AN INVESTIGATION OF PROGRAMMING AND SPACE:

INTEGRATING SKATEBOARDING INTO PUBLIC SPACES TO ENHANCE THE URBAN FABRIC

by

HENRY CARTER RICKS

(Under the Direction of Douglas Pardue)

ABSTRACT

As American cities continue to densify, it is paramount to create public spaces that reflect and welcome the diversity of urban life and the activities that foster community and culture; skateboarding is an element of that diversity but rarely accorded visibility. By a literature review that provides insight into historical context, theory of programming in urban space, and implications of skateboarding and design, and by investigating case studies that encompass the diversity of skateboarding spaces (formal and informal), I will create recommendations for integrating skateboarding into a successful multi-functional urban space. The goal of this research is to effectively create ways to achieve a blend of urban cultural activities, suited to a wide range of ages, abilities, and accessibilities, and successfully integrate these activities into designs for an urban plaza in the cultural hub of Memphis, TN.

INDEX WORDS: landscape architecture, urban plazas, programming, skateboarding, skate parks, skate urbanism, urban design

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DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to my family who have supported me with love and patience, allowing me to follow my passions in life. And to Elizabeth, for whom I cannot imagine this experience without.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

As American cities continue to densify, it is paramount to create public spaces that reflect and welcome the diversity of urban life and the activities that foster community and culture. Skateboarding presents a unique dialectical process between the organization and programming of the city and its desire to inspire freedom, creativity, and diversity. Shifting policies and perceptions around skateboarding bring forth a need to understand how skateboarding is adding value to the city and how it can be leveraged to create a more diverse and inclusive urban experience. Already an active participant in enlivening the urban realm, the contributions and challenges skateboarding poses to the city can be leveraged by landscape architects and designers to create more vibrant, diverse, and inclusive public spaces.

Skateboarding as a valuable urban practice, is beginning to be reflected in cities, giving rise to a new era called “the new skate city” and “skate urbanism” (Angner 2017, Borden 2015, Lombardy 2016). Skate urbanism is occurring through skateboardings’ DIY movement, a skate infrastructure boom, and an increase in spaces created by skate-architects who include skate-able design in their work (Lombard 2016, 1-12). The role of skateboarding in creating vibrant places, reimagining neglected spaces, and providing a range of social benefits, has garnered the attention of cities who are seeking to harness and promote the positive values of skating in the urban landscape (Angner 2017, Borden 2001, Borden 2015, Bradley 2010, Lombard 2015, Owens 2014).

Through its humble beginnings as an American fad to its current status as a global phenomenon, skateboarding has provided a critique of the built environment, challenging the notion of public space since its inception. Skateboarding has developed in two places of vastly different character, the constructed skatepark and in the shared space of the city (Borden 2001). Where the skatepark offers predictability and accommodation, it is often an inflexible space that is poorly located (Borden 2001, Chiu 2009, Lorr 2016). Street skating offers spontaneity and experience but is met with conflict and contestation regarding safety, destruction of property, and negative public perception (Borden 2001, Chiu 2009, Lombardy 2016, Woolley 2010). This research seeks to understand the opportunities and challenges presented by skateboarding in both skateparks and skate spots such that skating can be integrated effectively into urban, public spaces and contribute a valuable resource to further the skate urbanism.

According to market research firm, Board-Trac, there are upwards of 12 million skateboarders in the United States (Owens 2014). The popularity of skateboarding and its place in mainstream culture has solidified a new era in its evolution. In this climate, skatepark designs are being reimagined and skateboarding is increasingly being integrated with other uses in the same space. The shift represents a surge of civically engaged skateboarders and advocates of skateboarding who are taking city building seriously by rethinking the way skate spaces are incorporated into the urban realm (Owens 2014). Skate urbanism ushers in a new responsibility of skateboarders, designers, and policy makers to harness the value of skateboarding, reevaluating the relationship between skateboarding and the city.

The central question driving this thesis: *what are the unique contributions and challenges skateboarding offers to urban spaces and how might landscape architect's leverage and address these to create and support vibrant, diverse, and inclusive public spaces?* Untangling this

question brings rise to many others. How does skateboarding add value to the city? How does skateboarding influence urban spaces and how do urban spaces influence skateboarding? What are the challenges and potentials of integrating skateboarding and other uses? The realization of skateboard urbanism necessitates guidelines and models to ensure its role in the creation of vibrant places in the urban landscape.

Purpose and Significance

The purpose of this research is to present the ways in which skateboarding adds value to the city and examine how designers can leverage this knowledge to create multifunctional, public spaces that include skateboarding in their programming. The significance of this research lies in the potential for landscape architecture to employ the design strategies, garnered from an exploration in constructed skate parks and appropriated skate spots, to create a new model for integrating skateboarding into public spaces.

The research adds to a growing body of knowledge which explores how design can produce more creative and inclusive landscapes. Shifting populations and the rise of neo-liberal ideals implore an evolution in the way public spaces are designed and used (Woolley 2010). Public spaces should adapt to the needs of the citizens, encouraging diversity, creativity, and interaction. Perceptions of skateboarding have changed in recent years, with cities around the world turning their attention to the benefits of incorporating skateboarding into the urban fabric (Angner 2017, Borden 2001, Borden 2015, Borden 2016, Lorr 2016, Owens 2014). These potentials are realized through inclusionary designs where skateboarding is not ostracized but allowed to contribute to the culture of the city. Given the current state of skateboarding and the city, it is important to consider the ways in which skateboarding can be included in the programming and design of public, urban spaces.

Delimitations/Limitations

Skateparks and skate spots are explored in this research to garner key strengths, weaknesses, similarities, and differences in the strategies used for their placement and design. The selection of skateparks and skate spots for analysis was limited to one of each per city. The skate spaces were chosen as demonstrable examples of constructed and found skate spaces within their respective city. The cities chosen were limited to four representing a range of populations, densities, climates, and influence in skate culture. The goal was to understand how and if these spaces were reflecting the values of skateboarding to the city, in order to provide landscape architects and designers with a resource aimed at leveraging these potentials through design interventions. Dimensional requirements and materials for skate obstacle design and placement are only briefly explored would make for pertinent supplemental research. Skater and non-skater input was not examined in this research but plays an important role in creating successful public spaces and should be explored in future research.

Skateboarding is a broad topic that intersects with many different urban and social issues, which made narrowing the scope of the research difficult. The subculture of skating and demographics including age, gender and other social factors, are only briefly explored and change from city to city making the comparison of such places difficult and inherently imperfect. Inclement weather made the observation of some of the skate spaces difficult and in those cases provided limited information about skater and non-skater interactions. The range of cities selected in the research gives a comprehensive assessment of skateboarding and the city but comparing them is made difficult due to their inherent differences in density, demographic makeup, and city composition.

Methodology and Overview

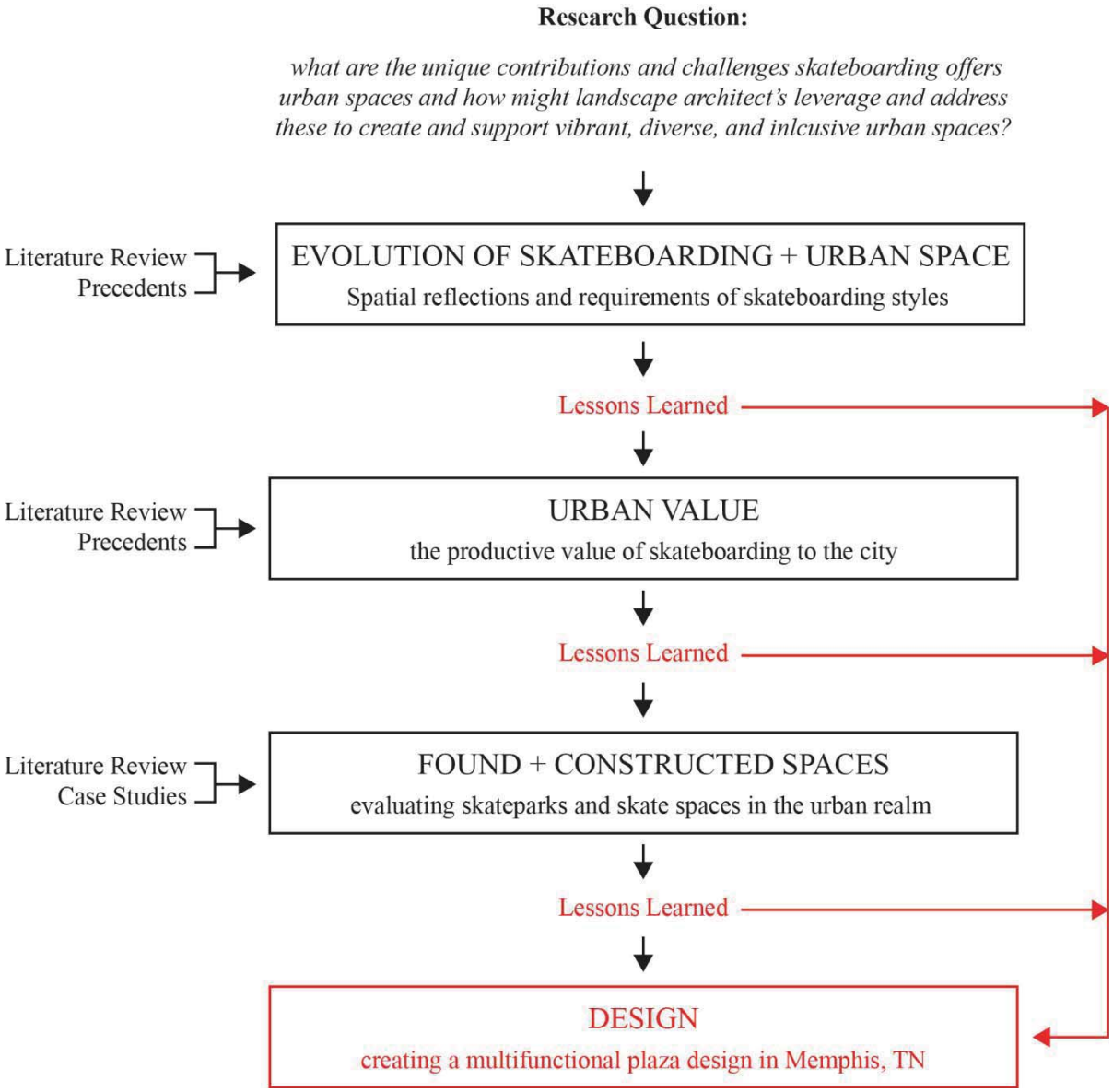


Figure 1.1: Flow chart showing structure of thesis.

Literature Review

Skateboarding is a dynamic subject that intersects many topics and disciplines. It is therefore analyzed by various academics as a different subject, making the pursuit to understand skateboarding within one realm difficult. While some identify skateboarding as a sport, others identify it as a culture, which assumes a different format of research and documentation. Integral to my research is to understand the breadth of the scholarly documentations on the relationship between skateboarding and the city and its value to urban life. In identifying the value of skateboarding, this research seeks to enhance the understanding of skateboarding as a diverse topic while producing a value measurement to further legitimize the relationship between skateboarding and the city. Iain Borden's seminal work, *Skateboarding and the City—Architecture and the Body* (2001), provides this thesis important theoretical and historical information in reframing the ways in which skateboarding engages with architecture and the urban landscape. A more recent compilation of academic articles by Kara-Jane Lombard, *Skateboarding: Subcultures, Sites, and Shifts* (2016), brings further understanding to the far-reaching impacts and implications of the modern skate scene. These two works will be referenced throughout this thesis along with other sources involving urbanism, sociology, urban studies, sports studies, community planning and more.

Precedents

The manifestations of skateboarding, from skating styles to public perceptions, are understood by the time period which predominates. Three descriptive precedents are presented to emphasize the evolution of skateboarding and its increasing value to the city. LOVE Park in Philadelphia embodied the controversial street skating of the nineties and is studied to understand how skating can add value to derelict areas of the city, sparking conversation about

the meaning of public space. The more recent saving of the iconic Undercroft skate space in London, signals changing perceptions of skateboarding and the cultural significance it plays in communities. Finally, Isreals Plads in Copenhagen is studied to understand how to successfully integrate skateboarding into a multifunctional urban plaza.

Case Studies: Participant Observation of Eight Skate Spaces

To achieve a comprehensive study of skate spaces, observations of a skatepark and an appropriated skate spot in four different cities was performed. A skatepark and appropriated skate spot were observed, evaluated, and analyzed in New York City, Philadelphia, Atlanta, and Memphis to understand their strengths and weaknesses in adding value to their respective cities. This method of participant observation requires the observer to assume a hidden role in order to record qualitative investigations without disturbing the studied subject and was adapted from Angner's (2017) research on skate spots in Denmark. Observing the skate spaces required traveling to the site and spending time collecting information about the space, users, atmosphere, and the surrounding context. This process yielded lessons learned which informed the design of a multifunctional plaza in Memphis, TN.

Design

Lessons learned garnered from the literature review, precedents, and case studies were used to design a public plaza that incorporates skateboarding in Memphis, TN. The site selection and design interventions were a direct reflection of the research generated in this thesis. The designed plaza was subjected to the same evaluation and analysis as the observed skate spaces to prove the design decisions were effective in creating a multifunctional space.

Terminology

Appropriation: the introduction of a new use to a space by a group, other than what the space was originally intended for; claiming of space (Angner 2017, 8).

Line: a succession of skateboard tricks in a row (Angner 2017, 8).

Skate-able place/skate spot: places such as squares, park and plazas with favorable conditions for skateboarding and where skaters and non-skaters negotiate over the use of space (Angner 2017, 8).

Transition: a quarter-pipe shaped skateboard element (Borden 2001). The name "transition" originates from the curved transition between the wall and floor found in drained swimming pools. Eventually this skate element was adopted into pool and vert style skating.

Vibrancy: a measure of positive activity or energy in a neighborhood that make an urban place unique and enjoyable to its residents despite the challenges of urban living, can be produced and influenced by skate spaces (Jacobs 1961).

CHAPTER 2

THE EVOLUTION OF SKATEBOARDING AND URBAN SPACE

Skateboarding and Spatial Reflections

Skateboarding has evolved from its inception as a fad in the 1960's to a global phenomenon and cultural practice. Defining exactly what skateboarding is remains a nebulous pursuit as the compilation of academic reports, essays and discussions by Lombard (2016), reveal that skating is many things: "a multi-million-dollar industry, sport, children's pursuit, fad, underground movement, criminal activity, form of transport, aesthetic practice, and much more." (11) Understanding the history of skateboarding is essential to revealing the current perceptions and trends that point to a need for multifunctional public spaces that incorporate skating.

Simply broken into four distinct eras, or waves, the history of skateboarding reflects a larger cultural and political environment shaping its meaning. The meaning of skateboarding adapts to the varying terrains and varying modes of engagement and forms of repression (Lombard 2016, 5). Borden (2001), chronicles the evolution, starting in 1959 as a fad and ending in the early 2000's as an undeniable culture and industry. Throughout its history, skateboarding has played a valuable role in the understanding of public space in America.

The first wave of skateboarding began between 1959 to 1965, as the skateboard emerged as fad created in a do-it-yourself, rudimentary fashion (Lorr 2016, 140). Skateboarding gained a following among the surf crowds and in 1965, it appeared on the cover of Life magazine. In 1964, the first outdoor skatepark was constructed in Jacksonville, Florida. Although skateboarding had risen to popularity in the 1960's, it remained a dangerous activity, with poorly

designed boards causing numerous accidents. By August 1965, twenty American cities had banned skateboarding from sidewalks and streets (Lombard 2016, 10).

In 1972, skateboarding entered its second phase with the introduction of a technological improvement: the polyurethane wheel. By the mid 1970's the modern skateboard had arrived—wooden deck, aluminum alloy trucks with steel axles and urethane wheels (Borden 2001, 18-19). The 1970's was the next phase of professionalization and commercialization of skateboarding, with skate teams rising to popularity in California. The commercial sector responded with improved technology and the construction of thousands of skateparks around the country. Skateboarders began exploring the vertical limits of skateparks, pools, and drainage pipes (Lombard 2016, 9). Pool skating revealed a terrain for skating that was incomparable with any other urban landscape and was considered the future of skateboarding at the time. Drainage ditches and other large-scale water management projects formed another architectural terrain that skaters began to seek out and master (Borden 2001, 40). By the 1980's, skateboarding had become more mainstream, commercialized, and profitable, generating 300 to 500 million per annum by the late 80's (Lombard 2016, 10). Despite the interest of large corporations and numerous sponsored events and competitions, skateboarding entered a slump due to high insurance rates and lack of interest, which led to the decline of many skateparks.

The third wave of skateboarding was a response to a particular time, place and context prior to 1991, which forced skateboarders out of skateparks and into the streets (Lorr 2016, 144). The demise of the skatepark left skaters exploring the city and as a result, cities around the world cracked down on street skating. As Lombard (2016) observed, "skateboarding's status as a resistant and underground activity became more entrenched with the rise of street skating in the 1990's, while at the same time also becoming more professional and respectable." (10) ESPN2's

X Games in the 90's legitimized the status of skateboarding as an "extreme sport," highlighting the personality of the sport, establishing respectability amongst non-skaters, and creating celebrities (Lombard 2016, 10). In practice, third wave, nineties skating was the most underground, confrontational phase as skateparks continued to decline forcing skaters to adapt to the chaos of the streets (Lorr 2016, 145). In the 1970's the urban space of the skater was typically the suburban landscape whereas in the 1980's and 1990's this increasingly became the "adult space of the city, its streets, squares, and roads with all their social complexity and dangers" (Borden 2001, 167). The use of urban streets was long a skateboarding tradition with the 1960's use of public, suburban roads and the 1970's appropriation of found spaces like drainage pipes and other water management infrastructure. "Skateboarding and street skating were embodied practices used to construct and reinforce oppositional identities" (Lorr 2016, 145).

The widespread criminalization of street skating during the mid-1990's pushed skaters back into skateparks, creating the 4th wave of skateboarding. Skaters raised during the fourth wave of skating found skateparks and ramp skating the preferred 'normal' places to skate. The influx of new skaters into the subculture once again began to legitimize skateboarding as a commercialized sport and made it more acceptable to the general public (Lorr 2016, 141-46). The skatepark regained its popularity amongst skaters and incorporated elements from the past trends in skateboarding with pools, vertical ramps, and street elements, creating and solidifying a fourth wave and a new skateboarding generation.

There is a clear evolution from the fourth wave to the next era which some have labeled "skate urbanism." In this new climate, skateboarding is perceived as integral to the cultural fabric of the city and is respected, designed for, and given significance as a valuable urban practice.

Current trends have manifested through innovative skateparks, multifunctional skate spaces, city master plans for skating, growing commercialization and popularity, and cities around the world creating skate spaces to attract and retain youth. To quote Borden (2015),

> Skateboarding is increasingly central to debates about the value of public spaces, while simultaneously adding artistic, cultural, educational and commercial value to our urban lives. It is even helping to address some of our most difficult social challenges and providing hugely disadvantaged children and youths with new hopes, skills and futures.

Borden (2015) argues that in this phase of skateboarding the bans and defensive architecture techniques are being replaced with the understanding of the positive impact skating can play in "education, entrepreneurship, and community cohesion." Skateboarding has become an organized force in the city, pushing the understanding of public spaces to be more inclusionary, creative places. The current trends necessitate models for multifunctional spaces that include skateboarding in their programming. Angner (2017), Borden (2015), Lombard (2016), and Owens (2014) point to the rise of the "new skate city," where skateboarding is leveraged as a source of added value to the city. European models embracing the new skate city are gaining traction and progressive cities like Portland, Oregon have skating master plans that link skateparks and skate spots throughout the city. Skateboarding was selected to participate in the Olympic Games in 2018 for the first time in its history, further pointing to a global acceptance and interest in the urban practice. Identifying methods to leverage the productive value of skateboarding and improve the quality of the city is more relevant in this climate than ever before.

Evolution of Skateboarding

Era	Skate Trends	Studied Skate Spaces
1960s	**1st Wave** Skateboarding starts as a California fad, gaining a following in the surfer crowd. Skating takes places on city and suburban streets, though it is banned in many cities by 1965 and falls out of popularity.	
1970-80s	**2nd Wave** The modern skateboard arrives leading to the construction of thousands of skateparks around the country. Skate teams form in California, skaters discover the pool and begin to explore the vertical limits of the act. The skatepark declines due to issues of litigation and liability, ending the era.	
1990s	**3rd Wave** The demise of the skatepark leads to the exploration of the city. Skaters appropriated city streets, plazas, and squares. A new style of skating emerged called street skating. Cities responded by criminalizing skateboarding on public property, making this the most confrontational wave in its history.	LOVE Park The Undercroft Brooklyn Banks Thomas Paine Plaza Black Blocks Al Town
1990s-2000s	**4th Wave** Criminalization pushed skaters back in to skateparks. Younger skaters identify the skatepark as the normal skate space, marking a new era. Skateparks began to include street (90's) and vertical (70-80's) elements.	LES Skatepark Tobey Skatepark
Current	**Skate Urbansim** Skateboarding is seen as a valuable and culturally significant part of the urban experience. Skateparks are designed to integrate other uses and encourage interaction and spectating. Skateboarding is designed for and allowed in multifunctional public spaces.	Isreals Plads Paine's Plaza 4th Ward Skatepark

Figure 2.1: Evolution of skateboarding. (Author)

Skate-able Ingredients

As discussed, skateboarding is a "diverse and fluid topic" which engages with different landscapes, cultures, and meanings (Angner 2017, 25). Borden (2001) identifies two landscapes in which different styles of skateboarding have developed. 'Constructed space,' implies designed skateparks, skate bowls, half-pipes and indoor skateparks, while 'found space' refers to urban plazas, streets, parking lots, and claimed space such as DIY parks. This thesis explores both constructed and found skate spaces to identify key strengths and weaknesses between the two. The different styles of skateboarding inherently entail varying spatial needs, therefore a brief overview of skate styles and necessary skate-able ingredients for those styles is pertinent. Four main skateboarding styles have emerged: freestyle/cruising, transition skating, street skating, and park skating.

Freestyle and cruising necessitate flat ground such a streets and expanses of concrete. Freestyle involves standing still and performing tricks on flat ground such as handstands (Borden 2001). Cruising refers to simply riding the skateboard, often for speed, and requires expansive smooth terrain.

Transition based skating is based on the quarter pipe. This style originated in the pool skating of the 1960s and later vert (vertical) style skating, the large U-shaped wooden constructions that mimic a drained pool (Angner 2017).

Street skating combines transition skating and freestyle moves, using the infrastructure of the city as the obstacles. The flat ground trick, the ollie, allows both skater and board to elevate simultaneously, and is the building block for all street style tricks (Angner 2017). To quote legendary skateboarder Stacy Peralta, "For urban skaters the city is the hardware on their trip" (Borden 2001, 179).

Park skating is a style specifically adapted to designed skateparks and is a blend of street and transition skating (Angner 2017).

The typical obstacles, or skate-able ingredients, found in the streets and later adapted to skateparks, are presented in Figure 2.2. Some form of these obstacles are found in most skateparks and in every city street, although there are many more skate-able objects and there are no rules for how skaters interpret the urban environment (Angner 2017).

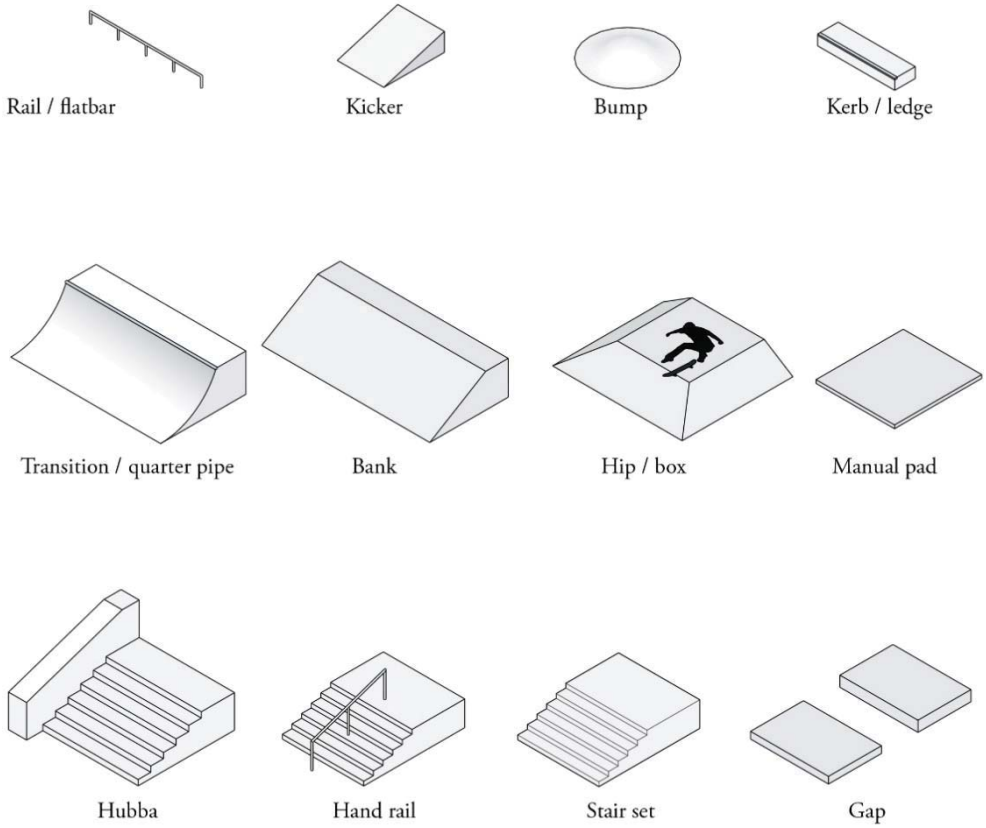


Figure 2.2: Common skate elements. (Image by Angner 2017)

Skateparks and Skate Spots

Skateparks and skate spots offer skaters and non-skaters a different arena for action and interaction. Often, constructed spaces, whose sole purpose is to serve the skater, dilute the experience of skating through a predictable set of obstacles as opposed to the spontaneity, freedom, and flow of found spaces (Borden 2001, Chiu 2009, Lorr 2016, Woolley 2010). Constructed spaces offer more ideal conditions, safety and cater to different skating styles. Street skating presents a different experience from skateparks and is characterized by unpredictability, discovery, and danger, and remains at the heart of the skateboarding subculture. Research suggests that many skaters prefer street skating even though skate bans, prevailing surveillance, and skate-proof designs dominate the American city (Borden 2001, 2015, 2016; Chiu 2009; Lorr 2016).

Chiu (2009), explored the difference between skate spots and skateparks in New York City and identified three differences between park skating and street skating which are summarized by three phenomena: "the social production of public space, the social controls imposed on skateboarders and the discursive construction of skateboarding." (32) While street skating involves searching the environment for affordances to perform tricks, park skaters utilize built environments that match their requirements. Chiu (2009) argues that to understand the difference between street skating and park skating is to understand the difference between represented space and representational space. As Borden (2001) says, "Unlike the urban streets of the city itself, the skatepark was always a consciously provided space, a mental projection and representation of skateboarding terrain." (131) Street skating involves mental, social, and physical practices that can make the experience richer and offer an urban journey as opposed to a prescribed scene. Chiu (2009) notes that the typical skatepark is enclosed by a fence and can be

compared to a playground where the skating is all about practicing and advancing individual skill. Streets afford more diverse environments with endless physical elements to engage and more interaction with urban life.

