

SKATE TO CONNECT

Skateboarding as a tool for
shared public spaces

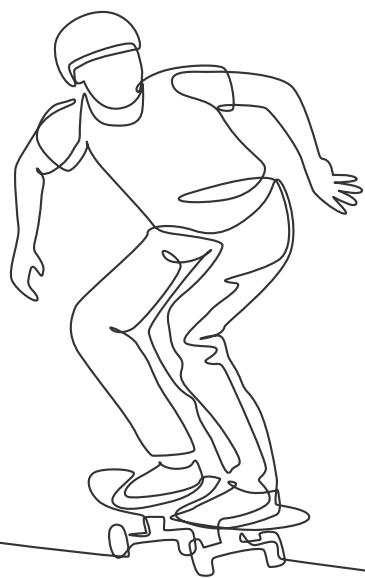




Bachelor paper

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Abstract

The idea of „Skateboarding as a Tool for Shared Public Spaces“ is examined in this essay, with an emphasis on how urban public spaces might be planned and used to the advantage of skateboarders and the general public. How urban planning might enhance the potential of such common areas to promote inclusivity, engagement, and understanding among various user groups is the main study issue.

The paper's methodology is based on a combination of case study analysis, field observations, and qualitative interviews. People who are involved in the design and use of these places, both in Vienna and abroad, were interviewed. Their observations help identify specific areas of cooperation between the skateboarding community and urban planners.

The findings indicate that including skateboarding into urban planning may significantly contribute to the development of thriving, diverse cities. Effective public communication, flexible infrastructure, and collaborative planning are frequently characteristics of successful projects. Events and short-term modifications to public areas can support social connections and the general acceptance of skateboarding.

In order to provide context, the article begins with an overview of the historical and cultural characteristics of skateboarding before providing a succinct overview of the local scene in Vienna. The chosen international case studies show how skateboarding may have a real-world impact on the development of vibrant public spaces.

Lastly, the study emphasizes how important legislative support and public relations are to preserving inclusive skate areas. Additionally, it offers tactical approaches for future civic initiatives aimed at integrating skateboarding as a valid and beneficial aspect of the urban environment.

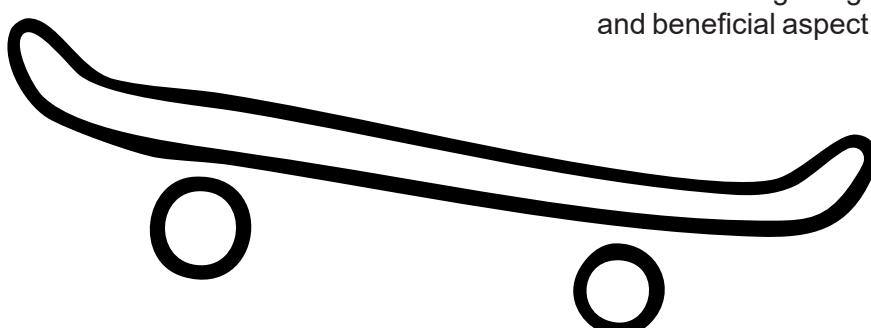


Table of content

Introduction	5
Aim of the study and relevance for planning	6
Definition of terms	6
Personal motivation and positioning	7
Structure of the paper	8
Research question & Research design	9
Methods	10
Shared public spaces – theoretical approach	11
Public space theory	11
Spatial appropriation & user conflicts	12
Urban plurism & inclusion	12
The role of public spaces in skateboarding	13
Skateboarding and the urban culture	14
Skateparks vs. street skating	14
Do-it-yourself Spots (DIY-Spots) & Plazas	15
Impact on urban planning	16
Shared use of space	16
Interactions between skateboarders & the public	16
What enables shared use of space?	17
A space where coexistence works well - good practice examples	18
Cities where skateboarding is already being used as a tool for shared public spaces	23
Recommendations for actions & Conclusion	27
Connecting theory and findings	28
Recommendations for action – A planners guide how shared urban spaces can work!	29
References	36
List of figures	37





1. Introduction

Public spaces serve as meeting places for social interaction, communal living and as cultural places of expression - influencing but also reflecting people's everyday lives. Especially for skaters, accessible and open public spaces are essential, as their practice is fundamentally tied to the built-in environment around them, which desperately needed to be considered. The absence of such spaces - plazas, sidewalks, benches, ledges - leads to the loss of the subculture's physical foundation and social relevance. However, these spaces are often being designed with a focus on control, exclusion or economy, instead of promoting openness, creativity and inclusion. In nowadays society, there is a growing need to rethink the use of public spaces and the question of who is allowed to participate in shaping them.

Skateboarding offers a very special approach to urban space - it does not cohere to the pre-determined uses but creates a new and unique view of the city. The culture is based on creativity, adaptability but also community and engages with the city and its spaces in a very unconventional way. Curbs, stairs, squares or railings are referred to as "street spots" in urban spaces and are not only perceived as static objects but as opportunities for certain possibilities for movement, self-expression and social connections.

Through skateboarding, public spaces become shared and common environments in which different groups meet and interact with each other. Skateboarding can form a bridge between the different user groups through the targeted design of urban space, but also through community events and projects. These interactions and encounters break down prejudices, promote mutual understanding and thus enable flexible, open use of shared public spaces. Urban and spatial planning plays a very decisive role in the creation of such spaces. Skateboarding is not seen as a nuisance by the public, but as another valuable layer of urban life. This recognition can lead to infrastructural and social conditions in cities that actively promote skateboarding - not just through dedicated skateparks, but also through skate-friendly design integrated into everyday public spaces.

Nevertheless, skateboarding is still rarely considered as a relevant factor or topic in urban development and planning. In most cases, it is not explicitly addressed in planning guidelines or masterplans, resulting in missed opportunities to incorporate skateboarding as a positive and functional element of public space.

Skateboarding is more than just a recreational activity; it challenges social norms, encourages inclusive participation, and contributes to the continuous transformation of urban environments. Concurrently, it tackles a common shortcoming in urban design: the lack of attention paid to teenagers and young adults. Through skateparks and skate-friendly places, this age group may become more visible, acknowledged, and feel like they control the city, fostering more inclusive and youth-centered public spaces.



Aim of the study and relevance for planning

Skateboarding functions as a valuable way to explore and activate urban space in new ways. Skaters repurpose everyday elements of the built environment, infusing them with alternative meaning and use. These actions do not simply reflect the city - they actively produce it, often revealing potential in places overlooked by conventional planning.

Especially with less and less space available nowadays and having loads of discussions on inclusive and participatory urban design going on, it becomes crucial for all spatial disciplines to explore tools and strategies that promote multifunctional use in public space.

The subculture of skateboarding has a unique and creative engagement with the urban environment and its diverse community can offer significant contributions to the process of creating accessible and inclusive public places for everyone.

In this paper, I aim to explore how skateboarding can play a meaningful role in the development of shared, inclusive public spaces, and how urban planning can recognize and support this potential. Through case studies, good but also bad examples, and conversations with those shaping these spaces, the research seeks to identify concrete ways in which planning and skate culture can collaborate toward more vibrant and accessible spaces within cities.



Definition of terms

In the context of this research, "shared public spaces" are referring to public areas that are being used simultaneously by different social groups, including both skateboarders and non-skateboarders. The spaces and places which are going to be discussed are not designed exclusively just for one purpose or a single user group - they instead promote coexistence, interaction, and flexibility.

These shared public spaces challenge society's conventional concepts of ownership and control over public space, through encouraging diverse forms of activity, such as different forms of movement, recreation, and social get-togethers.

They therefore rely on public urban environments - like plazas, parks, or open streets - that are simultaneously being used by multiple different user groups, both skateboarders and the general public (e.g., pedestrians, residents, or tourists). There is no strict functional separation happening in those spaces, you can instead watch activities overlapping, dynamic interactions going on, and the potential for social encounters. They so to say serve as informal meeting points where subcultural and mainstream urban life intersect and make different dynamics collide on a daily basis.

Personal motivation and positioning

Skateboarding has been an essential part of my life for the past four years and has significantly shaped how I experience and understand urban space. What began as a curiosity quickly became a deep personal passion - one that continues to shape how I move through the world and how I perceive my environment every single day. For me, skateboarding is a way of experiencing the city - of interacting with space, building connections, and seeing potential in places others might overlook. It's about creativity, community and the freedom to shape your environment in your own way. This shift in perception made me more aware of how urban space can either invite or exclude, depending on how it is planned and managed.

As a future urban planner, this awareness has become central to how I approach space. My experience within the skateboarding community allows me to see the gaps between how cities are designed and how they are actually used. Skateboarding depends on open, accessible public spaces - it thrives on flexibility and improvisation. And yet, these same spaces are often under threat - from restrictive urban design, policing, or a lack of recognition in city planning.

This personal and professional dual-perspective has formed my interest in the intersection between skateboarding and urban development. I see skateboarding not only as a cultural practice, but as a powerful tool for exploring how public space can become more inclusive, dynamic, and participatory.

As someone working at the intersection of practice and planning, I want to advocate for urban design that embraces diversity in movement and use - and that values subcultural engagement as a contribution to the quality of life in our cities.



Through this research, I aim to bring lived experience and planning knowledge into dialogue, to help foster a better understanding of shared urban spaces. My goal is to strengthen the connection between the skateboarding scene and urban planning, and to contribute to strategies that support more inclusive, open, and socially vibrant public environments.



Fig. 01: Leonie Huber; Fakie nosegrind
Source: Anna Lusser, 2025



Fig. 02: Freedom Skatetrip Budapest
Source: Marlene Mitterndorfer, 2025

Structure of the paper

At this point, the structure of the paper is going to be briefly outlined in order to explain the approach taken to answer the research question.

Following up the introduction, the second chapter provides the theoretical foundation for understanding skateboarding as a spatial practice integrated in the dynamics of shared public space. The chapter begins with a short explanation of public space theory, drawing on theorists like Henri Lefebvre and Jürgen Habermas to take a look at how the public is defined and constructed. This is followed by a discussion about spatial appropriation and user conflicts, which highlights how various social groups claim, shape, and often even compete over space. Lastly the chapter emphasizes the importance of the so called “urban pluralism” and inclusion in creating space as a shared public place for many communities.

Building upon this theoretical approach, the second chapter focuses on the role of public space within the context of skateboarding. It begins with a cultural analysis of skateboarding as a subcultural and urban practice, exploring its historical development, identity-forming potential, and unique relationship with the built environment. This section then explores the contrasting characteristics of skateparks and street skating, examining how each setting shapes the practice, culture, and spatial dynamics of skateboarding in different ways.

