every £1 spent on community sport and physical activity generates over £4 for the English economy and society”

Quantifying return on investment is an exciting concept because it puts a dollar value on the more nuanced value sport and recreation projects provide. This is particularly relevant to clients like universities or local councils that need to make decisions about what to build under a 5-10 year capital works program. The question clients are asking is *“why spend a load of capital on something that’s going to give a negative return?”* Pinnington explained. While the rental income on student accommodation and the tuition fees for academic space is easily calculated, sports and recreation spaces have large operational costs and are often seen as a liability. This research is helping to reframe the thinking.

Active Environments Framework

Sport England has also created an “Active Design Framework” which establishes 10 principles for creating active urban places. The Framework seeks to help planners, designers and everyone involved in delivering and managing places to create and maintain active environments, encouraging people to be active through their everyday lives.

Sport New Zealand is also developing a similar resource, an “Active Design Guide”, which will sit alongside their “Spaces and Places Framework.”

Pinnington explained that the promotion of play and recreational activity face similar challenges in the UK as we do in Australia. *“For anything beyond the base sports building, there is the question of who is going to pay for it. Conversations between stakeholders are needed.”*

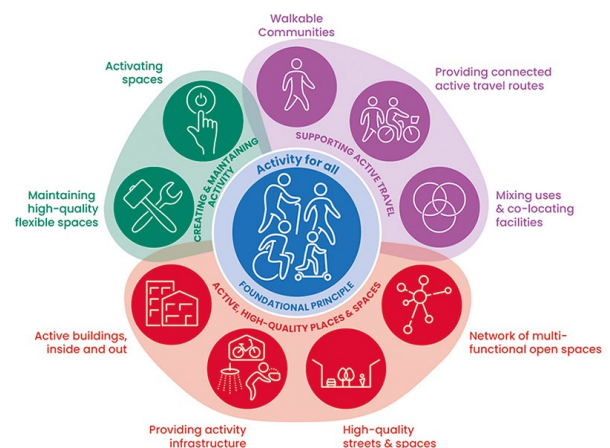


Fig. 3 Active Design Framework (Sport England)

2

A National Database The Knowledge Centre

Interview with:

Jeroen Hoyng
Specialist in Exercise Friendly Environments
The Knowledge Centre

The Knowledge Centre for Sport and Physical Activity in the Netherlands is a comprehensive database for sharing knowledge about sport and physical activity. Working with policymakers, practitioners and scientists the organisation gathers scientific research and works to disseminate the knowledge across the country. I met with Jeroen Hoyng, from the Knowledge Centre (TKC) to discuss their work.

Shared Resources

TKC has a vast range of resources including practical delivery guidelines, project profiles, checklists, research, monitoring and evaluation tools and delivery roadmaps. This State funded organisation has consolidated knowledge and resources as a way to unite and empower different groups to successfully deliver more spaces for physical activity.

Three Components for Physical Activity

TKC defines a Physical Activity Friendly Environment (PAFE) as an environment that facilitates, stimulates and challenges people to be physically active, to play, to do exercise or to do sports.

The “PAFE model” (Hoyng & Van Eck, 2021) defines three key components for successful physical activity environments. Hardware, software and orgware.

1. **Hardware** is the physical infrastructure. This needs to be accessible to everyone and facilitates sports, play and physical activity. It includes sports centres, pools, playgrounds, open green space

pathways and natural environments.

2. **Software** refers to the sporting and physical movement stimulation activities. Examples include, sports events and tournaments, campaigns and websites sharing knowledge and coaching and training assistance.
3. **Orgware** refers to the organisational processes of managing and maintaining hardware and software. This includes management and maintenance, suitable financial support, vision and policy, evaluation, monitoring and collaboration with the community.

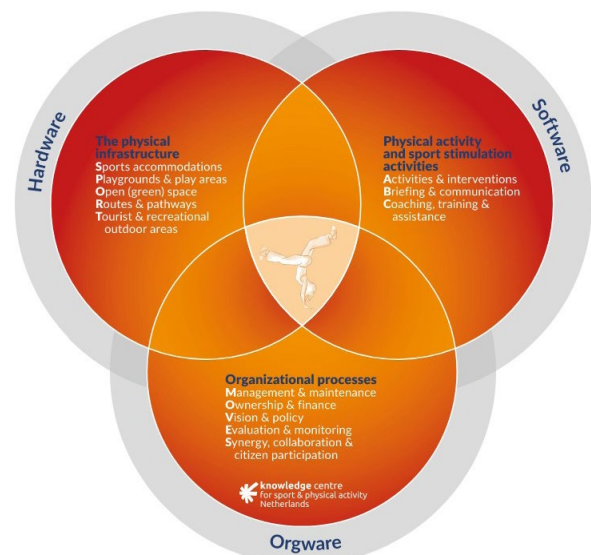


Fig. 1 PAFE Model (Hoyng & Van Eck, 2021)



Fig. 2 Interactive map showing the 40 building blocks (The Knowledge Centre)

Hoyng explained,

“there are no blueprints, everything is about context, you can learn from each other but you need to apply it in your own environment”

This model demonstrates that sports and recreation buildings cannot succeed in isolation. The built form (hardware) is only a component in an interdependent system. Successful facilities are not simply the byproduct of good design, they have the necessary systems and processes in place – the software and the orgware. For true innovation, all three components need to be considered as part of the design process, not as an afterthought that follows design.

The Building Blocks for Physical Activity

TKC has created a resource for the implementation of PAFEs. Analysing publications by designers, urban planners, other knowledge institutes and scientific research, 40 building blocks were established. They fall under three categories across four scales of the built environment.

The three categories are:

- 1. Recreational activity
- 2. Active mobility
- 3. Sport

The four scales are:

- 1. City level
- 2. Neighbourhood level
- 3. Street level
- 4. Building level

Details of each building block, sample projects and relevant research are available both in an e-book and also an interactive map on their website. This framework provides a wealth of interesting ideas to help promote physical activity at all scales. Making design ideas for physical activity so easily available means they are more likely to be considered and applied.

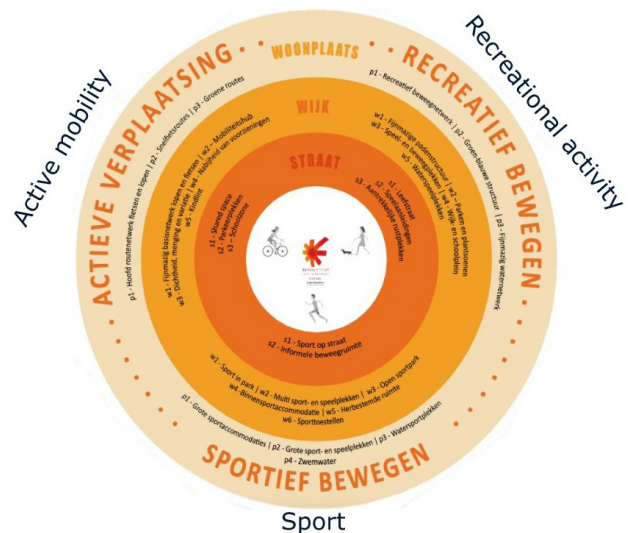


Fig. 3 Categories of physical activity (The Knowledge Centre)

3

Making Research Accessible

John Moores University

Interview with:

Prof. Lynne Boddy PhD
Professor of Physical Activity & Health
Physical Activity Exchange Lead
Research Institute for Sport & Exercise Sciences
School of Sport and Exercise Sciences

During my time in Liverpool I visited John Moores University and met with Professor Lynne Boddy for a tour of the Research Institute for Sport and Exercise Sciences (RISES) that sits within the School of Sport and Exercise Sciences. Boddy leads the Physical Activity Exchange (PAEx), a research group within RISES, which creates evidence based interventions for physical activity in the real-world. She and her team are also key contributors to the Liverpool Active City and Global Active City movements, explored in a case study to follow. As she explained,

“John Moores is very committed to applying the research so it’s not just sitting on a shelf”

Real Work Application

The PAEx has a range of testing apparatus used to measure both high-performance athletes and everyday people. Equipment included pressure and temperature-controlled chambers, balance machines, running tracks, and sleep rooms. They have a step machine set up to review how the height and depth of stair treads could affect falls in elderly people.

