The City is A Skatepark:

Lessons in Skate Friendly Urban Design

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Supervised Research Project Report
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Credit: (Gross, 2013)

Abstract
City approaches to street skateboarding are at a crossroads: governments struggle to balance the growing popularity with the potential disruptiveness of skateboarding in public areas. However, some cities have found ways to incorporate street skating into public space. This project, and embedded guidebook, examine good practices drawn from these city examples. Semi-structured interviews with representatives of government and/or the street skating community in San Francisco, New York, Paris, Malmö, and Vancouver supplement information available publicly via academic articles, popular media, videos, and skate magazines. The interviews were coded and used to pull out recurring themes. In total four themes were identified: skaters and the public, supportive infrastructure, finances and development, and working together. In each of these themes the guidebook explores: the nature of the problem, what is done about it, and the outcomes of these interventions. There are five key findings: street skating can be harnessed, allow the space to formulate itself, funding is achievable, you need key translators in the system, and pick the right opportunities. Ultimately street skateboarding represents opportunities for greater inclusion in the city. However, it will be up to individual municipalities if they want to seize this possibility.

Résumé
Les approches municipales en matière de skateboard de rue sont à la croisée des chemins : les gouvernements ont du mal à trouver un équilibre entre la popularité croissante de cette pratique et les perturbations qu'elle peut causer dans les espaces publics. Cependant, certaines villes ont trouvé des moyens d'intégrer le skateboard de rue dans l'espace public. Ce projet, accompagné d'un guide, examine les bonnes pratiques tirées de ces exemples urbains. Des entretiens semi-structurés avec des représentants des autorités et/ou de la communauté des skateurs de rue à San Francisco, New York, Paris, Malmö et Vancouver complètent les informations accessibles au public via des articles universitaires, les médias grand public, des newsletters et des magazines de skate. Les entretiens ont été codés et utilisés pour dégager des thèmes récurrents. Au total, quatre thèmes ont été identifiés : les skateurs et le public, les infrastructures de soutien, les finances et le développement, et la collaboration. Pour chacun de ces thèmes, le guide explore la nature du problème, les mesures prises pour y remédier et les résultats de ces interventions. Cinq conclusions principales ont été tirées : le skateboard de rue peut être exploité, il faut laisser l'espace se formuler de lui-même, le financement est réalisable, il faut des intermédiaires clés dans le système et il faut choisir les bonnes opportunités. En fin de compte, le skateboard de rue représente une opportunité pour une plus grande inclusion dans la ville. Cependant, il appartiendra à chaque municipalité de décider si elle souhaite saisir cette opportunité.

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Until next time, Montreal.

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1.Introduction

Skateboarding, once a marginalized activity, has become one of the most popular sports worldwide (Borden, 2019). However, the growth of skateboarding has not been even across its different styles. "Park boarding", which takes place in skateparks, has gained widespread appeal and acceptance by municipal authorities, while street skateboarding (street skating), which appropriates public space, has remained marginal in city policy (Borden, 2019). Explorations of this dynamic have traditionally focused on how cities have responded with hostility to street skating, through the use of skate stoppers (McDuie-Ra & Campbell, 2022) and plaza reconstruction (Howell, 2005), and how skaters have, in turn, responded to these attempts to stop them.

More recently, research has begun to focus on those cities that have sought to incorporate street skateboarding into public space. For example, Edwards (2020) focuses on cross-comparing cities that have incorporated street skating into public space. While it is a good introduction to the subject, Edwards' research was limited by the COVID-19 pandemic, and he was not able to interview any practitioners or assemble a list of practices.

This paper aims to fill this gap by asking skateboarding organizations and planners what kinds of policies and spatial interventions they undertake when they wish to support street skating. The intention is that this project will become a resource for both city planners and street skateboarders who wish to incorporate street skating into public space. For city planners for whom "[t]he idea of planning is […] that through intervention and action better […] outcomes can be achieved" (Campbell, 2012, p.393), this research will provide insight into proactively managing the conflict between street skaters and other users of public space. For street skateboarders who "enjoy reinterpreting [the] urban landscape" (McDuie-Ra, 2021, p.43) but do not enjoy conflict with the police, this research will provide formal avenues for involvement in public space. The purpose of this study is to create a shared list of good practices for accommodating street skateboarding that can be used by urban planners.

Research Question and Methodology

This supervised research project will investigate the good practices that enable street skateboarding in public spaces. At the outset of this research, it was anticipated that cities promoting street skating in public spaces would have broadly similar approaches and success factors. To determine whether this expectation was accurate, I conducted four phases of qualitative research.

The first phase consisted of a literature review. I explored academic literature on public space, surveillance and appropriation as well as more specific skateboarding literature. Following other skateboarding academics, I also reviewed skating videos, magazine articles and photos (Dinces, 2011; Borden, 2001). These sources provide a first-hand account of how skate culture interacts with public space. This review was used to situate the report within the existing research and allow for the identification of relevant case studies.

The second phase involved identifying and contacting stakeholders identified in the literature review. These stakeholders included urban planners, urban designers, and skating organizations in cities that have incorporated street skating into public spaces. Once contact was made, interviewees were then

invited to an interview. These were semi-structured interviews, allowing me to “pursue areas spontaneously initiated by the interviewee” (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 114). On average, interviews lasted for one hour. The list of questions is included in Appendix A.

In total, eight people were interviewed: four who were part of a municipality and had worked on a skating project, and four who were part of the skate community in that city. The “skate community” is an intentionally broad term that refers to skaters, skate journalists, and members of skateboarding organizations. I use this broad definition because some projects did not undergo extensive public consultation and, therefore, stakeholders involved in the project could not be identified. Regardless, in all situations where a skate community member and municipal official commented on the same project, it was ensured that the skate community member was familiar with the project and its development process. The distribution of interviewees is as follows:

City	**Municipal Official**	**Skate Community Member**
San Francisco	Dan	Max
New York	Jim	Steve
Paris	Paolo	Jebrane
Malmö	Gustav	
Vancouver		Stone

As per the consent form (Appendix B) all the interviews have agreed to be identified by full name and position.

In the case of Malmö, a member of a skating organization was not reached in time to participate in the interviews. Similarly, in Vancouver, a municipal official was not reached in time. However, in both cases, this was deemed acceptable for two reasons. First, because Malmö’s interview was conducted with a municipal official and Vancouver’s was with a skate community member, the balance of perspectives remains. Second, the guidebook attempts to offer an overview of practices rather than an in-depth review of each project or city; therefore, participation from both municipal officials and community members is not a requirement for each city.

The third phase consisted of coding the interviews for recurring themes. In total, 96 unique codes were identified with 404 occurrences across the interviews.

In the fourth and final phase these codes were then organized into the four themes in the guidebook: skaters and the public, supportive infrastructure, finances and development, and working together.

This methodology is based on two previous McGill Supervised Research Projects: “The Planner’s Guide to Tactical Urbanism” (Pfeifer, 2013) and the “Shrinking Communities Handbook” (Hicks, 2021).

Key Results

Analysis of the interviews and literature led to specific recommendations linked to each theme. However, in general, the following are the five key takeaways of the analysis:

1) Street skating can fit in. Skaters want to participate in society and when they are provided with supportive design and thoughtful social engagement points, they can fit into public space like any other user group.
2) Designers can mitigate skating's damage and conflict points, however, at a certain point, planners must live with a certain amount of uncertainty. Skating as a subculture embraces risk, and the only way to mitigate this is through a good relationship with the community.
3) Skating interventions are often low or no cost and can be good spaces for brand involvement. While this may seem to contradict skating's anarchistic energy, by and large commercial involvement does not seem to be a problem.
4) You need key translators in the government. People who can understand both skaters and their desires can help form links as well as establish trustworthiness and authenticity with users.
5) Street skating is not suitable for every space. Planners should recognize it one of many ways to activate space and introduce it where it is appropriate and there is popular support.

Structure of Report

This SRP begins with an introduction, a review of the methodology, and a summary of the results. Chapter 2 examines the evolution of literature on street skating, as well as concepts of appropriation and deviance in public spaces. Chapter 3 offers a more detailed review of the research results. This review serves as the basis for Chapter 4, the guidebook, which functions as a standalone document within the report. The guidebook itself contains an introduction and review of street skating history and key concepts, main suggestions, and a conclusion. The SRP then concludes in Chapter 5 with its own separate conclusion and a review of the five key takeaways from Chapter 4.

2. Literature Review

Introduction

Skateboarding consists of both a formal and an informal style. The formal style, “park skating”, takes place at designated skateparks (Figure 1), while the informal style, “street skateboarding” (street skating), appropriates public space (Borden, 2019) (Figure 2). Street skating’s appropriation involves reusing everyday objects – like stairways, rails, and benches – for skating tricks. Given the unique relationship between street skating and urban space, street skating has received considerable attention from planning and urban design scholars.

Figure 1: An example of "Park" Skating

Figure 2: An example of "street skateboarding"

This literature review begins with an examination of urban appropriation and informality. This sets up a review of two approaches to appropriative practices – the controlled approach and the permissive approach. The controlled approach aims to limit appropriative practices, while the permissive approach allows users to adapt their environment. This permissive approach is adopted by the guidebook, which follows and argues for a different way of approaching street skating. The review then examines how street skating literature has understood these approaches.

The sources for the following literature review were identified through snowball research. This technique involves using academic databases to find books and articles that respond to or build on a few initial sources. This provides a sense of the relevant academic debates about the topic. Grey literature was identified in the same way.

Informality

Informality at its most basic is defined as something “marked by the absence of formality” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Informality is typically thought of as being expressed in urban planning through housing typologies, with informal settlements (“slums”) typically being pointed to as the premier example of informality (McFarlane, 2012). Informality however can be thought of as a broader category if we consider Colin McFarlane's (2012) argument that informality is not just expressed in the built environment but operates every time people move around formally sanctioned channels or use space in unsanctioned ways. It is helpful to consider informality like this as it provides literature with which we can understand unsanctioned uses.

One such unsanctioned use is street skating. Street skating can be considered an informal practice when it reuses the urban environment to perform tricks. Examples would be sliding down a

handrail (Figure 3), grinding on a bench (Figure 4) or ollieing down a flight of stairs (Figure 5). In all these cases, the intention of the space or object is not to perform tricks; yet, skaters recontextualize it.

Figure 3: Sliding down a railing

Figure 4: Griding on a bench

Figure 5: Ollieing down a flight of stairs

While street skating may seem to be a "misuse" of space, it can also be seen as a byproduct of planning. Specifically, as Ananya Roy (2005) argues, informality is produced by formality (2005). Planning sets the rules and regulations for what is allowed in a space, thereby classifying all other actions as informal. Importantly, Roy argues that informality is fluid, with the state choosing "to determine what is informal and what is not, and to determine which forms of informality will thrive and which will disappear" (Roy, 2005, p.149). This is evident in the history of street skating. Skating, when it began in the 1950s and 1960s, was considered a novelty and was allowed on city streets; however, when it developed a more aggressive style in the 80s, it was pushed out or banned from many public spaces. Roy also argues that people pass through different levels of informality within a day. Similarly, in a single session, skaters may move between skating in designated skate parks to street skating, the whole time drifting between legal frameworks.

It is not just academic examinations; street skate videos from throughout the decades highlight the sport's urban and informal character. Videos often emphasize the city as a backdrop and highlight confrontation with police, property owners, or the public who push back against skaters' creative reuse of space (Dime Mtl, 2024; Bubbajacksn, 2025; Sigmund619, 2017). As Duncan McDuie Ra argues, the culture emphasises the value of informality:

> "It can be difficult for those outside the culture to appreciate the necessity of skateboarding in the streets, in spots intended for other uses. Why not just skate in a designated skatepark? […] [Well] in part because of the draw of reinterpreting urban landscapes built for entirely different purposes, and in part because streetscapes are imbricated in the visual and symbolic aspects of the culture". (McDuie-Ra, 2021, p.43).

Street skating has a deep attachment to informal practice. Therefore, given that planning produces informality and skaters embrace this informality how do planners approach this street skating practice?

Controlled

Planners' historic approach to street skating and informality more broadly has been to attempt to control or remove it. Reasons for controlling informal practices vary; however, it is largely done to limit conflict and provide protection for the practice. For example, in his book on public squares, Mark Childs (2004) argues that planners have long understood their responsibility to be minimizing conflict

through tools such as zoning, design, and regulations. This is intended not only to protect users engaged in formal practices but also those engaged in informal practices by providing them with a designated space. For example, writing on “slum” clearance in India, Gautam Bhan (2009) argues that the informal is vulnerable to shifting attitudes. Bhan argues that formalized systems can integrate people into the state apparatus and provide them with legal protection. Planners' approach to skateboarding mirrors this. Specifically, planners use skate parks to a) control the conflict in public space by redirecting it to a controlled environment and b) to provide skaters with a protected space where they can undertake an activity without risk of arbitrary enforcement. To perform this redirect, planners use positive enforcement, such as providing skate parks. However, planners have also increasingly used crime prevention through environmental design strategies (CPTED).

