Expert Arguments for Skateparks

(1) Skateparks as Public Spaces

This section shows that skateparks can be unobtrusively integrated into the urban landscape, and that with the proper design skateparks can be places enjoyed by the wider community. Use these quotes to help make the case for a skatepark in your area being good for people other than its immediate users.

A great number of spectators take advantage of these spaces to admire the participants’ feats. Self-presentation in public places constitutes one of the strongest motives for the youngsters. Skateboarding and roller-skating take on an extra significance with the audience’s presence.

- Jean Griffet, The Experience of Teenagers at Marseilles’ Skate Park, Cities, 2001, p.421

Participants and their parents, passers-by and the simply curious represent the different users of the site. The scenery and the resulting atmosphere confer a particular flavour on the place: a place where one can relax, stimulate or be stimulated...this success is certainly linked to the fact that the location of the playground has not been imposed by city planners but chosen by the users themselves.


Well designed and managed skate facilities will become a hub for community life...A skate facility can be a catalyst for healthy community life in which young an old socialise, have fun, develop new skills, make new friends, hang out and much more.


Skateboarding is an activity which contributes to the variety, vitality and security of outdoor public spaces. Skateboarders are tourists, consumers and participants in the arts, culture and economy of cities. Skateboarders extend the hours of the use of public spaces. Many non-skateboarders are attracted to spaces were people skateboard, just to watch the activity.

- Anthony Bracali, chief architect of the Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art and skatepark advocate.

Nearly all of the recent studies include a call for more participative governance, integrating skateboarders into the design and planning of public space.

(2) Culture of Respect, Togetherness and Sharing

Skateparks are social spaces that nurture certain types of Behaviour; they are not ‘unregulated’, ‘lawless’ or ‘chaotic.’ There are always models of Behaviour – waiting in line, or applauding skill – that bring users together; skateparks are places that both require and teach mutual respect, discipline and togetherness, through a shared appreciation of mutually beneficial norms. Use these quotes to show skateparks as socially inclusive places.

The skate park has an almost ‘peaceful’, genial, non competitive atmosphere. Whenever a trick is successfully executed, skateboards are drummed on the ground as a kind of alternative applause.

- Karsten & Pel, Skateboarders exploring urban public space, Journal of Housing and the Built Environment, p. 335.

Although lacking adult-imposed mechanisms for control, these activities and leisure contexts provide forms of control that are internal either to individual participants and/or their group, and thereby help to develop capacities for self-regulation, cooperation, and negotiation with peers.


“Skatepark users share common values: the game, waiting in turn to “roll in”, respect for the skate park users’ rules, and they are all attracted by a place which favors their sporting practices.”


“Skateboarding is about seeing and being seen. It is a social culture which requires social space. Often, if you see a group of eight to ten people skateboarding, only two of them will be on a board at any one time. The others are sitting, talking and hanging out.”

- Anthony Bracali, chief architect of the Philadelphia Museum of Modern Art and skatepark advocate.

“Urban managers should view skateparks as a means by which to reward and encourage specific character traits in young people, principally personal responsibility, self-sufficiency and entrepreneurialism.”

(3) Health Benefits and the Negligible Risk of Injury

Skateboarding has a reputation as being more dangerous than more established team sports, although the emerging statistical data shows that this myth is just that. It should also be recognised that a great many people are not getting nearly enough exercise, and that skateparks are places that teach people from a young age that exercise is not only necessary for good health, but a good thing in itself. The public provision of free-to-use sporting areas is part of a council’s responsibility to promote the good health and general well being of its citizens. Skateparks are good for public health!

“Perhaps the most damaging prejudice is the notion that skateboarding is an unsafe sport. When compared to other recreational activities, skateboarding has a smaller percentage of reported injuries per participant (.49%) than other activities, including soccer (.93%), baseball (2.25%) and basketball (1.49%).”

- Worth W. Everett MD, Skatepark Injuries and the influence of Skatepark design, The Journal of Emergency Medicine, 6

“If present trends continue it is estimated that half of the UK’s children could be obese by 2020.”

- Economic and Social Research Centre, 2006, www.esrc.ac.uk

“According to the Consumer Products Safety Commission, skateboarding has a smaller percentage of reported injuries per participant than soccer, baseball, basketball...Granted, many skateboarding accidents are simply not reported – but this speaks well of skateboarders, who apparently feel that safety is their responsibility, as are injuries when they happen.”


