

## **Don't skate here: exclusion of skateboarders from urban civic spaces in three northern cities in England**

### **Abstract**

Skateboarders, who are predominantly young people, inhabit the fabric of urban conurbations in a way that no other group of open space users do. They have been identified as challenging capital norms, cultural forms and having a unique physical relationship with urban form. In city centres they choose to use specific civic spaces which provide opportunities for tricks. In some city centres skateboarders are excluded from using specific civic spaces by a series of social, legal and physical controls. This paper explores these issues in the context of three northern cities in England in order to develop a deeper understanding of the design approaches used to exclude skateboarders. Finally the paper discusses the relationship between social, legal and physical controls to exclude skateboarders from specific civic spaces in these city centres..

**Key words: Skateboarders, design, urban civic space, controls, city centre management**

### **Authors**

Helen Woolley, Teresa Hazelwood and Ian Simkins

## **Don't skate here: exclusion of skateboarders from urban civic spaces in three northern cities in England**

### **Introduction**

One of the groups within western society who have been identified as under represented users of open spaces in urban areas are children and young people (Dunnett et al. 2002). They enjoy and make a significant contribution to urban centres (see e.g Woolley et al, 1999a, b) and yet their experiences are often controlled or treated with suspicion by other gatekeepers and users, both adults and other young people (see e.g. White, 1993; Woolley et al, 1999a, 1999b). Skateboarders are one sub group of young people who tend to be predominantly male, middle class with a dress code and identity of their own (Beal,1995; Borden, 2001; Karsten and Pel, 2000; Woolley, 2003b). Their activity is different from organised sports, which are mainly competitive, in that participants learn from each other, are supportive and encouraging of each other's abilities while at the same time being creative and not bound by rules (Beal, 1995; Karsten and Pel, 2000; Woolley and Johns, 2001; Nemeth, 2006). Skateboarders use the urban fabric in a way no other group in society does and have been identified as a resistant sub-culture of their own challenging capitalist norms, cultural forms and physical relationship with the urban form (Beal, 1995; Borden, 2001).

Skateboarders use both found and constructed open spaces in cities with some of the found spaces being civic spaces in the heart of city centres. This paper first discusses skateboarders' found and constructed spaces and some concerns identified from literature about the use of found civic spaces. Using this knowledge as a framework the paper explores why and how skateboarders are excluded from some civic spaces in three northern towns of England.

### **Skateboarders use of urban spaces: found and constructed space**

Skateboarding started on the west coast of America as a response to a desire of surfers to continue their activity, 'when the surf was flat' (Borden, 2001: 209). The architecture of cities such as Los Angeles, 'allowed frustrated surfers to re-enact the sense of being on the sea, rolling down the tarmac drives and roads of its undulating residential sectors as if they were an ocean wave' (Borden, 2001: 29). Skaters continue to be renown for identifying and using found spaces within the urban fabric which include school grounds, ditches, pipes and on the west coast of America the empty swimming pools of large villas.

Open spaces within the city which are not designed for the activity of skateboarding but which are used for it have been called 'found space' (Borden, 2001), 'natural turf' (Dansworld) or 'natural terrain' (Phelps and Thatcher, 1997). In England one such well known found space is underneath the Queen Elizabeth Hall on the South Bank of the river Thames in London which was used by skateboarders over thirty years ago (Ward, 1978) and which is still used in this way today. This use of open spaces in ways which were not imagined by the original designers are expressions of the affordance of such spaces (Gibson, 1979).

During the 1970s there was a move to provide skateparks, or 'constructed space' with profitable business opportunities with investors and skatepark designers becoming involved

(Borden, 2001). The aim was to provide structures in concrete that provided opportunities to re-create the sensations and bodily movements of surfing, together with the experiences of skating in the urban fabric. Many skateparks were built in America with the first in the United Kingdom being built in the summer of 1977. During this time skateparks were built in many cities on nearly all continents of the world but in the 1980s many of these facilities closed. The 'ramp' then became an increasingly important element for skateboarders, contributing to a resurgence of skateboarding during this decade. (Borden, 2001: 77). Ramps could be used in two ways: as a moveable element within the landscape or as part of the construction of an indoor facility providing opportunities for skateboarding at all times of the day and the year, a benefit for some climates and locations (Borden, 2001). Skateboarding became a 'global phenomenon' (Borden, 2001; 57) becoming popular in different countries across the world, many of which had no direct physical relationship with the sea.

### **Why found space is used**

Skateboarders found spaces in cities include civic spaces, some of which are in the heart of city centres (Woolley, 2003a). It has been identified that these spaces are used because they offer the four dimensions of accessibility, trickability, sociability and compatibility (Woolley and Johns, 2001). Accessibility refers to the location of a space, how easy it is to get to and whether it is well known. Trickability relates to whether a space has elements within it which allow for the performance of various tricks. Sociability refers to the opportunities a space provides for 'meeting, gathering, relaxing, watching and learning from others or just 'hanging out'' (Johns, 2001). Compatibility refers to how compatible skateboarding is with other potential users of a space and the level of conflict or harmony skateboarders encounter. Sometimes there is a perceived, rather than actual conflict between skateboarders and other users (Woolley, 2003b) but real, even 'bitter conflicts' between skateboarders and shop keepers have been identified (Karsten and Pel, 2000).

