



Queer Perspectives on Public Space

An evidence base informing LGBTQIA+ inclusion in the built environment

UNIVERSITY OF
WESTMINSTER

ARUP

We asked over 400 LGBTQIA+ people and allies what inclusive space meant to them. These are their perspectives:

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Glossary

Queer

Queer is an adjective and identity that typically means not exclusively heterosexual. Once a pejorative term, Queer has been reclaimed by some. However, we recognise that not every LGBT+ person identifies as Queer and some may find it still offensive.

Queering

Queering is not just about rethinking how public space can be made more inclusive for gender and sexual orientation non-conforming people, but for all those groups who currently feel excluded or threatened in such spaces ([Queering Public Space](#)).

LGBTQIA+ and LGBTQ+

We refer to the diverse collective range of sexual and gender minority identities as the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer, Intersex, Asexual and all other identities not covered where it is appropriate to do so (+).

However due to limitations in the data on responses from Intersex and Ace (asexual and / or aromantic) people, we do not consider the data to be representative of the experiences from people of that community. So when referring to the data, we use the LGBTQ+ acronym. More information can be found in the limitations section.

Data comparisons

Where it is appropriate to do so, we differentiate responses based on groupings. For example, sometimes we separate LGBTQ+ and T. Where comparisons are made with other data sources, we reflect the categories as defined in the source. For example where we reference the UK census, we use LGB.

Data disclaimer

On occasion throughout the document, the data may not add up to 100%. This may be either due to a rounding discrepancy, respondents skipping questions, or respondents giving more than one answer to a question. Where percentage value is less than 2%, it is not illustrated on charts.

Introduction

Queer Perspectives on Public Space aims to address the data gap on LGBTQIA+ people's experiences within public space by finding out what feels safe, comfortable and inclusive.

What is the challenge we are addressing?

Too many people feel that public space is not for them. As explored in [Queering Public Space](#) this is acutely felt by LGBTQIA+ communities across the globe.

Our previous research found that due to the way public spaces have traditionally been designed, feelings of exclusion, danger and vulnerability are all-too-familiar experiences for LGBTQIA+ people. However, there was a lack of data to inform how to address this.

Alongside **Dr Pippa Catterall (University of Westminster)**, we set out to bridge this gap and improve our understanding of these experiences further, to help create inclusive and welcoming spaces for the intersectionally diverse communities that we live amongst.

How did we do it?

We co-created a dataset with other LGBTQIA+ people based on their perceptions of inclusion, safety and belonging in public space. We worked with Dr Pippa Catterall and our global Arup Queering Public Space network to design an online experiential survey that could be filled out by anyone, anywhere in the world, consisting of two parts:

- Asking about perceptions of safe and inclusive spaces, and preferences of public space
- Placing respondents in one of six 360° environments where they could listen and pan around a public space and comment on aspects they liked and disliked.

We then disseminated the survey globally, through our existing networks and partnerships as well as reaching out to community groups and organisations around the world.

Over the course of three months, we received a total of 407 responses.

The survey was hosted on Virtual Engage, an online consultation platform. All questions were optional and complied with GDPR and Arup's internal data privacy policies.

We conducted a mixed mode analysis of the data. Quantitative responses were analysed using the descriptive statistic methodology, and qualitative responses were studied through an iterative process of inductive coding.

Through workshops with academic research partners, along with knowledge generated from the [2021 Queering Public Space research](#), we were able to consolidate our findings into key themes.

Accessibility

This document uses several charts and diagrams to graphically represent data. If you need this information in an alternative format, please get in touch at QueeringPublicSpace@arup.com.

Demographics

Who answered?

Gender & sexuality

Gender representation is balanced for men and women, with 44% of respondents identifying as men 42% as women, with 14% identifying as non-binary / gender fluid.

The largest demographic based on sexuality or romantic attraction are 'gay or lesbian' at 46%. In total, approximately 80% of respondents identified as LGBTQIA+.

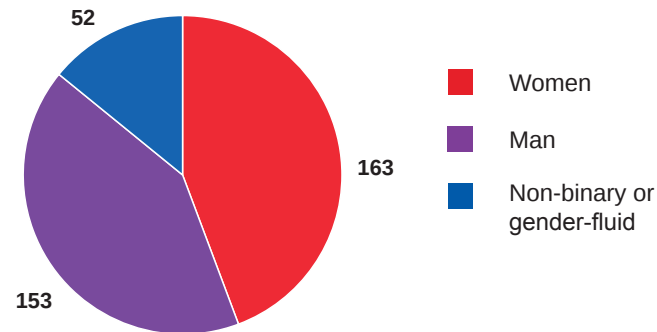
12%

Identify as transgender

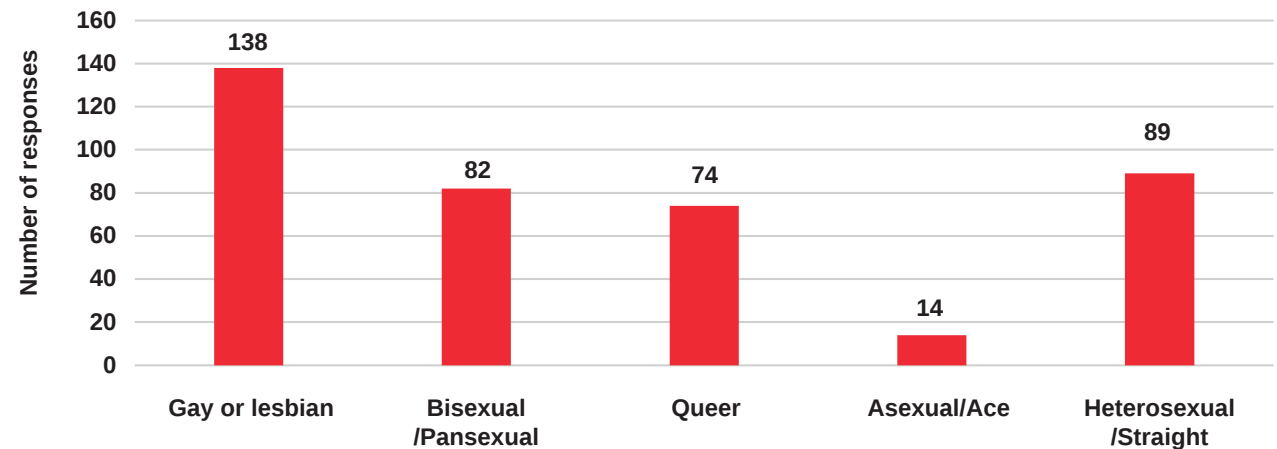
2%

Identify as intersex

Gender distribution of survey respondents



Sexual / romantic attraction of survey respondents

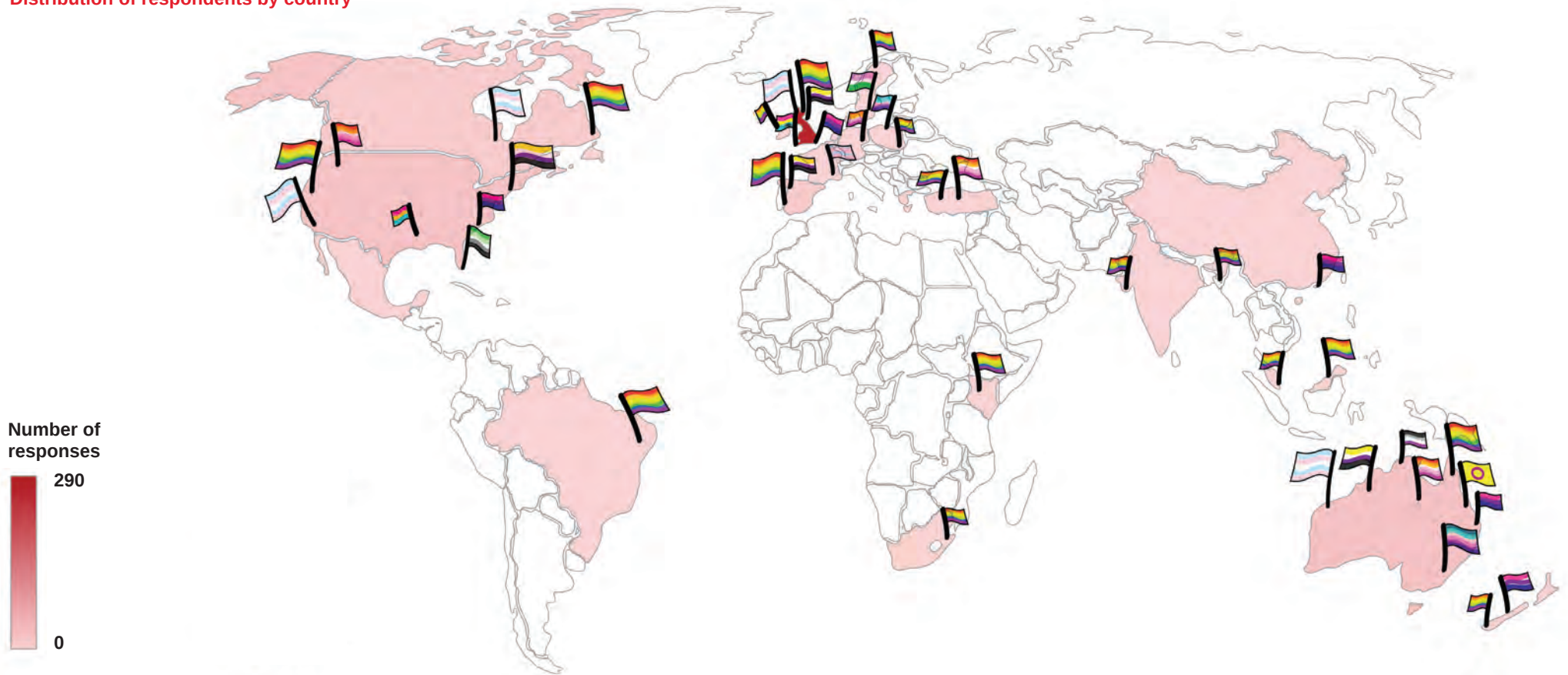


Who answered?

Location

Despite receiving responses from across the globe, 70% of responses were from the UK, where the research was conducted from. This may reduce the applicability of findings to non-western cultures and will be explored in future phases.

Distribution of respondents by country



Demographics

Who answered?

Age

Compared to the UK average, the survey overrepresents people within the 25-66 age range while underrepresenting younger (16-24) people.

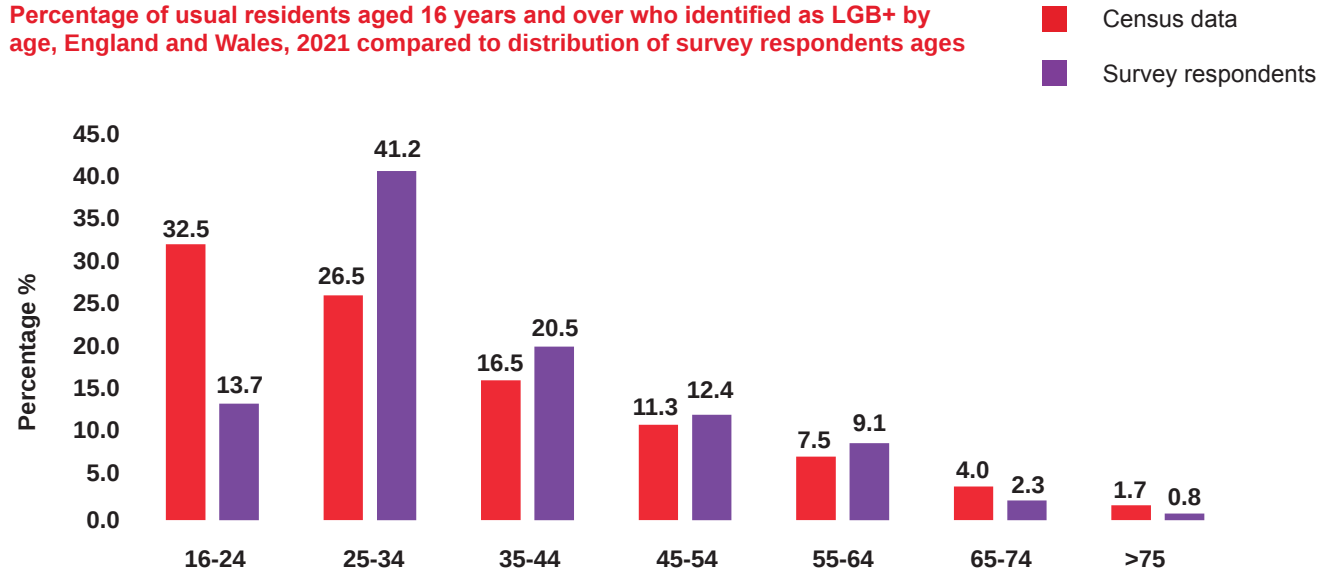
31%

Identified as disabled or having a long term health condition

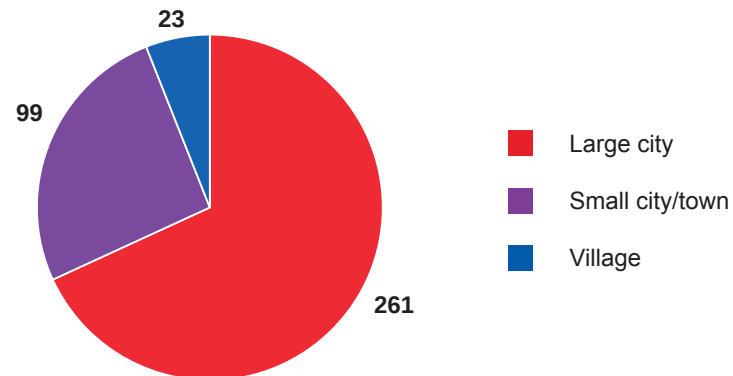
22%

Identified as being part of a racially marginalised group within their location

Percentage of usual residents aged 16 years and over who identified as LGB+ by age, England and Wales, 2021 compared to distribution of survey respondents ages



Area of residence of survey respondents



Demographics

Who answered?

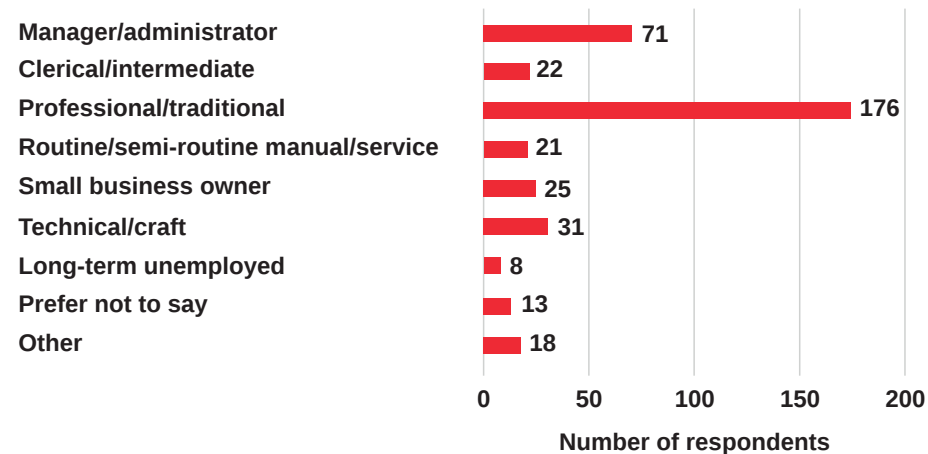
Class

We asked about the occupation of the main household earner when the respondent was aged 14 as a way of evaluating differences in class or socio-economic background. 46% of respondents' came from a similar socio-economic background, where the main household earner held a professional or traditional occupation when respondents were aged 14. This would imply that survey results better reflect the perceptions of those from middle-class backgrounds.

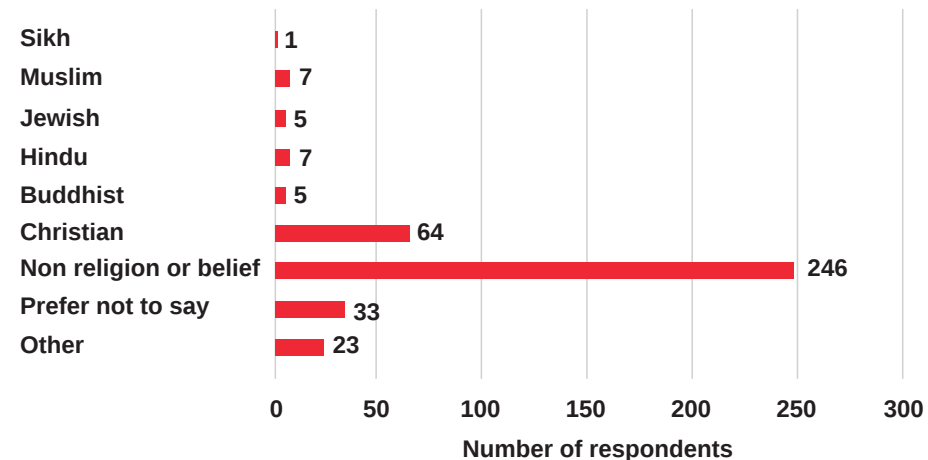
Religion / belief

60% of respondents identified as having no religion or belief. When compared to the England and Wales census 2021, the survey results are a good representation of the LGB community (60% vs 63%), but not of the trans community (36%).