Concerning the nature of surveillance, or the social controls imposed on skateboarders, the skatepark and the street are monitored differently, too. Surveillance has long been part of skateboarding culture and thus plays a role in authenticating or legitimizing skate spaces. Many cities have skating bans or restrictions that prohibit skating in public plazas and other spaces. Skateparks themselves have restrictions: hours of operation, helmet requirements, and other rules. The social control of skateboarding in any place is mediated by the demographics of the users and the other activities held in that space (Chiu 2009). The fear of skateboarding leads to the creation of skateparks to be maintained by an environment of discipline and order (Chiu 2009). In practice, cities have created skateparks and have also enacted skate bans in order to control public spaces. When cities create skateparks, skateboarding is rationalized as a sport, but when it exists in the city, it can be seen as a nuisance. These inconsistent policies do not allow skating to exist at its full potential for the city and its citizens. When skaters are excluded from public space, it reshapes their culture and changes their perception of time and space.

The meaning of skateboarding is reinforced through its cultural symbology. Because the world is globally connected, the projected image of the typical skateboarder effects the culture of skating. Skate spots around the world are in video games, magazines and featured in videos. The predominant marketed image of the skateboarder is found in “a preexisting environment” appearing to “have taken advantage” and appropriated that space for skateboarding. The street then becomes a significant symbol to skateboarding culture (Chiu, 2009). Chiu’s (2009) research suggests that most skateboarders view street skating as appropriating, liberal and real, and

requiring additional creativity. As Borden (2001) suggests, “the spectacular nature of skateparks create the possibility for skaters to become dissatisfied, becoming bored” (170)

All skate spaces create opportunities while restricting others, which is not to say that one is superior to the other. Because of its controversial nature, skateboarding is often contained with laws and rules, but separating contestation from rule “leaves little space for theorizing the productive engagement between them” (Lombard 2015, 170). The purpose of inquiry into the two types of skate spaces is to garner the strengths and weaknesses of each and provide lessons learned to guide the design of a multifunctional public space that incorporates skateboarding. Skateparks serve as “proving grounds,” a place to practice, and a safe, predictable space to skate. The urban landscape offers a different set of obstacles and modes of control which the modern skateboarder still values (Nemeth 2005). The research and information from previous academic endeavors suggests that the typical skatepark is not the complete answer to incorporating skateboarding within the city. The resounding desire for the urban experience is reinforced by skate culture but often not projected into designated skateparks. A new model of skateboard space, integrated into the urban realm, has the potential to harness the productive value of skateboarding and also give the city a vibrant and diverse public space.

Precedents

With a clear understanding of what skateparks and appropriated skate spots are, three precedents representing the shift in skateboard policy and perceptions are explored next. LOVE Park in Philadelphia embodies nineties street skating and the confrontational 3rd wave of skating. The Undercroft in London examines how skateboarding has become to be seen as a valuable part of the city. Finally, Isreals Plads in Copenhagen, reveals how design interventions can allow skateboarding to exist alongside many other urban activities.

LOVE PARK, The Irreplaceable Skateboarding Landmark

While most people have a mental conception of a skatepark, less obvious is the understanding of an iconic, appropriated skate spot in America. Skate spots are usually not intended for skateboarders, but their design or specific elements provide an almost perfect set of obstacles and materials, engraining these spaces into in the local, national and global culture of skateboarding. One such space, LOVE Park, is explored to understand the power of appropriated skate spaces and the manifestations of skateboarding during the third wave of street skating in the American city.

LOVE Park, originally John F. Kennedy Plaza, in Philadelphia, is an iconic urban plaza that served as the epicenter of the skate scene on the East coast during the nineties. Its history offers important lessons on the appropriation of public space and the role of programming and policy in the public realm. Howell (2005) argues that the contested history of LOVE park is a study of "consumer culture, class politics, and urban space" and is central to Philadelphia's transition to a new mode of economic development."

The plaza was completed in 1965 at the height of the Great Society, in an era of public works and social welfare programs. The space was created in a modernist mode of development that was centrally planned, publicly funded, state led, and designed for the modern working class (Howell 2005). It was a successful urban space for the first two decades of its existence, but a recession in the 1980's transformed the plaza into the makeshift home of countless homeless. By 1991, the local paper was publishing articles with titles such as "Who Eats at JFK Plaza? Brown-Baggers, Homeless—and Rats" (Howell 2005, 34). Skateboarders began to flock to the plaza due to its open layout, expansive granite planters, ledges, rails, and stairs, all of which were no longer used by the general population of Philadelphia.

Figure 2.3: LOVE Park, the epicenter of skateboarding on the East Coast.
(Photo by Jonathan Rentschler)

Figure 2.4: Demolition of the iconic skate spot.
(Photo by Jonathan Rentschler)

Figure 2.5: A family watches a skater.
(Photo by Jonathan Rentschler)

At that time, the skateboard industry was barely afloat and LOVE Park injected a raw, non-Californian skate space into the skating scene that became the "darling of the skateboard media" (Howell 2005, 34). Local employees, tourists, and residents flocked to the park to watch the skateboarders perform their tricks (Nemeth 2006). The City did not share the sentiment, even though skateboard shops began popping up in the center city, breathing life into the CBD, and skate photographers, videographers, and professionals relocated to the core of downtown. LOVE Park made its way into video games, magazine covers, and videos making it a world-famous icon for youth culture.

By 2000, Philadelphia had placed a citywide ban on skateboarding that specifically noted the skateboarding practices taking place in LOVE Park. The local and national rhetoric on skateboarding painted the skateboarder as a destructive menace that had no respect for property and offered no productive value to the engine of the American city. The ban on LOVE Park was viciously enforced with police sweeping the plaza regularly, often ending in violent episodes (Howell 2005). In a seemingly contradictory chain of events, the plaza gained enough attention to attract ESPN's X-Games in 2001 and 2002 (Howell 2005). ESPN wanted to have the event in LOVE Park, but the mayor's office insisted on Dilworth's Plaza, which is directly adjacent to LOVE Park. The games generated an estimated $80 million in revenue for Philadelphia, but the City fenced off LOVE Park for renovations before ESPN's arrival in 2002, prompting them to decline a contract with the city for the next year (Howell 2005, 34).

The mayor insisted the City would build another skateboard facility but moved forward with a $800,000-dollar renovation plan of the plaza that introduced new planters, teak benches, and patches of grass aimed at disturbing the skating scene. The renovation was highly criticized as a local paper noted the "main goal was to get rid of skateboarders; it wasn't to make LOVE

Park a good urban space" (Howell 2005, 35) In a poll of two thousand residences of the area 92% were still in favor of allowing skateboarding in LOVE Park (Nemeth 2006). In 2002, a number of the city's leading business and policy organizations flew in Richard Florida, a Columbia urban planning PhD and bestselling author for his work on the new creative class. Florida spoke to a large audience on the subject of urban economic development where he addressed the redesign of LOVE Park saying, "Skateparks are very important to young people, an intrinsic part of their creative culture, part of their identity. We should be expanding the skate parks…To take the park away is to tell them that they are not valid. Big mistake" (Howell 2005, 35).

By 2003, skateboarding in LOVE Park had become a hot topic in the mayoral election where the challenging Republican candidate promised skateboarding would be returned to the plaza. Though unsuccessful, the publicized dialogue spurred the creation of a nonprofit lobbying group, Skateboard Advocacy Network, who enlisted local activists, editors, lawyers, architects, and planners. Together the group produced a "balanced solution" proposal that called for the removal of some of the obstructive planters if the skateboarders would agree to only use certain areas of the park after 3pm (Nemeth 2006). The City responded to the proposal by citing that if skateboarding was allowed it would cost $100,000 dollars per year in maintenance. SAN rebuttal came with backing from DC, a large California based shoe manufacturer, pledging one million dollars over a ten-year period. In an unprecedented decision the City replied that they simply did not see skateboarding in the future of LOVE Park citing damage and liability as their chief complaints (Nemeth 2006). It should be noted that at the time, not one lawsuit had been filed against the City of Philadelphia by either a skateboarder or a pedestrian in all the years skating had been occurring at LOVE Park (Nemeth 2006).

In response to the controversy over skateboarders in Love Park, the Skater's Defense Lobby formed in 2001 to defend the rights of skaters against the proposed municipal legislation banning skateboarding (Franklins Paine Skatepark Fund). The group championed the "cause to secure safe and dedicated spaces for skateboarding in Philadelphia, as well as to advocate for the positive value of skateboarding as a sport and recreational pastime for youth." Franklin's Paine Skatepark Fund was founded in 2001 as a direct result of these efforts and helped spearhead kickstarter campaigns to raise money for a new skatepark that emulated the iconic plaza. The new skate plaza, Paine's Park, was designed by Anthony Bracali of Friday Architects and Brian Nugent, as a new type of skatepark that reflected the "evolution of the lessons about skateboarding in public space" (Franklins Paine Skatepark Fund). The design of the new park incorporated elements of LOVE Park and attempted to create a space that blurred the lines between skatepark and plaza, as LOVE Park had once done. Paine's Plaza is observed, evaluated and analyzed later in this thesis.

LOVE Park was ultimately redesigned again with completion of the new design slated for 2018. The design does not incorporate skateboarding into its programming though it can be expected that the iconic park will always be examined by old and new skaters for its deeply engrained involvement in the evolution of skateboarding. Skateboarding in LOVE Park proved that once perceived "scruffy skaters" have a powerful influence on the city. The skaters are now seen not only as an opportunity for development but also serve as "an indicator of whether or not the city can survive" (Howell 2005, 37). The case of LOVE Park highlights the transition of skateboarding from the highly confrontational third wave of street skating, to an acceptance of its value. Understanding the evolution of skateboarding perceptions, culture and manifestations provides insights in how to leverage the value of skating and create more inclusive public spaces.

The Undercroft: Skateboarding as a Cultural Catalyst

In the case of LOVE Park, the appropriated skate space was ultimately lost, but it did spark debate about the importance of skateboarding to a local and global community. A more current precedent highlighting the new wave of skateboarding is the saving of the Undercroft in London. In this case, an appropriated skate space generated such cultural significance that it transformed an entire neighborhood and was eventually proclaimed a designated skate space by the city. The value of skateboarding to both skaters and non-skaters was realized and harnessed with success, providing a cultural asset to London. Iain Borden (2016) detailed the history of this skate spot in the article, *Southbank Skateboarding, London, and Urban Culture*, which will be referenced throughout this section.

Over the last decade, London's booming developmental growth has begun to overtake many skateboard spaces that have been established for years. This politically charged controversy has been covered by the media in London, giving rise to mixed opinions. The concerns and issues being raised revolve around "democracy, public space, cultural value, historic preservation, commerce, and urban design" (Borden 2016, 91). The Undercroft at the Southbank Centre, was at the forefront of the debate involving the preservation of iconic skate spaces and set a precedent for leveraging urban skate spaces.

The Festival Wing, comprised of galleries and music halls, was added to the Southbank complex in 1967. The architects of the project belonged to the radical architecture firm, Archigram. The designers created walkways and ground level spaces, known as the Undercroft, which were intentionally left as blank slates for improvised use and activity. Naturally, when skateboarding flooded London in 1973, skateboarders found the flat spaces and angled banks to be an instant skate spot (Borden 2015). Skateboarding has been taking place uninterrupted in the

Undercroft for forty consecutive years, arguably the oldest place in the world where skating has continuously happened for so long. As skateparks declined in the 1980's, the Undercroft became more like a city street, with skateboarders, artists and homeless appropriating the space into their own. Between 2004 and 2006, skate-able street elements were introduced to the Undercroft through funding by Sony, Playstation, Nike, and others (Borden 2016). Railings and yellow lines were installed around the skate-able space for liability reasons allowing skateboarding to be formally permitted by the Southbank Centre (Borden 2016, 94).

With skateboarding legally allowed, the Undercroft became a center for varied urban arts with "BMX riders, photographers, filmmakers, poets, dancers and musicians" gravitating to this appropriated "studio in the streets" (Borden 2016, 94). This urban vibrancy was spurred by skateboarders, who first reinvented the space by engaging with underutilized architectural elements and ultimately created a cultural scene that became part of the local community. In doing so, the Undercroft has become arguably the most famous skate spot in the UK and has attracted skaters, artists, and curious tourists from around the world to its grounds.

In 2013, the Undercroft came under threat from a $100 million-dollar renovation and construction project that proposed retail units in the skate-able space. Objectors mounted a campaign and ultimately thwarted the developer from ending skating at the Undercroft. The Conservative Party Mayor of London stepped in to the debate calling the Undercroft "the epicenter of UK skateboarding" and "part of the cultural fabric of London" (Borden 2016, 95). Borden notes that the reason the Undercroft was saved was not only the efforts of the skateboarders but the efforts of the general population who saw the Undercroft as a source of vibrant, urban life. To quote Borden (2015), "People from all over the world enjoy seeing the

Figure 2.6: Skating at the Undercroft. (Photo by Sam Ashley)

Figure 2.7: Redendering for Hungerford Bridge. (Image by Soren Nordal Enevoldsen)

Figure 2.8: Redendering for Hungerford Bridge. (Image by Soren Nordal Enevoldsen)

Undercroft's unique combination of skateboarding-against-concrete, of unruly disorder amidst increasing sanitization, and so witnessing truly public space in action." (96)

When the SBC initially proposed replacing the Undercroft skate space with retail, they designated another area nearby for a formally designed skate plaza, called Hungerford Bridge. Even with the saving of the Undercroft, the SBC decided to move forward with the development of another skate plaza. The plaza was designed by Richard Holland, Soren Nordal Enevoldsen and Iain Borden, whose chief goal was to design a skate space that avoided institutionalizing street-based skateboarding within a skatepark-like environment (Borden 2016). The central design tenant of the designers, was that everything had to have multiple functions, and nothing was solely for skateboarding. The Hungerford Bridge design "assumed the character of public space that just happened to be good for skateboarding" (Borden 2016, 97).

The case of the Undercroft signals a change in the perceptions of skateboarding, giving the skateboarder significance and a place at the table when deciding the future of public space. In this precedent, skateboarding was the first sign of life, generated a cultural scene, and was ultimately valued by the city enough to save it from displacement. The skateboarders created vibrancy in the space by occupying it and injecting it with action and interaction.

Isreals Plads, Copenhagen, Denmark

Few multifunctional skate spaces exist in America. Denmark, however, has realized the value of combining many activities and user groups together in a single space. Of the European precedents, Isreals Plads, an urban square in central Copenhagen presents an unparalleled blend of activities in a relatively small public plaza. The site of the plaza formerly consisted of parking and markets until 2007 when the City decided to refurbish and modernize the square into a multifunctional, recreational plaza (Angner 2017, 54). The design was created by Sweco, COBE,

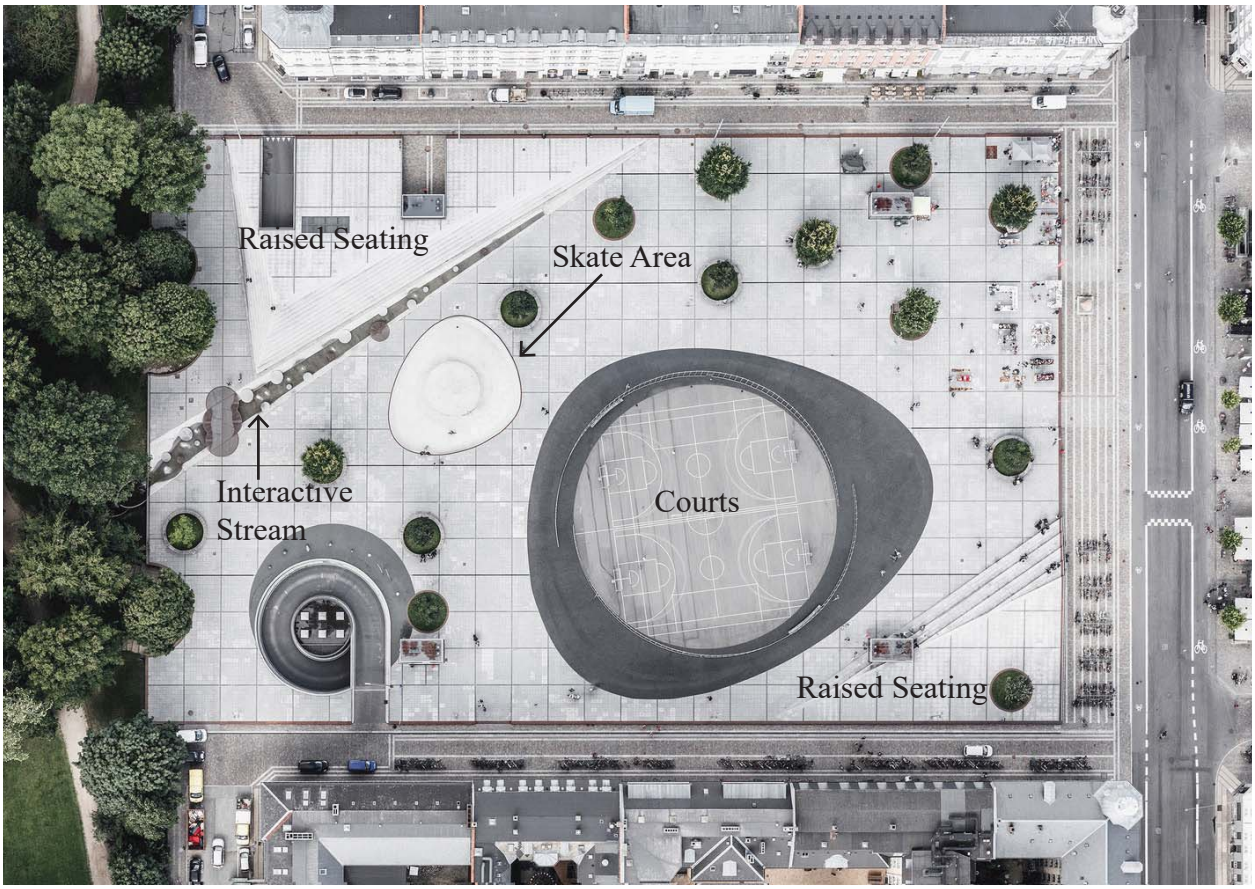


Figure 2.9: Plan view of Isreals Plads. (Photo by Rasmus Hjortshoj)


Figure 2.10: Interactive stream acts as a buffer. (Photo by Rasmus Hjortshoj)


Figure 2.11: Skating and spectating. (Photo by Rasmus Hjortshoj)

Niras, and Morten Straede, who sought to enliven the square, allowing it to function as both a youth activity area, a plaza, and a gateway to an adjacent park (Sweco 2017).

The square features a multisport area, which serves as a basketball and street soccer venue, a skate area, which consists of a doughnut shaped skate bowl, alternative playground equipment, an interactive stream, tiered seating for a view of the entire square, and multiple seating areas for gathering. This highly diverse set of uses was designed such that each space felt at once separate from and a part of the greater plaza. As Sweco (2017) explains the square "can be compared to a living room and a recreational space." The site serves as a school playground, where an adjacent school lets out during the afternoon, a skate-able plaza for skateboards, bikes, and scooters, and a recreational area allowing for basketball and street soccer in the city center. The space also functions as a public plaza with raised seating, landscaping, and areas of respite. An interactive stream separates the skate-able areas from the seating such that there is a clear designation of space, creating a sense of security while allowing for bystanders, office workers, and tourists to engage with the different activities of the square.

Skaters and non-skaters benefit from the space which is made more vibrant by the plethora of activities the space was designed to include. An examination of this space leads to a few key takeaways. The most important is that the multi-use plaza functions seamlessly when planned carefully. Using design techniques to designate "rooms" for certain activities allows many activities to be carried out simultaneously. The most notable design intervention in the plaza was to create a buffer from the skate area and the tiered seating. This was accomplished through the placement of an interactive stream which would catch any stray skateboards from posing a threat to others while keeping non-skaters engaged in the activity. Isreals Plads shows

that the challenges of incorporating skate and non-skate areas into a single space are solved through design interventions.

Lessons Learned

Chapter 1 explored the evolution of skateboarding and its relationship to the city. The trends in skateboarding are a direct reflection of the policies, perceptions, and landscapes that dominate the era and determine the predominate style of skating. Historically skateboarding has been pushed in and out of skateparks, forcing skateboarders to adapt to the physical, political, and cultural conditions of the time. Understanding that skateboarding is an inherently urban activity taking place in public streets, public skateparks, and public plazas alike, brings forth a need for a more resolute solution for incorporating skateboarding into public spaces than current American models have done.

Skateparks and skate spots, the constructed and the found, each have legitimacy as grounds for skateboarding, social interaction, and community. The research shows that the contradicting policies surrounding the handling of skateboarding are not always concerned with harnessing the full potentials skateboarding can offer individuals, communities, and cities. The methods of control and public perceptions determine acceptable and unacceptable behavior in public space. Shifting perceptions and policies on skateboarding warrant more progressive models that reveal how skateboarding can coexist alongside other uses in public spaces. The precedents explored in this chapter represent this shift. LOVE Park showed that skateboarders have the power to revamp derelict city centers, adding value to the spaces they interpret. The Undercroft was deemed worthy of protection as a culturally significant part of the urban fabric of London. Isreals Plads shows that cities are now seeking to harness the values of skateboarding by programming it in to multifunctional public spaces.

Skateparks as a total resolution for skateboarding in the city do not fully harness the potentials of skateboarding or the desire of skaters and non-skaters for more organic interaction in public space. Appropriated skate spots can lead to conflict and contestation between other users and civic policies. It is evident there is a demand for a new model of public space that is inclusive to an array of urban performances. The ways in which skateboarding adds value to the city must first be identified to create such a model. These values will be explored in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

URBAN VALUE

Central to this research is understanding the ways in which skateboarding adds value to the city. The inextricable relationship between skateboarding and the city is critically examined in this chapter to identify key values which can be harnessed and promoted, reframing skateboarding as an integral part of the urban experience. This examination will ultimately generate criteria aimed at measuring and promoting these values and enable skateboarding to function as a productive layer in the city.

Vibrancy

The success of public space is defined by its use value to the individual, the neighborhood and ultimately the city. When successful, these spaces are deemed vibrant, acting as a magnet for civic manifestations that represent significant value to their surroundings. This research will return to the understanding of vibrancy by Jane Jacobs (1961) to frame the value of skateboarding in the city. Jacobs (1961) defines vibrancy as a measure of positive activity or energy in a neighborhood that make an urban place unique and enjoyable to its residents despite the challenges of urban living. Here, positive activity is realized through the meaningful interactions of diverse uses and users. Accordingly, mixed land use is a critical component of urban diversity and vibrancy as the spatial proximity between different land uses increases the potential for social interactions at the street and district levels (Sung et al. 2015). Vibrancy should be thought of as a diverse collection of citizens, involved in multiple uses of the same space, simultaneously adding to the value of that space. Inherently embedded in this

understanding of vibrancy are three components: an activation value, an exchange/use value and a social value. These three components will be explored in this chapter.

Activation Value

Skateboarding can be seen as an additive activity layer which promotes the very tenants of Jacob's (1961) definition of vibrancy. Both skateparks and appropriated skate spaces encourage interaction between the individual and other users, as well as, the individual and the built environment. The activation of space by skateboarding is not limited to the skater but extends to the interaction between skaters and non-skaters, skaters and the city, and non-skaters and the city. Each relationship stands to benefit from activated urban spaces.

Through the discovery and use of different terrains during its evolution, skateboarding was essentially a "repositioning of the urban" (Borden 2001, 33). Initially transforming the use of suburban streets and coves to reinventing urban plazas and squares, skateboarding can be considered a socio-spatial condition, neither purely physical nor purely social, and where "architecture and activity are concrete inactions of each other" (Borden 2001, 53). Because much of street skateboarding involves the appropriation of space, in which skating is not the intended use of the architectural elements, the act brings underutilized, unnoticed features to life. Urban theorist Henri Lefebvre, calls the appropriation of space "a creative reworking of its time and space" (Lefebvre 1991). It is in this spontaneity that skateboarding offers the city something more than what it is often perceived: "'the likeness of a sum or combination of elements,' reduced to the legibility of signs" (Borden 2001, 188). Skateboarding responds meaningfully to the city by making the work of art, saying and living the city on its own terms. LOVE Park, presented an example of how skateboarding can enliven public spaces that have been deserted or

forgotten by injecting a “positive activity” which in turn attracts more positive energy around that space.

Another tenant of Jacobs (1961) understanding of vibrancy is the notion of the street functioning as a “sidewalk ballet,” where pedestrian activity is not constrained to certain times of day. Skateboarding addresses this through the alternate rhythm by which skateboarders navigate the city. Whether skateboarders are moving to or from a skatepark or an appropriated skate spot, they are doing so at a much different pace than the rest of the city. Skateboarding time is immediate and also discontinuous, composed of a few minutes here and there, spread over space, and in between the socially programmed activities of production and exchange (Borden 2001). This alternate pace generates a preponderance of what Jacobs (1961) calls “eyes on the streets,” a form of natural surveillance, subconsciously promoting safer streets. In many cases, skaters inhabit public spaces at times when they would otherwise be uninhabited, and skaters spend longer time in urban plazas, as other users hurry through the space, which can have the positive effect of effectively policing the space. (Woolley 2010, 228-29).

Skateboarders often use spaces which have no other use, and in doing so create a meaning for that space. Skaters inject youth and dynamism into the city, challenging accepted definitions of space and social logic and redefining what we understand the city to mean. Skateboarding promotes vibrancy through its critique of the built environment, activation of unused space, and representation of a way of living.

Use/Exchange Value

In understanding the wider meanings of space and culture, “skateboarding is displaced from the stuff of history to the realm of critical thought” (Borden 2001, 11). A critical

examination of skateboarding and the city reveals that skating engages with both use value and exchange value which contributes a socio-economic layer to the urban fabric.

For decades, the city, especially the central business district, has been seen and perceived as a purely economic entity with little thought given to the social role or importance of the area (Woolley 2010, 211). Regeneration of some urban cores in America has resulted in the development of spaces presumed to be public, although in reality the 'publicness' of these spaces is considered questionable (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998). These public spaces often cater to productive citizens, those who are promoting and engaging with exchange, involved in the economic engine of the city. In spatial terms, skateboarders are sometimes considered to have an experience similar to that of the homeless, because they are seen as occupying space without engaging in economic activity (Borden, 2001). Borden (2001) suggests that the act of skateboarding, especially street skating, engages with 'use value' of space over 'exchange value.' This leads to conflict and contestation as skateboarding is seen as a disturbance in areas of business. But, current trends point to the resurrection of urban centers not merely as economic engines but as socially significant areas, seeking to create vital and viable city cores (Woolley 2010).

Skateboarding inherently supplies the city with an organic, street culture that plays a role in adding value to the city. In the beginning of the 21st century, urban planner, Richard Florida (2002), argued that the "economic need for creativity has registered itself in the rise of a new class," which he termed the "creative class." Cities must rethink how they are organized such that they attract and retain this class by focusing on funding and developing lifestyle amenities. Florida (2002) asserts that "the creative class is drawn to organic and indigenous street-level culture… Much of it is native and of-the-moment." This represents a shift from the prioritization

of exchange value to the necessity of incorporating use values within the city. Current trends suggest that organic street culture, such as skateboarding, is in fact what attracts younger generations to the city and therefore is tied to the economic vitality of the city.