CPTED, as it relates to skateboarding, encompasses two key concepts: natural surveillance and the broken windows theory. Natural surveillance was first popularized by Jane Jacobs (1961), who introduced the idea of “eyes on the street,” arguing that urban spaces should be designed to encourage informal observation by residents and passersby, thereby making it easier to detect and deter criminal activity. This idea was later formalized by Oscar Newman (1972), who detailed how architecture and urban design could be used strategically to promote natural surveillance and other crime prevention strategies (Childs, 2004). These theories helped establish the precedent that the design of a space plays a role in crime prevention.

Broken windows expanded the role of planning and design in crime prevention. Broken windows is a theory advanced by George L. Kelling and James Q. Wilson in their highly influential 1982 article “Broken Windows: The Police and Neighborhood Safety.” In this article, Kelling and Wilson expanded the definition of what is considered unacceptable use and behavior in public space by arguing that visible signs of “disorder” lead to further crime. As Kelling and Wilson (1982) write:

> Window-breaking does not necessarily occur on a large scale because some areas are inhabited by determined window-breakers whereas others are populated by window lovers; rather, one unrepaired broken window is a signal that no one cares, and so breaking more windows costs nothing. (p.3)

This article has expanded the role planning and design play in crime prevention as the definition of what is considered unacceptable use has broadened to include more general disorderly behaviour.

These two aspects of CPTED have proven highly influential in how cities respond to skateboarding. Specifically, as McDuie-Ra and Campbell (2022) argue, cities' use of skate-stoppers works to recreate the key aspects of CPTED highlighted above. Skate-stoppers are “various metal spikes and bumps […] added to handrails, ledges, and other street furniture to frustrate skater’s slides and grinds” (Figure 6) (Borden, 2019, p.232). When installed by cities, skate stoppers indicate a commitment to “broken windows” theory and natural surveillance in two ways. First, skate stoppers demonstrate a commitment to broken windows by indicating that the aesthetic of skate-stoppers is preferable to wax applied by skaters or grind marks left by skaters (McDuie-Ra & Campbell, 2022). This preference stems directly from the broken windows theory and a feeling that dirty and damaged spaces represent an invitation to criminality. Second, skate-stoppers represent a desire to minimize the labour cost of surveillance. As McDuie Ra and Campbell (2022) write, “once [skate-stopped], the spot being “protected” does not require constant monitoring by security guards or electronic surveillance” (p.239). As a skate-stopping company, SkateBlock writes on their website that their products “are ‘on duty’ 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year” (Borden, 2018, p.22). A city's use of skate-stoppers

demonstrates the city's belief that skating represents a crime or behavior that needs to be monitored and prevented.

Figure 6: Skate Stoppers

Permissive

The controlled approach explained above is not without its critics. Researchers inspired by Foucault and Henri Lefebvre, for example, focus on how this type of control serves as a form of social ordering and normalizes certain types of behavior. Skate stoppers, for example, embody Foucault's concept of the panopticon as they work to survey and discipline you before you act. The panopticon is a prison with a central tower, which, by its design, makes those imprisoned feel as if they are always being watched (Figure 7). Foucault uses the panopticon as a metaphor to explain how, in his view, society has moved from punishing those who act out, to one of surveillance that forces us to self-regulate. As Foucault argues (1977):

> Because it is possible to intervene at any moment and because the constant pressure acts even before the offences [and] […] [power] acts directly on individuals; it gives 'power of mind over mind' (p.206)

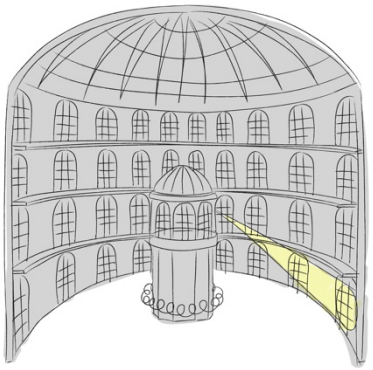

Figure 7: The Panopticon

The omnipresent nature of skate stoppers in a city is intended to convince skaters that nowhere is safe to skate, thereby discouraging the entire street skating style, much like a panopticon. As Foucault argues (1977) "[l]ike surveillance […], normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power" (p.184).

The power of normalization is also echoed by French Marxist Philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1991), who argues that this normalization is embodied not just in our social climate but in "space" itself. "Space", Lefebvre argues, is not a neutral backdrop but is instead deeply tied to power relations, politics, and economic systems. As Lefebvre (1991) writes, "a space is not a thing but rather a set of relations" (p.83). In this view, spaces that ban skateboarders do not just ban a certain type of behavior but also ban a type of person or ideas. Jeremy Németh (2006) provides a good example of this kind of argument in exploring the skateboarding ban in Philadelphia's famous skate spot "LOVE Park". Németh (2006) traces the history of LOVE Park and argues that "LOVE Park was created by architects and planners for the purposes of relaxation and respite, [but] the skaters transformed the park into a space of creativity and exploration" (p.313) (Figure 8). Ultimately, the exclusion of skaters from LOVE Park and its ultimate demolition represents a denial of citizenship to the city's youth and "a normative (re)construction of LOVE Park as a secure space for the consumption of adults" (Figure 9) (Németh, 2006, p.307).

Figure 9: Love Park Before Renovations

Figure 8: Love Park Renovation Plan

In articles like Nemeth's and others (Pégard, 1998; McDuie-Ra & Campbell, 2022), readers are presented with what Cresswell (1996) argues is the power of "deviant" actions in public space, which is that "[they] tell us something about 'normality'" (p.9). Whether intentionally or not, skateboarders' actions reveal to the public how space is regulated, and control is manifest in our society (Borden, 2001). The power of skateboarding, therefore, is that it challenges power structures and ultimately teaches "young people in particular to not only understand their right to the city but also [how to] exercise it" (Edwards, 2020, p.42)

Skateboard Urbanism

The dynamic of control and rebellion, however, is increasingly being replaced by a new one as some cities allow skaters to claim public space. This development has been considered in two ways in the academic literature: as compromising or collaborative. Compromising refers to academics who view the increasing integration of street skating into public space as evidence of skating's diminishing countercultural influence. Collaborative refers to those academics who see skating's increasing incorporation into public space as proof of progressive ideals. Both theories are explored below.

Compromising Critique

Some academics have focused on the increasing incorporation of skaters into public spaces as proof of gentrification. In this argument, skaters are seen as agents of development who are utilized, much like CPTED, to ward off other less desirable uses.

Howell provides a good example of this kind of argument by exploring the skateboarding ban in Philadelphia's "LOVE Park" from a different angle. Howell (2005) focuses on the opponents of the skateboarding ban and argues that defenders of the spot mobilized creative class and gentrification strategies in their attempts to save it. These strategies included arguing that skaters deterred unhoused people, arguing that skating generated economic revenue, pitching a new public-private partnership that would have seen the square maintained by private skate shoe company DC, and having Richard Florida speak on behalf of the virtues of skaters in attracting a creative economy. While skating was ultimately banned and the plaza was reconstructed, street skating briefly served as a tool of gentrification, as the city used it to promote a creative image and deter unhoused people. As Howell (2005) writes:

> From the 1970s to the 1990s, modernist plazas like Love Park were largely abandoned by municipal governments, and at this same time, skateboarding was a marginal industry. […] But in recent years, skateboarders have delivered Love Park to the city of Philadelphia in a new, more marketable form. In the 2000s, as the skateboard industry has grown to over a billion dollars and as the cities have begun to reinvest in their leftover modernist spaces, many opinion makers

> have begun to perceive some ‘‘synergies.’’ Skateboarding may have been a wrench in the modernist ‘‘growth machine,’’ but in Philadelphia, it has been retooled as a cog in the entertainment machine. (p.41)

Ultimately, for Howell, skating has been captured as a neoliberal tool of development and skaters used as a form of CPTED.

Few other academics have expanded this argument, most likely due to the rarity of cities incorporating skating into public space. One example, however, would be Chihsin Chiu and Christopher Giamarino (2019), who write that: “[c]ities are finding it not just economically viable to tolerate skateboarding, but also beneficial in attracting creative crowds to weave authenticity, spontaneity, and vibrancy into their respective urban fabrics” (p.468).

However, the influence of the neoliberal perspective on skateboarding is more apparent in skateboarding plans than in academic literature. For example, the City of Melbourne’s skate plan (2017), argues that “[s]kating injects vibrancy, economic benefits, performance and culture into the city” (p.7). The Skateboard Great Britain (2021) plan similarly argues that “[s]ome skateparks, like F51 in Folkestone, have been conceived and constructed as part of wider urban regeneration projects, helping to redevelop a whole neighbourhood or part of a city” (p.10). Therefore, in some academic articles and skating plans, street skating’s incorporation into public space is seen to represent gentrification. Yet, there are academics who disagree with this perspective.

Collaborative Critique

Some academics have understood the increasing incorporation of skaters into public space as a progressive movement. Specifically, these academics argue that cities have allowed skateboarding into public spaces as a commitment to challenging power structures, rather than as a redevelopment strategy.

Two writers argue this: Iain Borden and Jamie Edwards. Borden (2018) argues that a review of cities' evolving approach to street skating demonstrates the triumph of a progressive, inclusive attitude. Focusing on projects like Southbank Undercroft in London and the Big O Pipe in Montreal, Borden notes that many public spaces have survived due to both community advocacy and shifting attitudes. Writing on the public's reaction to the proposal to remove skaters from the undercroft, Borden (2018) writes that:

> Even the conservatively minded newspaper The Times proclaimed that destroying the skate space to provide retail outlets would amount to “cultural vandalism” (p.26).

This example and the increasing designation of skate spaces as historically and culturally significant leads Borden (2018) to write that “we are beginning to see public attitudes move beyond the mild curiosity of the 1960s and 1970s […] onwards into a world where many of the more enlightened urban citizens, designers, officials, and managers can see the value of skateboarding as an integral part of the public realm” (p.37). In Borden’s view this increasing public acceptance is a “bottom-up” phenomena which cities are responding to as opposed to using to forward their own agenda.

Reviewing skateboarding projects worldwide, Jamie Edwards (2020) arrives at a similar conclusion. Edwards argues that many skateboarding projects in public spaces can be traced back to community advocacy rather than top-down city planning. And while cities often use skating for economic development, this is a byproduct of a progressive agenda that allows for more citizen control. Skaters are not pawns in development, Edwards (2020) argues, but actively engage with the planning system through “community-based bottom-up collectiveness” (p. 2). Edwards sees Malmö, Sweden – one of the most progressive skateboarding cities - as a particularly vivid example of this. Edwards (2020) argues that skateboarding has opened up greater questions about the urban environment, it is a city where skaters' advocacy “[has] […] gained [skaters] the right to change themselves by changing the city” (p.37).

Conclusion

Examinations of street skateboarding are informed by a depth of academic literature. Broadly, street skating falls within academic examinations of informality and how it is categorized in planning. Within explorations of informality, street skateboarding raises questions of control, both in terms of how it is done and what that reflects. Foucault and Lefebvre inform an array of skateboarding scholars who argue that skateboarding demonstrates how power is manifest in our cities. Finally, new spaces that now incorporate street skateboarding either view skateboarding as being integrated into this power—compromising critique—or as examples of successful challenges to power—the collaborative critique.

This project is informed by both the compromising critique and the collaborative critique. Specifically, because this research is interested in the processes by which these skating projects are built, it does not presume that projects are either collaborative or compromising. The research instead tests the validity of each theory by interviewing an equal number of planners and skate community members. The interview questions (Appendix A) are also tailored to explore both theories by asking an equal number of questions on the successes and challenges of projects. The section that follows presents an academic review of the results of these interviews, in view of the literature.

3.Research Results

The guidebook that follows highlights the results of interviews conducted with four skate community members and four city officials. As noted in the introduction, the purpose of this study is to create a shared list of good practices for accommodating street skateboarding that can be used by urban planners. The guidebook that follows presents the information gathered in the interviews in a graphically appealing and non-academic tone to provide accessibility for planners and skateboarders. This section provides an academic distillation of the results of these interviews by city. A thematic analysis of the results can be found in the guidebook.

The results gathered for analysis are based on interviews conducted with four skate community members and four city officials. These participants were recruited through email and through social media (LinkedIn and/or Instagram). The recruitment script can be found in the Appendix (Appendix B). Interviews typically lasted between sixty and ninety minutes. The interviewees were all men. However, this gender bias is acceptable, as it first reflects a gender bias in skateboarding, and the guidebook is attempting to provide an overview of processes and design, rather than a sociodemographic analysis. The interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams and used both video recording and automatic transcription. Questions for each interviewee were specific to their role (Appendix A). Although the questions are general, the semi-structured format allowed me to explore areas that arose naturally during the conversation and to follow up on responses for clarification.

