

# Skateboard urbanism

An exploration of skateboarding as an  
integrated part of public space

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“Through an everyday practice - neither consciously theorized nor programmed – skateboarding suggests that pleasure rather than work, use values rather than exchange values, activity rather than passivity, performing rather than recording, are potential components of the future, as yet unknown city.”

- Iain Borden (2001, p. 173)

Preface

Skateboarding has been a part of my life since I was around 10 years old. It began as child’s play as I and the kids from the neighbourhood would skate the parking lot outside our house, just goofing around. Over the years skateboarding grew from play to passion and in 2003 my friend Robert and I decided to enrol at Fryshusets skateboard high school in Stockholm.

After high school I moved to Barcelona to learn Spanish and skate, as the city is known as the Mecca for skateboarding with countless skate-able squares, odd skate environments, great weather, culture and so on. It was in Barcelona I started to get more and more interested in urban public space, those places and squares that seemed so vibrant and full of life, perfect to skate and generally just great for people.

After some time I realized I wanted to study landscape architecture, I had been interested in the subject for years without knowing it existed.

The education deepened my interest even more and while I moved to new cities during my studies, my skateboard was always the best tool for making friends and discovering the new places I came to.

Before writing this thesis I was fortunate enough to get the opportunity to work as a skate-architect/ skatepark designer at Copenhagen-based design studio Pivotech. During my time in Copenhagen the idea of writing a master thesis on urban skate-able space grew after conversations with studio manager Fabian Narin.

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Fredrik Angner

Abstract

Skateboarding is a practice that happens both in dedicated skateparks and in the public places of the city; two very different types of environments. While skateboarding in skateparks rarely poses problems due to their purpose-designed nature, skateboarding in the shared spaces of the city has not generally been encouraged and is often designed against. However, recent trends in planning for skateboard infrastructure show that many cities are now recognizing skateboarders as a positive part of urban life and seek to integrate skateboarding into urban public space. This trend of integrating skateboarding into the city has been called “Skateboard urbanism”.

The aim of this thesis is to provide deeper understanding of how skateboarding can be integrated into urban public space by planning and design. Further it aims to provide insight into important characteristics of popular urban skate spots and what added values theses spaces can generate. To succeed in this, qualitative methodologies such as interviews, literature studies, site observations and case studies have been used to provide insight into different aspects of the topic. The results in this thesis mainly represent the skaters perspective on the matter, which should be kept in mind when reading.

The first chapter, “*Skateboarding*”, investigates skateboarding as a wide concept. Chapter two, “*Skateboarding & the city*”, describes how skateboarders interact with the city and how this differs from skateboarding in dedicated skateparks. In chapter three, “*Integrated designs*”, important characteristics of urban “skate spots” are outlined and practical examples of these places are analysed. The fourth chapter, “*Added value*”, describes what added values public places with an integrated skate-function can generate. Chapter five, “*Skate-friendly cities*”, provides insight into how cities work with integrating skateboarding into the public spaces of the city.

The outcome of the research in the first five chapters was presented in a sixth and final chapter, “*Planning suggestions*”. Here my reflections and ideas based on the results outlines aspects and tips for city staffers and landscape architects to consider when planning and designing for integrating skateboarding in the public spaces of the city.

# Sammanfattning

### Sammanfattning

Detta är ett examensarbete i landskapsarkitektur som syftar till att undersöka hur skateboard kan integreras in i stadens offentliga platser genom planering och design. Studiens första del består av fem kapitel där olika aspekter av ämnet undersöks. Arbetet mynnar slutligen ut i ett sjätte kapitel där ett antal förslag presenteras på hur städer kan angripa frågan.

### Bakgrund

Skateboardåkning sker idag både i skateparker och på stadens offentliga platser, varvid det sistnämnda inte alltid har blivit uppmuntrat och uppskattat. Faktum är att skateboardåkning i staden ofta motarbetats med negativ design genom så kallade “skate stoppers” och andra typer av förbud. Detta är dock något som håller på att ändras. Ett flertal städer såsom Malmö, Köpenhamn och Melbourne arbetar nu aktivt för att integrera skateboardåkning i stadens offentliga rum (såsom torg) och ser skateboardåkare som en positiv del av stadslivet. Denna trend har kallats för “Skateboard urbanism”.



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Skatebara objekt som medvetet integrerats på två av Värnhemstorget i Malmö.

### Syfte och frågeställningar

Syftet med detta arbete är att få en fördjupad inblick i hur skateboard kan integreras i stadens offentliga rum genom planering och design. Vidare är syftet att undersöka viktiga karaktärer för platser i staden som blivit populära för skateboardåkare och att få inblick i vilka mervärden dessa platser kan generera.

Huvudfrågeställning:

- Hur kan skateboardåkning integreras i stadens offentliga platser genom planering och design?*

Underfrågor för att stödja huvudfrågan:

- Vilka är nyckelkaraktärerna för offentliga platser i staden som passar för skateboardåkning?*
- Vilka mervärden kan offentliga platser i staden som passar för skateboardåkning generera?*



“Skate stoppers”.

### Metod

Frågeställningarna undersöktes genom att dela upp forskningsarbetet i fem kapitel: “*Skateboard*”, “*Skateboard & staden*”, “*Integrerade designs*”, “*Mervärde*” och “*Skate-vänliga städer*”. I dessa kapitel har resultat från olika metoder vävts samman för att få fram en bredare bild av ämnets beståndsdelar. De metoder som använts är intervjuer, litteraturstudier, platsobservationer och fallstudier. Resultaten mynnar sedan ut i ett sjätte kapitel, “*Planeringsförslag*”, som ger förslag på hur städer kan arbeta för att integrera skateboard i staden genom planering och design.

### Skateboard

Skateboard är ett brett ämne som på många sätt är svårt att definiera. Det är både ett globalt fenomen och en lokal aktivitet. Vissa menar att det helt enkelt är bäst att undvika att sätta ett format på skateboard eftersom att det då reducerar ämnet från dessa sanna karaktär, nämligen att vara ett fritt medium utan definitioner och regler. Skateboard kan därför innebära lite vad som helst beroende på vem man är; det kan vara en sport, en konst eller en livsstil. Skateboardkulturen har även ett starkt subkulturellt arv men är idag även en del av mainstreamkulturen.



Valutan inom skateboardkulturen är ens trick och personliga stil.

### Olika stilar kräver olika miljöer

Skateboard innefattar många stilar som kräver olika typer av miljöer. Vissa utövas i skateparker medan andra stilar utövas i “hittade” miljöer såsom gator och torg vars funktioner omtolkas för att passa skate.

### Social kontext

Skateboard är en mycket social aktivitet, där utövare som inte känner varann enkelt kan bryta isen socialt bara på grund av att de åker skateboard. Många känner en frihet och känsla av fulländning när de åker skateboard, en sorts urban eskapism. Inom skatekulturen döms man efter individuellt uttryck, kreativitet och autenticitet. Ens trick och rörelser är valutan vilket teoretiskt borde innebära att alla olika typer av uttryck uppskattas. Dock har skateboardens subkulturella macho-arv tillsammans med patriarkala normer skapat ramar som man måste passa in i för att bli socialt accepterad. Passar man inte in så värderas man lågt. Här har kvinnliga och homosexuella uttryck historiskt inte varit uppskattade, även nybörjare har haft svårt att bli accepterade. Mycket tyder dock på att detta långsamt håller på att ändras och att framtiden för inkludering och jämlikhet inom kulturen ser allt ljusare ut.



Trots att skatekulturen har ett macho-arv så börjar skateboard bli mer nybörjarvänligt och öppet för olika uttryck.

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Skateboard & staden

I staden är skateboardåkning helt annorlunda än i skateparker. Platser som approprieras av skateboardåkare omtolkas för att passa skateboard. Detta har sagts vara en kritik av den moderna staden och dess livsstil. Objekt med en enstaka funktion som ett trapppräckle blir istället omtolkade till något som kan ge upphov till glädje och underhållning. Många beskriver att åka skateboard i staden som ett resande äventyr där resan mellan platserna är lika viktig som de platser man approprierar. Det oväntade kan hända och man blir en del av stadens puls och mångfald av upplevelser. Skateboardåkarnas sätt att använda platser på annat vis än vad som anses lämpligt leder dock ofta till konflikt. Detta beror ofta på höga ljud, materiella skador och missförstånd. Detta går dock till stor del att lösa genom planering och design.

Integrerade designs

Resultat från intervjuerna visade på fjorton nyckelkaraktärer för urbana skate spots, vissa av dessa blev ihopbuntade då de ansågs höra ihop. Karaktärerna var, utan särskild ordning:

- Läge i staden - helst centralt
- Tillgänglighet - platsen ska vara lätt att ta sig till
- Äventyr - andra skatebara platser ska ligga nära
- Grad av utmaning
- Grad av omtolkningsbarhet - multifunktion
- Upplevd autencitet - platsen ska kännas "hittad"
- Robusta material och släta ytmaterial - åkbarhet
- Minimalism, storlek och öppenhet
- Variation och dynamik
- Karaktär - platsen ska kännas speciell
- Attraktioner och tillgång till bekvämligheter
- Kontext - Atmosfär och omgivning
- Lugn - det ska gå att undvika att stå i centrum
- Oförutsägbarhet och stadsliv

Platsobservationer

Genom platsobservationer på tre populära skate spots; "Warschaur Bänke" i Berlin, "Israels plads" i Köpenhamn och "Place de la République" i Paris gick det att fastslå att dessa nyckelkaraktärer är av stor vikt. Då dessa ändå varierar beroende på plats så bör de ses som indikatorer på vad som är viktigt snarare än måsten för att skapa dessa typer av platser.

Integrerade skateparker

Dedikerade skateparker kan också med fördel integreras med andra funktioner såsom i kombination med dagvattenhanteringssystem.

Mervärde

Resultat från intervjuerna och litteraturstudier visade att offentliga platser för skateboard kan generera följande mervärden:

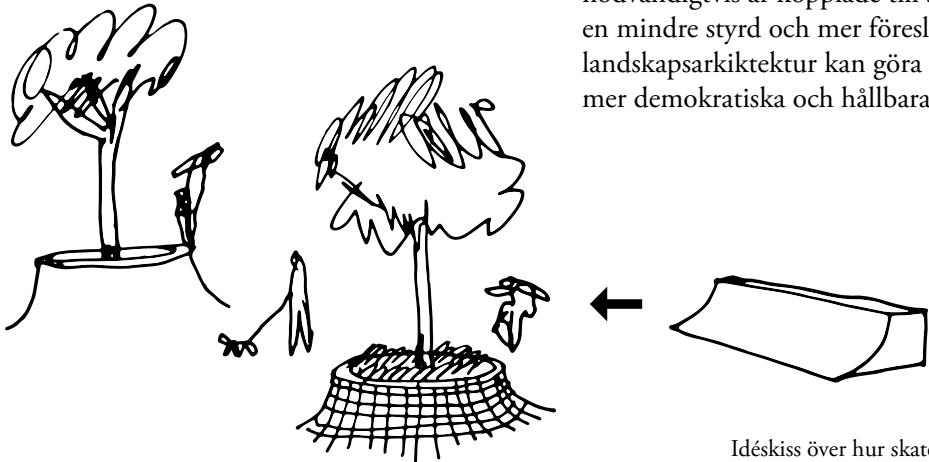
- Bidra till folkhälsan
- Skapa oväntad kontakt i staden
- Bidra till att skapa sociala värden och integrering
- Aktivera platser och tillföra en säkerhetsaspekt
- Generera identitet
- Generera turism
- Skapa atmosfär, puls och performativitet
- Bidra till meningsfullare platser
- Bli sociala arenor för ungdomar
- Inspirera andra grupper att interagera med det offentliga rummet.
- Bli yt- och kostnadseffektiva platser
- Uppmuntra till medborgarligt engagemang

Skatevänliga städer

Tre fallstudier av hur Melbourne, Köpenhamn och Malmö arbetar för att integrera skateboard i stadens offentliga rum och i övrig kommunal planering visade att detta ändamål kräver en holistisk approach som innefattar allt från design till events.

Förslag gällande planering och design

- Lyssna på skateboardåkarna
- Hjälp skateboardåkarna starta en organisation
- Beakta alla stilar och färdighetsnivåer
- Sträva efter inkludering
- Involvera en bred grupp experter och brukare i projekt
- Gör både lång- och kortsiktiga mål
- Hitta rätt platser
- Skapa äventyret
- Skapa platser som skyddar från väder
- Var öppensinnad och visionär
- Överväg att integrera dedikerade skateparker
- Aktivera platser med events
- Stanna inom gränserna för de bästa "hittade" platserna för skateboard
- Designa för inkludering
- Föreslå snarare än styr beteende
- Ge platsen karaktär
- Se till att platsen är åkbar
- Använd robusta material
- Tillåt användarna att definiera sin egen plats
- Skate-stoppa inte



Idéskiss över hur skatebara objekt kan bakas ihop med planteringskärl för att uppfattas som mer autentiska.

Diskussion

Besvarades frågorna? Detta är givetvis subjektivt men jag vill argumentera för att samtliga ställda frågor har besvarats men att dessa inte bör ses som några sanningar utan snarare som viktiga aspekter som tåls att tänka på om man som landskapsarkitekt eller stadsplanerare ska arbeta med dessa frågor.

Resultatet och estetik

Då resultaten i detta exjobb visar på att skateboardåkare i staden föredrar miljöer som uppfattas som "hittade" blev en slutsats att design för skateboard på offentlig plats bör integreras genom subtil och multifunktionell design. Detta förhållningssätt till estetik och design gör att platser kan bli mer som pannåer för stadslivet snarare än en färdiga tavlor där beteende styrs efter platsens inritade funktioner.

Resultatet i ett bredare perspektiv

Jag argumenterar för att sättet som skateboardåkare använder och omtolkar staden kan bredda uppfattningen för hur vi som landskapsarkitekter ser de platser vi ritar. En bänk kanske kan designas för att bjuda in till nya omtolkningar som inte nödvändigtvis är kopplade till skate. Jag tror att en mindre styrd och mer föreslående approach till landskapsarkitektur kan göra de platser vi skapar mer demokratiska och hållbara för framtiden.

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# Intro



## Background

Since skateboarding first grew out of the Californian surf culture in the 1950's it has been rooted in adapting urban and suburban landscapes; turning them into pleasure grounds. While never disappearing, skateboarding has taken many turns, rising and falling in popularity and has over the decades established itself as a practice with millions of practitioners worldwide. While skaters initially appropriated found terrains, such as school yards and drained backyard pools skateboarding moved to its own purpose-designed arena in the early 1970's; the skatepark. In these environments skaters could progress without being chased away by security and angry home owners. It was not until the rise of "street skating" in the 1980's that skateboarders started to appropriate urban environments such as plazas again (Borden 2001).

Since then skateboarding has developed into a practice that takes place both in dedicated skateparks and in the shared space of the city, two environments of entirely different character (Borden 2001).

While skateboarding in skateparks rarely poses problems for the general public due to their purpose designed nature, skating in public places such as streets and squares has generally not been encouraged. Skaters that prefer skating these types of environments often end up in the centre of urban conflict and are commonly rejected from public places. In city centres all over the world skateboarding is designed against by the implementation of skate stoppers and in other ways prevented due to noise concerns, damage, personal safety concerns and biases (Borden 2001, pp. 247-260). Banning skateboarding from public places however, is ultimately a counterproductive and unsuccessful strategy for several of reasons.

Apart from the authoritarian attitude stated above, skating as an activity is, as Iain Borden states, difficult to classify as a truly illegal activity. Furthermore, he believes that skaters are unlikely to stop skating anyway and that banning skateboarding is likely to add to the already anarchistic spirit of skateboarding, becoming yet "another obstacle to overcome" (2001, pp. 257-258).

Instead of seeing urban skateboarders as a problem or skateboarding as something that only should take place in skateparks, recent trends show indications of cities starting to see skateboarders as an integrated part of urban life. This trend that has been called "Skateboard urbanism" (Owens 2014) also referred to as "the skate city" and is said to be one of the most common topics of current discussions on skateboarding (Lombard 2016, pp. 21-23).

Cities such as Malmö, Copenhagen and Melbourne are increasingly open towards integrating skateboarding into public space and municipal policy. They have recognized skaters as one of many groups that are part of urban life and see skateboarding as a positive agent in activating unsafe and left-over space as well as generating vibrancy in urban place (Lampinen 2016; Clasper 2016; CoM 2016). This way they are addressing a broader issue that can be applied to a range of other activities and functions in the quest for sustainable cities; a multifunctional approach to using city space.

Due to my interest in both skateboarding and landscape architecture I have wanted to learn more about how skateboarding can be integrated into the public spaces of the city through planning and design, how cities work with this and what added values this approach can generate for cities.

## Aim

The aim of this thesis is to gain deeper understanding of what to consider in terms of planning and design when integrating skateboarding into urban public space used by both the general public and skateboarders.

Further the aim is to shed light on important characteristics of urban skate spots as well as the potential added values that these places can generate for cities.

## Research questions

### Main research question

- How can skateboarding be integrated into urban public space through planning and design?

### Sub-questions to support the main research question

- What are the key characteristics of urban skate-able space?
- What added value can urban skate-able space generate?

## Limitations

As a consequence of the limited scope of this thesis, literature has been studied to the extent of getting an overview of urban skateboarding and how it can be integrated into urban public place. Hence, deeper investigations of topics such as the history of skateboarding, its philosophical, social, technical and subcultural meanings are outside of the scope of this thesis and have not been deeply investigated. Further, the work is limited to investigate skateboarding as integrated in urban places and does not focus on skateboarding in dedicated skateparks. This thesis does not in any way attempt to present a "full picture" of what skateboarding is.

Moreover, any similarities to Landscape urbanism or other urban theory has not been investigated due to the limited time and scope of this format.

Geographically this thesis can be seen as universal since skateboarding is a global phenomenon and globalization has made cities worldwide have somewhat similar urban conditions (impervious surfaces, etc.). However, most of the study is made upon interviews of mainly Swedish/Scandinavian skateboard experts and observations of European places and case studies.

Regarding observed urban skate spots the study was limited to three sites. These were selected for their values as demonstrable examples of urban places where the skate-able function is a subtle component in places used by the general public.

The selection of case studies was limited to three cities and were chosen for their value as demonstrable examples of cities officially working with integrating skateboarding into urban public space.

# Methodology

The subject of skateboarding is a peculiar one. While it is nothing that has gone unnoticed in the academic field it is a difficult and fluid subject to cover. In order to gain a holistic understanding of the subject I relied on a range of qualitative research methods and split the thesis into different chapters, each handling different aspects of skateboarding. Throughout the five first chapters “*Skateboarding*”, “*Skateboarding & the city*”, “*Integrated designs*”, “*Added value*” and “*Skate-friendly cities*” methodologies are intertwined and each end in a summarizing reflection where I lifted thoughts and ideas that came up during the process of writing this thesis. Together these reflections and ideas formed the last chapter, “*Planning suggestions*”, which is a proposal on how cities can plan and design for integrating skateboarding into public space.

## Personal communication - interviews

In order to gain deeper insight into how the topic, a set of interviews was conducted. In pursuit of this specific data, attempts were made to find interviewees that were both skaters and that had professional experience of working with these types of questions. Hence, the interviews represent the skater perspective on the matter.

The method of interviewing was semi-structured and qualitative; meaning that a set of pre-thought out questions were presented to the interviewee in a given order. The questions were then answered openly by the interviewee giving them the opportunity to elaborate freely on the questions with a focus on why and how (Bryman 2008). Due to the personal nature of the conducted interviews and the difficulty to provide retractable data the interviews are formally referred to as personal communication.

The information from the interviews served as the base for this thesis and the interview questions were tightly linked to the research questions. The group of interviewees was selected from relevance and availability, in both social and geographical terms.

Skateboarding is a highly male dominated activity (Borden 2001 pp. 139-150), hence more men were part of the group due to professional relevance (as in people actually working with skateboarding) and availability. However, attempts to lift the question of gender was represented both in interview questions and the group of interviewees, as the statistical rate of women in the group by far exceeds the statistical quote of total female practitioners, see page 11-14 for presentation of interviewees.

Three of the interviews were conducted via email. The other nine interviews were recorded after approval from the interviewees, translated, transcribed, summarized and shortened to only contain relevant information. The raw data was then used as the base of research. By analysing the outcome I tried to find common denominators in the provided answers. The guiding interview questions are attached as an appendix.

## Literature studies

To gain insight into research on skateboarding and its relation to architecture I studied Iain Bordens “Skateboarding, space and the city – architecture and body” (2001). Borden is Professor in Architecture and Urban culture at Bartlett, College of London, and is often cited in the discussion of skateboarding and the city. His work is particularly interesting for this topic because of its strong focus on architecture and space where many other works on skateboarding are of sociological character.

To get a broader insight and more updated look on skateboarding I studied “Skateboarding, subculture, sites and shifts” by Kara-Jane Lombard (2016). Lombard has put together a collection of texts from a wide range of scholars devoted to researching skateboard (including Iain Borden) and thus provides a multitude of angles into what skateboarding is, what it is becoming and its connection and effects on culture, everyday life, social processes, and so on (Lombard 2016).

Other relevant articles that have been used were found via simple Google searches. Search words included: “Skateboard + urbanism”, “Urban + skateboarding”, “Place de la République + skateboard”, Warschaur + Bänke”, “Israels plads + Skateboard”, “Melbourne + Skateboard”, “Copenhagen + Skateboard”, “Malmö + Skateboard”.

## Participant observation of three urban skate spots

To further explore urban public places where both skaters and the general public dwell, observations of three of Europe’s most popular urban skate spots was made. The chosen sites were three places that I have personal experience of skateboarding at and that fitted the criteria specified in *limitations*. These were:

- Warschaur Bänke, Berlin
- Israels plads, Copenhagen
- Place de la République, Paris

The method of observation was a so called total participant observation, where the observer has a hidden role and acts as anyone that might happen to be on site. This method is commonly used for qualitative investigations where the researcher becomes part of the natural context and avoid disturbing the studied subject/field (Denscombe 1998).

The focus of the observations was on what made the sites popular urban skate locations. This involved getting a holistic sense of these places, which meant spending considerable time on site, ranging between 2-5 hours. Special focus was put on identifying what made the chosen sites favourable for skating, involving everything from skate-able elements to factors such as setting and location. After the observations an analysis of the impressions and results was made to try and pin point the key characteristics of the particular site.

## Case studies

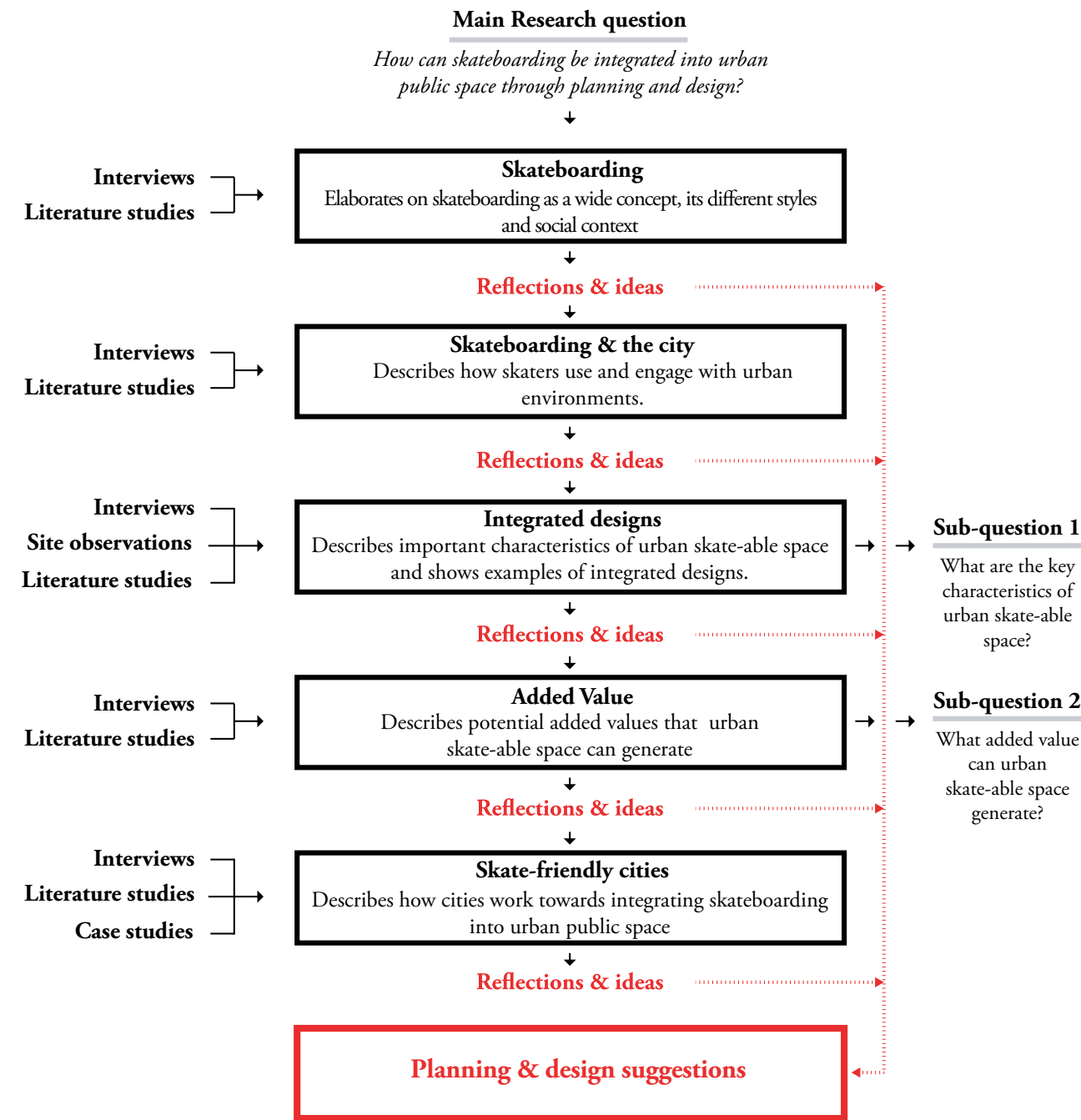
In order to understand how cities work strategically with skateboarding as an integrated part of the city three case studies were made. The focus of these studies was on how these cities work with integrating skateboarding into public spaces and municipal policy.