Of these four dimensions trickability might be considered as the most important for if there is no opportunity for tricks then skateboarders will not use a space. Over twenty years ago the American magazine Thrasher (1987) published a long list of skateable urban elements, which included curbs, gutters, ramps, hand rails and stairs to name a few. One skateboarder has commented that:

*'I attempt to make everything skateable – walls, curbs, ramps, whatever.'*  
(Peralta: Borden, 2001: 179)

Other elements of urban open spaces which have been recorded as being used by skateboarders include wheelchair ramps in Amsterdam (Karsten and Pel, 2000) and blocks, stairs, kerbs and gaps in the British cities of Sheffield, Manchester and Cardiff (Woolley and Johns, 2001). In addition the specific spaces of streets in Amsterdam (Karsten and Pel, 2000) and vacant spaces in Los Angeles have been identified as being popular (Flusty, 2002). In finding the affordance of an open space or an element within an open space, such as sliding down a handrail which is designed for safety purposes, 'the whole logic of the handrail is turned on its head' (Borden, 2001: 192). Thus skateboarders 'inhabit the urban environment in a unique and creative way' (Woolley and Johns, 2001).

## **Social and physical concerns about use of found civic space**

The use of found civic spaces in city centres by skateboarders can raise both social and physical concerns by those who do not participate in the activity.

*Social concerns:* Some consider that skateboarding is a 'social incivility' or a 'public disorder' because non participants, or other users of a space may feel anxious or apprehensive about sharing a space with skateboarders (Oc and Tiesdell, 1997; Woolley and Johns, 2001). Some perceive skateboarding as dangerous because of the potential for collisions between skaters and other users (Borden, 2001). For some people the sight of skateboarding is not acceptable (Nemeth, 2006) while others perceive skateboarders as 'noisy', and 'disruptive' engaging in high speed manoeuvres that might physically endanger 'legitimate plaza users' (Flusty, 2002). There can also be a perception that skateboarders interfere with the use and enjoyment of the spaces by others (Owens, 2002). Thus the activity of skateboarding is not seen as a legitimate use of some civic open spaces which are perceived as being solely for the use of workers from surrounding offices (Woolley and Johns, 2001; Flusty, 2002).

*Physical concerns:* Another concern is that of the physical result of skateboarding on the urban fabric. Scratches, skid-marks and paint from the underside of boards can be left on walls, handrails, street furniture or other elements which are used within an urban space (Borden, 2001; Woolley and Johns, 2001). Such level of damage can be superficial, however for more popular skate spots the damage can be more severe with gouges and scratches leading to the 'rounding-off or breaking up of edges, cutting out a ragged silhouette' (Borden, 2001: 209). Elsewhere skateboarders have been accused of 'scarring' surfaces, 'depositing dark rubber skid marks across the plaza's face' (Flusty, 2002: 342). Wax can sometimes be found on ledges or curbs where skaters have applied it in order to improve the sliding quality of a surface (Borden, 2001). Such marks are usually not permanent but one manager clearly expressed that such, 'outdoor fixtures and pavement finishes are not there to be transformed into skate-furniture' (Flusty, 2002: 342.) In another location concern was expressed that, 'within two weeks they had left their imprint on the plaza: deep gouges on the edges of the new benches and the new fountain. . . . They had also stripped the paint off the newly installed handrails and marred the city logo' (Thompson, 1998: 78). In Philadelphia's Love Park damage estimated at \$60,000 was caused by skateboarders and resulted in legal controls of the activity (Nemeth, 2006).

## **Controls on skateboarders' use of found civic space**

In response to these social and physical concerns about skateboarders use of found civic space a series of social, legal and physical controls have been identified from literature as being used (Woolley, 2006).

*Social controls* can be considered to be where people are used to exclude skateboarders from a found, or potentially found civic space. This might include the employment of security staff as experienced in the Welsh city of Cardiff where skaters commented that they were constantly moved on by security guards stating that, 'they were always hassling us' (Woolley and Johns, 2001). In Sheffield in the early 1990s skateboarders used to enjoy a space opposite the railway station which was owned by one of the city's universities until security staff were employed to stop the skaters using this space (Woolley, 2003b).

*Legal controls* are dominated by the use of bye-laws to prevent skateboarders, and sometimes other wheeled activities, taking place in specific spaces within a city. The introduction of other legal controls such as curfews may also have an indirect impact on skateboarders (Owens, 2002). The use of legal controls to prevent skateboarders using specific urban, usually civic, open spaces was initiated in the USA during the 1970's when city ordinances were introduced enabling communities to restrict the use of skateboards in defined public spaces (Owens 2002). Borden (2001) reports that such bye laws have been introduced in many cities in England.

*Physical controls*: can be identified as taking one of two forms. The first is the design and provision of constructed spaces of skateboard parks which are considered by some as a 'relegation' resulting in skateboarders being 'out of sight' and 'out of place' (Nemeth, 2006).