Once the interviews were completed, the transcripts were edited for clarity and checked for completeness. To identify the themes, an iterative coding process was used with the transcripts scanned over multiple times. From the long-form interviews completed with these stakeholders, a total of 96 unique codes were identified, with 404 occurrences across the interviews. These were coded into four themes:

Skaters and the public: This themes groups together comments and suggestions around mixing skaters and non-skaters. This refers to comments made by interviewees about mixing other members of the public with skaters both as a safety concern and in terms of preventing antisocial skating behaviour.

Supportive infrastructure: This theme encompasses comments made about the physical design of the space. Specifically, how do you create an authentic space for skaters when street skating is so much about appropriation.

Finances and Development: This theme covers comments on the cost of financing and building a street skating project.

Working Together: This theme covers comments made about how to make a project unroll successfully from a bureaucratic point of view. Specifically, how can street skating fit into a municipal bureaucracy.

The table below examines the issues addressed by each of these themes and how each city responds to them.

Theme	San Francisco	New York	Malmö	Paris
Skaters and the public Issue: How do you mix skaters and the public?	Build in mixed use facilities to prevent the space form being monopolized.	Pay particular attention to flow and contact points.	Engage skaters in the space's creation and its maintenance.	Design modular infrastructure that can be skated but can also be appropriated in other ways.
Supportive infrastructure Issue: What should the space look like?	The space should tie into the rest of the skating network (consider what unique thing does this space offer).	Consider using material that is authentic to the space. Material that replicates the urban environment closely.	Consider nearby amenities – what will people do when they are not skating? Are there places to sit?	The space should blend in. The space should look unintentional to keep it feeling authentic.
Finances and Development Issue: How do you fund this?	Seize the right political moment.	Undertake not-for-profit partnerships and funding opportunities.	Use sponsored skating events to help establish permanent infrastructure	Undertake public private partnerships
Working Together Issue: How do you work with skaters in the municipal system?	Work with community figures and work expeditiously	Need key translators who can speak to both a municipal point of view and a skater point of view	Demonstrate how skaters contribute to municipal goal fulfilment	Work across departments

*Many cities share overlap on their approaches

These themes, explored in more depth in the guidebook, lead to the following key takeaways, linked to each theme, which I evaluate here against other literature.

The first key takeaway is that conflict is due to the design of a skate space not the inherent culture of skaters. While interviewees noted that some skaters do engage in antisocial behavior the majority will engage with other users to make shared use of the space. This is reflected in other literature like Howell's (2005) exploration of LOVE Park where skaters attempted a variety of compromises with the city to keep the park open to skating. Similarly, Edwards (2020) notes that at the Los Angeles courthouse space, skaters negotiated regulations for the space in order to maintain its use.

Another significant takeaway from these interviews is to make the space attractive to everyone, not just skaters. While skaters may be willing to share the space other users will only use it if there is a reason for them to do so. While this does not echo skate literature it does echo more broad urban design concepts (Shaftoe, 2014; Whyte, 1980). As William Whyte (1980) argues "[t]he best way to handle the problems of undesirables is to make a place attractive to everyone else" (p.63).

Another recurring point is that cities should involve skaters in the design of the space. Skaters have a better sense then others of how a space might be used to performs tricks and how much area is needed to do so. Therefore, consulting with skaters ahead of time can you help avoid potential conflict points. This aligns with arguments by Borden (2019) and McDuie-Ra (2021) that skaters have a "specific gaze" which they use to scrutinize public space and imagine how it might be skated.

Another important point is that skaters help harness the potential of underused spaces. Interviewees highlighted that skating was used to "clean up" previously dangerous areas or to animate spaces that were not being used. This is in line with Borden's (2019) argument that skateboarding brings a unique character to the city by suggesting that "pleasure rather than work, using space rather than paying for it, activity rather than passivity, performing rather than watching, and creativity rather than destruction, are all potential components of our cities" (p.194). It also mirrors Whyte's (1980) concept of triangulation which describes how plazas are made better by a stimulus which can help bring strangers together through its observation.

Planners should also seek to design custom elements which respond to local scenes and demand. During interviews it was suggested that this helps create a sense of ownership and a desire to actually use the space. This aligns well with comments made by Montreal skaters in the Red Bull Dire Skate documentary (Mathieu, 2016). Here skaters highlight that previous parks were designed cheaply without consultation and so skaters did not feel ownership of the space.

The research also underscores the need to support skating's cultural elements not just physical space. Interviewees noted that skate shops, art venues and fashion all form important parts of skate culture and to build a thriving culture the ecosystem around these must also be supported. A review of skate videos, magazines and skating brands back this up as it is clear that skating culture composes a lot outside of the park.

Planners should remove barriers to participation, whether that be for not-for-profits, brands, or individuals. There are many approaches to designing shared skate space which cities can facilitate by opening opportunities for participation. This mirrors some calls from urban design scholars for more co-created and evolving spaces (Urhahn Urban Design, 2011; Campo, 2013)

It was also revealed that skate spaces are good for further activations. Street skaters can create a spontaneous environment which facilitates further artistic projects or activations like concerts or markets.

Planners can also gain political support by showing how street skating can fill a variety of goals. Planners noted that this was one of their main reasons for engaging with street skating was how well it facilitated the cities other goals. This echoes news articles (Moskowitz, 2024; Dougherty, 2025) as well

as cities own internal studies about the variety of benefits brought by street skating areas (San Francisco Recreation and Parks, UN Plaza activation Project Fact Sheet, personal communication, March 18, 2025).

The tenth and final key takeaway is that you need key figures to help navigate both skating culture and the city process. Interviewees mentioned throughout the importance of having people who understood both skateboarding and the municipal process. This reinforces Edwards (2020) argument that the most successful spaces were those where skaters had a degree of input and control.

In view of the literature review on the compromising and the collaborative critique, this project finds cities engaged in both types of approaches. Some key takeaways such as the third and the sixth emphasize the necessity of collaborating with skaters when planning skate elements. Other key takeaways, however, such as the fourth, the fifth, and the ninth highlight a top-down approach for planning skate elements.

The case studies are similarly mixed. UN Plaza in San Francisco for example is an example of a more top--down skating project, as acknowledged by both planners and skate community members. UN Plaza in San Francisco faces onto City Hall and was frequented by unhoused individuals, drug users, and dealers. In an effort to "clean-up" the plaza before San Francisco hosted APEC (Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation) the mayor's office-initiated programming including skateboarding in the area to move unwanted uses out. This was highly successful but as acknowledged by both planners and skaters, UN plaza was not a particularly hot skating spot before. Instead, skating was used by the city to "resolve" a particular city problem.

Conversely, at the Brooklyn Banks, another case study, the City of New York was unaware that skaters valued the space. The Brooklyn Banks is a space under the Brooklyn Bridge on the Manhattan side which is a very popular street skating spot. The space was built in the 1970s as part of the 1 Police Plaza redevelopment project. Its red brick banks (big banks, small banks, and the nine stairs) were frequently used for street skating and many skate videos were filmed there. However, in 2004 renovations destroyed the little banks area and in 2010 the rest of the area was closed as major restoration took place on the bridge. It became clear that renovations could take longer than expected with no promise the space would remain as is. To secure the bank's future Steve Rodriguez and Rosa Chang formed a Not for Profit called "Gotham Park" which seeks to protect and expand the bank's area. Their work has been funded through grants and donations that support increased public space and the "economic revitalization" the project will bring to the area (Moskowitz, 2024). In this case the bottom-up effort of community organizers got the city to pay attention and eventually secured the maintenance and repair of the banks.

Ultimately, the research, key takeaways, and case studies demonstrate that the compromising and the collaborative approaches to planning skating spaces were applied case by case and can even be fluid within a case itself. This reflects how a street skating project can serve many different goals both for a municipality and the skaters themselves. As Gustav Eden said in our interview:

> But in a way you can see the skate project in two ways. You can see like. Oh, here's the skaters and they've learned how to tap all these different streams of funding for money you know and support. And so, they've been really successful in doing that. On the reverse […] my goal fulfillment as a municipal officer is very well facilitated by working with skateboarding.

Skateboarding can serve a wide variety of goals for different users. The guidebook that follows presents how planners might achieve some of these.

Urban Planners Guide to Street Skating

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August 2025

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Executive Summary

Street skating is an increasingly mainstream and popular recreational activity. However, its awkward place between urban planning and park planning has left it unplanned for and marginal in much of city policy. Most cities treat street skating as something to be fought against or something to be used and co-opted. However, some cities are beginning to collaborate with skaters to reintroduce street skating into city spaces.

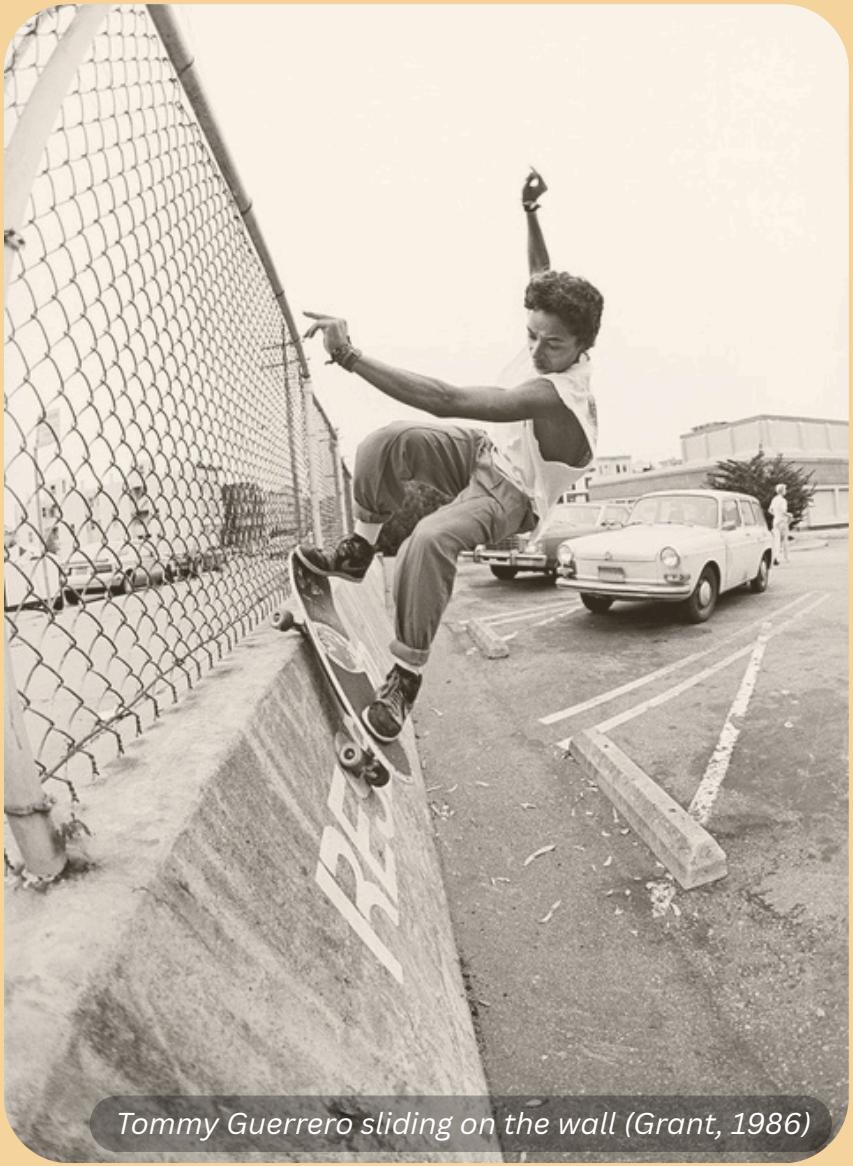
The increasing reincorporation or legalization of street skating reflects several trends. First, street skating's increasingly mainstream and diverse users. Second, the low cost of street skating projects, and third, cities attempts to attract hip creatives. The guidebook, which follows, looks to understand how cities pursue these goals while contending with some of skating's more disruptive characteristics like damage or antisocial behaviour.

To understand some of the good practices cities are establishing for street skating projects, I conducted long-form interviews with four skate community members and four city officials. These recommendations are organized by theme in the Guidebook.

Key Recommendations

- Conflict is due to the design of the space, not the culture of the skaters. Skaters can and will share space when it is clear to all users that the space is meant to be shared.
- Design with all skate levels in mind to prevent monopolization. One of the key ways to encourage sharing is to design spaces that skaters of all levels (beginner or professional) can use. This prevents it from being monopolized by one skill level, making it less likely for others to use it.
- ·Involve skaters to understand potential conflict points. Skaters need space to run up and dismount from their tricks. Design the space so that pedestrians are not crossing right in front of these.
- Understand how skaters can help harness the potential of the space by introducing vibrancy and activity. Street skating may be most effective in revitalizing currently underutilized or unused public spaces. Understand the unique vibrancy street skating can bring to these spaces to better sell its potential.
- Create custom elements that fit and respond to local scenes and demand. It is important that the space feels authentic to its urban context. Otherwise, it may fail to draw in skaters.