Skateboarding, according to Borden (2001), is an 'infinite postmodern mutant,' a critical tactic that denaturalizes the city of abstract space and exchange. This interpretation suggests that confronting needs and desires, not products and things, creates change and proposes a return to art not as aestheticism but adaptation of time and space, an engagement with objects unrestricted to their use qua commodities but as the common property of social experience (Borden 2001, 246). Here, the use value of space is tied to the vibrancy of space, in which it is not restricted to certain times, economies, or programs, but perceived as native and in the moment. New generations are expecting this sort of use value to exist in their cities and therefore is tied directly to the vitality of cities.

Skateboarding is at once a localized and global phenomenon. Skateboarders are responding to the Lefebvre theory of implosion-explosion, "the process where an extension of urban phenomena internationally is accompanied by a simultaneous intensifying of the actual urban fabric at the local scale" (Lefebvre 1991). Skateboarding can be seen as an act that breaks up the homogeneity of the city by offering it spontaneity and alternative values. Lefebvre argues that daily life is diminished when a city fails to replace "the symbolisms, times, rhythms, and different spaces of a traditional city with anything other than dwelling units and the constraints of traffic" (Lefebvre 1991). Skateboarding suggests that cities can be thought of as series of micro spaces, rather than comprehensive urban plans, monuments, or grand projects, pointing to the resurrection of the urban not as a product, but as a way of living. Skateboarding reminds us

that the city is a series of diverse place-specific phenomena, ignorance of the global serving to heighten awareness of the local (Borden 2001, 217-232).

Here, skateboarding adds value to the city by playing a role in reviving space and attracting users. Embedded within these values is an economic impact. A skate master plan for Melbourne, Australia states that skate activity in the city creates a positive impact on the economy and tourism through skate provisions and events (Melbourne Skate Framework). Cities are now turning their attention to the potentials of skateboarding and its role in attracting diverse citizens and revitalizing the urban fabric. This exchange/use value is directly tied to the vibrancy of an area as it is a determinate of whether a place has adapted to the desires and diversity of its citizens.

Social Value

The social value of skateboarding has surfaced with a growing body of knowledge proving that skateparks and skate spaces play a unique role in fostering social benefits to individuals and communities. In the current wave of skateboarding, cities are looking to skateboardings' ability to bolster, mend, and create community. These social benefits range from developing social capital for individuals to providing a productive outlet for neighborhoods. As Lorr (2015) states, "skateboarding practices can be understood as both a technology of the self and of the collective, as a resource and socializing medium through which to learn socially constructed modes of intergenerational identity and conduct comportment, and the cultural configuration of people's social worlds."(145) The current pulse of skateboarding, revolves around the integration of skateboarding into urban and cultural life and "its utilization as a tool for socially progressive and inclusive ends" (Lombard 2016, 10). As Borden (2015) states,

"skateboarding addresses some of our most difficult social challenges and providing hugely disadvantaged children and youths with new hopes, skills and futures."

The immediate social benefits experienced at skate spaces include establishing friendships, bonding to a friend group, gaining peer and respect status, and increased opportunities to interact with people (Dumas and Laforest 2009). The development of this social capital has been recognized as a way to positively engage young people. Community oriented projects like Ethiopia Skate and Megabiskate in Addis Ababa, RideIt in Detroit, Skateistan in Afghanistan, Cambodia, and South Africa, SkatePAL in Palestine, 7Hills in Jordan, Bedouins in Tunisia and All Nations Skate Project in the US all deploy skateboarding to build social capital and counter deep-rooted issues with alcohol, drug abuse, unemployment, violence, gender prejudices and access to education (Borden 2015). Skateparks and skate spots act as 'opportunity structures,' spaces that provide various social, psychological, and physical resources that shape preventive attitudes and secure safe and supportive environments (Dumas and Laforest 2009). Bradley (2010), found that skateparks and skateboarding serve as a positive context for adolescent development of many individual and social skills (Figure 3.1). Skateboarding also fosters values of personal freedom, self-expression and cooperation (Bradley 2010)

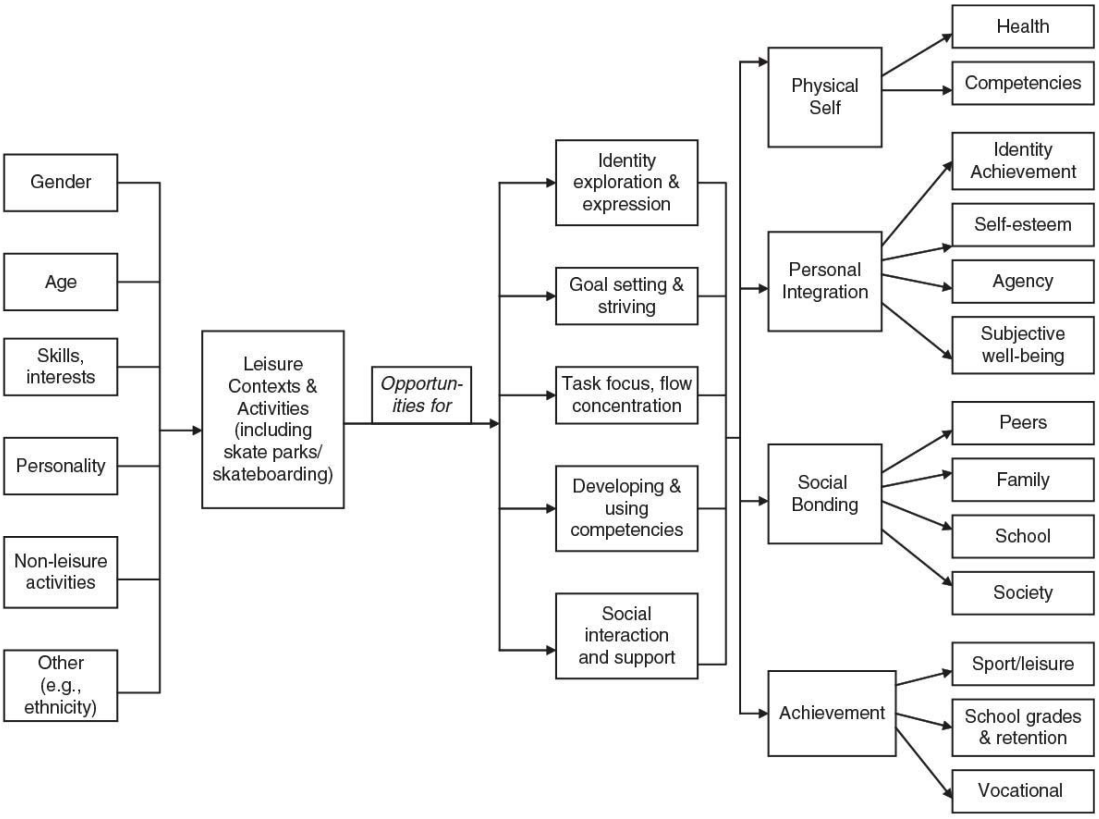


Figure 3.1: Benefits of participating in leisure activities like skateboarding (Bradley, 2010)

Beal et al. (2017) chronicled increased community advocacy in establishing and maintaining skate spaces. The research unfolds the development of three skateparks in the Bay Area which used community advocacy to accomplish their goals of creating skate spaces. The advocacy for the proposed skateparks included providing a safe, healthy outlet for youth and promoting economic vitality and neighborhood ownership for ethnic minorities (Beal et al. 2017). The current climate has produced a new understanding and growing acceptance of the benefits of skateboarding within communities. The social benefits of skateboarding clearly extend beyond the individual to the neighborhood, community, and city. Skateboarding is not

only a localized act, but “a globally reproduced and exchanged phenomenon” (Borden 2001, 126).

The social value of skateboarding is vast, ranging from building social skills and improving mental health to helping solve many of the most deep-rooted urban issues cities face. In doing so, skateboarding is acting as a positive activity or energy in a neighborhood that makes the place unique and enjoyable to its residents despite the challenges of urban living, creating vibrancy.

Lessons Learned

Skateboarding adds value to the city, activating its streets, engaging with both use and exchange value, which attracts citizens and contributes to the economy, and providing a range of social benefits. Each of the values of vibrancy, activation, use/exchange, and social, serve both skaters and non-skaters. Activation can be understood as relating to the built environment of the city, use and exchange value can be thought of as an economic component, and social value can be thought of as community. Understanding how skateboarding creates vibrancy is vital in promoting a cohesive relationship between skateboarding and the city. The three values of vibrancy that were identified and explored in this chapter will guide the design of a multifunctional space that incorporates skateboarding and therefore must be measured. In the next chapter criteria aimed at measuring vibrancy (activation, use/exchange, social) are created to evaluate if and how vibrancy is being represented in skateparks and appropriated skate spots in four American cities.

CHAPTER 4

FOUND AND CONSTRUCTED SPACE

The new wave of skateboarding has brought with it a greater understanding of the value and potentials of skateboarding. The literature and precedents signal a gap between the productive value of skateboarding and its current place in the American city. There are few examples where skateboarding is afforded the opportunity to exist cohesively with other uses in public spaces therefore diluting the potential for skateboarding to promote vibrancy. Even though street skating takes place in the public realm every day, it is still subjected to extensive measures of control and is illegal in most public spaces. Skateparks serve as consistent skate spaces for communities but are often improperly located and inflexible in their use. The previous chapter identified how skateboarding adds value to the city. In this chapter an evaluative guideline is created to measure that value through the observation and analysis of eight skate spaces, identifying how American cities and skateboarding are interacting and how to improve the relationship through design interventions.

Method

Skateparks and skate spots are both integral in the evolution of skateboarding to its current wave necessitating an understanding of how each one is functioning. Constructed skate spaces encompass skateparks, those spaces that have been intentionally designed for skateboarding, while appropriated skate spaces refer to places that are unintended for skateboarding but have been used or appropriated by skateboarders over time. These two spaces are both legitimate skate landscapes which have implications and reflections. A critical

examination of the literature on urban design and skateboarding (Angner 2017, Borden 2001, Borden 2015, Skate Melbourne Framework, Public Skatepark Development Guide, Woolley 2010) reveals five criteria by which to examine the skate spaces: Location/Accessibility, Connectivity, Multifunctionality/Integration, Design, and Context/Atmosphere. The individual criteria reflect each value of vibrancy as identified in the previous chapter. Location and Accessibility speak to the nature of the site in which the skate space is located. Connectivity speaks to the adjacent surroundings of the skate space and how the space is being reflected outside its bounds. Multifunctionality and Integration seeks to understand how the skate space is being used. Design is examining the layout of the space. Context and Atmosphere examine the characteristics of the broader surroundings. The five criteria present questions that generate an understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of each skate space.

Location/Accessibility	• Are there barriers to the site? • Is the site accessible without a vehicle? • Is the site part of a larger milieu?
Connectivity	• What are the other uses around/adjacent to the site • Where are people walking on site? • What is the relationship of the site to public space?
Multifunctionality/ Integration	• How many different types of activities occur at the site? • Are there non-skaters on the site? • Are there non-skaters watching the skaters? From where? • What are the relationships between the skate areas and non-skate areas?
Design	• Can non-skaters approach the area without being in danger? • What are the skate-able ingredients of the site? • Is landscaping employed?
Context/Atmosphere	• What are the neighboring amenities? • What is the character of the surrounding neighborhood?

Figure 4.1: Criteria and related questions for skate space evaluation

I evaluated both skateparks and appropriated skate spaces using the evaluative guideline (Figure 4.1) to conduct the first stage of analysis. The evaluation of both skateparks and skate spots produces similarities and differences, strengths and weaknesses, design implications and avoidances, and pertinent information to guide the creation of a new skate space. I visited the skate spaces from December 2017 to February 2018, spending three to seven hours at the site observing and documenting the skate spaces and their surroundings. The information was then compiled with an analysis of surrounding context layers: land use, figure ground and median income.

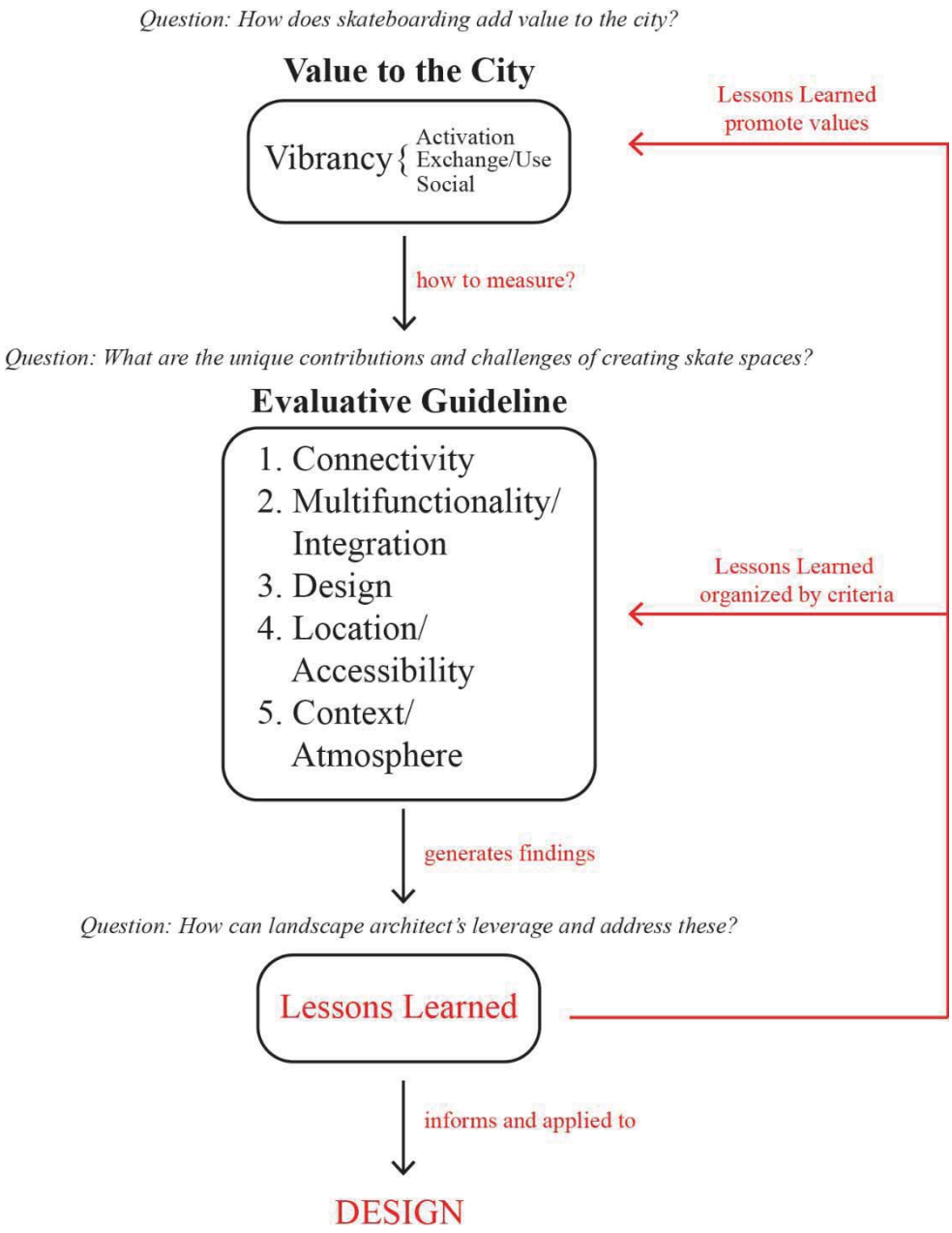


Figure 4.2: Flow of Methodology.

Skate Spaces Observed

Each skate space has its own history within the city it occupies. The skateparks, and even more so the appropriated skate spots, often have a history of their creation. Different skateparks attract different types of skaters and maintain their own authentic culture. Selection for specific skateparks and popular skate spots in each city were chosen based on their design and cultural significance to both skate culture and the city itself. Magazines, videos, and word of mouth were used in the selection of some of the sites.

New York

LES Skatepark: One of the largest skateparks in New York City, LES Skatepark, is located in Chinatown on the lower east side of Manhattan. Formerly an appropriated skate space, it was redesigned for skateboarding in 2012.

Brooklyn Banks: An iconic, world renowned appropriated skate spot, Brooklyn Banks is located under the Brooklyn Bridge on the edge of Chinatown and the Financial District of Manhattan.

Philadelphia

Paine's Plaza: Completed in 2013, this skatepark was designed as an open plaza that sought to incorporate the lessons learned about skateboarding and public space.

Thomas Paine Plaza: The appropriated, brutalist plaza in the heart of downtown Philadelphia has been a part of skating culture in the city for decades and is adjacent to LOVE Park.

Atlanta

4th Ward Skatepark: Completed in 2010, as Atlanta's first public skatepark 4th Ward is part of the redevelopment of the surrounding aspurred by the Beltline, a greenway that will encompass the entire city.

Black Blocks: An appropriated pocket park on an interstate overpass, Black Blocks has been a staple in Atlanta skate culture since the 1990's.

Memphis

Tobey Skatepark: Completed in 2010, as the cities first public skatepark, the park represents a step forward by the city in promoting skateboarding.

Al Town: An appropriated abandoned building foundation, Al Town is a DIY skate space in a neighborhood context.

Post-Observational Analysis

The information generated through the evaluative guideline was compiled with an analysis of surrounding context layers. Land use, figure ground, and median income layers were created at a quarter mile radius from each skate space to generate key findings. These measures were selected to further evaluate the relationship between the skate space and the city. All median income data was gathered from the 2010 US Census database.

Presentation

A brief description of the skate spaces is presented first with a map revealing the distance between the skatepark and skate spot. Maps showing quarter mile analysis of land use (atmosphere), median income (neighborhood context), and figure ground are shown next. Call outs from the evaluative guideline for the skate spaces are shown in the skate space and surrounding area. Observational summaries of each site are then presented first, followed by photographs highlighting key points from the spaces. Diagrammatic sketches revealing skater and non-skater circulation and other pertinent information are presented to complement the photographs. Finally, key lessons learned from the spaces are summarized.

NEW YORK CITY, NY

Name:
LES Skatepark

Type:
Vert/Street Skatepark

Year Complete:
2012

Era:
4th Wave

Name:
Brooklyn Banks

Type:
Appropriated Skate Spot

Era:
3rd Wave Street Skating

Land Use

- Government/Institution
- Residential
- Commercial
- Mixed Res/Com
- Industrial
- Park
- Skate Space
- Rail

LES SKATEPARK
New York, NY

ATMOSPHERE

A balance of active spaces, businesses, and residential highrises. The skatepark is part of a larger park system.

LES SKATEPARK
Median Income

- low: $19,643
- mid: $24,965
- high: $35,021

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

Surrounding users are low to middle income residents.

Figure 4.3: Land use and median income

LES Skatepark
New York, NY

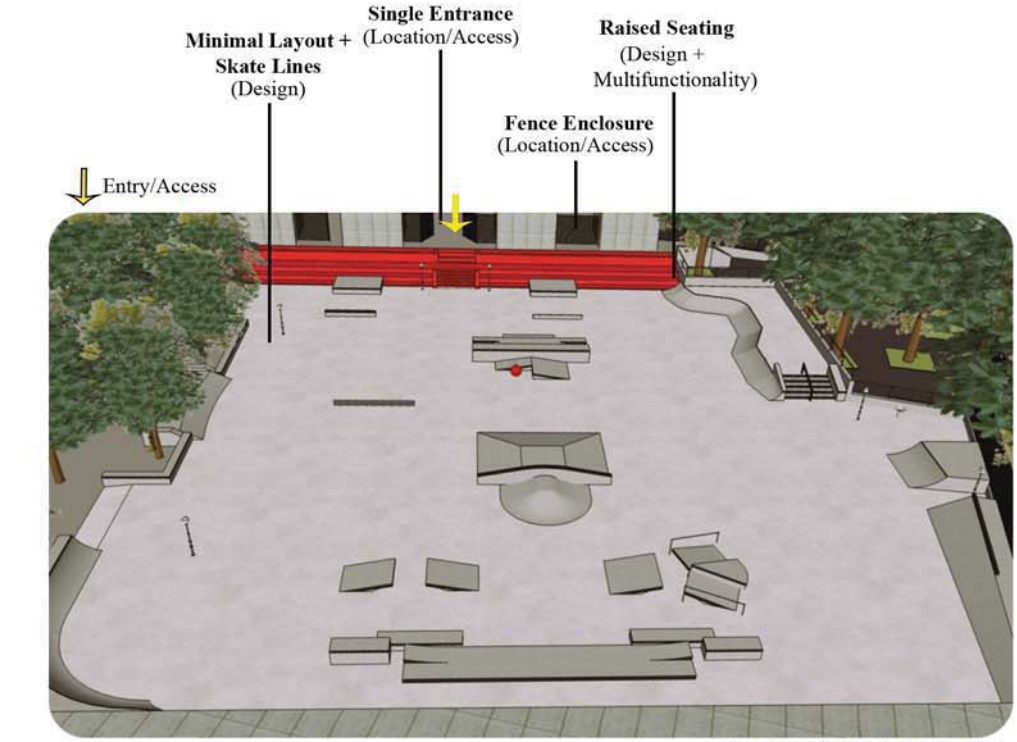


Image by California Skateparks

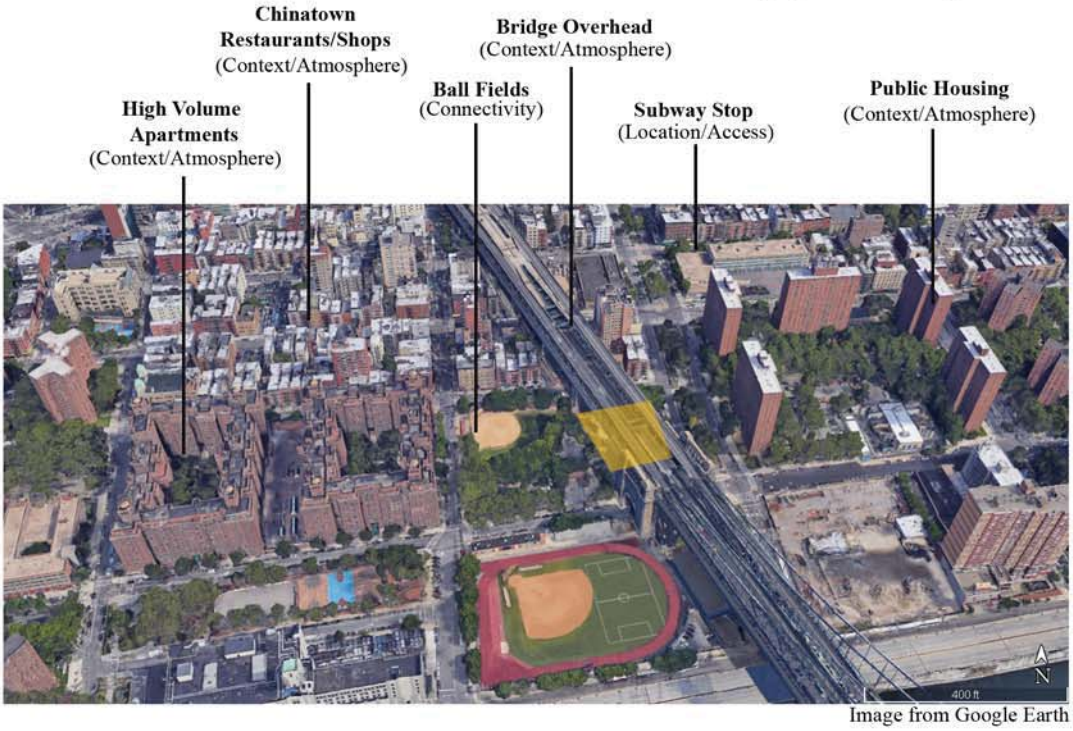


Image from Google Earth

Figure 4.4: Applying the criteria.

Site 1: LES Skatepark, Manhattan, New York City

Observations:

Located under Manhattan Bridge in Chinatown on the lower east side of Manhattan, LES Skatepark is one of New York City's largest skateparks. Previously an underused basketball court turned appropriated skate space, the park was formally redesigned in 2012 by California Skateparks after receiving a grant from Nike (California Skateparks). The unique placement of the park under a famous bridge gives the park a sense of significance though it was probably located there because development in this location would have been difficult. At the edge of Chinatown, the park is surrounded by a very diverse neighborhood that includes public housing, apartments, Chinese restaurants, and shops. The skatepark is part of a larger network of green spaces with a baseball field and playground adjacent to it. There are a number of sports fields and ballcourts in the area that serve the dense surrounding area.

The park is easily accessible due to its proximity the subway. The skatepark can also be accessed by walking, cycling, skating and by driving. Those who do not live near the park are likely to use the subway as it is the most efficient mode of transportation, and I observed skaters using the subway to get to the skatepark. There is also a bike share station one block from the park.

The skatepark has a diverse set of skate-able elements including ledges, banks, transitions, stairs, rails, curbs, and bumps. The park is arranged such that most of the skating occurs in lines parallel to each other which helps circulation and makes the flow predictable to skaters and non-skaters. Amphitheater style seating is found at the main entry of the park and provides a view of the entire skatepark. The single seating area at the main entrance is the beginning and end of the journey for the average non-skater as there are no clear safe areas past

that point. Non-skaters are not encouraged to venture out into the space by the design or by the atmosphere as this is clearly a skate zone. A single entry and a tall chain link fence do not invite those passing by on the street in to the space. A single path on the southern section provides a thoroughfare for pedestrian traffic utilizing the adjacent park space, but the path closes at dark.

The design of the park is simplistic in its layout allowing street style skating for different skill levels to occur simultaneously. The more advanced skaters preferred the obstacles directly in front of the entrance and seating area where they can show off to friends and spectators. Less experienced skaters seemed to prefer the back where the skate elements were easier, and it was harder to be seen.