Melbourne was chosen because of the strategical document that the City of Melbourne (CoM) is in process of developing; the “Skate Melbourne Plan 2017-2027” (2016). This strategical document (draft) is one of many similar documents. However, while most of these have a strong focus on dedicated skateboard infrastructure the Melbourne plan stands out because of its focus on the integration of skateboarding into shared urban spaces.

Copenhagen and Malmö were chosen because of the cities skate-friendly attitudes. Information on Malmö was extracted from an interview with skate co-ordinator Gustav Svanborg Edén<sup>1</sup> and from a video of a Finnish skate seminar where Edén explains the history behind Malmö’s way towards becoming a skate destination (Lampinen 2016). Information on Copenhagen was extracted through reading articles found online.

1 interview, Malmö 2016.11.17

# Disposition



# Terminology

Below follows a set of terms used in this thesis that need some clarification in terms of how I have used them:

**Appropriation**  
Following Lefebvres “Production of space” (1991) I understand and define this term as the introduction of a new use to a space by a group, other than what the space was originally intended for; basically claiming of space.

**Line**  
A succession of skateboard tricks in a row.

**Public space**  
Public space is a controversial term, as geographer David Harvey argues public space is often under private ownership and heavily regulated by state. In his view the concept of public space has been eroded and does not allow for a diverse and free social life where all types of events can take place. He argues that public space should be a space of negotiation between its users (CCCB 2016). In this thesis I refer to public space as shared urban spaces that are perceived as being public and where its users get to negotiate over the use of space.

**Skate stopper**  
Design interventions specifically made to prevent skateboarding from damaging or disturbing public and private property such as spikes and other devices to protect urban furniture (Borden 2001, pp. 254-255).

**Urban skateboarding**  
Skateboarding that happens in the public space of the city and not in dedicated skateparks.

**Skate-able place/skate spot**  
Places such as squares, parks and plazas with favourable conditions for skateboarding and where skaters and non-skaters get to negotiate over the use of space.

**Transition**  
A word for the quarter-pipe shaped skateboard element (see page 31 for image). The name “transition” originates from the curved transition between the wall and floor that some Californian swimming pools had when drained. Early skaters searched for these drained pools and skated the curved transition as a concrete wave (Borden 2001, p 33). Eventually this reinterpretation led to the evolution of transition-based skateboarding styles such as pool and vert skating (Borden 2001, pp. )

For terminology on more skate objects see page 31.



## Interviewees



Photo courtesy of SNE architects ©

### **Søren Nordal Enevoldsen, Copenhagen**

*Architect, SNE Architects*

– I have been skateboarding my whole life and got interested in architecture partly because of my fascination for the urban landscape that I've gained through skateboarding. Now I design active urban and recreational urban spaces often with skate-related architecture. There are a lot of different reasons as to why I skate depending on my age and stages in life. Today I feel that skating is a way more intimate and personal thing that clears my mind and gives me these poetic “zen-moments”.



Photo courtesy of Pivotech ©

### **Sandra Olsson, Malmö**

*Building engineer, Pivotech*

– I have skated for about 10 years and work with skatepark design at Pivotech. I started skating a lot more when I moved to Malmö in 2009. Being a part of Tösabidarna (female skate organisation) led to skateboarding basically taking up all my free time, weekends etc. Skateboarding has always been a very good combination of a fun social thing I do with my friends and for myself as a physical and mental challenge.



### **Martin Karlsson, Stockholm**

*Teacher, Fryshuset skateboard high school*

– I started skating 1988 during the second wave of skateboarding, or third from a worldwide perspective. Second in Sweden. And then I never stopped, I still skate a lot. At the moment I work as a skateboard teacher at Fryshusets skateboard high school but since 1988 I have not just been skating, I have also made skateboard magazines, been running skateboard companies, designed skateparks and a little bit of everything that involves skateboarding.

### **Sarah Meurle, Gothenburg**

*Photography student*

– I have skated half my life, starting when I was thirteen and since I grew up just outside Malmö I quickly became part of the Malmö skate scene. When I was sixteen I started at Bryggeriets skateboard high school and after that I have been moving around to different locations around the world, skating and doing other stuff on the side. I got sponsored at an early age and have generally spent a whole lot of time on my skateboard.



### **Gustav Svanborg Edén, Malmö**

*Skateboard Co-ordinator, City of Malmö*

– I have skated since '87. I am educated in various subjects such as philosophy, economy, media, etc. and have lived with skateboarding for the most part of my life, it has been my biggest cultural asset. I started working for Bryggeriets skateboard high school which then later led to me working for the City of Malmö. My role here is originally event-oriented but has been re-developed into a role that involves events, activation and urban development.



### **Anthony Crawford, Stockholm**

*Board member, Stockholm skateboard collective*

– Born and raised in England, London – Walthamstow to be specific. I started skating around 1995 and have basically been skating since then. I remember going in to London and seeing skaters at PlayStation skatepark, just standing there gawking and just got stuck into it. To be honest, all my life before I started skateboarding, I really didn't feel like I had an identity and when I got into skateboarding it was like; this is what I want to do, this is fun.





**Günes Özdoğan, Uppsala**

*Professional Skateboarder*

– I have been skating for about twenty years. I started out skating here in Uppsala and have actually kept at it nonstop since then. I've been sponsored for about ten years now and ride for Adidas skateboarding (amongst others), on their international team, and skateboarding has taken me to places all over the globe. So I am going to continue to do that.



**Niklas Boström, Stockholm**

*Chairman, Stockholm skateboard collective*

– I've skated since 1996, mostly street. I am chairman of Stockholm skateboard collective, which is an organization that works for a skate-adapted Stockholm. I am educated in sports science and sports education with an expertise within sports organization and management. This has been a major asset in talking with politicians, architects and the city and in starting a skateboard organization. I know how to apply for funding and other important organizational aspects.



**Emma Fastesson Lindgren, Stockholm**

*Board member, Swedish skateboard association*

– I'm currently a student at Stockholm business school and have been skating since I was eleven, which is about 10 years ago now. I am also a board member of the Swedish skateboard association and compete in skateboarding on elite level. I skate simply because its fun.

Photo courtesy of Emma Fastesson Lindgren ©

**David Gough, Gothenburg**

*Landscape architect, Mareld Landskap*

– Throughout my life I skated through school, college and university. After moving to London work took overhand and I didn't start again until I moved to Sweden. When I came here I went down to the local skatepark and started meeting people, so skateboarding really has a huge social value. I got more and more involved in the skate scene and started sitting in boards, designing skateparks, etc. Skateboarding is a part of my life and will continue to be.



**Katharina Sterner, Gothenburg**

*Association secretary, Swedish Skateboard Association*

– I started skating 1996 so I have been on the skateboard for 20 years now. During those 20 years I have had periods of not skating since society says that it's best to be a guy if you are going to skate and then grow up after you are 15. But when I actually grew up I realized that growing up means making your own decisions and then I started skating again. Now I work as association secretary for the Swedish skateboard association, something I really wouldn't have believed 20 years ago.



**James Thoem, Copenhagen**

*Urban planner, Copenhagenize*

– I've been skateboarding for well over half my life, and for me it's mostly a social thing. I have no particular direct relationship or interest in the professional side of skateboarding, no ambitions of sponsorship, no interest in an 'industry' job. Though that is not to say it hasn't influenced my current line of work as an urban planner. The countless hours spent scouring the alleyways, drainage ditches, and industrial parks, undoubtedly helped shape my interest in understanding urban landscapes.



# Skateboarding

This chapter elaborates on skateboarding as a wide concept, such as its different styles and its social context based on interviews and literature studies.



# What is skateboarding?

## Skateboarding: A fluid & dynamic field

It might seem like an easy task to define what skateboarding is, in one way it is; it is simply play with a wooden deck on four wheels. However there seems to be more complexity to it. As Gustav Svanborg Edén<sup>1</sup> (Skateboard co-ordinator at Malmö city) explains, skate has many dimensions: “skate is very diverse. In every circumstance it is presented, skateboarding is always reduced from its true character”.

Looking to the academic field scholars such as Borden (2001) and Lombard (2016) have tried to define the meanings of skateboarding. Even here it would seem like skateboarding holds a multitude of meanings and as it turns out it is quite complex to point out exactly what skateboarding is.

“...skateboarding is a fluid, dynamic field, a global phenomenon whose participants have strong connections to local scenes, a rebellious activity and commercialized form.”

- Kara-Jane Lombard (2016, p. 38)

As this quote suggests, it is quite problematic to define exactly what skateboarding is because it is dynamic, ever changing and in many ways contradictory. There are simply different sides to the story as architect Søren Nordal Enevoldsen<sup>2</sup> states: “skating is so many things; it’s the act itself, it’s the industry, the clothing, style, trends, competitions and media, it’s the skate spots and skateparks and so on”.

1	interview, Malmö	2016.11.17
2	Interview, email	2016.11.30

## Skateboarding is what you want it to be

A common debate is if skateboarding is a sport or a lifestyle. According to Edén<sup>1</sup> it is better to look at skateboarding as an interface through which you as a skater face the world, meaning that it affects all parts of your life. He argues that in skateboarding you can be physically aggressive or relaxed depending on what you want, that it is a physical way of expression that at the same time is closely tied to aesthetics, culture and film: “skateboarding has a wide and rich cultural capital”.

Considered this way skateboarding can open the door to a wide range of interests and become what you want it to be; a sport, a lifestyle or a free medium for expression depending on what you feel.

## Mainstream culture / underground subculture

One thing is certain however, while skateboarding has a strong subcultural heritage and certain anarchistic tendencies (Borden 2001) it has now turned into also being a part of mainstream culture as Chairman of Stockholm Skate Collective, Nicklas Boström<sup>2</sup> explains: “skateboarding is part of mainstream commercialization now”. A trend that most interviewees think will continue to grow, as Enevoldsen<sup>3</sup> says regarding the future of skateboarding: “my guess is that it will be everything it is today, just on steroids”.

A proof of this development is the recent announcement that skateboarding will be a part of the Olympic games in Tokyo 2020, something that has led to mixed feelings in the skateboard world (Thrasher 2016; Transworld 2016).

1	interview, Malmö	2016.11.17
2	Interview, Stockholm	2016.11.16
3	Interview, email	2016.11.30



Further, skateboard media has undergone a massive shift from being communicated via the occasional video and magazine to “being sprayed out all over the internet through social media”, as skateboard teacher Martin Karlsson<sup>4</sup> puts it. Urban planner James Thoem<sup>5</sup> explains that as a result of this, the skate industry and associated media can now find a stronghold virtually anywhere, whereas before it used to come from a centralised source, most often in southern California.

4	Interview, Stockholm	2016.10.24
5	Interview, email	2017.01.24

Regardless of what skateboarding is turning into Thoem<sup>6</sup> reflects what most interviewees feel: “I’m quite certain that no matter what, skateboarding will continue to be fun, whether in the streets or at the skatepark, or somewhere in between”.

6	Interview, email	2017.01.24
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## Different styles, different spatial needs

Skateboarding involves a variety of different styles that have developed over the many stages of skateboarding, each adopting different types of environments (Borden 2001).

According to Enevoldsen<sup>1</sup> this is commonly misunderstood by municipalities and city planners, “it is almost impossible to explain to them that skateboarding is not just one thing but many things depending on styles”.

Following Borden (2001) skate-able space can be subdivided into two superior categories, found and constructed space. Skateparks and other purpose built skateboard infrastructure is in the category of “constructed space” while “found space” is not designed for the purpose of skateboarding but is reinterpreted to fit skating (p. 2).

Examples of typical found terrains are (Borden 2001 pp. 173-184):

- Shared urban places such as squares and plazas
- Streets and alleys
- Parking lots
- Indoor spaces such as garages

Examples of constructed spaces are (Borden 2001, pp. 57-88):

- Concrete skateparks
- Prefabricated skateparks
- Skate bowls
- Half-pipes and ramps
- Indoor skateparks

### Freestyle & Cruising

In Freestyle most moves are executed whilst standing still, such as doing handstands (Borden 2001, pp. 17, 65).

Cruising is a collective term for surf-related styles (downhill, slalom, longboarding) and generally take place on sidewalks and down hills and does not need any particular obstacles or special purpose built infrastructure (CoM 2016, p. 9).

### Transition based skating

These styles are based on the quarter-pipe element, originally used like a concrete wave by pool skaters in drained backyard swimming pools. Later vert skating, a type of skating in huge U-shaped wooden ramps, developed out of pool skating. “Vert” is short for vertical and alludes to the vertical upper part of the ramp, above the quarter-pipe. All these styles are based on doing tricks on or above the lip/coping, which is the upper edge of the pool/ramp (Borden 2001, pp. 57-88).

### Street skating

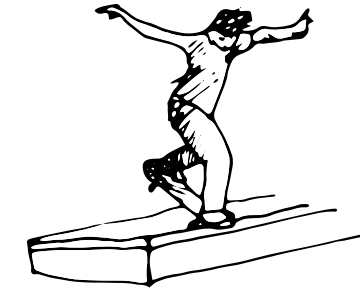
This style was developed by combining transition-skating and freestyle moves and applying them onto objects of the city. The base trick is the flatground ollie which enables the skater to jump together with the board and onto objects (Borden 2001, pp. 176-182). This is by far the most common style in urban skating.

### Park skating

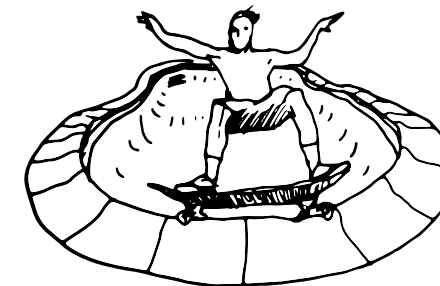
Park skating is a style specifically adapted for different types of purpose built skateparks (CoM 2016, p.9) and can be described as a flow-based merge between street and transition skating.



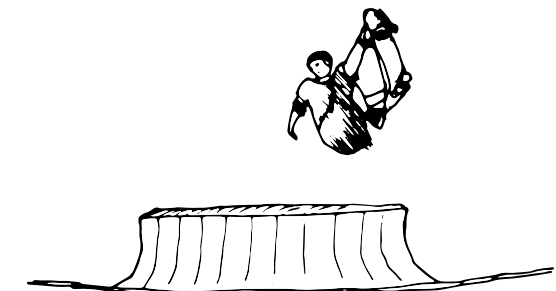
*Street skating* needs urban skate-able places such as public squares, plazas and other urban environments that can be reinterpreted for skating.



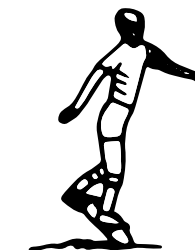
*Park skating* needs skateparks with both “street” and “transition” elements.



*Pool skating* needs concrete bowls/pools



*Vert skating* requires huge wooden half-pipes.



*Freestyle* requires flat surfaces



*Cruising* is generally used a mode of transportation and requires smooth ground materials.

1 Interview, email 2016.11.30

# Social context

## Identity

That skateboarding has identity shaping elements is no secret. Skateboarding has even been compared to Romanticism with skaters having their own dress codes, language and expressions and so on (Borden 2001, p. 138).

Board member of Stockholm Skate Collective, Anthony Crawford<sup>1</sup> reflects what many of the interviewees feel: “to be honest, all my life before I started skateboarding, I really didn’t feel like I had an identity and when I got into skateboarding it was like; this is what I want to do, this is fun”. Karlsson<sup>2</sup> even feels that he is so attached to skateboarding that he would have a hard time seeing who he would be if it was not skateboarding.

## Freedom & individualism

To Landscape architect David Gough<sup>3</sup> skateboarding is more a form of escapism where he feels like he can switch everything off and do what he wants: “it’s just freedom in a form that I haven’t found in anything else”. Skateboarder and photographer Sarah Meurle<sup>4</sup> felt that the freedom of skateboarding worked better for her than stressing over football practice multiple times a week: “the freedom of skating worked out very good for me. I could practice my own tricks and I had a small group of friends to ride with”. The individual freedom of skateboarding is also what attracted Boström<sup>5</sup> to skating after having played a lot of hockey and participated in other sports: “skateboarding is far more ephemeral and social; I decide when to skate, how to skate and who to skate with”.

1	Interview, Stockholm	2016.10.20
2	Interview, Stockholm	2016.10.24
3	Interview, Gothenburg	2016.10.28
4	Interview, Gothenburg	2016.10.28
5	Interview, Stockholm	2016.11.16

## Alone but together: Sessions

Further, skateboarding is a social practice and rarely happens alone. If you go skateboarding alone, chances are that you will make a friend or bump into one at the skate spot or skatepark.

The group activity that takes place at a skate spot or skatepark is called a “session” and can be described as an individual group practice, a sort of an “informal competition” (Borden 2001, p. 124). In the interviews it becomes apparent that there are high social values to sessions, and that through sessions at a spot or a skatepark you can approach other skaters and break the ice socially. Like Edén<sup>1</sup> explained earlier, skateboarding can be seen as an interface, a type of lens through which you look at the world. This way, if you are a skater yourself and you bump into another skater, you know you will have things in common.

## Local activity, Global connectivity

Professional skateboarder Günes Özdoğan<sup>2</sup> explains that since skateboarding is a global culture and shared instantly through media you are bound to have mutual points of interest with other skaters. This way skateboarding can bridge gaps between different demographics, across ages and backgrounds. Further, this makes it easy to take the initial steps of bonding and is thus a great way to integrate in communities where you do not have many other friends and acquaintances. Crawford<sup>3</sup> is one of many that have had first-hand experience of this, moving from London to Stockholm, “Coming here skateboarding really helped me find friends; most of my friends are skateboarders”.

1	interview, Malmö	2016.11.17
2	Interview, Uppsala	2016.10.20
3	interview, Stockholm	2016.10.20



Session at Charlotte Ammundsens plads, Copenhagen.



Session at Place de la République, Paris.



Friendship at Place de la République, Paris.



A safety net for outcasts

Many interviewees mentioned that skateboarding can serve as a safety net for people that have started off on the wrong path in life. Edén<sup>1</sup> explains that there are a lot of great things about organized sport but there is a large crowd of people that do not fit that profile and seek other activities to engage in. In his view a portion of these people are quite strong individuals that do not want to be confined by anything and do things their own way. He thinks that skateboarding can provide a good alternative for this group since these people are in a category that can end up being very expensive for cities if they follow the wrong path. Association secretary at the Swedish Skateboard Association Katharina Sterner<sup>2</sup> also thinks that skateboarding catches a certain group of people that does not feel like they belong elsewhere in society and explains that skateboarding gives these people a sense of belonging.

Currency

Individual expression, creativity and authenticity are highly valued qualities within skateboarding and praised within the skateboard industry (Beal & Weidman 2003). Further, Borden (2001) explains that the currency within skateboarding is your moves and how you gracefully you can communicate them (pp.114-135, 262). According to Edén<sup>3</sup> the value of this currency is higher if you do a move on something that has not been skated before or if the trick is made in a new way, with better “style”. Here he points out that aesthetics come in to play in more ways than just the act of skating: “the setting and filming is important to communicate authenticity and make the viewer inspired”.

This should theoretically give room to all kinds of expressions making skateboarding indifferent to race, gender and social backgrounds. However, you have to fit the criteria.

Judgement

Edén<sup>4</sup> explains that the skateboard industry emerged in a time when skateboarding was closely related to punk and driven by male teenage ideals. He explains that this testosterone fuelled and subversive legacy has created a frame from which all skaters are being judged to some extent, by others within the skate community.

Enevoldsen<sup>5</sup> experienced this when he started getting into the skate scene as he felt a need to prove himself to the older and cooler local skaters, in order to gain acceptance. Even though Enevoldsen is now forty years old he explains that this feeling still comes lingering at times: “I still to this day get that insecure feeling sometimes, where I feel that I get judged by my surroundings and have to perform in order to be accepted”. He explains that skate media constantly feeds you ideas that professional skaters are these heroes and that it is the best thing in the world to be sponsored, generating a type of ideal for skaters. – Don’t get me wrong, I love skateboarding and a lot of the media, but there’s also a negative side to the whole ego focus/sponsor-thing that I believe side-tracks a lot of teenagers. It’s not just the media’s fault; we as skaters also do it to ourselves locally.



Front stage & Backstage

Meurle<sup>6</sup> accurately explains a feeling most skaters often have: “sometimes it’s nice to feel that you don’t have the eyes of a lot of other skaters on you”. Here, Building engineer Sandra Olsson<sup>7</sup> is on the same note: “I hate to skate when I feel self-conscious”.

This brings Erving Goffmans theories of “Front stage” and “Backstage” behaviour to mind. Where people tend to behave differently while being

observed such as when in public place (front stage) than when alone or closed off with people you know better (backstage) such as being at home with family (Goffman 1959). Front stage behaviour is to larger degree dictated by following norms (Goffman 1959), such as Karlsson<sup>8</sup> expresses: “at busy places you just end up doing the same things as you already know, there is not really any space for trying something new and progressing”.

1 Interview, Stockholm 2016.11.16  
2 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27  
3 interview, Malmö 2016.11.17

4 interview, Malmö 2016.11.17  
5 Interview, email 2016.11.30

6 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27  
7 interview, Malmö 2016.11.17

8 Interview, Stockholm 2016.10.24

Above: Skateboard move being documented at Place de la République, Paris.



**Skateboarding, gender issues & homophobia**

It is no secret that skateboarding is an activity predominantly practiced by men (Borden 2001, p.144). Edén<sup>1</sup> explains that this partially has to do with how communication within the skate industry being directed solely towards boys.  
– Decades of having teenage guys as only target group has led to expressions in skateboard culture being deterrent to women.

Meurle<sup>2</sup> thinks it has to do with more than just the skate industry: “I feel like our whole culture and society is split into norms on how men and women are expected to act and do so it’s not surprising that it is the same with skateboarding”. Boström<sup>3</sup> is on the same track and explains that there are many other activities with similar male dominated hierarchical structures where it has been about being the most aggressive and radical. He explains that norms grow out of these cultures that take time to change: “how long has female football been accepted for instance?”

There are other values and traits that quite contradictory have been excluded in skateboard history, homosexuality for instance. Looking at the social structure of skateboarding this however is quite ironic (Borden 2001, p. 147).

“Skaters thus spend much time looking at photographs of other young men, emulating other young men, and displaying themselves to young men. Skateboarding could thus easily be construed as a homosexual gesture, and perhaps as a result of this possibility many skaters seem to react in a number of different ways. First there is homophobia.”

-Iain Borden (2001, p. 147)

1 Interview, Malmö 2016.11.17  
2 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27  
3 Interview, Stockholm 2016.11.16

This legacy becomes apparent when skateboard legend Brian Anderson lands an article in New York Times for coming out officially as gay in 2016 after being one of the most influential street skaters since the early 1990’s (Dougherty 2016). This really should not be something that was even relevant and while there is no doubt skateboarding still has miles to walk (Welsh 2016; Papalardo 2017) this is however an indicator that the social climate is slowly starting to warm up.

**Skateboarding is getting more inclusive**

“Talking about female skateboarding, I think that is going to increase a lot”, says Sterner<sup>4</sup> and thinks this already existing trend will continue to grow. Boström<sup>5</sup> is also optimistic and explains that we are generally going towards such tendencies now that old norm codes are being de-cyphered which opens up the possibility to do what you want, not what you should. In fact most interviewees look brightly at the future for inclusion within skateboarding, both when it comes to gender and sexual orientation. Regarding female participation, Edén<sup>6</sup> has seen strong growth and asserts: “it’s only a matter of time before female skating explodes”.

As perceived by Karlsson<sup>7</sup> skateboarding has also become internally more accepting: “before there were only a few things that were cool but that frame has expanded enormously”. Here, Sterner<sup>8</sup> points out that there is also more room for beginners: “before you basically had to be good from the beginning since there was no room for beginners”.

4 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27  
5 Interview, Stockholm 2016.11.16  
6 Interview, Malmö 2016.11.17  
7 Interview, Stockholm 2016.10.24  
8 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27



Skate culture is becoming more tolerant to beginners. Kids skating at Place de la République, Paris.



Katharina Sterner and Sarah Meurle are two of Swedens most prominent skaters.



The vast majority of skaters are still young men. Boys being boys at Place de la République, Paris.

## Reflections and ideas

### Skateboard is not just one “thing”

Skateboarding is a fluid and diverse topic and involves multiple styles, spaces and meanings. When planning for skateboarding it is then important to understand that skateboarding can not be seen as just one thing or one style that can be catered for in an all-in-one solution, it goes against the whole idea to reduce skateboarding to a format. If a city is serious about working with skateboarding thorough research has to be done so that people involved in planning for skateboard infrastructure understands that skateboarding involves multiple styles and expressions.