- ·Support the larger skating culture. Skating is tied to music, art, and other creative mediums, which, if supported, can form a skating ecosystem that provides a positive and creative environment for skaters and multiple touchpoints for the city.
- Remove barriers to brands, not-for-profits, and individuals participating in building sports facilities and public infrastructure. There are numerous stakeholders who can and would participate in creating skate space if the city facilitates their involvement.
- ·Skate spaces can become good spots for further activations and recuperation of costs. Skaters lend a “cool authenticity” to the space, which can make it a valuable spot for the city to rent.
- Build on favorable political or cultural conditions. Skating can serve several different political purposes. Recognize how it may serve a current administration and work to present that argument.
- You need key figures to help navigate both skating culture and the city process. People who can demonstrate knowledge of both skating and the municipal world are key in helping ensure the projects respond to both sides' concerns.



Tommy Guerrero sliding on the wall (Grant, 1986)

1. Introduction

Will Golding Front Side Crook in Hull's (UK) new street skating space (Golding, 2018)

Over the past sixty years, skateboarding has transformed from a niche hobby to one of the world's most popular sports. This rise, however, has not been equal among all styles of skateboarding. While park boarding is now widely accepted and supported by cities, street skateboarding remains a problem. In fact, many cities employ "skate stoppers" or other skate prevention techniques to stop street skating. In response, street skaters find new spaces or remove the stoppers.

This back-and-forth is a headache for many city officials, who may lack the means to constantly battle with skaters. As skateboarding becomes more mainstream, some cities are also starting to recognize its potential to revitalize certain areas or to brand the city as culturally authentic.

Whatever their reasons, cities across North America and Europe are seeking a more effective approach to street skating. As they do, a set of good practices is beginning to emerge. This guidebook offers an overview of good practices for city planners to effectively integrate street skating into the urban environment.

What is street skating?

Street skateboarding is a style that uses everyday public spaces and architectural features for tricks. Skaters commonly use railings, steps, and ledges as their playground, often without distinguishing between public and private property. This style emerged in the 1980s and 1990s, partly due to the closure of many skateparks across North America. This skating style adopted an aggressive and countercultural attitude, which was reflected in clothing, tricks, and skating videos that often reveled in confrontations with property owners. However, street skating has undergone significant changes over the years, driven by three key forces.

First, the face of skateboarding is no longer the "angry white teenager" of the 80s and 90s. The sport has become far more diverse in age, gender, and race.

Second, skateboarding is big business. The global skateboard market is a billion-dollar industry, and companies now invest significantly in street skating's success through sponsorships and marketing. This is a far cry from its roots as an anti-establishment movement.

Finally, the sport has cemented its place in mainstream culture. This can be seen in street skating's inclusion in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics as well as its popularity in entertainment, like the *Tony Hawk's Pro Skater* videogames and critically acclaimed films like *Mid90s*.

These changes are now being reflected in urban planning. After years of a hostile relationship, cities are increasingly designing skateable features directly into public spaces. Popular examples of this new, more integrated relationship include:

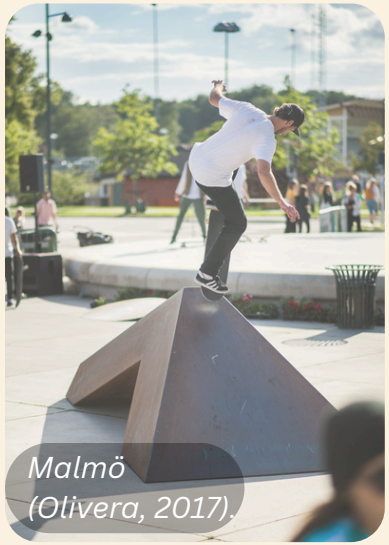
MACBA, Barcelona: The Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (MACBA) is a spot long appropriated by street skaters fond of its granite ledges and smooth surfaces. In response, the museum has officially allowed street skaters on Tuesdays and Sundays after 2:30 pm and unofficially permitted skating all day.

MACBA (Saint Jordi Hostels, n.d.)

Undercroft, London: Beneath the Queen Elizabeth Hall, the undercroft is one of England's classic skate spots. Long informally recognized, the space was officially designated and granted cultural and historic significance in the 2010s.


Undercroft (Ravenscroft, 2019)

Malmö, Sweden: Malmö works to incorporate street skating spots throughout the city and in all new developments. This embrace of street skating has looked to empower the local skating scene while creating a creative culture that can compete with the larger nearby city of Copenhagen.


Malmö (Olivera, 2017).

Why permit street skating?

While concerns are often raised about the damage caused by skateboarding, the supposed criminality of skateboarders, and the danger skaters can pose to themselves or others, the cities above (and others) have forged ahead with skateboarding projects. Although each city has unique motivations for embracing skateboarding, three reasons are particularly common:

Popular Demand: Skaters themselves are often the biggest champions for creating legal street spots. Skaters might advocate for a spot due to a lack of other facilities or a desire to maintain an existing street spot. As researchers like Iain Borden (2019), Åsa Bäckström and Shane Blackman (2022) have noted, non-skaters have also come to increasingly support street spots as skating has grown from an underground subculture to an Olympic sport, and skaters themselves have diversified in age, race, and gender

Low-cost, high reward: Street skating is a cost-effective way to provide recreational facilities, requiring little to no alteration to the existing environment. Yet, this small investment can yield huge returns. Street skating spots become magnets for skaters, attracting visitors who spend money locally and bring energy and life to the area.

Neighbourhood regeneration: Cities trying to cultivate a vibrant, creative image are finding that embracing street skating is a powerful signifier. Sanctioned skate spots can act as a magnet for what's often called the "creative class" by, as Chihsin Chiu and Christopher Giamarino argue (2019), instilling "authenticity, spontaneity, and vibrancy into their respective urban fabrics".

For these reasons (and others) some cities have incorporated street skating into public space. How planners in these cities negotiate these benefits while also responding to the concerns presented above is the subject of this guidebook.

Methodology

To identify good practices, I conducted qualitative research in five phases.

The first phase consisted of a literature review to situate the report

The second phase consisted of reaching out to stakeholders and conducting semi-structured interviews with those who agreed to participate.

The third phase consisted of a meta-analysis to draw out recurring themes from the interviews.

In the fourth phase, I utilized both the literature and my meta-analysis to compile a list of recommendations that comprise the bulk of the guidebook.

The purpose of the guidebook

This guidebook examines the good practices of successful street skating projects. The intention is to provide guidance to urban planners and help them:

- **See what works:** Learn the key features of a successful skate spot.
- **Respond with confidence:** Get clear guidance on skaters' wants and desires and how to handle requests for new skate spots from your community.
- **Spot hidden opportunities:** Learn how to recognize and develop a site's potential for becoming a great place to skate.

Scope

It is important to note that while this guidebook focuses on providing some best practices based on existing projects, it does not offer a review of every successful street skating and public space project. Time and availability did not permit a review of more contexts.

Similarly, the identified good practices are intended to serve as a general guide and provide a foundation for engagement. The guidebook cannot offer the specificity needed for every skating project, as each city is unique.

Finally, while the guidebook touches on design, it does not offer insight into materials or specific kinds of architectural considerations that must be made for those incorporating street skating into public space.

2. History

Skateboarding has undergone significant changes over the decades, with its popularity and styles evolving constantly. While historians and skaters might debate the exact dates, the sport's history is generally divided into four main eras (Adam Miller, 2018). These are the 1950s-1960s (the beginning), the 1970s-1980s (vert skating), the 1980s-1990s (street skating), and the 2000s–present (wide adoption). The following section reviews these historic eras, paying particular attention to how cities responded to each of them.

Lucas Fiederling, Frontside Feeble at the Brooklyn Waterfront (Mirbach, 2016)

1950s-1960s: The Beginning

The first skateboards appeared in the 1950s, evolving from homemade scooters. These early scooters were just a piece of wood nailed to a fruit box and a single roller skate (Borden, 2019, p.6). As the narrator notes in Bruce Brown's early skateboarding documentary "America's Newest Sport" (1966): "no one knows exactly when the box came off and they took to just riding the plain old 2x4 with the old roller skate, eventually [however] this evolved into the modern skateboard". Iterations of this early skateboard used steel wheels that were difficult to turn and struggled to handle bumps and cracks in the pavement. (Borden, 2019; Brown, 1966). However, the big breakthrough came in the late 1950s with the switch to clay wheels. This led to the first real boom in skateboarding popularity, first in California (Backstorm& Blackman, 2022), which then spread throughout the United States and the world (Borden, 2019).

Early Skateboarding (Christopher, 2014)

The early style, which developed around these boards, mirrored the simultaneously emerging sport of surfing. This is why skateboarding at the time was sometimes referred to as "sidewalk surfing". Early skate tricks focused on what one could do while balancing on the board—like handstands or spinning—rather than using the board to interact with obstacles, which would become a key feature of later styles.


Ellen O'Neal (Myers, n.d.)

Early municipal responses to skateboarding were "benign acceptance and mild curiosity" (Borden, 2018, p.21). This was most likely because the early style of skating was far less appropriative of urban space than later iterations. However, that doesn't mean there were no rules. The 1966 documentary "The Devil's Toy," for example, includes a scene in Westmount, Quebec, where police stop skaters and instruct them to move to a designated area. This indicates that early forms of regulation did exist, albeit in a much milder form than the measures that would follow later.

1970s: Vert Skating

In the 1970s, interest in skateboarding was again driven by a change in the skateboard itself. In this case, clay wheels were replaced by polyurethane, which could handle cracks and gaps in the pavement more effectively than ever and provided skaters with enhanced speed and control (Borden, 2019; Dinces, 2011). Around the same time, grip tape also became a standard feature on boards, allowing skaters more secure footing (Borden, 2018, p. 14). These changes directly influenced skating style. With better equipment, skaters could move faster and make sharper, more aggressive turns. A clear example of this was the rise of the Zephyr Competition Team (or Z-Boys), who pioneered a style of skateboarding which emphasized getting low to the ground and making quick, sudden turns (Peralta, 2001).

The other big change of the 1970s was the birth of "vert" skating. During a California drought, skaters realized the smooth, curved walls of empty backyard pools were perfect for riding. Skaters began to take over pools throughout California, and for the first time, skating moved from horizontal to vertical. The takeover of abandoned (and sometimes not) pools was also an early example of skaters' challenge to property rights (Borden, 2001, pp. 46-47).

Jay Adams (MP, n.d.)


Pool Skating(Gilley, n.d.)

During this period, cities saw the first wave of purpose-built skateparks. Many were intentionally designed to look like the backyard pools skaters loved, which was an early attempt by planners to redirect skaters from private property into officially approved, sanctioned spaces. These parks were incredibly popular, as by 1982, "over 190 skateparks had been built in the US across at least 35 states" (Borden, 2019, p. 68). These early parks, however, were privately owned and required admission fees. This would ultimately be the park's downfall, as steep prices led skaters to turn elsewhere, while a series of liability lawsuits also forced many to close (Borden, 2019, p.134).

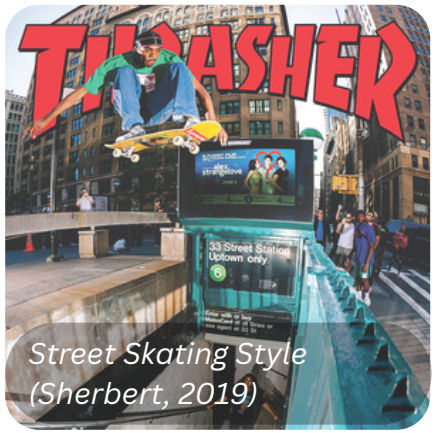
1980s – 1990s: Street Skating

Following the “near total closure of the first skateparks” (Borden, 2019, p.194), skating began to drop in popularity. The skaters and skate companies that stuck around had to find a new way to keep the sport alive. Their solution was a full-scale return to the streets (Howell, 2001; Borden, 2001).

This time, however, street skating was different. It became more aggressive and creative, with skaters aiming to conquer any urban obstacle they could find. Famous street skating pioneer Natas Kaupas summed this up by saying, “I attempt to make everything skateable”.

A new culture also grew around this style, with skate videos and brands celebrating its raw, rebellious energy (Dinces, 2011; O'Haver, 2018). The return to urban centers also linked skating to other emerging cultural and artistic trends, such as graffiti and rap music.

This era marked the most hostile relationship between skateboarders and city authorities. During this time, many cities adopted the "broken windows theory," which suggests that minor signs of disorder can lead to more serious crime. As a result, cities started to view skateboarding, and the scuffs and marks it leaves, as a major threat to public order. In response, cities increased fines and policing of skaters. Cities also began installing "skate stoppers" - metal bumps to stop slides on urban furniture. In response to this increased surveillance, skaters doubled down on their appropriation and adopted a more confrontational attitude. Clashes with police and the public became a common theme of street skating videos of the time (O'Haver, 2018).