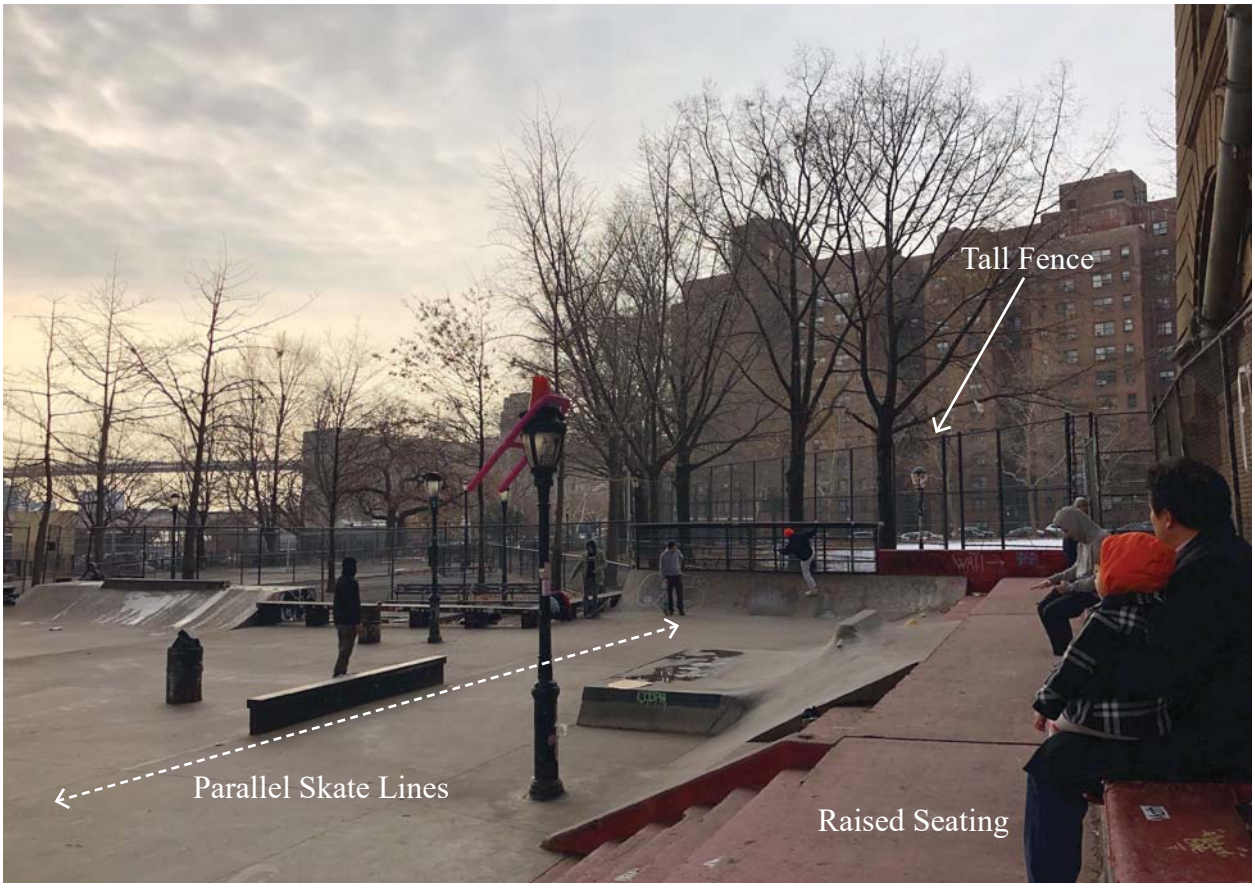


Figure 4.5: A man and his son observe the skaters. (Photo by author)

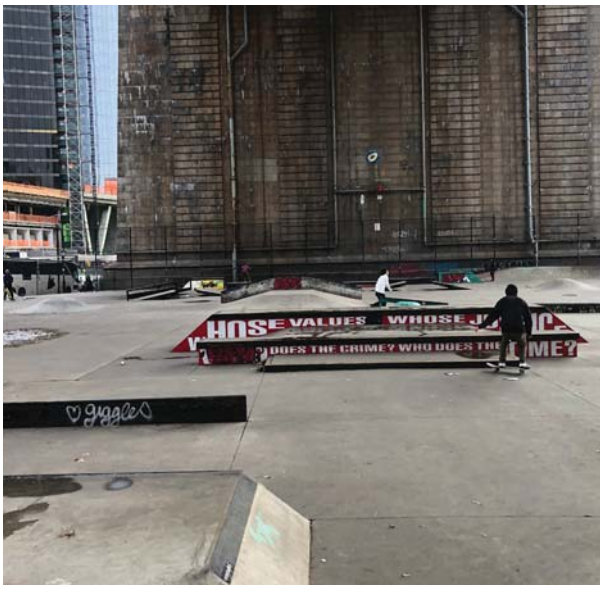
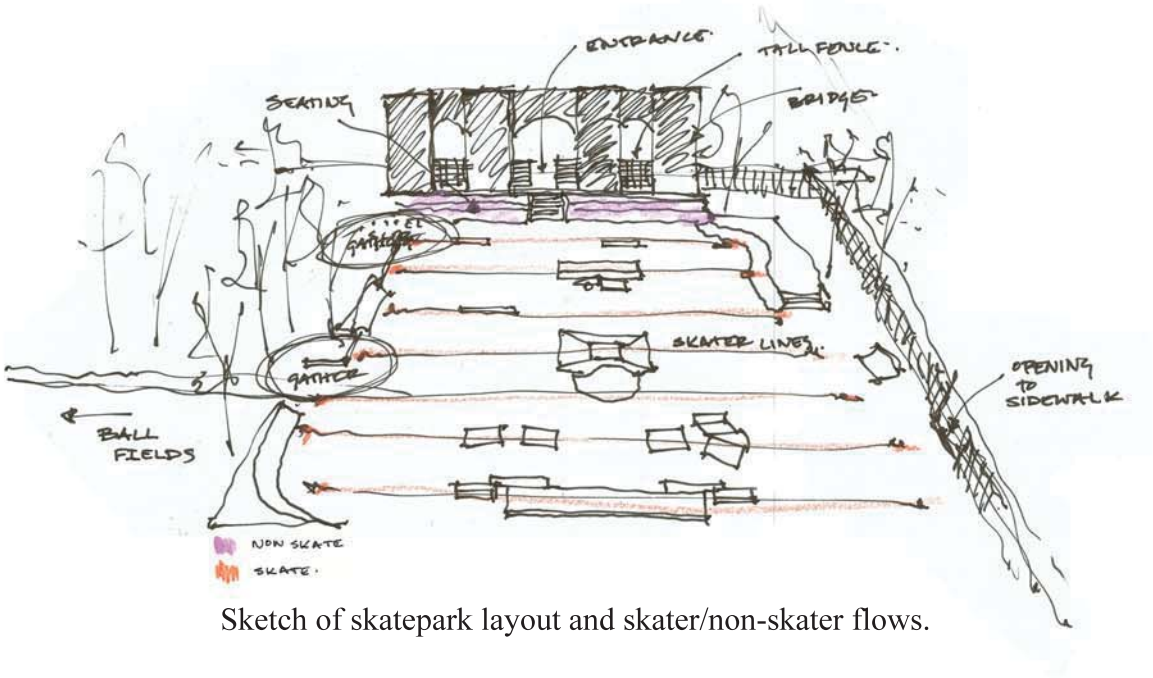


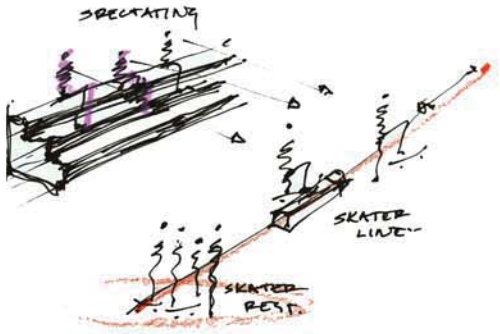
Figure 4.6: View from spectating area. (Photo by author)


Figure 4.7: Skating under the bridge. (Photo by author)

Sketch showing skate line rhythm.



Sketch of skatepark layout and skater/non-skater flows.



Sketch of raised spectating area/skate lines.

Figure 4.8: Sketches of the skatepark. (Author)

Lessons Learned:

LES skatepark has a simplistic design and expansive space between obstacles that allows it to cater to different styles and levels of skating. The linear skate lines that organize the park create clear zones of activity and rest for skaters. The layout created a frontstage for advanced skaters and backstage for less experienced skaters, an important quality of skate spaces according to Angner's (2017) findings. The park is not as inviting for non-skaters, though, with only a single space at the entrance to spectate and gather. The large fence and lack of connectivity to other spaces do not allow the park to readily translate its activity to the surrounding landscape.

The post-analysis revealed that LES skatepark is surrounded by a diverse population. The quarter mile radius around the park shows residential high-rises, mixed use blocks, and connective park space. Accessibility by a nearby subway stop also activates the area with pedestrian traffic. The surrounding area is predominately low-income housing. The skatepark is less than a mile from Brooklyn Banks, a well-known skate space, providing connectivity to another skate area.

LES highlights the importance for skate spaces to translate directly to the streetscape in order to succeed as a vibrant space. There are strengths to the simplistic design, but it does not offer the non-skater enough options for viewing and engaging with the park. Aptly placed in a diverse area, the skate space must be open to the streetscape in order for the activity of the park to reach beyond its grounds, promoting vibrancy.

LOCATION/ACCESIBILITY: Avoid fencing to allow for the activity of the skatepark to be reflected into the street. The **single entrance** made the skatepark feel unwelcoming to non-skaters.

CONNECTIVITY: Proximity to transportation and other urban activities makes the skatepark part of the fabric of the neighborhood.

MULIFUNCTIONALITY/INTEGRATION: Raised seating allows non-skaters a place to view the action and skaters a place to rest.

DESIGN: Predictable skate lines provide organization of the space for all users. **A front stage and backstage** provide organization, security, and cater to different skill levels. **A minimal layout** gives the space order and predictability.

CONTEXT/ATMOSPHERE: The adjacent mixed uses, created an active surrounding area and provided amenities like shops, restaurants and residences. **Proximity to another skate spot**, helps create a skate journey in this area.

Brooklyn Banks
New York, NY

ATMOSPHERE

The skate spot is situated at the nexus of government buildings, residential high rises, and mixed use blocks. The Brooklyn Bridge runs over the skate space, hindering street level activation.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

The skate spot is situated at the convergence of neighborhoods, providing access to a diverse population.

Figure 4.9: Land use and median income

Brooklyn Banks
New York, NY

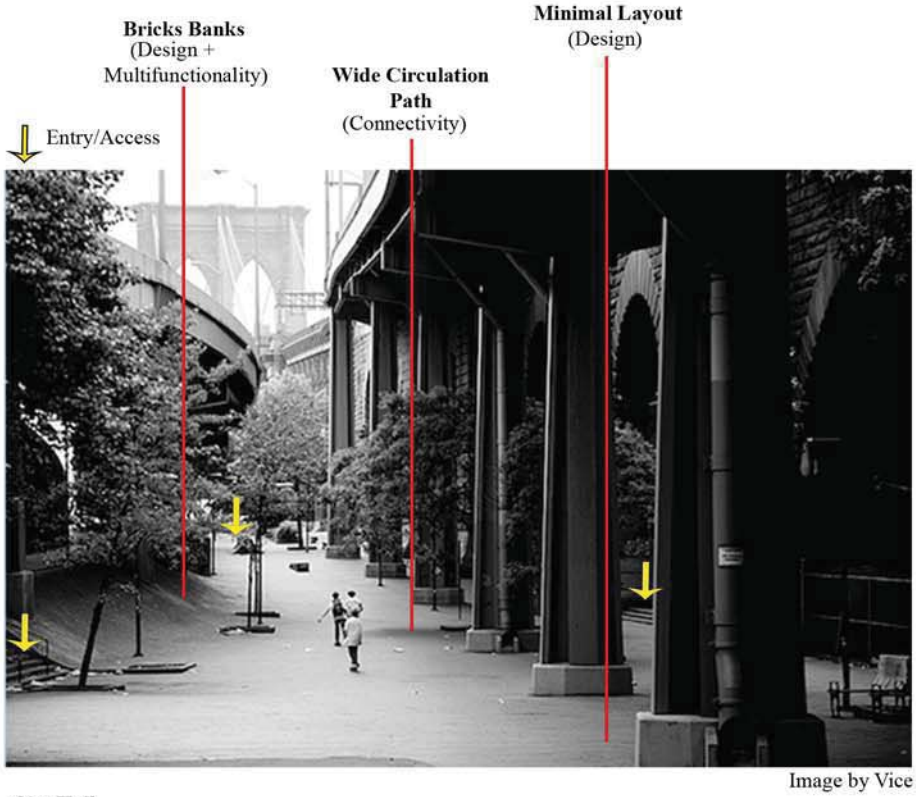


Image by Vice

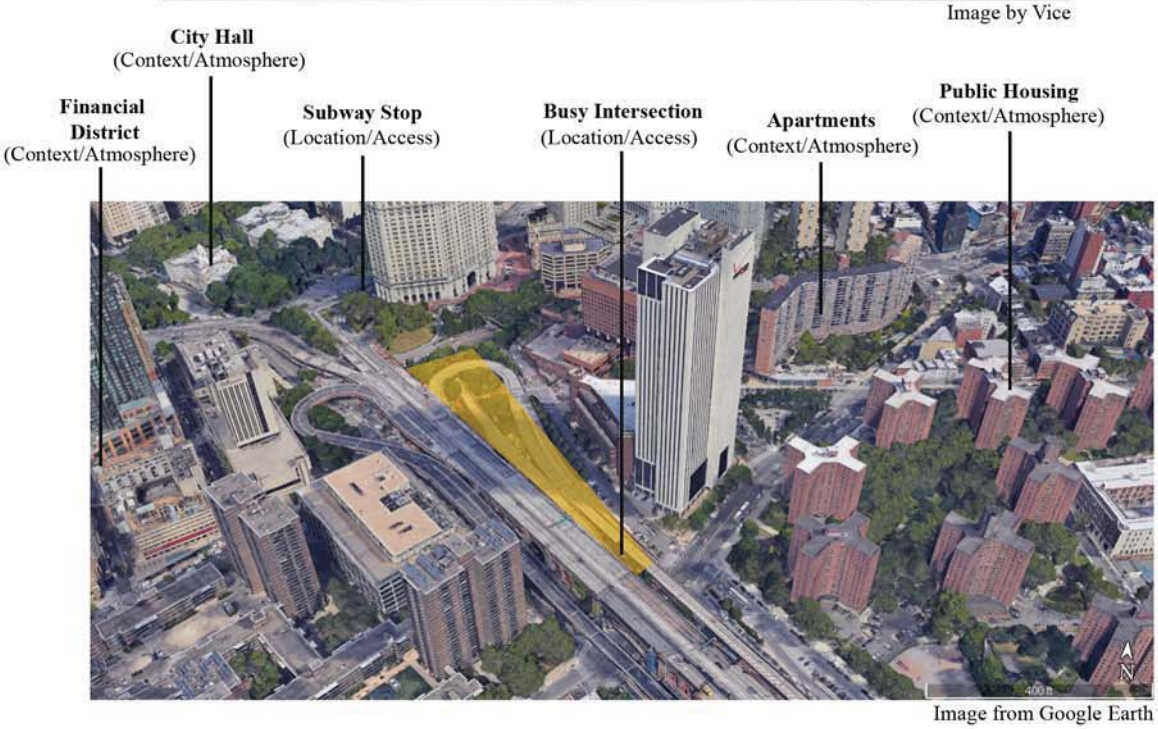


Image from Google Earth

Figure 4.10: Applying the criteria.

Site 2: Brooklyn Banks, Manhattan, New York City

Observations:

Brooklyn Banks is located underneath the Brooklyn Bridge in Manhattan. Unfortunately, the park was fenced off during my visit due to construction to the bridge, but I was still able to observe the layout of the space and its surroundings.

Brooklyn Banks is a downtown plaza located under the Brooklyn Bridge and was historically a poorly maintained park. The space became a world-renowned skate area due to its unique skate-able features. The park is made up of a small plaza and a large plaza. The small plaza contains planters, benches, and steps that lead to the higher level. The main plaza is a linear space between the bridge buttresses and a building. The wide and steep brick banks that buttress the bridge are the reason skaters from around New York flock to this spot and the reason for its iconic reputation in the skate world. The park was closed for a year in 2004 and reopened as a park of multiple uses that accommodates skateboarding in July 2005 after negotiations between local skaters and the NYC Parks Department (Chiu 2009).

Brooklyn Banks has both found and constructed skate-able elements with the most notable being the banks. I saw DIY ramps and manual pads on the site as well and stairs, ledges, and benches providing a mix of prescribed and natural skate obstacles. This site was one mile from LES skatepark and shared a similar surrounding context. To the west of the park is the highly dense and mixed use Financial District. Government buildings surround the area while low income high rises predominate the east. The site is accessible by all means of transportation although its location under the bridge makes it difficult to find. A subway stop north of the site allows convenient access, but there is little around the park to draw users in. The park does not activate the streetscape, because it is relatively isolated in its location. The bridge and busy

intersections mark the transition from Chinatown to the Financial District, tucking the space away from the visibility of the streets. Being at the nexus of two neighborhoods would seemingly translate to a vibrant area, but the surrounding heavy infrastructure of roads and bridges dilutes the possibilities of the park.

There is something to be said for the appropriation of this space by skaters as the odd location under the bridge and less than desirable immediate surroundings probably would leave the park underused. Skateboarding here injects a liveliness to the space that would otherwise exist as a passage from A to B for most, providing natural surveillance and activating the site. The layout of the park is open and allows for skating to exist without being disruptive to people walking by. The simple nature of the skate elements also provides clear designation of areas for skaters and non-skaters.

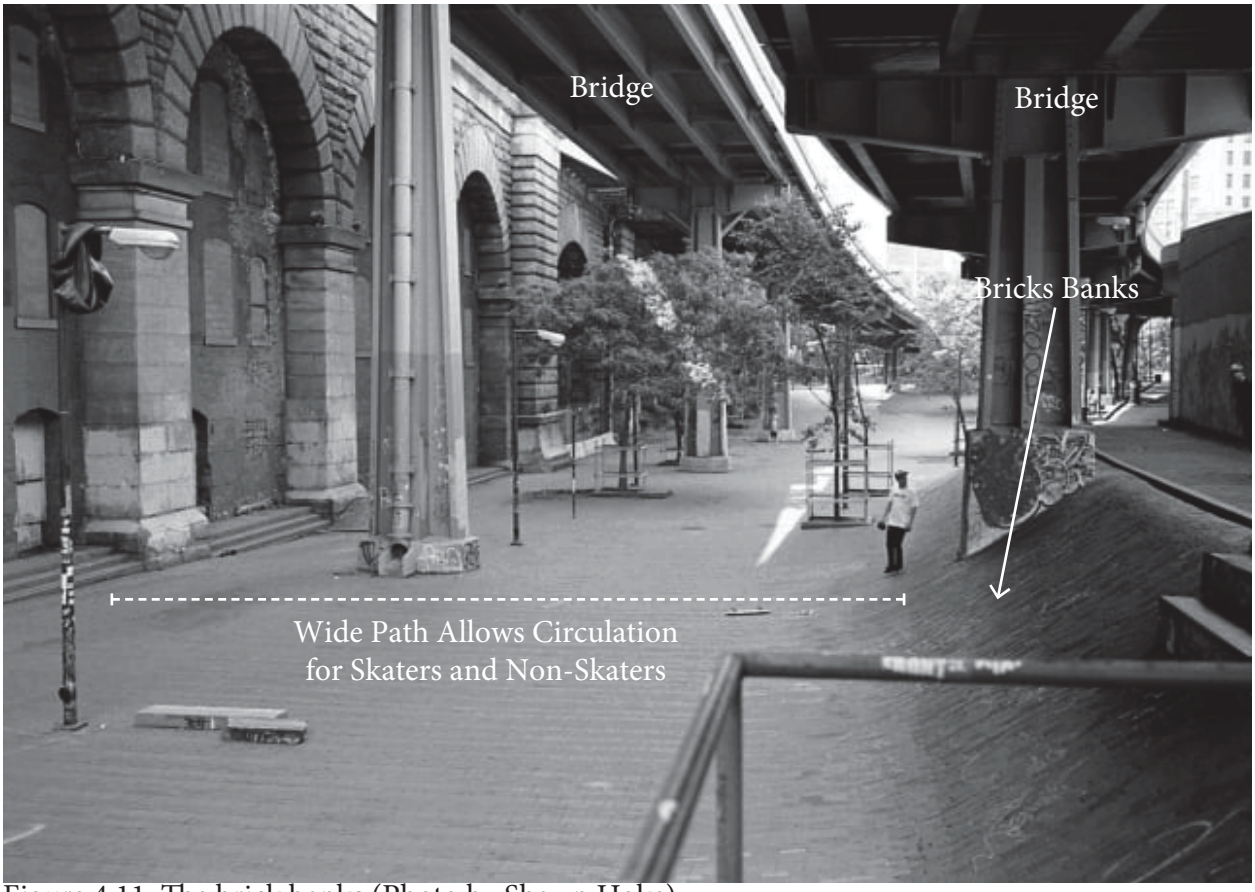
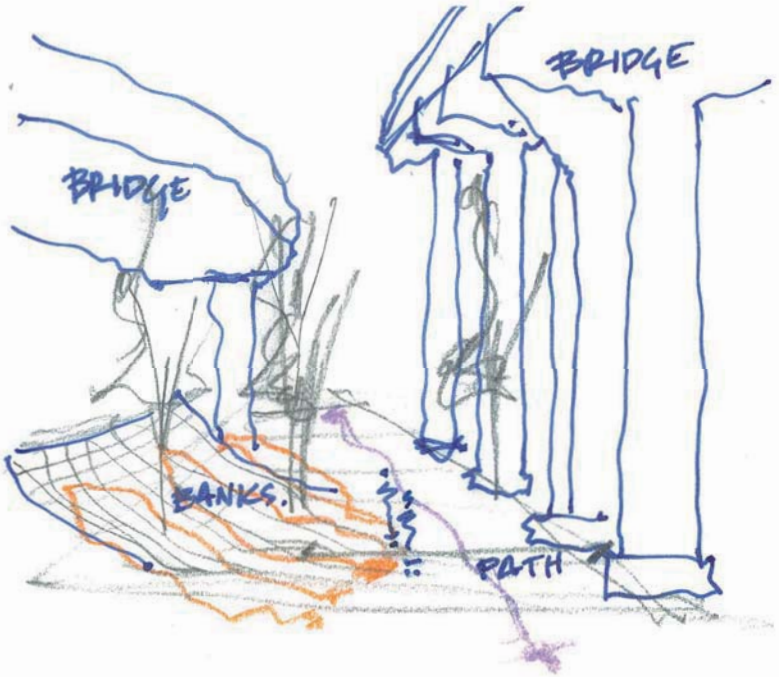


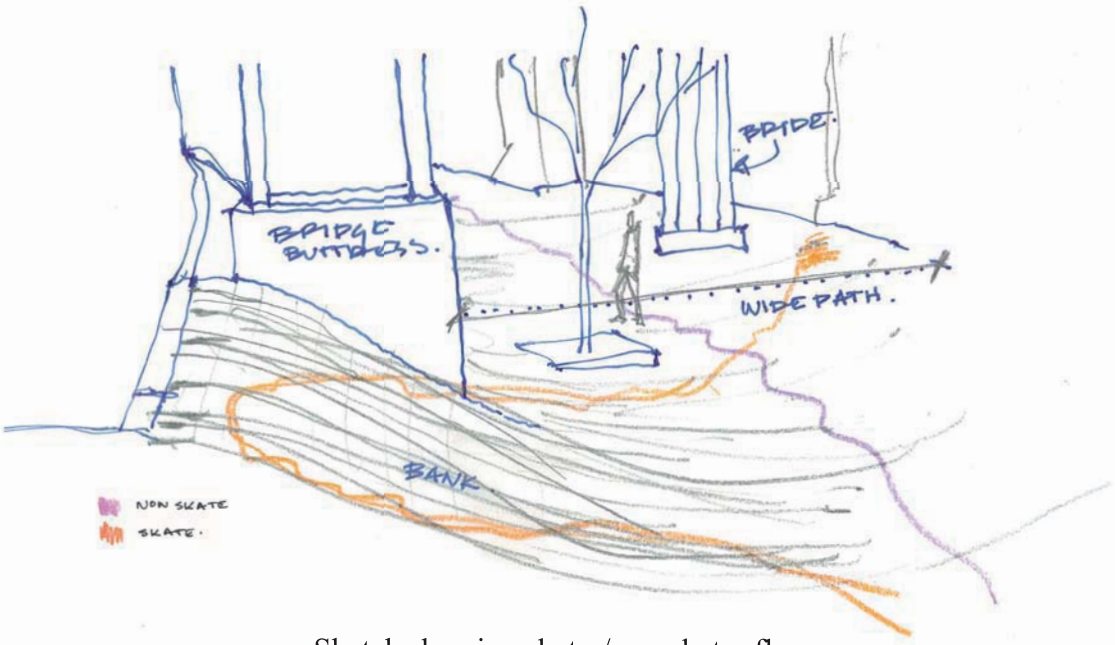
Figure 4.11: The brick banks (Photo by Shawn Hoke)


Figure 4.12: DIY elements added to the space. (Photo by Shawn Hoke)


Figure 4.13: DIY ramps at the Banks. (Photo by Shawn Hoke)



Sketch showing location of the space under bridges.



Sketch showing skater/non-skater flow.

Figure 4.14: Sketches of the skate spot. (Author)

Lessons Learned:

Brooklyn Banks proves that an iconic skate spot can develop from very simple skate elements, seemingly unusable for most. Naturally appropriated skate spaces often occur in underused or underappreciated areas and Brooklyn Banks falls into this category. Here the significance of a simple design is appreciated. A wide pathway along the banks allows skaters and non-skaters to use the space without conflict. Porous edges give the space an openness and feeling of true public space. It also allows the park to function as a connective corridor, increasing the chances of interaction between skaters and non-skaters. The park is enlivened by skateboarders who provide natural surveillance and a performance for those walking by. Brooklyn Banks shows that designing for skate spaces does not have to provide perfect materials as the banks of the iconic spot feature brick pavers, a far from ideal riding surface. Simple gestures, such as the sloped banks, are all a skater needs to reinvent the use of the space. Wide pathways and multiple levels of the park provide for safety for skater and non-skaters, designation of space, and opportunity for improvisation.

A variety of land uses surround the space with government and institutional buildings to the north, residential to the east, and mixed-use blocks to the southeast. Socio-economically diverse, the surrounding environment speaks to the importance of the location of public spaces in creating vibrancy. The lack of visibility from the street limits the ability of the diverse surrounding population to translate to activity in the space. The space is less than a mile from LES Skatepark, providing connection to another skate space.

LOCATION/ACCESSIBILITY: Porous edges make the space open to many users and function as a public space. **Transportation** options make the park accessible to diverse users. **A busy intersection** prevents access to the park.

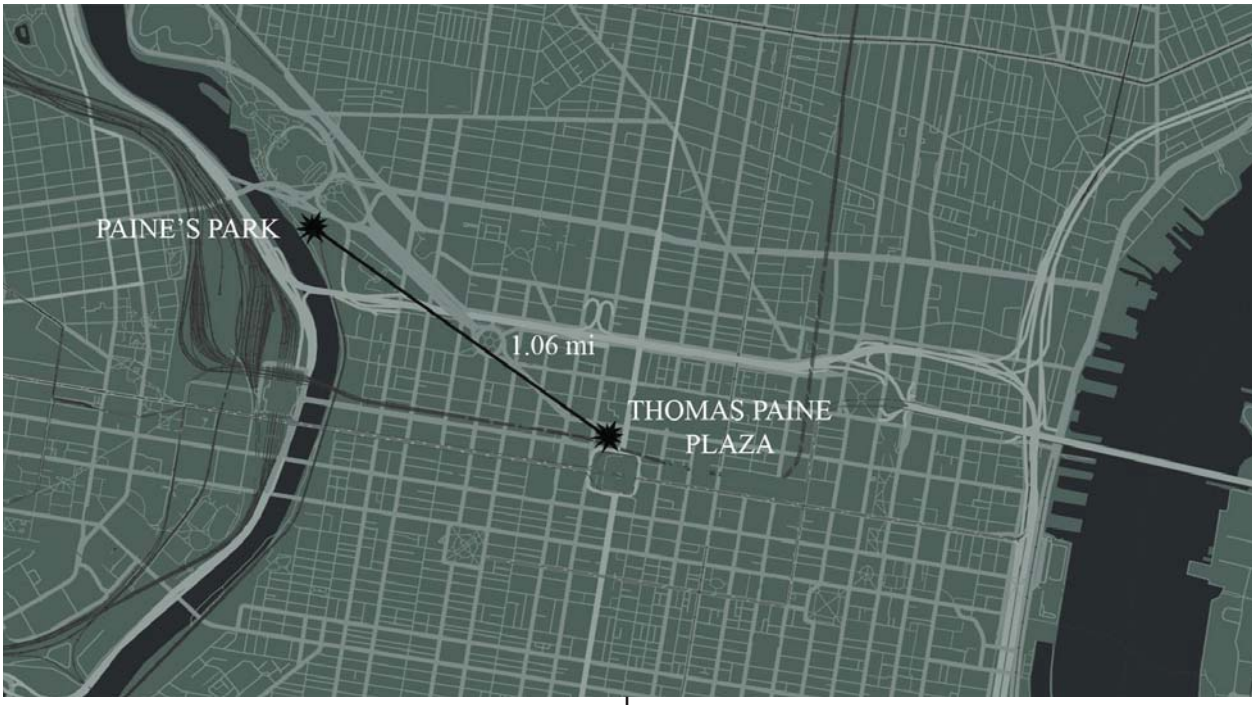
CONNECTIVITY: The wide path through the linear park allows the space to act as a thoroughfare for pedestrian traffic.