The PAEx are strongly focused on real world application. Gathering data in an artificial lab environment can distort peoples’ behaviours so the PAEx are currently trialling opportunities to take the lab outside. Setting up test environments in familiar public settings and using markerless cameras they can

better understand how people move and respond to spaces for physical activity.

Their discoveries about injury risk, body composition, behavioural change and mental health build a database of knowledge that can drive positive change for people at all levels of activity.

Beyond the Individual

Boddy explained how the Socio-Ecological Model is applied in the research of the PAEx. This model identifies how an individual is influenced by their context – their social environment, physical environment and policies. Policy can include active travel, urban planning or school sport class programming. Rather than expecting individuals to change behaviour on their own, this model recognises that there are some factors that are out of the individual’s control. For projects to succeed, it is important to consider how all of these factors can be improved.

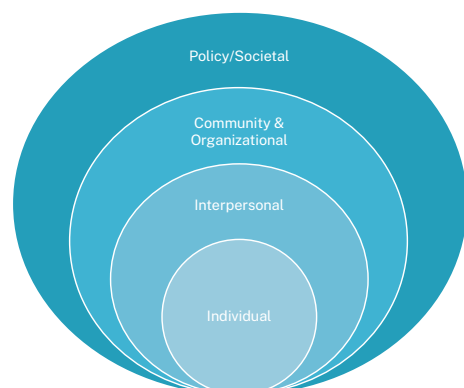


Fig. 1 Socio-Ecological Model (TRB website)

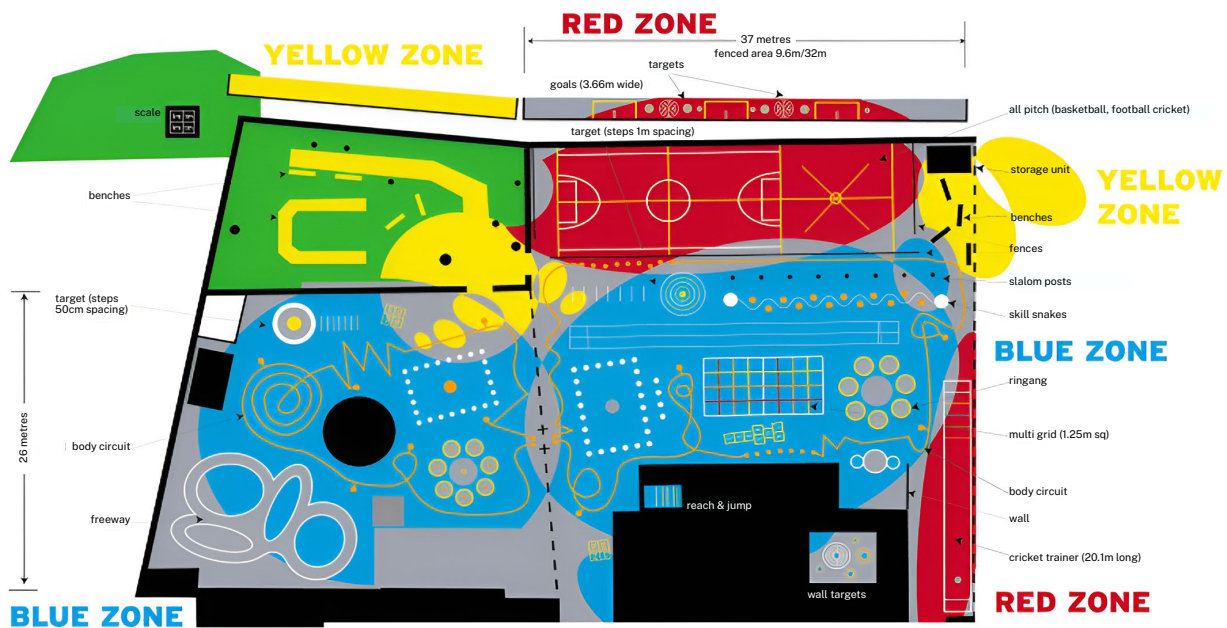


Fig. 2 Playground marking plan (Ridgers Stratton)

Different Formats for Data

We also discussed the challenges involved in comparing data internationally. There are several resources available from organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and Global Observatory of Physical Activity (GoPA) but each country has their own way of measuring which means data comparison might not be accurate. Measuring rates of physical activity is further complicated, Boddy explained, by the *“ripple effect, you can’t measure one thing in isolation, there are chain reactions”*.

Playground Design

The PAEx has also researched how playgrounds can be designed to better promote physical activity. Rather than one large sporting pitch covering the playground, redesigning playgrounds into different zones for different types of activities can change the behaviour of children.

The “Sporting Playgrounds” project began with empirical work undertaken between 1996–2000 and led by Professor Gareth Stratton and supported by Professor Stuart Fairclough and Dr Nicola Ridgers. The project used a novel approach to change the physical playground environment in infant schools.

The researchers re-designed playgrounds at fifteen intervention schools into three specific colour-coded zones; ball games (red zone), less structured active games, such as chase and tag (blue zone), and quiet activities, such as socialising and inactive cooperative

games (yellow zone). The project also installed physical structures that included soccer goal posts, basketball hoops, fencing and seating, as well as ensuring manipulative sports equipment such as soccer balls, skipping ropes and tennis balls were provided to promote activity.

By remarking the playground into colour coded zones the researchers noticed an increase in activity. Specifically, playtime moderate-to-vigorous physical activity (MVPA), and vigorous physical activity (VPA) significantly increased by 10% and 6%, respectively.

A unique aspect of this study was the medium and long-term follow-up measurements at 6 and 12 months, respectively. The strongest positive effects of the playground redesign on MVPA and VPA were observed after 6 months and were still evident on VPA after 12 months.

This research has gone on to inform a range of playground interventions across the country and it is a great example of the work John Moores is doing to utilise research to help inform how our built environments are designed.

4 Making Research Accessible

Southern Denmark University

Interview with:

Prof. Jasper Schipperijn
Professor, Head of Centre
The Faculty of Health Sciences
Department of Sports Science and Clinical Biomechanics
Research Unit for Active Living

I visited Odense, the birthplace of Hans Christian Anderson to meet with Professor Jasper Schipperijn. We discussed both the work of Research Unit for Active Living (RUAL) and more broadly the World Health Organisation (WHO).

The RUAL has around 35 researchers looking at physical activity as part of everyday life. They work to create frameworks for physical activity through research, development, and education. They examine cycling, playing, walking, sports participation and training focused on the behavioural and social side, not high performance sport.

Making Research more Accessible

It can be difficult for those outside the academic sphere to understand or access research on sport and physical activity. The RUAL is committed to making information more accessible. They have employed 1.5 full time staff members committed to “research translation”. They interview people from all different professions, including architects, to understand how the information should be shared. Schipperijn explained,

“we know a lot from a behavioural point of view but for some reason that knowledge doesn’t reach the people that need to use it, so let’s get better at doing that”

Measuring Building Usage

We discussed a range of practical research projects underway between the RUAL and its partners. Currently they are working with municipalities across Denmark to study building usage. Utilising cameras in the buildings, AI is being used to compare the rates of bookings with the rates of usage. Anecdotally, while sports clubs say they are lacking capacity, they are discovering there is free space. The research has revealed a need to optimise operations to make it easier to cancel bookings and support volunteers. It is also revealing parts of the buildings that are not being used which will allow adjustments to be made and may also inform future design solutions.