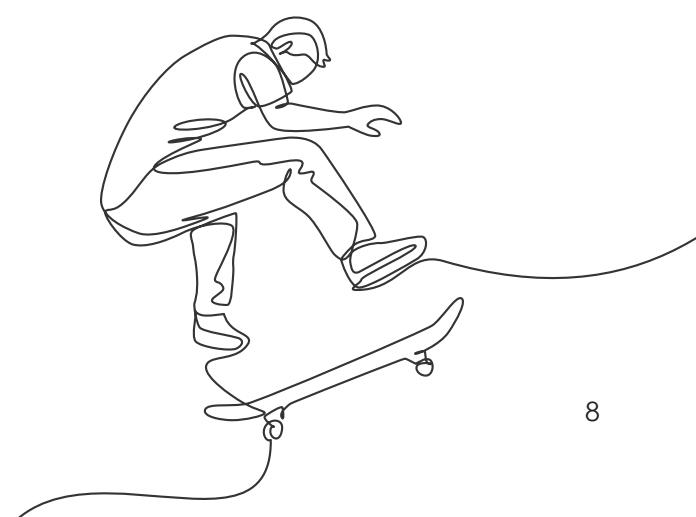
The next chapter concludes how skateboarding interacts with urban planning and the concept of shared public space. Particular attention is given to interactions between skateboarders and the general public, addressing what enables or limits the shared use of public space. Challenges such as conflict, regulation, and exclusion are discussed alongside with opportunities that emerge when cities embrace skateboarding as a legitimate and creative form of urban participation. The chapter also presents case studies and best practices, analyzing successful “skate-friendly” cities like certain places in Innsbruck and Copenhagen alongside grassroots initiatives such as DIY (Do-it-yourself) skateparks or festivals, especially hosted to integrate skateboarding into the urban structure of a city.

These are contrasted with less harmonious examples to highlight recurring conflicts, like St. Marx in Vienna or Magba in Barcelona. A comparative analysis identifies key factors that influence shared public space use, supported by insights from skateboarders, pedestrians, and planners to ground the findings in real-life experiences.

The results from the empirical case studies and theoretical framework are discussed in the fourth chapter. This discussion identifies key themes such as barriers between user groups, miscommunication, and the role of urban design as a potential mediator. The role of policy and planning is emphasized, particularly in how inclusive and adaptive design processes can bridge gaps between different users and benefit coexistence. The chapter concludes with a set of actionable recommendations for how urban planning can better support inclusive, shared public spaces with skateboarding as a catalyst.

The conclusion of the paper provides a final synthesis by addressing the original research question and reflecting on the broader implications for urban design, public space policy, and social interaction. The research process itself is critically reflected upon, including its limitations and the questions that emerged throughout. Possible avenues for future research are suggested.

Finally, the results of the paper are translated into practical formats: on one hand, recommendations for action, offering guidance to urban planners but also to people within the skate community; on the other, specific examples of how a shared public space should or could look like are shown for further use for anyone - both under the guiding theme: Skate to Connect.



Research questions

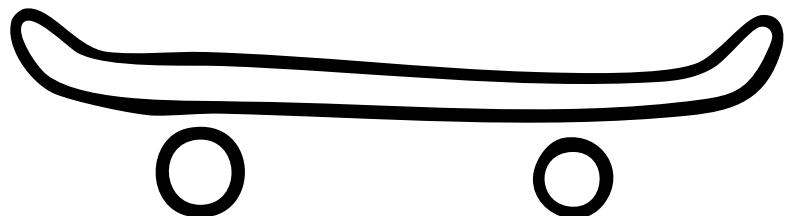
The culture of skateboarding and its connections to space and society were of great personal interest even before starting even before starting the academic exploration of the subject. A more thorough examination of skateboarding's spatial consequences from the standpoint of spatial planning provided fresh perspectives on how certain user groups affect and appropriate urban landscapes. The following study topic was finally developed as a result of several conversations and a more in-depth examination of the sociocultural dynamics inside these locations.



How can skateboarding function as a tool to create public urban spaces, that serve as shared environments where skateboarders and the broader public can come together?

How can inclusive meeting points that foster interaction between different groups, cultures, and ways of life be created?

In what ways can urban planning support the development of those inclusive public spaces as shared environments?

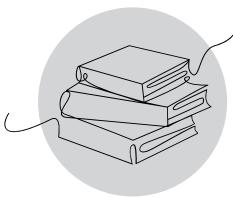


Research design

Methods

Engaging with the lived realities of people and their relationship to the environment lies at the very core of spatial and urban planning. However, this requires more than a purely theoretical analysis or extensive data alone. A creative, sensitive and open-minded research approach must be used - one that reveals and considers the practices and interactions that shape everyday life.

The paper uses both an empirical inquiry and a theoretical method to address the research subject. The goal of this mixed-method approach is to develop a thorough understanding of how urban planning may be used to build and support shared public places for skateboarders and the general public. The research develops a grounded yet visionary perspective on inclusive urban environments by drawing on academic theory, real-world case studies, and firsthand accounts from those actively forming these spaces.



Literature research

The study's theoretical foundation is the literature review. It entails reading scholarly works that examine urban planning, public space theory, spatial justice, and subcultural activities like skateboarding, including books, journal articles, and essays. To put the more general ideas in perspective, authors like Henri Lefebvre (right to the city, spatial practice), Jürgen Habermas (public sphere), and more recent voices in urbanism and spatial planning are cited. In order to draw attention to previous studies and pinpoint gaps in the body of knowledge that this paper seeks to fill, works that particularly explore the relationship between skateboarding and urban settings are also examined.



Desk research

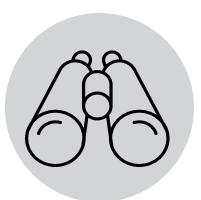
Analyzing internet publications, reports, blog posts, and social media posts on skateboarding in public areas is a component of desk research. This approach aids in documenting contemporary conversations both inside and outside of the skate community, such as public debates, policy changes, grassroots activism, and urban planning initiatives. Access to grassroots stories and visual representations of skateboarders' interactions with public space were also made possible by social media sites like YouTube and Instagram.

Urban planning presentations and conceptual plans that support inclusive public spaces often emphasize the idea of flexibility and openness. When skateboarding is not viewed as a disturbance but as a creative form of interaction, the design of a space changes significantly. Plans that integrate smooth surfaces, low ledges, open zones, and multi-use furniture shift the focus away from strict functional separation and instead promote coexistence.



Interviews

A wide range of people, including skaters, architects, urban planners, event planners, and activists from Vienna and other cities across the world are being asked questions on the topic in the form of semi-structured short interviews. The outcome of those insights offered a range of viewpoints and accounts regarding the utilization and alteration of public areas. The people being interviewed were selected based on their active participation in the creation or use of common spaces, whether through work, involvement in the community or by just being a part of the skateboarding scene. These discussions enabled a bottom-up understanding of spatial dynamics and were crucial in connecting theory and lived experience.



Observations

Skateboarders interact with the city in spontaneous, playful, and creative ways - often reinterpreting architecture beyond its intended use. A stair set becomes a challenge, a plaza becomes a stage, a forgotten corner becomes a social hub. Over time, these spaces are transformed from static structures into dynamic environments. What looks like an empty surface by day can turn into a vibrant meeting place by evening. Skateboarding brings rhythm, visibility, and movement into the urban fabric. These interactions also reveal tension - some are drawn in, others avoid the area. Yet in this friction lies potential: shared moments, brief connections, new ways of using space.



2. Shared public spaces - a theoretical approach

Public space theory

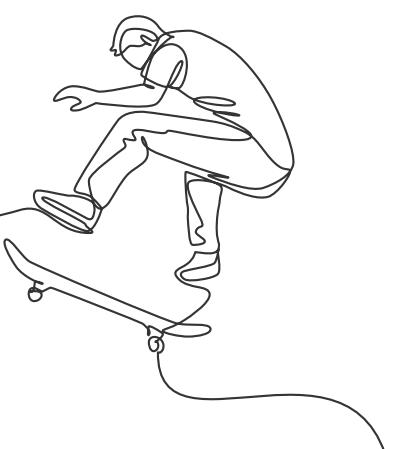
Public space is a central element of urban life, whether as a site of encounter, negotiation or identity. Henri Lefebvre's concept of the right to the city (Lefebvre, 1996, p. 158) emphasizes that space is being socially produced and is usually shaped by its users. According to Lefebvre (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39), his spatial triad - perceived, conceived, and lived space - explains why official planning (being conceived) frequently conflicts with actual space use (being lived). Skateboarding operates in this lived sphere, reinterpreting the city's built environment through movement and user appropriation.

In Jürgen Habermas book, "The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere", he frames public space as essential to the democratic discourse (Habermas, 1989, p. 85). More recent interpretations expand his emphasis on verbal communication to include corporeal acts that bring visibility and interaction into the public sphere, such as skateboarding (Iveson, 2007, p. 218).

However, critics like Don Mitchell argue that many public spaces are becoming increasingly controlled and exclusionary, limiting unregulated activities like skateboarding (Mitchell, 2003, p. 5). In response, shared spaces promote flexible use and diverse encounters - supporting spontaneous, coexisting uses instead of rigid functionality (Gehl, 2010, p. 9).

Jane Jacobs, in *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, introduces the idea of "eyes on the street" as a form of informal urban surveillance that fosters safety and community through everyday presence. She writes: "There must be eyes upon the street, eyes belonging to those we might call the natural proprietors of the street" (Jacobs, 1961, p. 35). Skateboarding contributes to this presence, not by enforcing order, but by activating space through visibility, movement, and continual human engagement.

Seen through these frameworks, skateboarding emerges as a creative form of urban participation - reshaping how public space is experienced, contested and shared.



Spatial appropriation & user conflicts

Urban public space is never neutral - it is shaped and reshaped by the ways people use, contest, and claim it. Spatial appropriation refers to the informal, often spontaneous, use of space beyond its intended function. Skateboarding exemplifies this: stairs, benches, and ledges become tools for expression and movement.

De Certeau distinguishes between strategies (used by institutions to organize space) and tactics (used by individuals to subvert or reappropriate it). Skaters practice such tactics by creatively reinterpreting urban form, resisting standardized, commercialized uses of space (De Certeau, 1984, p. 96).

These acts often lead to user conflicts. As Franck and Stevens explain, public spaces serve multiple groups with competing interests, making conflict inevitable (Franck and Steven, 2006, p. 6). For instance, businesses may view skateboarding as disruptive, while skaters see it as a form of cultural expression.

This tension is heightened by defensive architecture - design strategies explicitly intended to deter certain uses (e.g., skate stoppers). Yet, these very conflicts can reveal the social potential of shared spaces. When design allows for overlapping uses, it encourages negotiation and interaction rather than exclusion (Smith and Low, 2013, p. 128). Recognizing appropriation not as vandalism but as engagement opens new possibilities for inclusive planning.