Occupation of main household earner of survey respondents at age 14



Religion / belief of survey respondents



Section 1.1

Key findings

Our findings can be categorised into two key groups: general themes and exploratory themes.

To understand the contributions of public space features according to respondents, we mapped the features based on impact and preference. High and low impact was calculated by the number of respondents who considered the feature important for an inclusive environment, and preference was calculated by the net difference between positive and negative responses. The remainder of the document follows the two groups:

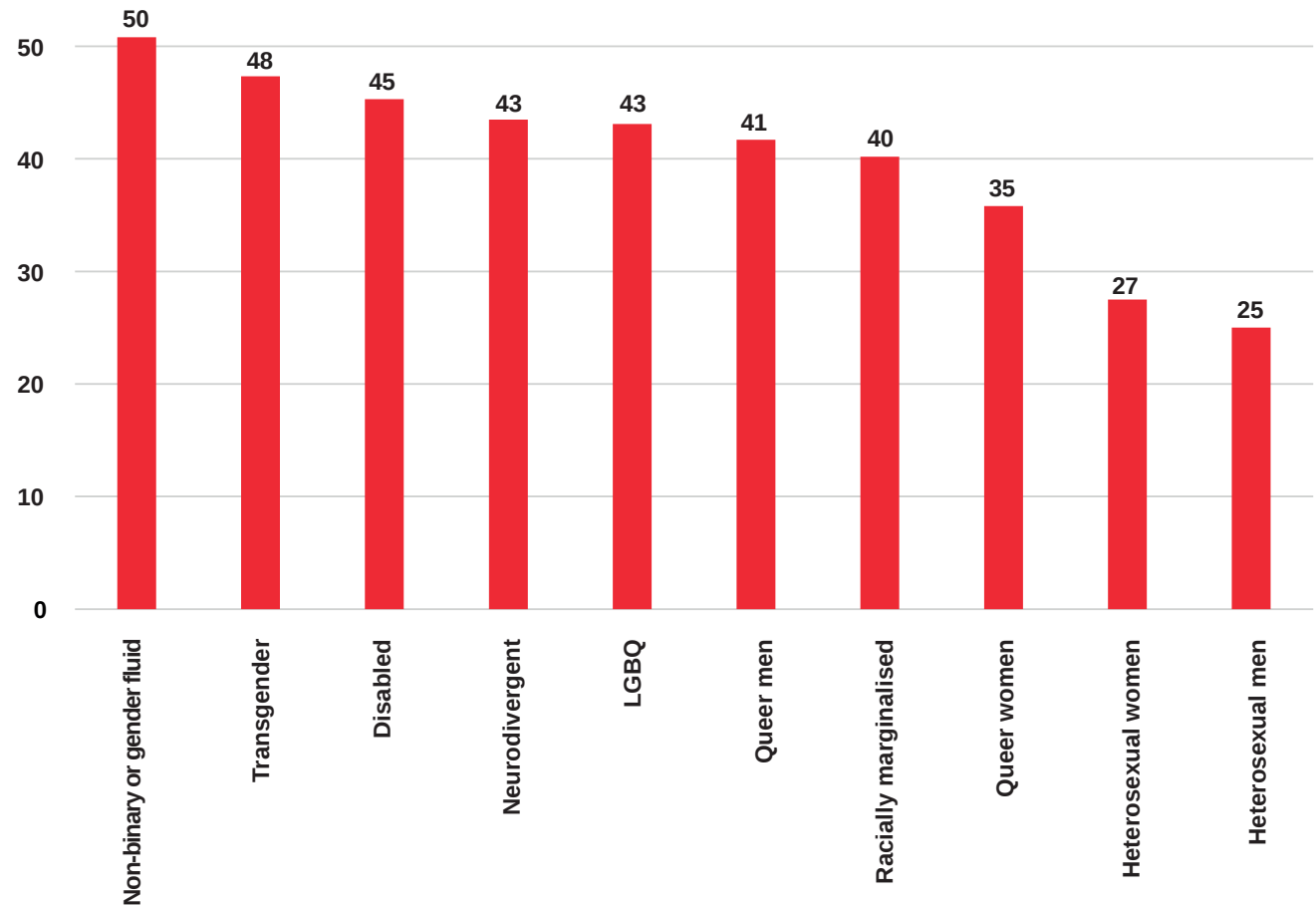
General themes

The general themes refer to the features that were considered to be resoundingly positive and demonstrated that people felt welcome and included when these features were implemented well.

Exploratory themes

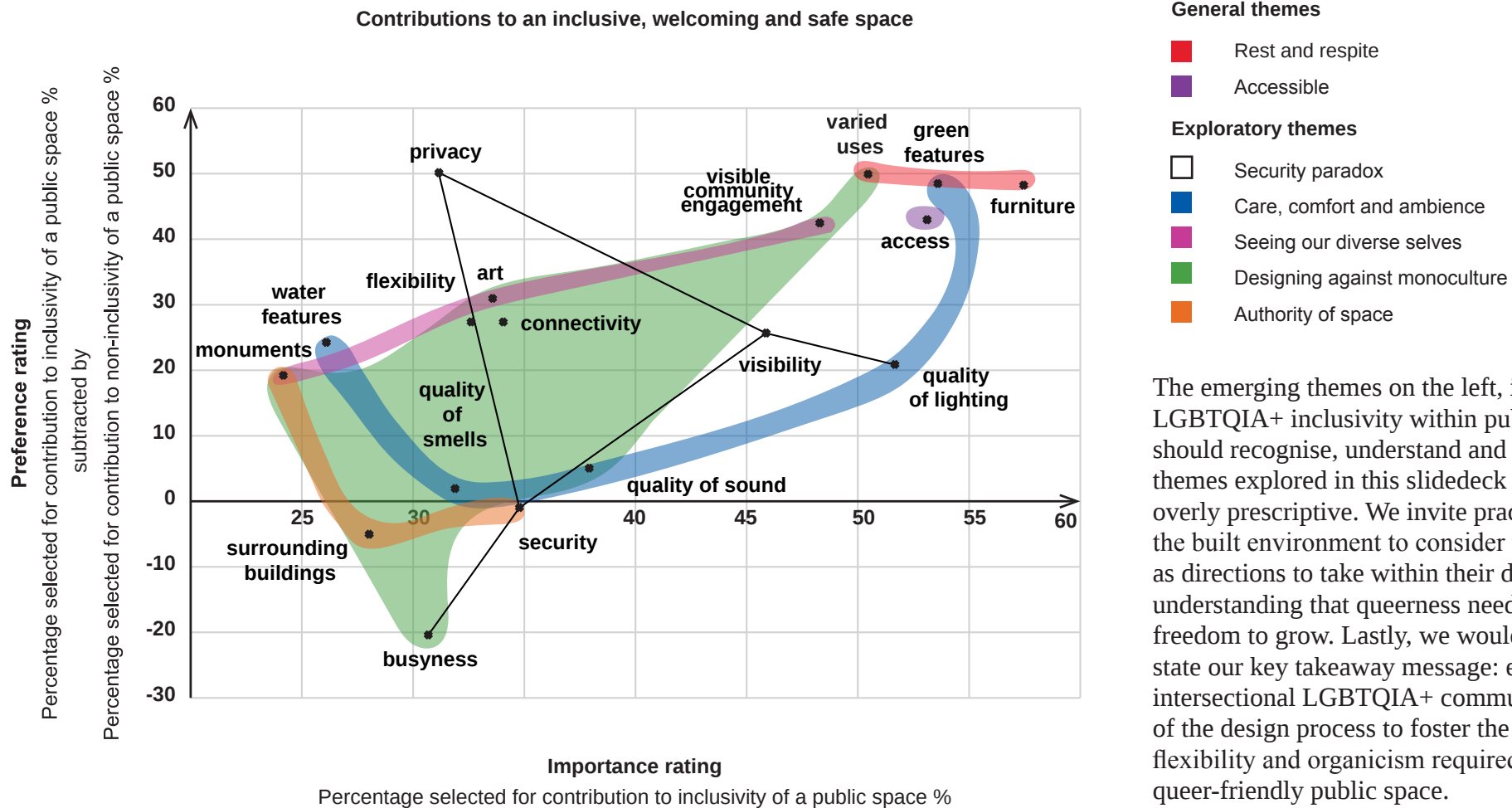
The exploratory themes provided nuanced results and illustrated the divergences in experience when it comes to different features in public space for different groups of people. These themes illustrate the rich, interconnected and sometimes contradictory experiences of LGBTQIA+ people in public space. With that, when designing spaces that are intended to be welcoming towards LGBTQIA+ people, there is unlikely to be a one size fits all design approach.

Percentage of respondents that stated the inclusivity of public spaces when choosing where they live as 'very important'



Section 1.1

The emerging themes



The emerging themes on the left, illustrate how LGBTQIA+ inclusivity within public space should recognise, understand and embrace the themes explored in this slidedeck without being overly prescriptive. We invite practitioners in the built environment to consider these findings as directions to take within their designs while understanding that queerness needs organic freedom to grow. Lastly, we would like to state our key takeaway message: engage intersectional LGBTQIA+ communities as part of the design process to foster the creativity, flexibility and organicism required for a truly queer-friendly public space.

Section 1.2

What does 'inclusive' actually mean?

We asked respondents what 'inclusive public space' meant to them in three words, and the three most common responses were 'safe', 'accessible' and 'welcoming'.

The diagram on the right represents a breakdown of frequency of responses by demographic. The words 'safe' and 'accessible' were most mentioned by people identifying as non-binary and gender fluid (54% and 30%), and the word 'welcoming' was mentioned most by people identifying as women (25%).

48%

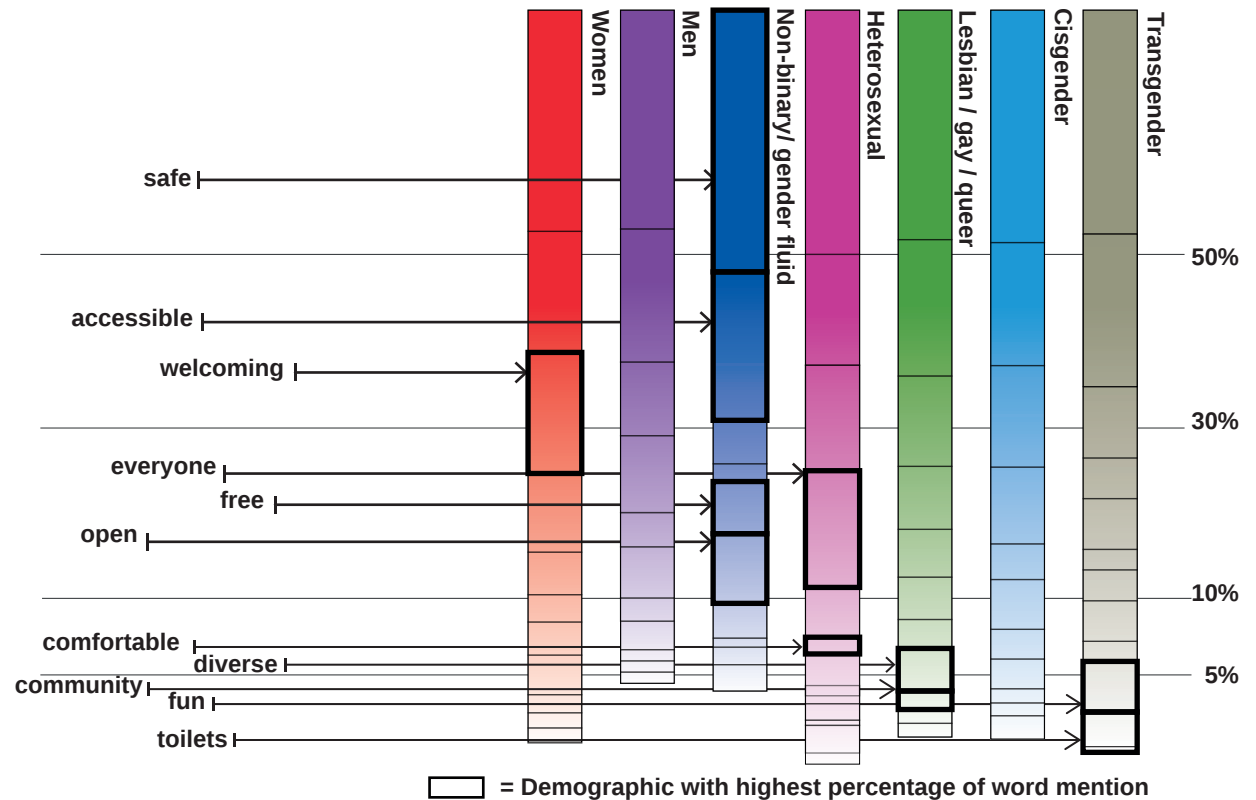
Stated that an inclusive public space means 'safe'

26%

Stated that an inclusive public space means 'accessible'

What does 'inclusive' mean?

Percentage of responses of keywords to 'In three words, what does 'inclusive public space' mean to you?'



Other keywords

30% = Space, safety,

10% = Friendly, welcome, people,

5% = Place, inclusive, inviting, freedom, anyone, somewhere, joy, feeling, spaces, accepting, everybody, clean, public, physically, access, flexible, communities, bright, designed, neutral, well, equal, gender, green, diversity, belonging.

Section 1.3

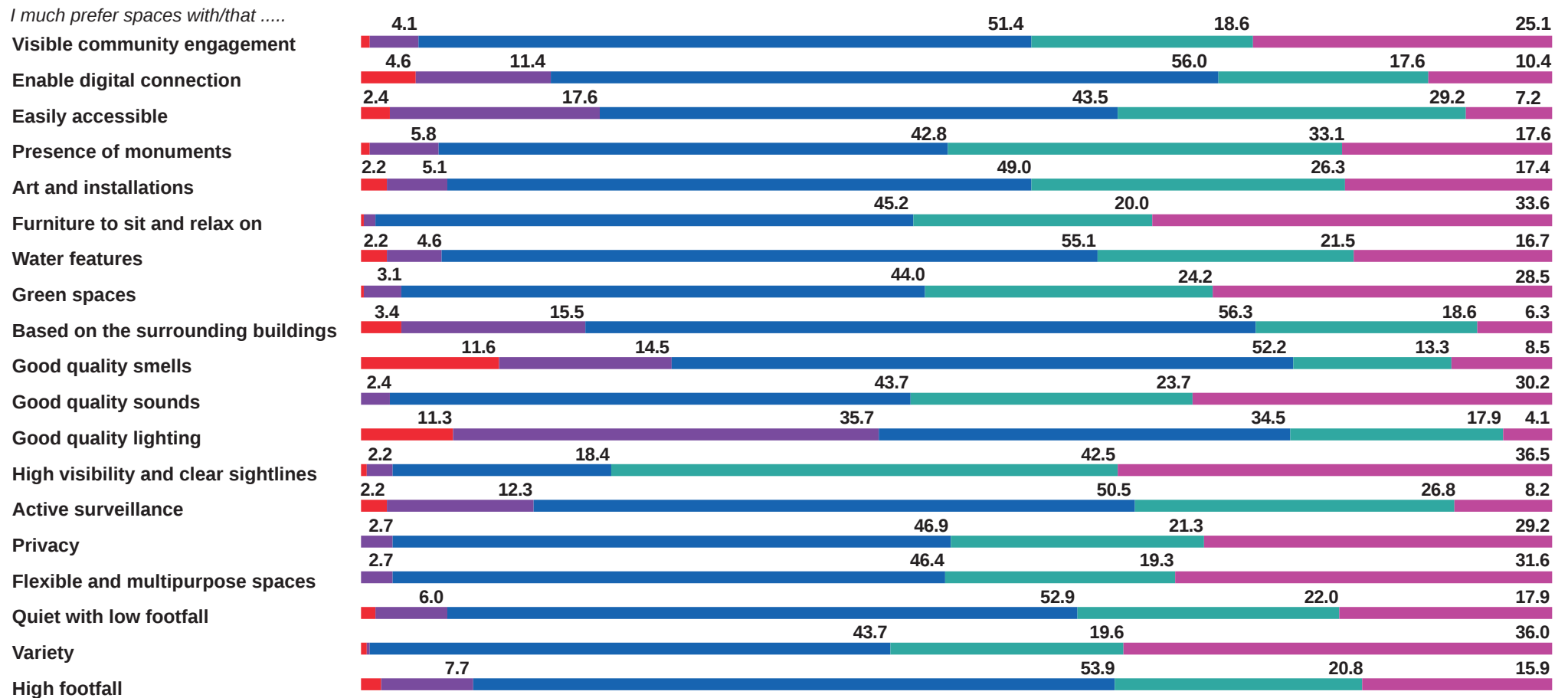
Desired spaces

The below diagram breaks down people's opinions on possible features within hypothetical public spaces, and how that influences their choice to use or visit a public space.



