

sb

www.iaks.org

51st year

ISSN (Print): 0036-102X
ISSN (Internet): ISSN 2198-4331

International magazine for
sports, leisure and recreational
facilities

4/2017



OPEN SPACES FOR SPORT AND EXERCISE



SKATEPARKS AS VEHICLES OF DEVELOPMENT COOPERATION

IMPORTANCE OF AN ASCENDANT SPORT FOR SOCIETY

Author Ralf Maier, maier landschaftsarchitektur, Am Dreieck 4, DE-51107 Köln, www.maierlandschaftsarchitektur.de
Photos maier landschaftsarchitektur, Samantha Robison (Bethlehem)

Skateparks are very attractive vehicles for development cooperation for a variety of reasons. They promote social and integrative skills, as well as coordination and sensory-motor skills. Unlike classical club sports, the emphasis here is on self-organisation and group cohesion. They therefore represent a very good means of self-help: instead of competitiveness, cooperation is encouraged and is lastingly anchored in society.

In addition, skateparks are relatively inexpensive to build compared to other infrastructure projects as well as being virtually maintenance-free. A skatepark thus unites strong social empowerment with physical exercise at an attractive price – the advantages are obvious.

In countries outside Europe, construction projects require a special approach. In other cultures, other mindsets and attitudes to work are often encountered. So that effective cooperation is possible all the same, improvisation and flexibility are important. Despite elaborate advance word-of-mouth agreements, the reality can be different, because what often seems logical and totally natural for natives is not always obvious for outsiders. For a project to succeed, it is essential to be not only aware of this in advance but also understand it and to take it into account in cost calculation, scheduling and all further steps. It would be counterproductive to be convinced of one's own

modus operandi and to force it on people locally. Curiosity, openness and a thoughtful and respectful approach, on the other hand, make a good impression.

Since 2008, we have thus been able to build facilities in Afghanistan (2009), Tanzania (2011), Kenya (2013), Bethlehem (2015), India (2016) and Kigali (2016). Another park, which we are currently working on, is due for completion in Windhoek, Namibia in 2017. The sponsors worldwide include the Green Helmets, Don Bosco and SOS Kinderdörfer, who have the parks built for schools or children's homes.

Design by experts, construction by volunteers

Design is carried out in Germany by the Cologne design office Betonlandschaften / maierlandschaftsarchitektur. The requests of the financier and of future users are taken into account at this stage. All employees are personally

Photo left page: Karokh, Afghanistan Photo above: Kigali, Ruanda Photo on the bottom left: Dodoma, Tansania Photo on the bottom right: Bethlehem, Palestine

involved in action sport, being skateboarding, BMX and mountain-biking enthusiasts themselves. They understand the needs of sports practitioners and are thus able to find solutions compatible with a tight budget and at the same time satisfying all the requirements of a skatepark, so it need not fear comparison with its big brothers in Europe and the USA.

Project management is handled by Skate-Aid in Münster, Germany, a non-profit foundation founded by Titus Dittmann. The procurement of construction materials and construction of the facility rely in large part in the participation of volunteers. Under the supervision of one or more experienced skatepark constructors, young adults from Europe and local youth help with construction. This also ensures that users can identify with the facility from the outset and that it is well received.

Sustainability and success

We witness the wave of positive feedback on a daily basis on Facebook, where stills and videos from the parks are posted. One can see the progress made by young users and the parks' high frequentation, which is of course always highly gratifying for us. Current programmes with volunteers who teach skateboarding and

companies who regularly donate materials ensure that truly everyone has access to the sport. Campaigns such as in India, where "No school, no skate" and "Girls first" is propagated, generate an environment of equal treatment and motivate each individual to invest work in his or her school career – something that might otherwise be neglected.

Its success is also underscored by its many emulators, such as skatepak, concrete jungle, 7 Hills and many others, who have meanwhile built parks in Peru, Bolivia and other countries. Having successfully opened the skatepark in Panna, India in 2015, we are currently planning a second park for the nearby village of Janwahr. The children of Janwahr Castle, as we have called the first park, are now spending a large part of their spare time skating, so India's first rural skatepark has already become too small.

We are currently handling roughly ten skatepark projects worldwide and are noticing how the sport is shifting more and more into society's mainstream. Additional attention will be generated by the 2020 Summer Olympics, where skateboarding and BMX will be taking place for the first time in their "freestyle" form. No end to the trend is in sight.