# Accessible Skateparks Survey 2020
## Summary and Evaluation

*Between May to October 2020, a worldwide survey on the subject of accessibility in skateparks was carried out by the Goodpush Alliance, Drop In e.V. and SEHstern e.V.. The aim of the survey was to find out how to make skateparks more accessible for everyone. We reached out specifically to skaters with disabilities and WCMXers to ensure their perspectives were included.*

*The survey format was an online questionnaire via Google Sheets, which was disseminated via various networks and social media channels. The survey was answered by 73 people from around the world.*

## 1. General Information

The survey began with general questions about the person (name, age, place of residence, contact details, skateboarding/WCMX history and frequency).

This was followed by five questions about skateparks. Questions were asked about existing barriers in the skatepark and about wishes / dreams for the design of skateparks. A distinction was made between the skatepark and its surrounding environment or amenities.

In addition, the participants had the opportunity to name their favorite skatepark and to make general statements about skateboarding. All questions were asked with open answer fields and were optional to answer.

We evaluated the first questions about the respondents quantitatively:
- 73 people from 15 different countries took part in the survey (mainly USA, UK, Canada, Germany, with further responses from Mozambique, Australia, Sweden, Eswatini, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Ireland, Egypt, Netherlands, Jordan).
- The age of the participants ranged from 8 to 59 years. The average age was 28 years.
- Years of skating (including WCMX) ranged from "just started" to 53 years. Here we calculated an average of 17 years that the respondents skated.
- The answers on the frequency of skating were given from several times a year to daily. From this we conclude that all participants actively skate.
- 33 of the respondents stated that they had a disability. There were 23 people with restricted mobility, five people with visual impairments, four people with mental / cognitive impairments and one person with a hearing impairment.

## 2. Problems and Suggested Solutions

The main part of the survey was differentiated into two areas:
- **Problems at skateparks** (corresponds primarily to question 2 of the survey, with some social barriers mentioned in question 3)
- **Proposed solutions** (question 4)

First, we read all the answers and marked comments that were particularly informative or powerful, with a focus on the perspectives of people with disabilities. In the next step, we gave priority to all responses from people who stated that they had a disability.

We then assigned short key statements to the answers to reflect commonly mentioned problems, such as "getting up the ramps" and suggested solutions like "gradual inclines leading up ramps". We then counted the number of times that each key statement was mentioned. Finally, we sorted the statements according to the following categories:

- Mentioned once
- Mentioned 2-5 times
- Mentioned more than 5 times

Points that have only been mentioned once require further discussion with experts. The more frequently an aspect is mentioned, the more it should be taken into account when planning skateparks.

In addition to the distinction between problems and proposed solutions, we sorted the statements according to the following areas:
- Obstacles in the skatepark – focus on WCMX
- Obstacles in the skatepark – focus on visual restrictions
- Social aspects
- Amenities and environment
- Dream obstacles

This structure gave us a better overview and is reflected in our reported findings below.


## Obstacles and Solutions in the Skatepark – Focus on WCMX

The following points were mentioned as problems for WCMX use of skateparks (with the frequency in brackets afterwards):

- Difficulties getting up ramps / out of bowls (19x)
- Ramps and obstacles too high/steep/challenging (5x)
- Rails inaccessible without a kicker (4x)
- Accessibility in general (not able to access all parts of the skatepark) (4x)
- Platforms and ramps not wide enough for wheelchairs (or platforms missing) (3x)
- No toilets (3x)
- Lack of speed / no starting point to get speed (2x)
- Bad condition of skatepark (2x)

A nine-year-old WCMXer describes the first point as follows:
"Getting to the top to do drop ins, the closest park to us you have to go up rocks (I have to get out and climb while mom carries my chair up) because the ramp is too hard for mom to push me up from the front."

A WCMXer from the USA explains the problem of getting speed as follows:
"Skateparks ideally would have bigger ramps closer to the obstacle since we can't pedal and our push is limited once we are at our top speed."

The following solutions were suggested in this area (and some further ideas will be mentioned later in the section on dream obstacles).

- High starting points to get speed (5x)
- Banks / inclines leading up to the top of ramps or out of bowls (3x)
- General accessibility (2x)
- Distance between obstacles not too wide (to keep speed) (1x)

An interesting suggestion came from a WCMXer in the UK: "[Entire skatepark] sunk into ground, with concrete/tarmac surround, with a low slope ramp to get back [to] ground level."