Responses to 'When choosing to use or visit a public space, how much do you agree or disagree with the below statements?' Percentage of selection %

I much prefer spaces with/that



Section 2

General themes

A number of public space features were found to be generally well appreciated. Those were:

Variability and flexibility

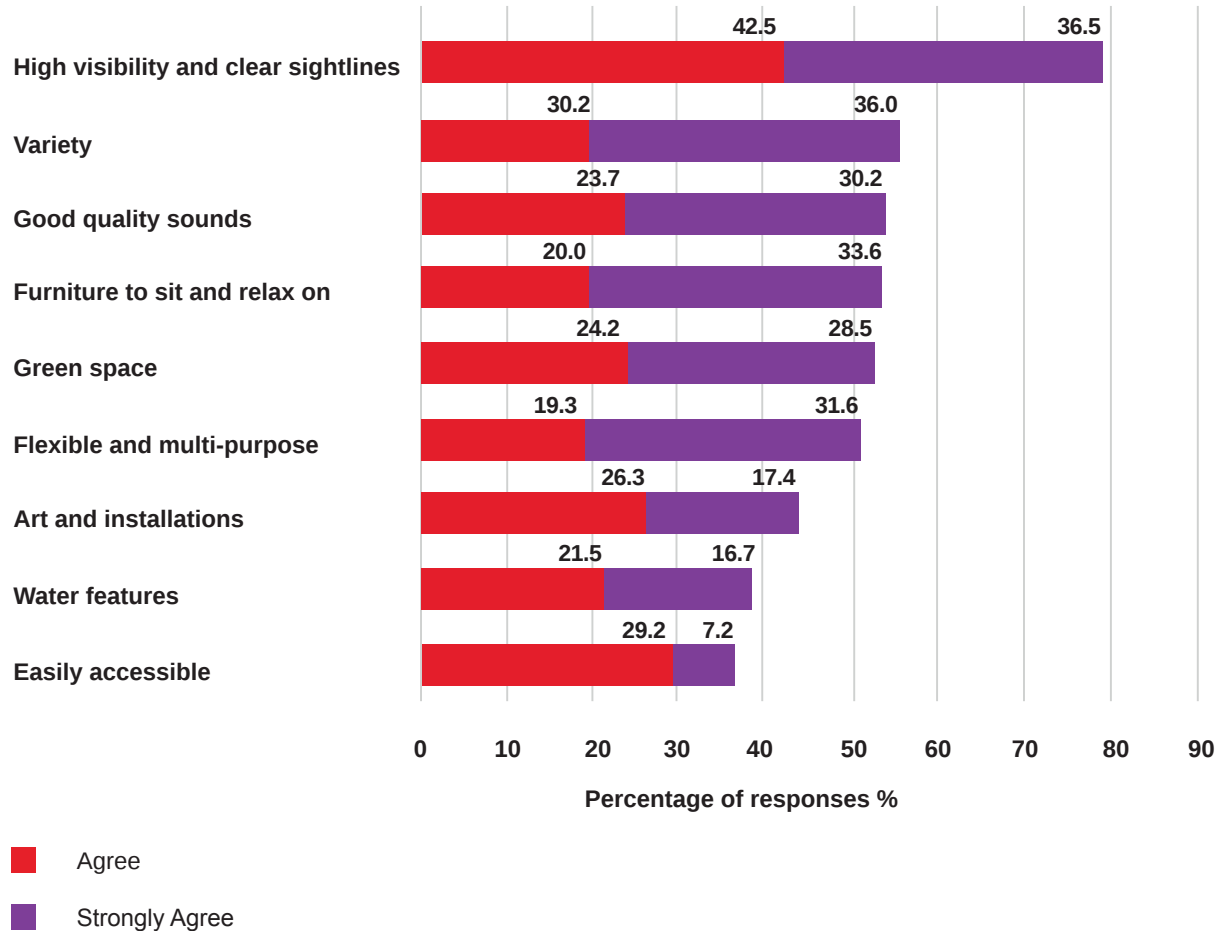
‘Variety’ is the second most preferred feature when choosing to use or visit a public space, with 55.6% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing. Providing diverse, flexible mixed-use neighbourhoods and spaces allows everyone to live a more enriched life and enhance opportunities for participation. Provision of variety increases the likelihood that everyone will be able to find somewhere in public space they feel welcome in.

In addition to varied use of spaces, choices of sanitary provision will also improve the experience of transgender people in public spaces.

Ease of access

Within existing inclusive spaces, 52.9% of respondents said that ‘ease of access via public transportation’ contributes to the inclusivity of space, which is the third most selected feature after available furniture and green space. Ensuring decent connectivity to public transport networks can enable as many people as possible to be able to independently reach or leave the places that they feel comfortable and safe in.

Top preferred features when choosing to use or visit a public space Percentage of selection %



Section 2

General themes

Rest and respite

Thoughtful design provides spaces for people to relax, socialise and connect with the natural world around them. The features ‘furniture to sit and relax on’ and ‘green spaces or features’ are the most selected features contributing to inclusivity of existing spaces. Integrating green space and green features into public space, and providing a wide range of furniture types and layouts can support an even wider range of users to relax and gain respite.

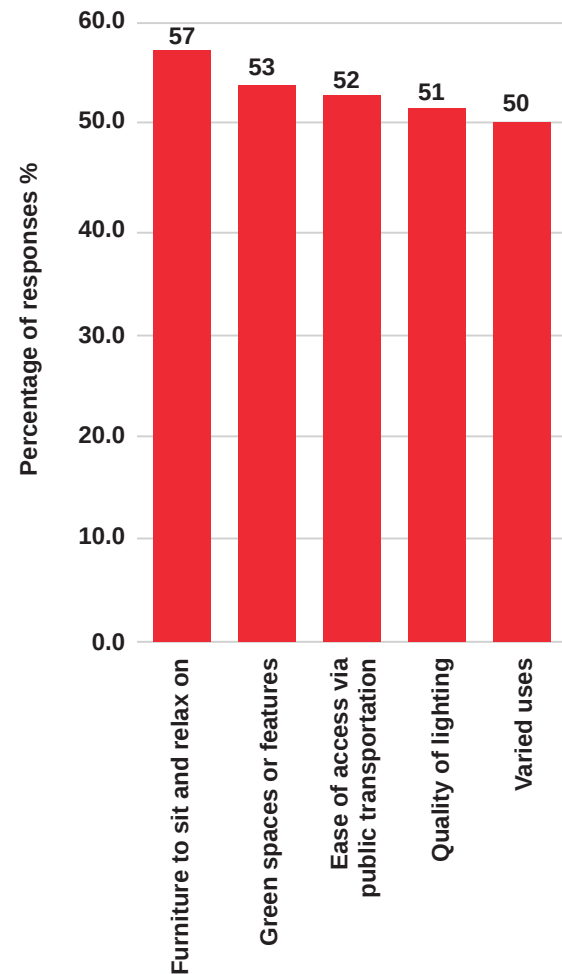
57.2%

Agreed that furnitures to sit and relax on contributed to inclusive public spaces

53.4%

Agreed that green spaces or features contributed to inclusive public spaces

Top contributing factors to existing inclusive public spaces



Section 2

General themes



“The access to green spaces and the canal from the town centre... There are variety of things to do – retail, including market days, leisure, heritage etc... Evidence of community in murals, personalisation of residential frontages (e.g. gardens, planting, flags etc.); also, there are galleries to visit and an artist’s community. Evidence of community makes it feel safe and secure. Town centre and train station are well-connected; only a brief walk between the two. ”

Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire, UK

© Niall Bourke/Arup

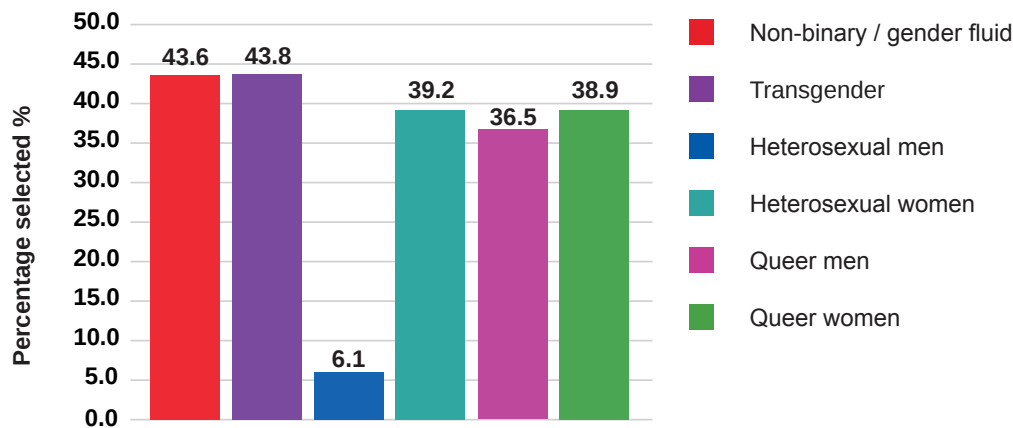
Section 2

General themes

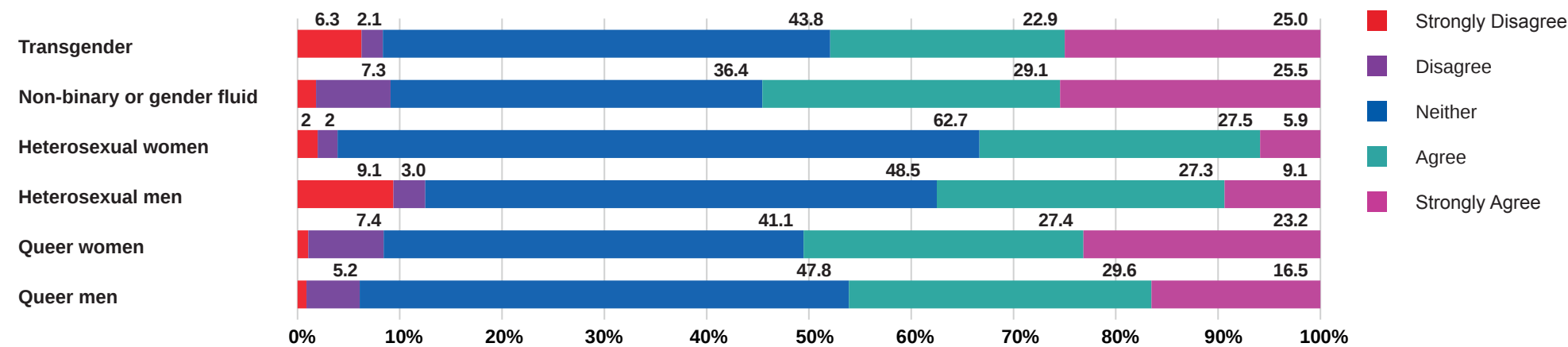
Public art

Responses generally favoured micro-interventions such as art and installations when choosing spaces to use or visit with 43.7% stating strongly agree or agree. In addition, art and installations rarely contributes to the non-inclusivity of spaces (2%). Art and installations help to break up monotony of public space. Adding vibrancy and colour to our surroundings can add character, and make public space more pleasant and welcoming for everyone. The findings showed that heterosexual men were 8 times less likely than LGBTQ+ people to view existing public art and installation as a contributor to feeling safe, welcome and inclusive. Further analysis is required into why this might be the case.

Percentage of responses selecting public art and installation as a contributing factor to inclusive public spaces by demographic %



Percentage of responses to 'I much prefer spaces with art and installations' Percentage of selection %



Section 3.1

Security paradox

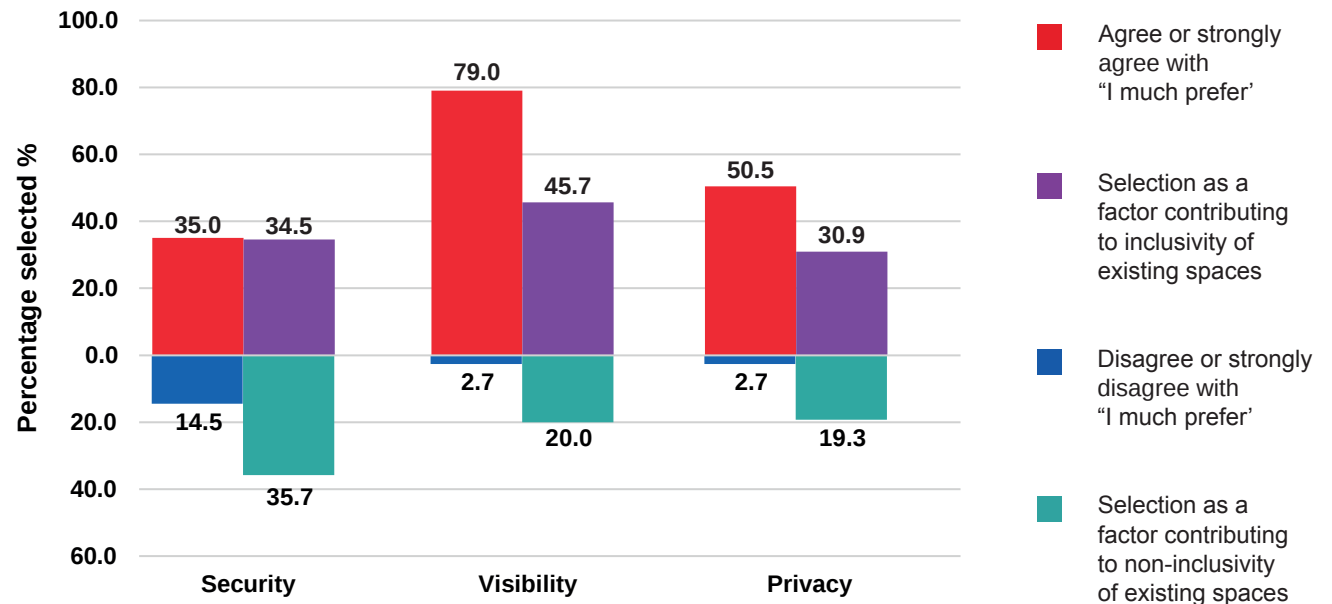
Responses illustrated nuanced perceptions of safety and security for LGBTQ+ people. Some features can make some feel safe, but unsafe for others.

Active surveillance

The feature 'security' was favoured with 34.5% of respondents selecting it as a contributor to existing inclusive spaces. However, there is an even higher percentage selection of 35.7% respondents selecting 'security' as a contributor to non-inclusive, unsafe and unwelcoming spaces. Within the demographic subgroups, transgender and non-binary & gender fluid respondents preferred spaces with active surveillance the most at 54.1% and 47.2% selecting agree or strongly agree, while heterosexual women have much less preference for active surveillance with only 23.5% selecting agree or strongly agree. This supports existing research findings that women do not feel more safe with technology-based surveillance (for example, CCTV may not be able to capture all forms of harassment such as verbal harassment or stalking).

Furthermore, it was revealed through qualitative data that many stated that security and figures of authority can often cause unease and feelings of marginalisation. Therefore, methods in reducing hate crime and security for LGBTQ+ people should be further investigated.

Comparing overall preference of public spaces with existing inclusive or non-inclusive public spaces: percentage of selection regarding security, visibility and privacy.



“When there is a lot of security such as police or guards in an area, it puts me on edge as if they are looking for trouble.”

Section 3.1

Security paradox

Passive surveillance

Compared to security and active surveillance, preferences for passive security measures were clearer throughout the responses. High visibility and clear sightlines was the highest rated feature with 79% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing that they prefer it. Clear sightlines to highlight the presence of others can enhance not only safety but comfort. Qualitative responses revealed several passive surveillance features that improve the perceptions of safety, these include active frontages, good sightlines, mixed-use neighbourhoods to encourage footfall at all times, as well as the atmosphere of community. Despite the large percentage of people selecting visibility and clear sightlines as a preference, a significant number of people (20%) also noted that it has contributed to existing non-inclusive and unsafe spaces. This will be explored on the next page in conjunction with privacy.