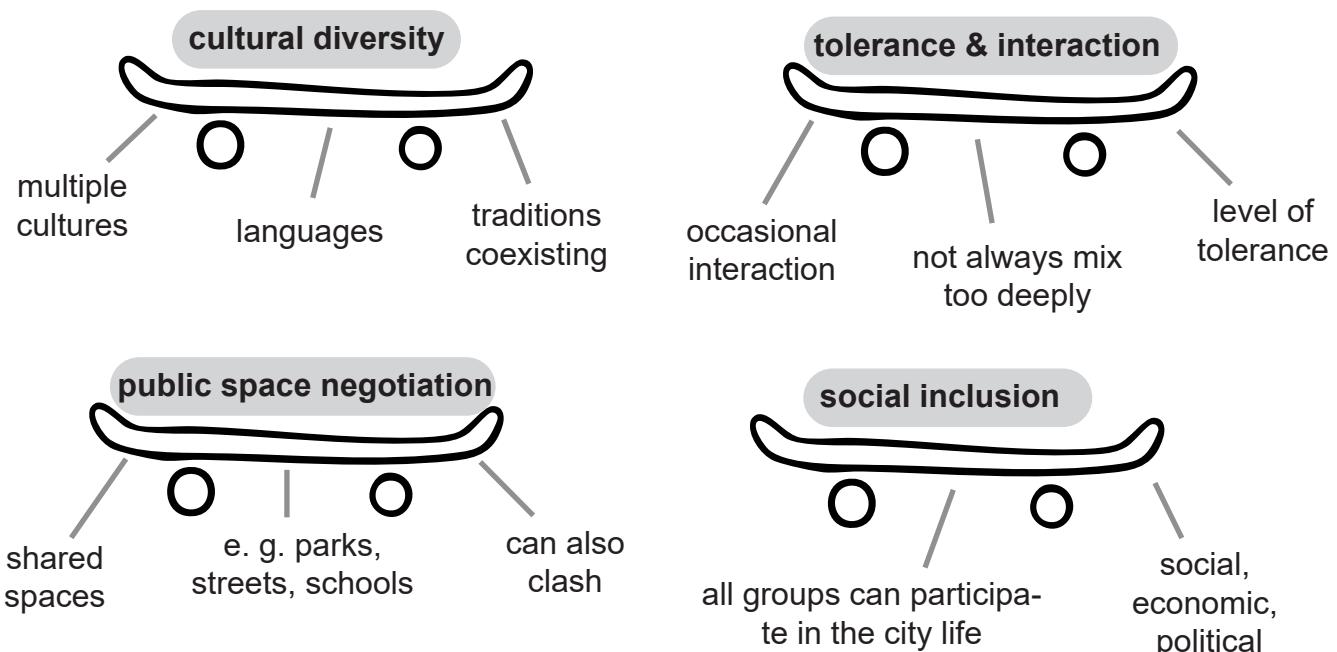
Urban plurism & inclusion

Urban public spaces are inherently plural, which means that they are used by people with different backgrounds, cultures, and needs. Recognizing this diversity is essential for designing inclusive environments that accommodate multiple forms of expression and occupation.

Iris Marion Young emphasizes the importance of "difference" in democratic societies, arguing that public spaces should support a plurality of voices and ways of life rather than enforcing uniform behavior (Young, 2011). This aligns with skateboarding's presence in public space, which embodies an alternative, often youth-driven form of urban participation.

Skateboarding in public space, when embraced rather than restricted, contributes to such pluralistic environments. It challenges dominant norms and invites a rethinking of how public space can be activated, not just accessed.

Key aspects urban plurism:





3. The role of public spaces in skateboarding

„Skateboarding is a highly creative and spatially subversive activity, which contests the regulation and control of public space.“

– Ian Borden, Skateboarding, Space, and the City:
Architecture and the Body (2001)

Skateboarding has always had a strong connection to public spaces, shaping not only the activity itself but also how the urban environments are seen and being interacted with. It first took off in California in the late 1950s, born out of surf culture, and quickly grew into a form of rebellion and self-expression that pushed against traditional ideas of how public spaces should be used (Borden, 2001).

Skateboarders approach the city in unique ways, reimagining its architecture. Things like stairs, railings, and ledges - meant for walking or sitting - become opportunities for creativity and movement. As Ian Borden points out, skateboarding disrupts how public space is regulated. It's a kind of resistance, an active, physical way to push back against simply consuming space the way it was designed to be used (ibid.).

In that sense, skateboarding becomes a form of urban intervention. Skaters constantly push the limits of what city planners intended, turning everyday features into platforms for personal and collective expression. While many cities have responded by building skate parks, skaters still gravitate toward non-designated areas, claiming their right to the city in their own way (ibid.).

Whether seen as a certain subculture, a competitive sport, or a form of urban activism - skateboarding continues to reshape how we think about and use public spaces. It remains a powerful cultural force in today's urban landscape.

Its presence challenges us to design and govern cities not only for function, but for flexibility, creativity and shared ownership.



Skateboarding and the urban culture

Skateboarding is more than a sport or form of recreation - it is a cultural practice deeply embedded in urban life. From its inception, it has been linked to expressions of identity, resistance, and reappropriation of space. As Ian Borden articulates, skateboarding is a form of „spatial subversion“ that challenges the intended functions of the built environment: “Skateboarders do not just move through urban space - they remake it, reinterpreting architecture through the body and through motion” (Borden, 2001, p. 130).

Skateparks vs. street skating

One of the most debated distinctions within skateboarding culture is between skating in designated parks and in public, everyday urban environments. While skateparks have become increasingly common in cities as a means of accommodating and regulating skateboarding, they represent a form of spatial institutionalization that can undermine the subversive potential of the practice.

According to Borden, “Skateparks attempt to relocate skateboarding to a sanctioned zone, reducing its challenge to urban order. However, they cannot replicate the unpredictability and improvisational nature of the city” (Borden, 2001, p. 221). In skateparks, the freedom to reinterpret space is partially limited by design. Rails, ramps, and bowls are meant to be skated - whereas in street skating, the skater must discover and repurpose these elements for themselves.



Fig. 03: Skatepark in China
Source: Tim Antonson, 2024

This reinterpretation transforms the city into a canvas for creativity and agency. Skateboarders engage with architecture not as passive users but as active co-creators.

Christian Peters emphasizes that skateboarding “represents an alternative form of spatial practice that reveals informal, often marginalized, ways of engaging with the city” (Peters, 2016, p. 86). It disrupts the top-down logic of urban planning by foregrounding the user’s experience and imagination.

Christian Peters expands on this, noting that “Street skating promotes a spatial awareness and critical engagement with the city that is lacking in the closed systems of skateparks” (Peters, 2016, p. 92). Furthermore, he suggests that the popularity of skateparks may lead municipalities to neglect more inclusive planning strategies: “Instead of promoting coexistence in public space, skateparks can serve as a means of displacement - removing skaters from visible urban life” (ibid., p. 93).

The contrast here is not simply about location, but about the meaning and function of public space. Street skating inherently challenges the norms of who public space is for and how it should be used, while skateparks risk neutralizing that challenge by containing the activity.



Fig. 04: Street skate spot in Budapest
Source: Marlène Mitterndorfer, 2025

Do-it-yourself Spots (DIY-Spots)

DIY skate spots are some of the most powerful examples of bottom-up urban transformation. They reflect a form of self-organization and spatial practice where skateboarders directly shape their environment. Peters emphasizes that DIY spots are “experiments in autonomy and creativity,” offering insight into how users reinterpret and reclaim neglected urban spaces (Peters, 2016, p. 83).

In places like Vienna or Hamburg, skaters have turned industrial backlots or fenced-off plazas into vibrant hubs. These spaces, built with donated concrete and labor, create a strong sense of community ownership and are often more socially inclusive than official skateparks (Kilbert, 2020, p. 89).

Schweer warns, however, that these spaces can become co-opted: “When DIY culture becomes fashionable, it risks being depoliticized and integrated into a neoliberal urban branding” (Schweer, 2020, p. 135). Cities must walk a fine line, supporting grassroots innovation without compromising its authenticity.



Fig. 05: Building a DIY skate obstacle
Source: Personal archives, 2025

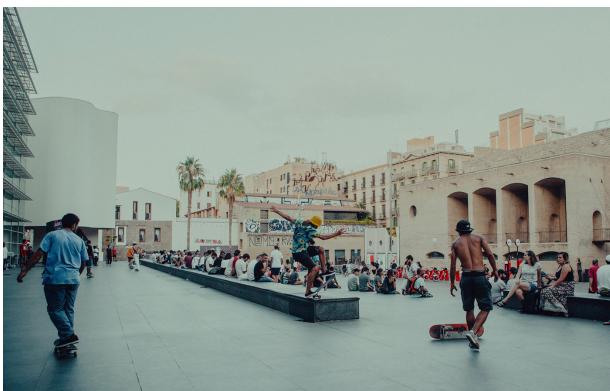


Fig. 07: Magba Plaza in Barcelona
Source: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/88057081/Skate>

Plazas

Urban plazas are key battlegrounds for the negotiation of shared public space. As Borden (2001, p. 225) argues, plazas represent both architectural form and symbolic meaning - they are stages for movement, visibility, and social contestation. Skateboarding often flourishes in these environments due to their open surfaces and modular design.

While some plazas implement defensive architecture (such as metal studs or fences), others actively encourage diversity of use. Schweer (2020, p. 128) notes that “truly inclusive plazas don’t regulate difference - they embrace it, architecturally and socially.”

Gehl (2010, p. 54) supports this view: successful plazas are ones where “multiple activities unfold simultaneously, with room for sitting, talking, watching and moving.” In this sense, skateboarding adds value by animating space and providing informal spectacles.



Fig. 06: Stalin Plaza in Prague
Source: <https://skatejawn.com/stalin-plaza/>

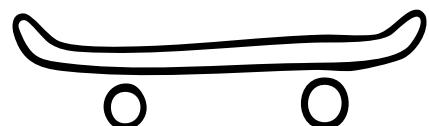


Impact on urban planning

The relationship between skateboarding and urban planning is inherently political. It raises questions about inclusion, ownership, and the right to shape the city. Ian Borden argues that skateboarding reveals “a tension between the conceived space of the planner and the lived space of the user,” echoing Lefebvre’s spatial triad (Borden, 2001, p. 90). In this light, skateboarding is not only a reaction to urban space – it is a form of spatial production that embodies lived experience and cultural identity.

This has important implications for planners. Christian Peters writes that “Skateboarders are not just users of space - they are experts in movement, surface and flow. Their insights should be integrated into planning processes” (Peters, 2016, p. 94). Rather than being perceived as a problem to be managed, skateboarding can be seen as a valuable indicator of spatial quality: skaters tend to gravitate toward spaces that are open, accessible, and aesthetically engaging qualities that benefit all users.

When cities embrace skateboarding as a legitimate form of urban engagement, new planning strategies emerge. For example, integrating skateable elements into general public design (e.g. benches without skate stoppers, smooth open plazas, low ledges) fosters a more inclusive environment without necessarily constructing separate, isolated skateparks. Peters calls this approach “skate-friendly urban design,” which he describes as “an integrative strategy that balances flexibility, tolerance and multifunctionality” (Peters, 2016, p. 95).