## Obstacles and Solutions in the Skatepark – Focus on Visual Restrictions

The following points were mentioned as problems for skaters with visual impairments:

- Obstacles are not long enough (2x)
- Not enough or bad light (x2)
- Too much distance between obstacles being disorienting (1x)
- Missing tactile lines on the floor (1x)
- Lack of high contrast colors (1x)
- Unsafe platforms (1x)
- Unable to hear other skatepark users such as scooters or BMX (1x)

A good summary of the problems is the following quote about skatepark problems from a blind skater from the USA:
"Not having a tactile map of the park to help orientate myself if I have never been there. The size of objects is always a challenge for me: ledges, flat bars, quarter pipes, and other obstacles are too short in order for me to properly orientate myself to skate them. Objects need to be wider and longer in order to give more room for air. The more crowded a park is the sketchier it is for me with all of the noise and never knowing when I am clear to go."

Some suggestions for improvement were made:

- Tactile orientation in and around the skatepark (3x)
- Wider obstacles (1x)
- Sensory wall (1x)

The following quotes describe how tactile elements could provide useful benefits to help address the problems mentioned above:
"Miniature replica of the park for the visually impaired to get a feel of the park layout. Bonus: it could be used for fingerboarding."

"It would be nice to have some kind of tactile lines to give you notice when to ollie for a obstacle that's coming up."


**Social Aspects:**

Our survey also aimed to identify social barriers that might be faced by skatepark users, such as how welcome they feel. We identified the following key problem statements that affected skaters with disabilities at skateparks:
- Lack of awareness about disabilities (such as when a disability is not visible) (4x)
- Not always feeling included or welcome f.e. When there are too many people (3x)
- Lack of beginners area (2x)
- People distancing themselves when they find out about disability (1x)
- Unpredictable things and noises (1x)
- Feeling overwhelmed when not in their local skatepark (1x)

A skate trainer from Australia said the following about the first point:
"I facilitate skateboarding programs and lessons for youth with disabilities, mostly intellectual and cognitive disabilities. Most commonly the barriers I encounter while supporting my clients is the lack of awareness in the community around disabilities that aren't easily identifiable. This may often lead to participants feeling unsupported and sometimes discourages them from engaging in community activities."

In order to improve problems on a social level, no direct suggestions were made regarding the design of the skatepark. In relation to the obstacles in the skatepark, however, the following was mentioned most frequently:
- Mixed skatepark for all abilities (level / street / transition) (7x)

Whether this can also influence the atmosphere in the skatepark should be discussed further, as well as whether more information and/or rules could be helpful.

**Amenities and Environment**

Since accessibility of skateparks relates to the wider environment and getting to/from the skateparks, we asked questions related to these factors. The key statements identified below were taken from the answers of all survey respondents with a disability. The following problem areas were mentioned:
- Lack of wheelchair access from road to skatepark (10x)
- Long travel (9x)
- Lack of parking (3x)
- No toilets (3x)
- Anxiety / feeling unsafe on public transport (2x)
- Other difficulties accessing skatepark from the road (2x)
- Poor or no lighting (1x)

Long journeys can also mean that there are no connections by public transport or that the path from the road to the skatepark is very difficult, as the following quote from a blind skater makes clear:
"Getting to and from the park is always a challenge, skateparks are often off-set from roads or in the middle of large parks."

The following solutions were proposed in relation to the amenities and environment of the skatepark:
- Clean, barrier-free toilets (8x)
- Wheelchair accessible pathways (7x)
- Green space/nature (5x)
- Good public transport connections (5x)
- Rest area with shade (4x)
- Water fountain (3x)
- Parking (2x)
- Sensory safe zones (2x)
- Good lighting (1x)
- Central location (1x)
- Assistants on-site to help get on ramps (1x)

The following quote explains what is meant by "sensory safe zones":
"Mainly not too loud – I can find boxed off skateparks overwhelming and this also can start my tinnitus off."

**Dream obstacles**

The participants in the survey expressed the following wishes in relation to obstacles in the skatepark:
- Mixed skatepark for all abilities (level / street / transition) (7x)
- Rainbow-rail / Rail to ride on / Rail with kicker (8x)
- Roll-ins (5x)
- Foampit (with big ramp) (4x)
- Pump track / snakerun (3x)
- Bowl with tunnel / door / easy exit (3x)
- Manual pad with up-ramp (1x)
- Wider stairs with enough space for a wheelchair on the steps (1x)

The following summary comes from a WCMXer:
"A little bit of everything and a way for someone in a chair to get to everything"

## 3. Favorite Skateparks

The fifth question asked respondents to share their favorite skateparks and why they were chosen. The three most frequently mentioned should be considered in more detail. Further accessibility solutions may be found in their skatepark designs.