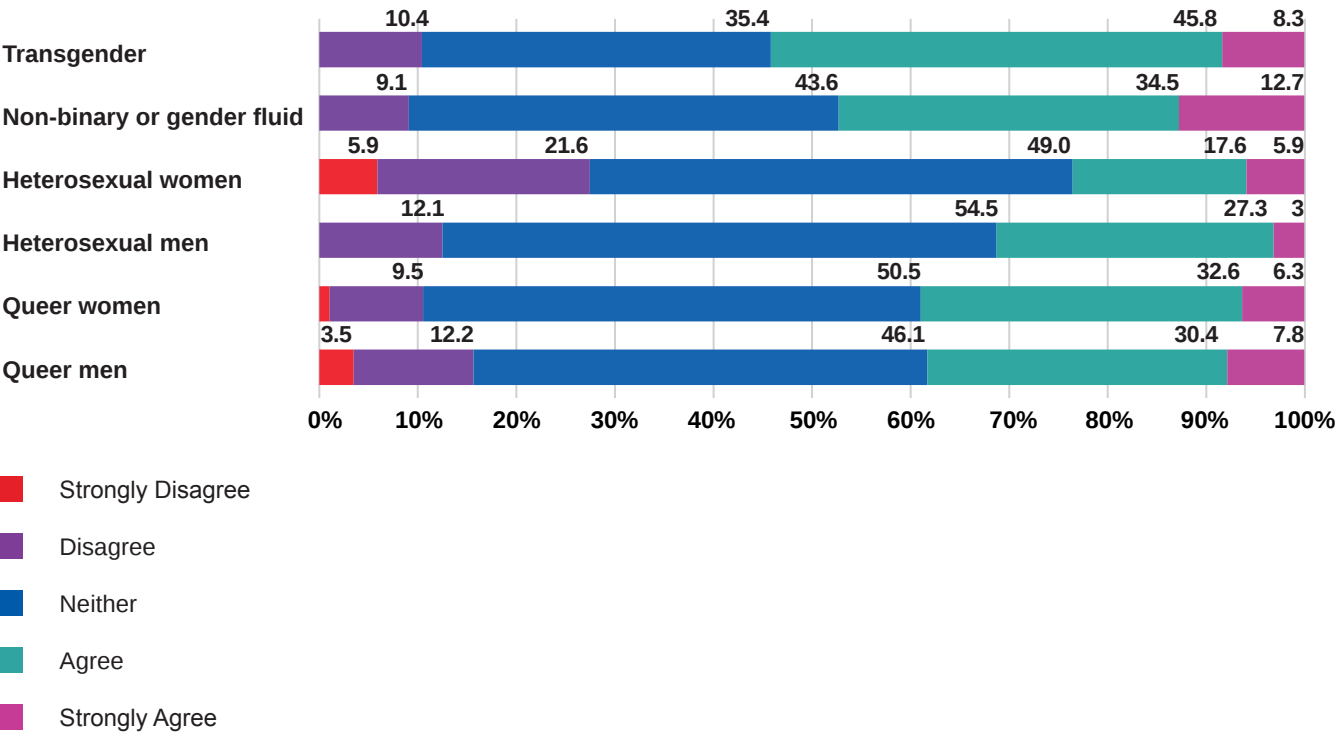
79%

Agreed or strongly agreed that they much prefer spaces with high visibility

20%

However stated that visibility was a contributor to unsafe spaces

Responses to 'I much prefer spaces with active surveillance' Percentage of selection %



Section 3.1

Security paradox

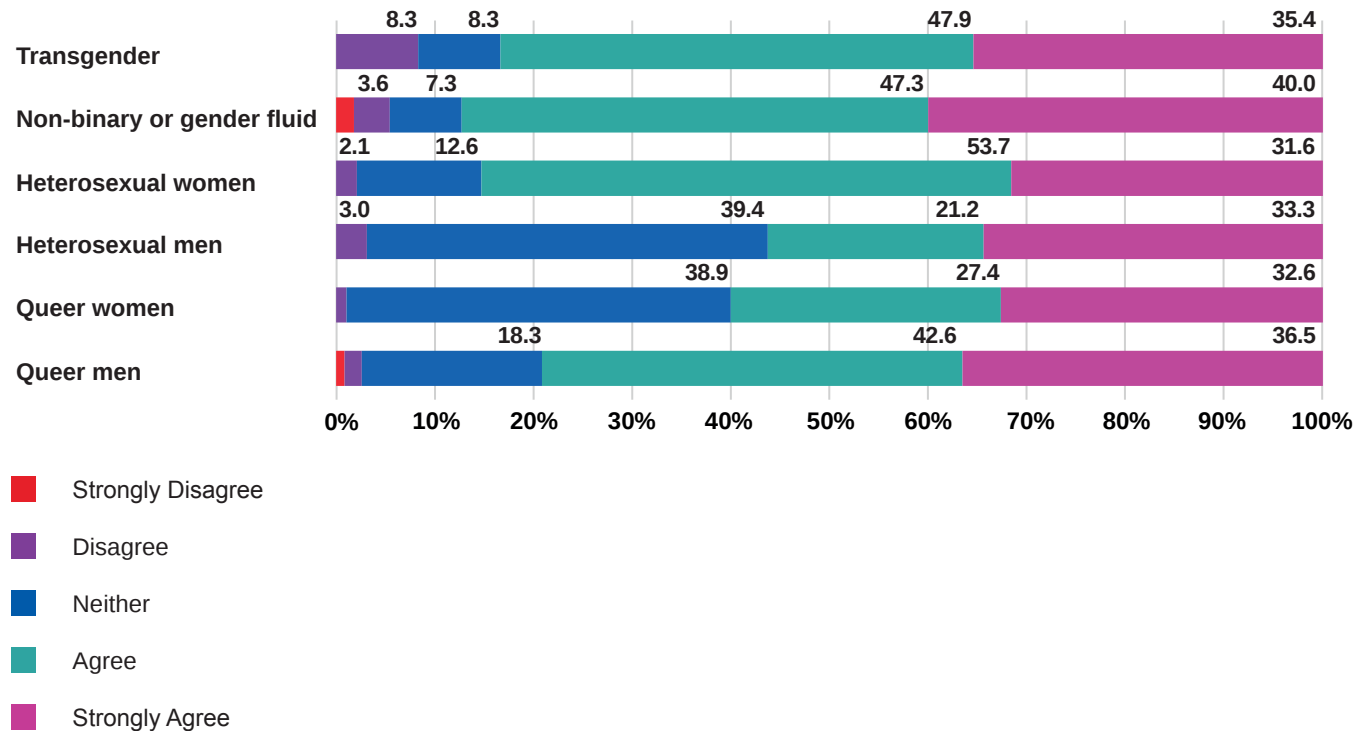
Lighting

Our findings confirmed existing research ([Nighttime Vulnerability Assessment](#)) that lighting design is one of the most important built environment factors when it comes to perceptions of safety and security. The quality of lighting is almost 3 times more important for LGBQ women and transgender people than heterosexual men. LGBQ women are also twice as more likely to be negatively affected by quality of lighting. Low quality lighting can be just as bad as no lighting when it comes to increasing feelings of vulnerability. Ambient, human-scale lighting were the clear preferences for safety and inclusivity.

“Visibility is an interesting concept as it really depends on the place. In some places that are visible, I feel more safe but less able to be myself. In other areas that are less visible, I feel able to be myself (ie. with partners) but maybe less safe? It’s not a direct correlation, but depending on who’s around you, you may feel different.”

“Easier sight lines into internal areas provide a passive sense of security and connectedness to other people.”

Responses to ‘I much prefer spaces with high visibility and clear sightlines’ Percentage of selection %



Section 3.1

Security paradox

To see but not be seen

A need for privacy was repeated regularly by our LGBTQ+ respondents. Privacy is generally favoured with 50.5% responses agreeing or strongly agreeing their preference, and only 2.7% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. This is also supported by the number of people stating visibility as a contribution to non-inclusive spaces. This may imply that LGBTQ+ people require spaces to be themselves or express affection away from a risk of judgement. Some respondents provided recommendations for ways to achieve this, including providing places for social interaction that were partially hidden such as furniture behind low walls, or surrounded by greenery, to reduce the visibility slightly but not entirely. It is also important to note that 19.3% of respondents stated that privacy has contributed to existing non-inclusive and unsafe spaces, which means that designing privacy and visibility needs to be a careful balancing act.

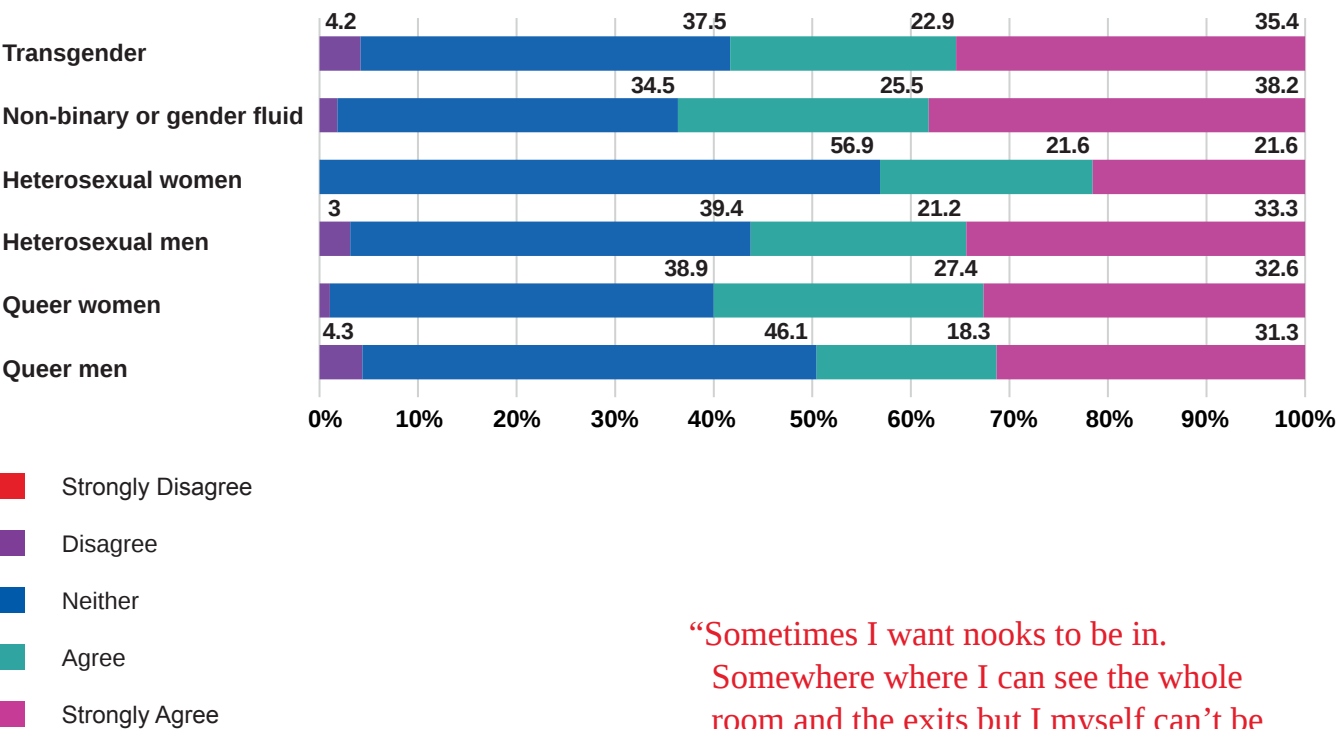
50%

Agreed or strongly agreed that they much prefer spaces with privacy

19%

However stated that privacy was a contributor to unsafe spaces

Responses to 'I much prefer spaces with privacy' Percentage of selection %



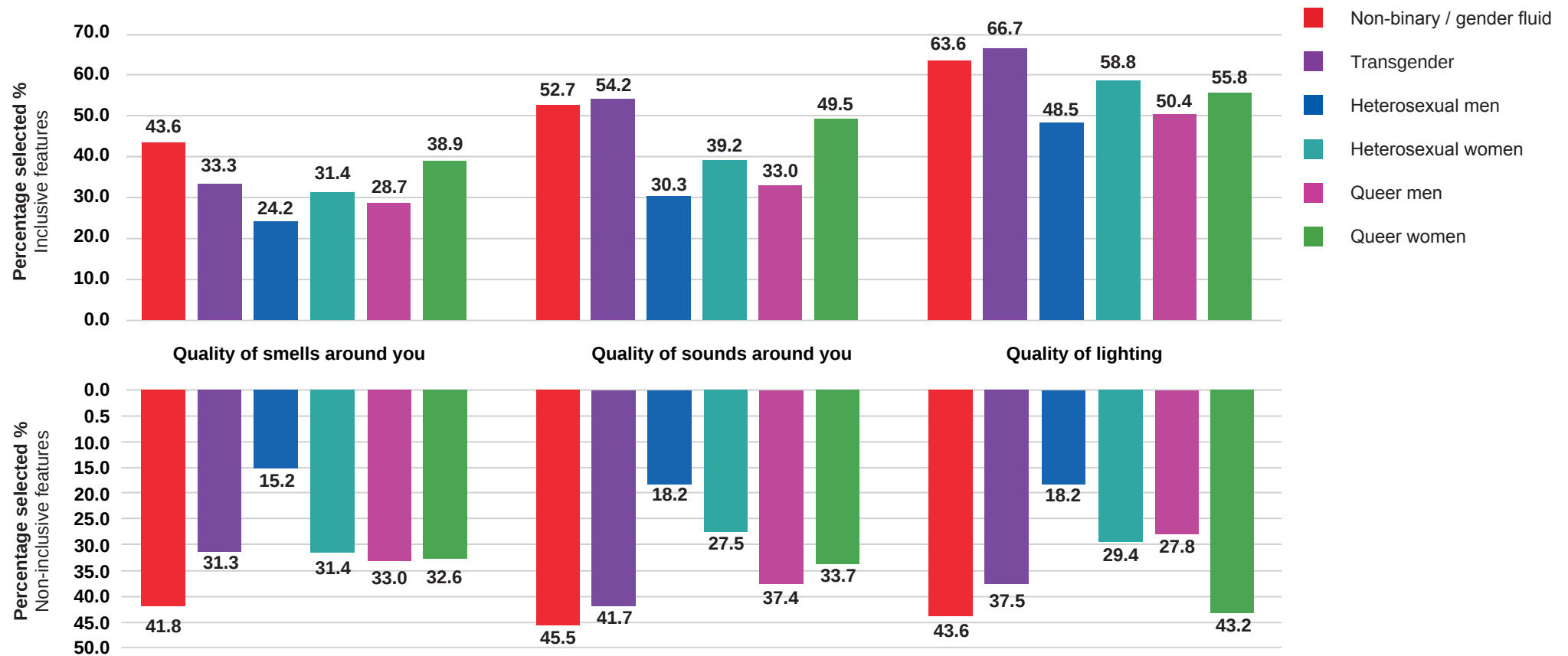
“Sometimes I want nooks to be in. Somewhere where I can see the whole room and the exits but I myself can’t be immediately and obviously viewed that’s really important. I will almost always pick the seat in a cafe that is at the back corner or just behind a pillar.”

Section 3.2

Health, comfort & ambience

Balancing comfort and ambience were found to be important factors when it comes to ensuring public space benefits people's health and wellbeing.

Percentage of selection regarding contribution to inclusive or non-inclusive spaces



Section 3.2

Health, comfort & ambience

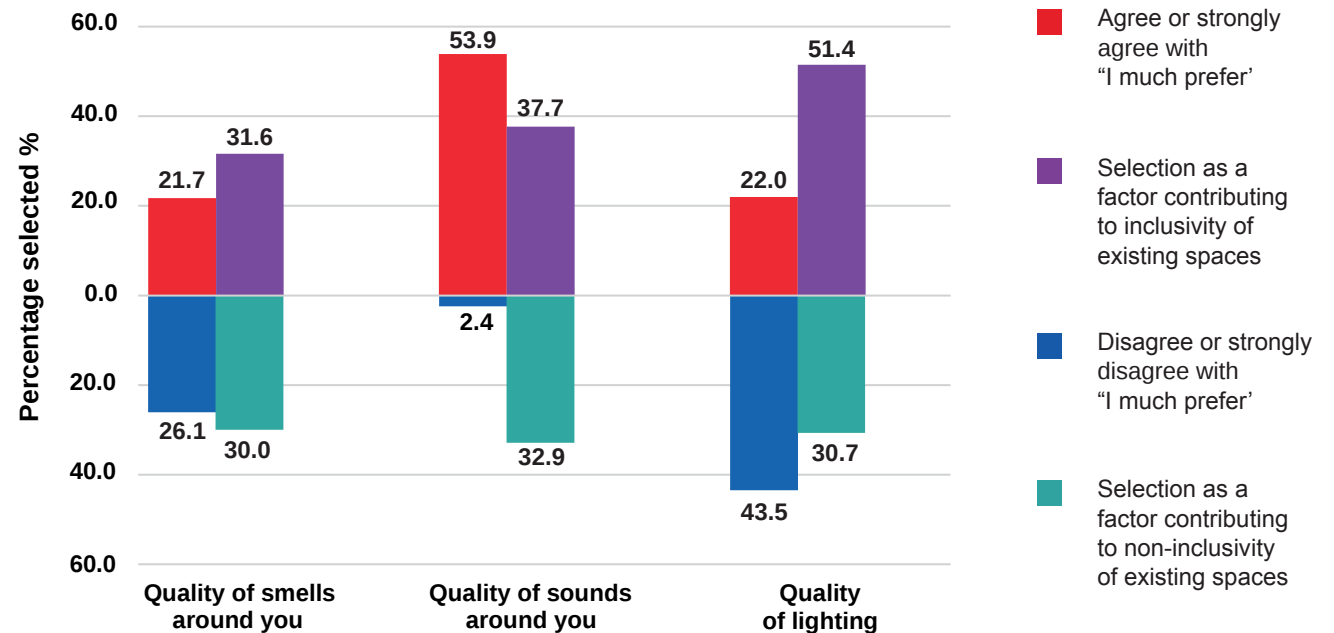
Environmental comfort: Quality of smells, lighting and sound

Factors relating to environmental comfort, such as quality of smells, quality of lighting and quality of sounds were generally rated lower when comparing desired space against existing spaces. This could be due to features of a space being unnoticeable until it has a negative impact on you.

Quality of lighting was considered to be most important type of environmental comfort for respondents as explained in the previous theme, with 51.4% of respondents selecting that quality of lighting has contributed to existing inclusive spaces.

The quality of sounds is the most preferred environmental feature when people choose to use a space, but it also has the most negative contribution to non-inclusive spaces. This could be due to a variety of reasons such as the level, character, context of the space, previous experiences of the listener and nature of the sound. This is worthy of being investigated further.

