

Appendix to ARP Blog 5: Focus Group Discussion Part 1 Transcript

Date: 17th November 2025

Discussion Duration: 19:27

Participants: 6 first-year BA Architecture students (anonymised as Student 1-6) and researcher, Kuljeet Sibia

Activity: Group debate on inclusive design in public spaces, focusing on a hypothetical scenario involving a new public park.

Note: This transcript has been transcribed with the help of AI tools and edited by the researcher. Further details and reflections of this process are captured on the blog.

Discussion Transcript

Researcher: Okay, right, that's recorded. I'm just going to ask you to enunciate. So I'm going to put it down there and just chat. Should a new government funded five million pound public park prioritise inclusive features for groups who face barriers in accessing public spaces, such as girls, disabled people, LGBTQ plus communities, the elderly and neurodiverse users, even if it reduces spaces for general recreational uses? The previous plan was for the park to deliver a new basketball court and running track for local community groups who have been advocating and campaigning for several years. Discuss for or against alternative as you wish.

Student 4: I think it can be both. If designed consciously and like with all these in mind, like there can be a compromise, I think, to still have sport as a focus, maybe not in the form of a basketball court, but still have sport as part of the design and still accessible by everyone.

Student 6: I agree. I think there's ways that you can think about these people in the previous proposal, but maybe, as you said, there needs to be a bit of compromise in the size of things or the quality to which it's built. Maybe if we need to have some more spaces for these people to also be able to use.

Student 3: I think you have to be quite careful with a situation like this where if the community groups have been campaigning for things that they believe to be necessary in the area, I think you risk kind of pinning people in a community against each other if the people who have been advocating for a new basketball court and running track end up getting an investment and then they don't feel that the money

has been going to where they were campaigning for it to go. They might direct their anger towards the people who were meant to be being serviced by the area, which first of all might just make it not usable for those communities if they don't feel like the space that's been created for them is being appreciated. But also, that's not the issue. The space for these people being created is not the issue, but I think it definitely could easily be seen that these people are being treated at a higher, being more important than the other people in the same community. I think you can definitely do both, but I think you have to be careful with where the money comes from and at what point this happens. If that's the part that they were campaigning for for these facilities, and then once they get the money, the money is redirected in a different way, I think that would definitely divide a group of people.

Student 2: I feel like they're designing the wrong way. I feel like prioritising inclusive design, they should be looking at it in a realistic way. It should be, obviously the plan is to, the sort of plan was for them to deliver a park. This feels like they're kind of prioritising these groups for, like we said last session, some architecture firms, they want praise. It seems like they're trying to do this instead. I think the sort of thinking should be, okay, we're going to design this basketball court. We're going to design this running track for the local community groups. At the same time, how can we incorporate inclusive design into this to make sure that everyone in the community can use it? Also, I feel like there should be some research done into how many of these sort of inclusive groups, the groups that would benefit from inclusive design, how much of that is concentrated in the local community. If it's such a low percentage of people, someone who might not even utilise the park, maybe that isn't necessary. But if it's an area where there are a lot of elderly people, there's like the LGBT community is perhaps a bit more concentrated in that area than obviously adding inclusive design into the basketball court, into the running track, would be a good idea. But if it's unnecessary, I don't think it should be included, in my opinion.

Student 5: I think it's just instead of how do we prioritise, how do we level the playing field? There's more or less, it kind of answers its own question in a sense that should we do this, even if it does this as a result, obviously the answer would be no. But there's a way you can go about it to make it so that you can integrate designs that can go about solving a problem or issue like this. I don't think it's necessarily, do we prioritise? How do we kind of make these people feel more catered to? How do we cater to everyone is a better approach, I think.

Student 1: I think I'm agreeing on that statement where it shouldn't be that we have to look into the background of the community for specifically what we look for, inclusivity within the certain sectors. It shouldn't be that we look for if the area has more LGBTQ plus people there. It should just be in general because then if you are creating these plans to only include the certain communities that are already there, then it's segregating even more and diversifying people even more. If you have that place specifically designed for the people that are already there, that makes sense. It's more like a reflection of what is there now, whereas in the future that might change.

Student 3: And I also think you're not at risk of kind of advancing an issue. Of course, places for communities like the LGBT plus community, you need safe spaces. But I think if the only safe spaces for those communities are completely separate from everything else, I think that may be reductive if the only way, that's not the only way that you can have inclusive design is for it to be a separate space. Because if you're that user and you feel you can only go to certain places to be included, that's not the everyday experience. You wouldn't feel necessarily appreciated in that way or considered as much.

Student 6: Yeah, I agree. I think if you separate it like that from just design in general, then you're at risk of giving these spaces a certain narrative instead of just, I mean, 50% of the population, for example, are women or girls. So if you're not designing everything to cater to the other kinds of people, the people who don't fit into the sort of able-bodied and all of those sorts of terms, then these places are at the end of the day. If you're only catering to a very small group of people, I think a lot of people have sort of hidden disabilities. I think you don't know who's going to use that space, and I think it's just a much safer way to do it if you just consider all of the potential users and then give it the same weighting as you would to the visual aesthetics of it.