### Skateboarding can serve as a social tool

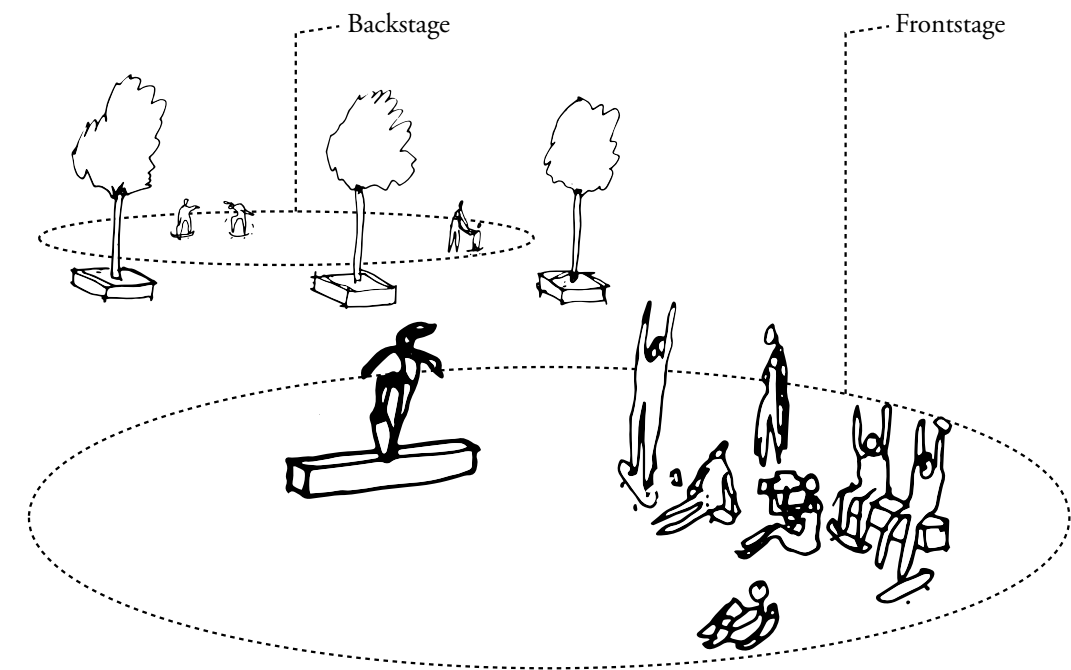
Skateboarding can serve as a great tool for integration and gives something practitioners world wide have in common that is free and easy to do, this can be something to consider for municipalities regarding social programs and events.

### Inclusion is key

While skateboarding has high social and cultural values and can offer a meaningful lifestyle for people who do not fit the profile of organized sports it also has challenges. With a subcultural heritage formed by male teenage ideals and being an activity practiced predominantly by men inclusion is absolutely key to how cities can motivate planning for skateboarding. Although trends are heading the right way there are still miles to go when it comes to equality issues within skateboarding. Considerable efforts need to be put on communicating that skateboarding is something that can be meaningful for all demographics across genders, backgrounds and ages.

### Make room for front and backstage behaviour

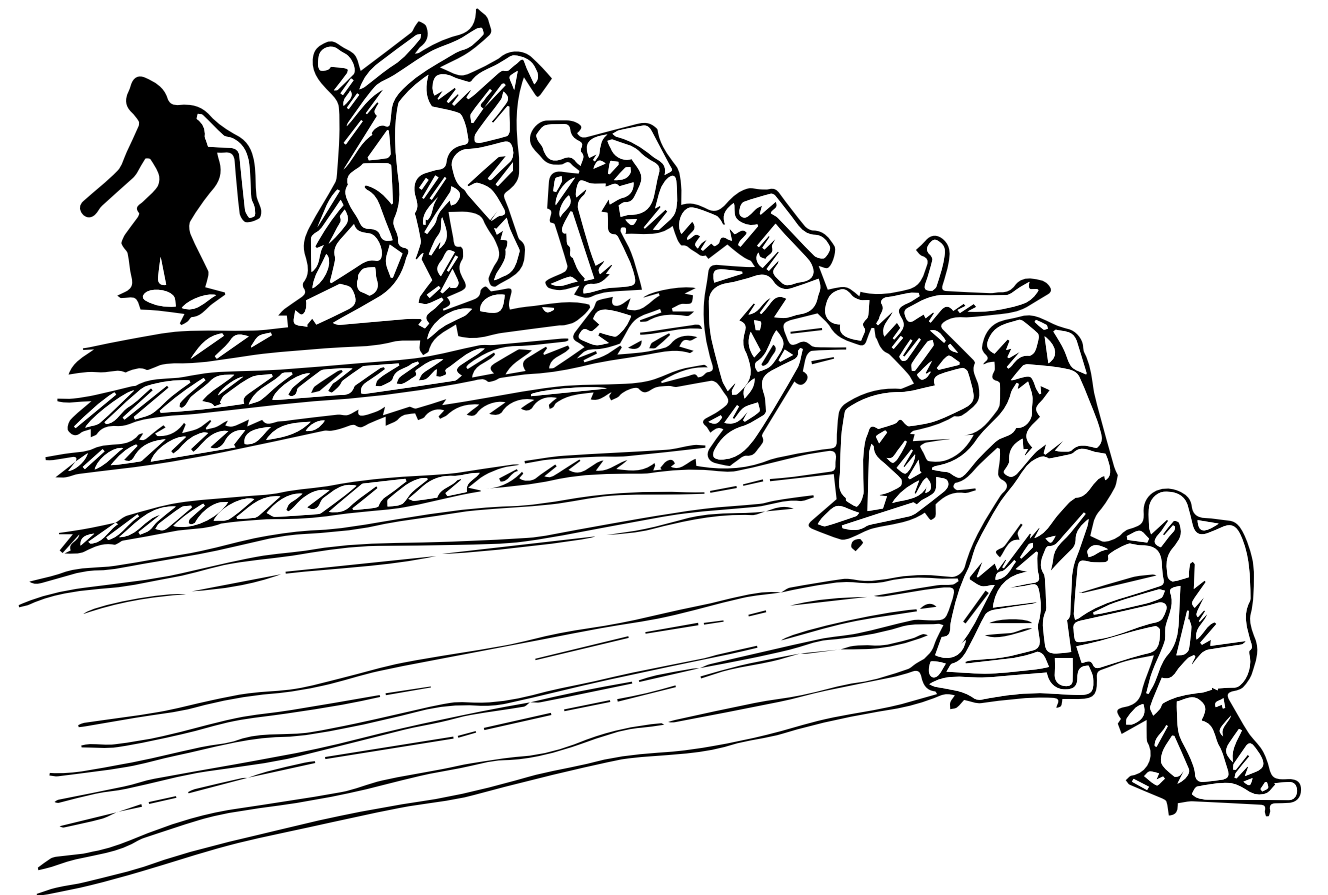
Skateboarding is valued and judged by individual expression, creativity and authenticity. Particularly through your moves and how gracefully you can communicate your skateboarding. This is on one hand a driver that is at the heart of skateboarding but can also be troublesome and negative for beginners and people that do not feel comfortable with being in the lime light. Design and planning should cover both places where you can be seen and avoid being seen.



**Idea:** A sketch on how both front stage and backstage behaviour can be designed for in a place. Subtle room dividers such as trees creates a perceived boundary between places you can practice in peace and show off your moves and style.

# Skateboarding & the city

*This chapter describes theory on urban skateboarding and how skaters use and engage with urban environments based on literature studies and interviews.*





## Theory on urban skateboarding

### Super architectural space & reinterpretation

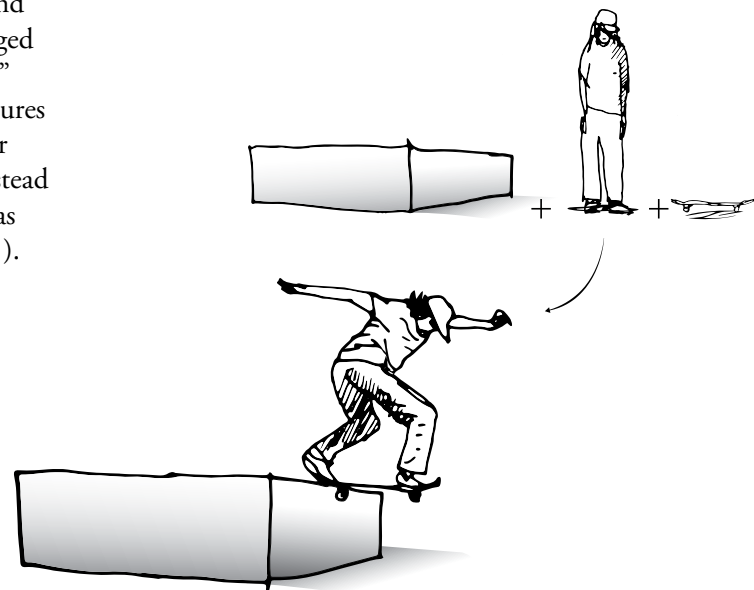
Looking towards the more serious attempts to describe the act of skateboarding, Iain Borden's "Skateboarding, space and the city: architecture and body" (2001) digs deep into what skateboarding is in relation to space. In the beginning of this book Borden challenges previous approaches to architecture history, the tendency of discussing just space and not the production of space (p. 9). Borden draws on the ideas of philosophers Michel Foucault and Henri Lefebvre to define architecture as a process rather than objects and space as a production of the dialectal process between itself, time and its users rather than something that is defined only by space itself (2001, pp. 6-12).

According to Borden (2001) the act of skateboarding can be explained as a production of space produced by the combination of the skateboarders body, skateboard and terrain (architecture). Where the body space of the skateboarder, the skateboard and terrain through the act of skateboarding are merged into what Borden calls "super architectural space" (pp. 90-125). In this way skaters unveil architectures manifold of possible uses and representations, for instance as street skaters slide down handrails instead of using their single inscribed function; using it as support whilst walking up or down stairs (p. 191).

### Appropriation & critique of the modern city

The way skaters reinterpret urban spaces is according to Borden (2001) a critique of the modern city; its coded semantics and single-use objects re-inscribed with new meanings of joy and use values (pp. 185-204).

Borden (2001), who analyses skateboarding through a Lefebvrian lens, means that skateboarders appropriate spaces in the city that are in the longer run dominated by capitalism and the state and use these programmed spaces of the city for its texture instead of its inscribed uses. This is why street skating is extra politically charged and often lead to conflict; it does not produce anything of economic value in places of commerce and economic production. He argues that this is a critique of the rules and lifestyle of the modern city and the notion of exchange values over use values in public space (pp. 229-260).



Skateboarder producing "Super architectural space". Body, skateboard and architecture unite and become a product of all three for a brief moment.



### Heterotopia

It has also been argued that when urban skateboarders re-invent the programmed uses of the city and its inscribed semantics they create spaces parallel to the coded existence of the city, their own architectural heterotopias (Borden 2001, p. 187; Lorr 2016, pp. 212-213).

First coined by Michel Foucault heterotopia is a descriptive term for "Spaces of otherness", spaces that are said to exist in many different ways. For instance they can be places that are used in contradiction to their inscribed purpose for a brief period of time (Foucault 1984).

### An urban Flâneur-ship

Further urban street skating has been related to the Situationist concepts of "psychogeography", "diversion" and "drift" where skaters like the French Situationists of the 1960's drift around in the urban landscape guided by its physical texture and emotional qualities and not by its inscribed meanings and codes, reclaiming the "public" spaces of the city if only for a short while (Borden 2001, pp. 194, 223; Howell 2001, p. 6).



Above: Skater reinterpreting a found "bank" in Uppsala, Sweden

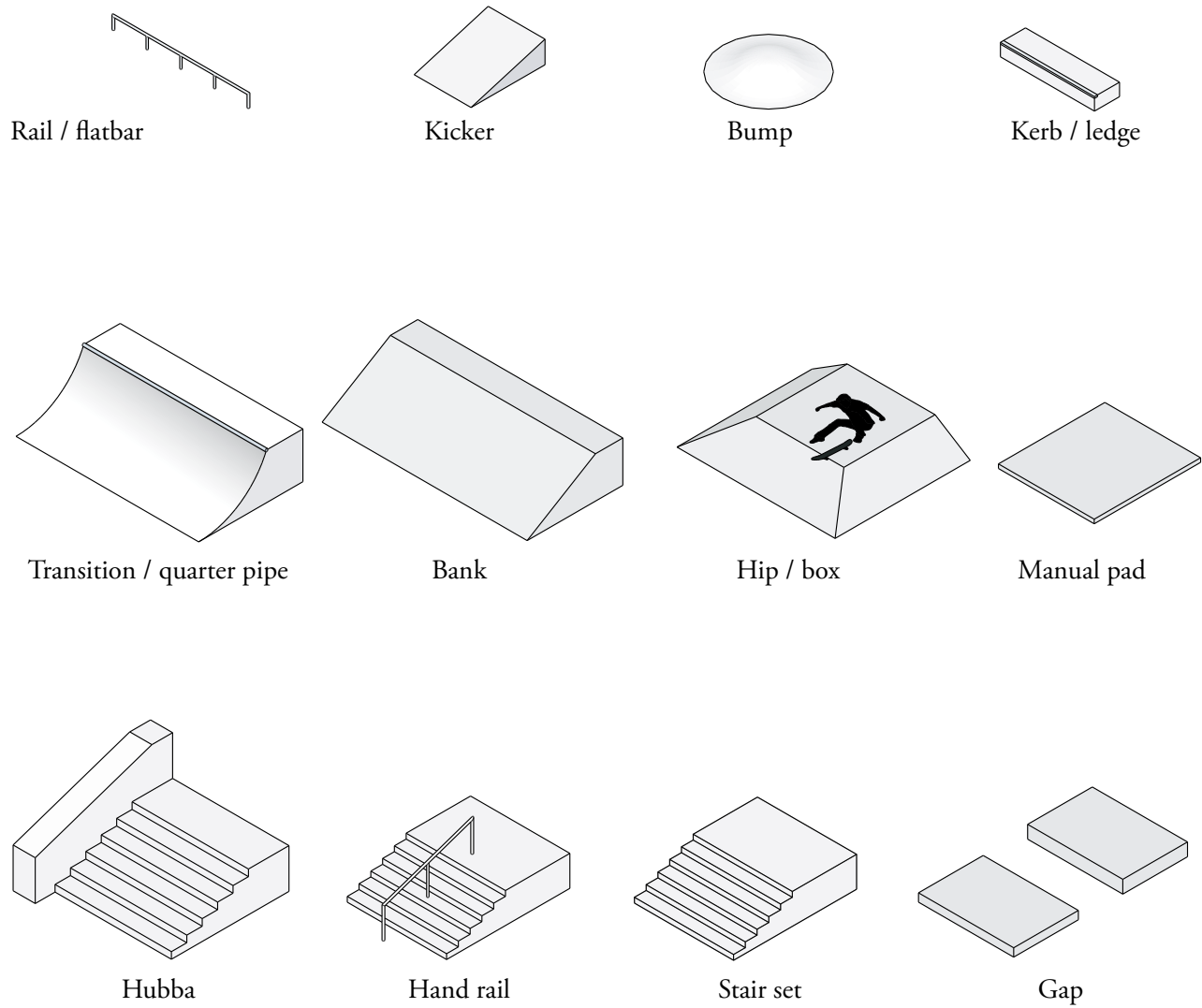
Below: Skaters creating heterotopias, spaces parallel to the other urban dwellers.



Skater vision

The skaters' vision constantly scans the city for skate-able space and it has been argued that they possess an architectural gaze that sees untapped potentials of urban space (Borden 2001, p. 185-228).

Below are some of the most common shapes and objects that skaters look for in the urban landscape. Although there are many more objects and no “rules” this can hint towards how skaters reinterpret urban environments.



Where some sees benches a skater see perfect kerbs/ledges. Jarmers plads, Copenhagen.



Ledges/pads at Israels plads, Copenhagen



Urban bank in London



# The urban experience

Although many practitioners do not live in urban areas and skateboarding most definitely can be practiced outside the city, there is an undeniable bond. As Enevoldsen<sup>1</sup> says, “to me skateboarding is true urbanism. Skaters really are the Homo Urbanus, a species born out of the urban realm”.

### A different thing from skating skateparks

All interviewees perceive skateboarding in the city as something completely separate from skating in skateparks. Enevoldsen<sup>2</sup> accurately describes this difference: “a skatepark and a street spot are two completely different things. It’s like asking what the difference is between a fruit and a big mac”. Skater and board member of Swedish Skateboard Association, Emma Fastesson Lindgren<sup>3</sup> uses another metaphor, “skating a skatepark is like colouring in a colouring book, street is like painting the whole thing” and asserts that skating street feels more “real” and creative. Thoem<sup>4</sup> thinks skateboarding in the city is much more “engaging, entertaining, and unpredictable” but that skateparks also have many qualities: “I can’t say that one is better than the other. They each have their strengths”.

### The experience of a city

When skating in the city you become a part of the city’s diversity of people, sounds, spaces and experiences. To Edén<sup>5</sup> urban skateboarding is a creative interaction with the urban environment, where you can physically engage with a city and its pulse. Özdogan<sup>6</sup> explains that urban skating takes you to new places and makes you discover new

1	Email	2016.11.30
2	Email	2016.11.30
3	Interview, email	2017.01.17
4	Interview, email	2017.01.24
5	interview, Malmö	2016.11.17
6	Interview, Uppsala	2016.10.20

cities: “you end up in environments and situations you never would have experienced if you didn’t skateboard”. Many interviewees explains that one of the things that make skating in the city special is the possibility for the unexpected to occur. Like Crawford<sup>7</sup> tells of the excitement he felt while growing up skating in London, a city that never sleeps: “in London we would have security guards chasing us and rude boys trying to rob us but that was all part of the experience”. He explains that the streets felt far more exciting because of the fact that “you are not really meant to skate there”.

### A travelling adventure

To many, the inner-city journey between skate spots is often the best part. Meurle<sup>8</sup> recognizes the value of the small places you pass by: “the in-between places are important, it’s often the most fun to skate from one spot to another. The transport stretch between the spots can actually be the best sometimes”. Edén<sup>9</sup> explains this journey as a type of “hunt and gather-adventure” where you search for places to skate together with a group of friends: “the journey is such a big part of street skating: you are an urban hiker, a flâneur looking for new experiences in the city and new possibilities to exploit”.

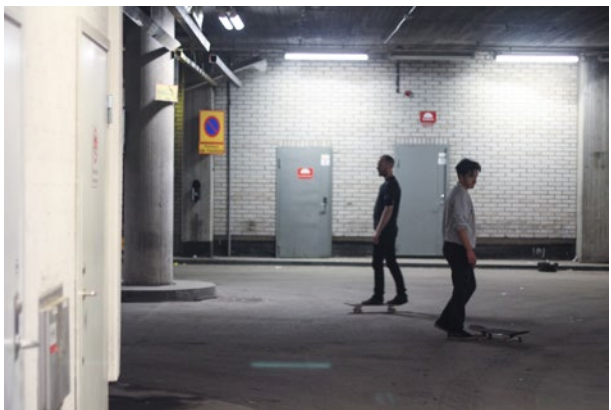
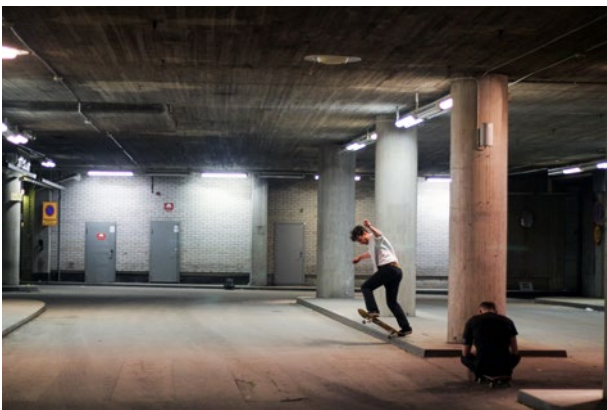
### Appropriation

The interviewees like the excitement of appropriating and reinterpreting spaces of the city that was not meant for skating. Edén<sup>10</sup> explains how places that have been appropriated by you and your friends is where you can develop your own social codes and sense of community: “it feels like it is your own corner of the city”.

7	Interview, Stockholm	2016.10.20
8	Interview, Gothenburg	2016.10.27
9	interview, Malmö	2016.11.17
10	interview, Malmö	2016.11.17



Skater uses skateboarding to engage and explore the industrial environments of Stockholms meat packing district.



The Sheraton hotel garage is a found indoor spot in Stockholm is ironically named after the nearby located Sheraton hotel and has sheltered skaters from rain and cold weather since the early 1990’s.



# DIY (Do-it-yourself)

## A middle ground

Another way that skaters engage with urban environments is by building their own skate spots. In order to unlock new skate-able possibilities of the city, the DIY-movement use construction methods to bridge the gap between ‘found’ and ‘constructed’ space. These kinds of DIY spaces are built fast and on low budgets, most commonly in left-over or forgotten space (Clasper 2016). As dodgy as this might sound, intentions are usually good, even altruistic, to quote James Clasper:

“Reclaiming the city is a motive, too. DIY skateparks often try to revive long-forgotten urban spaces, thus making them busier, livelier and safer.”

- James Clasper (2016)

## A bottom-up process

Further there is no definition as to how DIY-space looks, it is defined by a bottom-up process fuelled by the skaters desires to modify space for skateboarding. A freedom skaters take into their own hands, often also generating currency within the skate community (Atencio & Beal 2016, p. 173).

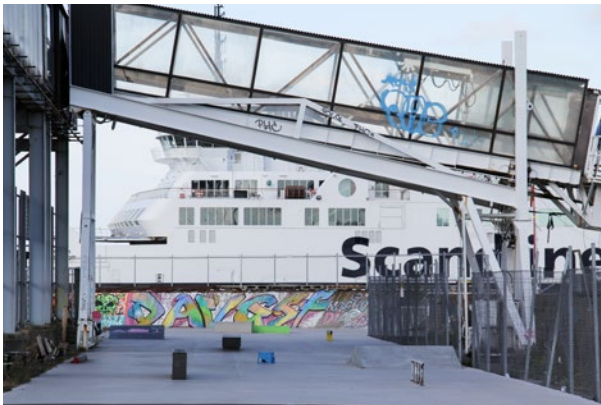
## Guerilla skate construction

The construction methods used range from fixing cracks in the asphalt in front of a skate-able object to building ‘Guerilla skateparks’. This is an activity that usually happens without previous permission (Orpana 2016, p. 240). Hence, this typology of skateboard infrastructure is quite ephemeral, there is no knowing how long built objects are there until destroyed by authorities.

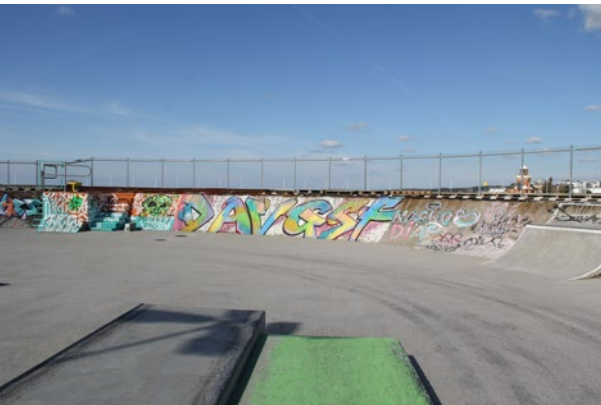
## Dedicated DIY

Although the most common form of DIY is an illicit freedom that skaters take into their own hands, some cities have dedicated spaces where skaters are encouraged to build their own obstacles. An example of such a case is the DIY spot “Oslopiren” in Helsingborg, Sweden. The area was according to Pivotech Studio manager Fabian Narin<sup>1</sup> dedicated for the skaters and prepared with “confalt” by the municipality. The result is a type of low budget fusion between a dedicated skatepark and a DIY space and has, according to local skateshop owner Daniel Granström<sup>2</sup>, been well received by the local skate community.

- 1 Telephone conversation 2017.01.15
- 2 Conversation 2016.10.28



Helsingborg DIY spot “Oslopiren” is located on an abandoned industrial pier where skaters are free to build their own skate environment.



Skaters have built their own objects on the smooth confalt surface and against a sloping wall at the end of the pier.



“TBS” (Train Bank Skatepark), Malmö - one of Europe’s most famous DIY-spots. While being built illicitly the spot has later been allowed for skateboarding (see page 89).



Loud cargo trains pass by making the sounds of skateboards fade in comparison.



Skate-able objects bridge the gap between footpath and fence - turning this otherwise desolate site into a skatepark.



# Conflict & Banishment

However fulfilling skating in the city can be for skaters, it can sometimes cause conflict. Edén explains that the most common causes for this involves following issues (Lampinen 2016):

- Loud sounds; skateboard wheels rolling over small tiles or rough surfaces can produce loud sounds.
- Material damage; chipping and waxing of edges.
- Demographic issues; skaters are mainly young men and can be perceived as disturbing by elderly people and other groups.

## Banishment & Negative design

The disturbing effects that skateboarding sometimes have, has in many cases led to skateboarders being banished from public place. In fact skateboarding has long history of banishment ranging back to the 1970's when skaters would get fined for skating pools and other appropriated terrains. Around the year 2000 the use of negative design, such as "skate stoppers" became common in city centres and spread quickly to cities worldwide (Borden 2001, pp. 247-254).