Comparing overall preference of public spaces with existing inclusive or non-inclusive public spaces: percentage of selection % regarding environmental quality



Section 3.2

Health, comfort & ambience

Green spaces

As discussed under general themes, the presence of green spaces and features is the second most common contribution to inclusive spaces. Even the smallest green spaces and features can provide physical, mental and wellbeing benefits for people ([Arup, 2014](#)).

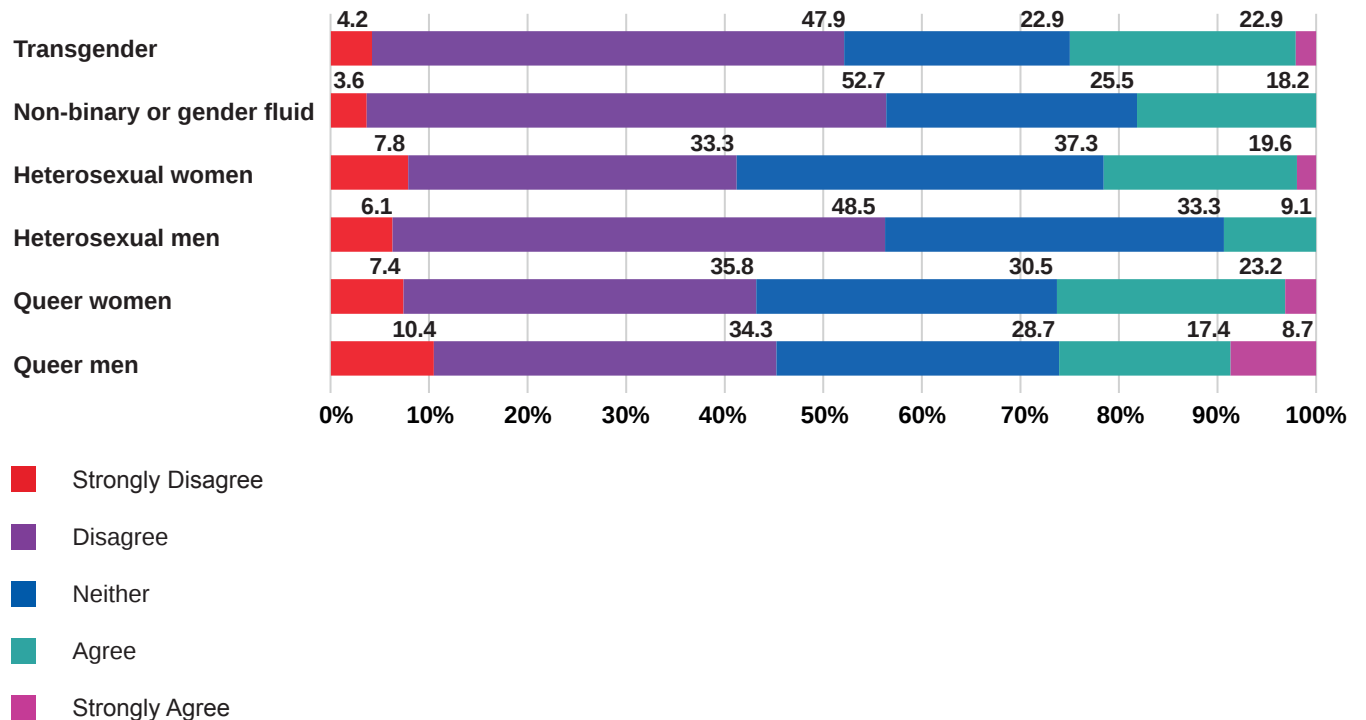
Mental health in healthcare environments

When respondents shared their experiences in healthcare environments, it was notable the number of respondents who reported feelings of anxiety and dread while in healthcare settings - places intended to provide them with care and comfort. These environments might stand to benefit from more human-centric design such as diversity in scales, colour and softer lighting. This is also worth investigation in future research.

Queering ecologies

Delving deeper into the character of green space, respondents seemed to prefer wilder, more organic green spaces, and in particular spaces with opportunity for engagement and volunteering.

Responses to 'I much prefer spaces with good quality lighting' Percentage of selection %



Section 3.3

Seeing our diverse selves

Public space tells a story through its buildings, monuments and streets. Historically LGBTQIA+ people have been left out of those stories and their histories have always been at risk of being erased.

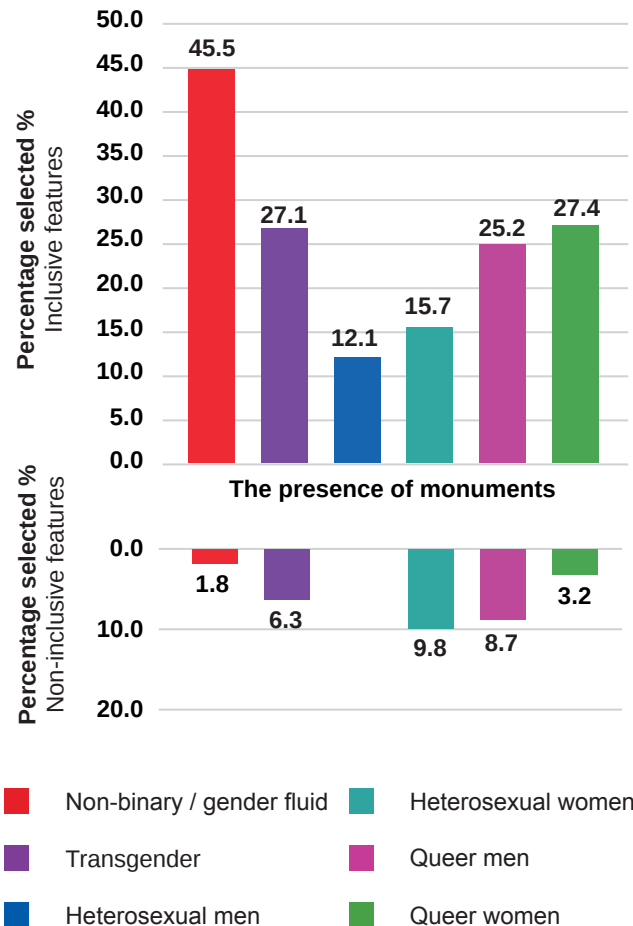
50%

Stated that they agreed or strongly agreed that they prefer monuments that represents their identity

22%

Stated that monuments contributed to the inclusivity of an existing inclusive space

Percentage of selection regarding contribution to inclusive or non-inclusive spaces: presence of monuments that reflect diverse identities



“When a space contains many signs that represent only a certain group (e.g. if the place is full of statues of men... all things being designed relatively tall and unreachable), it makes me feel unwelcomed and uncomfortable.”

Section 3.3

Seeing our diverse selves



“Edinburgh... I could enjoy public parks and beaches which felt safe, very walkable and were available by public transport with water, views, diverse features and beautiful nature. I’m thinking about Portobello beach and Holyrood Park in particular. The greenery aspect, long walking routes, public transport and interconnected parks are particularly important to me as long walks in nature are absolutely crucial for my mental health while living in the city.”

Holyrood Park, Edinburgh, UK

© Edoardo Bortoli

Section 3.3

Seeing our diverse selves

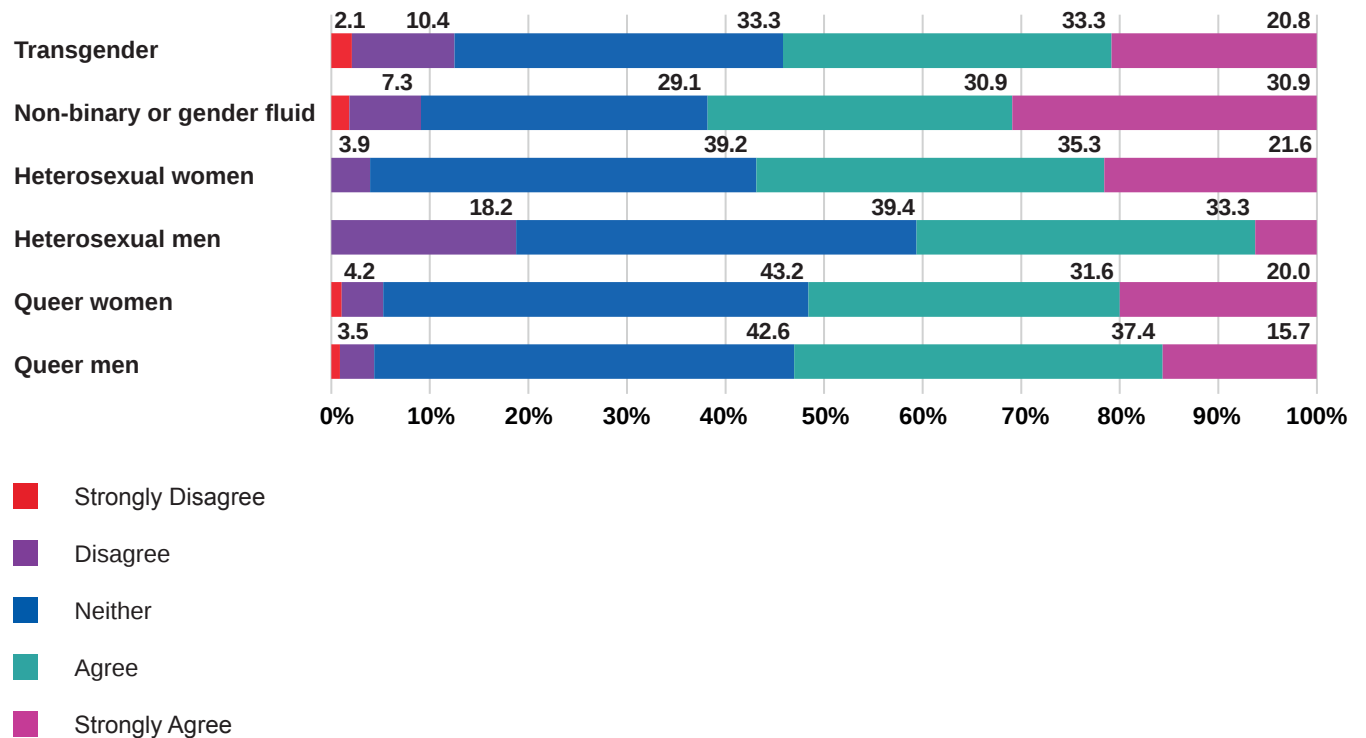
Queering monuments

Monuments play an important role in reflecting and celebrating certain histories and ideas, historically related to power. Monuments that reflect diverse identities in public space can help marginalised people to feel seen and remind them that their identity matters.

50% of respondents that they agree or strongly agree that they prefer spaces with a presence of monuments, statues and symbols that reflected diverse identities, however when asked about the same feature in existing spaces, less than half selected monuments as a contributing factor to their chosen inclusive public space. Furthermore, transgender, non-binary and gender fluid people are 3 times more likely to agree or strongly agree that they prefer the presence of monuments that reflect their identity than cisgender men. LGBTQ+ people are approximately twice more likely.

This relates to statues, symbols, plaques, names of streets, neighbourhoods and need not be someone or something famous or instantly recognisable. LGBTQIA+ people's everyday experiences are a vital part of our heritage, and by infusing diverse histories in our monuments, we enable power to be shared whilst new layers of meaning and memory emerge.

Responses to 'I much prefer the presence of monuments that reflect diverse identities' Percentage of selection %



Section 3.3

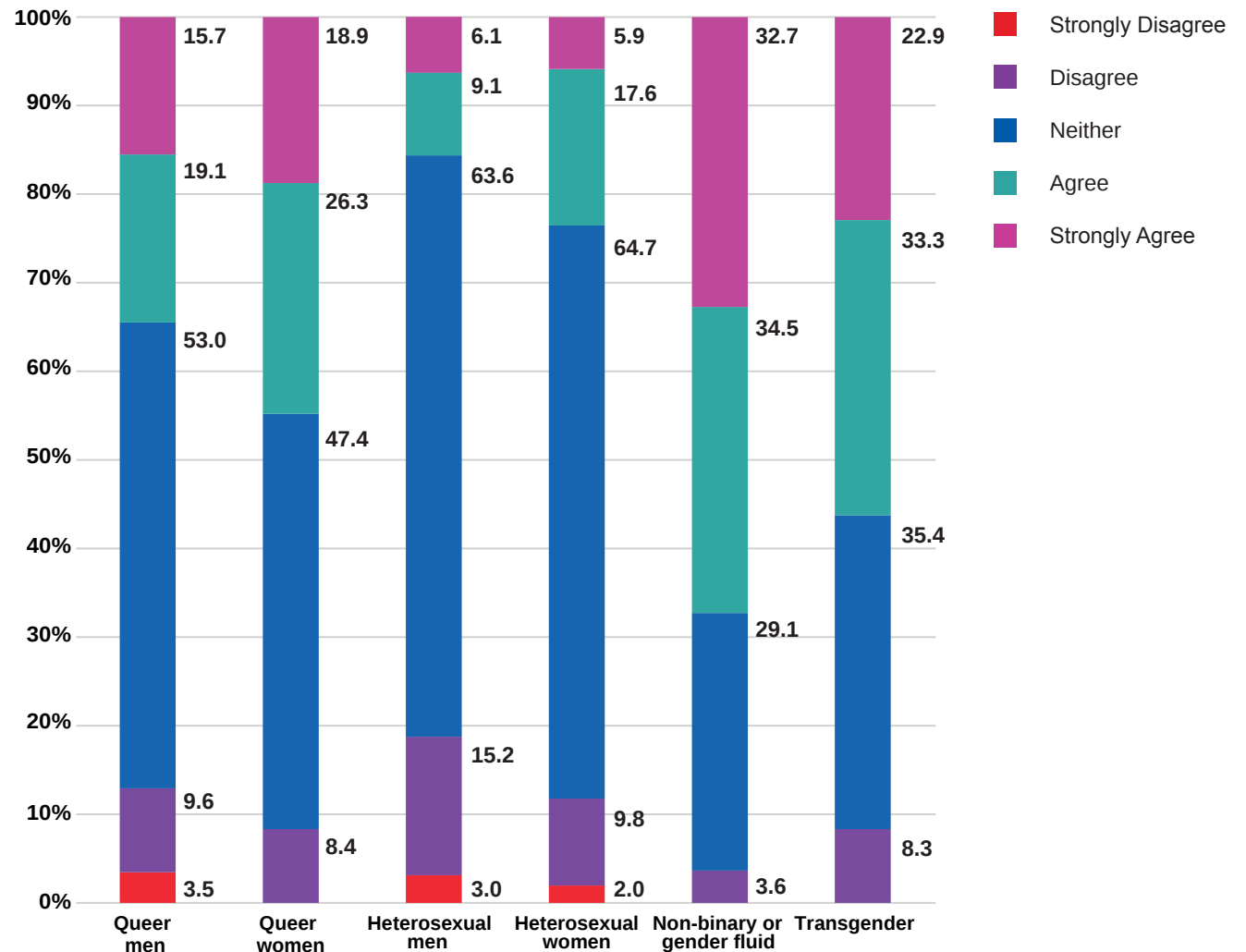
Seeing our diverse selves

In amongst the crowd

Crowds, while not suitable for everyone, came out as a consideration for inclusive spaces. The appreciation of cultural and social diversity was a recurring theme for participants. LGBTQ+ people were twice as likely to prefer busy spaces with high footfall, this was even higher for transgender and non-binary/gender fluid people. People also responded that being in diverse crowds made them feel safer. The preference for busy spaces could be due to a higher chance for diversity and less chance to be judged. Environments with people with different backgrounds, circumstances and identities help to create a sense of community and belonging. Seeing people around you who look like you, makes you feel like you can be you, whoever that may be.

“Lots of diverse groups gathering normalises my existence. I don’t feel like a minority in my gender, ethnicity or sexuality (which can sometimes be seen when I am masculine presenting and stick out like a sore thumb).”

Responses to 'I much prefer busy spaces with high footfall' Percentage of selection %



Section 3.3

Seeing our diverse selves

Alternatives to the Gaybourhood

While noting the important role that the Gaybourhood plays in the livelihoods of many LGBTQ+ respondents, others felt that these environments are overly structured towards wealthier gay white cis men who drink alcohol. Respondents shared alternatives of spaces they'd encountered that didn't sell alcohol, opened just as late as a bar, but are still able to provide a safe place for LGBTQ+ people. This links to the high preferences for variety as explained in both 'designing against monoculture' and 'general themes'.

“I personally feel much safer walking in city centre at night in Birmingham because streets and pavements tend to be wider and have much more lighting around at night. I also find that people in Birmingham walking around at night tend to be in groups (friends, couples, families) including different genders and age... the street ambience being more family-friendly (more public realm and space, creative architecture/art installations etc.) This makes the place less intimidating compared to where there's only men on street at night.”