Street Skating Style (Sherbert, 2019)


Infamous skating film KIDS (Clark, 1996)

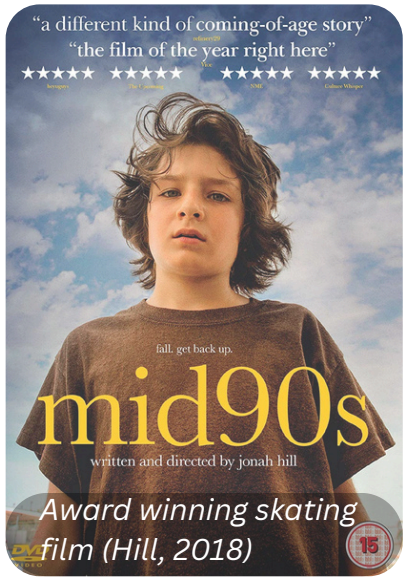

Natas Kaupas (Brittain, 1988)


Board sliding (Sinnin, 1998)

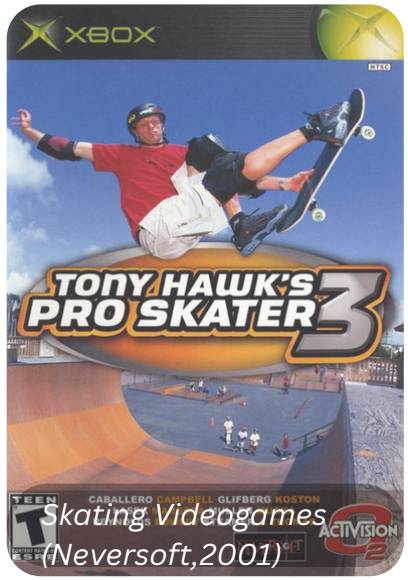
2000s: Wide Adoption

In recent years, street skating has evolved into a mainstream phenomenon. This has been due, in part, to the increasing attention professional skaters have received and their subsequent involvement in brand deals and sponsorships (O'Haver, 2018). Second, the subcultural popularity of street skating has been exported to mainstream TV, movies, music videos, and video games. At the same time, street skating has been widely adopted as the skateboarding community has become more diverse and inclusive. The culmination of skating's new mainstream identity was undoubtedly its presence in the 2020 Summer Olympics (Bäckström & Blackman, 2022).

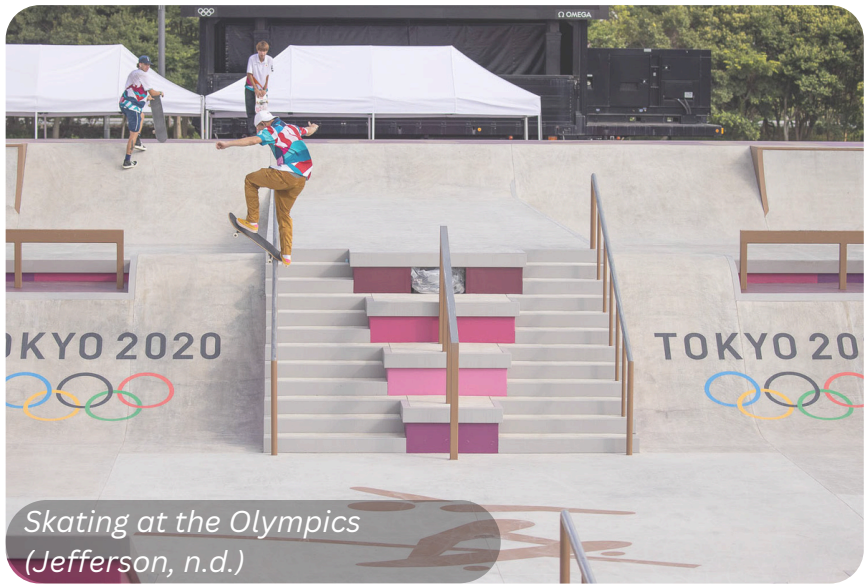
As skateboarding has become more mainstream, cities have grown more willing to find a place for it in the urban landscape. One of the clearest examples has been in the growth of municipally built and run skateparks throughout cities. These facilities have looked to direct skaters off the streets by providing them with places to skate. To appeal to modern skaters, these new parks often feature elements that mimic street skating, such as ledges, rails, and stairs. However, as this guide argues, skateparks have never fully replaced the appeal of the real thing. For skaters, the appropriation of urban space has remained too appealing, and skate culture has enforced this by only considering street clips to be valid for skating videos.



Award winning skating film (Hill, 2018)



Skating Videogames (Neversoft,2001)



Skating at the Olympics (Jefferson, n.d.)

3. Key Concepts

Academic research suggests that there are three types of relationships between cities and street skaters: attempting to stop it (conflict), trying to manage or utilize it for the city's own benefit (co-optation), or actually working together as partners (co-creation). This section presents a brief review of each of these theories.

Alex Gall (Transworld Skateboarding, 2001)

Conflict

This academic argument sees the relationship between skaters and cities as a power struggle. In these articles, the simple act of skating—such as grinding a ledge or ollieing a gap—is seen as a symbolic challenge to how cities are controlled.

Iain Borden first presented this argument in his 2001 book “Skateboarding and the Body” where he writes that:

> architecture contains elements of power, making us obey barriers and routes, informing us that transgressions will be met by hostile response, or simply reminding us of the pervasive presence of public institutions, the state, corporations and urban managers. [...] In this context, skateboarders’ assault is a small yet significant challenge to power, meeting like with like (p.213).

Other writers, such as Olivier Pégard, Jeremy Németh, and McDuie-Ra and Campbell, have built on this idea, arguing that skaters challenge different forms of control. What exactly skating is challenging – the place of youth in space (Pégard) or how capitalism shapes the urban environment (Németh) – depends on the article. Regardless of the specifics, all these articles see the relationship between street skaters and the city as one of ongoing conflict over who controls public space.

Skate Stopper (Wiggin & Bicknell, 2011)

Co-optation

This perspective argues that when governments and corporations adopt skateboarding, the sport loses its critical and rebellious edge. For example, Ocean Howell's (2005) study of Philadelphia's Love Park demonstrates how skaters were unofficially utilized to create an area that seemed cool and "revitalized," paving the way for redevelopment and gentrification. Similarly, other researchers, such as Chihsin Chiu and Christopher Giamarino (2019), note that cities often use skaters to project a creative and exciting image.

Other authors go further, arguing that skateboarding was never really oppositional to begin with. For example, Sean Dinces (2011) argues that skateboarding has been closely tied to commodification and a marketable form of rebellion. While other authors, such as O'Haver (2018) and Emily Chivers Yochim (2018), argue that skaters are too individualistic to conceive of their rebellion on more than personal terms.

Overall, this view suggests that skateboarding has been absorbed by the modern capitalist system and has become a tool for branding and urban development rather than a force against it

Danny Sargent Safeway (Kanights, 1990)

Co-creation

This perspective suggests that when cities and skaters work together, skateboarding can maintain its independent spirit. It argues that successful skate spots are often created because cities genuinely respond to the needs and culture of skaters, rather than being imposed from above.

For example, in his work on legalized skate spots, Ian Borden (2019) notes that many beloved skate spots are initiated by the local skate community, rather than the city or a corporation. Similarly, Jamie Edwards' (2020) research on legal street spots reveals that they are typically the result of pressure from skaters themselves, rather than a top-down decision by the government. Scholars of this perspective argue that cities are open to the critiques posed by skating and work to respond to it.


Public Consultations (Bauer, 2019)

Since this guide is based on conversations with both skaters and city planners, its foundation is one of co-optation and co-creation. The guidebook notes both the opportunities for planners working with skaters and some of the challenges or contradictions.

4. Themes

This guidebook was compiled from interviews with four members of the skateboarding community and four city officials. The interviewees were from San Francisco, Malmö, New York, Vancouver, and Paris. The section that follows details the main takeaways from these interviews, sorted into themes based on broad similarities.

Interviewees - Government Employees

Four government employees were interviewed. They shared helpful insights into the advantages and challenges of pursuing street skating integration projects. The interviewees from formal government projects were...

Jim Lau (New York)

- Worked on under the K-Bridge in New York
- Previously the Director of Design with the New York State Department of Transportation

Paolo Guidi (Paris)

- Chargé de mission cadre supérieur (Executive Project Manager) at Ville de Paris
- Coordinated the Place de la République in Paris

Gustav Svanborg Edén (Malmö)

- Project Manager (Unofficially the Skateboard Coordinator)
- Lifelong skater
- One of the main voices on skateboard urbanism

Dan Mauer (San Francisco)

- Project Manager Recreation and Parks Department
- Lead coordinator on the UN Plaza project

Interviewees - Skate Community Members

Four skate community members were interviewed. They shared helpful insights into the advantages and challenges of working with cities on skate community projects, as well as how these are received. The interviewees from the skate community were...

Steve Rodriguez (New York)

- Founder of 5boronyc, Co-founder of gothamparknyc,
- Dedicated street skateboarder and advocate for the Brooklyn Banks street skating spot

Jebrane Desigaud (Paris)

- Head of VOLCOM Marketing Projects Europe
- Key figure in VOLCOM's involvement in the Place de La République Skate installation

Max Harrison-Caldwell (San Fransisco)

- Express Desk Reporter at The San Francisco Standard
- Street skateboarder
- Wrote an article on the San Francisco UN Plaza project

Stone Friesen (Vancouver)

- Director of the Vancouver Skateboard Coalition
- Longtime skateboarder and skating advocate

The interviews were conducted on Microsoft Teams and used both video recording and automatic transcription. Transcripts of completed interviews were coded according to topics raised and completeness. 96 unique codes were identified. These were sorted into the following four themes:

Skaters and the Public. Street skaters and the public often come into conflict in shared public space. For example, older adults might fear being injured by skaters, or skaters might be scolded by members of the public. This theme explores how this tension is managed in legalized street skating spots.

Supportive Infrastructure. Cities might hesitate to create new legal street skating spots if there is a feeling that current parks are underused. If street skaters are drawn to unofficial spots, why would they use a city-built spot? This theme explores the designs and elements that have created attractive, purpose-built street spaces.

Finances and Development. Given that street skating can cause damage to existing space and new infrastructure may have higher costs associated with it, this theme examines what cities have done to manage the cost of creating a legal street skating spot.

Working Together. Given that skateboarding is often seen as a culture of individuals who resist authority, there may be difficulty engaging skaters in the planning system. This theme explores how planners have effectively engaged with the skateboarding community.

For each theme, this guidebook explores the nature of the problem, what is done about it, the outcomes, the takeaways, and an exploration of a case study reflecting on this theme. The key takeaways are as follows:


Conflict is due to the design of the space, not the culture of the skaters


Design with all skate levels in mind to prevent monopolization


Involve skaters to understand potential conflict points


Understand how skaters can help harness the potential of the space by introducing vibrancy and activity


Create custom elements that fit and respond to local scenes and demand


Support the larger skating culture


Remove barriers to brands, not-for-profits, and individuals participating in building sports facilities and public infrastructure


Skate spaces can become good spots for further activations and recuperation of costs


Build on favorable political or cultural conditions


You need key figures to help navigate both skating culture and the city process

Theme 1: Skaters and the Public

Key Takeaways Of This Theme:

Conflict is due to the design of the space, not the culture of the skaters

Design with all skate levels in mind to prevent monopolization

Involve skaters to understand potential conflict points

Understand how skaters can help harness the potential of the space by introducing vibrancy and activity

(Boulos, 2005)

Nature Of The Problem

Interviewees noted that one of the preeminent barriers to completing street skating projects is concerns about whether the skaters and the public can share space. There are two concerns: first, there are practical concerns about safety and potential collisions. Second, there are negative stereotypes that paint skaters as disruptive or criminal. (O'Haver, 2018; Beal, 1996). This theme examines how cities that incorporate street skating into public spaces have addressed these concerns by mitigating conflict and facilitating the successful sharing of space.

What Is Done

Planners identified four strategies to ensure a successful sharing of public space between skaters and other users.

1. **Incorporate skating into a larger mixed-use space**
2. **Engage skaters in the creation and maintenance of the area**
3. **Design for all levels, all skaters**
4. **Design with attention to flow and contact points**

These strategies are explored in the following pages.

1.Incorporate skating into a larger mixed-use space

(Volcom, 2024)

Planners emphasized that allowing multiple types of activities in the space prevents skaters from monopolizing the area and making others feel unwelcome. Instead of simply creating a skatepark under a different name, planners should locate skateable elements alongside or within other recreational facilities, such as basketball courts or pickleball courts. Furthermore, design the skate features to be multi-purpose. Ledges designed for grinding should also be comfortable for sitting, and other elements can be used for picnicking or relaxing. This encourages different groups to use the space together.