Negative design such as "skate stoppers" come in many shapes and appearances.

According to Borden this denial of letting skaters use places of economic consumption in other ways than what is considered appropriate is similar to how homeless people are treated in public place (Borden 2001, p. 253).

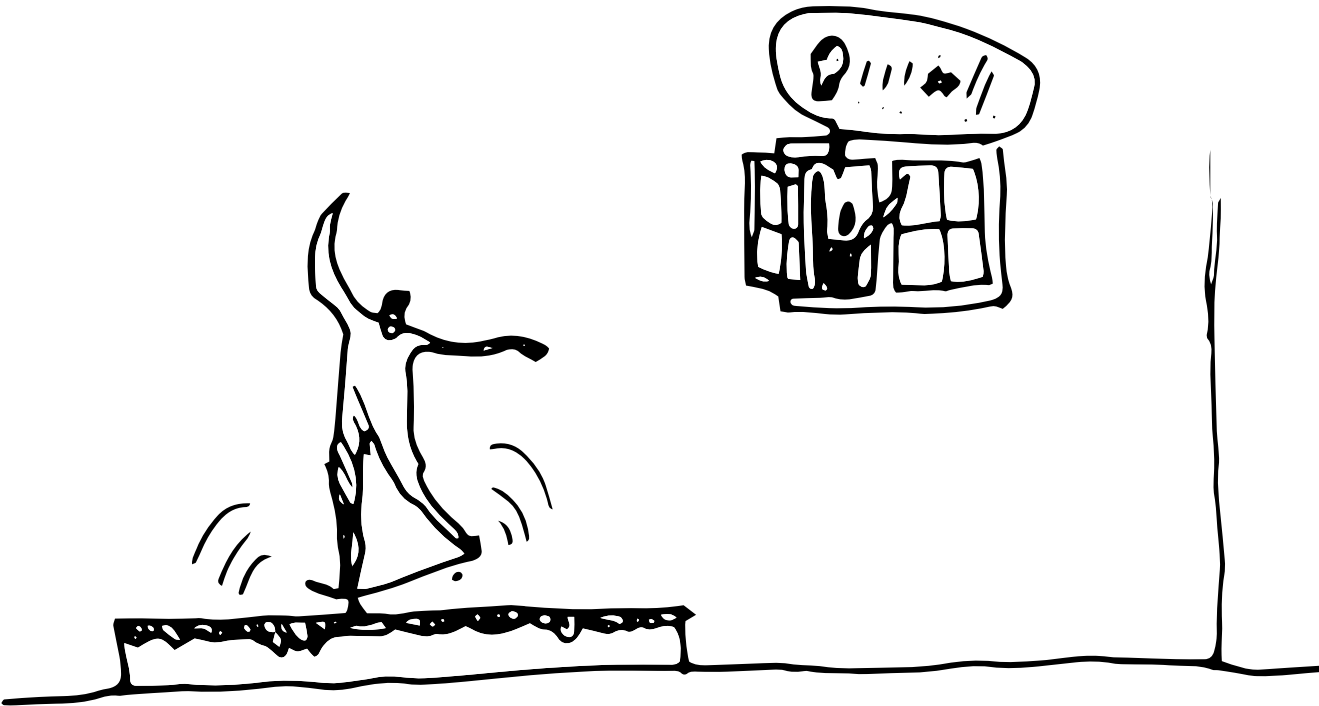
Edén<sup>1</sup> explains that the use of negative design always is an unfortunate situation where creative and active individuals (most of them young) are being told that they are not allowed to use public space in other ways than what is considered appropriate, simply because they want to be active and skate. Further he asserts that this occurs even though skateboarders seldom have any intentions of causing trouble or destruction and that most of these issues can be addressed with better designs and by being aware of what locations you make skate-able.

Sterner<sup>2</sup> elaborates on the negative message sent by skate stoppers, "it is frustrating when you see something new that is perfect to skate and within a week or so it is skate stopped. I think it creates a very negative charge; it is a failure."

1 interview, Malmö 2016.11.17  
2 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27



One of thousands of skate proofed edges in central London.



Conflict.



According to Fabian Narin<sup>1</sup> these ledges were destroyed with a sledgehammer by a nearby resident that tired of the sound from skaters .The skaters countered by putting a steel ledge over the cracks and were ultimately defeated by the city which put the wooden top on. Esperantoplatsen, Gothenburg.

1 Telephone conversation 2017.01.15



Close-up of the outcome.

## Reflections and ideas

### Skaters use the city for its texture and see space differently than non-skaters

As both theory and interviews have shown urban skateboarders appropriate spaces in the city and re-interpret the inscribed semantics of e.g. urban furniture such as benches and hand rails. When planning for urban skateboarding it is important to understand that this is a big part of what skateboarding is. Hence, overly directive design interventions such as skate ramps should be avoided at urban skate spots. The skate function should instead be merged with other functions such as planters or seating since this invites to a creative interaction where the skater feel like he/she has reinterpreted that object.

### Apply the skater lens

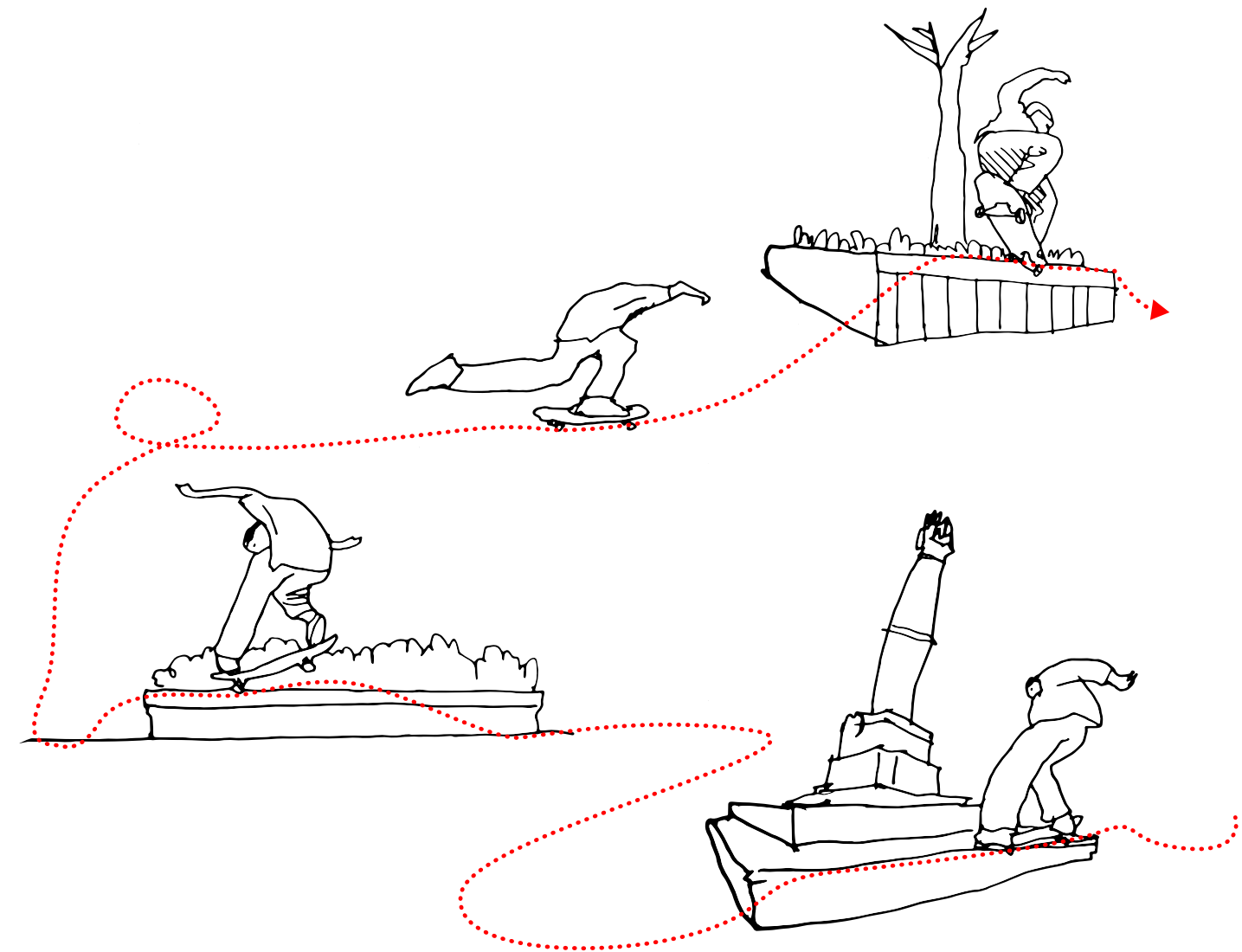
As skaters see the potentials of space differently it makes sense to try and understand skate-able space through this lens, letting skater draw mind maps of their cities could serve as a potential tool to better understand how they perceive skateboarding in a certain city. Another idea is to arrange urban walks where skaters and planners discuss the skaters image and use of the city as well as what locations could be suitable for skateboarding.

### Urban skateboarding is an adventure.

The interviewees tend to like skateboarding between skate spots as much as skating the actual spots. The in-between-places and connectivity between skate-able places are therefore important factors to creating good conditions for urban skateboarding.

### Conflict be handled through planning and design

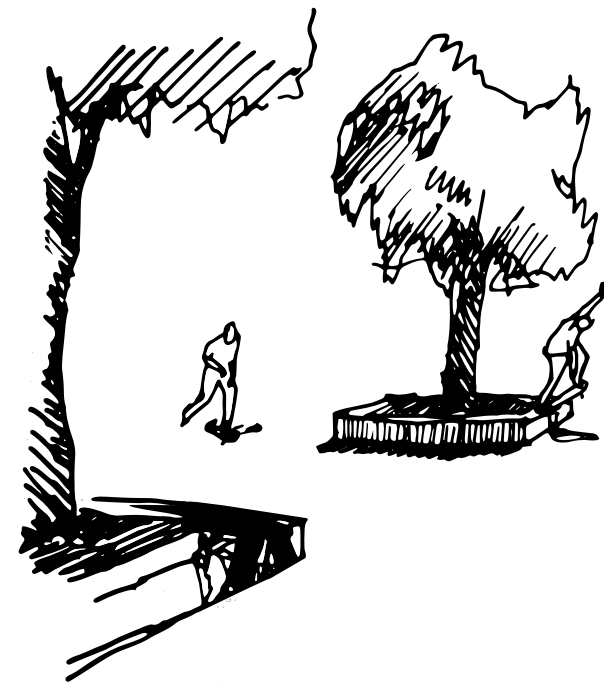
Because skaters see and use space differently they can often end up in conflict with non-skaters even though they do not mean to cause problems. Most of these issues such as noise and damage can be addressed by aware design solutions such as choice of materials and where skate-able objects are located.



**Idea:** Urban skateboarding is an adventure and a creative engagement with the physical environment, its better to have multiple smaller and varied skate spots that are connected than one big skate spot/skatepark.

## Integrated designs

*This chapter shows what the interviewees argue to be the key characteristics of urban skate-able space. Further, it shows examples of three urban skate spots that was observed and examples of skateparks that have been integrated into the city or merged with other functions.*





What are the key characteristics of an urban skate spot?

There are no rules to what a skate spot looks like or what it can be, as it is part of urban skateboarding to reinterpret places and introduce new uses to spaces and objects. However, if you look towards what characterizes most popular urban skate spots, there seem to be some common denominators. Through the interviews a number of themes could be identified, some of which are so closely linked that they formed one theme together.

Location & accessibility

“Location, location is everything”, is the first thing Enevoldsen<sup>1</sup> mentions when it comes to pin pointing what characterizes a popular urban skate spot. He is not alone, almost everyone brings up location as a very important factor. Meurle<sup>2</sup> explains that many of the most popular skate spots have become popular largely due to where they are located and not only because what they are like. Sterner<sup>3</sup> explains that this has to do with level of spontaneity and that you have to plan to go to a far off spot. Gough<sup>4</sup> explains that location becomes crucial for not only central spots that can become meeting points, but is also important for calmer spots, “location is key”.

Further, the ideal spot should be easy to access. According to Thoem<sup>5</sup> a spot that is only accessible by car will not generate the same mix of people and experiences as a more accessible spot. This is also underlined by Edén<sup>6</sup> who points out the importance of public transportation, bicycle paths and infrastructure to provide easy access to skate spots.

1 Interview, email 2016.11.30  
2 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27  
3 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27  
4 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27  
5 Interview, email 2017.01.24  
6 Interview, Malmö 2016.11.17

Robust materials & smooth surfaces - rideability

This is a basic requirement for skateboarding that all interviewees agree on. Edges and objects should be of robust materials since skaters physically interact with the built environment, as Gough<sup>7</sup> states: “the physical circumstances have to fit skateboarding”. Further, ground materials have to be smooth and solid to ensure rideability.

Minimalism, size & openness

Minimalism, size and openness are aspects the majority of the interviewees mentioned. To Karlsson<sup>8</sup> (and most of the others) you do not need a lot for a skate spot to be good and explains that the size and openness of the space, are some of the most important characteristics, “you don’t really need anything at all other than that, not even a kerb”. Crawford<sup>9</sup> is also a big fan of simplicity: “I like simple space; squared and linear, minimalistic; a few benches and wide open space”.

Connectivity between spots

Many interviewees prefer skating cities rather than spots and would like to see concepts where spots are lined up or spread out. Meurle<sup>10</sup> thinks the best thing is when you can go between spot and spot in a group together during one session. Karlsson<sup>11</sup> is on the same note and thinks that places where you can skate from spot to spot generates far more “skate joy” than one isolated larger skate spot.

7 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27  
8 Interview, Stockholm 2016.10.24  
9 Interview, Stockholm 2016.10.20  
10 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27  
11 Interview, Stockholm 2016.10.24



Plaza dels Angels, Barcelona. The square outside the contemporary museum of art (MACBA) is characterized by a vast and minimalistic black granite plaza. Its surface, benches, ramps and stairs has made this site something like a European Mecca for skateboarding.



Centrally located in Barcelonas Raval district the site is easy to get to and has a diverse flow of people passing through and using the space. Closeness to restaurants, shops and other amenities makes MACBA a place that is easy to dwell at for longer periods of time.



A long granite ledge/bench serves as both seating and as a skate-able object; simple and subtle.



Perceived authenticity

A recurring theme that came up during the interviews was what made certain spots feel “real” and others fake. For instance, Gough<sup>1</sup> states that most of the best places for skateboarding were intended for other uses and brings up Justin Herman plaza in San Francisco (better known as Embarcadero) as an example. He explains that designer, Lawrence Halprin, introduced risk in his design like out in the natural landscape (such as edges without railings) and like in nature people were forced to handle that risk. The results was one of the most legendary skate spots in the history of skateboarding due to what Gough calls “a happy accident for skateboarding”.

The importance of authenticity is underlined by Enevoldsen<sup>2</sup> who asserts that when designing an urban space where skate is integrated, the skater needs to perceive the space as found and not deliberately designed for skating. Here, he explains that the background story of the space is an important factor: “it needs to be a place that a skater believes he has found himself if he doesn’t know the background of the place”.

Ultimately, Enevoldsen<sup>3</sup> thinks that it is difficult but possible to design new urban skate spots that feel authentic and concludes that in order to make a space feel ‘real’, you have to stick within the limits of the best found skate spots. If you go outside these boundaries he asserts that the area will seem ‘fake’ or be perceived as a skatepark.

1

Interview, Gothenburg

2016.10.27

2

Interview, email

2016.11.30

3

Interview, email

2016.11.30

Reinterpretability - subtle multi-functionality

The more creativity a skate spot generates with the skater the better. To Edén<sup>1</sup> this comes down to programming: “you need to feel you are there by your own choice and not programmed to be there”. He explains that if you place out too obvious skate ramps at a found plaza it would take away the whole point, because you start to think what you should do, not what you can do. He explains that this takes away the right of the skaters to reinterpret the space and instead direct them, saying you can skate over here. A key factor for this reinterpretability seems to be multifunction of objects and spaces. Regarding multifunction Enevoldsen<sup>2</sup> explains that “true” multi-functionality requires a subtle design approach and that objects and areas should not have only one or two specific purposes, but should open for multiple possibilities.

Unique design characteristics

Many of the most popular skate spots tend to have design characteristics that give these places their own identity, many point to character as very important aspect of what makes a good skate spot. For instance Edén<sup>3</sup> explains that character can make you feel a sense of ownership and belonging to a place and that it can make a spot famous for its looks, attracting skaters from other places.

Challenge

Many interviewees think a good spot should offer challenge, if it gets too easy you get bored, as Thoem<sup>4</sup> states: “the place must be challenging to engage riders of all abilities”. Others think challenge is what makes street skating fun, such as Meurle<sup>5</sup>: “I think it is part of skating street that circumstances aren’t perfect”.

1

interview, Malmö

2016.11.17

2

Interview, email

2016.11.30

3

interview, Malmö

2016.11.17

4

Interview, email

2017.01.24

5

Interview, Gothenburg

2016.10.27



The Southbank Undercroft, London. The brutalist architecture of the Southbank Centre, which the Undercroft is part of, gives the skate spot a unique identity and authentic feel.



A zoomed out view over the Southbank Centre (with the Undercroft just behind the ferries) show its setting by the Themes and the inner city context of the site.



Hungerford bridge, London. The yet to be built urban skate spot that was to replace the Southbank Undercroft after a re-development was designed to be perceived as a found space that just happened to be good for skating (Borden 2016). See page 69 for more details. Photo courtesy of SNE architects ©

Calm

Almost all interviewees pointed out calmness as key characteristic and most of them seem to find more focus in calm places. Karlsson<sup>1</sup> has thought a lot about calmness over the years and experiences that he progresses better under calm conditions: “calmness is something that makes you want to stay at a spot for a longer period of time”. Some, like Sterner<sup>2</sup>, think that this can be especially important for beginners that easily get pushed away by more experienced and confident skaters at busy skate spots.

Unpredictability & Urban life

Contradictory to calmness many describe the possibility for the unexpected to occur as an important parameter of what makes a good spot. Further, Enevoldsen<sup>3</sup> explains that this is more likely to happen in an inner-city context: “it’s there skaters meet ‘the others’ and ‘the others’ meet the skaters”. This unpredictability is however, as Gough<sup>4</sup> concludes, difficult to design for.

Context - Atmosphere & Setting

Some spots have a certain atmosphere to them; framed by lush surroundings, tall buildings or set with a nice view. Context, setting and surrounding landscape are factors that seem important to the interviewees.

This is exemplified by Crawford<sup>5</sup> who like many other skaters confesses that he has always been a bit of a romantic: “I like skating in the city, where there are tall buildings and city lights”. Edén<sup>6</sup> on the other hand is fond of greenery and particularly enjoys skateboarding in lush places.

Attractions & amenities

Many bring up the importance of different attractions that appeal to a wide range groups in order to bring a diversity people to a place over different times. Here, Lindgren<sup>7</sup> highlights that closeness to cheap coffee places and to “other nice things” are important to the experience. Further, Thoem<sup>8</sup> states that a place that has no access to simple amenities such as food and water is “slightly less ideal” as an urban skate spot.

Variation & Dynamics

Dynamics and variation are what makes a spot interesting, as Özdoğan<sup>9</sup> says: “the best thing is if there are edges in different heights and different types of ride-able objects – everything from benches to stairs”. Karlsson<sup>10</sup> explains that this can also be in terms of visual aesthetics and temporal dynamics such as he experiences with the trees at the Stockholm skate spot, Observatorielunden: “its willow trees are trimmed every spring and by the end of summer the branches almost touch the kerb”.

1	Interview, Stockholm	2016.10.24
2	Interview, Gothenburg	2016.10.27
3	Interview, email	2016.11.30
4	Interview, Gothenburg	2016.10.27

5	Interview, Stockholm	2016.10.20
6	interview, Malmö	2016.11.17
7	Interview, email	2017.01.17
8	Interview, email	2017.01.24
9	Interview, Uppsala	2016.10.20
10	Interview, Stockholm	2016.10.24



**Example:** Observatorielunden, “Obsan”, Stockholm. This Stockholm skate spot is a good example of how minimalism and variation can both are present in a skate spot. The skate-able surface is made up by a large and shallow pond that is drained during spring and autumn when its smooth concrete floor and edges are skated. This space is simple and vast - minimalistic. Its surroundings however are lush, dynamic and picturesque, made up by greenery and characteristic buildings such as the city library (as seen in the photos). Fast growing willow trees frame the pond and provide a temporal variation over the seasons. The left picture is taken in spring when the trees are cut and the right photo in autumn when the branches have grown.



Further, “Obsan” is a good example of how a place can be and unpredictable, bustling and calm at the same time. While located very central in Stockholm and placed next to a busy road, the frame of willow trees create a perceived calm inside the pond. Although the surrounding area is crowded with pedestrians and people just resting on the lawns, few non-skaters venture onto the skate-able surface. This taken together with the vast size of the place makes it easy to find your own corner while there are still many people around. At the same time there are good possibilities for the more front-stage-oriented skater to be seen by both skaters and other spectators.

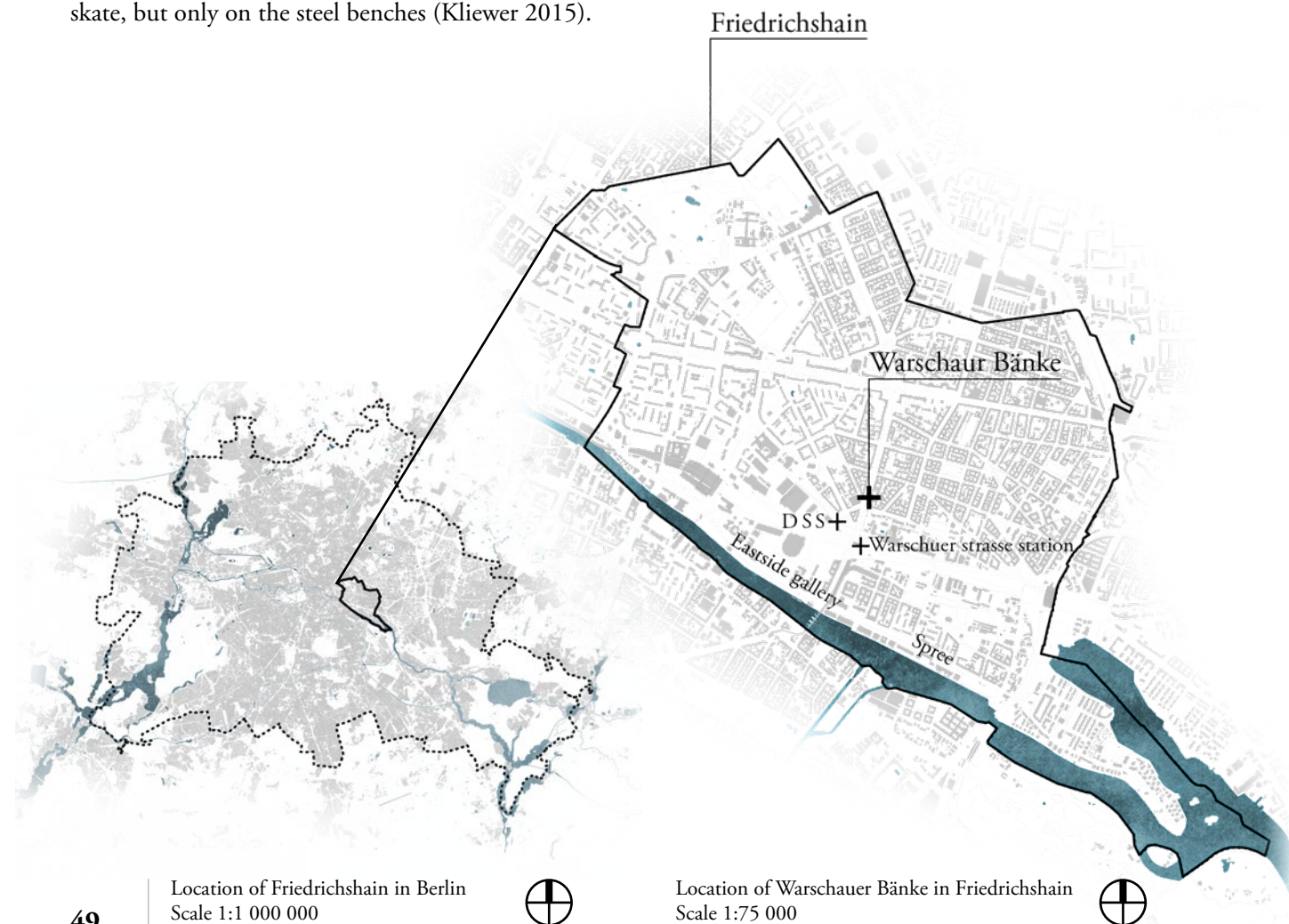


## Site observation: Warschauer Bänke, Berlin

### Background

The “Warschaur Bänke spot” is named by local skaters after its skate-able benches on a 500 square meter granite plaza, located on a stretch between the two lanes of Warshaur straÙe in the Friedrichshain area of Berlin. Initially skaters would get ticketed by police for skating the plazas wooden benches but after local skaters illicitly put home made steel slabs on top of the benches, the problem went away. The police that would ticket the skaters thought that the initiative came from the city and allowed skaters to skate, but only on the steel benches (Kliewer 2015).