MULTIFUCTIONALITY/INTEGRATION: Wide Paths create the ability for both skaters and non-skaters to use the space without conflict. The banks are a **multifunctional** appropriated skate element.

DESIGN: The minimal layout and **simplistic skate elements** makes the space highly functional for integrated uses.

CONTEXT/ATMOSPHERE: The mixed-use area provides activity around the park, **but its location** is not visible to surrounding streetscapes, leaving it underused. **Proximity to another skate spot**, helps create a skate journey in this area.

PHILADELPHIA, PA



Name:
Paine's Plaza

Type:
Plaza Style Skatepark

Year Complete:
2013

Era:
Skate Urbanism

Name:
Thomas Paine's Plaza

Type:
Appropriated Skate Spot

Era:
3rd Wave Street Skating

PAINE'S PLAZA
Philadelphia, PA

ATMOSPHERE

The skatepark is part of larger park system and museum district, disconnecting it from urban activation.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

The skatepark is in an area that is sparsely populated.

Figure 4.15: Land use and median income.

Paine's Plaza
Philadelphia, PA

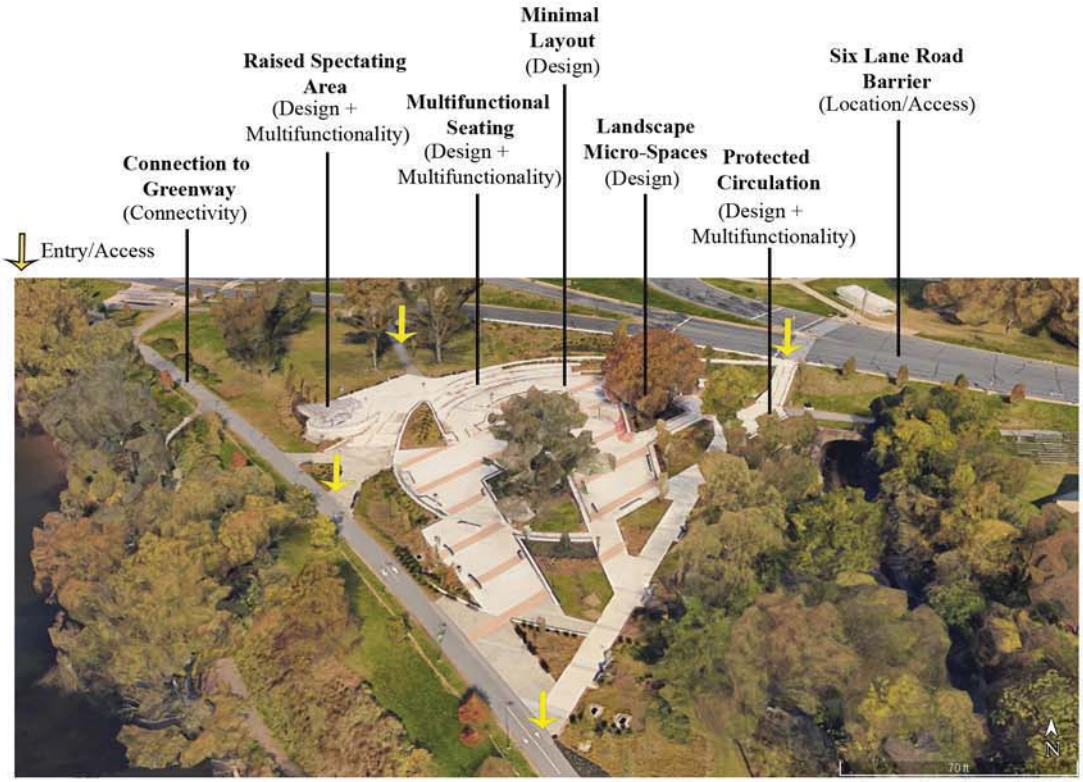


Image from Google Earth

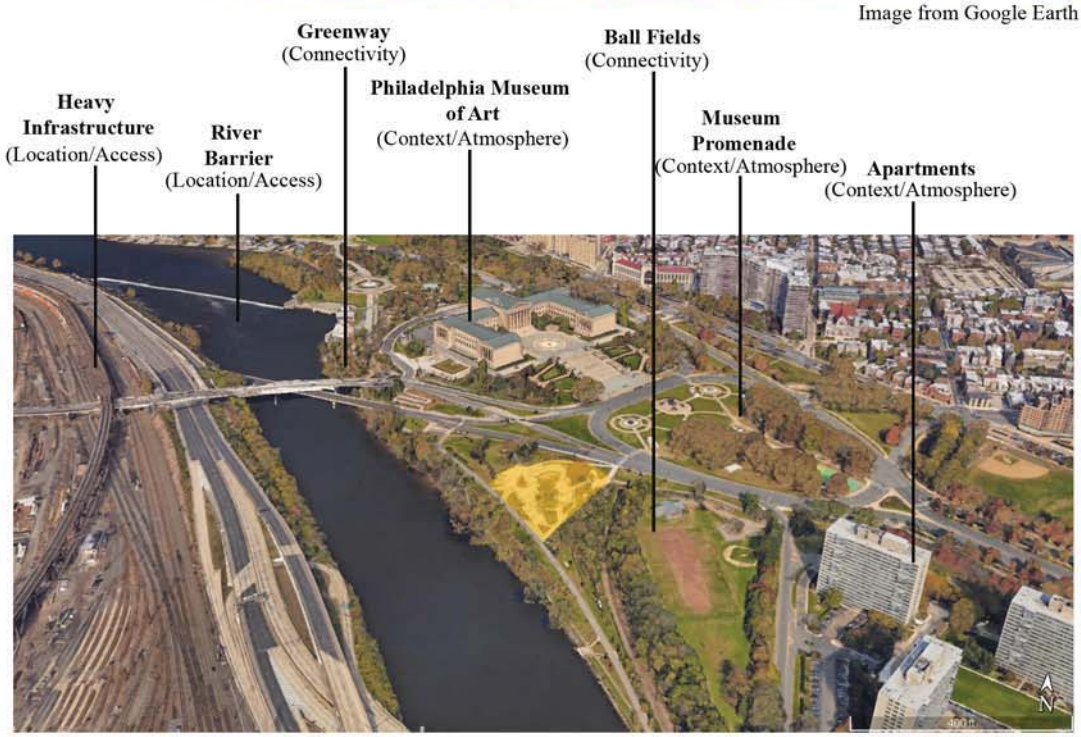


Image from Google Earth

Figure 4.16: Applying the criteria.

Site 3: Paine's Park, Philadelphia, PA

Observations:

Paine's Park is located along the banks of the Schuylkill River and is part of the Museum District which is comprised of several museums and institutions linked together by a series of lawns, gardens, and greenways. The extensive promenade visually connects the museum district to the center of the city, but the attractions and amenities along the road are spread out and disconnected. The skatepark sits at a lower grade than the surrounding attractions and is cut off by a six-lane road that serves the museum boulevard. The iconic Philadelphia Museum of Art sits atop the hill and across the street from the skatepark, but visibility to the park is hindered by the change in grade. The skatepark is integrated into the Schuylkill River Trail, making it highly accessible by cycling, skating, or walking. The greenway supplies the park with a variety of users from runners and cyclists to curious tourists. The nearest public parking lot serves the Philadelphia Museum of Art, which is often crowded with tourists making driving to the park difficult.

The design of Paine's Park is representative of skateboard urbanism and the reframing of the traditional skatepark. The skatepark visually reads as more of a plaza than that of a skatepark. Drawing elements from LOVE Park, like the curving granite steps that serve as seating and/or a skate-able feature, the skate-able elements within the space are mostly multi-functional. The plaza is made of two levels. The top contains more difficult obstacles and narrower paths with transition, rails, and stairs suited for faster and more advanced riding styles. Non-skaters can observe this area from multiple gathering spaces and an elevated lookout that provides sweeping views of the entire park, greenway and Schuylkill River. The lower portion of the plaza is composed of wider paths and multifunctional skate-able elements, like curbs and benches, and

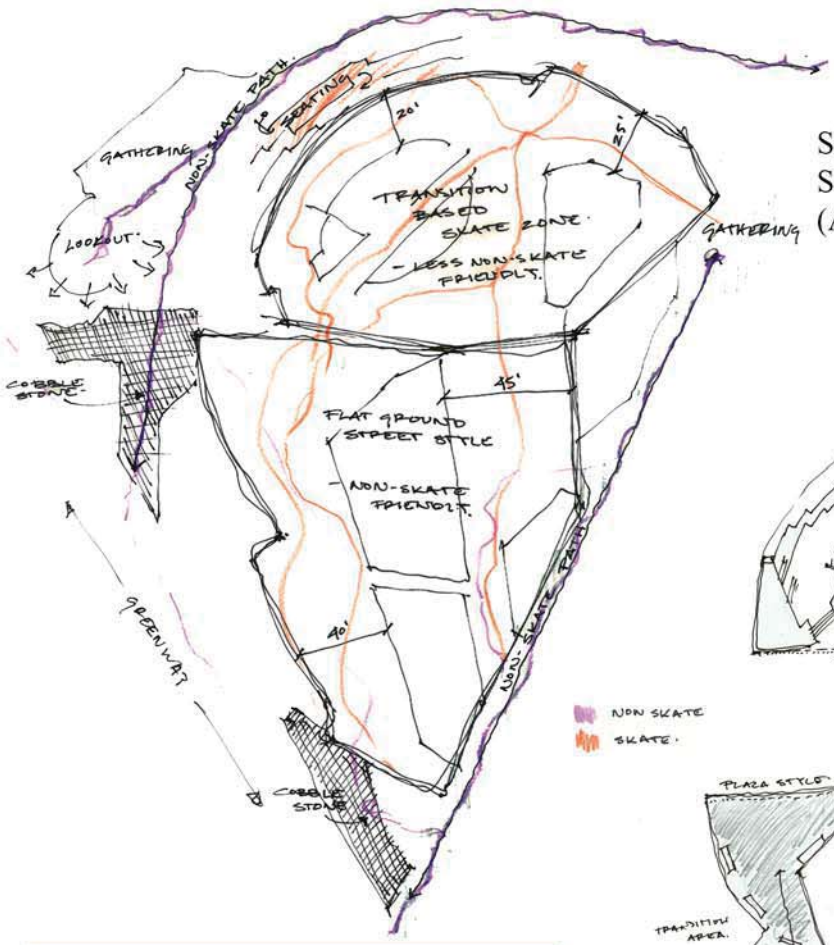
appears more like a street than skatepark. The wide paths allow for skaters and non-skaters to navigate the space comfortably. Hardscape material transitions, skate obstacle placement, and width of pathways allow the space to flow out to the greenway, blending the skatepark with public space. Landscaping is used to create rooms and barriers. The park is not enclosed and provides multiple circulation paths for non-skaters to comfortably move through the skatepark from the greenway.

The overall success of the design is not as readily translated to the surroundings. There are no amenities that attract users to the spaces, aside from the greenway. The park feels isolated, unable to reach its designs full potential, because there is no urban activation. This spot would be perfect for business workers and residents to enjoy the river, greenway and skate plaza, but there are few residents and businesses in the area.

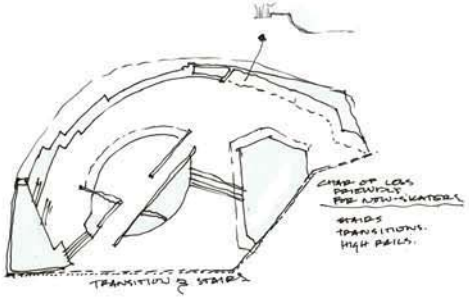
Figure 4.17: Open plaza style design of Paine's Park. (Photo by author)

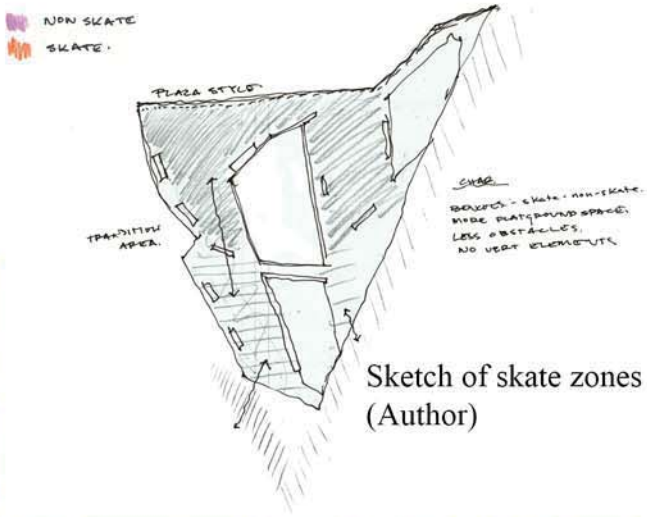

Figure 4.18: View from lookout over the park (Photo by author)


Figure 4.19: Cobblestone to designate areas (Photo by author)



Sketch of plan view
Skater/non-skater flow
(Author)





Sketch of skate zones
(Author)

Images by Friday Architects

Figure 4.20: Sketches and renderings of the skatepark

Lessons Learned:

The innovative design of Paine's Park allows the spaces to blur the lines between skatepark and public plaza and is representative of skate urbanism. With ample raised spectating opportunities, skaters and non-skaters can utilize the plaza simultaneously, encouraging interaction and activating the space beyond the typical skatepark. Use of materials, width of sidewalks, and placement of obstacles make the space navigable and comfortable for all users. The top level of the plaza caters to advanced skaters, acting as the front stage, while the bottom portion is more simplistic and serves as the backstage for novice skaters and spectators. There are no large scale skate elements like bowls or oversized ramps, adding to the encouragement of non-skater interaction with the space.

The weakness of Paine's Park is its location. Tucked away along the riverbank, not easily seen from the elevation of the street, Paine's Park is isolated from the urban fabric. The space has only three land uses in its vicinity: park space, museums, and a residential high-rise. Its location does not afford it the opportunity to activate the area due to the lack of density, surrounding amenities, and residences in the area. The figure ground shows that the nearby buildings are spaced considerably far apart. The greenway is the main source of activation for the skatepark that draws diversity but placement of the skatepark is more in line with a recreation area than a culturally significant, urban space.

LOCATION/ACCESSIBILITY: **Porous edges** make the skatepark accessible and inclusive. **The greenway** encourages different users to interact with the skatepark.

CONNECTIVITY: Activity is created by a consistent flow of greenway users moving adjacent to and through the park. **Protected circulation** creates connectivity between the street and the greenway.

MULTIFUNCTIONALITY/INTEGRATION: Raised seating and multifunctional skate elements allow the space to be used by skaters and non-skaters.

DESIGN: Minimal layout, materials to designate space, no extreme skate obstacles and landscaping make the space visually attractive, easy to navigate, and useful for skaters and non-skaters.

CONTEXT/ATMOSPHERE: Lack of urban activation around the site prevents the design from translating to the surrounding area.

THOMAS PAINE PLAZA SKATE SPACE
Land Use

- Government/Institution
- Residential
- Commercial
- Mixed Res/Com
- Industrial
- Park
- Skate Space
- Rail

Thomas Paine Plaza

Philadelphia, PA

ATMOSPHERE

The skate spot is located in a dense city center with many uses. A balance of mixed use, commercial, and park space is shown.

THOMAS PAINE PLAZA SKATE SPACE
Median Income

- low: $49,000
- mid: $73, 357
- high: $75,313

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

The skate spot is serving a range of users and is situated at the spine of two neighborhoods.

Figure 4.21: Land use and median income

Thomas Paine Plaza
Philadelphia, PA

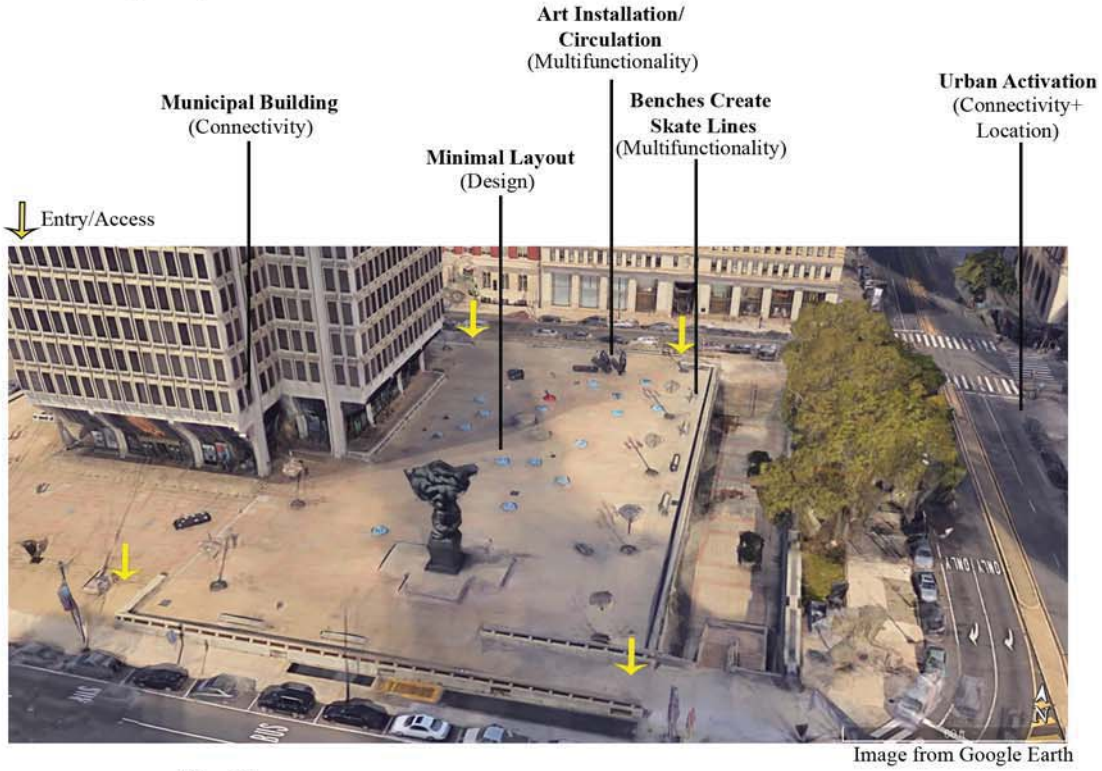


Image from Google Earth

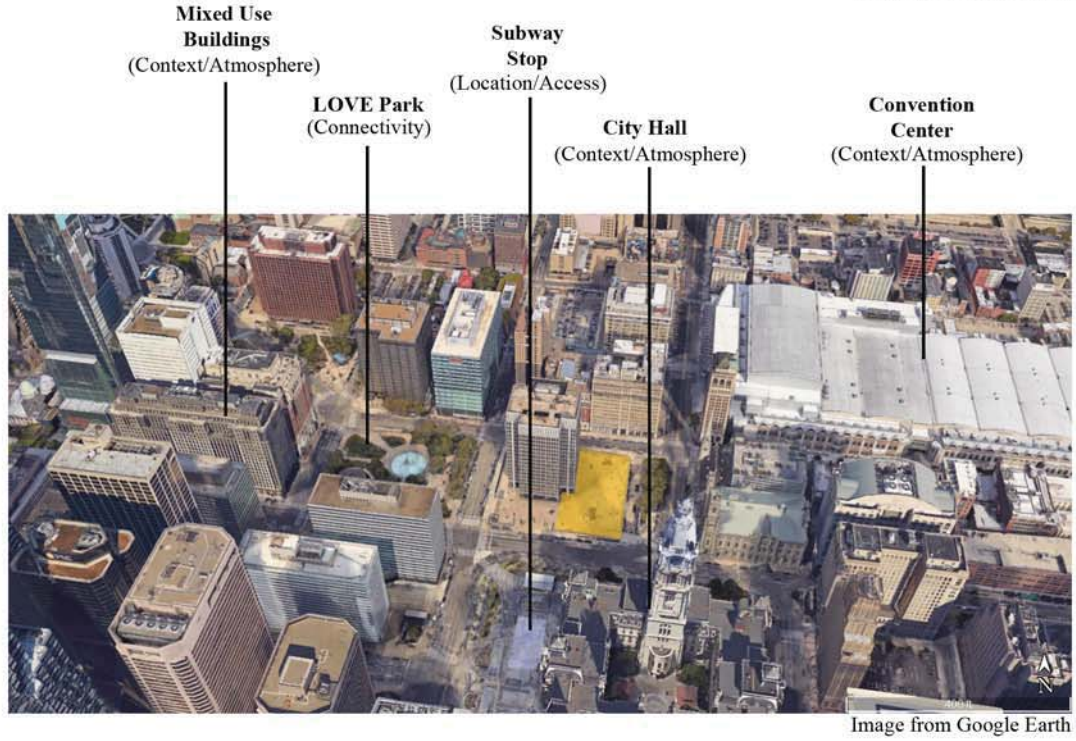


Image from Google Earth

Figure 4.22: Applying the criteria.

Site 4: Thomas Paine Plaza, Philadelphia, PA

Observations:

Thomas Paine Plaza is a public plaza located outside the Municipal Services Building in the heart of downtown Philadelphia. Across from City Hall and activated by a consistent flow of workers and tourists in the CBD, the plaza has been a mainstay in skate culture and has offered a large, gathering space for skaters and non-skaters alike. Since the redesign of LOVE Park skaters have utilized the brutalist design of the plaza as a skate spot that shares similar qualities as the former LOVE Park. The plaza is currently home to a 21-year-old art installation, "Your Move," which features large chess, dominoes, bingo, and parcheesi pieces. These pieces are generously scattered throughout the minimalist plaza and offer skaters a series of obstacles and lines to choose from. The art is dispersed such that it creates a sense of safety through the creation of "rooms" where skateboarding can take place without affecting other activities. The raised plaza is large enough that it is easy for multiple user groups to navigate the space. During my visit there was a Christmas festival across the street activating the area, and I observed a wide range of users including tourists, workers, and residents. This plaza offers skaters a more authentic and less prescribed experience of skating. Here, the game pieces, benches and stairs can be combined to create a variety of skating obstacles and lines. The openness and scattered art pieces provides interest for skaters and non-skaters.

This skate spot is accessible by all means of transportation, including a subway stop one street over. Because the plaza is in the heart of downtown, there is engagement with the pulses of urban life and inevitable interaction with many different users. In addition to accessibility, the plaza also offers amenities such as proximity to food and drink and proximity to other skate spots such as Rittenhouse Square. A bike share station is located at the corner of the plaza. I walked

from Paine's Plaza to Thomas Paine's Plaza which took half an hour. There is a distinct difference between the surroundings as the buildings densify and the visceral connection to the city is felt.

This plaza has a dated brutalist design. It is unsurprising skaters have appropriated the open layout and art pieces as the daily non-skater use of the space mostly occurs on the periphery for seating or as passage from one street to the next. The harsh landscape offers no shade or reprieve from concrete. The location of the plaza within the heart of the city is what attracts people to this place.

Figure 4.23: Thomas Paine Plaza is centrally located in the heart of the city. (Photo by author)


Figure 4.24: Skatestoppers on a bench (Photo by author)


Figure 4.25: Art installation and skate element (Photo by author)

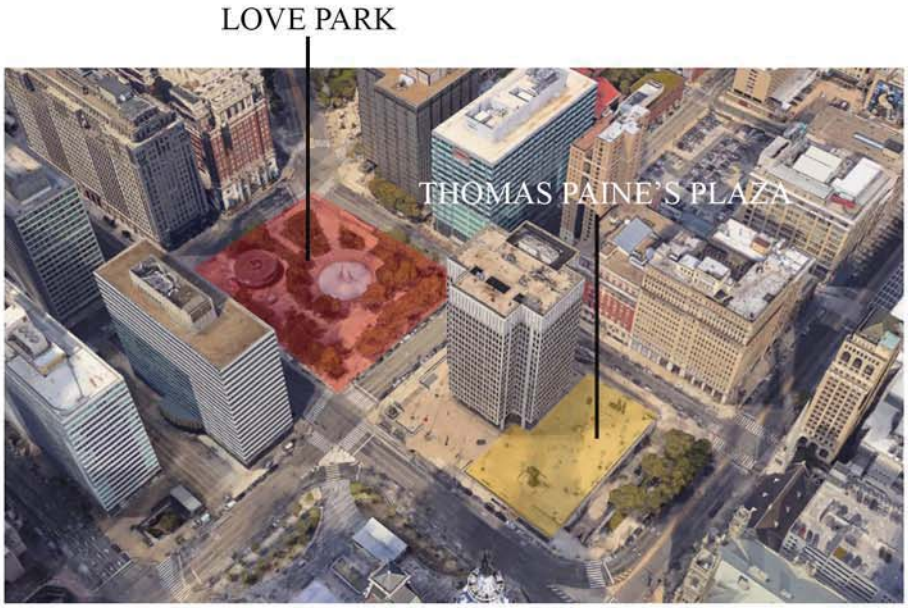
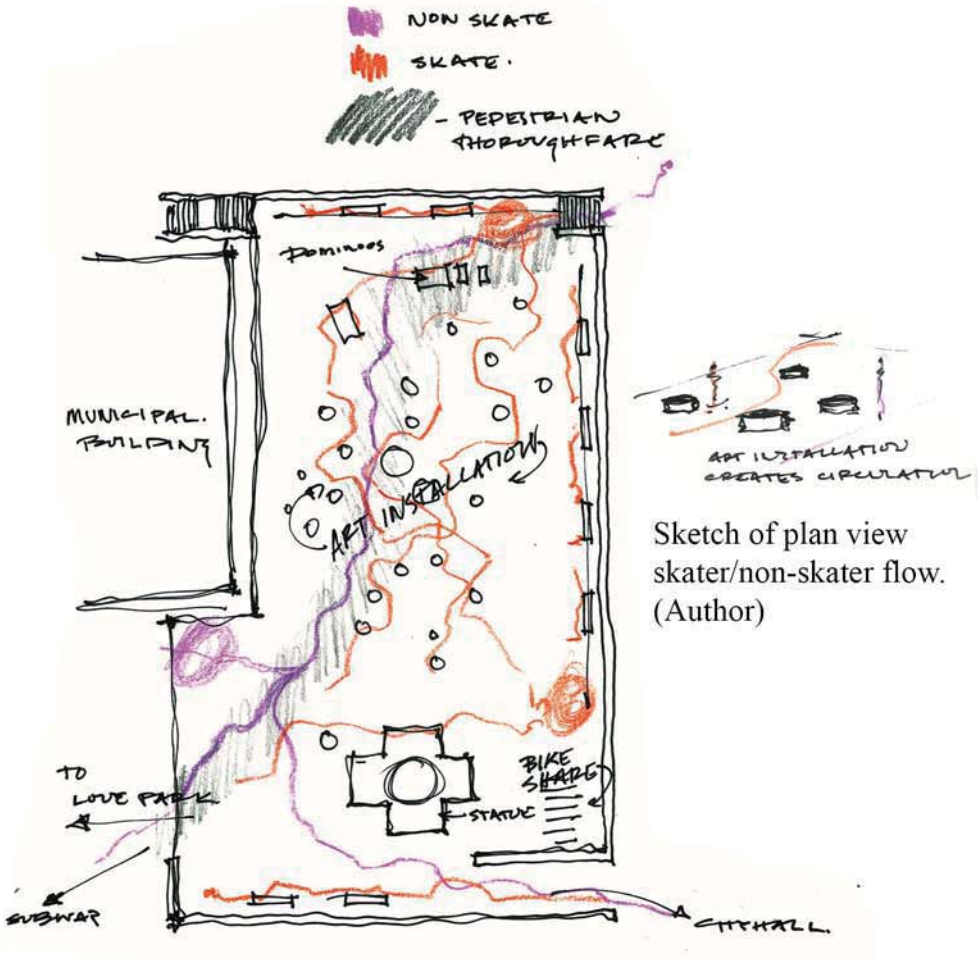


Image from Google Earth showing proximity to LOVE Park.