While it may seem counterintuitive to mix skating and other uses to prevent conflict, planners interviewed said that this mixing is what forces diverse users of the space to engage in dialogue with one another. Planner Gustav Eden references theorist Markus Miessen's concept of “agonistic assemblies,” emphasizing the learning that occurs through the negotiations around the use of shared space:

If someone else sits on that bench, they can have a dialogue and negotiation where they build their relationship and say like, ok, you want to sit well, could you sit somewhere else? No, ok, we respect that because we don't own the space, [however] neither do you. […] There's conflict, but through the conflict [or use of the space] we learn how to practically get along, not by talking ideology […] but practically navigating how to be citizens together.” – Gustav Eden (Malmö, Sweden)

2.Engage skaters in the creation and maintenance of the area

(Vellut, 2011)

Interviewees noted that skaters often have a tense relationship with public space because they have historically been excluded from public buildings, squares, or parks. To change this dynamic, skaters must feel some stake in the space.

Interviewees noted that this kind of engagement can be fostered by engaging skaters in the design and later maintenance of the space. Social outcomes also require social structures, so planners noted that points of regular points of contact within the skating community are necessary. This ensures that, if antisocial or illegal activity does occur within a shared space, the city can engage the skate community in good faith to prevent the space from degenerating.

If skaters want more of these mixed-use urban spaces that they can enjoy, [...] it needs to be with this communal spirit in mind [...] There's a lot of the public can do, but [the skaters] part has to be embracing this spirit of the commons, the shared space. - Max Harrison (San Francisco, USA)

3.Design for all levels, all skaters

Young skater at UN Plaza (San Fransisco, n.d.)

So there is synergy [...] [in] that all users are viable because, you know, skaters could be from ages as young as three years old up to into their 60s, so we didn't kind of have any bias towards the user groups – Jim Lau (New York, USA)

Planners and designers emphasized that street skating spaces should include elements for a diverse level of skaters (advanced and beginner).

Advanced elements may be unviable due to the space required, as well as safety regulations; however, more basic elements like manny pads, ledges, and mini ramps often require no special design and can be approached by a diverse range of levels. This diversity of obstacles is important in ensuring the space is not monopolized by high-level skaters, which can intimidate other members of the community and the wider non-skating public

4.Design with attention to flow and contact points

Interviewees noted that observing the flow of skaters as well as consulting with them can help minimize conflict points. Consulting with skaters can clarify how much run-up is needed to perform tricks, as well as to dismount from them. A helpful tip shared by Jim is to design with a “dual function in reference to access”. Planners and designers must pre-emptively understand that elements like stairs will be appropriated by skaters, and therefore, they need to provide other users with an alternative set of stairs nearby.

[Skaters need] [...] to build up speed and stuff like that. [So where they do that] [...] should not be where you'd expect somebody to crossover – Jim Lau (New York, USA)

The Outcome

Eyes on the street: Multiple planners and skaters acknowledged that one of the benefits of introducing street skating was to discourage other unwanted uses, such as sleeping or drug dealing. Skaters, though, are accustomed to sharing space with these "undesirable" elements and therefore act as "shock troops" (Howell, 2016), helping repopulate and clear the space before a more general public feels comfortable reintroducing itself to the area.

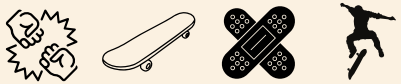
> *We realized that it had an effect on how people were enjoying the plaza and staying around [...]. I mean, there was a lot of squats back in the days, [at] this typical particular plaza. And after a [...] couple days of [...] skateboarders taking over, there was no more – Jebrane Desigaud (France)*

Gathering and Excitement: Many planners interviewed noted that one of the best aspects of creating spaces that cater to diverse users is the excitement and interaction it generates. Street skating is highly visual and social. It also adds an element of excitement to urban space, which people enjoy by passively watching or engaging with the skaters. As mentioned above, this helps break down barriers between skaters and other users.

> *If you look at a skate space like 5 people may be skating, but there may be 50 people hanging out, so the main activity isn't the skateboarding - the main activity is the social and because [skate spaces] are open, anyone can come in – Gustav Eden (Malmö, Sweden)*

Case Study: UN Plaza (San Fransisco)

Key Themes:



In 2023, San Francisco undertook the renovation of UN Plaza. Opened in 1973, the UN Plaza is a large urban plaza stretching between Market Street and Hyde Street, facing the San Francisco City Hall. The plaza has also been home to "drug dealing, homelessness, public urination and selling of stolen goods" since the 1990s (Moskowitz, 2024). To achieve a "presentable" look for the city, the mayor's office ordered the plaza restructured in anticipation of the 2023 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit. This involved a variety of activations, including the legalization of street skating in the plaza and the construction of specific skate elements. According to the San Francisco Parks Department, the activation has been highly successful, resulting in a 79% decrease in drug-related activity and attracting residents from around the Bay Area back to the plaza to enjoy its new use.

(Kaskowitz, 2023)

Theme 2: Supportive infrastructure

Key Takeaways Of This Theme:

- **Create custom elements that fit and respond to local scenes and demand**
- **Design with all skate levels in mind to prevent monopolization**
- **Support the larger skating culture**

(Olivera, 2017)

Nature Of The Problem

How can planners ensure that a new public street spot will attract skaters? This concern is valid, especially considering that many cities struggle with underused skateparks—facilities that can become wasted investments or even hotspots for antisocial behavior. The question is particularly urgent when cities develop street-skating infrastructure in hopes of drawing skaters away from unauthorized locations. So, what strategies can planners use to create a spot that will appeal to skaters?

What Is Done

Planners identified six strategies to ensure a successful spot that attracts skaters:

1. **Create cultural credibility**
2. **Design elements that are translocal and authentic**
3. **Connect space to a greater network**
4. **Consider nearby amenities**
5. **Support cultural infrastructure**
6. **Use temporality**

These strategies are explored in the following pages.

1.Create cultural credibility

(Mahoney, 2016)

Planners emphasized that during the planning and design stage, the city should approach skaters and skate brands to determine which elements to incorporate. Street skating places a lot of emphasis on “authenticity,” and consultations with the community can help identify which elements and styles are considered legitimate versus overly prescriptive.

Due to the difficulty of uniting skaters under a single representative voice, planners often conduct consultations with only a limited subset of the community or only a skating brand. Many skaters consider certain brands to have legitimacy, so consulting with their representatives is not considered inauthentic (O'Haver).

2.Design elements that are translocal and authentic

Planners often emphasized the need to be sensitive to local contexts while also drawing inspiration from international examples. San Francisco's UN Plaza, for example, contains reproductions of iconic San Francisco Street spots (the China banks, the Safeway curb) while also placing in the centre "a skateable pyramid, [a] nod to Place de la République in Paris" (San Francisco Parks Dept). Malmö also has a spot which is a reproduction of a part of the infamous "LOVE Park" in Philadelphia. Yet, while space may reproduce certain elements, planners cautioned against being too reproductive in your design. When elements are considered to have been "dropped in" from another context, they may not be considered "legit" and may not achieve the street skating appeal that planners are looking for. As Steve Rodriguez said in our interview:

> *It's pretty funny [...] if you had a locker that you found and you put it on a bank, you could skate it and it's the most legit thing. If it's made of wood and angle iron, it's not legit, even though it's the same exact thing. – Steve Rodriguez (New York, USA)*

As Steve hints in this quote, much of the authenticity is determined by the materials used and the extent to which the space is "made" for skating. Community members, for example, cited UN Plaza's "perfectly lacquered ledges" as a reason people would not post clips from the area. The design of "legit" places depends heavily on the materials used, as well as the extent to which the space does not resemble a park. Both Paolo and Jebrane noted, for example, that one of the biggest success factors in the "Place de la Republique" installation is that many people assumed it was an art installation, not a skating element.

> *People have even told me that it's a pity that the sculptures are skated. And I say, no, it's the other way round, Madame, these are skateboarding objects that are so beautiful that you mistake them for sculptures. [...]for me, I've succeeded in the project when people have the illusion that we're dealing with a cultural work and not a sporting one. – Paolo Guidi (Paris, France)*

Such comments and examples suggest that planners should prioritize designing custom elements over reproductions for the space. The elements may be inspired by international examples; however, the placement and blending must be carefully thought about to achieve a subtle integration that feels authentic and local.

3.Connect space to a greater network

When planning the integration of street skating, it is essential to understand how the spot fits into a broader network of both formal and informal skating spaces. Planners must match the supply of street skating spots to the real demand for them. This requires a rough understanding of the number of street skaters or potential street skaters, as well as an understanding of the network of both formal and informal spots. Street skating often involves a session where skaters will quickly hit many spots around a city. Cities should understand this network so that they can improve areas or spots between them. The Vancouver Skateboard Amenities Strategy for example determines where new skate amenities should be placed based on: density and future growth, major transportation corridors, low access to park space, demand for low cost recreation (based on the number of discounted recreation passes sold), gaps in the existing skate park network, and finally surveys with skaters on where they want to skate. While each city will consider its own criteria, the Vancouver example demonstrates how skating interacts with a variety of sociodemographic factors and city plans and how these might be considered.

> *"The skate community has a carrying capacity, right? If you build 10 facilities and try to resolve 10 spaces around the city and there's only 8 skaters, two of them are not going to get skated" - Dan Mauer (San Francisco, USA)*

4.Consider nearby amenities

Besides the connection to the rest of the network, nearby amenities also play an important role in determining which spots to make skateable. As comments from Gutav Eden note:

> *Is there greenery? Is there a shop with like cheap soda [..] like that can be as important as [...], whatever material the ledge is. – Gustav Eden (Malmö, Sweden)*

Planners noted that skaters they engaged with often choose spots based on nearby amenities, as well as other features. These amenities include bus stops, convenience stores, skate shops, seating areas, and trees for shade. While some of these elements can be replicated in new locations, many are more context-specific, requiring planners to adapt their strategies to existing sites.

5.Support cultural infrastructure


Tuatagaloa, 2024)

Also important is supportive cultural infrastructure such as music venues, art spaces, and fashion stores. Planners and skaters mentioned that the ability to support these other elements contributes to the sustainability of the skating scene and, thereby, the continued use of new spaces. City support for other elements of the street skating culture also helps develop a positive relationship between skaters and the city, allowing for easier collaboration and communication should issues or new opportunities arise.

Every skate park have a DIY space or a flexible space next to it. And [the city should always ask] what's the next event? [And if there is not one] we're going [to have to] plan one. [And] who of these young skaters do art [and how do we support]? [...] that is the infrastructure that develops a sound relationship with the city. – Gustav Eden (Malmö, Sweden)

6.Use temporality

Instillations do not need to be permanent. Planners involved in the Place de la Republique and the UN Plaza found it helpful to label their projects as temporary installations. The “temporary” label often enables projects to move through an expedited city approvals process and provides them the flexibility to “try something out” without feeling tied to the design if the project is not fully successful. Given the numerous factors that influence the success of a skating space, the ability to experiment is highly useful in determining what works and what does not. It can also give time to demonstrate the effects of an installation.

One factor that enabled us to [build the space] [...] was to say that it was an experiment. That [the ledges] were ephemeral elements, [this allowed us to] [...] avoid[...] the outcry from the architects. [...] [Yet despite the temporary label] that it's been there for years, so when [the space] is beautiful and integrated and doesn't generate a nuisance, quite the contrary, it stays – Paolo Guidi (Paris, France)

The Outcome

When the right supportive infrastructure is used, the space is considered authentic and legitimate, which can increase people's use of the space and may inspire visits from other areas (and even other countries). Some spaces may even transcend their purpose-built aesthetic and be featured in skate videos, advancing their reputation.

Planners should not expect that spots will be universally embraced. Skaters can be selective in what is considered authentic. A constructed spot may be used, but it will not reach the legendary status of accidental spots.

> *They blur the lines [in Scandinavia] because the skate spots are just really nicely integrated into, [...]existing urban environments. You know, it's not always obvious that something has been built for skating, so I think [in] some of those places, people will film clips, but in my eyes, it's still not proper. – Max Harrison (San Francisco)*

Case Study: Place de la Republique (Paris)

Key Themes:

Built in the 19th century, the Place de la République in Paris borders the 3rd, 10th, and 11th arrondissements. In 2018, it was chosen as the site of a new temporary skating element installation by Volcom. This followed Volcom's successful temporary installation of a series of skateable structures at Place de la Bastille. From street level, the installation does not resemble the Volcom logo; instead, it resembles an amorphous shape. It has often been characterized as an art project and has been highly successful in part due to its subtlety. Seven years after its "temporary installation," the element remains in place and is still highly skated by locals and professionals.

(Pai, 2024)

Theme 3: Finances and Development

Key Takeaways Of This Theme:

- **Support the larger skating culture**
- **Remove barriers to brands, not-for-profits, and individuals participating in building sports facilities and public infrastructure**
- **Skate spaces can become good spots for further activations and recuperation of costs**

(Mejia, 2023)

Nature Of The Problem

The difficulty with any public works project, particularly street skating, lies in the cost and lifecycle. Given ever-shrinking city budgets, it can be difficult to justify any new financial investment. The damage skaters can cause to spaces, along with the potential cost of repairs, makes the cost of projects even more difficult to justify (Roth & Bicknell, 2011; Németh, 2006). While project costs vary significantly, with small interventions costing as little as $40,000, major placemaking initiatives can cost millions of dollars.