Eventually the spot gained worldwide recognition through skate videos, attracting skaters from all over the world to do endless lines on the benches and over the small gaps behind these. Locals even arranged a competition at their beloved spot called “Battle at the Bänke”, celebrating its near perfect conditions for street skating (Kliewer 2015).





My observations

I visited this site 2016-07-16 and stayed on site for around four hours.

First of all this plaza is located in a bustling area in close vicinity to shops, bars and other facilities which makes it easy to go eat and come back or go for drinks after a session.

Further, the site is accessible and easy to reach by most means of transportation, since the Warschauer Straße station is located close by. A few hundred meters from this plaza there is also a skatepark, nicknamed DSS (Dog Shit Spot), and a DIY area which provides a variation of different skate-able spaces to skate between without having to hop on the metro or travel long distances.

Although this is a popular spot that can sometimes get crowded there is a calm to this spot which is created by the rows of lush trees on each side of the plaza; shielding the space from the busy surroundings. Occasionally pedestrians or bicyclists pass through the plaza since it is an extension of a foot path, creating a space of negotiation between the skaters and the people passing by.

To me, what essentially makes this spot genius is its simplicity; a simple granite surface with a smooth yet course texture combined with two rows of steel ledges. Behind each bench there are patches of dirt, possibly designed to give space for vegetation. These function as gaps for skaters to do tricks over, hence this place allows for long combination lines including gap, ledge and flat-ground tricks.

Analysis

Based on my observations the key characteristics of Warschaur Bänke as an urban skate spot are:

- **Minimalism;** Simple and subtle design.
- **Repetition of design elements;** Aligned benches and gaps allow for long lines.
- **Calm;** A perceived calm is created by rows of lush trees and hedges, shielding of the busy roads.
- **Location;** The site is central and close to amenities and attractions.
- **Accessibility;** the site is easy to access by multiple modes of transport.
- **Setting;** lush and vibrant inner city context.
- **Adventure - connectivity;** closeness to other skate spots.
- **Robust materials;** granite and steel.



Berlin - Warschauer Bänke. A calm and lush skate-oasis in the middle stretch between two roads. A simple granite surface with two rows of steel ledges, genius in its simplicity.



Skater doing a trick on one of the ledges.



Steel ledges with grass/dirt gaps behind.



# Site observation: Israels plads, Copenhagen

## Background

Israels plads is an urban square close to Nørreport in central Copenhagen. The site was redesigned after Copenhagen city decided to renew the old Israels plads that previously had been used for parking and markets. The design was made by a team consisting of COBE, Sweco, NIRAS and Morten Stræde after winning a competition (Sweco 2017).

Ideas behind the design was to let the adjacent H.C. Ørsted's Park wander into the square from one side meeting the bustling life at the food courts, Torvhallarna, on the other. Built on top of a parking garage, the surface of the square is follows a “magic carpet” design theme rising slightly over the adjacent ground. Two “wings” folded up in two of the squares corners create terraced seating areas that also function as viewing points. Across this surface oval shapes of vegetation and activity areas (one of them a small skate bowl) form “cut-outs” in the granite surface (Landezine 2015).

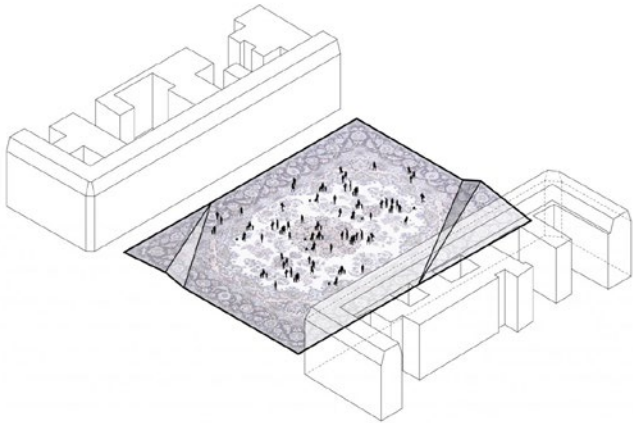


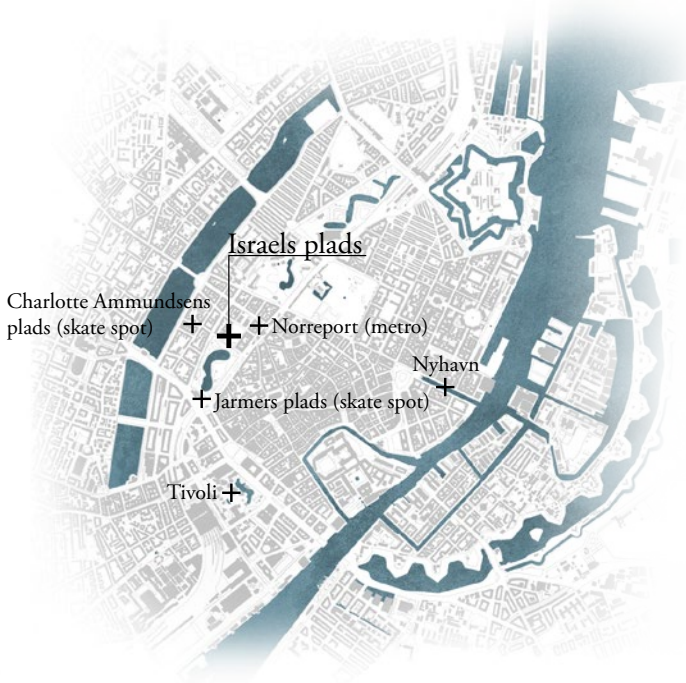
Diagram illustrating the magic carpet concept behind the design with two wings folding up at opposite corners of the square.

Photo courtesy of COBE architects ©. Permission given by: Line Wej Herdel.

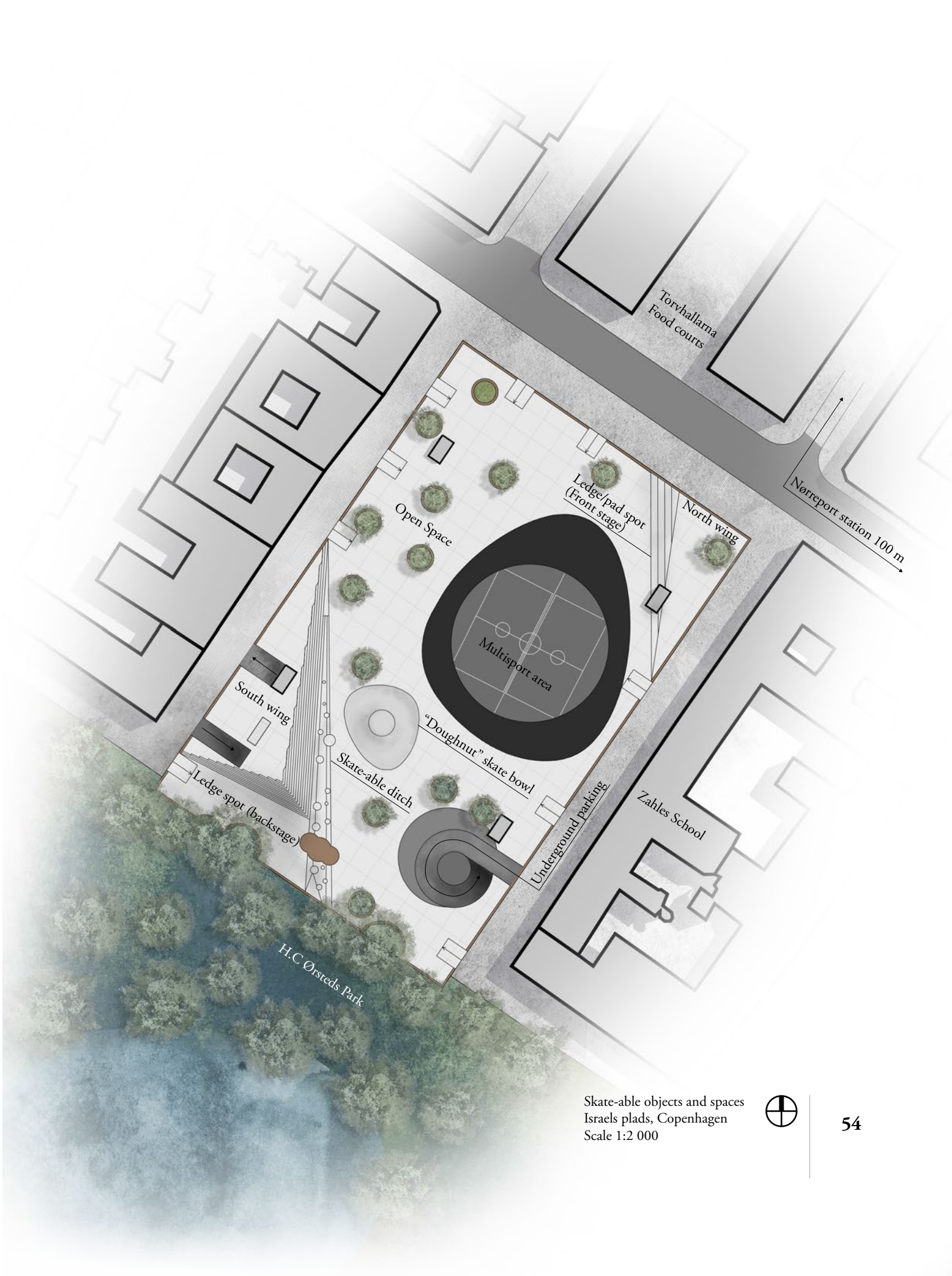
One of the many groups that thrive in this urban place are skaters, pointed out as one of the best spots in Copenhagen by world known professional skateboarder Eric Koston (Gush 2016).

Copenhagen resident James Thoen<sup>1</sup> places Israels plads as his favourite skate spot worldwide since it is ride-able, accessible, challenging, entertaining and because of its mix of smaller spots: “there are ledges and a little transition park”. He also points to the temporal aspect of the square as a factor as some elements of the square are only skate-able at a certain time of year.

1 Interview, email 2017.01.24



Map over Israels plads location in Copenhagen's inner city. Scale 1:100 000



Skate-able objects and spaces Israels plads, Copenhagen Scale 1:2 000







Overview of Israels plads, Copenhagen. Photo: Courtesy of COBE architects ©. Permission given by: Line Wej Herdel.



Skateboarder skates for the sunbathers at bottom step of the terraced south wing closest to H.C. Ørsted's Park.



55 The north wing; when sunny, these steps are used for seating.  
Photo courtesy of COBE architects ©.  
Permission given by: Line Wej Herdel.



The same steps during cloudy weather and early in the day, when they are often used for skating.



Second angle of the skate-able steps at the south wing.



A calm area is created between the south wing and H.C. Ørsted's Park.



A small doughnut shaped skate bowl gives the plaza different skate-able spaces that suit both more advanced skaters and beginners.

### My observations

I visited Israels plads on a sunny Wednesday in September (2016.09.21). After having spent five hours at the square I observed different waves of user groups taking over the space at different times of the day. During recess hundreds of children from the adjacent Zahle's school take over the whole square which then turns into a giant school yard. After working hours the sun draws massive crowds of sun seekers to hang out at the terraced "wings" and the rubber asphalt surface surrounding the multi-sport area in the centre of the square.

In between these waves the occasional pedestrian and tourist pass through the centre of the square while the wings become used by small groups of skaters, helping to activate the space in between the waves of people.

The vast open space of the square is covered by smooth yet textured granite slabs which suits skateboarding. Most of the skaters however are attracted to the two wings and the smaller concrete bowl. These three spaces offers a variety of skate challenges within the boundaries of the square.

The north wing closest to Torvhallarna has wide steps that allows for lines going up and down these steps while they simultaneously function as ledges or manual pads. Further this wing opens up towards the square as a stage which exposes the skater to a potentially large crowd of people, it is a place for people that do not mind being seen while they skate.

The south wing on the other hand faces H.C. Ørsted's Park and has a different atmosphere, here its height creates a secluded room between itself and the park. This invokes a feeling of calm more suitable for skaters that might not feel comfortable with too much public display, here there is calm but still people around. Due to the steps of this terrace being narrower this spot offers less skate-able possibilities, functioning as a ledge spot.

The small dedicated skate bowl in the middle of the square offers variation to the other two ledge based spots. Designed as what resembles a doughnut from above it offers a quite unique challenge; it is unlike most skate bowls. With a mellow radius of the transition, "the doughnut" is suitable for beginners but also offers challenge for the more experienced skater. Older skaters skate this spot alongside younger children on bikes, kickbikes and skateboards. Further, the equally popular skate spots, Jarmers plads (see page 88) and Charlotte Ammundsens plads (see page 74) are located within a two minute journey by skateboard making it possible to travel quickly between spots.

### Analysis

Based on my observations the key characteristics Israels plads as an urban skate-able place are:

- **Location;** central in town and adjacent to food courts, shops and H.C. Ørsted's Park.
- **Setting;** The square is pleasantly framed by old buildings, the lush park and bustling food courts.
- **Accessibility;** Bike lanes and the metro make the site easy to access from most parts of the city.
- **Adventure - connectivity;** closeness to other skate spots.
- **Robust materials and rideability;** Granite floor and ledges and the bowl in concrete.
- **Variability;** different types of skate-able spaces suiting a variety of preferences such as exposed and enclosed environments.
- **Unpredictability;** The many user groups and people generate unexpected events to take place.
- **Vastness;** The size of the square and its open character.
- **Minimalism;** Aside from the skate bowl the skate-able function is created through the terracing of the wings, simple and subtle.
- **Challenge;** The skate-able environments offer challenge for beginners and advanced skaters.



# Site observation: Place de la République, Paris

## Background

Place de la République is an urban square in the intersection between the 3rd, 10th and 11th arrondissement in Paris. This unique location had previously to its redevelopment not lived up to the standards expected from a contemporary urban space, for instance it lacked functioning pedestrian walkways and was essentially a giant congested roundabout (Archdaily 2011).

In 2013 Place de la République had been redeveloped to fit current and future needs after a redesign led by TVK Architectes Urbanistes (Landezine 2014). According to an interview with Pierre-Alain Trévelo, partner of TVK, made by Stephane Kirkland (2014) one of the core concepts of their design was to create a an urban space that could be re-programmed to fit future needs ranging up to fifty years ahead in time. When doing so the team tried hard not use the conventional approach of dedicating spaces for each specific use, such as a designing a dedicated skatepark for the skaters (Kirkland 2014).

“We expected to see skateboarding and we asked around to try to get a sense of how the skateboarding community might react, but we did not specifically design anything for skateboarding. Our principle was simply to not preclude activities. We worked hard to achieve a design that would not go against any specific type of use.”

- Pierre-Alain Trévelo (Kirkland 2014)

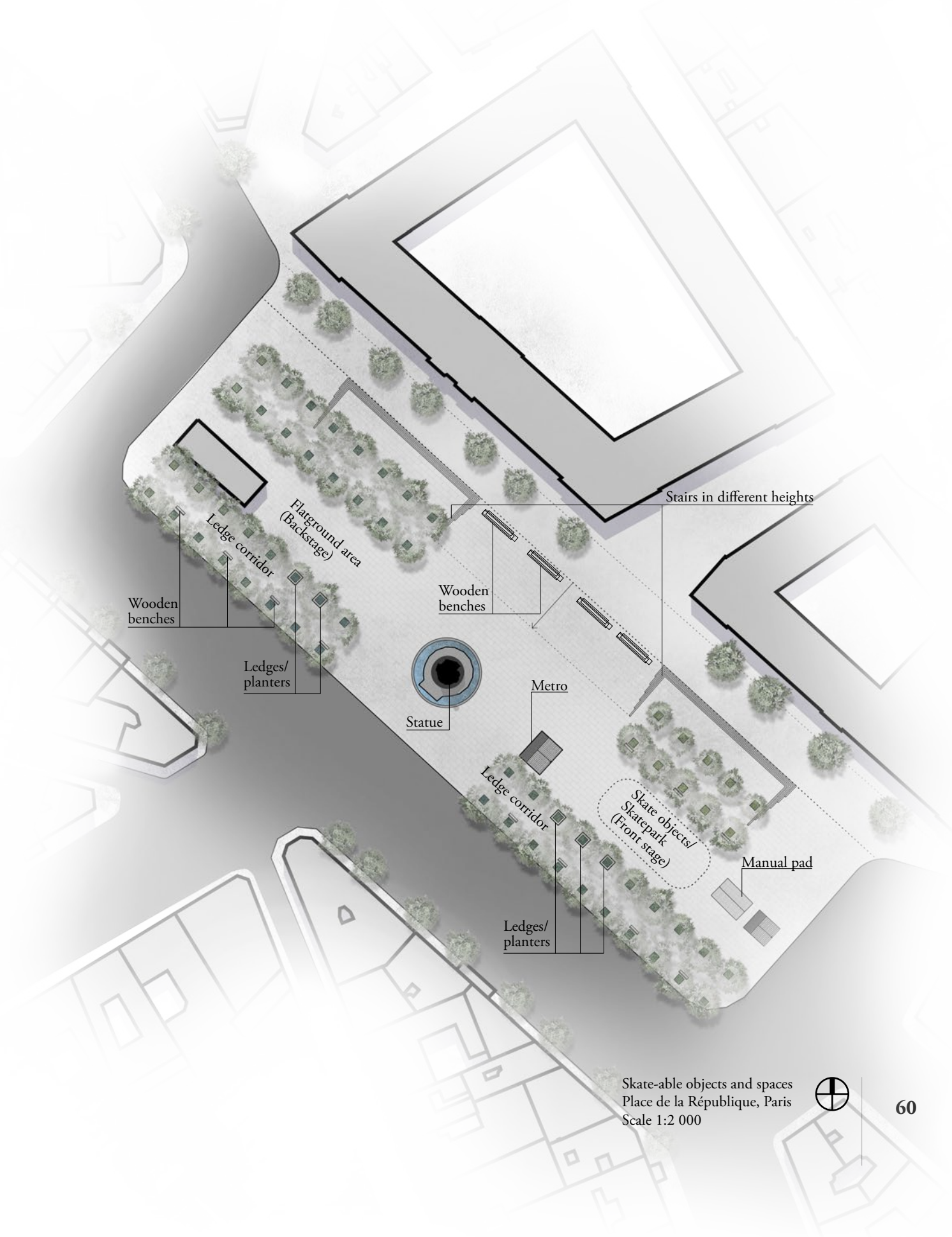
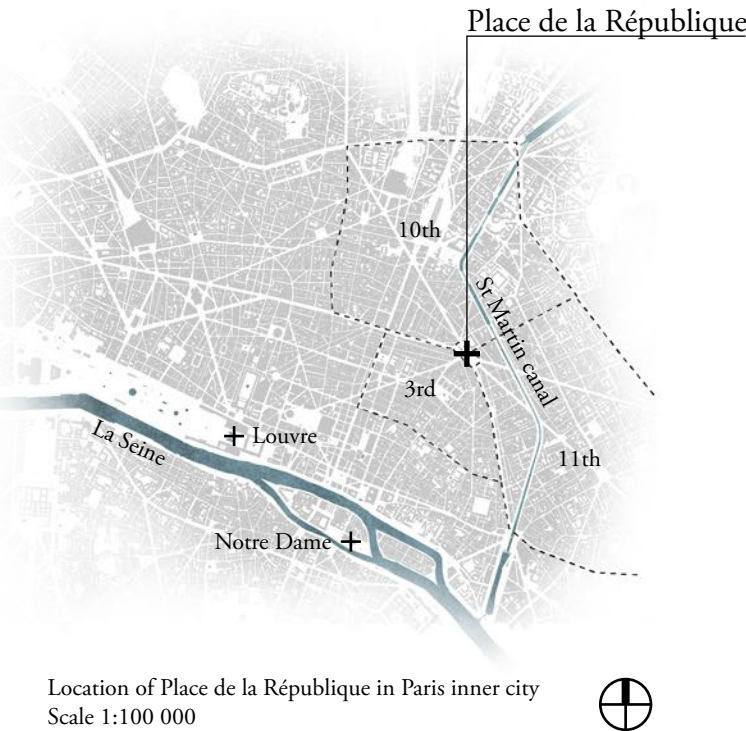
This concept of multifunctionality and desire to suggest rather than direct led to Place de la République ultimately being classed as a shared space and becoming a “unique kind of urban space for Paris” (Kirkland 2014).

The new Place de la République was welcomed by the Parisian skate community with open arms and according to French skater Joseph Biais (2014) the spot “set up a new deal” for the local scene.

“Looking at République, we can see that for once the city council really tried to do something for skateboarders, to integrate them to the street by not putting skate- stoppers on the ledges...”

- Joseph Biais (Biais 2014)

Its ideal location close to shops and the Saint Martin canal, together with its function as a node for public transportation has led to the skate community using it as the natural meet up point before heading out on skate missions. Biais explains that there is always bound to be people skating at République and that the vastness of the space makes skating possible even though the place gets crowded with kids and other people. While being a place that has everything a street skater can wish for, Biais concludes that République has become a meeting point for all types of groups and not just skaters (Biais 2014).







All roads lead to Place de la République. Photo: Courtesy of TVK Architectes Urbanistes©, permission given by: Océane Ragoucy.



The famous ledges of République; multifunction in terms of being the edge of the planter box, seating and a skateboard obstacle.



The south east part of Place de la République, where subtle skate ramps have been placed out to blend in with the material palette of plaza.



The North west part of the plaza is less directive and has plenty of space for beginners to practice.



Three planters in a row create perfect conditions for ledge based lines.



Unexpected contact.



### My observations

I visited Place de la République in the middle of November on an overcast Saturday (2016.11.12), the air was cold and damp. To my surprise I could count somewhere between 35-40 skaters defying the weather, although most of them were teenage boys there were also kids, girls and older people skating in different parts of the huge plaza. Most of the skaters were gathered around a set of skate objects that, contradictory to the non-directing design concept, had been placed out on one part of the square. Although these had a subtle design and interesting shapes they made this part of the plaza feel almost like a skatepark.

In other parts of the plaza smaller groups of skaters mixed in with the “other people” that used the wide open for a range of other activities such as football, running, dancing and demonstrating. Many of the skaters using the areas outside the dedicated part were beginners using the smooth concrete floor to practice basic tricks. These smaller areas also provide different skate-able objects such as stairs, wooden benches and ledges. Especially popular were a set of raised tree planters, that apart from being planters also function for seating and skating. Placed out with an even distance they are perfectly fit for ledge based lines.

Regarding location, the square is ideally placed in the city and is accessible from five metro lines, bus lines, by bike, foot and car. It is in all terms a social and infrastructural node of Paris which gives the place the setting of an inner city context. Despite the busy traffic flowing past one side of the square, two rows of trees create a perceived calm. Lastly, the vastness of the open space allows crowds of people to navigate through the square without bumping into each other.

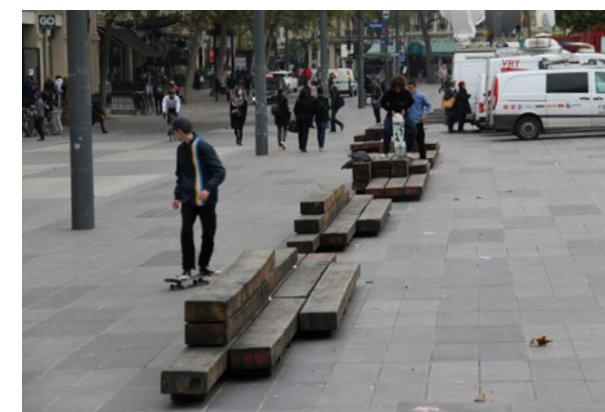
### Analysis

Based on my observations the key characteristics Place de la République as an urban skate spot are:

- **Location;** the site is centrally located in the city near to shops, bars, restaurants and so on.
- **Accessibility;** being a public transportation node in the city, the site is very accessible.
- **Setting;** The lush trees, the people, the architecture and traffic create an inner city setting.
- **Subtle multifunctionality;** There are no paths at the square so the flow of movement is not directed and elements such as tree planters have multiple functions.
- **Minimalism;** simple and held-together design.
- **Vastness;** The vast space leaves room to manoeuvre and to observe your surroundings.
- **Unpredictability;** The diversity of users and flows create opportunity for the unexpected to occur.
- **Variation;** due to the different “rooms” and obstacles.
- **Character;** The statue, the trees and design give the site an unmistakable character.
- **Robust materials;** Concrete slabs.
- **Authenticity;** Apart from the collection of skate objects, the site feels like a found place.



Pedestrians stopping by to enjoy the performance of the skaters.



Wooden benches are easily damaged by skateboarding but in this case they function as creative skate object.



Skaters travel between the many smaller rooms at the plaza.



## Integrated skateparks

### Urban skateparks

Another way to integrate skateboarding into public place is to let skateparks take on the characteristics of squares and other shared public places; such as the case of Paine's Park in Philadelphia (Owens 2014). These places, such as the case with Kristianstad skate plaza are however, according to Fabian Narin<sup>1</sup>, designed specifically for skateboard in concert with local skate communities.

In Paris, the skatepark at Rue Léon Cladel is something like an integrated dedicated skatepark, located on a closed of street between two blocks in a financial district surrounded by banks and offices (Constructo 2017). However interesting the Léon Cladel concept might be it did not take long before complaints came in from office workers and neighbours and the city decided on putting opening times for when skateboarding was allowed, leading to skaters getting kicked out of the skatepark if they did not obey (Biais 2014).

Although all these concepts are not likely to be perceived as found places they are inviting other people and uses to engage with the environments than just the skaters and can therefore be seen as a merge between public space and dedicated skateparks.