Researcher: Okay. Now, if I came in, if I was the architect and I said, we've been looking at the proposal of a basketball court and a running track, and we know exactly what a basketball court looks like. It's a court, it's got some sort of boundary treatment to it. A running track goes around the edges of it. The girls and the disabled people and the members of the LGBT plus community and the elderly people that we spoke to particularly have told us that they're not happy with a basketball court because historically basketball courts are places where boys and men congregate and colonise and take over. We've looked at basketball courts that

have a duality of use, but we're still finding that they feel safer to take ownership of them. And cities have never been designed for women, never been designed for women and girls and their understanding and their experience in mind. So we want to be more radical with our approach because we actually don't think it's radical. We want to do something that prioritises people who have never been prioritised, just like we've prioritised everybody else. And if we don't do this now, then we're not going to be able to provide something. We're not certain that we're going to be able to provide something that meets their needs as well as meeting a basketball court and a running track. And in the local area, we've had a lot of concern around harassment in public spaces across the year and across the day. And before something more drastic happens, we want to ensure that the public space that we're delivering can avoid that through design. What are your reflections on that?

Student 5: There isn't one way about these things through design. I feel like it's up to the architect involved to kind of choose the approach that they want to take. And from a bit more context that you've given us, it's like if we were opposed to the idea of it being for one group of people only, we've kind of broadened our perspective on that in the sense that, okay, we've looked at history and it shows and proves that over time, things have been more to one group than another. How do we reverse the roles? How do we now give it to the other group who have been more deprived of that? And I think that approach is answering to this question. You should go through with that. If that's the approach you're wanting to take and this is the context and thought behind it, then I think it makes sense to, yeah, absolutely. Because in comparison to all the other basketball courts that appeal to the other group, I think this is a different approach that can maybe even bring both groups together, maybe.

Researcher: Different opinion or same opinion on that?

Student 3: I think there definitely needs to be a dialogue between the community groups because I would like to hope that the community groups are obviously not advocating for a violent space. And I think if they don't have an understanding of that, depending on who's in the groups and their opinions, I think a reasonable person would be able to understand why you would have the motivation to change the design from the standard park design. And I think there is a reasonable way to go about it. I think as an architect or as a designer, I just think you don't want to be putting yourself on a pedestal and having that reflect negatively on the community if they feel that you're acting in a way where you think that you know better without any kind of communication between both parties. It would not service the

community if they're not involved in the design, especially if they've been advocating for it.

Student 2: Yeah, I agree to an extent about knowing what the people want. I think if you're making the space, the local community would have these kind of minority groups inside already. There's probably an intersection where there's people in the local community who are girls, who are disabled people, etc. So instead of deciding what you think everyone wants, maybe you should go and talk to people who have advocated for this and what they want out of this basketball court. And then also ask them in general questions about your concerns about the safety of this area and also maybe look at the demographic of those local community groups. Are they perhaps football groups or running track groups who are majority men? In that case, you are not making a community park. You're making a men's park. So you have to be careful on who you're catering for. If it's that case that I said that most of these groups are male-dominated sports groups, then obviously that's not a community. You have to talk to every single demographic in that area to see what they want out of that park.

Student 1: I just think, again, the point of you don't have to look into the majority in the specific area because it reflects back onto the fact that it's reductive. Within a basketball court or a sports group just in general, it's less about the architect building a basketball court. It's more about the program that's run there. So it's more about the club itself rather than you building the facility for the club. You can build a basketball court and then you can, with that sports club, make sure that they are being inclusive within that space because I feel like designing a basketball court is very limited. You can't really change it that much due to the game. And then the same with a running track. They've all got the similar design features. It's more about the community itself. Once you've made, put the facility in place that they organise themselves to be inclusive rather than you asking how you are going to design it to be inclusive.

Student 2: I think that the idea of just making something and then just allowing people to make it inclusive could work. But then at the same time, there are some things that you can change about a basketball court that could cater to certain people. So like adjustable hoop heights. For example, women are shorter. We've seen throughout history how largely commercially used products such as cars aren't made for women's bodies. So they're more at risk for injuries during car accidents because their spines don't align with the seats because they're shorter or

weigh less and because of those things. There are many things that you can change within a park to make things more accessible, to make things more inclusive towards women or like disabled groups or maybe even like the sort of instructions about basketball itself or the running tracks. They have these marks on the floor. Sometimes these are hard to understand for certain ability groups. Like maybe like neurodiverse people may find it difficult to understand. Like the sort of markings on the area. If you're not someone who plays basketball very often, even if you're not neurodiverse, if you're not someone who plays basketball very often, it might be confusing maybe labelling those markings on the ground. Just those small things. It can make some of space seem completely different and more welcoming. So it's very generalised. It's a bit of a generalisation to say that you can just make the space and then expect people to just come in and be inclusive because people aren't inclusive even in real life. People are very self-centred. Even if you try to say I'm very empathetic and I think about other people, no, you are self-centred no matter how you think about it. Because at the end of the day, when you design something, the first person that you're designing for in your head is someone who is kind of like you, like in the same ability group, in the same gender. It's very unconscious. It's very subconscious. So I think you have to put some thought into it, into the design, if you understand what I mean.

Researcher: Thank you very much.

End of transcript