

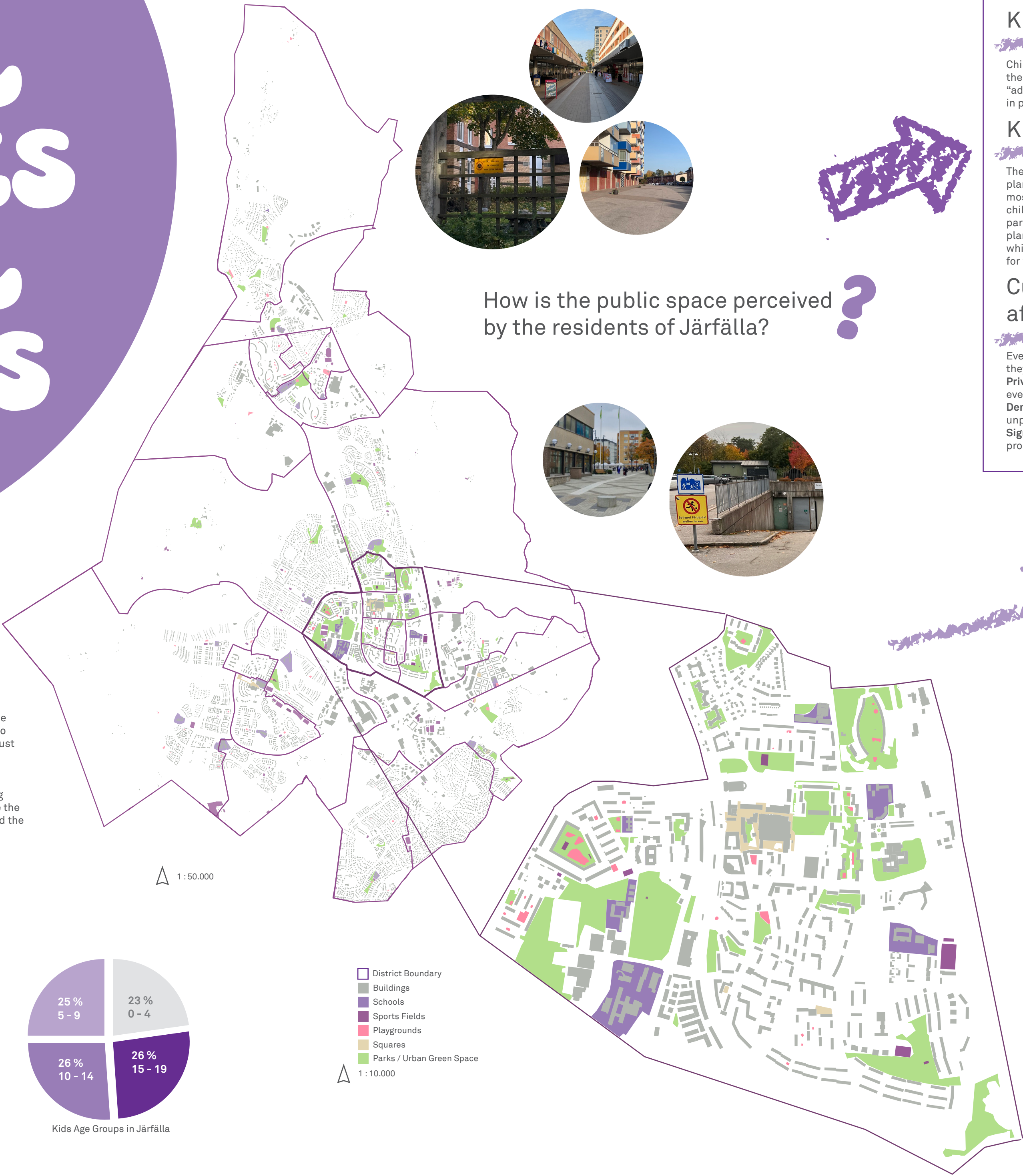
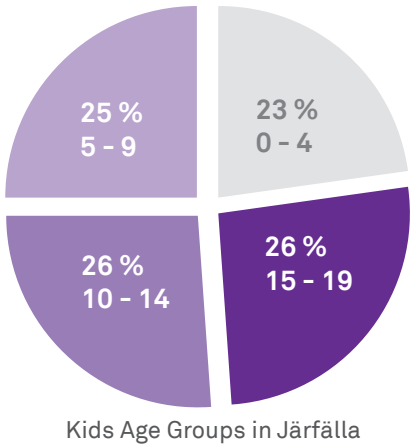
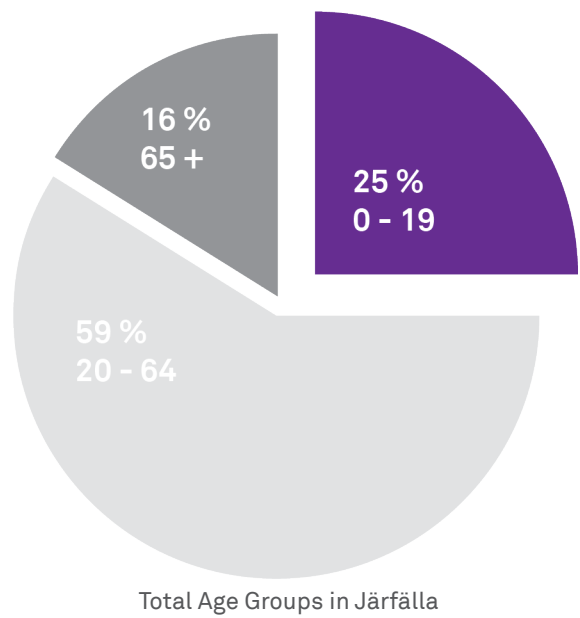
EQUAL SPACES EQUAL VOICES