### Combining skate with other facilities

Skateboarding has also been used as an incorporated part in other facilities an add on to an existing facility. A commonly used example of this (as seen in Borden 2015) is Rabalderparken where a sustainable storm-water management system has been tweaked to suit skateboarding; its canals as skate ditches and its reservoirs as bowls ensuring that the space is used in between the heavy rainfalls that the system is primarily designed to manage (SNE architects 2014). This can also be seem as a glance back to the origin of skateboarding when skaters would appropriate large scale water management facilities for its water like forms (Borden 2001, pp. 40-46).

1 Telephone conversation 2017.01.15



65

Rabalderparken, Roskilde.  
Skate elements are incorporated in a concrete swale/canal. Photo courtesy of SNE architects©, permission given by: Søren Nordal Enevoldsen.



Rabalderparken, Roskilde.  
Render of skate-able water reservoir. Image courtesy of SNE architects©, permission given by: Søren Nordal Enevoldsen.



Kristianstad skate plaza, blurring the boundary between urban space and skatepark. Photo: Pivotech©, permission given by: Fabian Narin.



Rue Léon Cladel, Paris. A dedicated skatepark in a truly urban context.



Green concrete highlights the skate area.

66

## Reflections and ideas

### What are then the key characteristics of an urban skate spot?

There seem to be many things that play in and that this matter is more complex than it might seem at first glance. As some of these characteristics are somewhat contradicting it becomes obvious that this is something that differs from site to site and that most popular skate spots only have a few of these characteristics/factors. Summing up the results from the interviews, the most important aspects are:

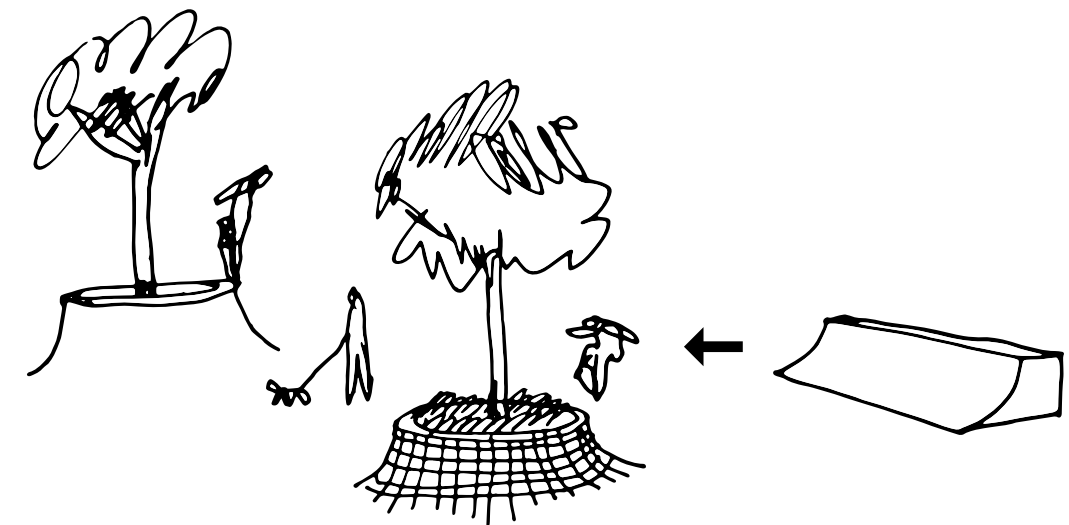
- Location & accessibility
- Robust materials & smooth surfaces - rideability
- Minimalism, size & openness
- Adventure - connectivity between spots
- Perceived authenticity
- Reinterpretability & subtle multifunctionality
- Unique design characteristics
- Challenge
- Calm
- Unpredictability & urban life
- Context - atmosphere & setting
- Attractions & amenities
- Variation & dynamics

Obviously some characteristics are more basic than others, such as robust materials and smooth surfaces since it is difficult to skate on e.g. grass or gravel even though all other characteristics may be there.

Further, all characteristics stated above are to some extent connected to all three of the observed sites, although there are variations in how they appear depending on site. Finally, I would argue that these characteristics can be seen as an approximation of factors that are important for an urban skate spot and not necessarily crucial for each individual place.

### Dedicated skateparks can be integrated with other functions

Skateparks does not have to be single-use facilities, as seen in this chapter dedicated skateparks can be combined with other functions, such as adding activity to stormwater management facilities in between the rains. This is something that should be made to a larger extent in order to make better use of space in cities.



**Idea:** A sketch showing how skate-able objects such as quarter-pipes can be baked into other functions to generate more inspiring and suggestive skate spots.

# Added Value

*This chapter explores the potential added values  
that urban skate spots can generate.*





# Benefits of skateboarding

As seen in *Skateboarding*, skating is a very social activity that connects people over different demographic backgrounds, but what other benefits come from skating?

## Public health

Skateboarding is a physically engaging activity which generates multiple benefits for the practitioner, ranging from stress relief to all over improved physical health (Becic 2014). Here, Gough<sup>1</sup> sees the potential health benefits for younger individuals that do not want to play e.g. football: “in the society we live in today skate can help to activate the youngsters that are pinned to their Ipads and computers”. As Edén<sup>2</sup> has experienced with Malmö’s skate spots and skateparks, the user-rates of those places are much higher than e.g. tennis courts and other sports facilities: “if you add the number of spent hours at skateparks and skate spots to public health calculations you will find that it is an extremely good investment to promote skate”.

1 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27  
2 interview, Malmö 2016.11.17



71 Skateboarding has multiple benefits for the practitioner.

## Philanthropy & Charity

Skateboard culture also tends to have a in built politics, a type of skateboard philanthropy where the skate community attempt to teach beginners the ethics of skateboarding in order to preserve values of skate culture as it is turning into a mainstream culture. This is something happening on both micro scale (such as passing on advice and equipment) and on macro scale through foundations. In fact there are various organizations working with skateboarding as a tool to aid disadvantaged and marginalized groups to a better life (O’Connor 2016).

One of the most recognized examples of this is the NGO (Non Governmental Organisation) “Skateistan” that helps disadvantaged children in Afghanistan, South Africa and Cambodia where 42% of all skaters are girls in the case of Afghanistan (Skateistan 2015). Meurle<sup>3</sup> thinks this says a lot about what skateboarding can be in a place with no pre-configured norms on skateboarding: “I think that project says a lot about skateboarding’s potential”.

3 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27



# The value of urban skate spots

Skateboarding in itself can, as we have seen, generate values such as physical and mental benefits for the practitioner, but what added value can the actual spots generate? After analysing the interviews multiple added values could be identified.

## Social values & integration

Edén<sup>1</sup> who works with urban skate-able space has seen how such places can generate ‘massive’ added value for cities, “urban places for skateboard functions as a fantastic social platforms that creates bonds across a wide range of demographics; gender, race, age, social background, religion and so on”. He continues to explain that skate is nothing you do in teams; it happens free on a place, if you are shy you can start at the edge and work your way in and when you gain more confidence or if you are more confident you can rush straight into it.

Furthermore, the interviewees agree on that skateboarding generates close friendships, as Boström<sup>2</sup> concludes, “skating has given me a lot of really good friends”. For people coming to new places skateboarding can also serve as a great method for integrating in a new society. Both Crawford<sup>3</sup> and Gough<sup>4</sup> has moved to Sweden from Britain and both mention skateboarding as the best way for them to make new friends and integrate into society. Here, these places help.

1 interview, Malmö 2016.11.17  
2 Interview, Stockholm 2016.11.16  
3 Interview, Stockholm 2016.10.20  
4 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27

## Activation and safety

Sterner<sup>5</sup> is one of many that point out that skateboard can bring people to a place and induce an aspect of safety and activity, “I believe that crime rates have even dropped in some areas due to this”. Edén<sup>6</sup> who knows a great deal about this explains that skate adds to the spectacle of the city and activates space that might otherwise be empty. That in turn adds to the safety aspect: “unused places can otherwise fall into decadency and become a place for drug dealers and crime”.

## Unexpected contact

One of the most common answers from the interviews was that these places make people that would not usually come in contact, meet. Sterner<sup>7</sup> says that urban skateboarding creates an interaction between skaters and non-skaters: “through just watching or other types of encounters, it makes people meet”. Boström<sup>8</sup> underlines this importance and explains that skate truly generates border-crossing meetings: “people who wouldn’t otherwise meet end up socializing”.

## Identity

Most famous skate spots have their “locals”, people that have connected with the place so much that they feel a sense of belonging and ownership. Özdoğan<sup>9</sup> explains this value, “for the local skaters and people of the city urban skate spots can generate a sort of identity forming aspect”.

5 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27  
6 interview, Malmö 2016.11.17  
7 Interview, Gothenburg 2016.10.27  
8 Interview, Stockholm 2016.11.16  
9 Interview, Uppsala 2016.10.20

Atmosphere, pulse and performativity

As we have seen skateboarders like to be a part of the urban pulse, but according to the interviewees they can also bring pulse, atmosphere and a performative dimension to urban places. Özdogan<sup>1</sup> has experienced that when people see skaters enjoying skating at a certain place, they think it is fun to watch: “skateboarding can generate a type of street art effect when performed in urban place”.

Places of meaning

According to Enevoldsen<sup>2</sup> one of skateboarding’s finest added values is that skating can contribute to creating more meaningful places, that are not solely based on consumption. Moreover, Edén<sup>3</sup> states that since urban skateboarding is based on appropriation a discussion of how public space can be used, often arise. This he means, creates more democratic places where citizens get to negotiate over how the space can be used: “They have to get along and realize that the place they are on is actually a shared space”.

A social arena for youth

Edén<sup>4</sup> explains that the social resource of a well function urban skate spot is like having an amazing youth centre free of charge and that works ten times better, since it happens out of free will and is run by the skaters themselves. He highlight that these places do not have opening times: “if you have a fight with your dad you can always go there, other places might be closed”. This is something that many have brought up as a positive thing, such as Özdogan<sup>5</sup> that remembers experiences he had as young: “urban plazas and skate spots can provide a relief from juvenile boredom”.

1 Interview, Uppsala 2016.10.20  
2 Interview, email 2016.11.30  
3 interview, Malmö 2016.11.17  
4 interview, Malmö 2016.11.17  
5 Interview, Uppsala 2016.10.20

Inviting other activities

Skateboarding can inspire and encourage other user groups to interact with public spaces. This is something Edén<sup>6</sup> has noticed about skate-adatpting Värnhemstorget in Malmö: “As an added value, other user groups started appropriating this place like parkour practitioners, roller-bladers and performance artists”.

Cost and space efficient places

One thing Boström<sup>7</sup> thinks is particularly important to underline is how much cities can save in terms of space and money by integrating skate functions in existing urban places, instead of building new places for skate. According to Edén<sup>8</sup> the costs of adapting urban places for skate is very low in relation to the normal budgets these places have for construction: “it’s cheap and comes more into choice of materials and such”. He goes on to explain that the feedback you get from successfully integrating skate into public places is huge: “you get places for events and activity by making very small adjustments. It’s an extremely cost effective method of designing for social sustainability”.

Tourism

The interviewees think that urban skate spots can become famous landmarks for the local people but can also bring people from other places, generating tourism. Özdogan<sup>9</sup> reflects what most interviews think: “if a spot gets famous it can generate a lot of tourism in the long time perspective”.

6 interview, Malmö 2016.11.17  
7 Interview, Stockholm 2016.11.16  
8 interview, Malmö 2016.11.17  
9 Interview, Uppsala 2016.10.20



Charlotte Ammundsens Plads, Copenhagen. Known by skaters as “White banks” for its characteristic white banks.



The white banks surround a multi-sport area for basketball, floorball and football. This space efficient method of overlapping activities seem to function well and increases the contact between different user groups at the space.



The white banks gives the site character and suggests rather than dictates behaviour. This leaves room for interpretation is equally popular by skaters and playing children.



# Civic engagement

An other added value that urban skate spots can generate is civic engagement as skaters and other people care about and defend the urban spaces they have developed a strong sense of belonging to.

## Preservation campaigns

There are multiple examples of urban skate spots that have been threatened by destruction or redevelopment, such as the legendary Lyon skate spot ‘Hotel de Ville’ and London spot, ‘Southbank’. In order to save these places from destruction and alternation skaters have started preservation campaigns in efforts to preserve these highly appreciated flukes of architecture (SHdV 2016; LLSB 2016). These campaigns are bottom up processes driven by local skaters and their advocates (Borden 2015).

## Long Live Southbank

The by far most comprehensive and successful campaign was the Long Live Southbank initiative that ultimately saved the legendary spot from being replaced by a redevelopment into becoming retail units by the land owner, Southbank Centre (LLSB 2016). The skaters refused to be relocated to a new skate-able space further downriver at Hungersford Bridge that had been subtly designed as found space to mimic the characteristics of the original site (Borden 2016). As Borden (2016) states some street skaters think that it goes against the whole point of street skating to deliberately design for street skating

as is rooted in appropriating space (p. 151). Even though there are multiple examples where this has been made with success (Borden 2001, pp. 152-154) the issue in this case was not the desire for a new and better place to skate, but to preserve a piece of important skateboard legacy (Wainwright 2013).

Just as Enevoldsen<sup>1</sup>, designer of the space at Hungerford bridge, has pointed out in *integrated designs* (p. 45) the background story of a spot is important. This is also underlined by Borden (2016) when he explains how the background story of the space at Hungerford Bridge could never come close to having the same social, cultural and historical value to skateboarding as the space of the Southbank Undercroft (p. 152-153).

The campaign showed that urban skate spots such as Southbank have a vast cultural and social value and in the end the initiative was championed by some of the most influential and famous people involved in skateboarding, defended through legal actions (LLSB 2016) and with around 150 000 people signing the petition against the redevelopment of the site (LLSB 2014). Ultimately the initiative succeeded after when former Mayor of London, Boris Johnson, took the side of the skaters and declared the site “the epicentre of UK skateboarding and is part of the cultural fabric of London” (Brown 2014).

Now, Long Live Southbank lives on and help other skate communities to preserve their own spots (LLSB 2016).



The Southbank Undercroft, London. The history of this urban skate spot is now protected for future generations through the ‘Long Live South Bank’ initiative.



Overview from north-east corner of the Undercroft.



Overview from south-west corner of the Undercroft.

1 Interview, email 2016.11.30



# Reflections and ideas

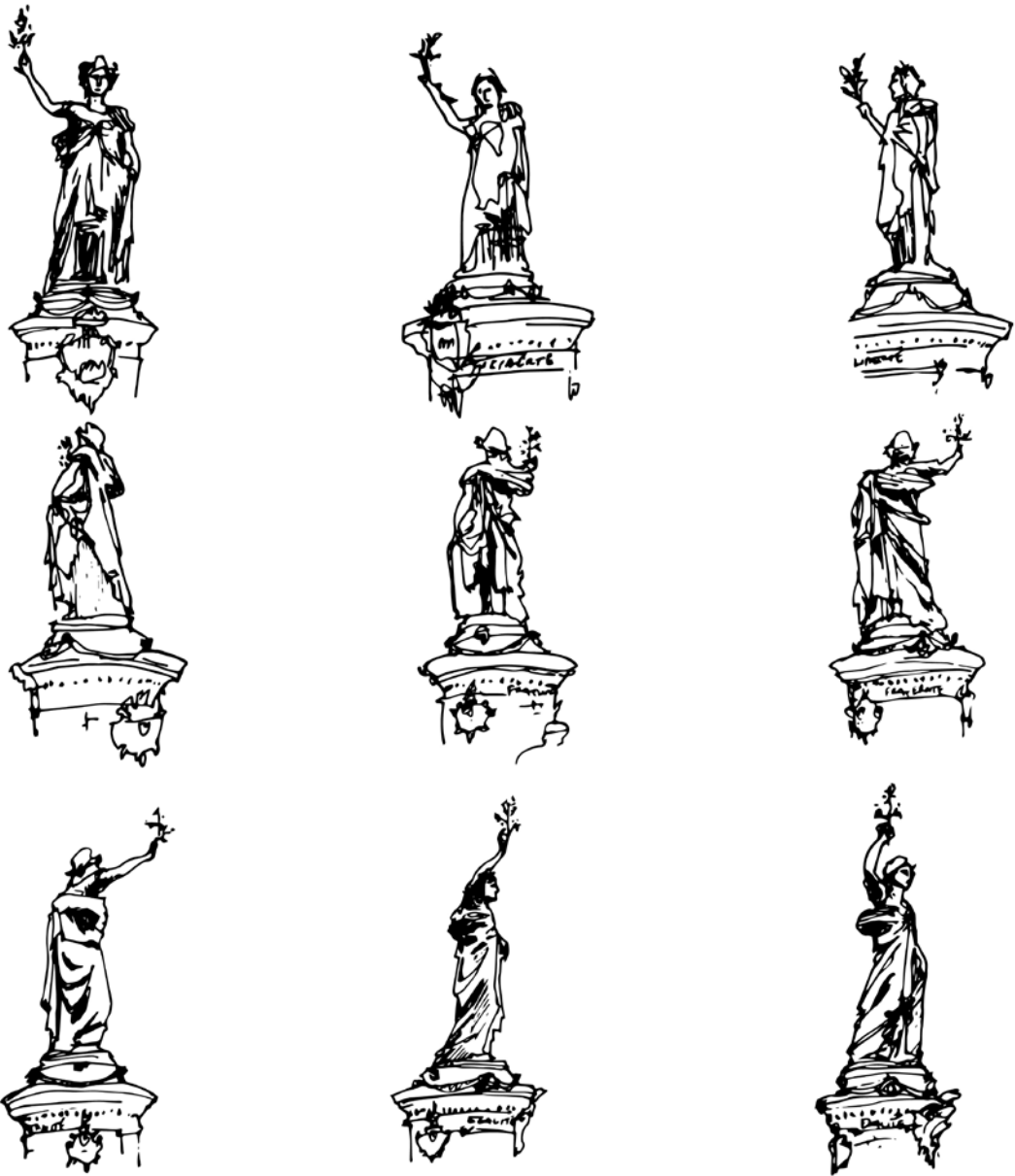
## Skateboarding is a healthy activity and holds great potential

Skateboarding alone is an activity with great potentials for increasing public health and is equally popular between men and women in places where there are no pre-configured norms concerning who can skate and what skateboarding is meant to look like and be.

## Urban skate spots can generate multiple added values

Cities have a lot to gain from preserving, creating or enhancing urban skate spots. According to the interviewees these places can generate multiple added value for skaters, non-skaters and cities and can certainly add to the overall quality of a city. Summing up from this chapter these values count up to at least thirteen themes that illustrate what urban skate spots can add to cities:

- Add to public health
- Become a type of safety net for outcasts (as seen on page 21)
- Generate unexpected contact
- Add social values and help integration
- Activate space and add a safety aspect to unsafe places
- Strengthen the city's identity
- Generate tourism
- Add atmosphere, pulse and performativity to public spaces
- Contribute to more meaningful places
- Become social arenas for youth
- Invite and inspire other active groups to engage with the urban environment
- Be cost and space efficient places
- Increase civic engagement



The statue at Place de la République.  
**Idea:** Since visual aesthetics is such a key element to skateboarding an idea could be to plan urban skate spots close to e.g. artwork or in front of a beautiful building. The more special a spot looks, the more unique filming or skating at that spot will be.

## Skate-friendly cities

*This chapters describes what the interviewees think important when planning for urban skateboarding and how three cities work towards integrating skateboarding into urban public space*



# How do we make skate-friendly cities?

As we have seen in the previous chapter skateboarding can generate multiple added value for cities, but what does it take for a city to become “skate-friendly”? The interviewees had many ideas of how cities should work with skateboarding in order to get the best possible results for all involved parties. During the interviews following themes came up.

## Listen to the skaters

Something all interviewees point out as the first and most important things cities can do for their skaters is to talk to them. Edén<sup>1</sup> underlines the importance of talking to as many skaters as possible and from the widest possible range of demographics: “try and find an age span and representation between ages and types of skating”. It is also important to consider other user groups when it comes to public space, as Gough says<sup>2</sup>: “all user groups should feel like they have been involved and a part of the decision-making”. Here, many interviewees stress the importance of establishing a partnership with the local skate foundation or encouraging the skaters to start a organisation of some sort if there is not one already.

## Consider all types of skate

Many interviewees also point out that it is important to consider all needs, not just the skaters that want skateparks or the ones that want urban spots. This is explained by Olsson<sup>3</sup>: “consider different groups, there are people that like skateparks and people that like street”.

1

interview, Malmö

2016.11.17

2

Interview, Gothenburg

2016.10.27

3

interview, Malmö

2016.11.17

## Do your research - look at references

Many think its best to look at popular urban skate spots for inspiration. Enevoldsen<sup>4</sup> recommends that involved parties should look at reference projects together: “everybody involved should start out with a study trip to a good skatepark/spot, where both flow, styles and construction is discussed.

## Get the right people involved

As details and angles are of extreme importance, Olsson<sup>5</sup> recommends getting experts involved: “you have to talk to people that know the drill”. This importance is underlined by Enevoldsen<sup>6</sup> who thinks its crucial to involve people with both professional skills and experience of skateboarding: “get a designer that both have architectural skills and skates. If possible get an engineer that also skates or have worked with skateboard infrastructure before”. Further, Edén<sup>7</sup> states that it can be useful to establish contacts with national skate foundations and big skate clubs in order to get input if the expertise cannot be found locally.

## Consider climate

Depending on local conditions seasonal change and weather can make skateboarding impossible outdoors. For a thriving skateboard community there is need for indoor spaces where the skaters can escape harsh weather. Coming from Uppsala, Sweden, Özdoğan knows the importance of indoor skate-able spaces: “The best thing a city can do for its skateboarding scene is absolutely to provide some type of skate-able space both indoors and outdoors. I am from Sweden where winters are freezing cold so places to skate indoors are absolutely important”.

4

Interview, email

2016.11.30

5

interview, Malmö

2016.11.17

6

Interview, email

2016.11.30

7

interview, Malmö

2016.11.17

## Find the right locations

As seen in *integrated designs* location is key. The interviewees all stress the importance of finding the right locations. Meurle<sup>1</sup> thinks it is important with central locations that are easy to access. Here, Edén<sup>2</sup> states that the best skate spots are also great meeting points and that locations should have the potential of becoming social nodes in the city. Apart from central locations that can become social locus points, he suggests choosing locations where skateboarding can add vibrancy or a safety aspect: “use skate to activate the city”. Further, he explains that there are also many places where skateboarding can cause problems, such as close to offices or homes and that these locations should be avoided.

According to Gough<sup>3</sup> it makes sense to use analysis methods such as Space syntax analysis when finding sites to activate with skate. He argues that the best squares are places where the architects have really looked at the flow of people and how they are coming in contact with different things.

1

Interview, Gothenburg

2016.10.27

2

interview, Malmö

2016.11.17

3

Interview, Gothenburg

2016.10.27



Skate stoppers save these fragile terrazzo ledges from skate-related wear and tear, but at what cost? Choose adequate materials.

## Create adventure - variation and connectivity

As urban skateboarding is an adventure many think it can be a good idea to make many connected spots rather than only one big as Karlsson<sup>4</sup> states: “Spread the spots out, don’t make such spectacular things. Just a series of spots which also encourages you to skate from spot to spot”. Edén<sup>5</sup> also underlines that spots should be varied and easy to travel between: “you can create adventures and paths in the city by clustering and lining up skate spots, that way skaters can bring activity from one part of the city to another that might need activation”.

## Do not skate stop

As irritating and inappropriate as skateboarding sometimes can be in certain places, skate proofing sends a negative message. Most of the interviews agree on that skateboarding should be designed away from certain places where it might be a problem, however this should as Meurle<sup>6</sup> points out be made through aware design solutions and not by skate proofing. Edén<sup>7</sup> is on the same note and thinks these issues should instead be solved with better designs.

4

Interview, Stockholm

2016.10.24

5

Interview, Malmö

2016.11.17

6

Interview, Gothenburg

2016.10.27

7

interview, Malmö

2016.11.17



Cobble stones and gravel on each side of this otherwise perfect ledge has protected it from skate-related wear and tear without the use of negative design.



Designing environments not units

Edén<sup>1</sup> underlines the importance of designing environments: “let’s agree that a city built like a skatepark would look horrible and the same goes for skateparks; a skatepark designed to be just a skatepark looks horrible as well. It is about designing environments, not entities or concrete deserts”.

To Enevoldsen<sup>2</sup> bad design solutions are often related to an approach to always follow standards and traditional examples, he recommends using reasonable sense instead: “analyse the design together with the designer and then the city should take responsibility for the safety”. Edén<sup>3</sup> is also critical to blindly following rules and standardized solutions, “when it comes to pre-ordering skate objects from a catalogue – don’t do it! That is something that destroys skate-able space all over the world on a daily basis”.

Here, Enevoldsen<sup>4</sup> is aware of the problem of risk and responsibility when it comes to bold designs: “that is where the whole thing gets bureaucratic, because no one wants to take responsibility in case of an accident”. He explains that this is why the easy-to-explain and obvious solutions often are chosen: “today people like powerful punch-lines and storytelling, box-thinking is still very present”. The challenge here is according to Enevoldsen to sell a subtle unproven design approach to a decision maker that wants to make totally sure that everything works as intended.