Fig. 1 Co-creation project at the RUAL (Simon Klein Knudsen)

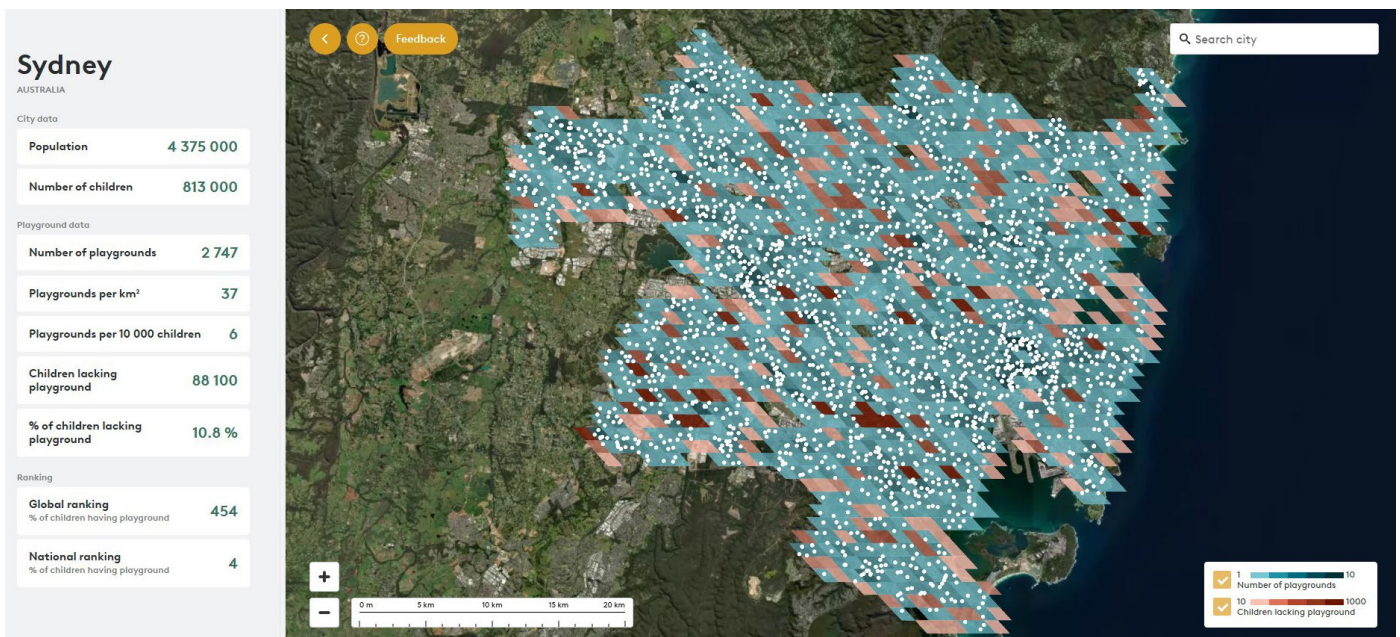


Fig. 2 Map showing the distribution of playgrounds in Sydney (Playscapes)

Access to Playgrounds

The World Playground Research Institute, which is part of the RUAL is dedicated to promoting children's health wellbeing and physical activity globally. They have recently released a tool called "Playscapes" which maps the number of playgrounds per child in cities across the globe, identifying areas where playgrounds are not available for children. The tool reveals that the percentage of children lacking a playground in Sydney is 10.8% in comparison to 8.7% in Copenhagen and 4.9% in Barcelona. Practical mapping tools like this help governments to understand opportunities for play in the built environment on a global stage and can directly impact planning and funding strategies.

Co-Creation

RUAL's research shows that co-creation is essential for success. Schipperijn emphasised "*co-design is not far enough - it needs to be co-creation*".

Co-creation involves giving people options and giving them the power to decide. The process can be fun, especially with children but the way you ask questions is important. Schipperijn explained "*when you ask people what they want in a design process, they can only tell you what they already know*". With children, he explained, "*you need to ask about what they want to do and what they want to use the space for*". For example, a child might say they would like hills but the steepness, the transitions at the bottom, and the material can

limit the activities that take place. If we don't ask the right questions in the co-creation process we can misunderstand what is wanted.

We also discussed how the cost of buildings needs to be reviewed to include both co-creation and programming. Schipperijn suggested the following breakdown of the total project budget:

- 15% Co-Creation
- 50% Building
- 35% Programming (2-3 years)

Autonomy

We also discussed the trend towards autonomy. Teens 15-18 years old are much more interested in independent activities. Schipperijn explained "*kids don't want to come at fixed times, being together is critical but on their terms*". In the modern world, young people have so many options and so much access to information. The idea of things being done a certain way does not make sense to them. They want the opportunity to make their own decisions. Importantly they also want to be listened to and to be taken seriously. The design of our recreation spaces should acknowledge the way the interests of young people are changing and respond accordingly.

A Long Term Vision

5

Liverpool Active City | Global Active Cities

Interview with:

John Marsden

International Active City Advocacy and Development Coordinator
Global Active City Development

I met with John Marsden, who developed the Liverpool Active City Strategy in his hometown of Liverpool, a port city on the west coast of England. Famous as the hometown of the Beatles, Liverpool is also the birthplace of a global movement for city wide planning for physical activity. Cities around the world are now following the lead of Liverpool to become certified Global Active Cities under an International Olympic Committee (IOC) Certification.

Liverpool Active City strategy began in 2005 at a time when Liverpool had some of the worst health statistics in Europe, including high rates of heart disease, cancers, diabetes and obesity. Drug importation and gangs were also a major problem for the city. Of the eight core cities in England, Liverpool had the lowest rates of physical activity. Now in 2025, after 20 years of consistent action, Liverpool is the fourth most active of the major cities in England. As Marsden said,

“you’ve got to be willing to stick at it”

Socio-economic Inequality

Liverpool is classified as one of the most deprived cities in the UK with only pockets of affluence. The life expectancy in Kensington, Liverpool is 10 years less than the life expectancy in Kensington, London. Marsden and the Liverpool Active City team set about to utilise sport and physical activity to stimulate change.

Data

The first step was to gather data. A population wide survey was held to understand activity levels across the city. The survey showed that only 18% of people were reaching the physical activity levels needed to provide health benefit. The state of children’s health was particularly troubling. One in three boys and one in five girls were meeting the required level of physical activity for children, which is one hour per day as defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

Working Together

Liverpool City Council realised they could not be working alone to solve the problem. A consolidation of organisations and sectors was needed. There was bi-partisan support for change.

Marsden’s unique cross disciplinary experience and his ability to connect with others was key. He acted as a “diplomat for physical activity”, advocating with passion and perseverance. As he said, “*the key was not to be sitting in the ivory tower but actually talking with people*”. His unique role was half funded by the Health Service and half by the Municipality – an important recognition that community physical activity cannot be siloed into either the health or sport sectors.

Key to the success of the Liverpool Active City strategy was consultation. There were already many activists passionate about driving change, it was important to ask people what they would like to see.



Fig. 1 Photograph of the docks in Liverpool (Sarah Slattery)

A Localised Approach

They worked at the neighbourhood level in order to get the message out. Five neighbourhoods were defined with an Active City coordinator assigned to each one. They had their finger on the pulse in each of these communities. Marsden reflected,

“breaking down the barriers for people to engage in physical activity is something we’re proud of and that’s something that’s come about by drilling down [at a local level]”

Initiatives of the Program

Some key initiatives included:

- School classes -promoting physical activity in schools by upskilling teachers.
- Liveability Sessions -bringing physical activity into community centres.
- Exercise by Health Program -doctors prescribing physical activity for health benefits.
- Fire Fit - program to upgrade gyms inside fire stations so that fire fighters could provide training.
- Fit for Me -An online platform for average people to share their stories of finding better health.