4. Shared use of space

Interactions between skateboarders & the public

Urban public areas serve as negotiation grounds where various groups might live together, work together, or clash. Skateboarders and the general public have a particularly dynamic interaction; this friction reflects deeper issues of cultural visibility, legitimacy and spatial control.

Because it turns everyday city buildings into performance landscapes, skateboarding is intrinsically spatial. Ian Borden claims that skateboarders transform curbs, stairways, and benches into places for expression and mobility. According to him, „skateboarders physically and emotionally engage with architecture, transforming the city into a site of bodily pleasure and resistance“ (Borden, 2001, p. 238).

However, because store owners and passersby often view skaters as unsafe or disruptive, such appropriation frequently causes conflict.

Different reactions have resulted from these tensions. Using anti-skate infrastructure, such metal brackets on ledges, to keep skateboarders out of specific places is one popular tactic. As part of a larger neoliberal urban strategy that transfers accountability for maintaining public order from institutions to individuals, Ocean Howell (2008) criticizes this, pointing out that „skateparks reflect a model of governance that disciplines youth through the built environment“ (p. 479). Although skateparks provide areas dedicated to skateboarding, they frequently detach the sport from city life, depriving it of its spontaneity and cultural significance.

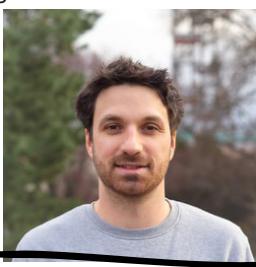
What enables shared use of space?

„St. Marx became a place where people of all ages, backgrounds, and interests came together. We had water access, benches, flowers, graffiti, a place to talk, to create – there was no discrimination. Everyone was welcome.“ - Ben Beofisch

Fig. 08: Ben Beofisch



Fig. 09: Johannes Wimmerder



„...that there are no thresholds where people might feel excluded. That you have the feeling: I'm allowed to be here, even if I don't skate.“ - Johannes Wimmerder



„There need to be spaces where you don't have to consume something just to be allowed to stay.“ - Lucas Jankoschek

Fig. 10: Lucas Jankoschek



Fig. 11: Leo Valls



„I think what makes it work is that people respect each other's way of using the space. Like, skaters, kids, older people – they all find their way without getting in each other's way.“ - Leo Valls



„When you feel you're not being watched or judged, it creates a space where you dare to try things and stay.“ - Gustav Eden

Fig. 12: Gustav Eden



Fig. 13: Anna Lusser



„A shared space works when no one feels superior and everyone feels they're allowed to contribute.“ - Anna Lusser



A space where coexistence works well

- good practice examples

Landhausplatz Innsbruck

Landhausplatz in Innsbruck offers a compelling real-world example of how shared public spaces can function successfully across different user groups. Though never officially designated for skateboarding, this expansive, open plaza has become one of Austria's most iconic informal skate spots. Its success lies not in precise planning, but in the space's open-endedness - what Jan Gehl calls an "invitation to use" (Gehl, 2010, p. 54). With smooth concrete surfaces, integrated seating, and generous circulation space, Landhausplatz is a multifunctional area where skateboarders, pedestrians, children, tourists and commuters coexist daily. In an interview conducted for this paper, Anna Lusser - skater, photographer and co-founder of the FLINTA* skate group Boobiebrettler - described the plaza as "a vibrant, informal meeting place where a casual sense of community emerges." For Lusser, the plaza exemplifies what shared public space should be: accessible, diverse, and capable of sustaining spontaneous interaction. She notes that while the plaza wasn't built for skating, it "naturally evolved into a perfect spot" because of its architectural neutrality and central location.



Fig. 14: Landhausplatz in Innsbruck

Source: <https://landezine.com/innsbruck-landscape-architecture/>

The space also aligns with three key principles that emerged in the interviews for this paper: accessibility, social interaction and flow. Anna Lusser highlighted that the plaza's openness allows skaters and non-skaters alike to feel welcome. "It's about respectful coexistence," she explained. "People often stop, watch, ask questions - even cheer us on. It becomes a place of exchange." This dynamic directly addresses common sources of tension in public space - like noise or territoriality - by fostering empathy and familiarity.

Rather than being segregated into single-use zones, the plaza is multifunctional. Skateboarding here doesn't displace other users; it adds to the experience. As Ian Borden (2001) argues, skateboarding transforms urban space into a performative and social landscape. Skaters engage with ledges, benches and ramps not as static furniture but as catalysts for movement and expression.

For other users, these actions turn the plaza into an informal stage - an unfolding spectacle that encourages observation and dialogue. Importantly, Landhausplatz also resists the trend of over-curation and defensive architecture. Unlike other urban plazas fitted with skate-stoppers, it has remained open to reinterpretation. This supports the idea that shared spaces benefit from design neutrality, allowing them to be activated in diverse, often unexpected ways. According to Christian Peters (2016), such flexibility fosters "an integrative urbanism," where planning works with, rather than against, grassroots creativity. Landhausplatz stands as a testament to how shared spaces can succeed when they embrace urban pluralism. As Lusser emphasized in the interview, "We don't need overly complicated design. Often, people just want open, free space where they feel they belong." Her remarks echo Iris Marion Young's (2011) call for public spaces that accommodate difference rather than enforce uniformity.

In summary, Landhausplatz exemplifies many of the qualities this paper advocates: adaptive design, inclusive use, social interaction and a balance between formal planning and lived creativity. It is not only a space for skating, but a space for coexistence - and a prime example of how public urban space can serve as common ground for diverse forms of life.



Fig. 15&16: Landhausplatz in Innsbruck
Source: https://www.baunetz.de/meldungen/Meldungen-Platz_in_Innsbruck_umgestaltet_1633561.html

Karlsplatz Vienna

Karlsplatz in Vienna offers a compelling case of how shared public space can accommodate a wide range of users - skateboarders, families, passersby, tourists and elderly residents - without relying on rigid zoning or overregulation. Its success lies not in prescriptive planning, but in its openness, adaptability and resistance to defensive architecture. Rather than being strictly managed, the plaza has evolved organically into a multifunctional public realm shaped by everyday use, negotiation and mutual tolerance.

Johannes Wimmeder, part of the Skateboard-club Vienna, defines shared public space as one where “different user groups have equal access and can actively use it – ideally at the same time.” Karlsplatz, in his view, exemplifies this principle. “You have kids playing there, eldersies hanging around and of course skaters,” he said. For him, the plaza is not just a physical location but a dynamic site of interaction and appropriation. “It’s a form of appropriation of public space... it’s part rebellion, part creativity, part self-expression.” Unlike official skateparks, where “you’re given a space and expected to stay there...it’s like a cage” - Karlsplatz invites spontaneous engagement and public visibility. His interpretation echoes Michel de Certeau’s notion of “tactics,” where everyday users creatively reconfigure imposed structures to make space their own.

Lucas Jankoschek, a skateboarder for nearly twenty years and founder of the Turtle Productions Skate Crew, echoed this sentiment from a personal and social perspective. For him, Karlsplatz “works because it’s not over-designed.” What sets it apart is it’s consume-free character. You’re not forced to buy anything. That makes it feel like it belongs to everyone.” He also highlighted its cleanliness, green areas, free water and lack of cars as crucial factors in making it feel inclusive and livable. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Karlsplatz became a social lifeline. “It was the first spot where we could hang together again after weeks of quarantine. It felt like a pocket of freedom.”

He also made a Turtle Production video called „The Karlsplatz Video“ about that time at Karlsplatz and started off by quoting:

”



Fig. 17: The Karlsplatz Video by Turtle Productions
Source: <https://youtu.be/gRNH7VSMey0?si=hp-TUyj-OeAFq5T4>

For Jankoschek, the key to shared public space is minimal regulation. “Public spaces need to develop naturally,” he said, warning against over-policing or commercial control. This critique aligns with Iris Marion Young’s (2011) call for public spaces that support social heterogeneity rather than suppress it. While the image of skateboarders has improved in recent years - partly due to skateboarding’s Olympic recognition - tensions persist. Still, he emphasized that skating at places like Karlsplatz fosters exchange: “People stop, watch, ask questions, cheer us on. It becomes a place of connection.” Ben, a longtime skater and skatepark designer, emphasized that Karlsplatz represents “one of the most positive examples” of shared space in Vienna. He pointed out that such spaces are rare in the city because public space is often “dictated from above” and heavily fenced or zoned. In contrast, Karlsplatz allows natural coexistence: “The plaza brings together people who wouldn’t normally meet. When people talk, things change.” He sees urban sports - like skateboarding, parkour and street art - not as disruptions, but as tools for informal dialogue and collective use.

Ben was also involved in redesigning part of Karlsplatz, including a multifunctional skate zone. Ironically, one goal of this redevelopment was to reduce skating in surrounding areas - but as he observed, "That's not how it works. The space regulates itself." Skaters gravitate to unused areas, and when those areas fill with other people, they move on. "Skaters activate areas that would otherwise be dark, empty, or even unsafe." The space, in essence, thrives precisely because it remains flexible and self-organizing.

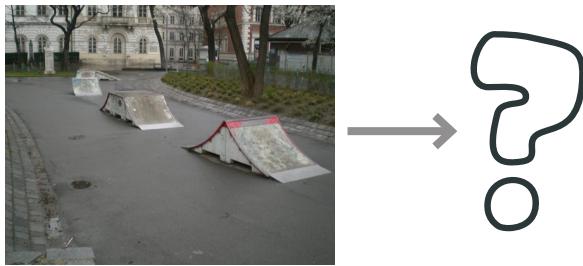


Fig. 18: Skatepark Karlsplatz
Source: <https://www.skatemap.de/?id=238>

Johannes added that for shared public space to thrive long-term, planning must include more structured civic involvement. "People are busy, everything is voluntary - there's a limit to how much can happen from below." He argued that the city must "provide facilitators of dialogue", where a city-appointed mediator works closely with grassroots communities to shape urban development. It's not just about inclusion but about enabling people to shape their space.

Karlsplatz demonstrates that effective shared space is not the product of elaborate design, but of openness, adaptability, and trust in its users. People sit, walk, skate, talk, or simply watch and through these informal actions, they build mutual respect. As Lucas Jankoschek said, "It becomes a place of exchange." In this sense, the space is performative, evolving through lived experience, not dictated function. Henri Lefebvre's concept of "lived space" comes alive here.



Fig. 20: Karlskirche Karlsplatz
Source: <https://vons-vons.blogspot.com/2021/06/karlsplatz-eine-zeitreise-im-film-2000.html>

That must not certainly mean they are not free of conflict. Tensions often emerge when groups with different expectations use the same space. Conflicts can be spatial, generational, or cultural. Noise is a common friction point, particularly with skateboarding, where repetitive sounds and sudden impacts may bother nearby residents or businesses. Concerns about safety, property damage, or anti-social behavior often lead cities to install anti-skate architecture or to ban skateboarding outright, undermining the inclusive ethos these spaces strive to uphold.