Second Borden (2001) suggests that design changes are made to existing urban open spaces and that these consist of two approaches. The first approach is the use of materials which are unskateable such as gravel and sand (Borden, 2001: 254). The second is the addition of anti-skateboarding details, what practitioners sometimes call 'skate haters', which are usually commercially manufactured and added to landscape elements such as walls and seats. The introduction of 'spikes and bumps added to handrails, blocks of concrete placed at the foot of banks, chains across ditches and steps' (Borden, 2001: 254) are examples of such elements.

### **Aim and methodology**

The objective of the remainder of this paper is to explore some of the reasons for and methods used to exclude skateboarders from civic open space in three northern cities in England. The focus is on the design and management of such spaces in order to provide feedback for others with similar responsibilities. The framework of social and physical reasons and social, legal and physical controls are used to analyse observations and interviews undertaken within the three locations. The primary aim of the work is to understand more about the physical controls used in these civic spaces and was inspired both by the practice experience of the second author and the academic interest of the first author. A secondary aim is to understand something of the relationship between the three dimensions of social, legal and physical controls.

There were two main reasons for the choice of the three cities in the north of England. First one of the locations was known to one of the authors from their practice experience. Second the other two locations have been part of previous studies about skateboarders' use of urban environments in England. For all three locations it was known that the local authorities were concerned about and addressing skateboarders use of civic spaces in the city centres. In addition all three locations could be reached within a reasonable journey time from our university city.

Two methods of gathering information were used. First, observations were undertaken of the open spaces to identify elements which were clearly and obviously designed and constructed to exclude skateboarders. These observations were informed by Borden's two suggestions that unskateable materials might be used and that elements might be added in to an open

space to make it unskateable. In addition the practice experience of the second author also informed these observations.

The second method was to undertake interviews with individuals in each of the three locations who were involved in the design and management of the spaces. The questions were framed around the following themes:

- decisions to exclude skateboarders from the open spaces;
- design and management methods used for this purpose;
- relationship between the methods used;
- experience gleaned from the methods used.

A university ethics review was undertaken and information sheets and informed consent forms were provided to and discussed with all those invited to participate in the interviews. In Sheffield the Landscape Architect who designed the Peace Gardens and one council staff managing the city centre agreed to be interviewed, both employed by the city council. In Manchester three respondents who are involved in managing the city centre civic spaces requested that they could be involved in a group interview. A separate interview was undertaken with the Landscape Architect of a private company who had been involved with the detailed design of some of the civic spaces in Manchester. In Crewe the Landscape Architect who has designed Municipal Square was interviewed. The manager refused to be involved in the research so a request was made as to whether anyone else would be prepared to be interviewed but again no positive response was received. This response has to be respected but does limit the breadth of information gleaned from the one city. It must be remembered that these interviews have all taken place some years after the design of the spaces but while the spaces are still being managed.

Each of the authors had a clearly defined role within this research. The first author oversaw the entire work, developed the interview framework, undertook the analysis and wrote the paper. The second author, whose practice experience had been one of the driving forces for exploring the physical control of the spaces, undertook the observations of all the sites. To provide consistency most of the interviews were undertaken by the third author who has had research training and the experience of research interviewing which the second author did not have. Having neither been involved in the observations nor professionally close to any of the schemes in the way that the second author had the third author was also able to be more objective about the questioning during the interviews. One final interview was undertaken by the first author. This was with the designer in Manchester who was traced through a professional network and this interview was undertaken by the first author partly because of availability and partly to explore some of the initial findings and analysis.

### **Observed civic spaces in Crewe, Manchester and Sheffield**

Observations were undertaken in major civic open spaces within the city centres of Crewe, Manchester and Sheffield. Each of these are civic spaces which have been refurbished or regenerated within the last 15 years.

Municipal Square in Crewe is a memorial square focused around the relocated war memorial in a scheme which cost £1.3 million and was completed in autumn 2006. The square is

surrounded by the Town Hall, which is home to the council's offices, Law Courts, library, two pubs and some offices. Within the square the landscape consists of Yorkstone and granite paving, inscribed text within the paving, grassed and planted areas, retained and newly planted trees, wooden benches, granite steps and walls, stainless steel railings and a stainless steel and glass balustrade. In Crewe, a smaller city than both Manchester and Sheffield, there was originally a desire to regenerate a second civic space, the one from which the war memorial was to be removed. This space was to be associated with retail outlets and 'was to be much more fun and interactive; we were talking about interactive fountains and those kinds of things'. A political change in the council resulted in the project not proceeding at that time.

Exchange Square in Manchester was developed between 1997 and 1999 at a cost of £4 million. The space is surrounded by tall shops, including a high quality department store, pubs and restaurants. The civic space is a pedestrian plaza with large areas of paving, several long, sloping, curving, stone seats, a linear water feature, a number of trees and a large TV screen. The refurbishment of Piccadilly Gardens in Manchester cost £12.5 million and was completed in 2002. The space is surrounded by a range of shops, bars, pubs, cafes and restaurants. It contains a large fountain, flat grassed lawns, granite paths, York stone paving, a range of seating, stone walls, planting, trees and a pavilion.