“Children and young people should achieve a total of at least 60 minutes of at least moderate physical activity each day.”

- Issy Hamilton, Children’s Play Council, Play and Health Fact sheet (2006.)

“Potential safety advantages of a skatepark are numerous: good lighting, regularly maintained skating surfaces, routine structural inspection and upkeep, enclosed (or semi-enclosed) areas that effectively eliminate external factors such as cars, buses, sidewalk cracks, street pot-holes, and pedestrian traffic.”

(4) The effects of skatepark on crime and youth/police relations

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the provision of public skateparks can dramatically improve the sometimes antagonistic relationship between police forces and young people; far from places of lawlessness, skateparks are places where people work within codes of behavior, and are spaces where sometimes aggressive energies are focused on positive sporting goals.

It is important to realise that the public provision of sports facilities – from tennis courts to skateparks – is part of the responsibility of the local and central government. These places offer the chance to relax, to exercise, and allow young people a place to enjoy activities together; they are important places for the well being of society.

“We haven’t had yet one call from a resident of Dawlish complaining about skateboarding [since the skatepark opening], this means the workload over any given weekend has been cut by 30%.”

- Gary Cairns, Police Community Support Officer, Dawlish

“The skatepark is important to the local community because it gives the children somewhere to go, it gives them a focus – a hobby, if you will – which keeps them off the streets and out of trouble; it’s fantastic, really”

- Steve Randall, Police Community Support Officer, Macclesfield.

Parks will be largely self-supervised, self-maintained, and self-policed.


Bill Fowler (superintendent of Recreation and Human Services for the City of Huntington Beach – CA) describes the end result as a win/win situation in what was before thought to be a zero-sum game. Soon after the park was built, police were expending less time and resources chasing skateboarders. They were working with the kids, and in turn, the kids were feeling less antagonized by the authority figures.

The presence of skateboarders can deter vandalism, drug use, prostitution, and homeless encampments.


A marked drop of 34.9% in levels of youth disorder was recorded in Beat 6, where the skatepark is located, since 2002-2006. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a code of honour among those who attend the skatepark. This encourages youths to behave appropriately for fear of spoiling it for others.

- Strathclyde Police Report.
Why Sprayed Concrete?

Unlike fitting together pre-cast moulds, free-form construction allows architects the freedom to create progressive designs, especially where one transition merges into another - allowing us to design the park that perfectly meets the requirements of the site, user-group and the local community.

“With pre-cast, every piece has to be cast in a mould, it’s heavily engineered and it’s a lot more concrete, so in that way it’s less environmentally friendly because you use about three times the amount of concrete. So that’s cost, an environmental impact and you’re having a limited design.”

- Jeremy Donaldson, Professional Skatepark Designer and Architect

Concrete has many advantages over other materials:

• It’s an ideal hardwearing riding surface and skaters’ and riders’ first choice.
• It’s vandal-proof, even under the most severe conditions.
• It will not rust, rot, decay, burn, break, or bend, and doesn’t contain loose fixings.
• It’s much quieter than steel or wood.
• It gives good traction and the least slippery when wet, it also dries the quickest.
• Concrete is far more durable and low maintenance than any other skatepark material

The proposed site is carefully prepared. First we excavate or build up the earth, and install drainage. The area is then set out with formers and re-bar to shape the material and the concrete is sprayed in place. A pump sprays the concrete onto the transitions using compressed air. We use the ‘shotcrete’ or ‘wet spray concrete’ method. Curved templates and screeds are used to give a high level of accuracy. Finally the surface is hand finished with steel trowels to give a smooth, durable polished surface.

“Look at the finish on that! Exclaims Matt Elms, crouching to run his finger along a paper-smooth block of solid concrete with a gleaming stainless-steel edge.”

About Cantelowes Skatepark in ‘Building’, Online Magazine 2007

I haven’t found more dedicated builders. I’m really impressed; I wish I had guys like them working with me as a local crew on my projects in Sweden. I haven’t been lucky enough at all to have people like they have at Wheelscape.”

Stefan Hauser, World-Class Designer and Builder, Placed to Ride Inc.
Are Concrete Skateparks that Noisy?