Cultural misunderstandings further complicate matters. Skateboarders are sometimes seen as disruptive or marginal, especially in environments that prioritize quiet, orderly behavior. This perception can lead to exclusion, either through active policing or subtle social pressure. As the interviews suggest, these tensions can be addressed not by stricter control, but by fostering familiarity, visibility and dialogue.

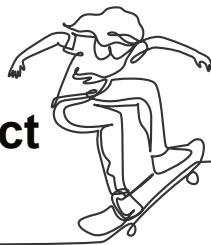
Karlsplatz stands as a rare case where these principles have, so far, worked. It shows what happens when cities resist the urge to control every square meter and instead allow space to be interpreted, lived, and reshaped from below. It is not only a plaza, but also a process: of co-existence, conflict, creativity and community.



Fig. 19: Statue at Karlsplatz
Source: https://www.meinbezirk.at/favoriten/c-lokales/tu-wien_a3165237



Fig. 21: Otto Wagner Pavillion
Source: <https://www.wissenswertes.at/karlsplatz-park>



A space with conflict

St. Marx Vienna

However, the redevelopment of Vienna's St. Marx area demonstrates how fragile shared public spaces can be when bottom-up urbanism collides with top-down political and economic agendas. What began as a promising experiment in grassroots placemaking is now a contested zone, caught between community-led creativity and large-scale commercial development.

In 2015, the "Wiener Standortentwicklung GmbH" (Vienna Site Development Agency) invited a local skate collective to transform an underutilized area in St. Marx into a DIY skatepark. This initiative was part of a broader urban branding effort to make the area more attractive to investors by signaling cultural vibrancy and community engagement. Over the years, the space evolved into a multifunctional hub – not only for skating, but for socializing, creating, gardening and gathering. As Ben, one of the co-founders and longtime organizers of the initiative of "St. Marx for everyone", describes: "It was never just about skating. It became a place where people of all ages, backgrounds, and interests came together. We had water access, benches, flowers, graffiti, a place to talk, to create - there was no discrimination. Everyone was welcome."

This organically developed space reflected what Henri Lefebvre would call lived space: shaped by its users, rather than by architects or bureaucrats. It became a rare example of sustained, informal urban commons in Vienna – operating outside of institutional control yet offering clear public benefit.



Fig. 22: St. Marx DIY Skatepark
Source: <https://www.goove.at/s/skatepark?page=2>

During the COVID-19 pandemic, when formal recreational facilities were closed or heavily restricted, St. Marx provided a much-needed open space for safe, outdoor activity. Notably, no COVID clusters emerged from the site, underscoring how responsible grassroots stewardship can function even in times of crisis.

Ben notes that the participatory promise that initially enabled the skatepark's creation was quietly abandoned: "At first, we were encouraged to be involved. There were workshops, planning sessions and community meetings. Then suddenly - radio silence. We heard about the new plans from a press release." What makes this situation particularly troubling is not just the loss of space, but the precedent it sets: that participatory practices can be selectively suspended when they become politically or economically inconvenient.

Despite this success, the park's future came under threat when the city approved plans for a large-scale event hall - a private investment project with unclear public benefit. The process marked a dramatic shift away from inclusion and transparency. According to Ben, "From one day to the next, all communication was cut off. We had been told our involvement mattered, but suddenly, everything was decided behind closed doors. No more meetings, no more updates - just press releases." This breakdown of participatory practice not only sidelined the very communities who had given years of unpaid labor to build and maintain the space - it also represented a broader political logic that views informal or alternative uses of public space as temporary, expendable, or undesirable when higher economic stakes are at play.

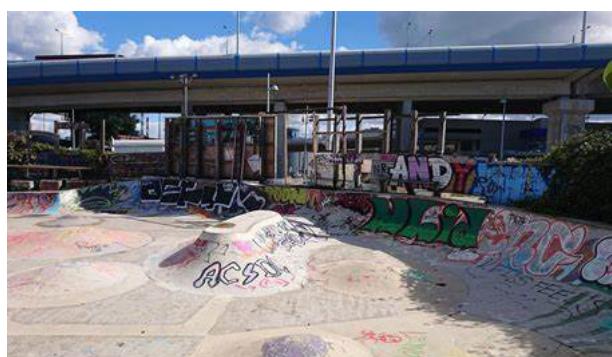


Fig. 23: St. Marx DIY Skatepark
Source: <https://trucksandfins.com/en/spots/skateparks/sankt-marx-skatepark/16574>

Instead of embedding civic participation as an ongoing right, the city treats it as an optional consultation phase - one that can be terminated once political consensus shifts. This undermines trust and discourages long-term civic stewardship. As Ben points out, "We did the work that the city didn't. We built infrastructure, maintained it, kept it clean, made it inclusive - and still, they act like it's theirs to erase."

Ben and others involved in the project now face a complex and politically charged battle. Their demands include a proper environmental impact assessment, traffic analysis, and a transparent permitting process. Yet these procedural requests are underpinned by a deeper critique: that public space is not truly public if its fate can be determined unilaterally by developers and politicians, without regard for those who use and shape it daily.

Worse still, the policy direction seems to lean increasingly toward defensive urbanism: skate-stoppers, hostile architecture, and surveillance designed to manage, exclude, or control informal use. As political pressure mounts to "order" the city for middle-class consumption and investor confidence, subcultural or non-commercial uses are framed as liabilities rather than assets.

As Ben put it, "We spent ten years building this space, piece by piece. It became a home for people who had nowhere else. If this gets erased overnight, what message does that send? That your work doesn't matter unless it makes money? That people's creativity and care are disposable?"

The St. Marx case serves as a cautionary tale. It shows that while shared spaces may emerge organically, their continued existence requires formal recognition, legal protection, and a political commitment to value civic agency over market logic. Without such protections, even the most vibrant examples of shared space can be lost - not because they failed, but because they succeeded in a way that was inconvenient to those in power.

As Ben concluded, "The city talks about participation - but it doesn't trust its people. We need spaces that are not just tolerated but protected. That means changing how planning works - not just who gets invited to the table, but who sets the agenda."

The City's Perspective

From the city's standpoint, the redevelopment of St. Marx represents a strategic opportunity to position Vienna as a future-oriented hub for culture, innovation, and international events. The new event hall is seen as a key infrastructure project that promises economic growth, tourism, and international visibility. In official communications, city planners emphasize the need for long-term planning, professional coordination, and efficient land use to meet the evolving demands of a growing city. While acknowledging the past use of the skatepark area, authorities have described the redevelopment as a "necessary next step" in Vienna's urban development strategy. In their view, informal or temporary uses must sometimes give way to permanent solutions that serve broader citywide goals - a position that reflects a tension between community-led experimentation and centralized urban governance.



Fig. 24&25: Initiative „St. MARX FOR EVERYONE“
Source: <https://stmarx.wien/>

ST. MARX FÜR ALLE

Cities where skateboarding is already being used as a tool for shared public spaces

Bordeaux, France

The transformation of Bordeaux into a skate-friendly city is a compelling case of how cultural practices, urban design, and civic negotiation can reshape the perception and function of public space. Spearheaded by professional skateboarder, filmmaker, and urban mediator Leo Valls, Bordeaux's evolution from repression to recognition demonstrates that inclusive urbanism is not only a matter of planning policy, but of attitude, experimentation and trust.



Fig. 26: Leo Valls pushing through Bordeaux

Source: <https://stadmakerscongres.nl/2023/11/skateboarden-en-het-smc-lessen-van-skateurbanism-in-bordeaux/>

For many years, Bordeaux was known among skaters as a city hostile to street skateboarding. Although it had designated skateparks, street skating in plazas and other urban zones was heavily policed and sanctioned. Urban furniture was fitted with skate-stoppers, plazas were closely monitored and those caught skating could face fines of up to €135. As Valls explains: "At one point it was so bad that we were only skating at night. It was like „ninja skating“ - silent, quick, and invisible. There was no acceptance in the day-to-day use of the city."

This criminalization of skateboarding did not only restrict movement, but also sent a message about who belonged in public space and under what conditions. While the city invested in modern skateparks on the periphery, the central, symbolic spaces of the city remained exclusion zones. Rather than opposing the city directly, Valls pursued a strategy of mediation and cultural framing. He recognized that the key to change lay not just in securing physical infrastructure, but in changing how skateboarding was understood. In 2017, he began engaging with city officials, urban planners, cultural institutions and residents, not to demand space, but to open up a conversation about co-existence.

This process began with small interventions: short films documenting street skating in Bordeaux, public exhibitions, community screenings and the use of social media to recast skateboarding as a creative, engaged use of space. These acts gradually built legitimacy, showcasing that skaters were not only users, but potential co-creators of the urban landscape.

The most tangible outcome of this shift came with the city's adoption of a „Municipal Master Plan for Skateboarding“, a formal commitment to integrating skateboarding into urban design, management and cultural planning. The plan identified 15 specific sites in Bordeaux with potential for skateboarding integration. Crucially, the approach avoided creating isolated skate zones. Instead, it prioritized adaptive design within existing public space - minimal but meaningful interventions that invite overlapping uses.

One of the earliest projects was at Place Dormoy, a quiet, underused square. Rather than redesigning the entire space, Valls proposed installing just two polished granite benches, designed to be both functional for general public use and perfect for skateboarding. This subtle gesture transformed the square.



Fig. 27: Guide du skateboard bordelais

Source: <https://www.bordeaux.fr/sites/bor-bdxf-drupal/files/2025-04/Guide%20du%20skate%20bordelais.pdf>

This approach is rooted in the principle of multi-functionality. The urban elements are not exclusive; they are shared. In this sense, the project reflects Jan Gehl's vision of public space as a dynamic stage for interaction, not a backdrop for passive movement.

Alongside physical design changes, Valls also worked on reforming regulatory frameworks. In a number of public spaces, including Place Saint-Michel and Place André Meunier, the city introduced time-based permissions for skateboarding. Instead of banning skating entirely, these areas now operate with clear usage hours (e.g., 8 AM to 8 PM), balancing the needs of residents and skaters.



Fig. 28: Skateboarding allowed in Bordeaux?
Source: <https://www.instagram.com/connect.skaturbanism.festival/>

"Before, it was black and white: skateboarding was illegal. Now it's about balance. Skaters know the rules, they respect them. And in return, they feel seen and responsible." Skaters have started to take more ownership over their surroundings: picking up trash, helping maintain the benches and intervening socially when conflicts arise. These soft forms of stewardship challenge the assumption that subcultural use equals disrespect or disorder. Rather, they show that recognition fosters accountability.

Another subtle but powerful shift was the use of signage. Previously, most signs related to skateboarding were prohibitive "No skating," "Fines apply," etc. Now, new signs acknowledge skateboarding as part of the spatial program, while also informing users about time restrictions and cohabitation principles. These signs are part of a broader symbolic shift from policing to participation.