The following section examines some cost-saving strategies that respond to these financial considerations.

What Is Done

Planners identified four strategies regarding the financing and upkeep of a street skating spot:

1.Secure funding

2.Explore not-for-profit partnerships

3.Support DIY spaces

4.Rent space

These strategies are explored in the following pages.

1.Secure funding

A common strategy for saving money on street skating projects is to undertake a public-private partnership. Typically, the partnership will involve a skateboarding company that helps fund or construct the space. This strategy is partly effective due to the role skate companies play within skateboarding culture. Skate companies such as Vans, Thrasher, Supreme, and Nike form a multibillion-dollar industry that stretches across the globe (Howell, 2005, p34). Despite this influence and skaters' countercultural identity, the industry and skateboarding have long been connected. Skateboarders, by and large, do not regard most skate brands as fake or inauthentic, and skate brands, in turn, invest a lot in the community to maintain a cool, casual image. According to Jebrane Desigaud this is why Volcom invested in the Place de La Republique skate instillation:

> *In skateboarding[...] you need to give back. You need to be do some stuff for the community so you get respect. It's how it works. – Jebrane Desigaud (Paris, France)*

This presents the perfect opportunity for cities, as many skateboarding brands have the financial resources to

to invest in projects, both for branding purposes and as general give-back initiatives. The exact breakdown of what percentage of a project can be funded by a private company depends on each project; however, in Paris, the entire Place de la République installation was funded by Volcom, while in San Francisco, only the newest addition to the UN Plaza was privately funded.

2.Explore not-for-profit partnerships

On the other end of the spectrum, projects can also be financed by not-for-profit groups and government grants. Interviewees suggested that in these cases, it is often the skaters who make these connections. While exact grants and funding sources vary, a notable donor is “The Skatepark Project” (formerly the Tony Hawk Foundation), whose mandate is to assist in funding projects like these. To receive grants and not-for-profit funding, projects must often meet specific goals, such as increasing equity, contributing to climate resilience, reconnecting communities split by infrastructure, or providing skate facilities in marginalized communities.

3.Support DIY spaces

Skateboarding has a significant “Do-It-Yourself “culture where skaters are encouraged to build and maintain skate elements and spots. In some cases it may be possible for cities o allow skaters to create their own spots thereby saving costs on materials and labor (see Burnside Skatepark). Even more simply, the city can allow skaters to remove skate stoppers from an area and make it skate-able again. In both cases, this approach requires close engagement to ensure that the elements comply with code and that the space is not monopolized.

In under the K[...]the skaters basically [...] took it upon themselves to bring [skate elements] to the site [(Figure x)]. And that was fine because we knew that this was a flex space – Jim (New York, USA)

(Quartersnacks, n.d.)

4.Rent space

Large, open skate plaza spaces are often well-suited for events and activities outside of skateboarding, such as festivals, concerts, or markets. These events can

become increasingly viable as skating helps keep the area safe during off-hours and as it gains a new, creative reputation. Multiple planners discussed the revenue that can be generated from permitting events in the new mixed-use street skating spaces.

(Gotham Park, 2025)

The Outcome

The outcomes of pursuing these strategies can be:

Faster process, easier political support: Interviewees noted that lowering costs, or better yet, presenting a project with no costs, leads to increased municipal support. Lower costs also allowed for greater experimentation, as the risk of the project not working was lowered.

> *Politically I got quick validation - well quite quick - because it didn't cost anything. So all of a sudden, the politicians had something to look forward to - Paolo Guidi – (Paris, France)*

Brands the city as creative: Following the theories of Richard Florida, many cities have looked to brand themselves as “creative” to attract millennial workers and the jobs that supposedly follow them. While few interviewees explicitly referenced the creative city concept, it was clear from the interviews that street skateboarding is perceived as contributing to a city's brand or identity in a way that increases interest in the city. Cities well-known for street skating may experience a growth in skate tourism. Brands seek to organize events in renowned skating cities and locations, which can potentially generate millions of dollars in economic returns and investment. LOVE Park, an infamous street skating spot in Philadelphia, for example, was the site of the ESPN X-Games, which Ocean Howell (2005) estimates to have attracted around “$80 million in revenue for the city of Philadelphia” (pp.34-35). Individual skaters also often travel to legendary street spots or skate cities, forming new friendships and contributing to the local economy during their stay. For example, Stone, whom I interviewed, explained that he spent a month in Malmö just because of the skating culture there.

Case Study: Brooklyn Banks (New York City)

Key Themes:

The Brooklyn Banks is an infamous street skating spot located under the Brooklyn Bridge in Manhattan. The space was built in the 1970s as part of the 1 Police Plaza redevelopment project. Its red brick banks (big banks, small banks, and the nine stairs) were frequently used for street skating, and many skateboarding videos were filmed there. However, in 2004 renovations destroyed the little banks area, and in 2010 the rest of the area was closed as major restoration took place on the bridge. During these renovations, it became clear that the work could take longer than expected, with no guarantee that the space would remain as is. To secure the bank's future, Steve Rodriguez and Rosa Chang formed a not-for-profit called “Gotham Park,” which seeks to protect and expand the bank's area. Their work has been funded through grants and donations that support increased public space and the “economic revitalization” the project will bring to the area (Moskowitz, 2024).

(Tama, 2020)

(Alley, 2023)

Theme 4: Working Together

Key Takeaways Of This Theme:

- **Build on favorable political or cultural conditions**
- **You need key figures to help navigate both skating culture and the city process**

(Appleton, 2025)

Nature Of The Problem

Some authors, such as Becky Beal and Hanson O'Haver, portray skateboarding as an individualistic and anarchistic culture. This image presents problems as planners may be unsure of how to approach or engage with skateboarders. Relatedly, once engagement is made, okanners may be unsure of how to move a street skateboarding project through a municipal bureaucracy. The following comments and examples examine these problems by looking at how to work within organizational structures to facilitate street skating projects.

What Is Done

To facilitate a street skating project in a municipal political structure, the following three things were said to be effective across interviews

1. **Establish relationships with "translators**
2. **Seize the moment**
3. **Forge cross-departmental collaboration**

These strategies are explored in the following pages.

1.Establish relationships with "translators"

All the projects reviewed for this guidebook relied, in part, on the expertise of someone who was both a skater and could work in a professional setting. This "translator" may be a city official, as was the case in the Paris or Malmö case studies, or a community member, as was the case in the New York case study. These "translator" figures are familiar with both municipal/government processes, as well as skateboarding culture and its desires. This familiarity enables them to effectively "translate" the desires of the skateboarding community into actionable initiatives for the municipality. It also gives them respect in both communities.

It's easy to talk about systems, but people always navigate systems. [..] Sometimes when I make a presentation, I see my own presentation about Malmö and I see all these photos of spots and skaters, and it shouldn't be that - it should just be like portraits of people. – Gustav Eden (Malmö, Sweden)

(Michaud, 2015)

2.Seize the moment

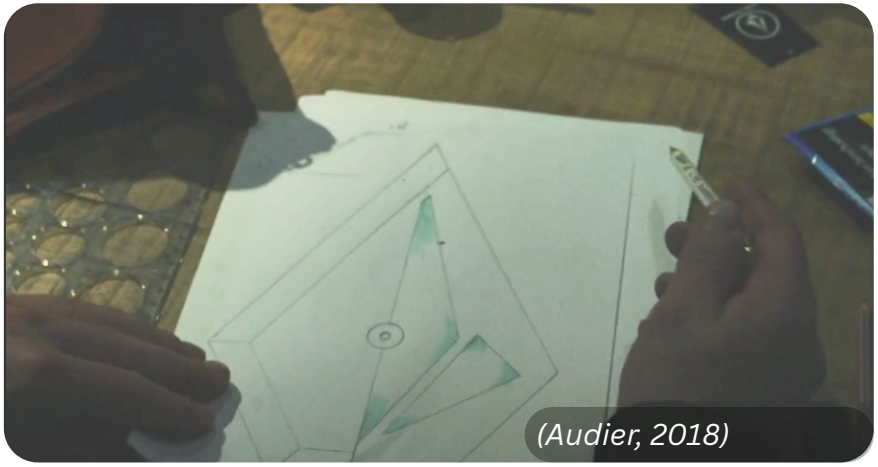
Interviewees acknowledged that for many projects, there was an element of luck or good timing. Planners can assist in this by recognizing the favorable conditions for a street skating project and seizing the opportunity. Paolo, Dan, and Stone all noted, for example, the importance of political alignment. Street skating is not necessarily more favoured by one kind of administration over another. Rather, it can support different goals for different administrations. In Paris, for example, street skating was part of a broader political program to reclaim space from cars, whereas in San Francisco, it served as part of a “cleaning up the streets” initiative. It is the job of planners to recognize how street skating can serve the goals of a current administration and frame it in a way that it may do so.

> *My goal fulfillment as a municipal officer is very well facilitated by working with skateboarding. So, it's not like the skaters have just tapped the city for funds and are giving nothing back because [they] complain a lot [...]. I think it's a mutual sort of goal fulfillment that is the key – Gustav Eden (Malmö, Sweden)*

Similarly, planners should look to seize the cultural moment. Skateboarding gained popularity and mainstream appeal during the COVID-19 pandemic as a low-cost way to exercise outdoors. This momentum was a big factor in planners pursuing street skating projects.

3.Forge cross-departmental collaboration

Street skating is multifaceted and often intersects with multiple realms of city policy and jurisdiction. Multiple interviewees touched on the idea that this cross-jurisdictional factor can be a big barrier to completing projects



(Audier, 2018)

100% so like you know the arborist just care about the trees, right? Like the guy who is designing the skate park just cares about the skate park. You know what I mean? [you have] [...] the ADA people for accessibility, they just care about that. Like there's a way to do it all together, but honestly it is more difficult. - Steve Rodriguez (Manhattan, New York)

Therefore, interviewees argued that planners need to act as organizers and dreamers, working to bring departments together. Paolo Guidi argued that this multidisciplinary approach is about a state of mind, not any specific method or policy. It is about imagining what can be done as opposed to looking at what must be done to accomplish the bare minimum.

The Outcome

The outcome of using these strategies can be:

Young people feel engaged by the system: When planners take the time to work with skaters, even just through translators, they create a culture of engagement. The city demonstrates to young people that it cares about their ambitions and goals.

Changes the public's view of skaters: Skaters' engagement with formal modes of government also changes the public's view of skaters. Skaters' formal involvement in the political process challenges stereotypes and fosters greater cultural understanding.

> *So here the skaters learned that if they do something and put the effort in the city will deliver on it. [...] And so, it really proved that that this form of collaboration works. – Gustav Eden (Malmö, Sweden)*

City goals fulfilled: As mentioned above in the "seize the moment" suggestion, it is often possible for cities to fulfill their goals through skateboarding. Therefore, when directed properly, skating can help cities achieve their plans.

> *The foundational ideology of skateboarding [is] self-determination and be active [...] [those are] not in conflict with fundamental values of democracy. They only become in conflict with society, if society tells you that you're not welcome – Gustav Eden (Malmö, Sweden)*

Case Study: Malmö (Sweden)

Key Themes:

Malmö is the third-largest city in Sweden and sits across the water from Copenhagen, Denmark. An industrial city, it struggled to define itself following the loss of industry in the 1990s. One way Malmö has embraced its identity is through the adoption of skateboarding and street skating. As Gustav Eden explained in our interview, this initiative came from both the city's desire to fulfill its goals and from skaters themselves who sought to establish their own scene outside of California. The development of Bryggeriet skatepark, funded by the municipality and built by skaters, was a particularly important moment that created a culture of community input and entrepreneurialism that has endured to this day. This has been further enhanced with the hiring of Gustav Eden, who has worked as a Project Manager (and unofficial skateboard coordinator) with the City of Malmö since 2014. In this position, Gustav has solidified the place of skaters in the city by serving as a permanent liaison, utilizing skateboarding to achieve both the city's and the skaters' goals.

(Olivera, 2017)

(Supply, n.d.)

5. Conclusion

Ultimately, despite its appropriative and perceived anarchistic attitude, street skateboarding can be accommodated in city space. What this involves overall is working to enhance street skating's strengths in animating public space and engaging the public, while mitigating harms such as cost or conflict.

Some of the ways planners may do this have been explored in the preceding pages. In general, what has been emphasized is the importance of engaging in good-faith collaboration. Historically, street skating has been excluded from public space. However, its unique urban qualities have led more cities to question the relationship. To reengage with skaters, cities must make good-faith efforts to recognize the unique culture of skaters and what they require from the city. When this is done, skating can become a beneficial and transformative presence for cities around the world.

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5. Conclusion

The purpose of this research has been to share some of the good practices in cities that allow street skateboarding in some public spaces. To do so, the previous chapters have examined in-depth street skating places in urban space. The literature review explored concepts behind CPTED, skating's evolving relationship with urban space, and how scholars have reflected on this relationship. The guidebook presents the culmination of my research, highlighting concerns, and techniques used to mitigate these concerns when undertaking street skating in public space projects. While there are specific takeaways within each theme and presented in the guidebook, in this conclusion I will present five general key findings from the research.