Janet Echelman TED 2014 Sculpture

© Ema Peters



Section 3.4

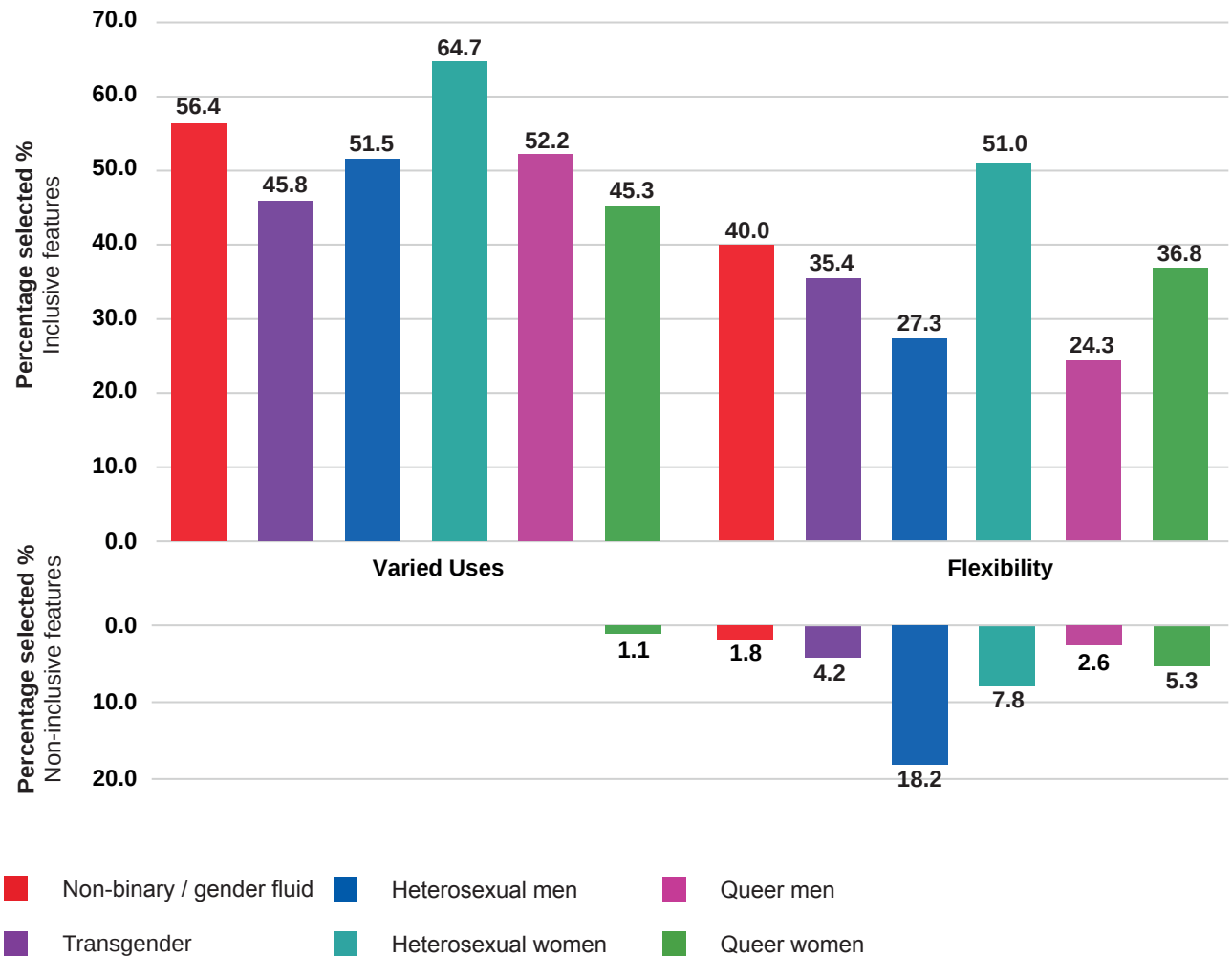
Designing against monoculture

Monoculture is the antithesis of diversity. Designing in a diverse and flexible way means that everyone can find somewhere appropriate they can live, work and enjoy themselves comfortably.

Mixed tenure / use

Designing in varied and flexible ways such as mixed-use development and planning can help to promote diversity. By encouraging and enabling different types of businesses, organisations, charities, community groups to operate in the same place or nearby, different groups of people who might frequent those different places can be brought together. This supports the finding in [Queering Public Space](#) that greater diversity helps people to feel more comfortable with diversity itself and see it as less threatening. Meaning there can be something for everyone, and a rich diversity can be fostered and celebrated.

Percentage of selection regarding contribution to inclusive or non-inclusive spaces



Section 3.4

Designing against monoculture

“The space is Place Flagey in Brussels which is an urban square with a variety of uses, fantastic transport links, mixed used buildings around, cafés, university campus and access to a green space and lakes. It feels mixed and vibrant with a variety of visitors across multiple intersections within society.”

Place Flagey, Brussels, Belgium

© Alex Vasey



Section 3.4

Designing against monoculture

Not just drinking spaces

Some respondents commented that the prevalence of alcohol-based drinking activity in the Gaybourhood was off-putting. Respondents felt that there were no spaces they can use at night, and some even felt less safe due to the large number of drinking venues. Providing queer spaces that offer alternative activities over the same hours could help create a more inclusive Gaybourhood.

Food

Comments were made by respondents about how the type of food available in a neighbourhood can indicate how inclusive it was. People with different cultural, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds are more likely to be used to different types of foods – and inclusive neighbourhoods should work towards providing that rich diversity in the food that it can offer.

“There’s a micro-district in Denver called Dairy Block that feels very welcoming... I don’t remember explicitly seeing LGBTQ plaques or art... but diversity of art and food signalled to me that this place was likely inclusive.”

Street Lanterns

© Ryutaro Tsukata



Section 3.4

Designing against monoculture

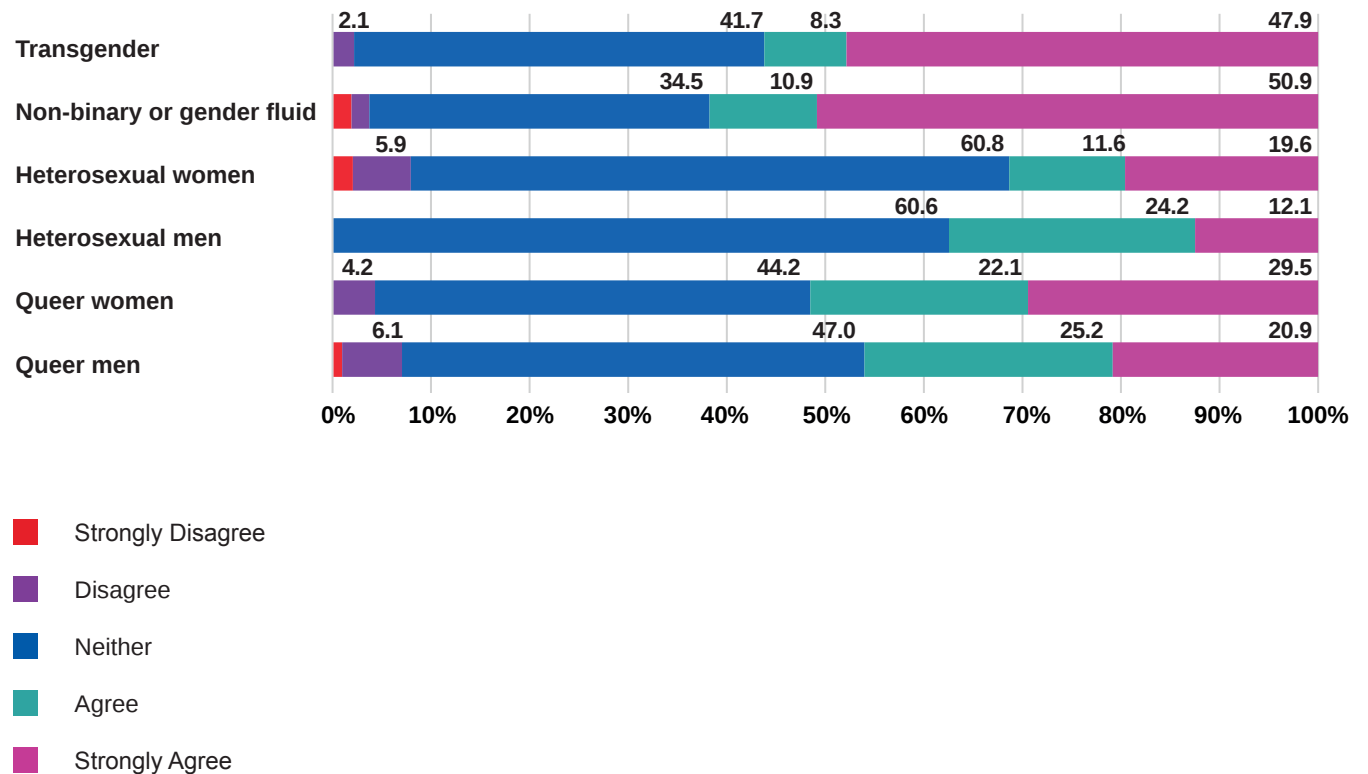
Community-led art

Transgender and non-binary/gender fluid groups have a strong preference for spaces that show community engagement, with 47.9% transgender and 50.9% non-binary / gender fluid respondents stating strongly agree for visible community engagement. In addition, LGBTQIA+ groups also have approximately 3 times the percentage selection for preference of ‘art and installations’ than that of heterosexual respondents. Therefore, the overlap between art and community engagement could improve LGBTQ+ public spaces through the form of community-led art.

Respondents thought more community driven art and installations in our public spaces would bring vibrancy and life to otherwise monotonous places.

“Providing evidence of community involvement would make this spaces feel more welcoming.”

Responses to ‘I much prefer spaces that show visible community engagement’ Percentage of selection %



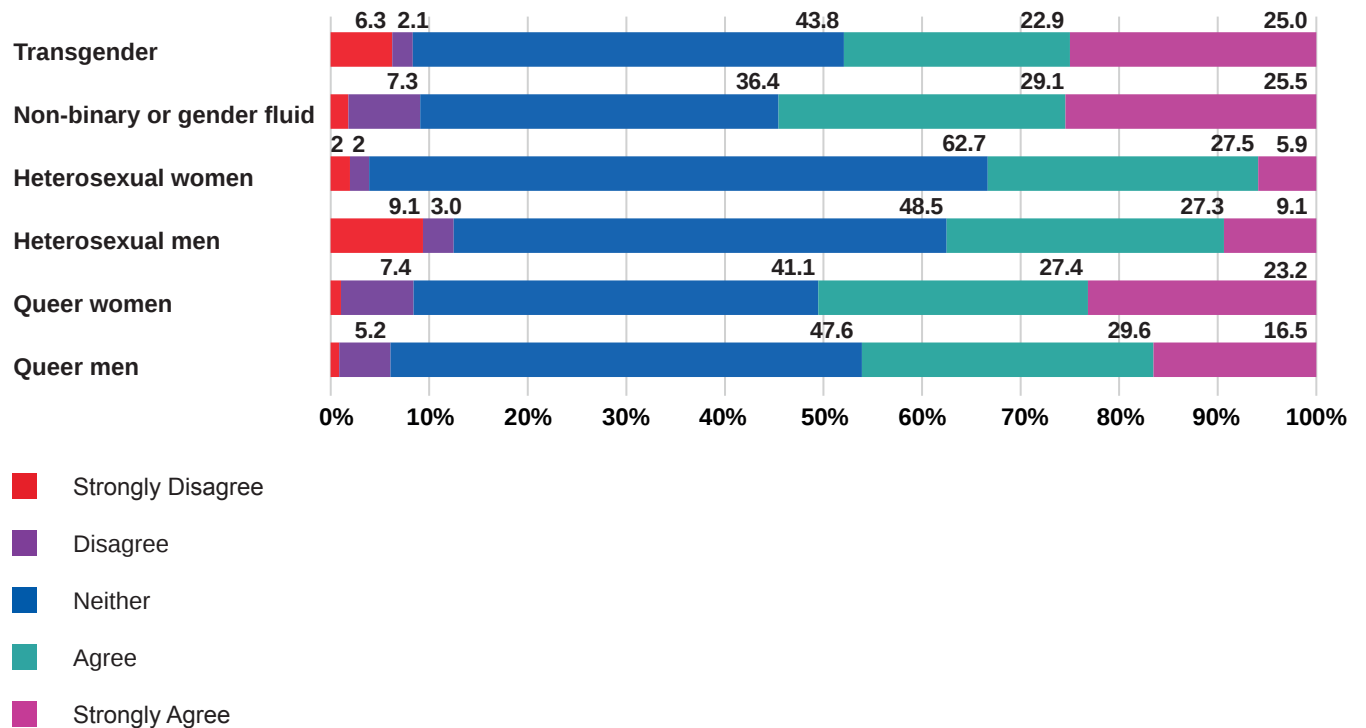
Section 3.5

Authority of space

Respondents shed light on fraught relationships with power and authority – raising questions and points on the consequential structures of power and governance around us.

“I have intentionally made a choice to live in an area of Leicester that is known for being quieter, suburban. My friends and I often joke that we all live near this area because there is a perception that we are less likely to experience hate crime here. When in the city centre I gravitate to spaces that have a friendly ambience... Particularly I find myself looking for community-based spaces because they are likely to have a better feel but also because I am often looking for that space to be present in that doesn't require me to spend money to be there.”

Percentage of responses to 'I much prefer spaces with art and installations' Percentage of selection %



Section 3.5

Authority of space

Neighbourhood effect

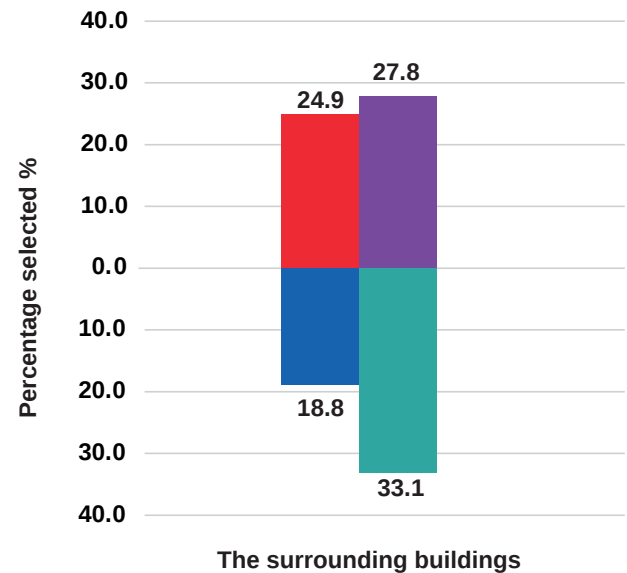
Respondents noted that on the one hand the Gaybourhood, for some has been a sanctuary, providing solidarity and community. But on the other the way that it looks was perceived as inviting of hate crimes. Many respondents felt that the proliferation of pride flags within a neighbourhood made them feel more unsafe, because those with a desire to target these groups would know where to find them.

Hostile architecture

The hostile architecture often found in public spaces played a large role in people feeling welcome or able to be in a space. Surrounding buildings have a greater negative impact than positive impact on the inclusivity of public spaces, 33.1% of people stated that it contributed negatively and 27.8% stated it contributed positively to existing spaces. Certain features designed to desist certain activities come across as policing, unfriendly and unjust. The sense of hostility in the architecture mirrors the perceived feeling of hostility faced by respondents.

“Visible security features such as CCTV and hostile architecture e.g. spikes and furniture designed for short-term makes these spaces feel uncomfortable.”

Comparing overall preference of public spaces with existing inclusive or non-inclusive public spaces: percentage of selection regarding surrounding building



Section 4

360° Environments

After answering the survey questions, respondents were then invited to share their perceptions on the 360° virtual environments.

Respondents could pan and zoom around the screen and listen to the soundscape audio. Respondents were given the ability to drop pins to leave free text comments on various aspects of the environment.

There were six 360° virtual environments in total, and respondents could leave comments on as little or as many of the environments as they wished.

When respondents wished to leave a comment, they were asked to respond to the following questions:

1. How does this make you feel?
2. Could you describe the space and what would make this space more LGBTQIA+ inclusive?

The six 360° virtual environment typologies can be seen in the next page.