Sketch of plan view skater/non-skater flow. (Author)

Figure 4.26: Sketches and images of the skate spot.

Lessons Learned:

As an appropriated skate space, the strengths of Thomas Paine Plaza lie in its open layout and its location. Highly accessible and consistently activated by urban life, the space is utilized by skaters and non-skaters, alike. The art pieces, benches, and stairs create an endless set of possible lines for skaters. The placement of these installations creates spaces of activity and spaces of safety allowing the plaza to accommodate multiple activities and purposes.

Although skating is technically illegal at the plaza, it is permitted informally, which creates inconsistent policies in using public space. With LOVE Park one block over, the use of Thomas Paine Plaza by skaters has been part of the continuation of street skating in Philadelphia. Centrally located in the city, the plaza surrounded by various amenities and is close to other areas of interest for skaters and non-skaters.

The quarter mile radius around the plaza shows diverse land uses and demographics. This is translated visually to the environment as it feels distinctly urban and significant. The density of buildings and mixed uses provide the space with connectivity, accessibility, and amenities that all add value to the experience of being in the plaza.

LOCATION/ACCESSIBILITY: Transportation options and a central location make the space highly accessible. The plaza is part of the urban fabric of the CBD.

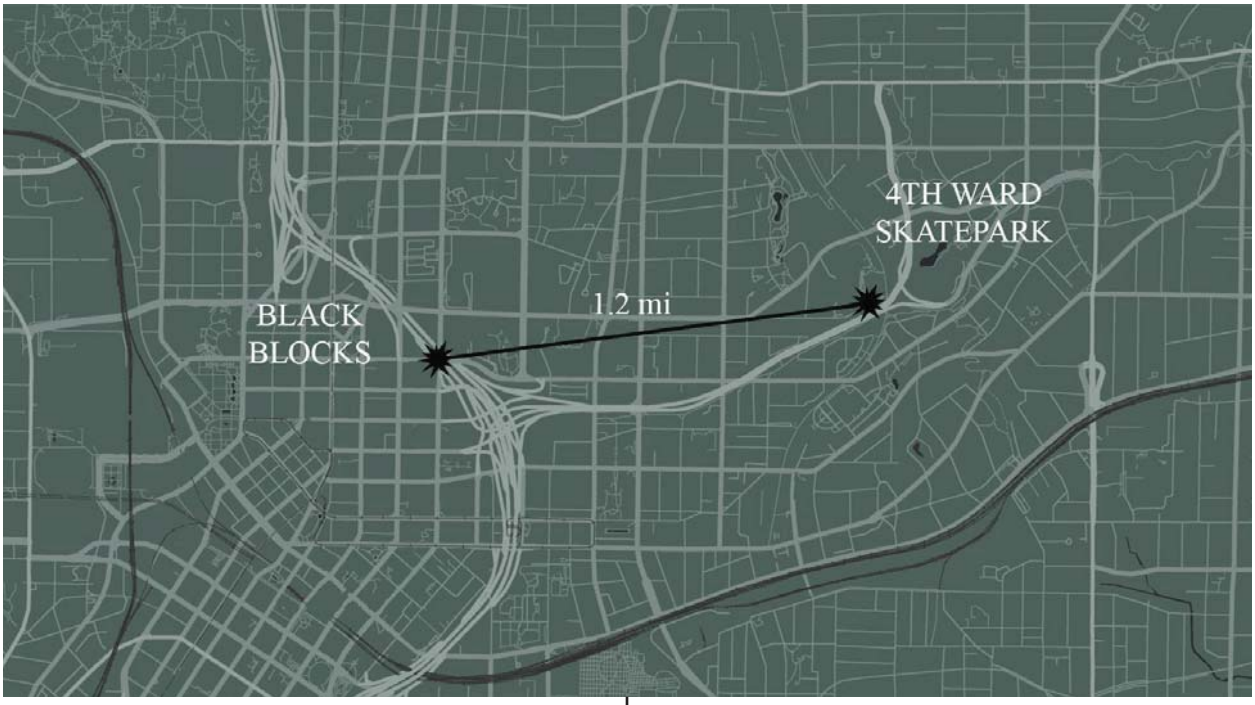
CONNECTIVITY: A mix of uses around the plaza provide a range of amenities like restaurants, bars, convenience stores, museums, and residences.

MULTIFUNCTIONALITY/INTEGRATION: Art installations make the space attractive for both skaters and non-skaters. Because the plaza is a public space it is used by and activated by many different types of users.

DESIGN: Minimal layout and the art installations provide secure circulation around the plaza.

CONTEXT/ATMOSPHERE: The surrounding area is composed of mixed use blocks that provide the space with visibility and amenities.

ATLANTA, GA



Name:
4th Ward Skatepark

Type:
Vert/Street Skatepark

Year Complete:
2010

Era:
Skate Urbanism

Name:
Black Blocks

Type:
Appropriated Skate Spot

Era:
3rd Wave Street Skating

4TH WARD SKATEPARK
Atlanta, GA

ATMOSPHERE

The skatepark is situated in a mix of uses which are all connected by the Beltline.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

The skatepark is located in between two neighborhoods. The park space serves a wide range of users.

Figure 4.27: Land use and median income

4th Ward Skatepark
Atlanta, GA

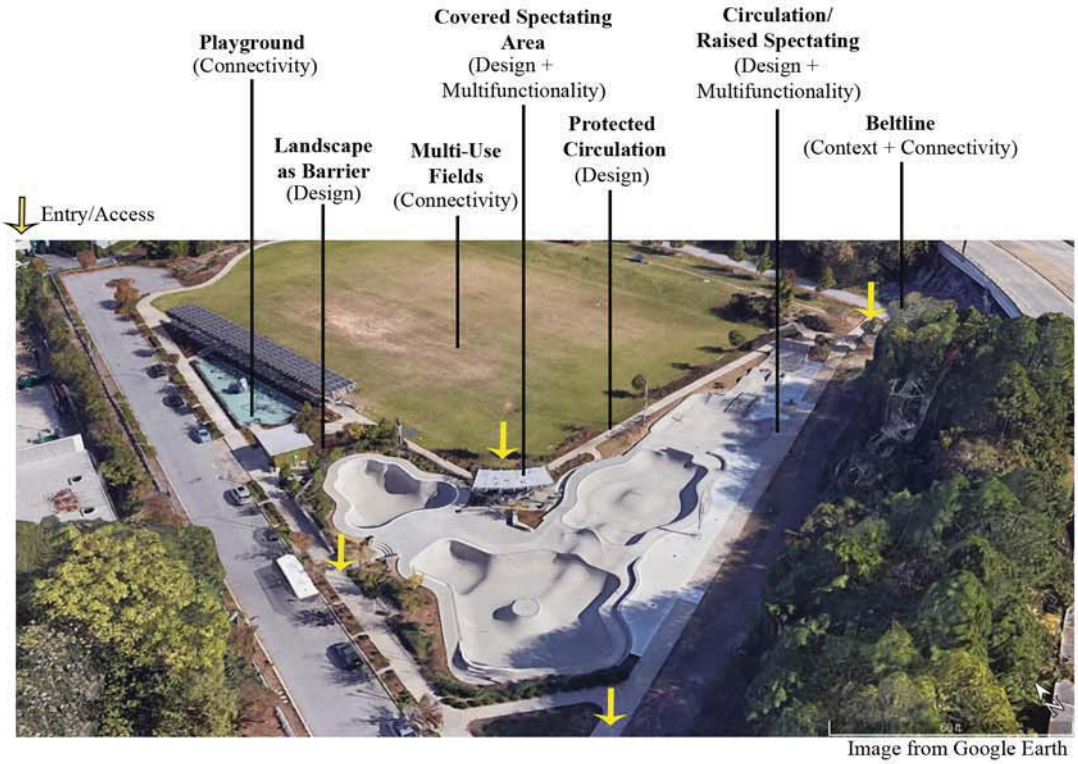


Image from Google Earth

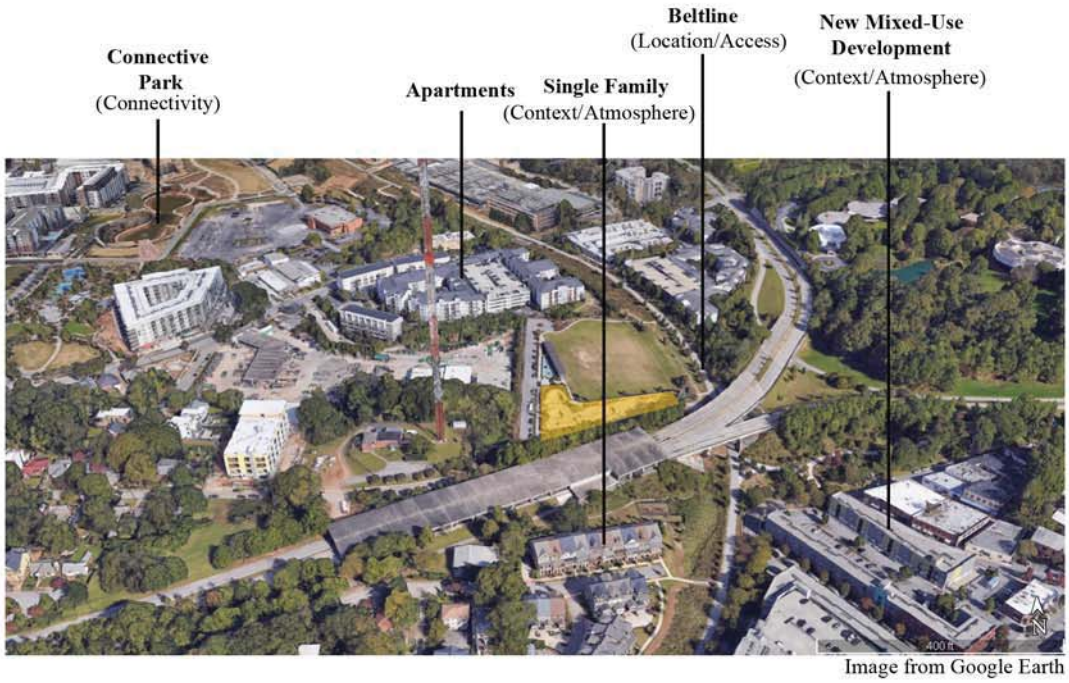


Image from Google Earth

Figure 4.28: Applying the criteria.

Site 5: 4th Ward Skatepark, Atlanta, GA

Observation:

As part of the redevelopment of Historic 4th Ward Park and continued progression of the Atlanta Beltline, a greenway slated to connect the entire city, the skatepark was developed as Atlanta's first public skate space in 2010. The proximity to the Beltline makes the site highly accessible for residents along the eastern corridor of the greenway. Development, including mixed-use buildings, has begun to change the landscape surrounding the area, and the skatepark seems to be an important amenity to the community.

The skatepark is located within another park which includes multi-use fields and a playground. There are restroom facilities and water fountains available for the entire park space. To the north of the fields is a new residential development, restaurants, and connectivity to another park. The Beltline runs under a raised interstate bridge and connects a new mixed-use development that has residences, bars, restaurants, and shops. The skatepark is directly adjacent to the Beltline and visually connects the two active spaces, luring skaters and non-skaters to the skatepark. Driving is likely the most common form of transportation to the park for residences who do not have access to the Beltline with the adjacent street providing parking. On a busy day, the allotted parking could easily fill up, leaving accessibility to the park difficult.

The park is made of three bowls which cater to different skill levels and a linear street section with stairs, rails, ramps, and space for flat ground tricks. The street section of the skatepark is connected to the path that leads to the Beltline and has stairs that function as a skate element and a raised spectating area. The entry from the park space has shade structure with seating that is genuine mixed-use space for skaters to rest and non-skaters to view the skatepark and greenspace. A modern railing protects the area from the skatepark allowing it to function as

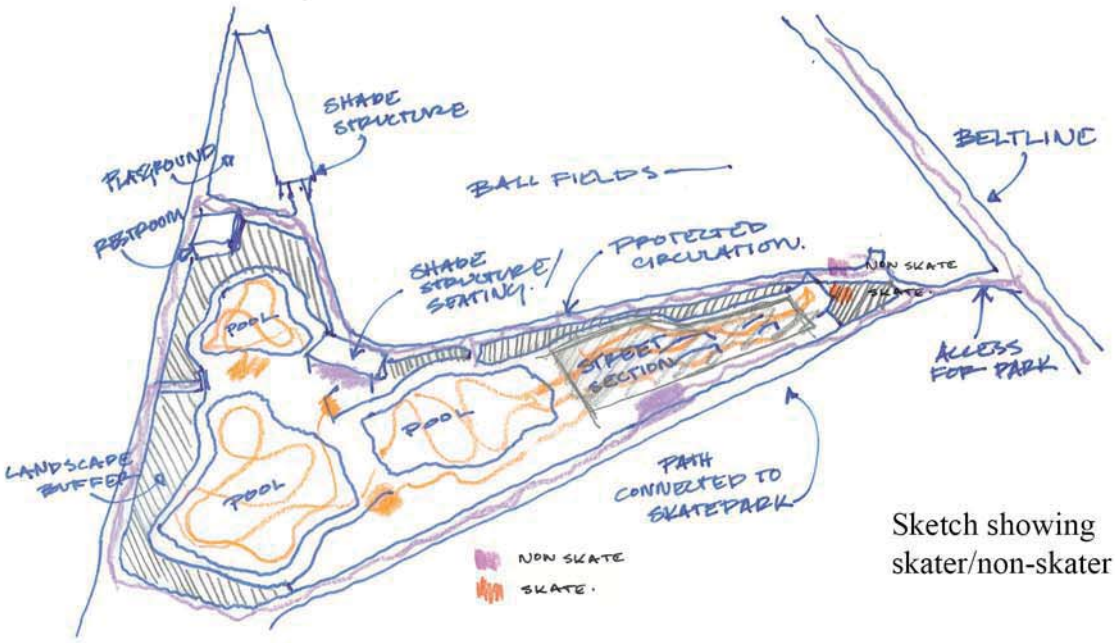
its own space while remaining spatially connected. There were a mix of users seated under the shades structure, from skateboarders to a spectators. Stone seat walls are placed within the skatepark to provide for skater rest areas and buffer from stray boards. These seat walls are not skate-able due to their shape and treatment. Landscaping softens the edges of the skatepark while also providing a buffer between skate and non-skate areas.

The skatepark is porous with three main points of entry and fencing placed thoughtfully only to protect the sidewalk and seating area. The skate elements of the park are extreme with steep bowls dominating much of the space, making navigation within the skatepark for a non-skater difficult. There is, however, a path outside the designated area of the skatepark that encompasses the whole space, allowing non-skaters to comfortably move along the periphery while staying visually connected to the skating. The skatepark is still very much a designated skate area, a formal skatepark, but it was not separated from the other surrounding areas and even encouraged spectating through its design.

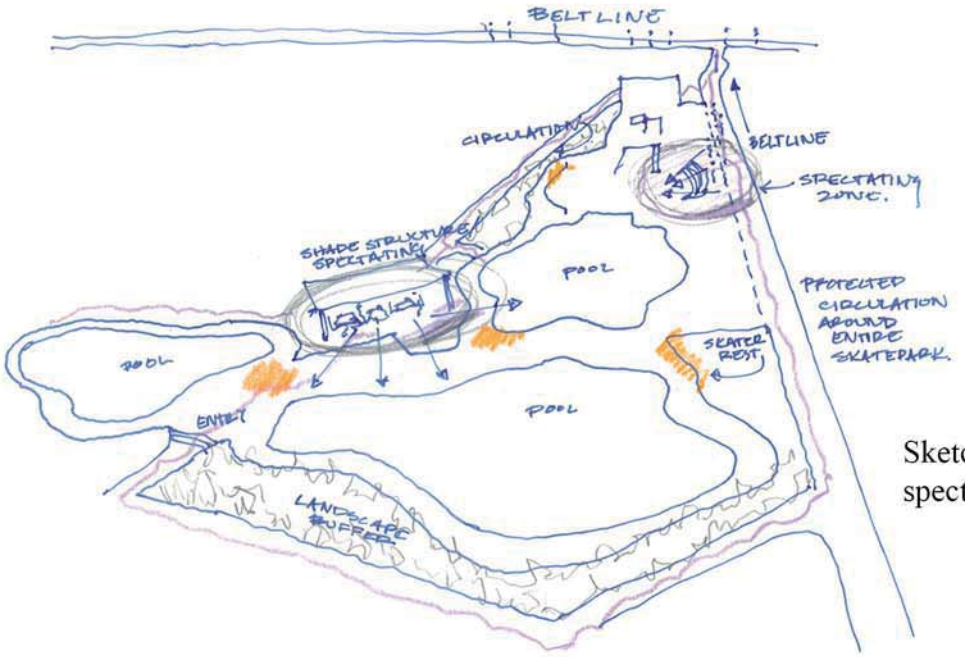
Figure 4.29:The design of the park allows for plenty of spectating opportunities. (Photo by author)


Figure 4.30: Front stage/ backstage. (Photo by author)


Figure 4.31: The activity of the skatepark and fields. (Photo by author)



Sketch showing skater/non-skater flow.



Sketch showing spectating areas.

Figure 4.32: Sketches of the skatepark. (Author)

Lessons Learned:

4th Ward Skatepark provides a number of applications for design as the park was successful in providing space for interaction between skaters and non-skaters. The design of the park provides connection between active zones: the Beltline, multi-use fields, playground, and skatepark. All of these active areas feed off one another and create a mix of users and activities, legitimizing skateboarding as an equal participant in the process.

The covered seating area adjacent to the skatepark served as a resting place that encouraged non-skater interaction with the skatepark. Landscaping and thoughtful fencing design showed that formal seating could be accommodated within the skatepark while still remaining comfortable and safe. The street section of the skatepark had stairs for close interaction between skaters and non-skaters and creates backstage for the more advanced areas that have bowls and vertical elements. Circulation around the skatepark for non-skaters was separated but still allowed for viewing and interaction.

The analysis of the quarter mile radius around the skatepark shows mixed uses with residences, bars, restaurants, and park space all connected by the Beltline. The Beltline connected the various land uses with the skatepark and park space, activating it more than the typical skatepark within a park scenario.

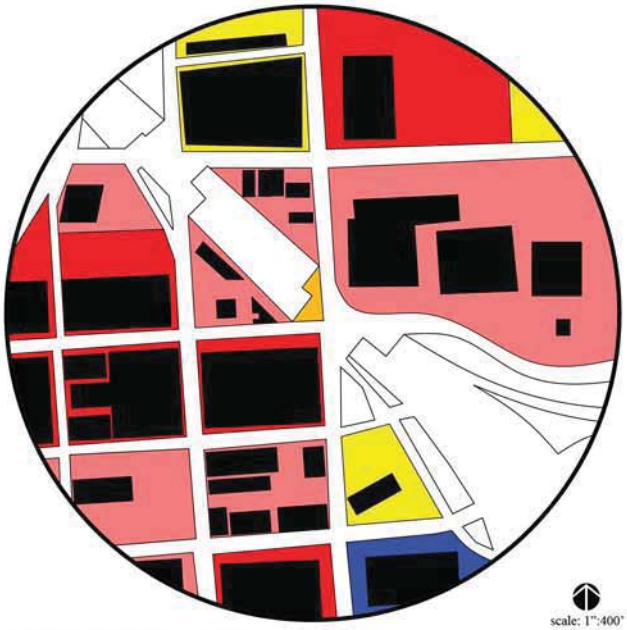
LOCATION/ACCESSIBILITY: The Beltline makes the skatepark highly accessible. The skatepark is part of a larger park that includes other activities.

CONNECTIVITY: The skatepark is activated by **other uses surrounding the park.** A path connecting the Beltline to the skatepark draws diverse users to the space.

MULTIFUNCTIONALITY/INTEGRATION: Covered and raised viewing areas make the space functional for skaters and non-skaters.

DESIGN: Protected circulation, designated viewing areas, and landscaping make the skatepark functional and inclusive.

CONTEXT/ATMOSPHERE: Mixed uses around the skatepark make it feel like a valuable part of the redevelopment of the area and gives users a range of amenities along the Beltline.



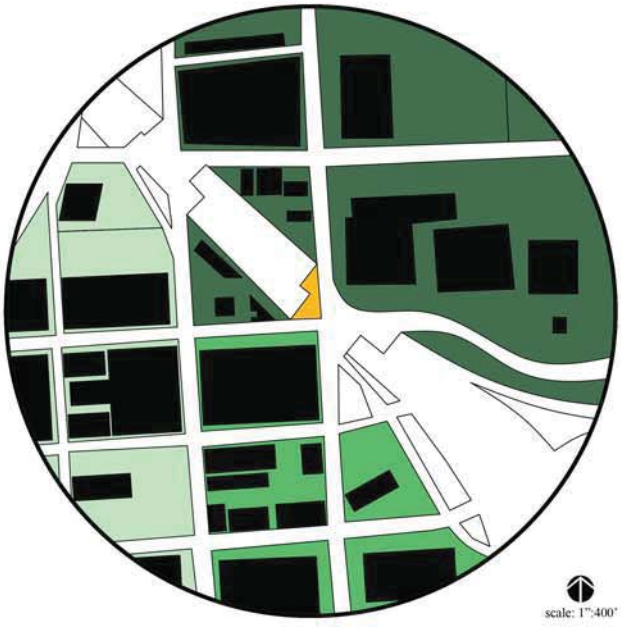
BLACK BLOCKS SKATE SPACE
Land Use

- Government/Institution
- Residential
- Commercial
- Mixed Res/Com
- Industrial
- Park
- Skate Space
- Rail

Black Blocks
Atlanta, GA

ATMOSPHERE

The skate spot is located above an interstate separating mixed use and commercial land uses. Its location does not allow it to activate the surrounding streetscape.



BLACK BLOCKS SKATE SPACE
Median Income

- low: $31,250
- mid: $34,028
- high: $44,638

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

The skate spot is located in between two neighborhoods. Higher income residential to north and the central business district to the south.

Figure 4.33: Land use and median income

Black Blocks
Atlanta, GA

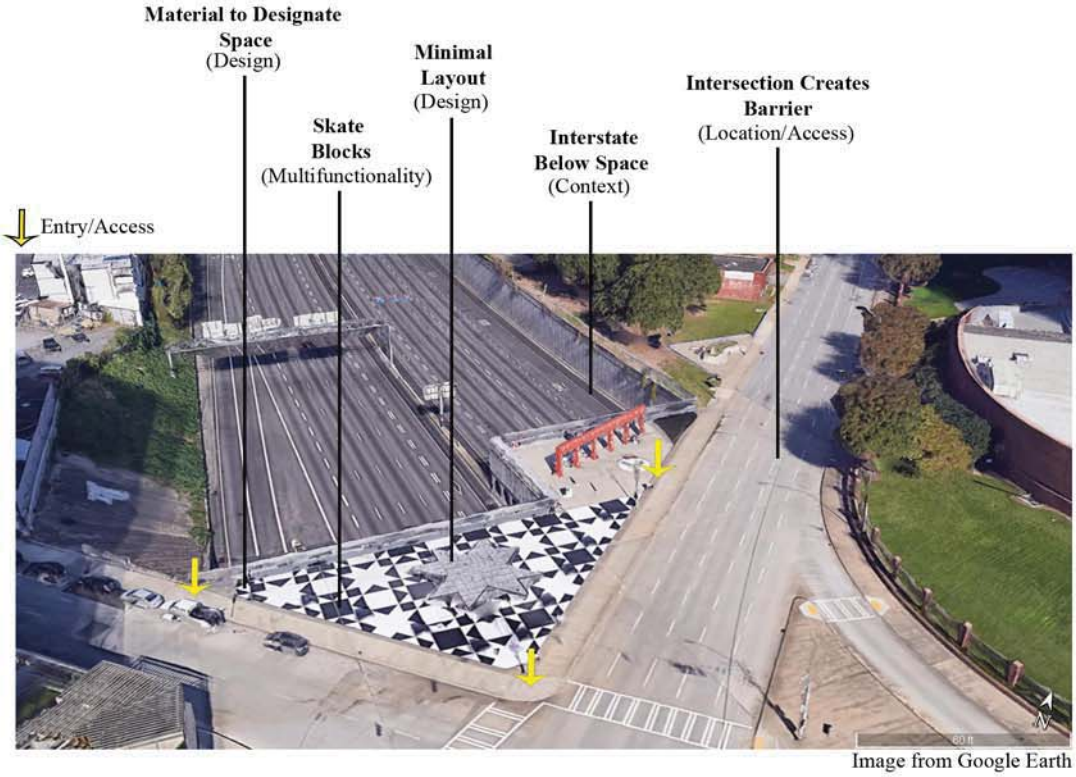


Figure 4.34: Applying the criteria.

Site 6: Black Blocks, Atlanta, GA

Observation:

Black Blocks is a true appropriated skate spot located in downtown Atlanta. On the corner of a major intersection overlooking the I-85 interstate sits the minimalist park, formally known as Folk Art Park. The space was constructed under the direction of the Corporation for Olympic Development in Atlanta in 1996 as part of the streetscape improvements to prepare the city for the Olympics (Atlanta Downtown). The park was a safe meet up spot for skateboarders during the heavy criminalization of skateboarding in the nineties and became an important part of Atlanta's skateboarding culture.

The skate area is a triangle shaped space with smooth, black and white checkered concrete. Nine black metal boxes line the perimeter of the triangle, creating a simple line of raised blocks. A peculiar, metal shade structure stands in the middle of the triangle with small ledges for seating on its four posts. The minimalism of the space and harshness of the surroundings make it no surprise that the space would become appropriated by skaters. I saw no one using the park except for a few homeless people and the majority of people passing by walked around the space rather than through it. The park offers little to the average citizen, because its location is disconnected from amenities and surrounding attractions.

