

Encourage the youth, they're doing much more than you think

How Skateboarding is pushing our cities to become safer, more inclusive spaces through contesting the right to use urban space.

Article by Joseph Andrews | joeandrews2009@aol.co.uk | August 14th, 2019, 14:00 BMT



Photography by Leo Sharp

Whether you've grown up in the city or not, the chances you've been exposed to the clattering of urethane wheels of a skateboard is second-to-none. Fossilized skateboard deck graphics against granite ledges are evidence of their inhabitancy, yet their activities are far from prehistoric.

'You can't do that here'

Skateboarders have their values challenged by society almost constantly, and the culture has had to grind their route into the mainstream amongst much conflict. 'You can't do that here' is ritualistically thrown towards skateboarders

daily whilst they traverse the urban environment, without granting much critical thought as to what they are doing.

Whose City is this?

Existing on the same dimension of city interactions as Parkour enthusiasts, BMX riders and even Buskers, Skateboarders are on the fringes of accepted urban space usage, reinventing any and every element of the city to find new meaning to dead space.

From the Lloyds Amphitheatre in Bristol's city Centre to the MACBA Museum in Barcelona and Hollywood High School's 16 stair-set, skateboarding's global network is establishing itself as an integrated by-product of modernity and urban growth.

Urban growth and Creative Capital

A surface-level observation would simplify this presence as anti-social behavior, yet urban theorists and sociologists such as Gregory Synder, Paul O'Connor, Ocean Howell and Henri Lefebvre have repurposed the activity as a positive modern expression.

Skateboarders speed up the pace of the modern city, deter criminal activity, activate public spaces and make cities safer, more enjoyable places to enter.

Not only this, but skateboarding has constructed a self-sustaining industry for itself. It fuels its own media coverage, establishes brands and sets up competitions, contributing/wheeling in an onslaught of economic benefits for cities through skateboard-tourism and collaborations with other creative industries, from iconic fashion brands to artists and film-producers.



A collaborative project between Carhartt WIP, Isle Skateboards and artist Raphaël Zarka explores the limitless interactions between art, mathematics and skateboarding. Photograph taken from www.carhartt-wip.com/en/journal/skate/2016/12/paving-space-the-film

It is more common than ever for professional Skateboarders to generate their earnings from their passion for the activity, subsequently reinvesting them back into their local economies. Tyshawn Jones from the Bronx, NY, has established his own family-run restaurant at the heart of his community.

The City's sign language

The sub-culture has not always witnessed these successes. 'Defensive designs' are a form of hostile architecture. Commonly seen as metal knobs on ledges and on handrails, slanted benches, referred to specifically as 'leaning blocks' by New York's subway are purposefully intended as sign language to the public that a certain space is not for you, forever.

Not dissimilar to anti-pigeon spikes on the interiors of train station rooves, rough grounds and metal knobs are methods of prevention for skateboarding and are fortified reminders that the city does not always welcome the use of spaces by everyone. Unpleasant interactions with the Police, private security and the public are a daily occurrence for Skateboarders, signifying that modern cities have a long way to go before becoming completely inclusive spaces for those with unconventional values.

Steady Progress into the mainstream

This is certainly not the case everywhere, with progressive cities leading the way through example. It is now accommodated for in Malmo, Sweden which integrates skateboarding into city planning and encourages the possibility of a career in the activity through schooling.

Bordeaux has permitted certain times for which skateboarders can inhabit certain spaces following talks with professional skateboarder and local resident, Leo Valls. The expansion of the Southbank Undercroft is a local and historical success story for England's scene.

Amongst these steps towards skateboarding's acceptance, it is a youthful reminder that the city can be an entertaining and inclusive environment for everyone.

Who knows, encouraging skateboarding in your city may be the next step in making it a safer, more inclusive and progressive space.