Global Active Cities

In 2012, the International Olympic Committee (IOC), the Association for International Sport for All (TAFISA) and Evaleo, an international organisation promoting active lifestyles, began developing the Global Active City model. Marsden and academics from the Physical Activity Exchange at John Moores University were engaged to develop an ISO standard certification to allow cities around the world to put in place a formal commitment to the promotion of physical activity and healthy lifestyles, following the example of Liverpool.

By 2018 the first six Global Active Cities were recognised –Buenos Aires, Argentina; Hamburg, Germany; Lillehammer, Norway; Liverpool, UK; Ljubljana, Slovenia; and Richmond (British Columbia), Canada.

The certification involves by the city forming a committee to determine how programs will be delivered, facilities mapping, establishing partnerships and undertaking research and data collection. The key benefit of the certification, Marsden explained is “*protection for what you’ve created*”. A Head of Active Cities Coordinator is appointed, and information needs to be sent back annually to track progress. Cities need to re-register every two years. As a system, the Global Active Cities certification puts the city on a global stage, creating a commitment and a sense of accountability to drive progress.

6

A Long Term Vision The Catalan Plan

Interview with:

Rosa Carretero Palau
Head of Sports Infrastructures and Facilities
Consell Català de l'Esport

In 2005, the Consell Català de l'Esport (CCE) approved a 10 year plan called the Pla director d'instal·lacions i equipaments esportius de Catalunya (PIEC). The objective of this plan was to create a balanced network of sports facilities and to plan and promote programs for public open spaces and sports facilities to meet the needs of all citizens. During my time in Barcelona, I met with Rosa Carretero Palau, Head of Sports Infrastructures and Facilities at CCE. She explained, *"Catalonia has a special tradition in sport – a love for sport"*.

Mapping a Network of Sports Facilities

CCE undertakes extensive surveys and data collection from the population in Catalonia to understand rates of physical activity, types of physical activity and where these activities take place. This data is then used to inform infrastructure planning under the PIEC.

In 2005 during the preparation of the PIEC, CCE undertook the Census of Sports Facilities of Catalonia (CEEC), which recorded more than 20,000 sports facilities across Catalonia. The Census is continuously updated and is an ongoing source of information so the evolution of the provision of sports facilities can be regularly evaluated.

The Practice of Physical and Sports Activity

CCE sees movement in a holistic way. As explained in the 2022 updated PIEC (aPIEC); *"When we refer to the sporting activity that we practice or the physical activity that we do voluntarily, we often speak interchangeably*

of physical activity, healthy activity, physical exercise, sporting activity or simply sport. Although these terms have different nuances in their definition, they are not always interpreted the same way. For this reason, PIEC 2005 grouped them all into a single concept called "physical and sporting practice" to refer to all physical and sporting activity in Catalonia."

Definitions are particularly important because sports and physical activity can mean different things to different people. The CCE 2019 survey revealed that there was a 20% discrepancy between people that said they practised "sports" (50%) and those that did "physical activity regularly" (70%). This nuance illuminates the challenge that exists in quantifying and tracking rates of physical activity across communities.

Space Planning for Sport

The PIEC also maps what type of spaces are used for different activities.

CCE's 2019 survey revealed *"Taking into account the proportion by types of activity, it turns out that overall, less than a third of the physical activity (32%) is carried out in sports facilities – that is in spaces specifically built for this purpose. That means that most of the population's physical and sports practice is done in open spaces and a small part at home."*

This important knowledge has helped shape how CCE plans and funds spaces for physical activity. They are utilising community specific data on where people want to do physical activity to inform how and where

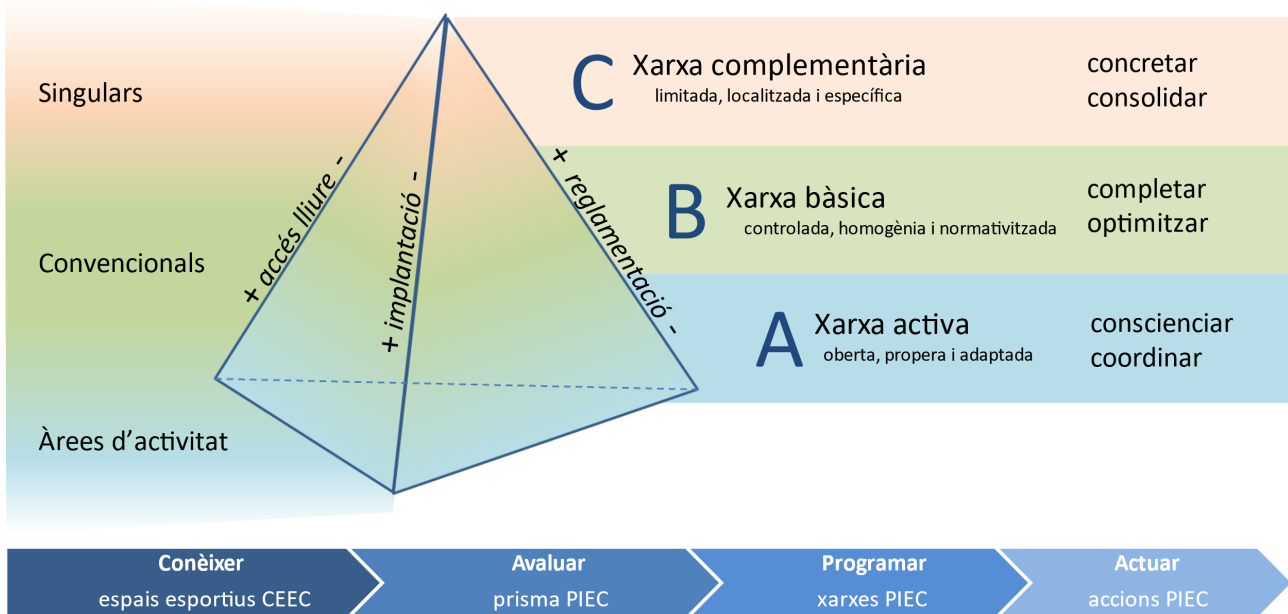


Fig. 1 Proposed methodology for updating the PIEC (3aPIEC)

people invest in the built environment and public space. Carretero Palau explained,

“sport must be brought back into cities, it will be the link that activates cities”

The Sports Network

The 2005 PIEC classified three facility networks (tiers). These were facilities of National Interest, Basic and Complementary.

Once the PIEC 10 year horizon had passed, CCE began work on its update (aPIEC). In 2022, the aPIEC proposed a new classification of sports facilities: Active, Basic, and Complementary. This renewed structure responded to the context of population growth, increased awareness of the the importance of sport and physical activity for health and recognition of the significant investment needed to meet the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030.

The aPIEC tiers are described as follows.

Tier A are open access areas for commonly practiced activities –walking, running, skating, cycling or playing, activities that are part of an active lifestyle. According to their 2019 survey, 44% of physical and sports activities are practised in these environments.

Tier B are spaces for commonly practised sports, within facilities that are generally access-controlled. These include athletics tracks, indoor and outdoor

swimming pools, multipurpose courts, tennis and padel courts.

Tier C are for specific high level activities, including facilities of national interest. These include stadiums, high-performance and tourism facilities.

Planning and Progress

Over the years that this three tier framework has been in place, CCE has tracked progress in each tier. With substantial investment from 2005 to 2015 in the Tier B facilities, the shortfall of these facilities has more than halved –shifting from an initial 11% deficit to 5% deficit over a ten year period.