Section 4

Six typologies

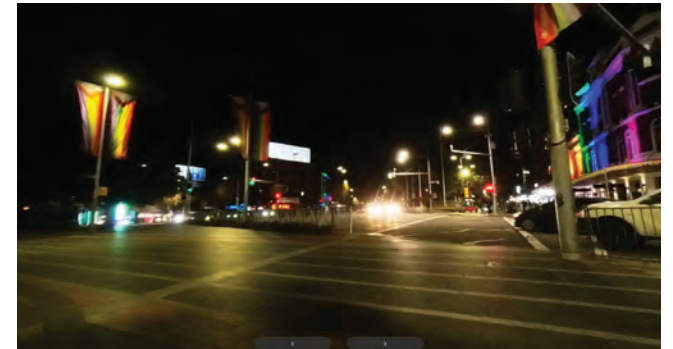
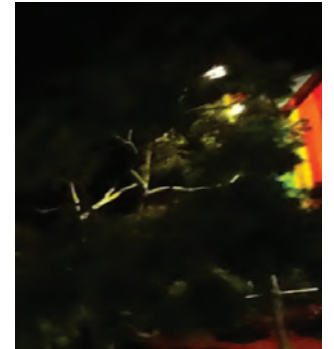
1. Bus station



2. Park



3. Gaybourhood



Section 4

Six typologies

4. Hospital approach



5. Residential street



6. Commercial area



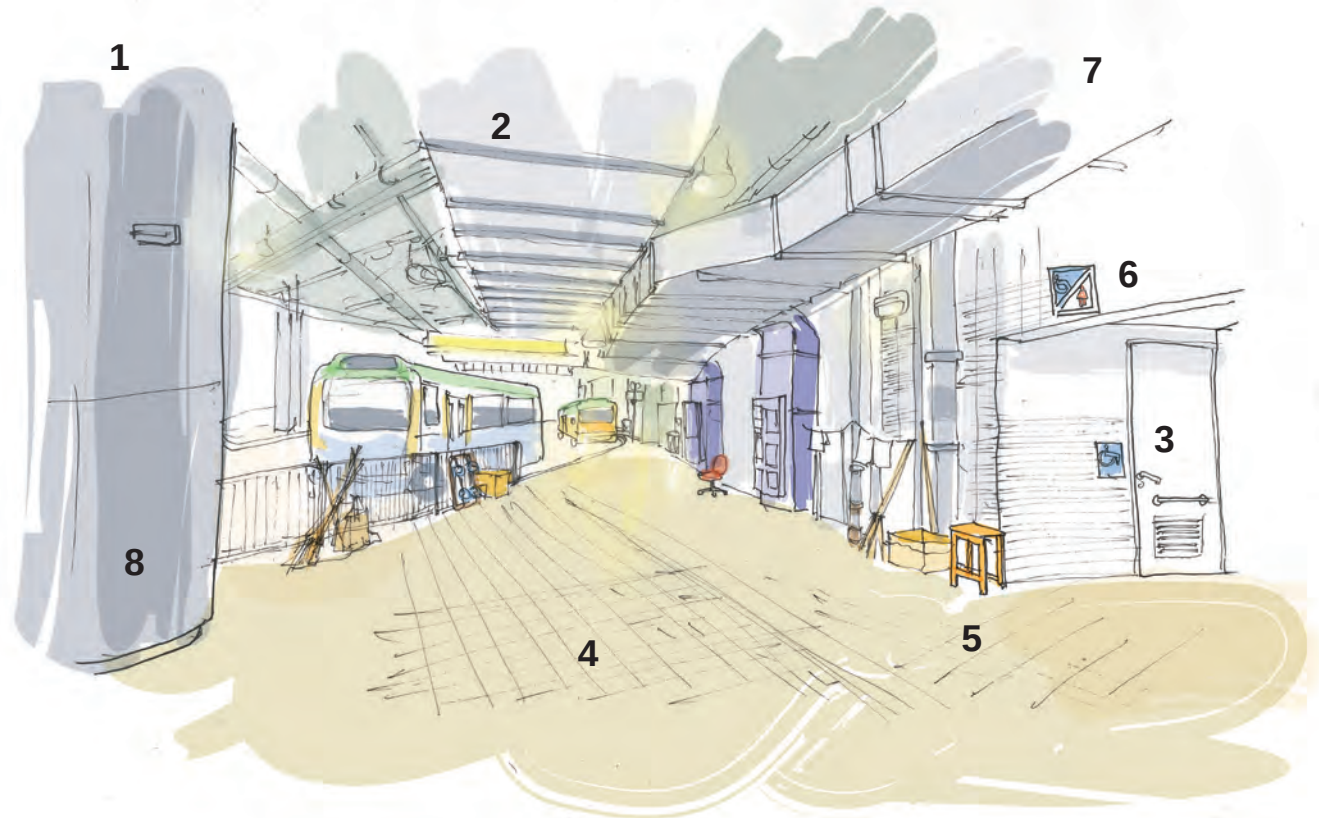
Section 4.1

Bus station

In general people found this space to be uninviting, functional and sad. People felt it was only appropriate for passing through, but were glad to have toilets.

The clutter, surfaces and environmental features made this place confusing, and uninviting.

This environment could be improved by adding colour / art, interactive facilities, inclusive signage, varied toilets (including accessible toilets), and more passive surveillance.



Non-inclusive characteristics

- 1 Fumes and acoustics**
"Would be very overwhelming"
"The high-pitched sounds are also not making me feel good."
- 2 Enclosed, claustrophobic**
"The dark enclosed ceiling makes me feel trapped."

Inclusive characteristics

- 3 Accessible toilet**
- 4 Good access routes**
- 5 Passive surveillance**
"Seats outside the toilets are in some way reassuring as you know there are people around."

Suggestions for improvement

- 6 Provide non-gendered toilets**
- 7 Provide digital screens and help points**
"Access to digital info if needed - so interactive panels which can also include help buttons."
- 8 Enhance visibility**
"Both more visibility to see who is around but also have the possibility to access a little privacy/feel less conspicuous."

Section 4.2

Park

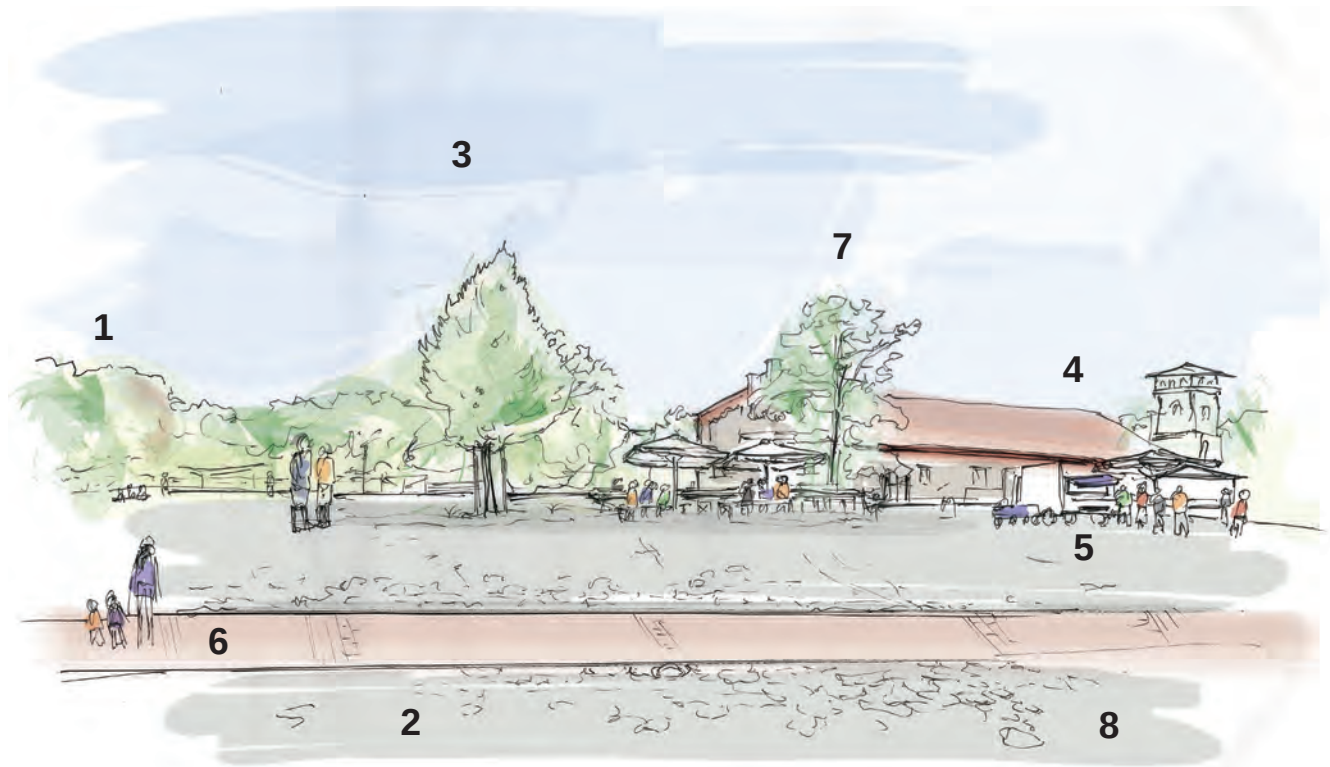
In general, the park was well received. Respondents could see themselves there and found the space to be comfortable, relaxing and safe.

However there was a sense of unease that the openness would lead to vulnerability and a fear of harassment. People were also concerned about night time – and though they might actively avoid it during hours of darkness.

Many respondents suggested to partition the space and provide a variation between the spaces. Examples include areas with low walls, areas in corners – which would cultivate a sense of privacy and security, out of direct line of sight.

People felt that the space could lend itself well to more art and installation that recognises queer presence and history. Opportunities exist for organic, community led-development. Perhaps in the form of rewilding and community landscaping.

Respondents also felt that having people of different ages around feels safe due to the visible diversity, however some respondents stated that due to the large percentage of families, they felt like they were not as welcome or represented there.



Non-inclusive characteristics

- 1 Exposed**
“It is so open that I would be concerned for my safety because there are so many directions a person could come from and so many opportunities for someone to see me before I see them.”
- 2 Night time vulnerability**
“At night time it would be a place to be avoided.”

Inclusive characteristics

- 3 Calm, tranquil**
- 4 Human scale**
“Buildings are of a very nice scale.”
- 5 Presence of others**
“The noises of happy people and laughing also make me feel like this is a place to hang out.”

Suggestions for improvement

- 6 Queering the landscape**
“Would be nicer if the nature would be a ‘wilder’: more trees, flowers and bushes.”
- 7 More varied furniture**
“More seating to allow for those in smaller groups to sit together as they may feel unsafe in a larger group at one of the tables.”
- 8 Preserve queer memory & usualise queerness**
“Some sort of sculpture or permanent art installation that recognises queer and diverse communities.”

Section 4.3

Gaybourhood

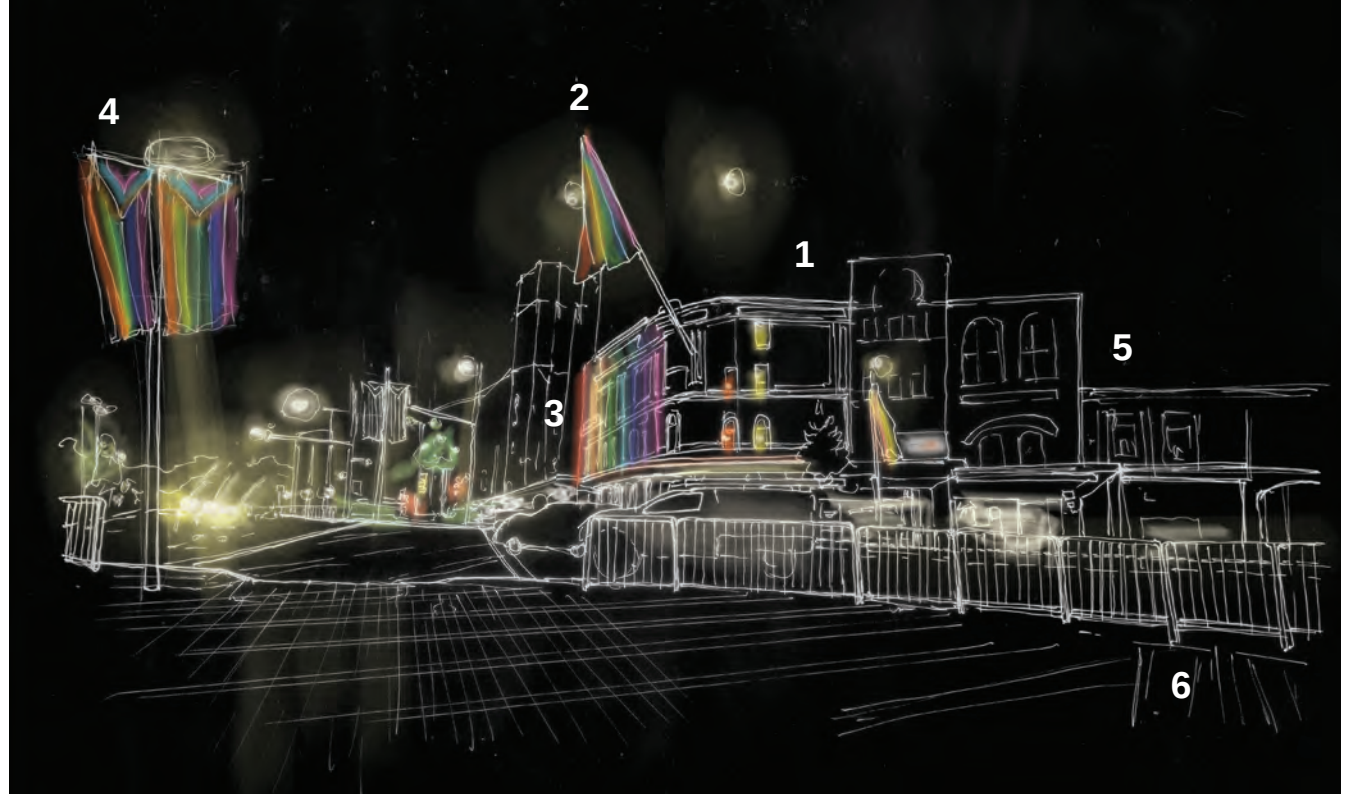
People tended to feel safer and welcomed by the vibrant, colourful environment in the Gaybourhood, even if it wasn't felt that the amenities and offerings were for them.

Respondents had divided opinions on the bright lights - some felt safe due to improved sightlines but others felt the cold, harsh flood-light style lighting did not make them feel safe.

Many comments were made about the focus on alcohol and the over-representation of cis gay men in the Gaybourhood – leading to feelings of exclusion. In this case, many suggested providing varied businesses involving alcohol-free options or community event spaces.

The prevalence of queer imagery such as the Pride flags were generally seen as welcoming features. However, some respondents raised concerns that there may be a greater risk of hate crime when leaving the space. It would therefore be worth exploring the role of transitional spaces, e.g., when leaving a queer venue or Gaybourhood.

The proximity to the busy road was a concern – adding to feelings to danger and insecurity.



Non-inclusive characteristics

- 1 Acoustics**
“The loud drunk noises of groups of people in the background would give me a less safe feeling if I was by myself.”

Inclusive characteristics

- 2 Queer imagery**
“It makes me feel immediately at home with the very obvious LGBTQ+ flags.”
- 3 Colourful, vibrant, welcoming**
“I want to go towards the lights. Looks queer and welcoming.”
“This is a very welcoming queer space - I'd feel comfortable being openly gay and even holding hands with my partner if I had one.”

Suggestions for improvement

- 4 Improve threshold design**
“Some sense of reassurance that once you move away from this corner the community is still welcome.”
- 5 Softer, more consistent lighting**
“The lighting should concentrate on the pedestrian areas more. Currently there are dark patches where people may feel at-risk or secluded.”
- 6 More active frontages**
“More open, porous architecture on the ground floor, with more visible LGBTQ+ amenities.”

Section 4.4

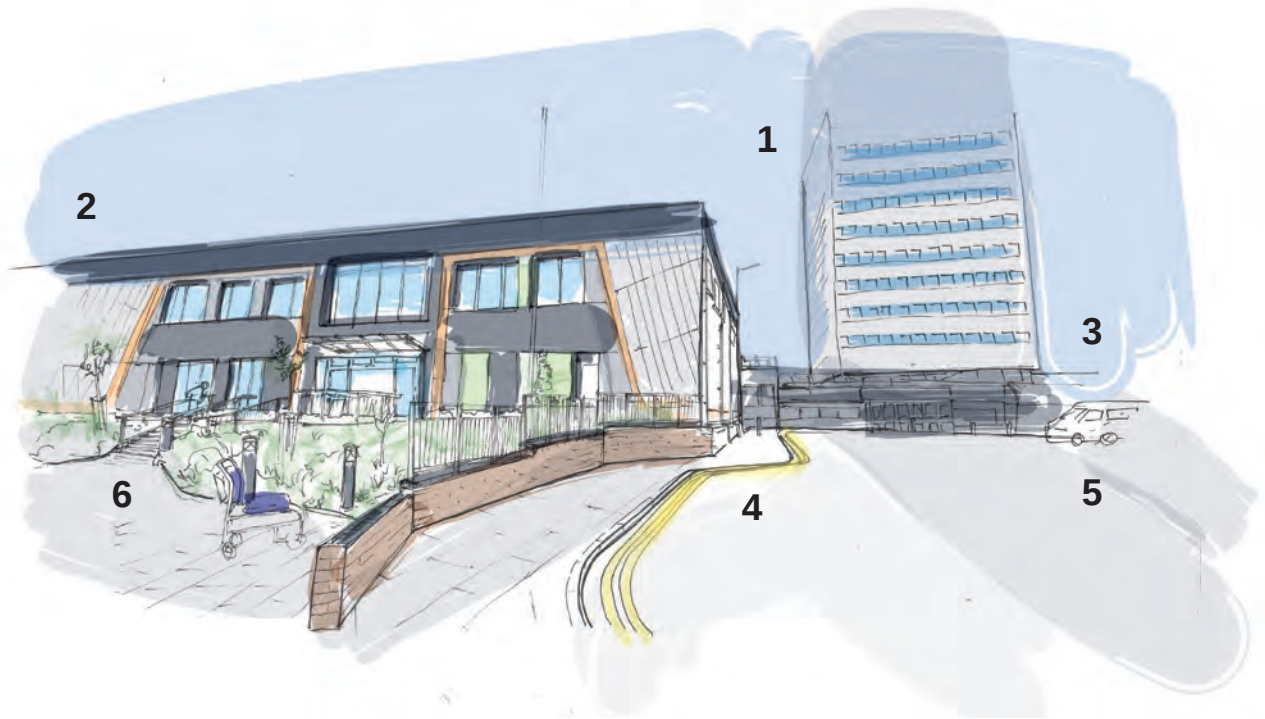
Hospital approach

There was an overwhelming notion in the responses that hospitals are not designed for people. They are functional, impersonal and soulless. The buildings are designed in such a way that makes people want to leave as soon as they can. The fear of harassment or mistreatment came up often.