Kids as Today's Citizens

The underrepresented 25 %

We often say that children are the future, but they are also the citizens of today. As planners, we always have to take this into account. Kids and Youth need their own space and security, just as much as the adults need theirs.

In public space kids and youth are underrepresented, both in physical space and planning practices. As children and young people represent 25% of the population in Järfälla, they have the need and the right to their own, accessible public spaces, and the right of being equal citizens and participants in urban space.



Kids & Youth as “Future” Citizens

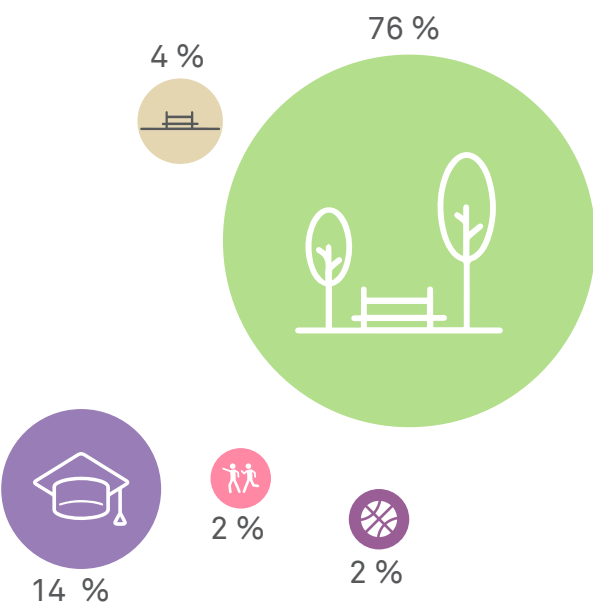
Children as “future” citizens is prevalent in planning discourse and comes from the idea that childhood is an innocent state, where children should not take on “adult responsibilities”. This notion is used to neglect children from participating in planning processes.

Kids & Youth in the Planning Process

There are examples of where kids and youth are allowed to engage in questions of planning, but the participatory processes which engage with kids and youth are most often resulting in mere consultation rather than actual participation. When children are allowed to engage, it is most often older children that are allowed to participate since they are deemed more knowledgeable about the complexity of planning. Kids and youth are however experts in their realities as being children, which is missed when planners and politicians take on the role as being agents for what children want and need.

Current Planning Practices affecting Childrens' Spaces

Even though children are restricted from engaging with planning questions, they are to a high extent affected by current planning practices and ideals. **Privatisation**, where yards and other areas are restricted for being used by everyone, affecting how kids and youth can move freely in their surroundings. **Densification**, affecting areas previously used by children and other groups for unplanned activities, close to their everyday spaces such as schools. **Sign prohibiting children from physical activities**, such as signs prohibiting ballplay.



How much public space is planned for kids & youth?

Of the 52 playgrounds in Järfälla municipality, 48 are aimed towards younger kids, leaving only 4 playgrounds planned for older children. Apart from that, Järfälla municipality argues that parks offer activities and spaces for older kids and youth, such as gravel fields, big lawns, ice skate rinks, as well as basketball courts and some skateboard equipment.