At the heart of this transformation is the role Valls played as a civic intermediary. His dual credibility, as someone respected within the skate community and trusted by city officials, enabled a dialogue that would have been impossible in a more polarized environment.

"I see myself as a translator - between cultures, between generations. You can't build shared space without someone to hold that conversation."

The Bordeaux model has since inspired other cities across France and Europe to rethink how they engage with skateboarding. Valls is now involved in projects in Paris, Marseille, and even smaller towns, working with local governments to promote design strategies that accommodate multiple user groups without suppressing subcultural expression.

This case does not pretend that friction disappears. Conflicts still arise whether between skaters and residents, or between noise and quiet. But instead of denying these tensions, Bordeaux has chosen to design for negotiation. Shared space, in this model, is not peaceful by default, but constructed through dialogue, adaptation and continuous rebalancing.

In conclusion, Bordeaux's evolution is not simply about skateboarding. It is about how cities can shift from a logic of exclusion to one of collaboration. Through modest physical changes, sustained dialogue and the cultivation of trust, Bordeaux redefined what it means to share public space. Skaters were no longer "others" to be removed, they became participants in the making of the city. The story of Bordeaux is a reminder that meaningful urban change doesn't always start with large budgets or grand plans. Sometimes, it starts with two granite benches and someone willing to listen.



Fig. 29: Portable, skateable sculptures in Bordeaux
Source: <https://connect-skaturbanism-festival.com/>

Malmö, Sweden

The city of Malmö offers a remarkable case of how skateboarding can be embedded in urban development strategies not as a marginal activity but as a dynamic force for inclusive and socially vibrant public spaces. At the heart of this transformation is Gustav Svanborg Edén, project manager at the City of Malmö's Department for streets, parks, and property. His work exemplifies a paradigm shift in urban planning - from segregating subcultures to engaging them as co-creators of space.



Fig. 30: Gustav Eden giving a lecture

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/gustav.svanborg.eden/>

Historically, Malmö - like many cities - provided designated skateparks such as Stapelbäddsparken, which functioned effectively as hubs for the skateboarding community. However, Svanborg Edén emphasizes that such facilities, while valuable, risk isolating the cultural and creative vitality of skateboarding from everyday urban life. "The skatepark confirms to norms of separation," he notes, arguing that while it contains the activity, it also confines its social and spatial potential.

Recognizing this limitation, Malmö adopted a forward-thinking approach that integrates skateboarding into public life through a dual strategy of events and prototyping. This model ensures that every skate-related event in Malmö leaves a tangible, lasting impact on the city's physical and social landscape. For example, skateboarding events are used as opportunities to prototype new forms of street furniture, redesign schoolyards or activate underutilized plazas - often in close collaboration with the local skate community.

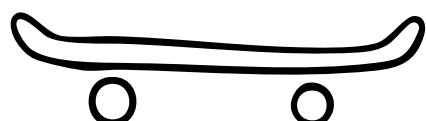
These interventions are not skate-exclusive: benches designed for skating also serve pedestrians; open courts built for skating are equally suited for dancing, playing ball or socializing.

This inclusive design logic reflects Malmö's broader urban philosophy. As Svanborg Edén explains, skateboarding introduces "an alibi for other users" - by animating otherwise passive or underused spaces, skateboarders create visibility, presence, and social safety. This approach aligns with Jan Gehl's concept of design as an "invitation to use," emphasizing flexibility over function, participation over prescription.

One exemplary project illustrating this inclusive and adaptive logic is the redevelopment of the Apelgårdsskolan schoolyard in Rosengård. Here, Malmö's city administration, together with local skaters, transformed a neglected site into a multifunctional activity hub. Although the intervention was initiated under the umbrella of a skateboarding event, the needs of the community - particularly the local children - dictated the outcome. "The kids at the school didn't mainly need skateboarding, but a ball court and a dance space," Svanborg Edén reflects. In response, the team designed a multi-court space that could accommodate diverse interests. Following the event, skateboarding infrastructure and equipment were left behind for ongoing use, administered by the school's all-activity house. This ensured continuity, ownership and accessibility, reinforcing the idea that skateboarding can coexist with and enhance broader community goals.



Fig. 31: Apelgårdsskolan school in Rosengård
Source: <https://malmo.se/Bo-och-leva/Utbildning-och-fors-kola/Grundskola/Grundskolor/Apelgårdsskolan-F-6.html>



This process-based model of urban transformation extends to Malmö's institutional frameworks as well. Svanborg Edén criticizes conventional linear planning models that prioritize finished physical outcomes over evolving social engagement. "Municipal planning must move away from slow, exclusive processes," he argues. Instead, he envisions an agile, community-driven urban evolution, where municipal workers act as facilitators and spaces are continuously shaped by those who use them. Skateboarders, accustomed to the principles of DIY culture - of building and rebuilding, of adapting and claiming - are seen as ideal participants in such a dynamic model.

Importantly, Malmö does not romanticize skateboarding uncritically. Svanborg Edén acknowledges potential tensions, especially when public spaces become dominated by particular user groups. For instance, intoxicated behavior or territorial attitudes can undermine inclusivity. Thus, careful design and continuous community engagement are key to ensuring that skateboarding remains a constructive force. As he puts it, "We need to consider who may be negatively impacted. You don't want to double the distance a pensioner must walk just to avoid a skate space."



Fig. 32: Street skateboarding in Malmö
Source: <https://skatemalmo.se/events/skate-malmo-street/>

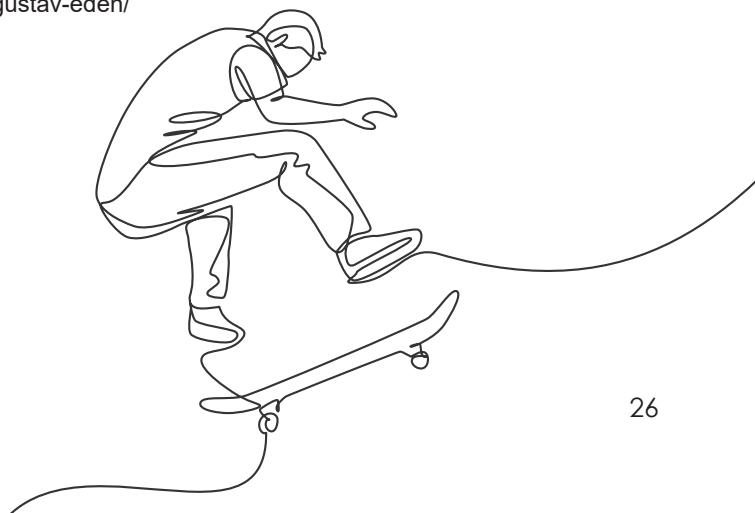
Malmö's success lies in its deliberate blurring of boundaries - between skaters and planners, between event and infrastructure, between space and society. The city embraces conflict not as a threat, but as a source of dialogue. By designing for interaction rather than control, Malmö cultivates what Svanborg Edén calls social infrastructure: the micro-interactions, relationships, and shared understandings that make public life vibrant.

This approach aligns with critical urban theorists like Henri Lefebvre, Michel de Certeau, and Iris Marion Young, who all emphasize the democratic and transformative potential of everyday urban practices. Malmö's practice affirms these theories in a real-world context, demonstrating that skateboarding - when supported and embedded thoughtfully - can function not just as a cultural or recreational activity, but as a tool for pluralism, equity, and participatory urbanism.

As a concluding reflection, Svanborg Edén urges a shift in how success is measured in urban planning. Rather than counting ledges or square meters, cities should evaluate the quality of engagement, the emergence of local leadership and the durability of community connections. "Many skateparks kill skate scenes," he warns. "A good design isn't finished. It's a process that enables people to be part of shaping their lives and their city."



Fig. 33&34&35: Skateboarding in Malmö
Source: <https://skatemalmo.se/events/skate-malmo-street/> & <https://www.freeskatemag.com/2016/11/09/inside-man-gustav-eden/>





5. Recommendations for actions & Conclusion

This paper sets out to explore how public spaces can serve as shared environments where skateboarders and the broader public can come together. Through literature, interviews, and case studies, it has become clear that skateboarding offers more than just a recreational outlet - it is a spatial practice that re-defines the role of the user in shaping the city.

Collection of pictures
of my friends Skateboards

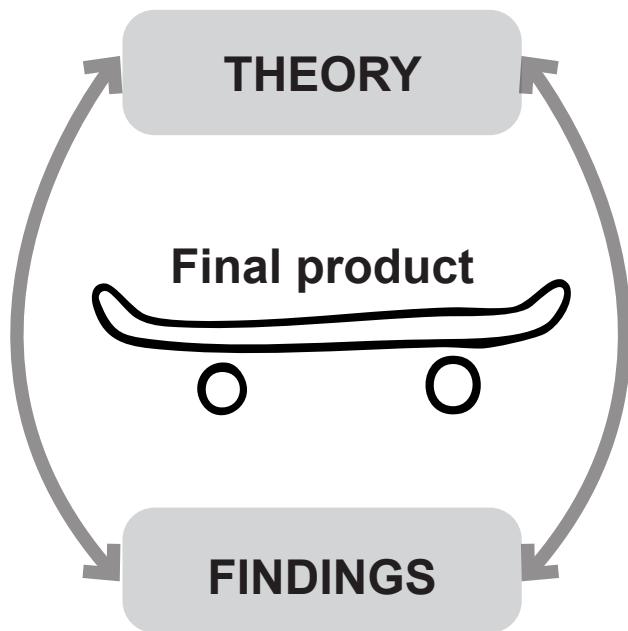


When given the opportunity, skateboarders bring life to underused spaces, foster new communities and challenge conventional uses of architecture.

Skateboarding thrives in places that allow appropriation, improvisation and shared use. These are qualities that resonate strongly with inclusive urban planning principles. As both Jan Gehl and Christian Peters underscore, planning should not be about controlling space but about creating invitations to use it creatively and collectively.

Connecting theory and findings

The theoretical perspectives from Lefebvre, Borden and Young offer a critical lens through which skateboarding can be understood as a transformative and democratic engagement with space. Borden's (2001) concept of spatial subversion and Peters' (2016) insights into lived urban practices connect directly to the empirical examples seen in cities like Bordeaux, Vienna or Malmö.



The following pages present the final outcomes developed from this work. Since communicating the relevance of shared spaces and their inherent potential plays a key role in the insights gained through this research, it seems only logical to prepare the conclusions in a way that is accessible to the broader public and to everyone within the skate community but also important urban planners. The final products therefore include:

On the one hand, the outcomes include concrete recommendations for action that offer guidance not only to urban planners and decision-makers in the field of city development, but also to individuals within the skateboarding community who wish to actively participate in shaping their environment.

These recommendations are intended to bridge the gap between institutional planning processes and grassroots initiatives, encouraging collaboration and mutual understanding.