The area around Black Blocks is dominated by large, busy streets leading to the CBD of Atlanta. Most of the land around the park is occupied by high rise hotels and office buildings that face away from the interstate and offer little in the way of activating the space with pedestrians. Because Black Blocks is seated on an overpass, it is in a dead space that is uncomfortable to navigate by foot. Arriving there is possible by all means of transportation, including a subway stop a half mile away, though the park would probably never be a destination for the average

person. There are high-rise condominiums and mixed residential high-rises in the area on both sides of the interstate that might use the bridge that the park is located on as a thoroughfare to and from downtown. Surrounding amenities are mostly restaurants and coffee shops on the ground floor of the hotels and office buildings, serving primarily users of the buildings.

Figure 4.35: The simplistic layout of Black Blocks.
(Photo by author)

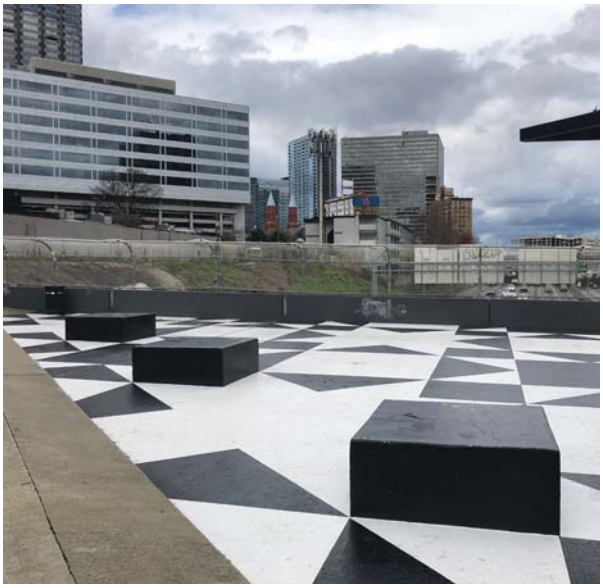
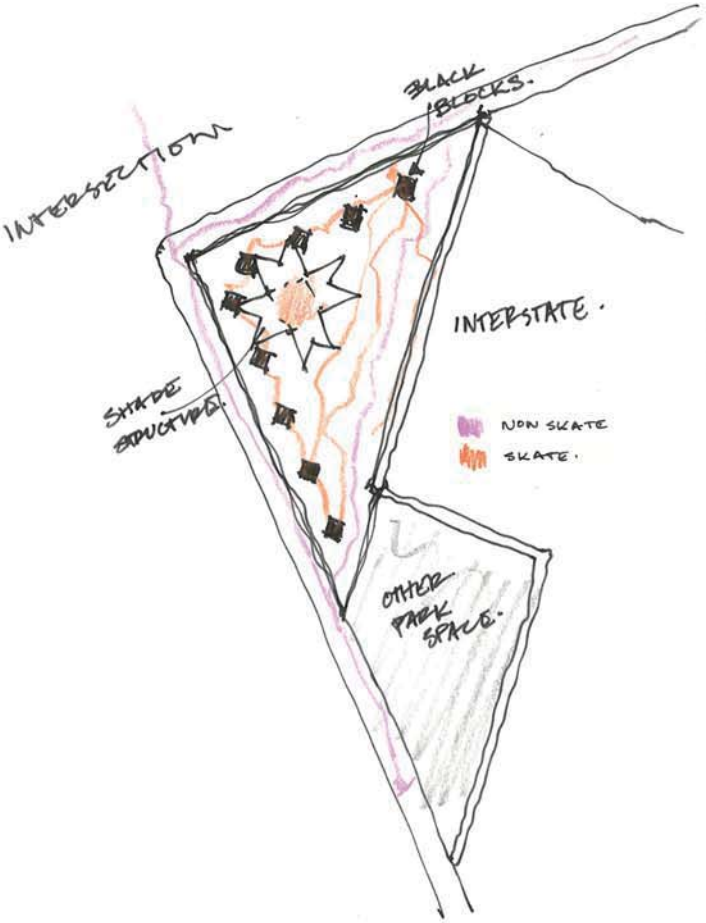
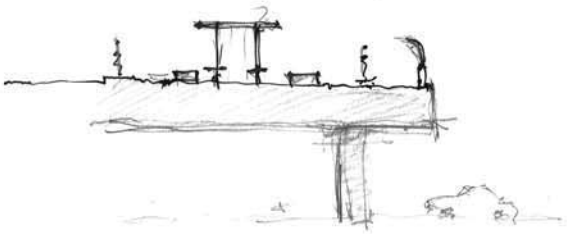


Figure 4.36: Material to designate the space.
(Photo by author)

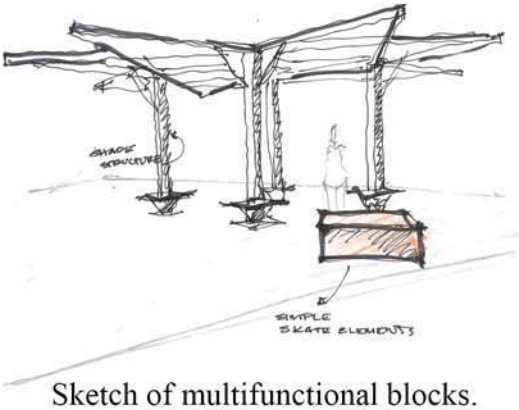

Figure 4.37: Raised blocks are multifunctional
(Photo by author)



Sketch of plan view
showing skater/non-skater flow.



Sketch of section showing the overpass.



Sketch of multifunctional blocks.

Figure 4.38: Sketches of the skate spot. (Author)

Lessons Learned:

Black Blocks is a representation of the third wave of skateboarding when skaters were subjected to intensifying measures of control. Because Black Blocks location is so undesirable, it became an uncontested area where skaters could meet up and skateboard without being subjected to the typical surveillance of other skate spots. Its location is probably why the skate spot has persisted for so long as skateboarders are the only users of the space aside from homeless. The quarter mile radius around the space reveals a mix of uses, but the location of the park in a dead zone over an interstate prevents that diversity to be represented in the landscape. The park is at the literal convergence of two distinct areas, downtown and Old Fourth Ward, but the lack of connectivity and harsh surroundings dilute the potential of the park to function as a valuable public space.

The minimalism of the park is congruent with the skate spaces found in New York and Philadelphia. The open layout, black boxes, and smooth concrete that make this space skate-able provide pertinent application for design. The skate-able elements are multifunctional structures that do not imply an intended use and function as art and seating as well as skate-able elements. The patterned concrete provides a visual demarcation of the space and an ideal riding surface for skateboarding. The principle lesson here is minimalism and multifunctionality of objects.

LOCATION/ACCESSIBILITY: A busy intersection creates a barrier to the space and makes it undesirable for pedestrians.

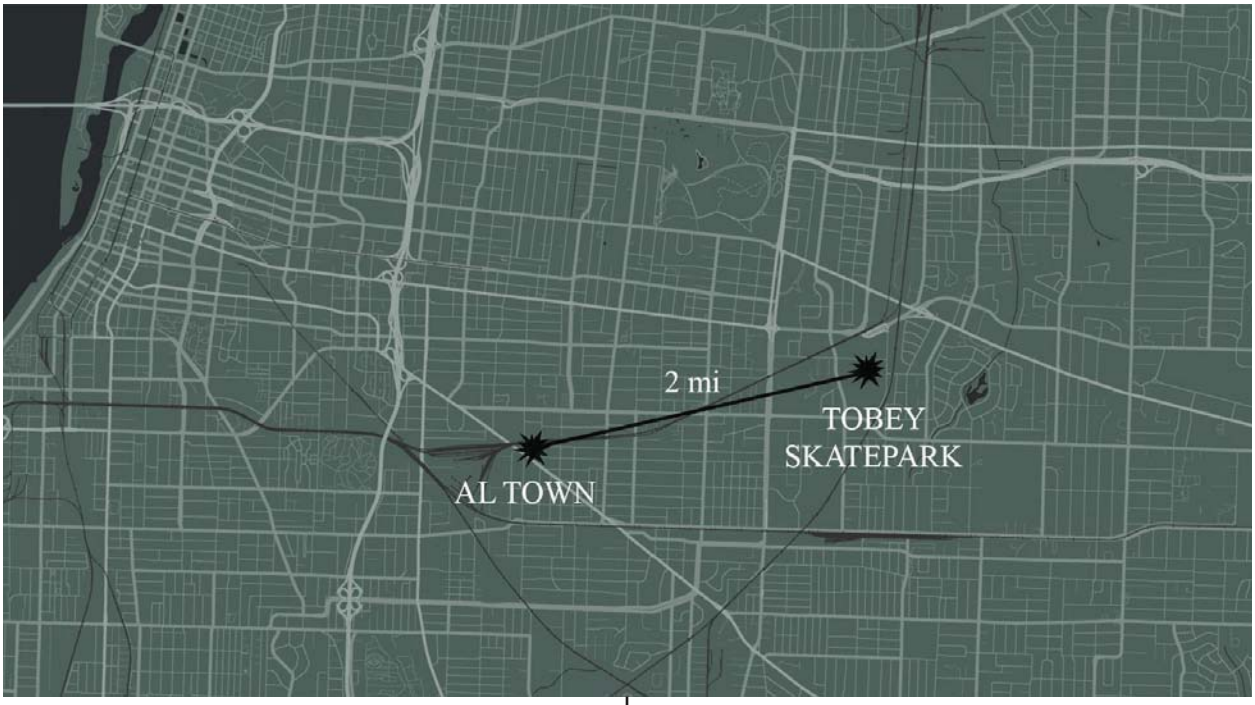
CONNECTIVITY: There is little activity around the space due to its location on an interstate overpass. Though the space was public, few people would be drawn to this location.

MULTIFUNCTIONALITY/INTEGRATION: Multifunctional blocks provide seating and skate-able elements.

DESIGN: Minimal layout and materials to designate space make the space function for skaters and non-skaters.

CONTEXT/ATMOSPHERE: The interstate divides the area, fragmenting the space from the surrounding amenities.

MEMPHIS, TN



Name:
Tobey Skatepark

Type:
Vert/Street Skatepark

Year Complete:
2010

Era:
4th Wave

Name:
Al Town

Type:
Appropriated DIY Skate Spot

Era:
3rd Wave Street Skating

TOBEY SKATEPARK
Land Use

- Government/Institution
- Residential
- Commercial
- Mixed Res/Com
- Industrial
- Park
- Skate Space
- Rail

TOBEY SKATEPARK
Median Income

- low: > $42,436
- mid: $42,436
- high: $77,188

TOBEY SKATEPARK
Memphis, TN

ATMOSPHERE

The skatepark is located within a park with little connectivity and density. City buildings dominate the immediate surroundings.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

The skatepark is located away from a distinct neighborhood. Higher income house are found to the east. The location does not serve a diverse population.

Figure 4.39: Land use and median income

Tobey Skatepark
Memphis, TN

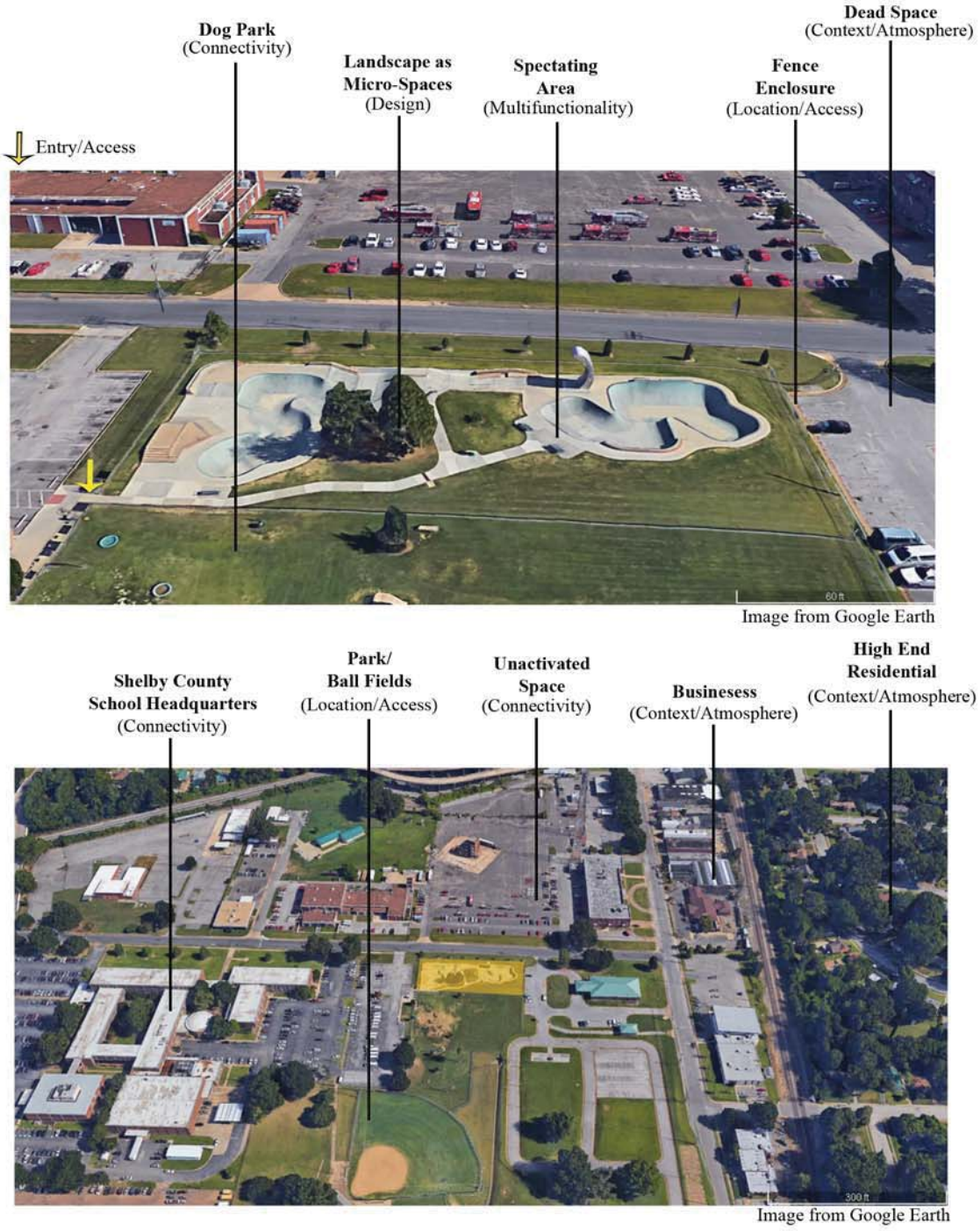


Figure 4.40: Applying the criteria.

Site 7: Tobey Skatepark, Memphis, TN

Observation:

Located in part of a larger park and fairgrounds system, Tobey Skatepark is adjacent to a dog park, ball fields and the Shelby County School Board building. Built as the first public skatepark within the city limits, Tobey was brought to fruition through grassroots advocacy. It has maintained popularity since completion in 2010 and remains the only skatepark in the city.

The park is accessed by most users via car or bus due to its relatively isolated location within a larger park system. Higher income residential homes are found to the east while a small university is found just to the west. The skatepark is more of destination than part of the fabric of the neighborhood although it is centrally located in the city and serves diverse demographics. Directly adjacent, to the east and west of the skatepark there are parking lots while to the south there is a dog park and ball fields. Although a fence separates the skate park from the dog park, there is a visual connectivity between the spaces, and I noticed most dog owners were watching the skateboarders. Shelby County Schools headquarters is the most active surrounding entity, providing a noticeable form of surveillance for the skatepark.

The skatepark is made up of two big bowls, a snake run, ramps, ledges, stairs, rails, and a large vertical element called “the wave.” The majority of the park is dedicated to the bowls, which are faster, vertical elements, while the northern section provides some street elements. The park experiences a lot of use because there are no other formal skateparks within the city. The street section of the park, which includes the slower paced skate elements is not accessible to non-skaters.

The designated gathering areas are small and do not provide the sense of security that would make the park inviting for most non-skaters. Two landscaped zones give extra resting and

improvisational space but feel isolated from the action of the skate zones. Skaters rest at each end of the street section because the park was crowded that day. Entering the park on a busy day would be intimidating as a non-skater, because there is a set of stairs directly upon entering and could cause conflict. This is a park where spectators need to pay attention as to not get in the way. Circulation around the park is mostly for skater use as paths are abutted against 12-foot bowls and other skate elements. The lack of separation between active zones and gathering areas made the experience chaotic. A few spectators lingered in the back of the landscape zones to avoid being in the way.

It is clear that the skatepark is significant to the skate community in Memphis. The design is intended it give skaters of all levels a place to skate and is well maintained. There is no translation of the activity of the skatepark to the immediate surroundings, which are mostly empty parking lots, underused ball fields and city buildings.

Figure 4.41: Active entrance to Tobey Skatepark. (Photo by author)

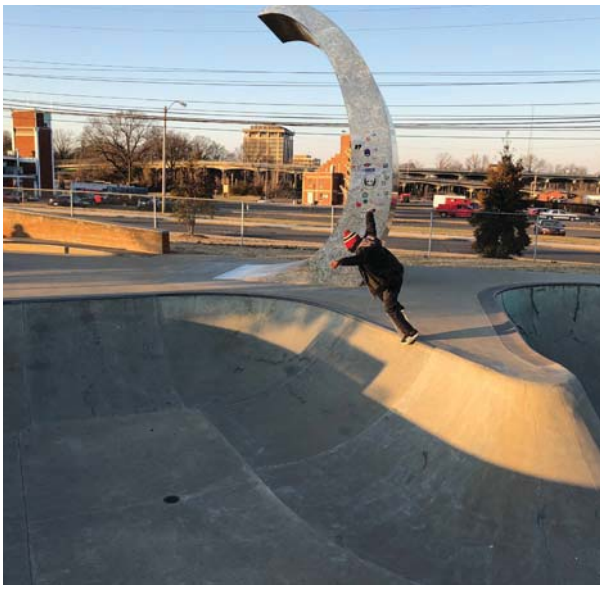
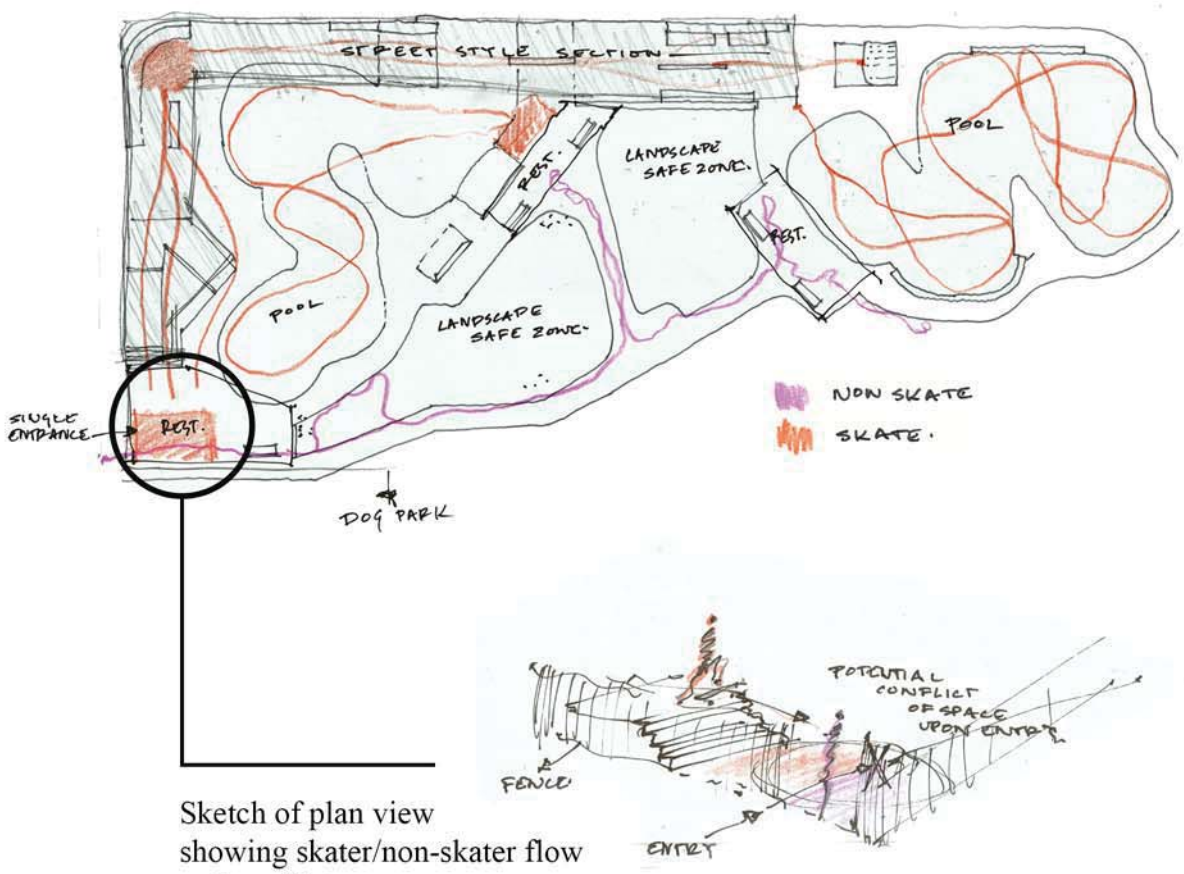


Figure 4.42: Little urban activation outside the skatepark. (Photo by author)


Figure 4.43: Spectating/rest area/material change. (Photo by author)



Sketch of plan view showing skater/non-skater flow and conflict area.

Figure 4.44: Sketches of the skatepark (Author)

Lessons Learned:

Tobey Skatepark functions as a safe place for skaters to practice safely and comfortably. In southern cities antiquated perceptions of skateboarding still exist, though the existence of the skatepark signals change. The skatepark is situated within a park and is therefore mostly a driving destination for users. The fencing around the park and lack of viewing areas make this park feel as though it was only intended for the skater. The adjacent dog park had the greatest number of spectators which suggests that placing active areas next to skateparks can increase the success of both spaces.

The skatepark is isolated form other forms of urban activation. The residential zone to the east of the park are high end homes. The dominant use of the surrounding area is park space and city buildings which offer little in the way of pedestrian traffic and urban activation. The demographics of the area are not as diverse due to the lack of residences within the quarter mile radius. The overall placement of the park is unsurprising as Memphis is not as dense as the other cities represented in the study and reflects the perceptions of skateboarding in this city.
The skatepark highlights the need for more skate-able places in the city, specifically those that are integrated into urban landscapes.

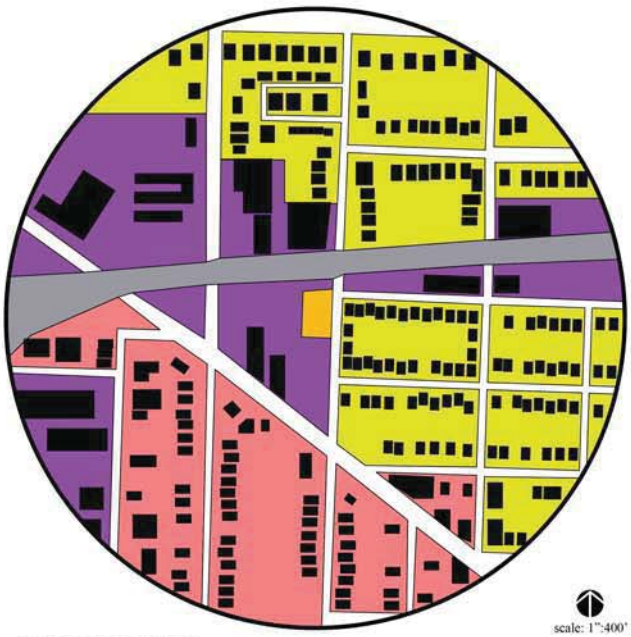
LOCATION/ACCESSIBILITY: A fence enclosure makes the skatepark intimidating for non-skaters. **The skatepark is a park within a park** which leaves much of the space around it inactive.

CONNECTIVITY: The dog park provides a source of non-skaters to the area. **Most of the land uses** around the skatepark are not providing interaction or potential for interaction with the skatepark.

MULTIFUNCTIONALITY/INTEGRATION: Spectating area and landscape safe zones provide non-skaters with an opportunity to use the space, but the skatepark is mostly concerned with serving the skateboarder.

DESIGN: Landscaping creates micro-spaces where skaters can rest, and non-skaters can view the action.

CONTEXT/ATMOSPHERE: There are few amenities surrounding the skatepark, and its location is mostly defined by its location within a park.



Al Town
Memphis, TN

ATMOSPHERE

The skate spot is situated in a predominately single-family residential area. Mixed use blocks to the south are include convenience stores and residences. The area is fragmented by an industrial corridor.

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

The skate spot is located at the convergence of neighborhoods representing diverse populations.

Figure 4.45: Land use and median income

Al Town
Memphis, TN

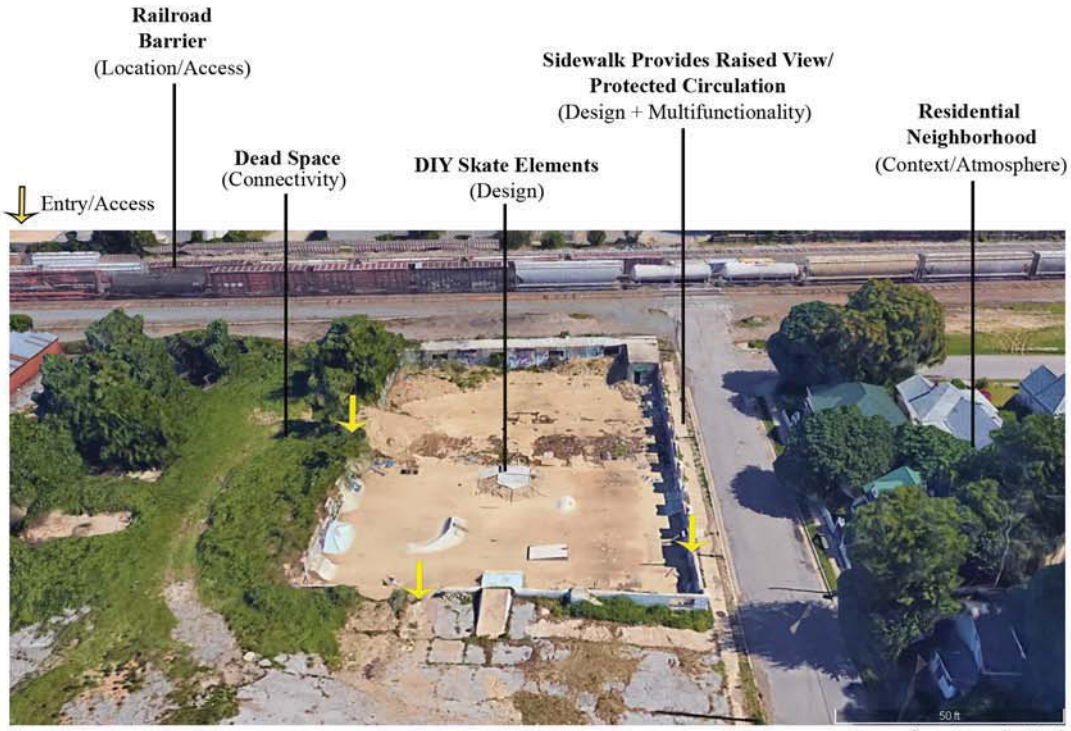


Image from Google Earth

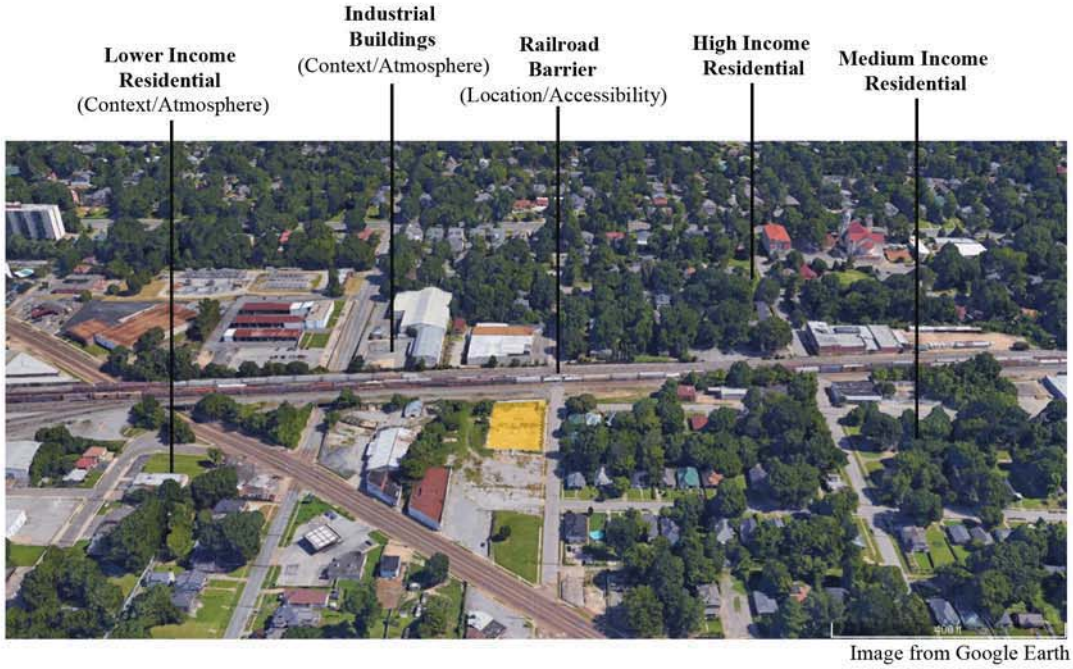


Image from Google Earth

Figure 4.46: Applying the criteria.