The Peace Gardens is a sunken green civic space in the heart of Sheffield's city centre, which cost £5 million and was completed in 1998. The space is now surrounded by refurbished shops, cafes, a hotel and offices. It is a one minute walk from Tudor Square, a focus of earlier research about skateboarders in Sheffield City centre. The Peace Gardens contains several raised lawns edged by water channels, a paved fountain area and raised beds with planting. There is Yorkstone paving and steps, walls benches and cascading water features.

### **Drivers to controls of skateboarders' use of civic spaces**

Before a discussion about the controls which were identified in each of the three city centres it seems appropriate to provide the context and reasoning, informed by the interviews, as to why such controls have been put in place. The interview responses in Manchester and Sheffield related to a range of civic spaces which have been regenerated, not only the ones in which observations were undertaken.

Social concerns in Crewe originated around the presence of homeless people in the civic square outside the town hall but the designer was aware that the regenerated square might attract skateboarders because of the presence of steps within the space. A view was expressed that attracting people, including young people, to such a space was in one way a positive thing: 'that is probably they think it is a decent space and in a way it's a vote of confidence'. However there was concern that if skateboarders were attracted to the space they might damage the steps. There was a desire to create a 'place for everybody' but because it was a memorial square 'there was a degree of greater pressure for people to behave appropriately in the space'. So the issue of skateboarders was not a great one when the design process started, although it was a consideration. This changed as construction of Municipal Square took place on site and this is explained in more detail below.

In Manchester the managers expressed that the desire was to 'make the whole of the area accessible for everybody', especially because some of the city centre civic spaces have a very high foot fall of pedestrians. However 'everybody' did not mean skateboarders within specific civic spaces and there were various considerations informing this attitude. One was the surrounding buildings and the functions they perform. These buildings include the Cathedral where the noise of 'banging as they are grinding along and hitting the ground' has repeatedly been reported by the Cathedral to the city centre management team as being a problem especially if weddings or services were being conducted. Noise was also mentioned as an issue with respect to some of the commercial and business uses of the city centre including the fact that solicitors might be undertaking interviews in offices and that adjacent to the cathedral is a music school. There was also some reflection upon the fact that the Cathedral Gardens was redeveloped after the IRA bomb of 1996 and that the remit was for this to be a quiet and respectful space. The managers of the spaces also reported that they have had 'complaints from the public about the dangers to them, because they suddenly have a skateboard coming at them at speed' and dealing with this nuisance of skateboarding in the city centre and especially in the high foot fall areas is seen as one way of managing the spaces for everyone. There was a clear expression in the Manchester group interview that the participants were officers of the council taking forward primarily the wishes of the elected members of the council and their policies and secondarily the wishes of the public. The designer in Manchester was clear that the by-law was in place before his company was involved and that this was a response to concern about potential physical damage to the regenerated city centre civic spaces.

Skateboarders in Sheffield had used Tudor Square (see Woolley and Johns, 2001) a civic space close to the Peace Gardens and there was some perception that this was a problem for the theatre goers of the adjacent theatres. The designer reported that gatherings of skateboarders in this civic space 'were getting quite large'. Coupled with this social, or perceived social, concern was a very strong concern that damage was being done to infrastructure and concrete bench seats by the skateboarding activity in Tudor Square. The old town hall extension, which was demolished as part of the regeneration of the Peace Gardens and associated area, had an overhang where skateboarders gathered and then used the steps nearby for grinding. There were occasions where 'the skateboarders would fly from under their feet, hit the plate glass windows on the front of the town hall extension and smash extremely expensive glass. This would be accidental but cost a huge amount of money and an issue felt important enough to deal with'. These experiences were coupled with a well publicized scheme in a city in Wales where within two weeks of it opening £10,000 of damage had been done by skateboarders. This provided economic as well as social and physical drivers to a policy approach in the redevelopment of the public realm and civic spaces in the city centre in Sheffield. The designer, who is and has been long employed by the city council, was placed 'to work collaboratively with client teams to develop projects from the beginning to form projects and help getting bids in and take through to completion'. This resulted in 'a proactive and collaborative way to work with the client and form thinking – this was the context of the team'. Within that context the prevention of damage to the new and expensive fabric of the civic spaces by skateboards was one of the design aims.



The interviews clearly revealed that the two themes of social and physical concerns, discussed earlier in the paper, were driving decisions to use controls to exclude skateboarders from civic spaces across the three locations. The depth of each concern was not necessarily the same in each location, which may reflect intrinsic differences between the locations and knowledge and experience of the specific interviewees. In addition linked to the physical concern was an underlying economic concern about the cost of repair to any damage which skateboarders might cause to expensive public realm civic space regeneration projects, which particularly came to light in Sheffield.

Interviews in Manchester and Sheffield also revealed that there was provision for skateboarders in constructed space elsewhere in the city centre. In Manchester reference was made to the fact that the city council had provided a facility at Manchunian Way, at the edge of the city centre. In Sheffield a constructed space was provided in Devonshire Green before the regeneration of the Peace Gardens. Although this facility is in the city centre it is not in the heart but just inside the ring road at the end what is now called the 'Gold Route'. Such provision was seen to complement the exclusion of skateboarders from specific civic spaces as a positive part of an overall city centre management strategy.