Older children in particular, who make up 13% of the total population, are underrepresented in Järfälla's public spaces, as most of the public spaces created and designed for children are intended for the younger ones.

This need should be highlighted in the context that current planning practice takes away spaces where children and young people spend time.

We identified that in the Jakobsberg and Söderhöjden focus area, 18% of public space is planned for children, including playgrounds, schools and sports fields. Squares and parks take up 82% of the public space and are not specifically planned for children and young people.

Around 7% of public spaces for children are missing, which equals 39.000 squaremeters (around 3.5 football fields).

How do Kids & Youth imagine their own public space ?

To get the perspective on public spaces from the kids and youth directly and to find out how they imagine their own public space, we decided to have a visit at a youth center in Jakobsberg. During the visit, the kids had the opportunity to express their opinions on different places, both in Järfälla and places around the world. The kids expressed their liking for pictures showing sport-related activity and expressed their dislike towards areas where traffic had an advantage over pedestrians.

This gave us insights into how kids in our focus group feel about different surroundings. The group also conducted an activity where they did collages of pictures that would represent a public space that they would like to have in Jakobsberg.

Places that the kids liked and used in their collages were activity-based spaces and places to hang out, including an outdoor dancing facility, alternative seating spaces like 'group swings' and sports facilities.

This visit worked as a foundation for our vision, which aims to give a utopian space that reflects the target group's needs. It is also a main part of the project concept, where it serves as an example of a way to engage kids and youth in the planning process through participation.

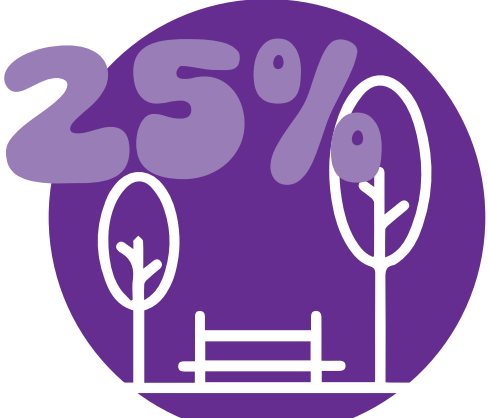


25% Representation

We argue that kids and youth should be represented in 25% of public space since the group represents 25% of the population of Järfälla.

Kids and youth should feel represented in their everyday surroundings and be able to make and design their own spaces in public. This need for more representation in public space should be highlighted in the context that current planning practices are taking away spaces where kids and youth are present.

To ensure that public space in Järfälla meets the needs of children and youth, several strategies can be implemented. Policies and zoning laws can be introduced that prioritise children and youth's spaces within urban development, based on the 25% representation principle. By rethinking public spaces and prioritising the needs of children and youth, vibrant and inclusive communities can be created in which kids and youth are not only represented but also actively engaged in shaping their environment.



Participation

We argue for actual participation of kids and youth in the planning process. The 25% of public spaces for kids and youth proposed should also be planned together with this group, otherwise no structural change will happen in the planning process for children-specific places. This process should include placemaking strategies through a process of engagement to incorporate the preferences of kids and youth into urban public spaces. Kids and youth over the age of ten should be especially considered in the process since they are the most underrepresented in public spaces currently.

These processes should also incorporate local knowledge, with NGOs and youth centers being part of consultation with public officials. To further establish kids and youth as competent actors in public processes and spaces, steering away from the notion of the group as “future” citizens, a kids and youth parliament should be instituted to engage the group in questions of political activity. This would give them opportunities to influence their local areas and propose their needs and wants in an arena where they are seriously heard.

& Accessibility

We argue that kids and youths should have equal access to places in the neighborhood, to be able to independently move between their own spaces safely.

Children growing up in densely populated areas tend to find traffic to be a challenging aspect of their lives. They need free and equal access to their own spaces, to hang out or to be active. Play should be an experience available everywhere, easily accessible. By redefining neighbourhoods with clear boundaries and better connectivity, cities can foster an environment where children can play and explore freely, enhancing their sense of independence within their community. By giving access to this group, we can address inequalities in urban environments. This means that planning for kids and youth should be based on reclaiming also the streets for other uses, for example, through pedestrianizing spaces and for urban play streets, with child-friendly streetscape as a part of child-friendly environments.