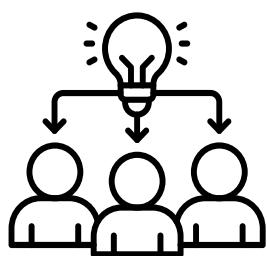
On the other hand, specific design concepts and visual examples are presented to illustrate how inclusive and multifunctional shared spaces could or should be envisioned in the future. These examples serve as inspiration and a practical reference for anyone interested in fostering connection, community and creative expression in urban spaces - whether in planning, activism or everyday use. All of this is developed under the overarching theme: Skate to Connect - highlighting skateboarding as a powerful tool to create social cohesion and activate public space.

Recommendations for action – A planners guide how shared urban spaces can work!

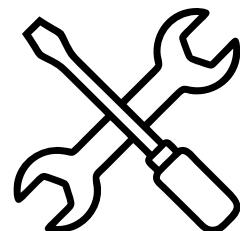
The research clearly highlighted three critical elements that enable successful shared public spaces: accessibility, social interaction, and thoughtful design features. These keywords do not stand alone - they are deeply interconnected, each reinforcing the potential of skateboarding to activate urban space in inclusive and engaging ways. Shared public spaces that function well for both skateboarders and the general public must be more than just technically functional; they must be socially responsive, open to reinterpretation and embedded in participatory urban strategies.

For different user groups to coexist meaningfully in public space, several conditions must be met. First and foremost, the physical environment must allow for overlapping and adaptable use - with open surfaces, flexible infrastructure and tolerance for noise and movement. However, physical design alone is insufficient. To support truly shared space, cities must pair thoughtful design with inclusive policies, educational outreach and collaborative governance structures. In light of this, the following recommendations outline key principles and actionable strategies for municipalities, planners and communities alike to embrace skateboarding as a tool for connection and urban revitalization.

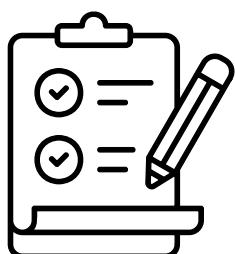
Recognize Skateboarding as a legitimate spatial practice



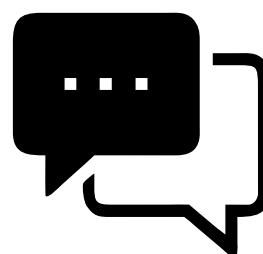
Support DIY and temporary interventions



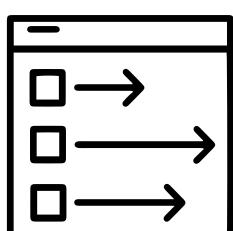
Develop inclusive, flexible urban design standards



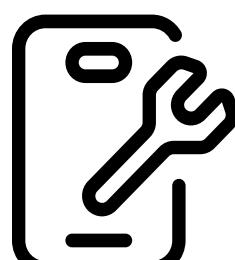
Establish the role of a municipal „Bridge Maker“



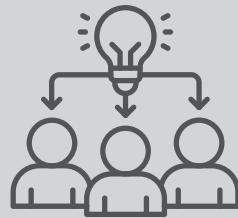
Create a three-phase urban strategy for Skateboarding



Reactivate forgotten urban spaces



Recognize Skateboarding as a legitimate spatial practice



Skateboarding must be embraced by urban planners as a means of civic engagement and cultural expression rather than being reduced to a simple recreational pastime. Skaters connect with the built environment in ways that provide meaning, encourage conversation and breathe life into unused areas. Therefore, rather than being criminalized through restrictive legislation or defensive architecture, skateboarding should be recognized in cultural, spatial and transportation planning strategies.

Programs that de-stigmatize skateboarding, educate municipal employees on its cultural background and emphasize its benefits for community development, youth safety and public safety should all be supported by cities. Making a „Pop-Up Skate & Culture Week“ - a short-lived, high-impact urban activation where skaters and non-skaters may interact through do-it-yourself skate obstacles, movie screenings, artist installations, beginning classes and public panels - is one creative move. As written on pages 25-26, Malmö has created some projects like that in the past.

Target groups

Urban planners and policy makers, local governments and municipal authorities,
Architects and Designers, cultural institutions and the public



Skateboarding is more than a sport - it's a creative and meaningful way of engaging with urban space. Skaters challenge conventional uses of the city by reimagining architecture for expression and movement, revealing hidden potential in overlooked places. Recognizing it as a legitimate spatial practice means valuing its cultural role and integrating it into urban planning instead of treating it as a problem.

Include skateboarding in planning policies and design guidelines

Action: Add skateboarding as a consideration in official urban development documents - like masterplans, mobility strategies, and public space design codes.

Appoint skateboarding as a planning stakeholder

Action: Involve skateboarding representatives in consultations for new plazas, squares, or recreational zones.

Promote positive public perception & host urban activation events

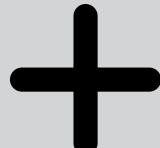
Action: Launch city-backed communication and activation campaigns that highlight the cultural and social value of skateboarding.

Avoid hostile architecture

Action: Stop using deterrents like metal knobs or skate stoppers, especially in shared public areas.

Pilot “skate-friendly” public spaces

Action: Action: Skate-inclusive design features: smooth concrete surfaces, long benches or ledges without obstructions, shade and seating for spectators, water.



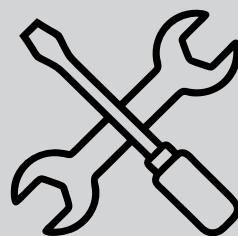
number of complaints vs. positive interactions in shared skate/public spaces

participation numbers in public events involving skateboarding

level of involvement of skateboarding communities in planning processes

reduced vandalism or deterioration in spaces activated by skaters

Support DIY and temporary interventions



DIY skate spots are grassroots expressions of spatial agency and community care. These informal environments demonstrate how citizens, when empowered, can reimagine the urban fabric. Rather than removing these spaces or treating them as nuisances, municipalities should partner with DIY crews to upgrade and sustain them. Where possible, cities can legalize and co-maintain DIY spots, identifying disused lots and turning them into community skate spaces.

In exchange for stewardship and maintenance, cities can offer materials (such as concrete or lighting), technical support or water access. These partnerships foster ownership, accountability and long-term resilience. St. Marx and its initiative "St. Marx für alle" on pages 21-22 is a great example and should be more supported.

Target groups

Local skateboarders and skateboarding communities, grassroots urban activists and cultural practitioners, urban planners and policymakers (indirectly), public



These spots should reactivate underused or "dead" spaces in the city. They can also encourage youth engagement, physical activity and social inclusion. Even though, they require little money and no expensive planning, there is community ownership and pride being created. They can function as safe social spaces beyond just skateboarding.

Identify suitable locations

Action: Survey small unused urban spaces (e.g., fenced-off lots, underbridges, old sports courts). Prioritize spaces with no current use or function.

Legalize & permit temporary use

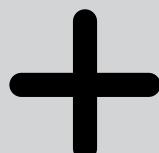
Action: Introduce short-term use permits (6–12 months) for DIY skateboarding projects, allowing communities to build and skate as long as basic safety standards and mutual respect are upheld.

Provide basic support

Action: Offer materials; Help with waste disposal or repairs if needed; Low-cost and user-led approach.

Collaborate, don't control and learn

Action: Do not overregulate or design the space for them; Trust skaters as experts in movement, flow, and how to build functional, creative elements; City staff can act as facilitators, not directors; If successful, consider extending support on the idea.



it's low risk and low cost

promotes shared responsibility

supports bottom-up creativity

revives neglected urban corners

Who benefits?

Skaters (creative outlet); City planners (activated spaces at low cost); Wider community (place to watch, interact, engage with urban culture); Neighborhoods (improved safety and foot traffic)

Develop inclusive, flexible urban design standards



The success of shared public spaces often hinges on their capacity to serve multiple functions and user groups simultaneously. Over-curated or overly programmed environments tend to limit the potential for creative engagement. Instead, cities should promote the integration of multi-functional street furniture and “loose space” design, elements that support sitting, playing, skating and gathering without being prescriptive in use.

To create cities that work for everyone - including skateboarders - urban design must move away from rigid, one-size-fits-all solutions. Instead, it should embrace inclusivity and flexibility, allowing spaces to adapt to different needs, uses and communities over time. This doesn't mean turning every public square into a skatepark. Rather, it's about making sure spaces are open to multiple uses - sitting, walking, playing, skating, socializing, without excluding certain groups through design choices.

Target groups

Urban planners and designers, municipal authorities and policymakers, community engagement coordinators, architects and landscape architects, advocacy groups



Many public spaces today are built for efficiency, control, or commercial use. This often excludes certain groups - like skateboarders - through: Skate stoppers on benches and ledges, overly programmed, restrictive designs, few open, comfortable areas for informal use. Flexible design allows multiple uses and encourages creativity, spontaneous activity and social connection across diverse communities.

Co-design with communities

Action: People who use the space, should be part of the design process from the start. With: Workshops, surveys, pilot projects, ongoing feedback with city departments

Embed skate-friendly elements into everyday spaces - not skateparks

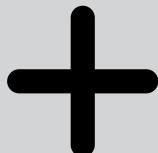
Action: Skaters should not be pushed to the edge of the city. Well-designed plazas, parks and schoolyards can accommodate skateboarding as part of their design, while also serving everyone else.

Create a city-wide standard or catalog

Action: Bordeaux (France) added skate-friendly furniture to its official city furniture catalog. Now every public space includes elements that work for multiple groups.

Design multi-functional furniture

Action: Design multi-functional furniture (“skateable furniture zones”); Smooth concrete surfaces; Low ledges or edges (that people can sit on or skate); Avoiding barriers like fences or signs that separate user groups



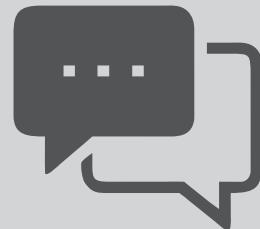
smooth, open spaces are easier for wheelchairs, strollers and the elderly

more activity in public space increases safety and social life

activation of unused areas, making dark or boring spaces lively and visible

encouraging interaction across age groups and cultures builds community

Establish the role of a municipal „Bridge Maker“



The appointment of a specialist urban sports coordinator or „bridge maker“ is necessary for towns to formalize support for skateboarding and guarantee regular contact between communities and planning authorities. By organizing interactive workshops, overseeing event logistics and incorporating skater input into urban development plans, this position would act as a mediator between skaters, locals and governmental entities.

Moreover, municipalities should mandate that all new public space developments - especially plazas, parks and schoolyards - consult directly with skate communities. Incorporating at least one skater representative into district planning boards can ensure that the voices of actual users help shape the environments intended for public interaction. In the examples in the pages prior you can see that I have been interviewing such "Bridge makers" from different cities as well.