### **Legal controls of skateboarders' use of civic spaces**

In Manchester a bye law was introduced in 1997 banning skateboarding from various public spaces, including one previously identified as a favourite skate spot (Woolley and Johns, 2001). In Sheffield a bye-law covering the city centre was introduced in 1998 to protect the new public spaces in the 'Heart of the City' project, which include the Peace Gardens. The introduction of this bye-law at an early stage in the regeneration of the city centre spaces in Sheffield is understood to be an important part of a broader city centre management strategy.

### **Social controls of skateboarders' use of civic spaces**

Soon after the redevelopment of Manchester city centre park wardens funded by the developer were put in place as part of the management of the city centre. Now there are two types of formal positions, ambassadors and wardens, which can be understood as providing the social control of these civic spaces. At the time of the interview there were 18 ambassadors and their role with respect to skateboarders was mentioned as being 'eyes and ears'. They keep a watch out for any antisocial behaviour and skateboarding in inappropriate places and feed such information back to their line manager. In turn this information is reported to the wardens in the city centre. There are currently 8 wardens and they receive any such concerns or complaints and visit the location. They might also respond if they see someone skateboarding while they are walking around. The wardens remind skateboarders that there is a by-law in place and that they are not allowed to skate in a particular space asking them to refrain from the activity. One interviewee commented that it was not unusual for a skateboarder to return to the space at 6 or 7 o'clock in the evening when they knew that the wardens would not be present. In addition to the formal social control provided by the presence and actions of the ambassadors and wardens it is apparent that there is a type of informal control where 'visitors' to the city centre can also report skateboarding in inappropriate spaces which can also be acted upon.

Initially a private security firm was used to 'look after the Peace Gardens' but now City Centre Ambassadors provide the formal social control in Sheffield city centre. There are over 20 such ambassadors who cover not only the Peace Gardens but also a range of 'premier public spaces' from the railway station to Devonshire Green in what was originally called the 'Heart of the City' project but which upon completion was named the 'Gold Route'. The role of the ambassadors is to be 'security staff with a positive and helpful, friendly face'. To this end they are described as 'very courteous in the way they address young people, they are polite to them but firm.' It was commented that the city centre ambassadors reinforce the by-law with respect to skateboarders. The role of the ambassadors is clearly considered to be part of a more strategic part of managing the city centre with them meeting and greeting people, providing information and when required emergency first aid. Indeed the strategic approach to managing the city centre includes 'a very creative programme of events to change the whole perception of what goes on in the city centre'.

In both Manchester and Sheffield there was a clear understanding that the social control of wardens and ambassadors was a reinforcement of the legal control, but undertaken in a friendly and courteous manner. However without the legal control it was considered that the social control would not have any substance for as the designer in Manchester pointed out skateboarders 'are always looking for a challenge'.

### **Physical controls in Crewe**

Although there had not been major concerns in Crewe about skateboarders before the design process some consideration was given to the situation in Municipal Square. This was a response to the desire for this space to have a specific character which would be respectful to the repositioning of the war memorial and associated events including Remembrance Day parades. The designer reported that a 'subtle' approach was taken. This included the use of granite sets in bands with an understanding that skaters would not use the rough surface; the positioning of a bench set back from others so that it does not give a clear straight line to skate along; and the design of handrails so that they were double with vertical posts which went above the handrail meaning that skaters could not slide down them. These three approaches were included as details at the initial design stage.

However 'it became apparent during the construction phase that skateboarders were eyeing it up' and even before the construction finished some were ollying on specific elements within the scheme including wooden benches and the wall at the side of some steps. The designer had considered that the handrail might be of interest to the skateboarders but not that the adjacent wall might be. As a response to this unexpected use of walls and benches it was decided to retrospectively design anti-skateboarding fixings to these elements and they were fixed in place before the completion of the contract.

Specific elements were designed as a response and included a small stainless steel 'L' shaped bar to be used two or three times on each of the benches, as can be seen in figure 1. The bar is small, discrete, and fits appropriately with the scale and design of the seats. It also was designed with rounded corners to look more aesthetically pleasing and be safer than if the corners had been angular.

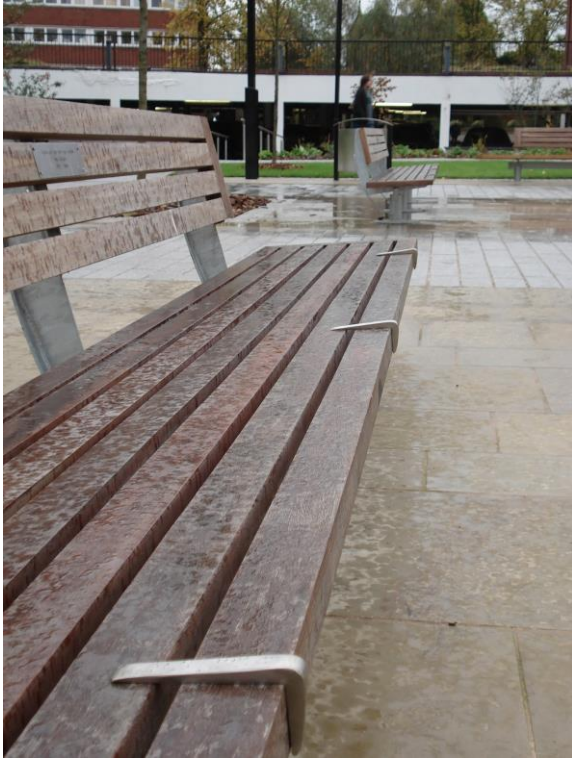


Figure 1: seat detail in Municipal Square, Crewe



Figure 2: Wall detail, Crewe

For the wall adjacent to the steps an angular 'U' shaped stainless steel bar was designed to be placed over every third coping joint on the sloping walls as can be seen in figure 2. The design is simple and angular in order to co-ordinate with the design of the walls. As with the bench detail, the bars were designed with rounded edges to make them more aesthetically pleasing and safer.