Respondents reported that the building contributed to or exacerbated the repeated feelings of anxiety and discomfort that arose in previous negative experiences in healthcare environments.

Generally the recommendations were to redesign the landscape to feel more human: more seating, waiting area, colour, art, better wayfinding and access routes.

Art, imagery and inclusive messaging was encouraged on several occasions, which may link to people's experiences of feeling unwelcome or uncared for.



Non-inclusive characteristics

1 Anxiety due to previous hospital experiences

"Anxious! hospitals don't make me feel calm and there's nothing to indicate a queer friendly environment here."

2 Function only

"Going to hospital for any reason is stressful. This is a very 'unloved' space - it is sparse and concrete with no obvious design vision and although there is some planting (minimal) this does not appear to be well maintained. It reinforces the stereotype that hospitals are about function procedure etc. rather than about people."

3 Seating

"Hate those little rest benches because we all know its just anti-homelessness hostile architecture. So that makes me think its perhaps not a super community minded space."

4 Dull

"The long blank wall is a little unsightly. The hospital architecture is also a bit institutional."

Suggestions for improvement

5 Partition landscaping

"Try and block off some of the service areas from view or make them look nicer. Add more seating in an area that isn't a smoke shelter."

6 Provide inclusive reassuring message

"Art, signs, literally anything that's going to signal to the community that the hospital is a safe one to attend - in this instance simply doing something like painting the bus stop rainbow wouldn't be enough to convince me it would need to be a hell of a lot more explicit that they're supporting the LGBTQIA+ community and that they are welcome there and will be safe and respected."

Section 4.5

Residential street

The general sentiment towards this site was 'neutral' – it did not provoke strong feelings as it functioned purely as a route from A to B – not somewhere that anyone saw themselves spending a prolonged amount of time. Comments were made on the liminal and transitional quality of the space.

The leafy, suburban residential style made people feel safe, however the graffiti and boarded up shop gave an impression of neglect and of this being unmaintained.

Suggestions for improvement mainly centred around widening the footpath, activating the streetscape with multi-use activity, and installing public art to replace the mural and break up the monotony of the walls.

This was another site that respondents felt could be experienced very differently at night.



Non-inclusive characteristics

- 1 Traffic**
"Traffic and noise is intimidating"
- 2 Maintenance**
"This space looks very empty unkempt I would feel uncomfortable in this space."

Inclusive characteristics

- 3 Neutral space**
"Somewhat at home" because it's familiar but also "on transit" because it's not a space to spend time on."

Suggestions for improvement

- 4 Provide community art**
"Create community murals to occupy blank space"
- 5 Improve activation**
"Active frontages multi-use (LGBTQIA-friendly) to activate the street at different times of day."
- 6 Road/pedestrian width**
"The sidewalk as drivers often harass trans / queer pedestrians from their cars due to the open visibility" "Decrease the road width and widen the pavement."

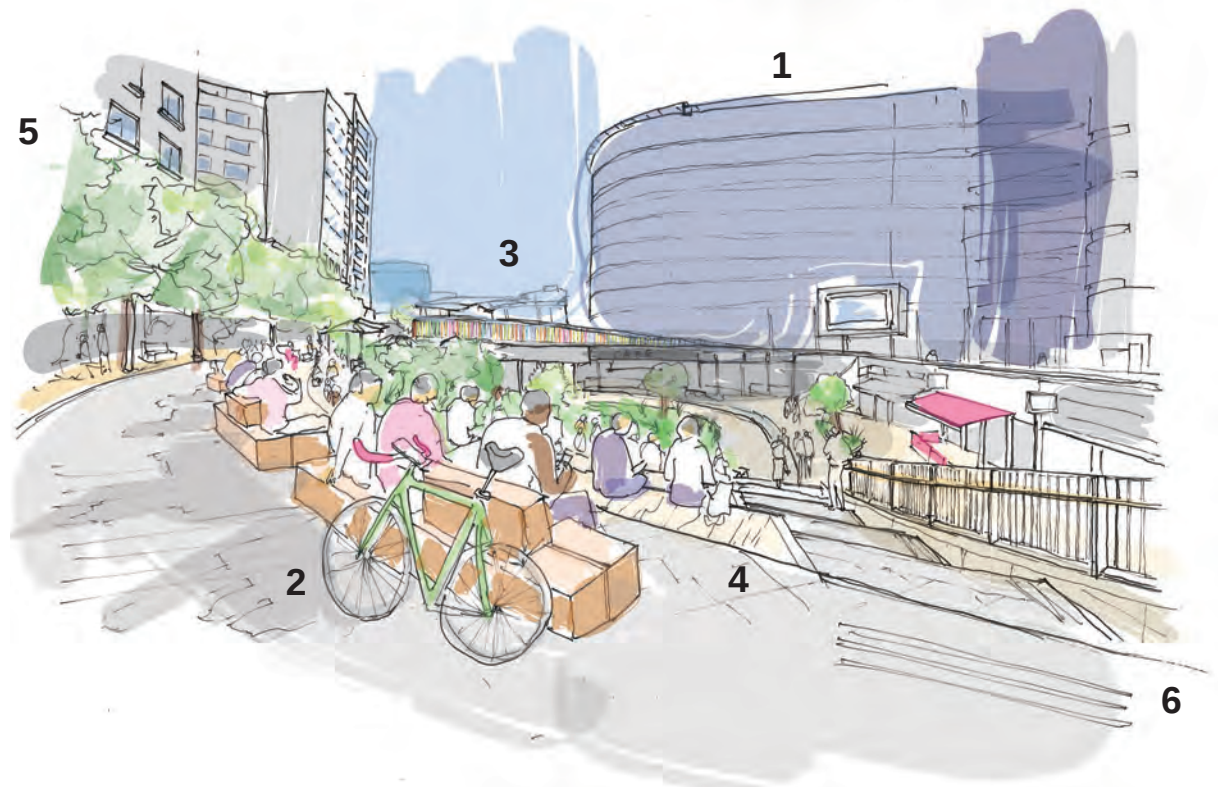
Section 4.6

Commercial area

Responses on the commercial area were in general positive. The openness and good sightlines made people feel that they would be safe, and the busyness, liveliness and vibrancy made this place feel safe and inviting.

Many people did feel that there were not enough varied seating options – the amphitheatre style created a sense of unease, due to not being able to see what's going on behind you. Some private, cosier, semi-private seating options were preferred.

The corporate-feeling of the environment also came up a few times – respondents felt that the place could do with more community engagement, colour and art.



Non-inclusive characteristics

- 1 Building mass**
"Claustrophobic."
- 2 Few seating options**
"All the setting options are very visible in a 360° way which doesn't enable a sense of knowing what's going on behind you and if someone is about to be a 'problem' for me."

Inclusive characteristics

- 3 Lively**
"The theatre style seats suggest good engagement with the space or at the very least the opportunity to do so."
- 4 Welcoming & good sightlines**
"Good lines of sight will help to feel comfortable and set up in a way that individual and groups are doing their own thing together in public" "It feels like a place you can create your own queer pocket."

Suggestions for improvement

- 5 Design with colour**
"Colourful seating or steps? Just a nice touch to tie in with the colours of the building."
- 6 Engage with community**
"Evidence of community involvement would make the space feel more welcoming and less corporate and generic."

Section 5

Limitations & next steps

The study was limited by the extent of engagement we were able to carry out as a small research team. Our initial reach was Arup and the University of Westminster's existing clients and partners. Two thirds of the way through the data collection phase, we conducted an initial round of analysis to identify gaps in the response base, to then target groups under-represented in the data.

On closing the survey we observed a number of trends in our response base, which are important to note as limitations. Those are:

Urban, suburban, rural realities

The reality of urban life is complex, and we note that the neighbourhood that respondents live in within their city, town or village can affect their experience considerably.

Our response base was skewed towards urban locations, where historically a large percentage of LGBTQ+ people live. But as [Queering Public Space](#) and [Queering Cities in Australia](#) have noted, LGBTQ+ are moving out of the inner city, historic Gaybourhoods and to the suburbs. A consideration for further study would be to compare urban, rural and suburban experiences.

UK centric

We researched community groups to make sure we were engaging with intersectionally diverse groups of people across the globe, and used social media to target community organisations directly,

but as a whole our responses are predominantly from the UK.

Outside the professional bubble

Ensuring we reached people outside of our own professional networks was a challenge. We learned that most of our respondents came from similar socio-economic backgrounds; which we estimated using the response from the question asking the employment context of respondents' guardian at age 14. The results showed a large percentage of responses stated 'professional', meaning that our reach may have not gone far past our own professional networks. This over-representation of professional responses may have affected questions such as the question "have you ever been engaged with in the design or public space in your area?"

Intersex and Ace people

While we had a representative gender split between women, men, non-binary and gender-fluid (compared to UK statistics), we found we were not able to collect a statistically significant amount of responses from Intersex and Asexual people. We recognise that both Ace and Intersex people have a very unique set of histories, challenges and experiences of public space, that may not be captured in this survey. Further research should focus on understanding this better.

Under-representation of <24 year olds

Similarly, younger people (under 24) were not as well represented compared to UK LGBTQIA+ age distribution. Young peoples' experiences may vary hugely with others', and in the interest of futureproofing and designing places for future generations, their perspectives would be welcomed in future research.

Further exploration

In addition to the demographic gaps we have identified, we have also identified potential for future research across various themes. These include:

- Built environment interventions in reducing hate crimes
- The balance of privacy and visibility in public spaces
- Perceived safety in relation to quality of sound
- Design of healthcare environments for improving wellbeing
- Prevalence of queer venues across the globe
- Inclusivity of architecture and building forms
- Threshold design of queer spaces, improving the perception of safety when leaving a queer space

Section 6

Call to action: engaging better

We asked, “have you ever been engaged with in the design of public space in your area?” and if respondents had any examples of engagement that they’d like to share with us.

On average, 20% of people respondents to say they’d been engaged in the design of public space in their area.

However, disparities exist as to who is engaged with. Heterosexual women were the least likely group of people to be engaged with.

Heterosexual men were 80% more likely to be engaged with on the design of public space compared to heterosexual woman, and 28% more likely than gay, bisexual and queer men.

Lesbian, bisexual and queer women were slightly more likely to be engaged with compared to heterosexual women, but both were found have low levels of engagement when compared to men.

25%

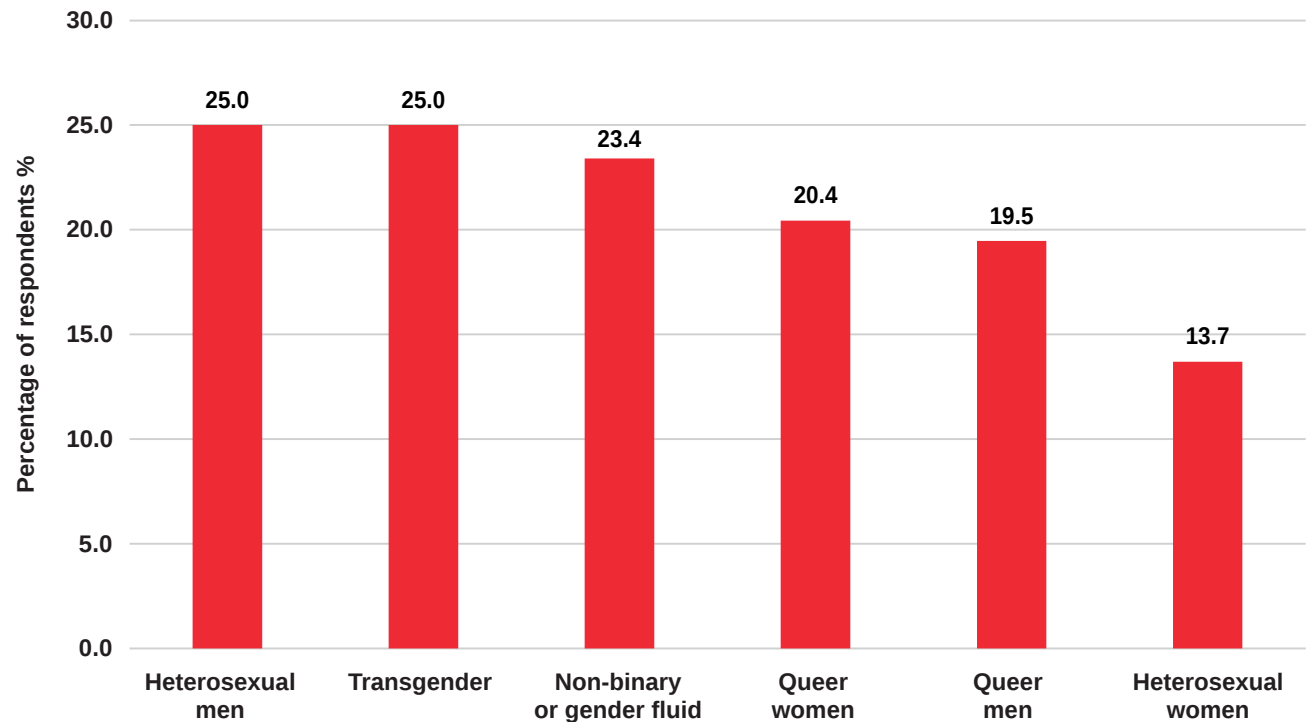
Heterosexual men have previously engaged with the design of public spaces

25%

Transgender people have previously engaged with the design of public spaces

“I would love to do this and it would be hugely impactful for me. I haven’t been a part of something like this because I haven’t been asked! When I can, I will. I want to help shape a better, more inclusive future.”

Percentage of respondents who have engaged with public space by demographic



Section 6

Call to action: engaging better

A call to action

Our findings illustrate that despite the complexity of people's experiences and preferences in public space, there are some nuanced considerations for planners, designers, architects, public bodies to take away.

Responses confirmed that on the one hand, some aspects of public space are undeniably positive for people; variation, flexibility, access, accessible furniture and art. The proliferation of these features will likely enhance people's experiences of public space in a positive sense.

On the other hand, our research shows that there are strong and sometimes conflicting sentiments regarding the design of public space, and therefore principles of care, sharing power and thoughtful practice are recommended in the journey towards LGBTQIA+ inclusivity within public space. Engaging lived experience and lived expertise is one key principle we can use to achieve this.

By designing with LGBTQIA+ people, we can co-produce and co-deliver meaningful places, that prioritise safety, belonging and inclusivity. We can share power, influence and decision making to see an abundance of expertise, ideas and enthusiasm for change.

Co-design is a social movement seeking to embed participation in everyday practice, by slowing down to listen, connect and learn. We argue that to truly queer our public spaces, we have to consider new diverse and inclusive ways of engaging. One way of approaching this could be co-designing with LGBTQIA+ people.

Public spaces are layered with complex, organic histories. Co-design allows us as practitioners to embrace these histories and to discover new queer futures rooted in lived expertise, whatever they may be.

With the richness of diverse perspectives that exists with the LGBTQIA+ community, it is imperative that we as practitioners in the built environment step back, prioritise community relationships with LGBTQIA+ people and embed lived expertise and experience in the design process.

Through participatory means, co-design can help us to draw out those lived expertise and experiences, needs and feelings. It can help to provide marginalised groups to have a voice in the design of spaces around them, and share power and influence. With this sharing of power and influence, new possibilities of queer stewardship arise, and new worlds of inclusive, welcoming and safe places can emerge with it.

“It would be important to me to be involved in a design process like this as I could help make the space feel more welcoming and enjoyable for myself and others. I believe inclusivity in public design is really crucial for communities to develop and grow in the local area, who can support and look after people in that community. If the public space is unwelcoming, or unaccommodating to certain groups, those people are more likely to feel isolated which will affect their wellbeing”

Section 7

Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge and thank the Queering Public Space global team on shaping, inspiring and advising this project. We would also like to thank those who have contributed to creating the survey, including the 360° environments. We would like to thank everyone who shared and completed this survey, it would not have been possible without you. Finally, we would like to thank the Queering Public Space Phase 1 team for the wonderful foundation we were able to build upon.

Illustrations - Emily Wang

Visual Communications support - Cerys Wilcox

Contact:

e: accessible-environments@arup.com



Project Director

Mei-Yee Man Oram

she/her/hers



Project Manager

Chris Watkins

he/him/his



Academic Advisor

Pippa Catterall

she/her/hers

Professor of History and Policy
University of Westminster



Researchers and co-authors

Luke Evens

he/him/his



Emily Wang

she/they

LGBTQIA+ people were 36% more likely to strongly consider the inclusivity of public space when deciding where to live and work.

Heterosexual men were 26% more likely to be consulted on the design of public space than lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer people.

ARUP