1	interview, Malmö	2016.11.17
2	Interview, email	2016.11.30
3	interview, Malmö	2016.11.17
4	Interview, email	2016.11.30

Strive for inclusion in events and designs

There are several ways to work for a more inclusive skateboard scene. Boström<sup>5</sup> explains that if you arrange a male competition, then you should make sure to throw a female competition as well. In terms of communication Karlsson<sup>6</sup> thinks the way to get skateboarding more inclusive is by making female skateboarding normal, “my way to do this has been through sponsoring girl skaters, putting them in skate videos I make and so on”. He explains that people need to see more girls skating so that it becomes more normal: “girls need to see girls skateboarding, it is only about that”.

Inclusion can also be designed for. Enevoldsen<sup>7</sup> explains that calm can be created by designing smaller informal areas close to the larger and more popular spots or skateparks, where you can approach the centre at your own pace: “I try to make informal areas connected or merged with the designs”.

Keep an open mind

According to Boström<sup>8</sup> the best and smartest way to generate great urban skate spots is to meet the skaters in the places they have appropriated themselves: “it can be as simple as just allowing skateboarding or renovating a few edges”. Sterner<sup>9</sup> think many cities have an approach to skateboarding that is outdated by ten to fifteen years: “be open and visionary”.

5	Interview, Stockholm	2016.11.16
6	Interview, Stockholm	2016.10.24
7	Interview, email	2016.11.30
8	Interview, Stockholm	2016.11.16
9	Interview, Gothenburg	2016.10.27



Solutions like these do not generate much skate joy. Design environments, not units and get experts involved.

# Case study: Skate Melbourne Plan

The City of Melbourne is currently in the process of developing a strategical planning document for skateboard infrastructure, functioning as a type of vision-document for how the city can support a safe, healthy and inclusive skateboard culture. Developed in accordance with other municipal documents it aligns with the Council Plan goal “a city for people”. Hence, the plan seems to have the function to inform other general planning documents within the municipality (CoM 2016, p. 5-7).

In the development process of this strategy the municipality has worked together with a wide team of people including skaters from different demographics, youth representatives, designers, police and so on (CoM 2016, p. 5). Interesting to note is the efforts here to put together a wide group of experts, covering most fields of expertise in order to make the further process run smooth. The document specifies three “key actions” to accomplish the ambitions of the plan (p. 4, 28-45):

- Locating spaces suitable for skateboarding
- Increase provision of both integrated and dedicated skate-able spaces
- Better the programming, communication, management and legislation regarding skateboarding

In order to get an idea of the composition of skateboarding demographics in the municipality as well as other underlying background information regarding skateboarding on both global and local scale methods including observations, surveys and research were used. This way the city could get an insight into important aspects concerning skateboarding (CoM 2016, p. 8-14).

## Thorough analysis

To gain deeper understanding of the results in relation to the specific circumstances for Melbourne an analysis of challenges and opportunities was made. Challenges was identified as e.g. issues with damage and noise while opportunities involved the multiple added values skateboarding can generate for skaters and non-skaters as well as the benefits from integrating skateboarding into public places. Comparisons was made of the amount of infrastructure provided for the different types of skating in relation to infrastructure provided for other sports and activities. Further the strategy involves an analysis of how much and what type of spaces that Melbourne provide its skaters in relation to both neighbouring municipalities and other cities across the globe (CoM 2016, p. 15-22).

## Guiding principles

To answer to the identified challenges and opportunities Melbourne has formulated a set of guiding principles a base for the three key actions. Regarding the integration of skateboarding into what the strategy defines as “shared skate-able space” the principles involve a set of themes (CoM 2016, pp. 23-27):

- Making sure all city users feel invited, safe and have easy access to theses spaces. Here shared skate-able space that is inviting for all city user are rated as more inclusive than other more dedicated skate typologies where non-skaters are only invited as spectators (pp. 23-24).
- Ensure that skaters from all demographics, genders, ages and styles are considered in terms of level of difficulty and spatial requirements (pp. 24-25).

- Integrating the skate function when designing new urban places if suitable (pp. 24-25).
- Integration of skateboarding into municipal programs for e.g. events (p. 26).
- Incorporate the use of sustainable methods such as sustainable storm water management and using sustainable construction techniques when building skateboard infrastructure (p. 26).
- Participatory design; letting the skate community be involved in the design process of skate-able spaces (p. 25-26).
- Consider the spatial characteristics of found skate-able spaces that skaters have appropriated on their own (p. 26).
- Merge skate-able spaces with other noise and performance based activities (pp. 26-27).
- Look to the creative and entrepreneurial spirit of skateboard culture, such as the DIY scene, for inspiration regarding design and innovative solutions for funding, etc (pp. 27).

## A working progress

The city of Melbourne realize the importance of time and has therefore specified long and short term goals in order to both cater for the present and the future (CoM, p. 44).

Further, it is important to note is that this document is still a draft and is being reworked after a feedback process (CoM, p. 7), which further illustrates how the city is transparent with the local skate community and others that may have opinions.

## Thoughts on strategical documents

The Skate Melbourne Plan offers plenty of “hands on” examples of how skateboarding can be integrated into the public spaces of the city. It offers tools and examples of how cities can approach the issue of urban skateboarding and at the time time considering all other urban dwellers. All things considered this strategy serves as an excellent example of how strategical planning for urban skateboarding can happen.

However, there are some questionable details. An example of this is an illustration in the Melbourne strategy that shows that the solution to the most common conflicts that occur regarding skateboarding in shared public space is to subtly confine skateboarding into its own area by using depressed surfaces or vegetation to shield the shared space from the skaters (CoM 2016, p 37).

Edén<sup>1</sup> who is generally positive to this document is also puzzled by this, “it’s unfortunate when the aim is to skate-adapt urban space and the outcome still tends to become a compartmentalization of skate-able space; where you take skateboarding out of the urban room and place it close by”. He explains that this takes away an important point; that public space is about negotiation between its users. Further Edén has recognized a tendency in these kinds of documents to add and subtract instead of actually mixing uses because of fear for injury, insurance issues, etc. However, Edén points out that it would be “very useful” with a physical document since cities usually are run by multiple departments. The question is then perhaps how they should be formulated in order to be effective if the purpose is to truly integrate skateboarding into public space.

1 Interview, Malmö 2016.11.17



# Case study: Copenhagen

## Copenhagen

Over the last decade or so Copenhagen has become famous all over the world as a skate-friendly city (Quartersnacks 2015). This popularity is much due to the city’s openness towards urban skateboarding, which can be seen in multiple ways.

First, Copenhagen has an employed a skate ambassador to help the communication between the city and the skaters, William Frederiksen. Frederiksen explains that since the local skaters formed an association around 20 years ago they have had a long history of communicating with the city council, which eventually led to a good partnership with the city (Derrien 2016).

Secondly, Copenhagen’s urban renewal projects over the last ten years or so have given Copenhagen an abundance of new skate spots (such as Israels plads on page 53), most within a short distance from each other since the city is quite dense and connected with bike paths (Hvilsom, Andersen & Gehin 2013).

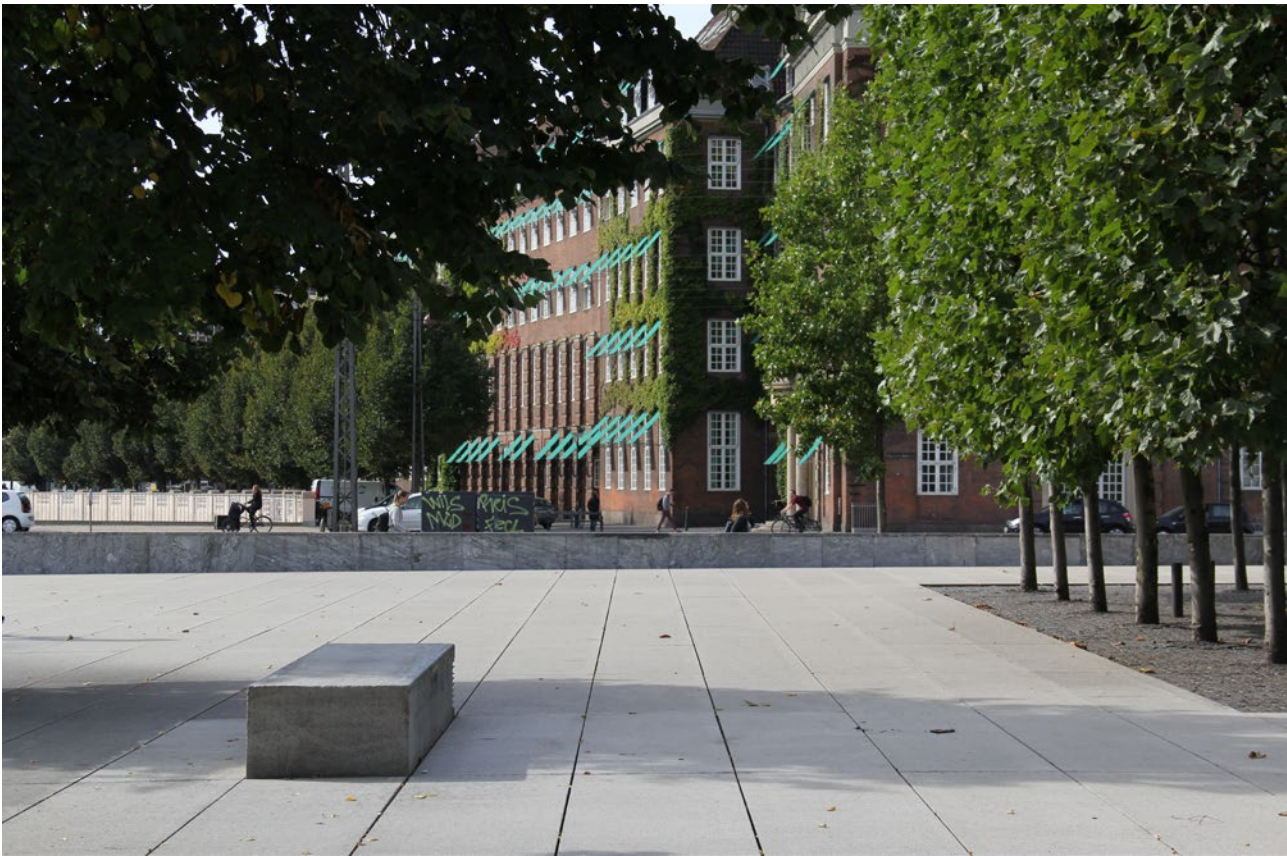
Third, Copenhagen attracts skaters from all over the world with its hugely popular five day skate event “Copenhagen Open”. This festival-like arrangement

is a celebration of skateboarding throughout different odd locations of the city, such as inside the theme park “Tivoli” and inside the city hall (Derrien 2016).

Fourth, this open mentality is evident in the case of Jarmers plads where the skaters convinced the architects of this otherwise under-used space to be allowed for skating. Even though it caused damage to its granite benches/ledges the architects thought it was good that someone actually used the place and the story ended up becoming a win-win for both skaters and architect (Vice 2011).

Lastly, this openness is present in the city’s approach towards “illicit” DIY skateparks. The city has an open mindset to these spaces and uses their potential to align with the municipal vision of developing spaces together with its users. By using this unconventional approach, Copenhagen works towards a livelier city (Clasper 2016).

All in all, Copenhagen is a useful reference to look into for cities that want to do more for their local skate community.



Jarmers Plads, Copenhagen. Apart from skaters, not many citizens seem to use this place.



The spots along “Superkilen”, Copenhagen

Left: Skater doing trick on a bench at the “Red place”.

Right: Kids watching skater ride down one of the asphalt hills at the “Black place”



The square is surrounded by roads, which means that few are disturbed by the sound from skaters.



Since skateboarding activated Jarmers Plads, the architects finally chose to see skateboarding here as a positive thing, despite marks on benches (Vice 2011).



# Case study: Malmö

## Malmö

On the other side of the bridge from Copenhagen, the much smaller Malmö holds a strong tradition of working with skateboarding. The city even has a skate high school (Bryggeriets gymnasium 2017) and an official website to help skaters find spots and have a great time while skating in the city (Skate Malmö 2017).

As explained by Edén in a Finnish skate seminar, Malmö started out as a city with relatively poor conditions for skateboarding in terms of both architecture and weather. After making a series of skate-friendly interventions and events the city has in a matter of years become a skateboard hub with a skate scene and a variation of skateboard infrastructure that attracts skaters from all around the world. This has given the city a large network of contacts to work with and is something that eventually led to Malmö hosting the Vans World Series Finals in 2016, a huge deal for such a small city. Further Malmö has a similar approach to Copenhagen regarding DIY where the illicitly conceived DIY skate spot “TBS” was seen as a positive attribution to the city and made legal instead of torn down (Lampinen 2016).



Granite benches as subtle additions to Konsthallstorget.

## Bryggeriet

Edén<sup>1</sup> explains that the secret behind Malmö’s success as a skate city is the partnership between the city and the local skate organisation, Bryggeriet. He asserts, that in Malmö, Bryggeriet is the foundation of everything, “we wouldn’t be a famous skate city if it wasn’t for the strong skateboard organization that has developed over 20 years”.

Edén<sup>2</sup> underlines the importance of encouraging the skaters to start a skateboard organisation in order to communicate the needs and desires of the skate community: “the city needs a partner to work against when it comes to skateboarding and that can take responsibility and deliver something back to the city”. He explains that every time the skaters of Malmö have been given a chance, Bryggeriet has delivered more than what was expected and thus created a great relationship to the city as a good and trustworthy partner.

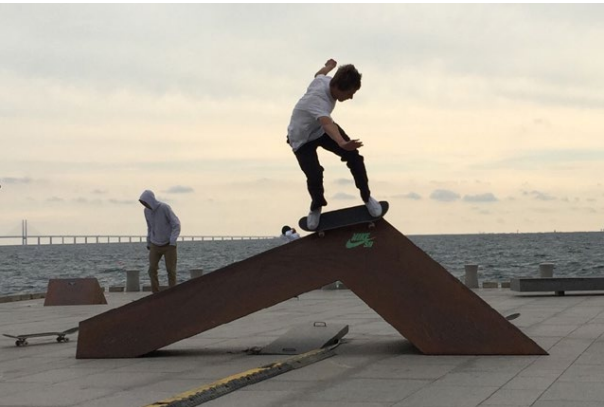
- |   |                  |            |
|---|------------------|------------|
| 1 | interview, Malmö | 2016.11.17 |
| 2 | interview, Malmö | 2016.11.17 |



Skater grinding the same benches. Photo: Martin Hallberg©



Skater gapping over a ramp leading up to a stage (also known as “the mushroom”) at Konsthallstorget. Photo: Martin Hallberg©



Corten steel objects placed out as temporary skate elements to activate space. Photo: Gustav Svanborg Edén©



DIY spot “TBS” made legal by the City of Malmö.



Skate adapted space

Malmö has also been at the forefront of working with skateboarding as an integrated part of public places, such as the case of Värnhemstorget and Konsthallstorget. These are what Edén<sup>1</sup> calls skate adapted spaces, where skate-able objects have been subtly retrofitted into these sites to enhance the skate-function. As opposed to DIY, these skate-modifications have happened through official processes.

In the case of Konsthallstorget Edén<sup>2</sup> explains that the space that had been appropriated by skaters for its skate-friendly stage but that the skate-able benches around the square started to chip from skating. Instead of banning skateboarding, the city subtly placed durable granite benches into the square embracing the skate function rather than opposing it. As a result of this Edén asserts that: “without skateboarding, Konsthallstorget wouldn’t have had nearly as much vibrancy and life; that I can guarantee”.

Regarding Värnhemstorget Edén<sup>3</sup> explains that this process started with a few skaters contacting the municipality about adding a few subtle skate-obstacles to enhance the skate function of the square that had a long history of being used for skating. The park department then contacted the original architects with the drawings of this addition and asked if it could be implemented, which it could as long as the objects were made in the same stone as the square. Edén explains that everyone thought it was a good idea since the place needed activation: “everyone basically said yes”.

1 Interview, Malmö 2016.11.17  
2 Interview, Malmö 2016.11.17  
3 Interview, Malmö 2016.11.17

Events and communication

After Värnhemstorget had got its additional ledges the city arranged a skate event to signal that people could skate there. Edén<sup>4</sup> explains that they now hold an annual competition there that brings life to Värnhemstorget and that strengthens the sense of community in the skate scene, “people travel from all parts of the country to participate”. He continues to underline the importance of events and that once you have one or a few good spots, you should make sure to show them. Even though skateboarding alone is an activator he suggest hosting events to really make it official: “activate the skate spots with skate events together with the skate organization. Make sure to communicate it through media after. Put your city on the skate map and let the skaters do the communication”.

Since skateboarding is becoming an Olympic sport which risks putting a competitive format on skateboarding and due to its macho-past, Edén<sup>5</sup> argues that it matters how the communication is made and what values that are being sent out. He suggests making different types of events that could involve art and a focus on participation rather than just competitions: “skateboarding is about not being confined, expression, reinterpretation and participation rather than competition. This can be balanced by the skate world demonstrating other sides of skateboarding through a wider lens so that people understand that there is more sides to skating”. An example of how Malmö use this approach was the demand from Malmö to arrange a female competition in the Vans World Series instead of only having men competing (Lampinen 2016).

4 Interview, Malmö 2016.11.17  
5 interview, Malmö 2016.11.17



Professional female skateboarder Vanessa Torres has travelled from the US to participate in the event “Back to Värnhem” arranged by the City of Malmö. Photo: Eken Eriksson©



The added ledges at Värnhemstorget are subtly retrofitted to the site using the same type of stone as the square was originally built in.



Tilted ledges have been sawed to fit the existing stair set.

# Reflections and ideas

## Creating a skate-friendly city requires holistic planning

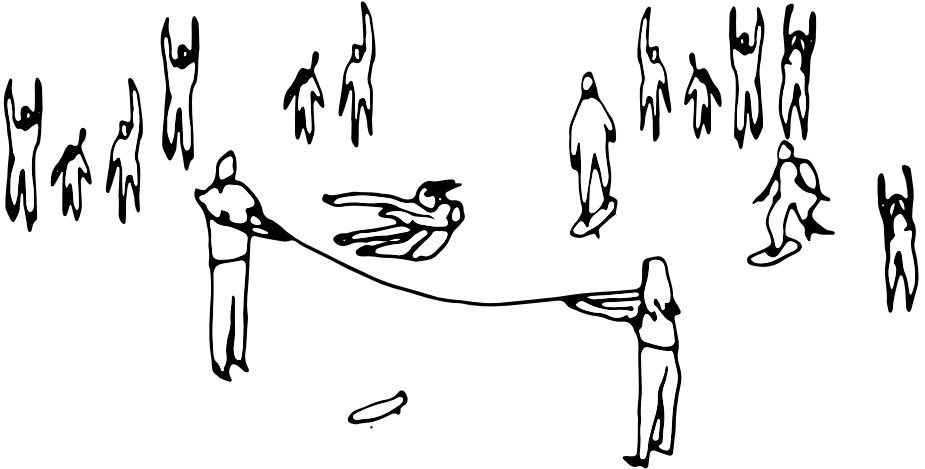
As seen by the interviewees and the three case studies the process of creating a “skate city” involves multiple steps and serious engagement from multiple actors. A ground pillar and basic requirement for this process to even start is to have an open-minded approach towards urban skateboarding and to recognize skaters as regular citizens, not just troublemakers. As we have seen, skaters rarely mean to damage, they simply want to skate.

Further, just providing skaters with a skate-able space is not enough; commitment, teamwork, awareness, communication, programming, events and many more aspects come into play. In the case of both Malmö and Copenhagen the local skaters have, through associations, developed reliable partnerships with the city reaching 20 years back. This has been necessary in both those cases for their success as “skate cities”. In the case of Melbourne the city is taking considerable efforts to cater for its skaters by doing proper research and analysis and by putting together a wide team of people to ensure best results.

Based on the interviews and case studies the most important parameters for making creating a skate-friendly city include:

- Having a skate-friendly approach
- Listening to the skaters
- Creating a strong partnership between city and skate community
- Doing thorough research and analysis
- Being open-minded, visionary and resourceful
- Considering all types of skate
- Getting a wide group of experts involved
- Considering climate; that it may be freezing outdoors half the year
- Finding the right locations and being aware of where skating is a problem
- Creating the adventure
- Designing environments not units
- Activating spaces with events in other forms than only competition
- Striving for inclusion
- Being aware of what values are being communicated

As always, every city or case has its own specific needs, therefore every case needs to be assessed individually to establish how goals are best reached.

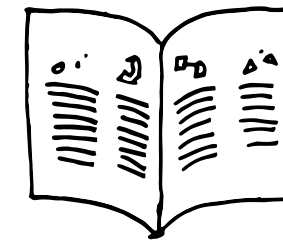


**Idea:** A sketch of how a participant based event could activate space rather than a traditional skateboard event where you are judged by style



## Planning & design

*The last chapter consists of a set of planning and design suggestions on how cities can work towards integrating skateboarding into urban public space, based on my reflections and ideas based on the results of this thesis.*



# Planning suggestions



In this sixth and final part of the thesis my ideas and reflections from writing this thesis are boiled down to a set of planning and design suggestions. These represent a condensed answer to my main research question:

*How can skateboarding be integrated into urban public space through planning and design?*

Although numbered to get an idea of in what order a chain of action could start, all suggestions are of importance. Some, such as “strive for inclusion” is a something that generally should be considered during the whole process while “Listen to the skaters” is more of a natural starting point. Further, it should be mentioned that some of the suggestions apply for both planning and design even though they are split into two categories.

Moreover, a skate-friendly approach is an underlying condition for these suggestions and has therefore not been mentioned. Lastly, it should also be stated that the suggestions represent the skaters perspective on the matter, since I and all the interviewees are skateboarders and since most of the reviewed literature is written by people with a background in skating.

## 1. Listen to the skaters

As case studies and interviews show, talking to the local skate community is the first and most important step. Here it is of importance to consider a wide range of demographics and cover a wide span of ages and backgrounds. Suggestions on how this can be made:

- Through surveys in skateshops, skateparks, or at found skate spots appropriated by the skaters.
- Through social media, online surveys or municipal platforms.
- Through Surveys in connection to skate related events where many skaters might be present.
- By organizing workshops where skaters get to draw mind maps and tell how they perceive the city through their lens.
- Through urban walks where skaters help designers and planners see the city through their eyes.

## 2. Help the skaters start an organisation

As seen by the case studies the secret behind both Copenhagen’s and Malmö’s success is the long partnership and dialogue between the city and the local skate organisation (see page 87-91). In order to give the city a reliable and communicative partner the city should help and encourage their local skaters to start an organisation.

## 3. Consider all styles and skill levels

Skateboarding includes a range of different styles that have different spatial requirements, it is therefore important to cater for all different styles of skateboarding (see page 17).

- Aim for a variation in provision of skate-able spaces to cover different styles.
- Consider all levels of skaters from beginner to advanced skaters.
- Avoid all-in-one solutions since many skaters do not like skating in dedicated skateparks.

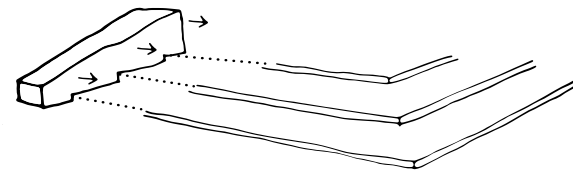




#### 4. Get a wide group of qualified people involved

To get the best result for both skaters, non-skaters and the city it is important with wide and boundary crossing teamwork. In the initial stages of developing the Skate Melbourne Plan a wide team of people was included in developing a strategy for how the city best could work with skateboarding (see page 85-86). When working in a project, consider including:

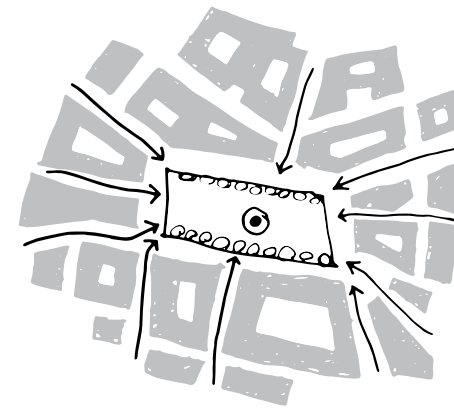
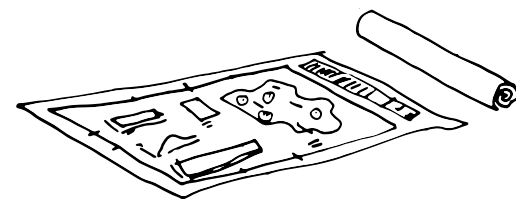
- Skaters of different demographics, gender, ages and of varying styles and skill levels
- Architects, engineers and other qualified professionals that have experience of designing skate-able spaces.
- City staffers from different departments within the municipality to ensure goals align with municipal policies.
- Other user groups that may be affected.
- Property owners, politicians, security experts and other experts should be involved depending on site specific conditions.