It is apparent that in Crewe some consideration was given to the possibility of skateboarders using Municipal Square once it had been regenerated and that this had an influence on the design of the space from the outset. However the designers had not foreseen that some elements might be used and as this happened before the completion of the construction phase of the project there was a reactive response at detailed design stage adding some anti-skating devices on in a retrospective manner. Both the function and form of these elements were considered in the design of these elements.

### Physical controls in Manchester

In Manchester there was some acknowledgement that skateboarders might be an issue in the regeneration of the public realm but the issue was not 'pushed down the throat' of the designer by the client. Thus at the beginning of the design process for Piccadilly Gardens not much consideration was given to the exclusion of skateboarders. The designer stated that as they initiated the design process 'skateboarding was entering a popular time but there was not much evidence about how to exclude skateboarders'. As the design progressed the designer became more aware of the skateboarding issue and the need to consider it in the design. A series of design details were introduced in to the scheme. Thus in some areas textured paving with a 'ribbon effect' was used to deter skateboarders from using larger areas of paving. Around benches areas of small cobbles were used to prevent skaters getting up speed and then grinding on the edge of a bench as can be seen in figure 3. Added on elements include attachments to some seats and armrests to others as can be seen in figure 4. Additionally planters were raised higher so that skaters could not jump up and skate on the edge of them. The designer considered that the design approach was 'linear, crisp and clean'.



Figure 3: Taller wall, armrest and cobbled paving, Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester



Figure 4: Seat detail, Piccadilly Gardens, Manchester

### Physical controls in Sheffield

On first visiting the Peace Gardens in Sheffield it might not be obvious that the intention is that skateboarders should not use the space because there are no obvious and typical anti-skateboarding devices or elements within the scheme. However two main approaches within the design of this civic space were taken to prevent skateboarders from using the space. First of all on the stonework rounded bull nosed curves have been used rather than a sharp arras as is clearly shown in figure 5. This not only prevents the skateboarders from using the edge for grinding but also provides a comfortable edge for sitting on. This is summed up by the designer's comments thus: 'The curves are critical, in the Peace Gardens that was the main feature to discourage them. It is also a comfortable shape to sit on, the sharp arras may give a crisp sophisticated aesthetic but they are not terribly comfortable to sit on and you have to put additional features onto the sharp arras to discourage skating and it makes your sleek design cluttered because you have to put bolted on bits of metal to stop grinding.' Thus it can be seen that both form and function have been considered carefully in this design approach.

The bronze handrails shown in figure 6 are provided on the steps in the space and these have been designed so that the handrail passes through the vertical posts thus preventing a smooth run down the handrail, which otherwise might be attractive to skateboarders. Form and function have been addressed carefully in the design of this handrail.

A more recently completed space is Millennium Square, which is adjacent to the Peace Gardens. This space was not designed by city council staff but by external designers who took a different approach to the exclusion of skateboarders. Two approaches to design were used. First long granite seats have been designed with sloping stone blocks that protrude past the stone block beneath and which are cut away in places, as can be seen in figure 7. The low

Yorkstone walls adjacent to the new hotel have had small, solid, stainless steel blocks, that protrude slightly, fitted within every other joint between the granite copings and this can be seen in figure 8. This is a classic anti-skateboarding fixture included in the design approach.



Figure 5: Wall coping and seat detail, Peace Gardens, Sheffield



Figure 6: Handrail detail, Peace Gardens, Sheffield



Figure 7: Seat detail, Millennium Square, Sheffield



Figure 8: Wall detail, Millennium Square, Sheffield

In each location it was expressed that the physical controls were important as part of a bigger town centre management strategy.

## Discussion

### *Design elements and design timeframe*

It is evident that across the three case study locations different approaches were taken with respect to the physical control of skateboarders by the design of specific civic spaces, and that these approaches related to both design elements and design timeframe.

Design elements included the use of textured paving materials both in general and around seats; location of seats; height of walls; added on elements to seats and walls; handrail detailing and the use of bull nosed edges. The elements used in each of the three locations are indicated in table 1. In each location the function of these excluding elements was balanced against the form or aesthetic desire of the designer. Sometimes form took precedent over function while other times function took precedent over form.

Design element	Crewe Design timeframe	Manchester Design timeframe	Sheffield Design timeframe
Texture in paving	DP	DD	DP
Seat location	DP		
Handrail detail	DP		DP
Details on seats	DR	DD	DP
Details on walls	DR		DP
Bull nosed edges			DP
Higher walls	DP	DD	

**Table1: Design elements and timeframe used in Crewe, Manchester and Sheffield to exclude skateboarders from using civic spaces**

DP: Design Philosophy - exclusion of skateboarders considered from onset of the design process.