1. Street skating can be harnessed.
Skaters want to participate in society and when they are provided with supportive design and social engagement, they can easily fit in like any other user group. Street skating is an urban activity whose practitioners continuously highlight the importance of being in public space and engaging with non-skaters. Achieving a balance between skaters and other users can be difficult, however, the authenticity of a skate space depends on it. The area cannot feel too much like a skatepark if it is to be both authentic and not become monopolized by skaters. When balance is achieved skaters can provide a host of benefits to a city such as eyes on the street and neighbourhood regeneration.

> *So, we like my goal fulfillment as a municipal officer is very well facilitated by working with skateboarding. So, it's not like the skaters have just tapped the city for funds and are giving nothing back because they […], complain a lot or […] there just really good at telling stories […] a mutual sort of goal fulfillment that is the key – Gustav Eden (Malmö, Sweden)*

2. Allow the space to formulate itself
For urban planners what frequently holds back street skating projects is the element of uncertainty. This uncertainty is related to things like the costs of repair, safety of skaters and other users, as well as the effectiveness of the intervention at drawing people from other areas. While the suggestions in the guidebook touch on how all these concerns can be mitigated a fundamental feature of street skating is its challenge of conventional planning wisdom and authority. Planners spoke to the extent you need to trust the space and the skaters who use it. This is not to say one can design haphazardly, but planners must also be cautious about over-designing. Installing temporary features can be very helpful allowing planners and designers to see the effectiveness of space before committing to it. Connections within the skating community also prove very helpful in these cases to determine whether a space is acting as intended.

> *Always look at the users and […] particularly conflicts […], it's hard to determine [….] [if] what you do will make a difference. But in most cases, […] any kind of people attraction is going to add value. If you can get masses of people together in one place, things will start to happen sort of naturally.– Jim Lau (New York, USA)*

3.Funding is achievable
Cities often worry about street skating projects due to the amount of funding needed to repair damage caused by skaters. However, this research shows that street skating projects are often inexpensive and can be funded through partnerships with brands. While working with brands may seem to contradict

skating's anarchistic energy, skaters do not seem to view it this way. Brands can often be authentic parts of the culture and can help alleviate construction costs.

> *I passed it off as an experiment and it didn't cost the city anything. So right away, right away, I didn't have the brakes on – Paolo Guidi (Paris, France)*

4.You need key translators in the system.
People who understand both skaters and the municipal system can help form links and establish trustworthiness and authenticity for both parties. All the skateboarding projects were assisted by some sort of key translator(s) or figure(s) who communicated between the skating community and the municipality. These people were sometimes community members or sometimes they worked within the system. When they were involved in the system, they could present the most long-lasting change for street skaters.

> *When I make a presentation […] about Malmö and I see all these like photos of spots and skaters, […] it shouldn't be that it should just be like portraits of people - Gustav Eden (Malmö, Sweden)*

5.Pick the right opportunities.
Street skating interventions are not appropriate in every part of the city. The skate community has a limited capacity to make use of every spot, and not all spots will have the same appeal. It is important therefore for planners to seize the right opportunities – choosing spots that are well-used and that contribute to a greater network of skating spots and strategies. Similarly, planners must wait for when the political or societal momentum presents opportunities for street skating projects.

> *Honestly, I'll be completely honest with you. I think it was luck – Steve (NY)*

Street skateboarding is an evolving practice that appropriates urban space. This research has looked to understand how planners evolve with this practice. While limited by the number of interviews completed, this project offers an introduction to an evolving topic. Future research could look more into the specific design considerations of these spaces, or it take a more sociological approach to understanding the impressions people have of the space. A longitudinal look at these spots will allow an assessment of whether these spots last or expand or are they a temporary type of intervention?

These five findings highlight that street skating represents chances to not just reinterpret the city but also to facilitate friendships and community building. In expanding street skating's place in the city, planners and members of the skating community, hope to build skating into the cities fabric in ways that work for everyone. How planners can further facilitate this process has been documented in this supervised research project. Future research will continue to provide evidence of successes and emerging challenges.

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Appendix A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

The world a skatepark: examining how street skateboarding can be integrated into the urban landscape

Respondent ID _____

Informed Consent Done? _____

Date & Location _____

Research Question: *What good practices cities that allow street skateboarding in public space implement to support the activity?*

Key Topics:

- Role of urban planners in facilitating or preventing street skateboarding
- What municipal policies and urban design features enable or inhibit street skateboarding
- What changes would support street skateboarding in new locations

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Intro: I am researching how cities can accommodate street skateboarding in public space and the role of planners and urban designers in this accommodation. I will use the interviews I am conducting to create a list of good practices shared between cities which have accommodated street skateboarding. These good practices will be used for my supervised research project which I will be published on the McGill University Library Website.

My questions are framed by my own research and experience. If you think I have missed anything important in my questions, I would appreciate if you suggested other topics we should discuss.

General Questions:

- What project were you involved in?
- What was your role in the project?
- How many people were involved in the project?
- What inspired the project?

Questions for Urban Planners:

- What were municipal policies towards skateboarders previously?
- What made this the location to explore street skateboarding?
- What community voices were consulted?

- How long did the project take? What steps did it involve?
- Did you work with a community group? Why or why not? (If yes what did this involve?)
- Do you feel like the project has been successful? Why or why not?
- Has this project inspired broader changes to the cities approach to skateboarding? Why or why not?
- Did you consider how this project would achieve acceptability for a wide range of the populace? In what ways did you consider this?
- What do you feel the role of planners should be in respect to street skateboarding?

Question for Urban Designers:

- How were you involved in this project?
- What design choices were made and why were they made?
    - What kind of materials were used?
- How did you consider different users of the space?
- What precedents did you look to?

Questions for Skateboarding Organizational actors:

- How were you involved in this project?
    - Was it you approaching the city or did the city approach you?
- Did you find barriers in attempting to complete this project? How did you address these?
- In what ways were the city involved in this project (administratively, financially)?
- What was the role if any of urban planners in your project?
- What was the role if any of urban designers in your project?
- Do you feel like the project has been successful? Why or why not?
- How has the street skateboarding community responded to this project?
- Do you feel that there were any policies or actions that officials/planners could have taken to improve the success of your project?
- Do you feel like this project changed the city or wider populations view of street skateboarding?

Appendix B

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Participant Consent Form

Researcher: Connor Adsett. In progress Master of Urban Planning (2025), McGill University, School of Urban Planning. connor.adsett@mail.mcgill.ca | (514)226-3198

Supervisor: Lisa Bornstein, School of Urban Planning**.** lisa.bornstein@mcgill.ca | (514)398-4077

Title of Project: The world a skatepark: examining how street skateboarding can be integrated into the urban landscape

Purpose of the Study: This form serves as an invitation to participate in supervised research project conducted by a Master's Student at McGill University. The purpose of this project is to understand the successes and challenges of integrating street skateboarding into public space. The research will focus on case studies where street skateboarding has been integrated into public space and will look to ask those involved in this process their opinions on its successes and challenges.

Study Procedures*:*
You will participate in the study as an interview subject. The interview will be done via Microsoft Teams and will last between 30-45 minutes. The questions raised will relate to your experiences with street skateboarding, the project you were involved in, and your thoughts on the project's successes and challenges. If you agree this conversation will be recorded so that after it can be analyzed for recurring themes.

Data collected from European participants will be stored outside the European Union or the European Economic Area. It will be stored in Canada, in compliance with Canadian and European data protection standards.

Voluntary Participation*:*
Participation is voluntary in this study. You may refuse to participate in parts of the study, may decline to answer any questions and may withdraw from the study at any time, for any reason by contacting Connor Adsett, Principal Investigator at connor.adsett@mail.mcgill.ca or (514)226-3198, You have the right to consult your study file in order to verify the personal information gathered, and to have it corrected, if necessary, by contacting at connor.adsett@mail.mcgill.ca. If you want only some segments of the interview removed from the record, these sections can be deleted. Any alteration or deletion of the information willingly provided can happen prior to publication, no later than 04/2025. Following publication information cannot be withdrawn. Data provided will be deleted from the researcher's computer following publication. However, physical copies of the data will be retained. It will be stored in a secure filing cabinet in Suite 400, Macdonald Harrington Building (815 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec H3A 2K6)

with access restricted to the Principal Investigator and Supervisor (Lisa Bornstein) for 7 years. After 7 years the information will be destroyed.

Potential Risks:

As the interviews will cover periods of time when street skateboarding was not legal, it may trigger past feelings of isolation or surveillance in public space. If there are certain interview questions that you feel will have a negative effect on your emotional well-being, you may skip those questions or withdraw from the interview at any point you desire.

Potential Benefits:

Participating in the study will have no direct benefit for you; however, this research project hopes to provide benefits for the wider skating community and city planners in demonstrating how street skateboarding can be successfully integrated into public space.

Confidentiality:

The level of confidential is dependent on you as it is optional to be identified in publication. You may indicate further down in the application whether you agree to be identified in the research.

If you ask to be identified, you may choose to adjust the specificity of the information provided. For example, you may choose to just provide a first (Jon), or last name (Doe), or just your relevant title (planner). You may choose to identify the city you worked in (Montreal), just the country (Canada), or provide no information on this.

If you ask to not be identified the primary investigator will assign a code to you that will then be used on all data and subsequent documents. This coding system will not allow others to link information back to your identity. The principal investigator will ensure that all details that could lead to you as a source of the information are excised from the interview transcript.

During the research phase confidential information will be stored in an encrypted hard drive with password protected computer files. Following publication of the report the encrypted hard drive will be wiped and physical copies of identifying information will be kept by The McGill Urban Planning Department under lock and key at the MacDonald Harrington Building (Montreal, Quebec) with access limited to Lisa Bornstein and Connor Adsett for a total of seven years (01/2032)

For information regarding McGill's Privacy Notice visit, https://www.mcgill.ca/annex-mcgill-privacy-notice#research You have the right to consult your study file in order to verify the personal information gathered, and to have it corrected if necessary, by contacting Connor Adsett (connor.adsett@mail.mcgill.ca | (514)226-3198)

Recording and Contact Information::

As mentioned above, it is your choice if you would like to be self-identified in the interviews and to what extent. Please indicate bellow which information you would like to share. This may be changed later if you wish.

Yes: ___ No: ___You consent to be identified by first name in reports.

Yes: ___ No: ___You consent to be identified by last name in reports

Yes: ___ No: ___You consent to be identified by position

Yes: ___No: ___You consent to have your organization's name used

Yes: ___No: ___You consent to have the city of the project identified

Yes: __No:__ You consent to have the country of the project identified

The principal investigator will take note of participant responses during interviews. However, to ensure the accuracy of the information recorded during interviews the principal investigator may use Microsoft Teams transcription service to automatically transcribe the conversation

Do you consent to having your conversation transcribed via Microsoft Teams?

Yes: __No:__

To add a further layer of accuracy an audio recording of the interview may also be taken. Please indicate if you agree to an audio recording of your interview by selecting one of the options below

Yes: __No:__

For EU residents:

Do you agree to have the data collected during the interviews transferred and stored in Canada outside the European Union? Yes: ___ No___

Yes: ___ No: ___ You consent to be audio recorded.

Dissemination of Results:

The results of this research will be disseminated via supervised research project. If you would like you may request a copy of the completed project.

Questions: If you have questions about the project, contact:

Project Supervisor: Lisa Bornstein
School of Urban Planning
Suite 400, Macdonald Harrington Building
815 Sherbrooke Street West, Montreal, Quebec H3A 2K6
Tel: 514-398-4077
Lisa.bornstein@mcgill.ca

- If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the

research team, please contact the Research Ethics Board Office, daniel.tesolin@mcgill.ca or 514-398-5410, citing REB file number 24-11-109.

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals, such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your information. A copy of this consent form will be given to you and the researcher will keep a copy.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Date

Appendix C

Interview Recruitment Script

Good afternoon _____,

My name is Connor Adsett and I'm a master's student in urban planning at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. I am currently working on a supervised research project examining the role planners play with respect to street skateboarding. I am specifically interested in projects where street skateboarding has been incorporated into urban spaces not originally intended for street skating. As the final deliverable of this research project, I am hoping to produce a guidebook that explores ways in which planners can participate in and support street skateboarding.

For this project I will be interviewing street skating organizations, as well as planners and designers who have been involved in street skating projects to get a better understanding of the successes and potential challenges that arise.

I am interested in interviewing you for this project regarding [PROJECT NAME]. Please note that all interviewees will be confidential unless interviewees indicate otherwise.

I look forward to hearing from you on if you can participate so we can set up a time to speak!

If you have any questions or comments about this project you can contact me at the information listed below or my project supervisor, Lisa Bornstein, at lisa.bornstein@mcgill.ca.

Sincerely,
Connor Adsett
Master of Urban Planning Candidate (2025)
McGill University School of Urban Planning
connor.adsett@mail.mcgill.ca | (514)226-3198