The three most frequently mentioned skateparks were:

- Fontana Skatepark South in Fontana, California / USA (3x)



- Venice Beach Skatepark in Los Angeles, California / USA (2x)

- Adrenaline Alley in Corby / UK (2x)



## 4. Online Event

On February 19, 2021, the Goodpush Alliance, SEHstern e.V. and Drop In e.V. organised an online event about accessibility in skateparks. This was an opportunity to share the survey results in a public forum and gather additional input from experts and stakeholders worldwide. Six speakers were invited to share their experience on adaptive skateparks:
- Lisa Jacobs (skatepark builder and volunteer for various social skate projects)
- David Lebuser (WCMX pro from Germany)
- Dan Mancina (blind pro skater from the USA)
- Bilal Mir Bat Zai (Afghan adaptive skater)
- Lily Rice (WCMX pro from the UK)
- Mandy Young (founder of Adrenaline Alley skatepark)

More than 70 people from 28 countries joined the event, which went nearly one hour longer than planned. Feedback from participants was that they greatly appreciated the exchange on this topic and they would welcome follow-up events.

Some important points from the discussion were:

- Skateparks have to be useful for a range of users, so it's extremely important to involve the community in planning and to be sure to include obstacles for beginners
- Barrier-free doesn't mean not challenging
  - Skateparks should be engaging for all levels, from beginner to advanced
  - The risk of falling is a part of skateboarding, for everybody

- Making a skatepark more accessible for users with a disability doesn't make it less skateable for anyone else.
- Accessibility means being able to enter AND use the skatepark
- Accessibility is not an addition onto skateparks so it shouldn't be seen as costing "extra money" but be part of the planning progress from the start
  - More people need to advocate for accessible skateparks and get involved in the progress of skatepark construction – ie. using connections to city administration and skatepark builders to provide information about accessibility
  - Accessibility should also be part of (small) DIY projects from the very beginning
- If skateparks are more accessible then more adaptive skateboarders will use them, and the scene will grow

The event participants also discussed the need for more input, data and representation for adaptive skating overall:
- Many agreed on the importance of collecting more data about accessibility in skateparks and collecting good examples of skateparks/obstacles from the community
- We should collect knowledge not only from (adaptive) skateboarders but also from people with disabilities or non-skate organisations that work with/for people with disabilities
- Keep in mind "invisible disabilities" like autism and mental disabilities – for example providing "sensory safe zones" at skateparks
- Make adaptive skateboarding more visible in the media – it's already happening a bit, for example some adaptive skateboarders are sponsored by bigger skate brands

Some questions and topics for further discussion raised were:

- Finances/funding for adaptive skateparks
- How to raise awareness for adaptive skateboarding and WCMX
- How to form a governing body for WCXM/adaptive skateboarding
- Do public skateparks have to be accessible by law? Are there any actions you can take after a skatepark is constructed?
- How to develop standards for accessibility in skateparks? (New Line Skateparks is working on something)
- Can the Olympic/Paralympics Games push WCMX and adaptive skateboarding? (still more riders needed)

The event was recorded and can be watched on Youtube:
https://youtu.be/oULYqkp5P34


## 5. Conclusion and Next Steps

Through the survey many points about how skateparks can be accessible have been collected. It also highlighted problems on the way to the park and showed a need for better facilities in the direct environment of the skatepark. The survey was mostly answered by WCMXers and/or people with mobility impairment. That is reflected in the results.

The online event showed that there is a big worldwide community that is interested in learning and sharing knowledge about adaptive skateparks. Some key goals are to raise more awareness for adaptive skateboarding/WCMX, to have more people actually joining the skateboard community, and building more accessible skateparks.

As a next step, we have just launched a second, shorter survey to collect a higher number of responses. The network from the onlive event can help to spread it so answers with a broader range of ideas can be received.

We will continue to share the survey results regularly to help inform any projects working on accessible skateparks or people interested in making skateboarding more accessible.

More online events are also planned, as well as creating a platform to share good examples of accessible skatepark design.

If you would like to know more or sign up to be notified about upcoming events and news on this topic, please register here or email goodpush@skateistan.org.

## About the Organisers

**The Goodpush Alliance** is a program by Skateistan to support social skateboarding projects worldwide and help them share their knowledge with each other. One of the main goals of Goodpush is to help more girls and children with disabilities take part in skateboarding.
https://www.goodpush.org/

**Drop In e.V.** is a non-profit organisation from Berlin, Germany. They do many different programs and have a project with WCMX (Wheelchair Motocross). Drop In e.V. uses skateboarding and other activities to connect with young people and then support them, for example with learning German or finding a job.
http://www.dropin-ev.de/

**SEHstern e.V.** is also a non profit organisation from Berlin. The staff supports people with disabilities in their daily life. They also help parents and families in different life situations and have several KITAs (pre-schools). SEHstern e.V. also runs "BoB - Berlin on Board", an inclusive skateboarding program for everyone.
https://www.sehstern-ev.de/