DR: Design Response - approach that is designed retrospectively as a response to use of the site or elements within a site

DD: Design Detail – design consideration is made at detailed design stage.

The table also shows the timeframe at which the design elements were considered. Sheffield set out to design skateboarders out of the spaces from the onset of the design process. This can be understood as a *Design Philosophy* approach and was associated with the use of bull nosed edges. The *Design Response* approach addressed design elements while a job was on site and as a response to skateboarders starting to use elements already built. The *Design Detail* approach was a response to a designer's increasing awareness that skateboarders might use a space or the elements within it, addressing this at the detailed design stage of the design process. The location which took the Design Philosophy approach was characterised by having had some years of experience of skateboarders using a civic space with perceived and social concerns. This city had also experienced some physical damage and resulting economic costs and was aware of significant costs that other cities had experienced. Thus it appears that this increased knowledge had led to a clear policy decision to use a variety of controls to exclude skateboarders from specific civic city centre spaces. Where such a clear



policy directive had not been made the links between that policy decision and the physical controls appears to be weaker.

### *Translating design knowledge to other projects*

It was evident from the interviews with the designers that the knowledge gained during the design and construction of these projects has influenced further projects. In one city the knowledge developed by the designer influenced further projects within that city while a different designer reported taking the learnt knowledge to projects in other cities.

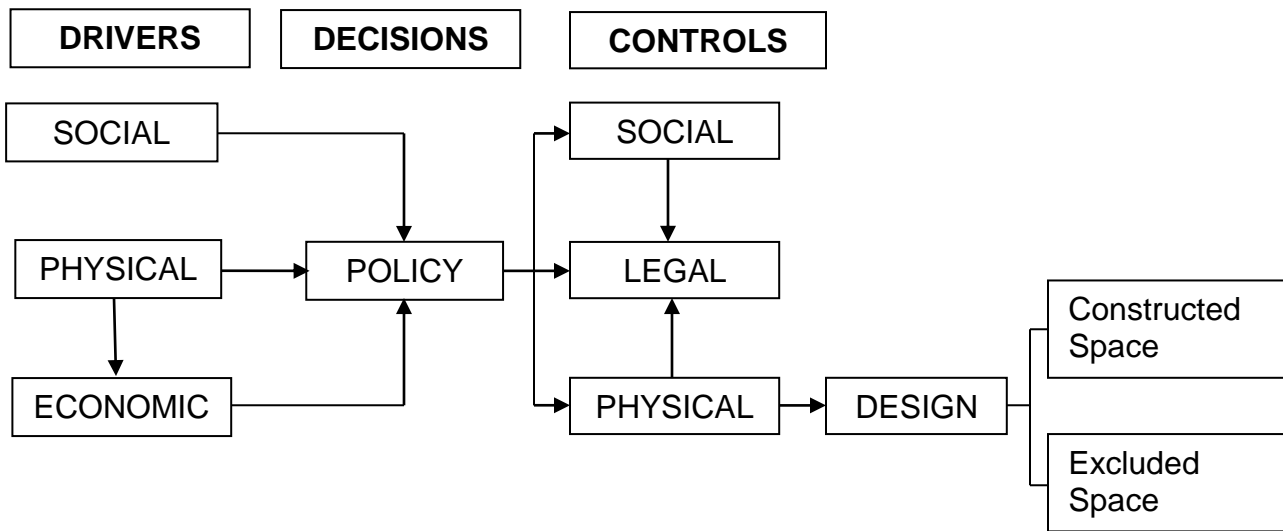
Thus in Sheffield Sheaf Square developed as the entry point from the railway station to the Gold Route includes a band of cropped sets by the low wall of a water feature. 'The reason is to discourage skaters from whizzing down the edge of the wall and jumping up and off the wall, because the small wheels of a skateboard don't run very well on granite sets'. In the redevelopment of the The Moor shopping area careful thought has resulted in the seats in this linear space having 'arms rests prevent stunt biking and skating and studs along the backs to stop people jumping up the backs and grinding'. Devonshire Green, where the constructed skateboard facility was provided at the start of the redevelopment of the Peace Gardens, has been redeveloped in the last five years. The skateboard facility is at the edge of this open space which is not in the heart of the city centre but on the inside edge of the ring road and closely associated with both retail and residential developments. In this space the approach has been to use the bull nosed edging on the wall but also has included small steel balls with a function of keeping skateboarders off the wall but with consideration for the aesthetics. In this city knowledge has become embedded within the city centre design team.

The designer in Manchester was clear that working on Piccadilly Gardens had been a 'turning point' in his career, partly because of the resurgence of skateboarding while the project was underway. The experience of this project has informed projects in large cities in other parts of the United Kingdom.

### **Conclusions**

The primary aim of this work was to develop an understanding of the physical controls which are used to control skateboarders use of civic spaces in city centres. Specifically the focus was to understand how these spaces are designed to exclude skateboarders. However it is clear that the issue of the design of such spaces does not stand alone: design is set within a complexity of issues. These issues can be identified as a set of drivers, decisions and controls and are represented in figure 9.