CCE is now promoting the Tier A investments and improving the quality of Tier B, recognising from surveys that this is the community priority. As Carretero Palau explained of CCE,

“they hear the concerns of the politicians and the sports bodies, but they act socially”

The development of this large scale infrastructure mapping is an excellent tool for understanding the whole picture, thinking beyond municipality boundaries and working at a regional level to promote greater equality and access to spaces for movement.

Incentivising Innovation

7

Danish Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities

Interview with:

Oliver Vagnes

Development Specialist

The Danish Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities (LOA)

The Danish Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities (LOA) is a unique organisation that helps to fund innovative facilities for sport, culture and outdoor activity in Denmark. Alongside other organisations such as Real Dania they fund expansive design thinking. Several people that I met with said that LOA was the “point of difference” for the remarkable sports facilities being delivered in Denmark.

An independent government organisation, funded via the National Lottery, LOA supports exemplary projects and design dialogue. They never build their own facilities but work in collaboration with local authorities and organisations to inspire new development ideas. They support physical activity projects across Denmark, not only financially but with a wealth of project experience and lessons learned.

Competitive vs Recreational Sport

The typical European and Australian model for sport is a “pyramid” model. Elite, high-level and competitive sport sits above recreational sport. However, LOA creates a “church” model (Scheerder 2007: 19), in which recreational sport sits alongside competitive sport, and receives funding separately. This structural recognition of recreational sport in its own right is an important distinction for broadening participation.

Leading Change

LOA’s objective is to shift thinking around sport. Oliver Vagnes, who met with me in Copenhagen commented that, sporting bodies have become used to custom designed spaces. He said,

“sport used to be very adaptable and flexible but the mentality of flexibility has been lost”

Across Denmark, the 20 x 40m handball court is a staple that was invented at the start of the 20th Century. Since then, sport participation has developed but sports spaces with handball courts are being replicated and there has been no functional development over the years. Vagnes believes in creating “a relevant facility response rather than senseless reproductions”. This means responding and adapting to change, rather than ignoring it.

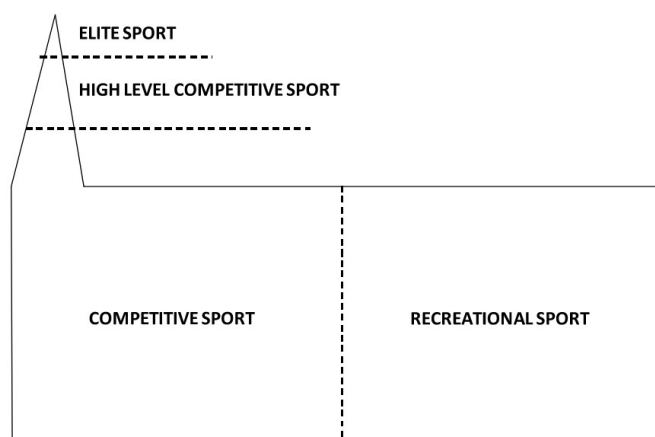


Fig. 1 Church model (Scheerder 2007: 19)



Fig. 2 Render of the Kirke Hyllinge Activity Centre (JaJa Architects)

LOA has run a series of campaigns over the last 15 years to encourage groups to rethink the traditional handball courts.

Campaigns in Denmark have included:

- The Indoor Common –rethinking the sports halls as a place for many sports activities, such as the Prism, shown in Section 1.
- New Life in Old Sports Halls –small refurbishments (maximum 10% extension) such as the Three Leaf Clover Hall in Stepping.
- New Times –New Sports Halls –extensions for existing sports halls such as the Culture and Movement Park, Høng.
- New Activities –intensive use of the 20x40 space such as the Kirke Hyllinge Activity Centre currently under construction.

Every Project is Unique

LOA does not create standard facilities – they want to see experimentation and they recognise that it is part of their success to sometimes fail. In order for organisations to get access to their funds, they must show evidence that they are genuinely coming up with a new approach. Once an idea has been tested, by definition it is no longer innovative, so copying previous projects is not sufficient to receive the funds. New ideas are needed.

In a speech Vanges delivered for the Sports Hall on Time Campaign he reflected *“No building is an island.*

There is always a local environment that you MUST relate to. Both the physical environment, but it’s also about the people who live there and the culture that exists.”

Sustainability Strategies

LOA adhere to the framework of the Reduction Roadmap, as a guideline. The Reduction Roadmap is a non-profit association which works to translate the international climate change agreements into industry-specific targets in Danish construction, based on the latest international research. They are targeting a 96% reduction in carbon and eventually environmentally regenerative projects.

LOA have a clear hierarchy in how they approach new projects.

- No build: optimising existing operations.
- Refurbish and remodel: allowing for new activities to maintain relevance and prolong facility lifespan.
- Extensions: adding facilities with a focus on creating an attractive and accessible building.
- Transformations: changing from one purpose to another.
- Greenfield projects.

This shows us that rethinking how sport occurs is not only good for physical activity, but also for the planet. If we can be more adaptable about how and where we do physical activity, we can use what we have and build less.

8

Bold Urban Planning Urban Mobility Plan

Interview with:

Rosa Carretero Palau
Head of Sports Infrastructures and Facilities
Consell Català de l'Esport

Barcelona's Urban Mobility Plan 2025-2030 (the next phase following the 2013-2024 Plans) radically de-prioritises private vehicles to create more space for public transport, recreation and green space.

In an article published in January 2025 it was announced that Barcelona has set a target for 85% of all journeys to be made using sustainable transport by 2030, building on the current rate of just over 80%. In stark contrast to the carparking provisions for sports projects delivered in Sydney, the new sports facilities I visited in Barcelona did not offer on site parking. I was able to visit them all easily, via public transport.

The Cerdà Plan

Barcelona's commitment to egalitarian mobility, ties in with the city's long history of urban planning that distributes space equally, for all. In the 19th Century, the walled city of Barcelona was densely populated and the health and quality of life for residents was deteriorating. A plan to demolish the city walls and expand the city was proposed. Despite controversy at the time, the Cerdà Plan was implemented. Ildefonso Cerdà designed a grid of streets that united the old city with seven peripheral villages. The grid was comprised of square blocks, each 113m long, with chamfered corners which provided clear sightlines between streets. While the sameness of the blocks was initially criticised, the plan has ultimately been celebrated for its sense of equality and generous streets, which have accommodated future needs.

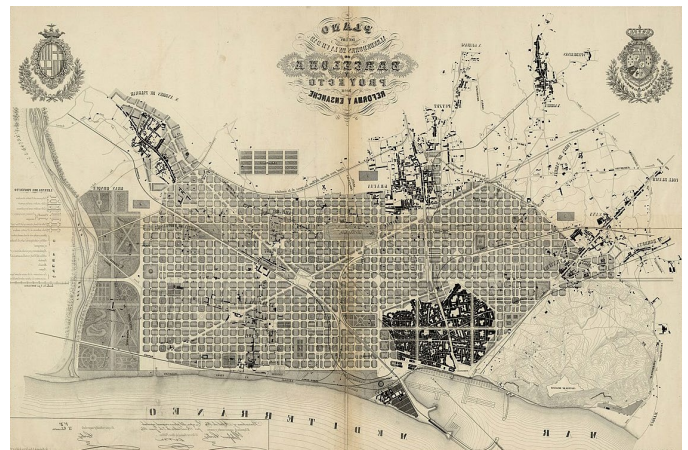


Fig. 1 The Cerdà Plan (Wikipedia)

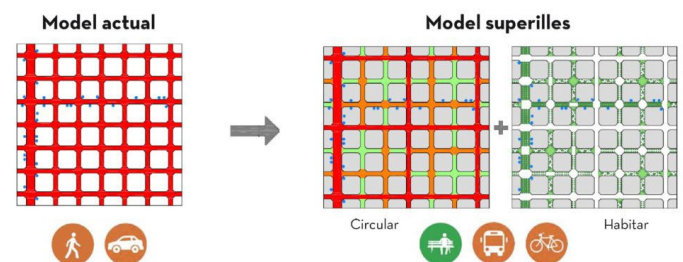


Fig. 2 Barcelona superblocks proposal (VIAC Mobility)



Fig. 3 Urban Mobility Plan (Barcelona Mobility and Transport)



Fig. 4 Informal basketball practice at Parc de les Glòries (Sarah Slattery)

Building upon this historic urban planning model, the City of Barcelona has developed a new model for reorganising the functioning of its streets. Private vehicles have limited access, freeing up more space for active transport, recreation, green space and biodiversity. This plan prioritises space for active lifestyles to promote the wellbeing and health of the population.