Unlike wood or metal, skating on high quality smooth concrete produces little noise, which is one of the reasons why we use this material. Other skate noise comes from ‘popping’ the board and landing during tricks as well as the typical ambient sound of young people at play.

The Skate Park Association of the USA (SPAUSA) have tested the noise of different skateparks made using different materials - the results are that concrete is quieter than all other wooden and metal ramps. According to SPAUSA - "Studies show that a skatepark has no more noise than the ambient surrounding noises that exist in other parks and is not nearly as noisy as a baseball park."

Measurements were taken from a concrete in-ground park: Test park Santa Monica Skatepark approx 18,000 sq feet with 50 participants at the time of measuring.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>dB Low Reading</th>
<th>dB High Reading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ambient noise</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 feet from entrance</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the entrance</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside park</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At the bowl</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To put this in perspective the following table shows the decibel levels of other sounds:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decibel Comparison Chart</th>
<th>Decibel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whisper Quiet Library</td>
<td>30dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal conversation</td>
<td>60 - 70dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Normal piano practice</td>
<td>60 - 70dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skatepark ambience 30ft away</td>
<td>63 - 78dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone dial tone</td>
<td>80dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>City Traffic (inside car)</td>
<td>85dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chainsaw</td>
<td>100dB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loud Rock Concert</td>
<td>115dB</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

“The stock arguments made by people against the installation of skateparks usually rely upon anecdotal evidence, unrelated issues, or just their unsubstantiated opinions about skateboarders and skateboarding. Most opponents will take reasonable concerns and inflate them into seemingly titanic issues: noise, crowds, increased traffic, parking problems, illicit activity, and so on. They will not usually ask how much noise a skatepark generates, for example, but tell the audience that skateparks are noisy.”

- www.skatepark.org

Some projects have had local residents protest against the idea of a skatepark mostly because of their pre-conceived ideas of what a skateboarder, BMX rider or inline skater is. It is up to you to prove to them that these stereotypical judgements are false and in fact these sports are a great form of self-expression and physical activity. Skateparks are an encouraging place for young and old people to gather.
SECTION FOUR: A CASE STUDY OF HEREFORD

The following three pages will give a brief history of Hereford skatepark. The purpose here is to give some concrete examples of the processes outlined above, and to show some of the typical stages that the skatepark goes through. Think of the following as an ideal to get a skatepark!

In July 2004, fifty young people arrived at a weekly county council meeting and gave some solid arguments for a skatepark in Hereford. The councillors were so impressed with the group that they agreed to set up a committee to plan for a skatepark in Hereford.

This committee decided to form a charity named Wheeled Sports 4 Hereford (WS4H). Everyone involved worked on a voluntary basis. Within a few weeks, over 300 young people had contacted WS4H, whether to simply give support, or to get involved with the design process.

Several people wrote to local newspapers, and soon the effort to get a skatepark began to get the support of other organisations. The local police, for example, were then receiving on average of a complaint every two days about skateboarding, and so were keen for skateboarders to get a place of their own.

Herefordshire City Council agreed to lease some land (see below) for 25 years for a ‘peppercorn’ fee. They also agreed to put £50,000 towards the building of the park.

WS4H then contacted Wheelscape. Our designers went and met the users, talked about what they wanted, and began to work on plans for the park together. WS4H then decided to build the park in three stages: stage 1 would be a plaza style, stage 2 would add a transition section, and stage 3 will see the existing park ringed with a new street section.

Through collaboration, a design for stage one emerged and, eight weeks after they started, our build team finished it (see below).
After the success of the first stage, a number of organisations agreed to give financial support to the park. The Big Lottery Play Fund donated £50,000; Crest Homes paid £55,000 through section 106 agreements; the Youth Opportunities fund donated another £55,000; the local police force gave £10,000. The park is now sponsored by six local businesses!

Stage 2 (see below) was designed collaboratively, was built in January and February 2010 and is probably being skated as you read this (!)

What should you take from the Hereford example? That a lot of collaborative work goes into getting a skatepark. That decent skateparks only get built if skatepark users are involved. That there is money out there, and that land is available. That councils will be on your side, especially if you can show that the wider community support a skatepark.

Hereford shows that getting a skatepark takes time, requires effort, but also that your project, in the end, will be more than worth it.