At the beginning of this exploration the *drivers* were considered to be social and physical but it is very clear from this work that there is a strong economic driver in that physical damage can cost considerable amounts of money to repair and that such damage can happen soon after or indeed before the end of the construction of a project. Social drivers might exist alone or might be in combination with physical drivers. Physical drivers might exist without economic drivers but it is likely that the two will exist in combination, in that physical concern usually leads to damage which costs money to repair.



**Figure 9: Drivers, decisions and controls to skateboarders' use of civic city centre open spaces**

The *decisions* can be identified as the policy decisions taken by politicians and design and regeneration teams that skateboarders should be excluded from specific civic spaces. However it is not evident that a clear policy directive was always in place which may be a result of the experience and context of the specific city. The strength of this policy decision may influence the controls used and particularly the timeframe of addressing design elements.

The *controls* were confirmed as including legal, social and physical. The legal control was seen to underpin both the social and physical controls and was understood as being needed to reinforce and give authority, especially to the social control. The social control was considered by some to be the most effective form of control providing a friendly and positive face. Others considered that social control was essential to reinforce the legal control. In addition there was an understanding that the social control was part of a larger city centre management strategy. The physical control of designing skateboarders out of specific civic spaces was identified as consisting of two dimensions with the first being the use of specific design elements. The second dimension was the timeframe of the application of these elements within the design process was identified as being either a result of a Design Philosophy, Design Response or Design Detail. The timeframe appeared to relate to the knowledge and experience held within the city and those designing the spaces. Sometimes this exclusive approach to specific civic spaces was accompanied by the provision of constructed space elsewhere, at the edge of the city centre.

So these drivers, decisions and controls create a complex set of relationships the result of which for skateboarders is that they are excluded from some civic spaces and yet can also be provided for, possibly in a limited manner, in constructed spaces. With respect to the city centres studied these complex relationships are represented as part of a strategic city centre

management regime. Reflecting on the situation in Sheffield the Landscape Architect had a perception that over the years a 'mutual respect' had developed and that the skateboarders understood why they were not allowed to use specific civic spaces. Further research is required to understand whether this point of view is held by the skateboarders.

## References

- Beal, B. (1995) Disqualifying the Official: An Exploration of Social Resistance Through the Subculture of Skateboarding, *Sociology of Sport Journal* 12: 252-267.
- Borden, I. (2001) Skateboarding, *Space and the City: Architecture and the Body*, (London, Berg).
- Dunnett, N., Swanwick, C. and Woolley, H. (2002) *Improving Urban Parks, Play Areas and Green Spaces*, (London, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister).
- Flusty, S. (2002) Trashing Downtown: Play as Resistance to the Spatial and Representational Regulation of Los Angeles, *The Spaces of Post Modernity: Readings in Human Geography*, 334- 346, (Oxford, Blackwell).
- Johns, R. (2001) Skateboard City, *Landscape Design*, September 2001.
- Karsten, L. and Pel, E (2000) Skateboarders exploring urban public space: Ollies, obstacles and conflicts, *Journal of Housing and the Built Environment* 15: 327-340.
- Nemeth, J. (2006) Conflict, Exclusion, Relocation: Skateboarding and Public Space, *Journal of Urban Design* 11(3): 297-318.
- Oc, T. and Tiesdell, S. (1997) *Safer City Centres: Reviving the public realm*, (London, Paul Chapman Publishing).
- Owens, P. (2002) No Teens Allowed: The Exclusion of Adolescents from Public Spaces, *Landscape Journal*, 21(1), 156-163.
- Phelps and Thatcher (1997)
- Thompson, J. W. (1998) A Good Thrashing, *Landscape Architecture*, March 1998.
- Thrasher (1987) 'Everything Under the Sun, 7(6), 56-59.
- Ward, C. (1978) *The Child in the City*, (London, The Architectural Press).
- White, R. (1993) Youth and Conflict over Urban Space, *Children's Environments*, 10(1): 85-93.
- Woolley, H. (2006) Freedom of the City: Contemporary Issues and Policy Influences, on Children and Young People's Use of Public Open Spaces in England, *Children's Geographies*, 4(1), 45-59.
- Woolley, H. (2003a) *Urban Open Spaces*, (London, Spon Press).
- Woolley, H. (2003b) Excluded from streets and spaces? *Sheffield Online Papers in Social Research (SHOP)* Special Edition on Skateboarding, July 2003. ([www.shef.ac.uk/socstudies/Shop](http://www.shef.ac.uk/socstudies/Shop) accessed on 22.4.08)
- Woolley, H. & Johns, R. (2001) Skateboarding: The City as a Playground, *Journal of Urban Design*, 6(2), 211-230.
- Woolley, H., Spencer, C., Dunn, J. and Rowley, G. (1999a) The Child as A Citizen: Experiences of British Town and City Centres, *Journal of Urban Design*, 4(3), 255-282.
- Woolley, H., Dunn, J., Spencer, C., Short, T. and Rowley, G (1999b) Children Describe their Experiences of the City Centre: a qualitative study of the fears and concerns which may limit their full participation, *Landscape Research*, 24(3), 287-301.