I also observed a strong sense of sharing in Barcelona. People on rollerblades utilised the cycle lane and cycle lanes crossed light rail tracks and pedestrian paths. At times I worried that people might collide, yet somehow, everyone was able to co-exist and overlap. The ability to share seemed to be fundamental to the city's culture—as though it was a joy to interact with others, rather than an imposition. A cultural shift towards sharing is essential to embed more movement and play in our cities.

Plaza de les Glòries

At the heart of the City of Barcelona is Les Glòries, the new green lung of the city which has replaced a former ring road. This project, nearly 20 years in the making, demonstrates how a long-term vision and commitment is needed to create change.

The proposal was the winner of a design competition held in 2013 and was designed by the French studio Agence Ter in conjunction with Catalan architect Ana Coello de Llobet.

I visited the recently opened park which offered

opportunities for groups of all ages to be active. Teenagers and young adults played basketball at a series of hoops clustered together, ping pong tables were set up, people walked, cycled and children ran up mounded landscapes. On a sunny day in April the park was buzzing with activity, people of all ages and backgrounds were enjoying the space together.

Urban Planning for Physical Activity

The City of Barcelona is putting planning and frameworks in place that deprioritise car movements to make space for people to move. The impacts will take time to be revealed, but I expect their health system will soon see the benefit of their choice to put physical activity first.

As Carretero Palau poetically explained,

“sport is health and this is the medicine we are taking now”



Fig. 5 A game of bowls beside the footpath in Barcelona (Sarah Slattery)

9

Social Purpose GLL

Interview with:

Tony Wallace
Regional Director
GLL

Greenwich Leisure Limited (GLL) was founded in 1993, as the UK's first leisure service to separate from local government control and to become a charitable social enterprise. I met with Tony Wallace, Regional Director of GLL to discuss their organisation and their combined commitment to commercial efficiency and social purpose. GLL is focused on people, the planet and providing and protecting public services.

GLL was formed in the London borough of Greenwich. Government budget cuts in the early 1990's meant that two leisure centres in the area could no longer continue to operate. Rather than closing the centres, a not-for-profit staff cooperative was established with rate relief support. In the 30 years since then, the organisation has grown into a £300 million business and GLL now manages almost 400 public service facilities across the UK.

Values Driven Business

Their website illustrates the six core values that shape the business, outlined as follows.



Fig. 1 GLL values (GLL)

1. **More than a job** – We want to be the best staff owned organisation in the UK, where people feel valued and want to be actively involved in an organisation that is different.
2. **Respecting the planet** – We are reducing our impact on the environment through actions such as less reliance on fossil fuels and minimising waste; and working closely on joint actions with our local authority partners.
3. **Partner of choice** – We recognise that great performance must be a 'given' in all our partnerships, but it is the quality of our relationships where our difference really comes through, and our capability and willingness to support our partners' broader agendas.
4. **The Better way of doing business** – We are a business for good and embrace the notion that we are a catalyst for change, and for improving the lives and opportunities for people in our communities.
5. **Tackling Health Inequalities** – We can play a key role in improving the health and wellbeing of all in our communities, including those facing economic, health and social inequality.
6. **Customers and communities at our heart** – We are a strong business because we listen and act on customer feedback, engage our communities, and use insight and foresight to improve all we do.



Fig. 2 GLL group fitness class (GLL)

Commitment to Staff

Key to GLL's success is its structure as a staff cooperative society. The majority of staff that work for GLL are eligible to join the society. It costs £25 to join, an affordable amount but enough to demonstrate commitment. Rather than staff automatically belonging to the co-op, they must consciously make the decision to buy in. By owning a stake in the organisation, they are directly invested in its success.

As well as the unique co-op model, GLL chooses to invest in their people in other ways. GLL has committed to paying staff a "living wage" a benchmark set by the Living Wage Foundation. Staff salaries are based on the real cost of living, not the minimum wage. They are also GOLD accredited under the "We Invest in People" framework, a UK 3-year accreditation program. Wallace explained,

"it's more than a job; staff have pride in GLL"

Creating Community Hubs

GLL began with leisure centres, operating under the name "Better". In line with GLL's broader social purpose, it has now diversified into libraries, children's centres and health services often co-located with leisure centres. This co-location of community services creates efficiencies and cost savings in administration and helps bring different groups together.

Partnering with the Health Sector

As set out in GLL's values, partnerships with a range of other organisations are very important, including the health sector. As Wallace pointed out *"How do you put a monetary value on keeping people healthy?"*

Better operates the York Stadium Leisure Complex which includes a community hub. Within this community hub the York and Scarborough Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust operate, delivering a range of specialist outpatient services from this centre.

Better also offers a GP referral program for physical activity called Healthwise. Those referred by a GP can access a low cost 12 week program to manage health conditions like diabetes, hypertension and depression. The program includes an initial one-to-one consultation with a facilitator to create a personalised activity plan and provides access to supervised group sessions, gym facilities, swimming pools, and mainstream fitness classes at the local leisure centre.



Fig. 3 GLL strength training class (GLL)

10 Social Purpose Everton in the Community

Interview with:

Michael Salla
Deputy CEO
Everton in the Community

The sense of belonging and connection that football brings to people in the UK cannot be overstated and it is now being used as a catalyst to improve wellbeing. Everton in the Community (EitC), the Everton FC charity in Liverpool have created a neighbourhood style campus to support and strengthen communities.

EitC is a place-based charity with the majority of its work taking place in the Kirkdale and County wards of Liverpool, which include the most deprived 1% of neighbourhoods nationally. The area has a life expectancy six years less than the national average.

Offering education, skills training, medical support and much more, they are leveraging the “power of the badge” to drive social change. Targeting challenges related to health, employability, anti-social behaviour, crime, exploitation, education, dementia and disability, EitC are supporting those most at risk and most in need in the local community. Salla explained,

“we’ve created a neighbourhood approach where people don’t have to navigate multiple systems – they come through one door and find the support they need”

The Blue Base

We visited the Blue Base, a simple community hall with commercial kitchen and bar, proudly signposted with the Everton badge. The day I visited a group of seniors was participating in a games day, laughing and connecting. Meanwhile, healthy food was being prepared in the kitchen by a group of volunteers including a retired Everton legend. The Blue Base hosts a range of events including financial training sessions, a food pantry and various social events.



Fig. 1 Digital Skills Lab (Everton in the Community)



Fig. 2 Digital Skills Lab (Liverpool Business News)



Fig. 3 Digital Skills Lab (Everton in the Community)

The People's Place

We also had a tour of the People's Place a mental health and wellbeing hub offering a one-stop shop approach to supporting people in the Liverpool City Region. This £2.5million facility, is the first mental health hub to be attached to a Premier League football club and has been presented with various awards for the impact of its programs.