#### 5. Make long and short term goals

Planning new skate-able spaces can take years. Thus it makes sense to consider long and short term goals such as in the case of the Skate Melbourne Plan. Strategies such as reclassifying DIY-spaces and skate-adapting popular skate spots and under-used places can be cost, space and time effective strategies. Suggestions on goals:

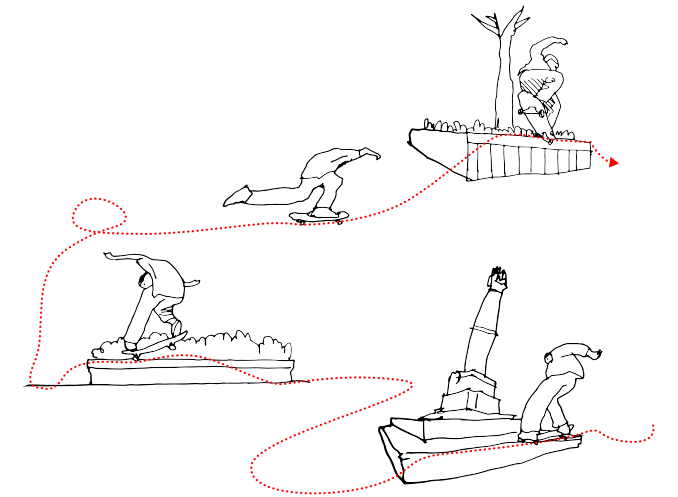
- Formulate short term goals for different types of styles that can be fulfilled with simple means.
- Formulate long term goals such as implementation of skate-friendly design when planning new urban places, e.g. squares.



#### 6. Find the right locations

As concluded in the observations of the three urban skate-able places, “Warschauer Bänke”, “Israels plads” and “Place de la République” and by the statements of the interviewees location is key (see *integrated designs*). Location becomes crucial for calmer spots and even more important for “meet-up” spots. Further skateboarding in the wrong location can cause problems and add a safety aspects and activity in under-used and unsafe places. Suggestions on questions to consider as a planner:

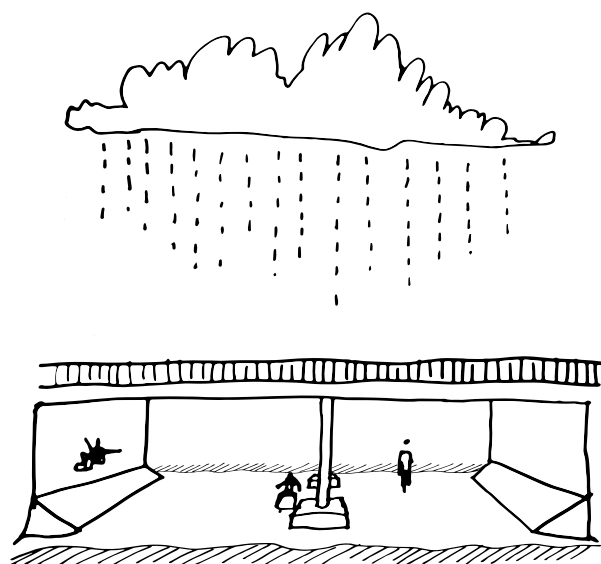
- Can places already appropriated by skaters be enhanced or officially allowed for skating?
- Are there any central and open places that have the potential to be modified for skateboarding and become a meeting place for skaters?
- Are there any unsafe or under-used plazas, left over spaces, squares that can be activated by skateboarding?
- Are there noisy locations where skateboarding will be less likely to cause disturbance such as places close to traffic?



#### 7. Create the adventure - connect spots

Urban skateboarding is often a travelling adventure, where you skate from spot to spot. Because of this it can be a good idea to have multiple spots within close range to create this skateboard adventure. Suggestions on how this can be made:

- Make sure it is easy to travel between spots. This can be made by building wider bicycle paths with fine grade asphalt between adjacent spots.
- Dot out smaller skate spots along paths.
- Consider doing multiple smaller interventions rather than one big.
- Provide a variation of skate-able spaces within short distance from each other. This can be made through letting the spots have different spatial characteristics such as clustered and aligned spots.



### 8. Consider climate

Depending on local climate conditions skating outside can become inaccessible during large part of the year. Indoor spaces are crucial for year-around skating and progression. Suggestions:

- Consider placing skate-able spaces under bridges and other roofs that provide shelter from rain and shade from extreme heat
- Provide some type of indoor space for skating

### 9. Be open-minded and visionary

With a little imagination urban skateboarding can help to fulfil municipal goals such as Melbourne seeing an opportunity to connect with “disengaged demographics” (CoM 2016, p. 15) and Copenhagen turning a blind eye to illicit DIY parks since skateboarding aligns with the municipal goal of being a “A city with an edge” (Clasper 2016). Consider:

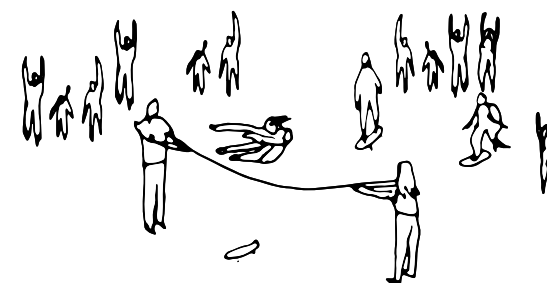
- Making a Swot analysis of strenght, weaknesses, challenges and opportunities to assess how urban skateboarding best can be catered for in relation to site specific conditions and municipal goals.



### 10. Consider integrating dedicated skateparks

As seen in the case of Rabalderparken, Kristianstad skate plaza and Rue Léon Cladel, skateparks can be integrated into urban shared space and invite other users (see page 65-66). Suggestions on how dedicated skateparks can cater for more functions and users than only skaters:

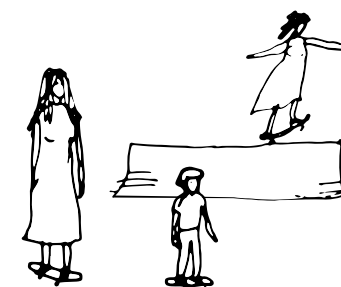
- Combine skateboarding with other facilities such as stormwater management canals or reservoirs.
- Use other materials than in-situ concrete such as granite slabs, brick and tiles to make a dedicated skatepark feel more like a square.
- Overlap other activities such as basketball and parkour over of skateparks (see Charlotte Ammundsens plads on page 74 for inspiration).
- Avoid fences to make skateparks more permeable and inviting.



### 11. Activate skate-able spaces with events

Events can be used to manifest skateboarding in places and highlight to the general public that urban skateboarding is embraced and seen as a respected activity that adds to the urban spectacle. As seen in the case studies both Malmö and Copenhagen work with events for skateboarding that are different than just skate competitions (see page 89-92). Suggestions on how this can be made:

- Encourage events that are based on participation and not on competing.
- Make sure events are include and inviting to a wide range of demographics; people from different backgrounds, ages and genders.
- Consider combining skateboard events with artistic, creative and different events to build on skateboarding's rich cultural capital rather than just skateboarding as a physical activity/sport
- Let the local skate community communicate the events to a wider audience.



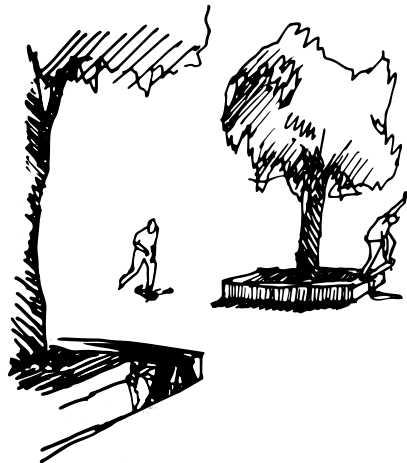
### 12. Strive for inclusion

Most expressions communicated in skate media shows men skating and has as we have seen set a frame for how skaters are valued (See *skateboarding*). this can be changed by communicating other values and expressions:

- Show that skaters are not just for teenage guys.
- Be aware of what norms you help create.
- Make extra efforts to promote female skateboarding and skateboarding practiced by other minorities within skate culture.
- Make efforts to include people from all backgrounds, genders, sexual orientations, religions, etc.



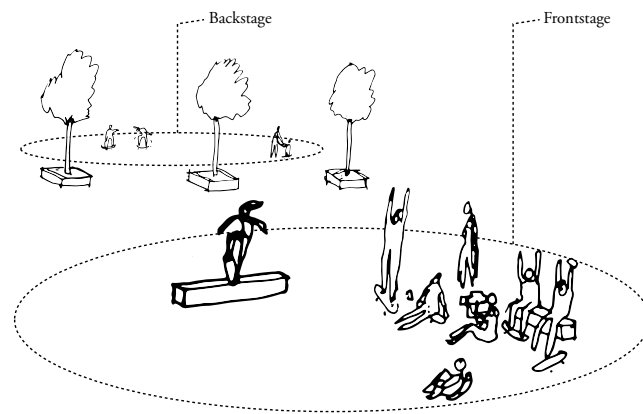
## Design suggestions



### 1. Stay within the limits of the best found spots

The best urban skate spots are usually quite simple. However, what they all have in common is that they feel authentic and not deliberately made for skating. Suggestions on what to consider when designing an urban skate spot:

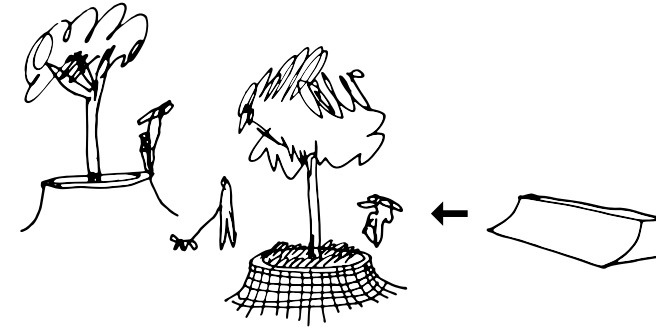
- Look at “the key characteristics” of urban skate-able places (see *Integrated designs*).
- Look at references, such as famous urban skate spots. Pick a spot with similar conditions and get inspired.
- Minimalistic design concepts are usually the best; keep it simple and open.



### 2. Design for inclusion

Beginners and skaters that do not feel comfortable with places that only allow for front stage behaviour, it would then make sense to create places where both front and backstage behaviour can take place and where beginners can approach the centre of events at their own pace. Below are some suggestions how this potentially can happen:

- Spread out skate-able objects over a large space.
- Make sure skate-able objects and environments are accessible for both beginners and advanced skaters, e.g. High and low kerbs.
- Create spaces where you can be seen and avoid being seen, such as at Israel's plazas (see page 53).
- Use trees and objects to create room divisions such as Place de la République (see page 59).



### 3. Suggest rather than direct; subtle multifunction

Authenticity and reinterpretation are two important themes within urban skateboarding and important factors to how a skate spot is perceived. The skate-function needs to be subtly incorporated into the place and the skate-able objects need to be used for other purposes than only skateboarding to make the skate-able place be perceived as it was not intended for skateboarding. Consider:

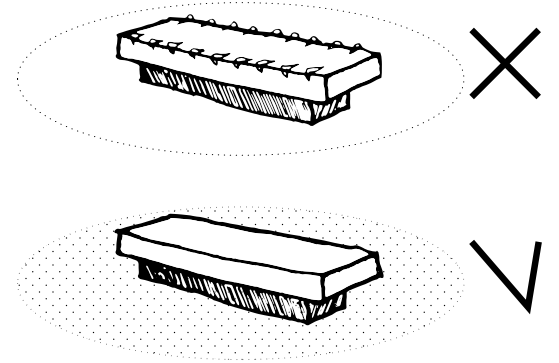
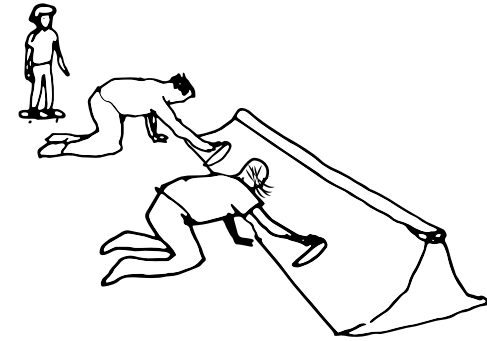
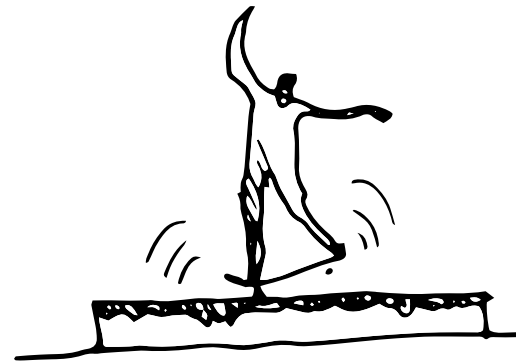
- Designing subtle skate objects and make sure they have other uses as well, such as the tree planters at Place de la République (see page 59).
- Terracing and shifting elevations of for instance a square can be enough to make a place great for skating, examples of this can be seen at Israel's plazas (see page 53).
- Use materials that blend in with the rest of the design; too obvious colours on e.g. a kerb can make it feel as it is meant for skateboarding on.



### 4. Create environments; give the place character

As visual aesthetics is important within skate culture it makes sense to introduce some type of design characteristic that makes a skate-able place feel unique or special. This can obviously be made in multiple ways but here are some examples:

- Adding trees with strong autumn colours, special leaves or spectacular flowering. Important to note is that trees that have problems with honey dew (which can lead to sticky stains) or that produce seeds might not be optimal to choose since seeds can put a full stop to skateboard wheels.
- Select a site that already has a characteristic feature such as the statue at Place de la République
- Integrate skateboarding with public art, such as making the base of a statue skate-able.
- Designing characteristic features such as the pillars of the Southbank Undercroft or adding a material that gives a special feeling, such as the black granite at MACBA (see *Added value*).



### 5. Ensure rideability; Smooth ground materials

As established in the interviews rideability is a basic condition for skateboarding and sometimes smooth and hard ground materials can be enough for skating.

- A slight texture on ground materials can give a characteristic feel to a place.
- Joints between tiles cannot be too big or uneven.
- Brick, Concrete and granite are good examples on surface materials that are suitable for skating.
- Avoid too slippery or too sticky surface finishes.
- Polished, flamed and fine picked surface finishes of stone are some suggestions of how stone can be treated to give a good surface for skating.

### 6. Use robust materials

As Gustav Edén says: “a kerb should be able to withstand some wax”. With the right materials skate-able objects can last for decades without becoming overly damaged (Lampinen 2016). Consider:

- Using materials such as granite (or other hard stone), steel, brick and concrete.
- Avoiding plastic, wood, terrazzo or other materials that might brake or chip.
- The choice of materials since wax and skate related wear and tear will be less visible on darker materials than bright.
- That materials have different feels and aesthetics which can be important to give some thought.

### 7. Allow users to define their own space

Urban skaters define their own space through reinterpretation of the urban landscape but also by altering found places through DIY methods. This creative interaction with urban space can be encouraged and used to create better skate-able environments where skaters can gain a sense of ownership over a place. This can be made by:

- Having an open mind set to illicit DIY in cases where it uses left over spaces and other under used place that may need activation.
- Designs that can be altered by the user, such as move-able furniture and skate objects.
- Provision of spaces where skaters can build their own skate environment.

### 8. Do not skate stop

By skate stopping places a negative charge will arise, potentially making the skaters less respectful towards public place and the general public. Further skate stoppers sends a negative message and is a display of the failure of the designer in understanding a place. This should be avoided. If skateboarding in a certain place is causing massive issues then avoid designing perfect conditions for skateboarding and problems will never arise in the first place. Consider:

- Putting the skate-able objects where they do not disturb.
- Trying to reach other solutions such as introducing times when skating is allowed and not.
- That gravel, grass and other surface materials that are not skate-friendly will remove the risk of a edges getting damaged from skateboarding.



# Outro

*In this section I discuss the results, the used methodology and finally I elaborate on further research.*



# Discussion of results

## Answering the main research question

The main research question was:

*How can skateboarding be integrated into urban public space through planning and design?*

This is of course a subjective matter, however the results have led to an outcome based on a range of qualitative methods that together provide a wide insight. Some of the experts that were interviewed work with these issues daily and all interviewees have long experience of being skateboarders. Site observations give insight to important characteristics and case studies show how cities work with integrating skateboarding into public space. These results alone provide an answer to the question. The planning and design suggestions represent a type of conclusion of these results and provide a condensed answer. However, it should be stressed that the suggestions represent my interpretation of the results and personal ideas that have developed over the process of writing this thesis. Since suggestions per definition do not dictate any rules or truths what so ever they should only be viewed as my conclusions based on the results and not a ‘complete picture’.

## Answering the sub-questions

The sub-questions functioned as necessary stepping stones to the suggestions by providing a more detailed insight into urban skate-able places and why these places are important for cities. Similar to the main research question they were answered in relation to the chosen methodology, mainly through the outcome of the conducted interviews and site observations.

The first sub-question was:

*What are the key characteristics of urban skate-able space?*

This question was answered in *Integrated designs* and just as the main research question the answer does not represent “a truth” but should be seen as an approximation of what characters that are important for an urban skate spot based on my interpretations of the results.

The second sub-question was:

*What added value can urban skate-able space generate?*

This question was answered in *Added Value* and is again based on my interpretations of the results.

## How can the suggestions be applied?

As stated above, the suggestions do not attempt to be a complete guidebook and need adjustments to each specific case. It is up to each individual city to assess their goals and approach towards skateboarding. These suggestions are not of much use for a city that see skateboarding simply as a sport and want to develop the best and biggest skateparks. However, for cities that aim for more space and use-efficient places and that have a positive attitude towards skateboarding I would argue that the suggestions and results can provide some perspectives and a starting point for a discussion on how to approach the matter of urban skateboarding in relation to planning and design. For implementation far more research would be required, both locally and by looking more in detail on how cities such as Malmö or Melbourne work and also to details of how popular urban skate spots are designed.

## How skateboarding is depicted

While researching this thesis it became clear to me that skateboarding holds different meanings depending on who you talk to or where you look; to some it is a sport, to others an art form. It would therefore be impossible to depict skateboarding in a manner that everyone would agree on. In this work I have tried to distance myself from defining skateboarding as only one thing and perhaps it is best that way. I think it is important to consider that skateboarding does not benefit from a narrow format.

## The skater perspectives impact on the results

By only interviewing skaters the results are likely to be somewhat biased, but more in depth when it comes to pin pointing key characteristics of urban skate spots and other specific topics a non-skater likely would have difficulties elaborating on. However, this may have given a one sided view on how to plan for urban skateboarding and some more problematic aspects of integrating skateboarding in public space may have been overlooked.

## The results and aesthetics

In terms of aesthetics this thesis encourages a subtle and minimalistic design approach since the results suggest that this will make urban places for skateboarding be perceived as more authentic than overtly directive designs such as skate ramps. This approach can not only increase space and use-efficiency in cities but also set a stage for multiple different activities and interactions to happen in the same place. This in itself contributes to a more aesthetically appealing and colourful city than the tendency in modern cities to divide areas and objects by function and use. Further, a minimalistic design approach has an effect on aesthetics; places become canvases for urban life rather than fixed paintings and behaviour is suggested rather than dictated.

## The results in a wider perspective

The results from both theory and interviews shows that urban skateboarders can carve pleasure out of environments that are heavily programmed for purposes of commerce and production. This “play” and re-imagination of objects and meanings of the city by skaters, such as thoroughly researched in Bordens work, I would argue holds potential to inspire how we as landscape architects view space and our designs. A bench designed in a certain way can invite for more uses and interpretations than just being seating, not necessarily connected to skateboarding but to other urban activities. This mindset is already to some extent present in urban planning and design as seen in the background story of Place de la République but is something that I would argue need to be considered to a higher degree than it is today.

As cities are getting more densely populated, pressure on public places gets higher. Here the concepts of multifunction, integration and reinterpretation then become increasingly interesting. The observed sites and the case studies of skate-friendly cities show that this does not necessarily have to do with making the city “greener”, better at managing stormwater and more biodiverse but that sustainability also can be found in places made entirely out of stone or concrete. Further, integrating skate-able objects with other functions means that these places will still be used if skateboarding takes another dive in popularity as opposed to a skatepark, which I argue to be of some significance when it comes to sustainability.

I believe that the approach that I elaborate in this thesis can add to making cities more vibrant, sustainable, democratic and more diversely used. Further, I am sure that with a little imagination this approach and these suggestions can be applied to a range of other fields within the urban realm.



# Discussion of methodology

## The choice of methods

Regarding the fluid nature of the topic it made sense to choose a range of qualitative research methods. Further, there are a limited number of cities and people involved with this type of questions, which also add to the qualitative argument. Because of the spatial focus of this thesis methods such as site observations was used, which would have been difficult to carry out using quantitative methods.

## Was the scope too wide?

Previous to writing this thesis I would have a hard time understanding how many topics skateboarding touches upon. Initially I thought that the scope was narrow but as soon as I started reading literature on the topic of urban skateboarding I came to realize that skateboarding touches upon everything from urban philosophy to gender issues and beyond. While not neglecting these topics I have tried to mention issues without going too deep, since I think these issues are important to the topic. As a consequence, the scope became wider than I thought which possibly has a tiring effect on the reader due to the lengthy document.

Even though the scope turned out to be wide it is still narrow regarding how much could and should be written on this. In that sense I argue that the scope was right for the thesis format.

## Was the subject researched enough?

Regarding literature more thorough and accurate investigations on topics such as subculture, social factors and history could have been made, however I was limited by time and scope which led me to prioritize the chosen literature and to limit my reading to get an overview over the subject.

Further, I can conclude that there has been far more research made on skateboarding than I would ever have imagined prior to writing this thesis. Where ever you look, regarding these types of studies, Borden seems to be frequently referred to for his work and thus it seemed fitting to have used his work as backbone, especially as it has an architectural focus.

The main contribution of this work however is not from the literature I have read but the information extracted from the conducted interviews. All the interviewees provided useful information that has widened my perception of the studied subject. Some interviewees, such as Edén and Enevoldsen have been given more room in this thesis than others due to their elaborate responses to the questions. This can probably be linked to their long professional backgrounds on working with skateboarding.

## The choice of interviewees

Regarding the choice of interviewees I could have been more wide in age span and demographic background. In terms of gender distribution I did reach out to a few more female skaters but did not get the chance to conduct those interviews. Still the quote of female skaters of the total number of interviewees represent a larger statistical quote than of skateboarding as a whole.

## Method and choice of site observations

In terms of the visited sites I had originally intended to visit more places but was again limited by time and scope. There are plenty of other European places that would have been interesting to observe, such as Prague’s “Stalin plaza” and “Sants” in Barcelona, the list is long. However, I would argue that the presented sites are representative for what the most

common characteristics of popular urban skate spots. Since I wanted to get a holistic understanding of what characterized these sites that included more than just physical structures, I chose the method of total participant observation instead of doing a site inventory which usually would be the method of choice for a landscape architect. This could have been made more in depth and over longer time but again limitations kept them short.

## Limitations and choice of case studies

Geographical availability and relevance together made these choices easy to make. I have worked in Copenhagen which makes me familiar with how popular the city is for skating and how the city actively works with well integrated and skate-friendly urban design. Malmö is across the bridge and is famous for being a skate-friendly city. In the case of Melbourne it was chosen for its strategical document, which made it easy to study from a distance. A full thesis could easily be written on each of these but I chose the wider perspective, which meant that research had to be kept limited.

## Role of the researcher

My liminal role as both a skateboarder and landscape architect has been both a strength and a weakness. I have personal experience of skateboarding ranging back as long as about four masters of landscape architecture, which gives me a far deeper insight into the subject than a non-skateboarder could ever have. I have worked with skatepark design and have some insight into the process of skatepark construction and current trends within this area of skateboarding. I am however not experienced within that profession to a degree where I am even remotely close to being “fully taught”. A weakness is that I am to some extent biased by my personal skating preferences

and experiences. I am primarily a street skater and personally prefer the type of skating which is most common in the places I have observed in this thesis. However, I enjoy all types of skating and regularly go to skateparks to meet friends and to skate. Further I am a white male, which places me in the over represented part of skateboard demographics. This may have led me to have a different experience of skateboard culture than representatives of more marginalized groups. Further, my interest has also led me to want to research each detail more in depth which has sometimes put me off focus and potentially led to a blurrier communication.

## Further development

As the next step I would suggest tapping into other segments of demographics and age groups to investigate their approach to the subject. Here, it would be interesting to interview non-skaters to get more insight as to how they perceive skateboarding in public space. It would also make sense to perform quantitative investigations as there are great statistical uncertainties in terms of measuring desires and approaches to skateboarding due to its nature as an unorganized activity. Further, since this thesis is more or less written from a skaters perspective it would also be useful to do a similar study but from a stronger planning perspective. Lastly, a natural next step would be to apply the planning and design suggestions to a site specific case and see how they can take shape.

## Closure

I hope that this thesis can prove helpful in the endeavour of creating better public places for skateboarding and the general public, as well as to widen the horizons of what skateboarding can be, mean and do for cities.

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# Appendix - Interview sheet

Name:  
Profession:  
Age:

Please feel free to elaborate on the questions as much as you would like.

- 1. *Who are you and what is your connection to skateboarding?*
- 2. *Why do you skateboard?*
- 3. *What do you think of when you hear the term “Skateboard urbanism”?*
- 4. *What are the key characteristics of urban skate-able place (physical and abstract)? Why?*
- 5. *Which are your top three urban skate spots and why?*
- 6. *What are the best things a city can do to promote and help skateboarding locally?*
- 7. *What added value can urban skate-able place (public) generate for a city and its inhabitants?*
- 8. *How is skateboarding different in a skatepark from in the city? Why?*
- 9. *Why are there so few women skateboarding (compared to men)?*
- 10. *How can we help more women into skateboarding?*
- 11. *How has skateboarding changed over the past fifteen years (In a very short summary)?*
- 12. *Where do you see skateboarding in ten years?*
- 13. *Is there anything you would like to add?*
- 14. *Do you have any further questions on my work?*