Target groups

Municipal governments and urban planning departments (city officials and policymakers or civic engagement coordinators), city institutions or decision-makers



Skateboarding is often misunderstood or overlooked in urban planning, leading to unnecessary conflict, underused spaces, or hostile design. By appointing a bridge maker, cities acknowledge skateboarding as a legitimate use of public space and invite skaters into the planning process. Municipalities should consult skaters on new public spaces and include a skater on planning boards.

Eventual tasks of a municipal „Bridge Maker“

Build networks - Connect municipalities with skate organizations, designers and experts.

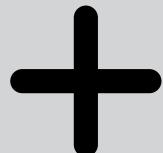
Mediate conflicts - Act as a neutral contact point to resolve misunderstandings or disputes between skaters and other user groups.

Represent skaters - Advocate for skaters' needs in municipal planning.

Advise on Design - Provide input or guidelines on skate-friendly and multi-use design for plazas, parks and schoolyards.

Integrate skater input into the design and redevelopment of public spaces.

Facilitate dialogue - Organize regular meetings and workshops between skaters, city planners and local communities.



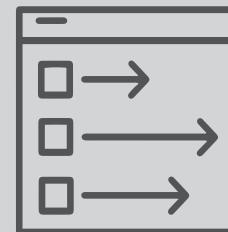
skaters gain safer, more accessible and purposefully designed environments

the city as a whole fosters a culture of participation, innovation, and youth engagement, contributing to healthier and more dynamic urban life

city officials and planners receive practical, user-informed insights, reducing costly design mistakes

local residents benefit from more inclusive, vibrant, and shared public areas, with fewer tensions between user groups

Create a three-phase urban strategy for Skateboarding (Masterplan)



In order to foster public spaces that are not only functional and accessible but also adaptable, expressive and reflective of contemporary urban cultures, cities should adopt a comprehensive, multi-phase urban strategy that treats skateboarding not merely as a recreational pastime or youth subculture, but as a legitimate spatial practice and creative form of civic engagement - one that challenges conventional uses of the built environment and contributes

to more vibrant, shared and democratically activated urban landscapes; this strategy should draw on proven international models such as the forward-thinking municipal approach developed in Bordeaux, France, where skateboarding has been successfully integrated into the city's planning, design and cultural policy through a combination of mediation, cultural activation and embedded spatial interventions. There is more to read about the program of Bordeaux on pages 23-24.

Target groups

masterplan targets both decision-makers and users - aiming to bridge top-down urban development with bottom-up community engagement (different user-groups)



A Three-Phase Urban Strategy for Skateboarding is a structured, citywide approach that treats skateboarding not as a nuisance or afterthought, but as a legitimate part of urban life. It combines conflict resolution, cultural recognition and urban design to build inclusive, functional public spaces.

Phase 1 Mediation:

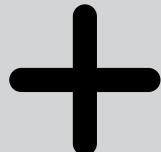
Initiate structured public dialogues between skaters, residents and city officials to identify shared concerns, reduce tensions and build mutual understanding early in the process.

Phase 2 Cultural Activation:

Organize events such as festivals, exhibitions, film screenings and performances to highlight skateboarding's cultural value and strengthen its public legitimacy.

Phase 3 Spatial Integration:

Create a long-term urban masterplan that incorporates skateable features into everyday public infrastructure (e.g. benches, ledges, plazas) and revise municipal street furniture catalogs to support inclusive, multi-use design.



a practical roadmap to manage skateboarding through planning rather than policing

opportunities for engagement, tourism and cultural programming

a stronger public voice in shaping public spaces

better use of public space by multiple groups without costly redesigns or enforcement

increased visibility and respect as part of urban culture

reduced conflict and better understanding between skaters and non-skaters

Reactivate forgotten urban spaces



Unused alleyways, fenced-off lots, abandoned parking lots and neglected corners abound in cities; these areas are sometimes disregarded in planning discussions yet have a wealth of possibilities for social and cultural revitalization. It is possible to rethink these „urban gaps“ as communal areas where skateboarding serves as a stimulant for young people’s participation, place-making and artistic expression.

Municipalities can map and identify small-scale areas that are ready for short-term or long-term interventions by conducting an „Urban Gaps Audit.“ Local skaters, artists and youth organizations might get microgrants from a pilot project like „Skate the Gaps“ to renovate these spaces with pop-up markets, music events, murals or mobile skate obstacles.

Target groups

Urban planners and city officials, community organizations and local residents, youth and marginalized groups, skateboarders and alternative space users



To ensure these reclaimed spaces are inclusive and meaningful, projects should reflect local history and identity. Cities can encourage temporary land use through partnerships with private owners offering branding or tax incentives and establish shared stewardship models to manage maintenance, programming and conflict resolution. Even a small, neglected lot can become a vibrant micro-public space.

Conduct an urban gaps audit:



Action: Municipalities should systematically map and assess small, underutilized spaces that could be repurposed temporarily or permanently.

Launch a “Skate the Gaps” Pilot Program:



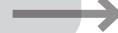
Action: Offer microgrants to local skaters, artists, and youth groups to revitalize these spaces. Examples: Mobile skate obstacles and DIY ramps; Pop-up skate events or community markets; public video screenings

Partner with Landowners:

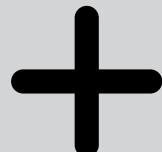


Action: Create incentives (e.g. tax breaks, co-branding, or public recognition) for private landowners who allow temporary public use of their vacant properties.

Create Shared Stewardship Agreements:



Action: Develop lightweight governance models that define roles for maintenance, programming, and conflict resolution between skaters, residents and city staff.



revitalized spaces that reduce blight and improve neighborhood livability

activation of areas that attract vandalism or neglect

access to new, safe, creative public spaces for activity

greater youth visibility and engagement in positive, constructive ways

strengthened local networks and new models for low-cost urban regeneration

productive use of idle land that aligns with social and cultural goals



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Eden, Gustav, personal interview, videocall, 12.05.2025

7. List of figures

Fig. 01: Leonie Huber; Fakie to switch nosegrind

Source: Anna Lusser, 2025

Fig. 02: Freedom Skatetrip Budapest

Source: Marlene Mitterndorfer, 2025

Fig. 03: Skatepark in China

Source: Tim Antonson, 2024

Fig. 04: Street skate spot in Budapest

Source: Marlene Mitterndorfer, 2025

Fig. 05: Building a DIY skate obstacle

Source: Personal archives, 2025

Fig. 06: Stalin Plaza in Prague

Source: Skate Jawn. Available at: <https://skatejawn.com/stalin-plaza/>
[Accessed: 01.06.2025]

Fig. 07: Magba Plaza in Barcelona

Source: <https://www.behance.net/gallery/88057081/Skate>
[Accessed: 01.06.2025]

Fig. 08: Ben Beofisch

Source: <https://augustin.or.at/zeitung/aktuelle-ausgabe/81881/>
[Accessed: 02.06.2025]

Fig. 09: Johannes Wimmeder

Source: <https://skateboardclubvienna.at/unser-team/>
[Accessed: 02.06.2025]

Fig. 10: Lucas Jankoschek

Source: <https://www.derstandard.at/story/3000000231061/turtle-productions-auf-dem-skateboard-zwischen-kunst-und-sport>
[Accessed: 02.06.2025]

Fig. 11: Leo Valls

Source: https://medium.com/@joseph_21774/an-interview-with-leo-valls-skateboarding-equality-of-space-in-bordeaux-b4f46077da37
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Fig. 12: Gustav Eden

Source: <https://www.freeskatemag.com/2016/11/09/inside-man-gustav-eden/>
[Accessed: 02.06.2025]

Fig. 13: Anna Lusser

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/boobiebrettler/>
[Accessed: 02.06.2025]

Fig. 14: Landhausplatz in Innsbruck

Source: <https://landezine.com/innsbruck-landscape-architecture/>
[Accessed: 01.06.2025]

Fig. 15&16: Landhausplatz in Innsbruck (both pictures)

Source: [https://www.baunetz.de/meldungen/Meldungen
Platz_in_Innsbruck_umgestaltet_1633561.html](https://www.baunetz.de/meldungen/Meldungen_Platz_in_Innsbruck_umgestaltet_1633561.html)
[Accessed: 01.06.2025]

Fig. 17: The Karlsplatz Video by Turtle Productions

Source: <https://youtu.be/gRNH7VSMey0?si=hp-TUyjpOeAFq5T4>
[Accessed: 01.06.2025]

Fig. 18: Skatepark Karlsplatz

(Source: <https://www.skatemap.de/?id=238>)
[Accessed: 01.06.2025]

Fig. 19: Statue at Karlsplatz

Source: https://www.meinbezirk.at/favoriten/c-lokales/tu-wien_a3165237
[Accessed: 01.06.2025]

Fig. 20: Karlskirche Karlsplatz

Source: <https://vons-vons.blogspot.com/2021/06/karlsplatz-eine-zeitreise-im-film-2000.html>
[Accessed: 01.06.2025]

Fig. 21: Otto Wagner Pavillion

Source: <https://www.wissenswertes.at/karlsplatz-park>
[Accessed: 01.06.2025]

Fig. 22: St. Marx DIY Skatepark

Source: <https://www.goove.at/s/skatepark?page=2>
[Accessed: 03.06.2025]

Fig. 23: St. Marx DIY Skatepark

Source: <https://trucksandfins.com/en/spots/skateparks/sankt-marx-skatepark/16574>
[Accessed: 03.06.2025]

Fig. 24&25: Initiative „St. MARX FOR EVERYONE“

Source: <https://stmarx.wien/>
[Accessed: 03.06.2025]

Fig. 26: Leo Valls pushing through Bordeaux

Source: <https://stadmakerscongres.nl/2023/11/skateboarden-en-het-smc-lessen-van-skateurbanism-in-bordeaux/>
[Accessed: 03.06.2025]

Fig. 27: Guide du skateboard bordelais

Source: <https://www.bordeaux.fr/sites/bor-bdxfr-drupal/files/2025-04/>

Guide%20du%20skate%20bordelais.pdf

[Accessed: 03.06.2025]

Fig. 28: Skateboarding allowed in Bordeaux?

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/connect.skaturbanism.festival/>

[Accessed: 03.06.2025]

Fig. 29: Portable, skateable sculptures in Bordeaux

Source: <https://connect-skaturbanism-festival.com/>

[Accessed: 03.06.2025]

Fig. 30: Gustav Eden giving a lecture

Source: <https://www.instagram.com/gustav.svanborg>.

[Accessed: 01.06.2025]

Fig. 31: Apelgardsskolan school in Rosengard

Source: <https://malmo.se/Bo-och-leva/Utbildning-och-fors-kola/Grundskola/Grundskolor/Apelgardsskolan-F-6.html>

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Fig. 32: Street skateboarding in Malmö

Source: <https://skatemalmo.se/events/skate-malmo-street/>

[Accessed: 03.06.2025]

Fig. 33&34&35: Skateboarding in Malmö

Source: <https://skatemalmo.se/events/skate-malmo-street/> & <https://www.freeskatemag.com/2016/11/09/inside-mangustav-eden/>

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