A range of clinical and non-clinical services are available on site, including community groups, GPs, mental health professionals, counsellors, dementia and diabetes clinics and health screening. EitC collaborated with residents, schools, researchers and the NHS to develop this service. It can be slow, costly and intimidating to get access to health services through the NHS and other traditional pathways so the People's Place makes it much more accessible and welcoming.

One program, the BEAT-Breathlessness Community Hub, provides support for individuals suffering from chronic breathlessness. A paper titled "Early Detection of Cardiorespiratory Disease at Everton BEAT-Breathlessness Community Hub" found that the program *"demonstrated an innovative approach to achieve timely diagnosis of heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease through community engagement, using the reach of a Premier League football club to help access people who may not otherwise respond to community health care screening strategies."*

The work of EitC and their partners is a illuminating example of private, public and academic sectors working together with a shared purpose.

The People's Hub

The main street entrance to the campus is known as the People's Hub. This includes meeting, office and classroom space to support the onsite learning offered by EitC. Within this building I also visited their digital skills lab, the first of its kind in the region. It offers young people in the area the opportunity to learn a range of STEM skills and to expand their career aspirations.

Free School and Football College

EitC made history in 2012 when it became the first Premier League Club to be granted government permission to open a free school. It supports young people aged 14-19 who may have struggled to find their place in the formal education system. The power of sport and the club helps them to reengage with education and learning.

Centralising Services around Sport

The concept of centralising so many community services under the banner of a sporting club is an exciting idea. It demonstrates an opportunity for private organisations to drive change by extending their offerings into the education and health sectors to better support vulnerable groups.

CONCLUSION

This report, set out in two sections, has explored what success looks like both at the micro scale of the building through to the macro scale of the system for delivery. The findings in the first and second sections are complementary and when brought together show a path to promote more physical activity and better health. By gathering these case studies and frameworks together, this report seeks to accelerate Australia's adoption of new models for physical activity in the built environment.

The project case studies reveal an important building typology for Australia – facilities and public spaces dedicated, not to organised sport but to play, informal movement and recreation. The twelve projects illustrate a snapshot of possible opportunities – adaptive reuse, temporary facilities, co-location of community functions, activation of infrastructure and streetscapes for play and movement. The briefs for these projects did not simply address the shortfall of sports courts in a region, they were highly specific and customised to the needs and interests of their local communities. They include spaces for free play and position places for physical activity as environments to learn new skills, to develop autonomy, to meet others and to socialise. They are flexible and most importantly, they are fun, for people of every age.

The ten case studies of the systems and frameworks for delivering sports infrastructure remind us that successful built outcomes are never created in a vacuum. The funding pathways, government and social structures, operational models, access to research and appetite for innovation all drive the development of these project briefs. Local governments in Australia are under increasing scrutiny to demonstrate “value

for money” in their sporting developments and that leads to efficiency driven thinking. Spaces typically need to be clearly defined, acoustically separated and be access and security controlled. This approach prohibits some of the most valuable spaces that we could offer – spaces for undefined activity – to climb, to bounce, to stretch and to move.

This research demonstrates what an important role those designing the built environment can play in promoting rates of physical activity in Australia. Architects and urban planners are in a great position to promote physical activity with every design decision. Removing cars to prioritise active transport, including more play space in the public domain, building projects that are not formally programmed but embrace the in-between, collaborating with the research sector – these can all help our communities get active.

The promotion of physical activity in the built environment is not being fully addressed, partly because it falls between the health sector and the sport sector, with neither sector holding full responsibility. This report offers architectural solutions to help bridge that gap.

We need to recognise physical activity in its own right and carve out more space for play and recreation in the built environment. There are many excellent initiatives already underway in Australia but further partnerships and collaborations which draw from the ideas explored in this report are needed.

So, let's get moving!

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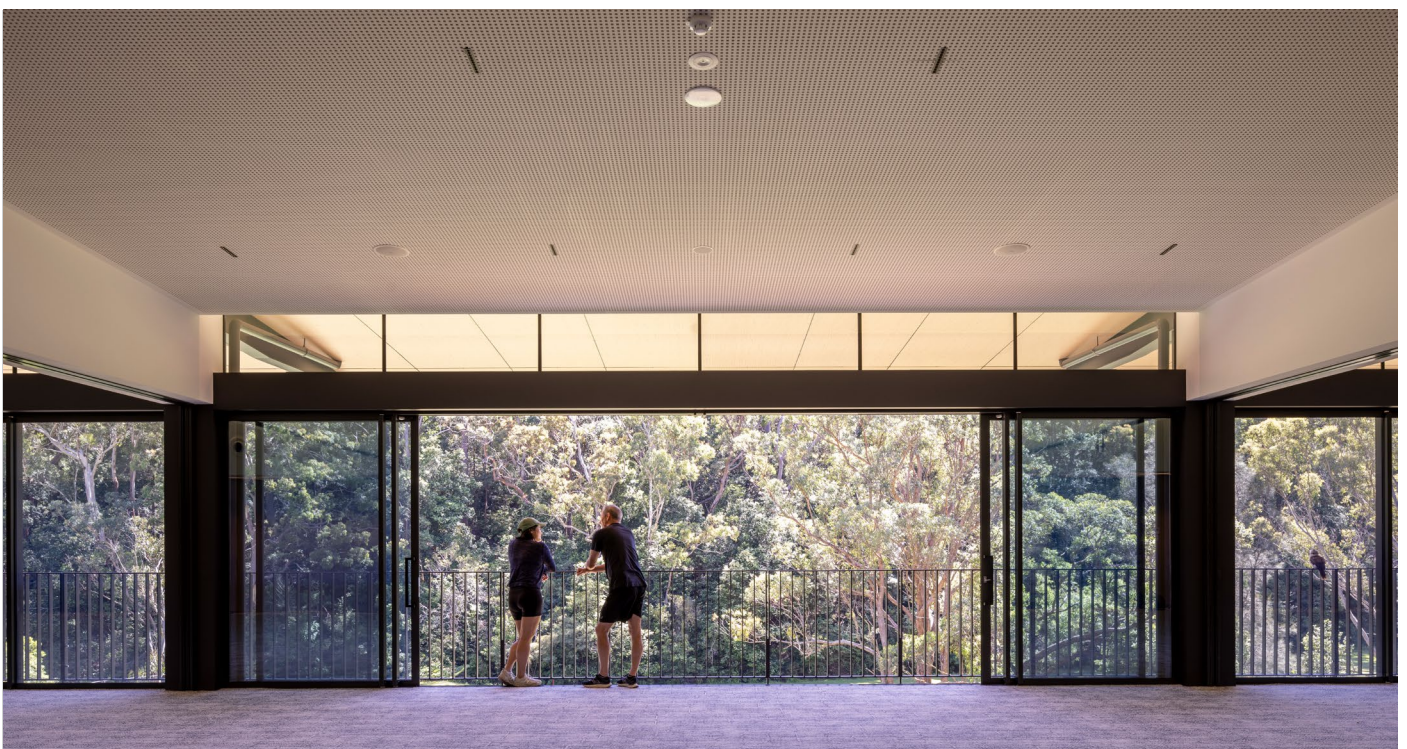


Fig. 1 Galuwa Recreation Centre (Brett Boardman for AJC Architects)

IMAGE CREDITS AND REFERENCES

IMAGE CREDITS

1. F51

Fig.1 (p.8), Fig.2-3 (p.9)

Source: Photograph from Hollaway Studio website

<https://www.hollawaystudio.co.uk/projects/f51-folkestone-skatepark/>

Fig.4 (p.9)

Source: Photograph by Sarah Slattery

2. Hebburn Central

Fig.1-2 (p.10), Fig.3,5 (p.11)

Source: Photographs from Faulkner Browns website

<https://faulknerbrowns.com/projects/hebburn-central>

Fig.4 (p.11)

Source: Photograph from the Dezeen website

<https://www.dezeen.com/2015/10/09/faulknerbrowns-architects-hebburn-central-community-centre-library-newcastle-rusted-steel/>

3. Temporary Sports Hall

Fig.2 (p.12), Fig.3 (p.13)

Source: Photographs by Yohan Zerdoun for Itten+Brechbuhl AG

Fig.1 (p.12)

Source: Plan by Itten+Brechbuhl AG

<https://www.ittenbrechbuehl.ch/en/projects/temporary-sports-hall-gloriarank/>

4. Skillspark

Fig.1 (p.14), Fig.2-3 (p.15)

Source: Photographs by Sarah Slattery

5. Pavello Illa

Fig.1-2 (p.16), Fig.3-5 (p.17)

Source: Renders, section and axonometric view from Anna Noguera Architects website

<https://annanoguera.com/proyecto/pavello-illa/>

6. Camp del Ferro

Fig.1 (p.18), Fig.4 (p.19)

Source: Photographs from AIA website

<https://www.aia.cat/en/projectes-arquitectura/equipament-esportiu-camp-del-ferro/>

Fig.2 (p.19)

Source: Photograph by José Hevia from Guiding Architects Barcelona website

<https://www.gabarcelona.com/blog/brick-award-insightours-camp-del-ferro-sports-centre-barcelona/>

Fig.3-4 (p.19)

Source: Photograph by José Hevia, section by AIA, Dezeen website

<https://www.dezeen.com/2021/01/23/camp-del-ferro-sports-centre-barcelona-bricks/#/>

7. GAME Streetmekka

Fig.1 (p.20)

Source: Photograph by Rasmus Hjortshøj for JaJa Architects

<https://jaja.archi/project/streetmekka/>

Fig.2-3 (p.21)

Source: Photographs by Sarah Slattery

8. Superkilen

Fig.1 (p.22)

Source: Photograph by Jens Linhe for BIG

<https://big.dk/projects/superkilen-1621>

Fig.2 (p.23)

Source: Photograph by Iwan Baan for BIG

<https://big.dk/projects/superkilen-1621>

Fig.3 (p.23)

Source: Torben Eskerod from SUPERFLEX website

<https://www.superflex.net/works/superkilen>

Fig.4 (p.23)

Source: Photograph by Torben Eskerod for BIG

<https://big.dk/projects/superkilen-1621>

9. KU.BE House

Fig.1 (p.24)

Source: Axonometric diagrams by ADEPT

<https://adept.dk/project/ku-be>

Fig.2-3 (p.25)

Source: Photographs by Adam Mørk for ADEPT

<https://adept.dk/project/ku-be>

10. Park N Play

Fig.1 (p.26)

Source: Building elevation by JaJa Architects

Fig. 2 (p. 26), Fig. 4 & 6 (p.27)

Source: Rasmus Hjortshøj for JaJa Architects

<https://jaja.archi/project/konditaget-luders/>

Fig. 5 (p.27)

Source: Diagram by JaJa Architects

<https://jaja.archi/jaja-mobility-pyramid/>

11. Athletics Exploratorium

Fig.1-2 (p.28), Fig.3 (p.29)

Source: Photographs by Rune Johansen for Keingart – Space Activators

<https://keingart.com/portfolio/athletics-exploratorium/>

12. The Prism

Fig.1 (p.30)

Source: Axonometric diagram from HIC website

<https://hicarquitectura.com/2019/04/brandlhuber-dorte-mandrup-architekter-crystal/>

Fig 2,3,5 (p.31)

Source: Photographs by Torben Eskerod from Dorte Mandrup website

<https://dortemandrup.dk/work/crystal-denmark>

Fig.4 (p.31)

Source: Photograph from SUBTILITAS website

<https://www.subtilitas.site/post/139455677669/dorte-mandrup-arno-brandlhuber-sports-and>

Key Findings

Fig.1 (p.32)

Source: Photograph by Iwan Baan for BIG

<https://big.dk/projects/superkilen-1621>

1. Sport England

Fig.1 (p.36)

Social value of sport and physical activity in England, p.6

Source: Image from Sport England website

<https://www.sportengland.org/news-and-inspiration/whats-social-value-sport-your-area>

Fig 2 (p.37)

Social value of sport and physical activity interactive map

Source: image from Sport England website

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Fig.3 (p.37)

Active Design Framework

Source: image from Sport England website

<https://www.sportengland.org/guidance-and-support/facilities-and-planning/design-and-cost-guidance/active-design>

2. The Knowledge Centre

Fig.1 (p.38)

Source: Hoyng, J, Scholte, D, 2021, Physical Activity Friendly Environment Model, p.2

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Fig 2-3 (p.39)

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Fig.1 (p.40)

Source: Adapted from Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). The ecology of human development. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

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Fig 2 (p.41)

Source: Ridgers, Stratton, Liverpool Sporting Playground Project, p.2

4. Southern Denmark University

Fig.1 (p.42)

Source: Photograph by Simon Klein Knudsen for the Research Unit for Active Living

Fig.2 (p.43)

Source: Image from Playscapes - City Playground Data Leaderboard

<https://playgroundresearch.org/playscapes/>

5. Liverpool Active City | Global Active Cities

Fig.1 (p.45)

Source: Photograph by Sarah Slattery

6. The Catalan Plan

Fig.1 (p.47)

Source: Image from 3aPIEC Planning sports facilities, p.5

7. The Danish Foundation for Culture and Sports Facilities

Fig.1 (p.48)

Source: Scheerder (2007: 19)

Fig.2 (p.49)

Source: Render by JaJa Architects

<https://jaja.archi/project/kirke-hyllinge-activity-center/>

8. Urban Mobility Plan

Fig.1 (p.50)

Source: Image from Wikipedia, The Cerdá Plan website

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cerd%C3%A1_Plan#:~:text=The%20Cerd%C3%A0%20Plan%20was%20a,the%20land%20owners%20and%20speculation.

Fig.2 (p.50)

Source: Image from VIAC Mobility website

<https://vaicmobility.com/en/projecte/superblocks-barcelona-2nd-phase/>

Fig.3 (p.50)

Source: Image from the Barcelona Mobility and Transport website

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Fig.4-5 (p.51)

Source: Photographs by Sarah Slattery

9. GLL

Fig.1 (p.52)

Source: Image from GLL website

<https://www.gll.org/about-us/purpose-and-values>

Fig.2 (p.53)

Source: Photographs from GLL

10. Everton in the Community

Fig.1 (p.54), Fig.3 (p.55)

Source: Photographs from Everton in the Community website

<https://stories.evertonfc.com/eitc-map/index.html>

Fig.2 (p.54)

Source: Photographs from Liverpool Business News website

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Acknowledgements

Fig.1 (p.59)

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Fig.1 (p.63)

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



I am a Studio Lead, Design at AJC Architects with diverse architectural experience gained in Australia and the US – from cultural and public projects to bespoke private residences.

Over the last seven years, I have been leading the design for Galuwa Recreation Centre an \$81M multiuse sports and community facility for Lane Cove Council. Seeing this project through from inception to completion has taught me a huge amount about the challenges involved in delivering sporting infrastructure for local government. It has also galvanised my passion for this typology.

During my time at AJC I have led several projects for PCYC NSW, an organisation committed to empowering young people to reach their potential. Working on these facilities in regional areas has shaped my understanding of the impact community sport can have to the lives of young people in Australia.

Beyond project work, I am a Director on the Board of IAKS ANZ, an organisation committed to developing inclusive, sustainable, and high-quality sports and leisure facilities. IAKS has a focus on knowledge sharing to bring communities together and inspire movement across the globe.

Undertaking this research has expanded my understanding of physical activity in the built environment and I look forward to continuing to learn and share ideas to help more people get active.

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