Site 8: Al Town, Memphis, TN

Observation

Al Town is a unique skate space because it is a DIY (Do-It-Yourself) skate space. Al Town has appropriated the bottom floor of a torn down building which provides a smooth concrete foundation. It is located on the edge of a neighborhood called Cooper Young, which is a well-known arts district in Memphis. The skate space is unknown to most in the neighborhood as it is on the corner of a socio-economic divide, in an area associated with increased crime, and is in a depressed basin surrounded by building rubble and unruly vegetation. The park sits at the convergences of two distinct neighborhoods of different socio-economic and demographic makeups.

All the skate-able elements in the park are constructed by the local skateboard community which acquire the supplies through donations from skate shops, hardware stores, and neighbors (Shaw 2013). Al Town has a vastly different atmosphere than traditional skateparks. Every wall is covered in murals featuring references to Memphis and its. Al Town combines homemade street and park style skating elements, with ample space between obstacles, catering to a variety of preferences and skate styles. Some of the skate elements' structural integrity are questionable and there is an obvious pattern of construction and deconstruction as obstacles have been created, deconstructed, and replaced. There are transitions, rails, manual pads, skate boxes, and even a small half pipe.

The park is highly accessible by bus, cycling, walking and skating. Because it is situated in predominately residential area it provides for an interesting landmark in the area for those passing by. The park is depressed into the ground which allows spectators to watch from above, giving a full view of the entire space. Al Town has a very distinct atmosphere and there are

spatial politics involved in who gets to skate the park. It is a highly localized space where the subculture of skating is alive and well, manifesting such that it looks and feels at the opposite end of the spectrum as Tobey Park. This appropriated space does appear is not as welcoming as some of the other skate spaces, but it cannot be denied that the skateboarders are giving an abandon building and a underappreciated neighborhoods life, color, and activation.

Figure 4.47: Looking down on the DIY skate space from a sidewalk. (Photo by author)

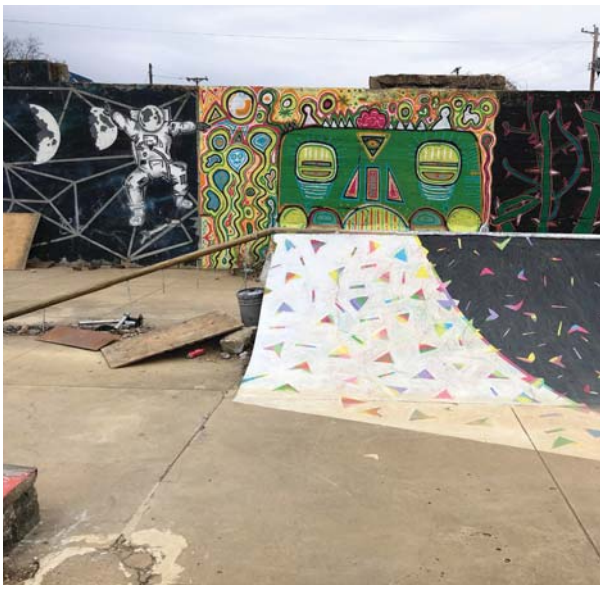
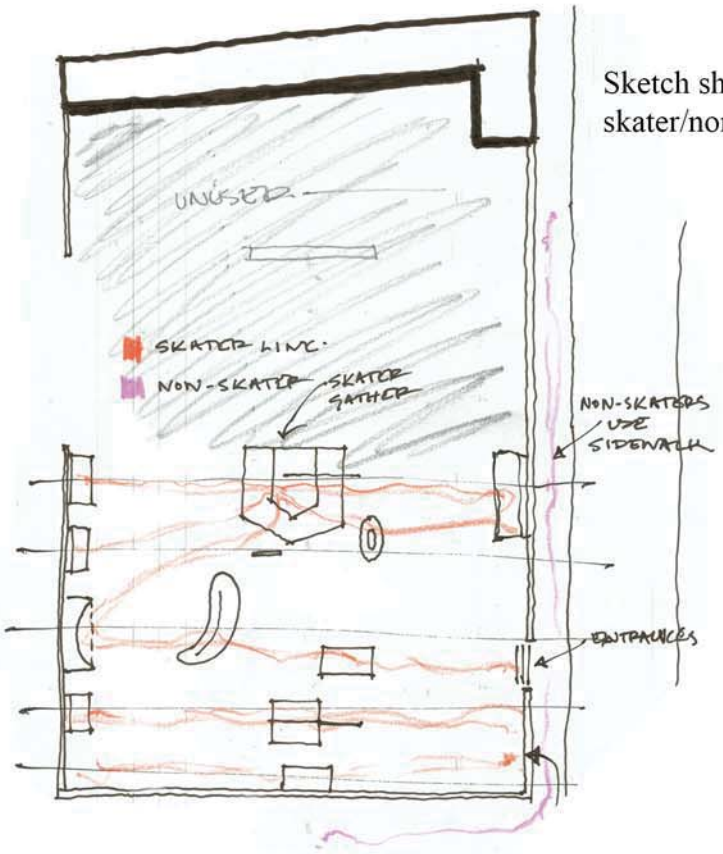
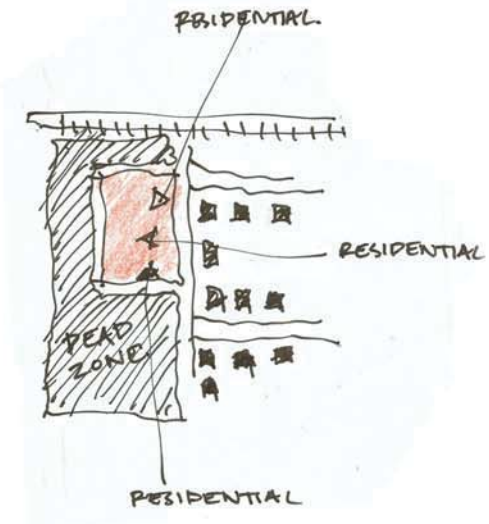


Figure 4.48: Art and homemade skate elements. (Photo by author)

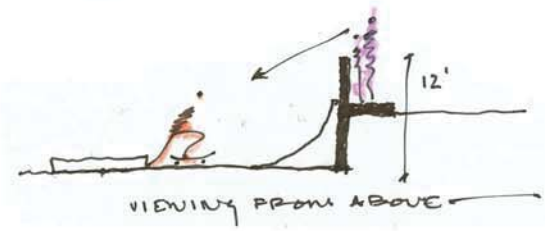

Figure 4.49: Highly localized skate space. (Photo by author)



Sketch showing plan view skater/non-skater flow.



Sketch showing context.



Sketch of depressed skate space.

Figure 4.50: Sketches of the skate spot. (Author)

Lessons Learned:

Al Town represents a truly appropriated skate space which has unique implications from design to site placement. The DIY park has transformed an abandoned building into a cultural landmark within the neighborhood. Its location, at the convergence of two neighborhoods, makes the space accessible to a diverse group of users and provides accessibility through neighborhood streets.

Because the skate area is below the grade of the sidewalk, there is visibility of the entire space, allowing spectating to occur without entering into the skate area. Murals and graffiti line the walls and the skate-able elements giving the space authenticity and luring non-skaters to take pictures and engage with the area.

LOCATION/ACCESSIBILITY: An industrial corridor and arterial road fragment the area around the skate space. The skatepark provides access to **three different neighborhoods.**

CONNECTIVITY: Three neighborhoods converge at the skate spot. **Inactive space** surrounding the site detract from the skate spot.

MULTIFUNCTIONALITY/INTEGRATION: Raised viewing is created by the change in grade between the public sidewalk and the depressed skate area. **Murals** attract non-skaters to the site.

DESIGN: The DIY skate elements make the organization of the space less predictable.

CONTEXT/ATMOSPHERE: The neighborhood context of the skate spot is the defining feature of the area.

Skatepark/Skate Spot Takeaways

Both constructed and found skate spaces provide legitimate skate outlets within the urban realm. Skateparks provide a secure and safe place to skateboard in an environment designed for skate-ability. Skate spots are appropriated places in the landscape that offer spontaneity, interaction and creativity.

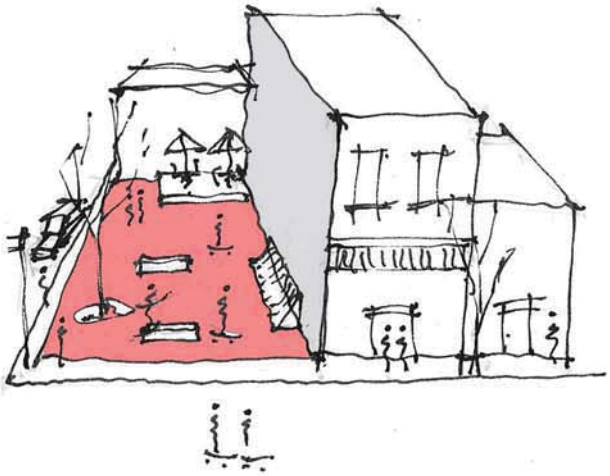
Skateparks provide an optimal skate environment through the construction of idealized skate obstacles. Their weakness often falls in their location and lack of versatility as a public space. Chiu (2009) noted in his research on skateparks in New York that the typical skatepark is enclosed by a fence and can be compared to a playground where the skating is all about practicing and advancing individual skill. Every skatepark I observed was situated within a larger park and next to some sort of recreational field. The assumption by planners and city governments still reflects the understanding of skateboarding as a sport to be practiced in a specified area. The urban activation around LES Skatepark was diluted by the large fence, single entrance, and lack of multifunctionality as a public space. Paine's Plaza had the most innovative design which was based on a plaza-like layout, blending skatepark and public space, but its design did not translate to its isolated surroundings. Atlanta's 4th Ward Skatepark encouraged non-skater interaction through the placement of seating and circulation around the park, but the skatepark itself was more concerned with skate-ability than being a multifunctional space. Tobey Skatepark was also enclosed and lacked flexibility as a public space for non-skaters.

- Location of skateparks within other parks makes them more of a destination than a part of organic street culture, hindering accessibility and diversity of people and uses.
- Location of skateparks away from mixed uses does not allow skaters connectivity to amenities and decreases potential value of the space.

- Location of skateparks away from other urban activities frames perceptions of otherness for skaters and non-skaters.
- Fencing, extreme obstacles, lack of protected circulation, and poorly planned spectating space makes skateparks feel unwelcoming and inflexible for non-skaters.
- Idealized skate obstacles can leave skaters bored once they have mastered the park.

Found skate spots often do not provide optimal skate-able environments but are valued for their authenticity, challenge, and appropriation. Skate spots are appropriated places in the city that are underused or simply ideal for skating. These spaces can lead to conflict and contestation as street skating is illegal in most cities and these spaces are not designed for skateboard use. In both southern cities I observed the found spaces were not inviting to other users. Brooklyn Banks provided an example of a successfully appropriated skate space, but the site lacks visibility and does little to activate the surrounding streets. Thomas Paine Plaza represents the most successful appropriated skate space, but skating there is illegal, and the harsh, brutalist plaza is dated and used mostly as a thoroughfare for pedestrian traffic. Black Blocks in Atlanta made use of an underused corner on a busy intersection, but skating there is illegal, and the average person would not choose to rest there. Al Town in Memphis transformed an underused space, but the spatial politics and inactive immediate surroundings made it uninviting for non-skaters.

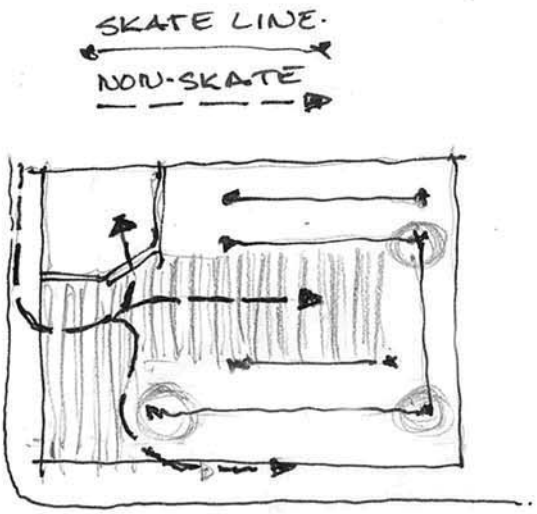
- Found skate spots are often located in underused spaces of the city that either are not visible and/or that are not permitted for use by skateboarders.
- Found skate spots can cause conflict of use making non-skaters uncomfortable, because they are not designed for skateboarding.
- Found skate spots are either ignored by cities or actively prevented through skate stoppers and skateboarding fines.



LESSONS LEARNED
skateparks and skatespots observed

Locate skate space adjacent to other urban activities to provide connection, accessibility, and visibility.

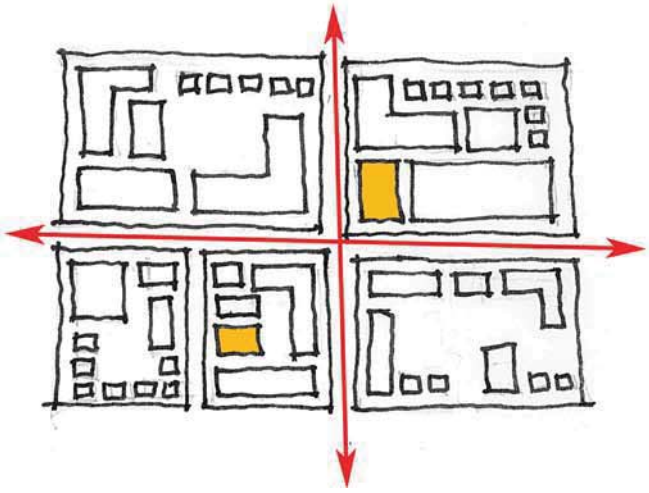
Design the perimeter of the skate space to be porous avoiding a single entrance.



Provide predictable lines for skating to occur such that there is a clear designation of space for skaters.

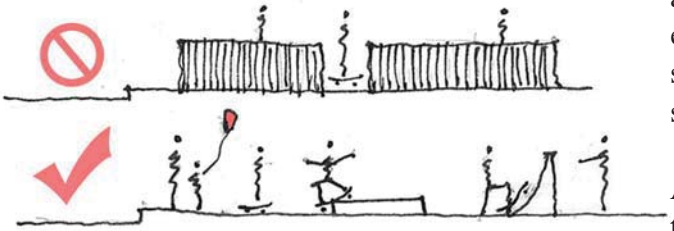
Allow protected or designated circulation throughout the space to make it inclusive and engaging for skaters and non-skaters.

Use materials to designate skate zones.



Locate skate space within a mix of uses and at the convergence of neighborhoods to encourage diversity of users and provide access to a range of amenities.

Locate skate-able elements outside specified skate space to provide another skate destination and encourage the urban journey.

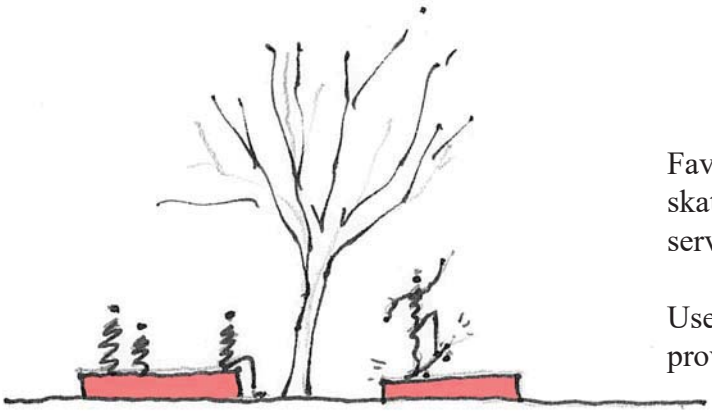


Avoid the use of fences around skate areas as it creates an unwelcoming environment, signaling constraint to skateboarders and otherness to non-skaters.

Avoid extreme obstacles such as bowls, these symbolize constructed skate spaces, encourage faster skating styles, and are intimidating to non-skaters.

Employ a front stage and a backstage. The front stage can serve as the main skate area while a backstage provides engagement without being directly a part of the action.

Consider a raised area for viewing the space, allowing visibility and interaction while ensuring separation and safety.



Favor a minimal, open design, where skate-able elements are multifunctional, serving skaters and non-skaters, alike.

Use landscaping to create micro-spaces, provide buffers, and give shade.

In order to connect the lessons learned to both the evaluative guideline and the three values of vibrancy explored in the previous chapter, two charts were created to highlight these relationships. The first chart shows the thirteen lessons learned organized by the five criteria that made up the evaluative guideline (Location/Accessibility, Connectivity, Multifunctionality/Integration, Design, Context/Atmosphere). Each of the lessons learned applies to one or more of the five criteria and identifies how each lesson is related to the questions asked by the evaluative guideline. The second chart organizes the lessons learned based on the values of vibrancy promoted (Activation, Use/Exchange, Social). Each lesson promotes two or more of the values. Also shown in the chart are the skateparks and skate spots where the lessons were derived from. Both of these charts link the findings to the critical components of this research which are to ensure that the lessons are promoting vibrancy and answering positively to the questions laid out in the evaluative guideline. With the collection of lessons learned to promote vibrancy and highlighting important decisions involving design interventions, this tool box can now be used to design a multifunctional plaza that incorporates skateboarding.

LESSONS LEARNED ORGANIZED BY CRITERIA

Evaluative Guideline → Location/Accessibility, Connectivity, Mulitfunctionality/ Integration, Design, Context/Atmosphere → Lessons Learned

Location/Accessibility

Lessons Learned
- Adjacent to Urban Activity
- Porous Edges
- Convergence of Neighborhoods/ Within Mixed Use Area
- Proximity to Skate Spots
- Avoid Fencing

Connectivity

Lessons Learned
- Adjacent to Urban Activity
- Porous Edges
- Predictable Skate Lines
- Protected Circulation
- Convergence of Neighborhoods/ Within Mixed Use Area
- Proximity to Skate Spots
- Avoid Fencing
- Avoid Extreme Obstacles
- Front Stage/Backstage

Multifunctionality/ Integration

Lessons Learned
- Adjacent to Urban Activity
- Porous Edges
- Predictable Skate Lines
- Protected Circulation
- Materials to Create Zones
- Convergence of Neighborhoods/ Within Mixed Use Area
- Avoid Fencing
- Avoid Extreme Obstacles
- Front Stage/Backstage
- Raised Area for Viewing
- Minimal Design
- Landscaping as Micro-Spaces

Design

Lessons Learned
- Adjacent to Urban Activity
- Porous Perimeter
- Predictable Skate Lines
- Protected Circulation
- Materials to Create Zones
- Avoid Fencing
- Avoid Extreme Obstacles
- Raised Area for Viewing
- Minimal Design
- Landscaping as Micro-Spaces

Context/Atmosphere

Lessons Learned
- Adjacent to Urban Activity
- Convergence of Neighborhoods/ Within Mixed Use Area
- Proximity to Skate Spots
- Avoid Fencing

LESSONS LEARNED, VALUES PROMOTED, SPACES OBSERVED

LESSON LEARNED
promoting values: ACTIVATION EXCHANGE/USE SOCIAL
skate spaces observed

ADJACENT TO URBAN ACTIVITY
ACTIVATION EXCHANGE/USE SOCIAL
- LES Skatepark
- Thomas Paine Plaza
- 4th Ward Skatepark

POROUS EDGES
ACTIVATION EXCHANGE/USE SOCIAL
- Brooklyn Banks
- Paine's Plaza
- Thomas Paine Plaza
- 4th Ward Skatepark
- Black Blocks

PREDICTABLE SKATE LINES
EXCHANGE/USE SOCIAL
- LES Skatepark
- Thomas Paine Plaza
- Paine's Plaza
- Black Blocks

PROTECTED CIRCULATION
EXCHANGE/USE SOCIAL
- Brooklyn Banks
- Paine's Plaza
- 4th Ward Skatepark
- Al Town

MATERIALS TO CREATE ZONES
EXCHANGE/USE SOCIAL
- Brooklyn Banks
- Paine's Plaza
- Black Blocks
- Tobey Skatepark

CONVERGENCE OF NEIGHBORHOODS/ WITHIN A MIXED USE AREA
ACTIVATION EXCHANGE/USE SOCIAL
- LES Skatepark
- Brookly Banks
- Thomas Paine Plaza
- 4th Ward Skatepark
- Black Blocks
- Al Town

PROXIMITY TO SKATE SPOTS
ACTIVATION EXCHANGE/USE SOCIAL
- LES Skatepark
- Brooklyn Banks
- Thomas Paine Plaza

AVOID FENCING
ACTIVATION EXCHANGE/USE SOCIAL
- Brooklyn Banks
- Paine's Plaza
- Thomas Paine Plaza
- 4th Ward Skatepark
- Black Blocks

AVOID EXTREME OBSTACLES
EXCHANGE/USE SOCIAL
- LES Skatepark
- Brooklyn Banks
- Paine's Plaza
- Thomas Paine Plaza
- Black Blocks

FRONT STAGE/ BACKSTAGE
EXCHANGE/USE SOCIAL
- LES Skatepark
- Paine's Plaza
- 4th Ward Skatepark

RAISED AREA FOR VIEWING
EXCHANGE/USE SOCIAL
- LES Skatepark
- Paine's Plaza
- 4th Ward Skatepark
- Al Town

MINIMAL DESIGN
ACTIVATION EXCHANGE/USE
- LES Skatepark
- Brooklyn Banks
- Paine's Plaza
- Thomas Paine Plaza
- Black Blocks

LANDSCAPE MICRO-SPACES
ACTIVATION EXCHANGE/USE
- Paine's Plaza
- 4th Ward Skatepark
- Tobey Skatepark

CHAPTER 5

SOUTH MAIN SKATE SPACE

South Main Historic District, Memphis, TN

Seeking to apply the lessons learned from the literature review, precedents, and case studies, a design for an urban plaza that incorporates skateboarding was developed for the South Main Historic District of Memphis, TN. The research guided the decision for the two most important decisions involving the space: location and design interventions.

South Main is a historically and culturally significant district just south of downtown Memphis. In the last decade the area has been revamped through the renovation of historic buildings and the construction of mixed use developments. The Civil Rights Museum, Blues Hall of Fame, Hotel Chisca, where Elvis's first album was played, a plethora of bars, restaurants, and breweries, all make this district a distinct cultural attraction. There is currently 500 million dollars of construction slated in the district, making South Main one of the fastest growing areas in Memphis (Downtown Memphis). The area is surrounded by cultural amenities and is just east of the greatest natural amenity in the area, the Mississippi River. Trolleys and a recently added bike share program provide a range of transportation options. South Main is at the convergence of a range of socio-economic statuses, with high income homes along the river to the west, a growing millennial population in the multi-use buildings to the south, and a low-income neighborhood to the east.

The distinct character of South Main as a historic and art centric neighborhood, is leading the charge in re-imagining urban life in this southern city. The regeneration of the city core is

represented in the revitalization of this neighborhood which is prioritizing multi-use blocks that incorporate lifestyle amenities, access to natural amenities, walkability, and livability. The previous chapters explored how skateboarding adds value to the city and identified lessons learned to inform the location and design of a skate space that functions as an inclusive public plaza. The momentum surrounding South Main, its central location, diverse demographics, and access to amenities make it the ideal location for creating an inclusive skate space that can generate and promote more vibrancy in the area. All thirteen of the lessons learned will be applied to the location and design of the skate space.

Design Tenants

The central tenant of design for this site is adopted from the designers of Hungerford Bridge in London: *the design should assume the character of public space that just happens to be good for skateboarding. Everything in the design will have multiple functions and encourage different user groups to engage with the space. Nothing is solely intended for skateboarding*. As proven in the previous chapters, skateboarders are resilient urban performers and they will find the spots of desire and use them. Therefore, central to this design is promoting skateboarding through design interventions which will give non-skaters the opportunity to share a public space with skaters that is safe, thoughtful, and versatile. By designing the space to be truly multifunctional, skaters and non-skaters will cohesively add to the vibrancy of the area.

The Site

The site sits at the corner of South Main Street and Talbot Avenue and is currently an open lot with an underused bocci ball court. The parcel is 74 feet wide and 95 feet long. Located on the central spine of the South Main Historic District, the site is highly accessible and surrounded by an array of mixed use buildings. The corner gives the site visibility and

opportunities for engagement from the surrounding sources of activation. The distinct historic character, celebration of arts and culture, and walkability of South Main create an ideal scenario for proposing a multifunctional plaza that incorporates skateboarding. The corridor needs a centrally located outdoor space that can provide the street with a focal gathering point.

Location/Accessibility

South Main is becoming increasingly dense with new developments and restoration projects transforming the district into a highly walkable area and providing access to surrounding neighborhoods. In keeping and promoting these qualities of the neighborhood, the skate space is located on a corner lot, affording visibility and accessibility. Because the surroundings area is comprised of a dense spine of amenities, the neighboring residential areas are provided access to the skate space due to its central location. The site is in front of a trolley stop, which links the South Main area to the riverfront, downtown, Medical District and midtown. A brand-new bike share program that will include 600 bikes will locate one of the slated 30 stations near the selected site. Big River Crossing, the longest bicycle and pedestrian bridge on the Mississippi River, ties in to South Main, making the site accessible to West Memphis, Arkansas and drawing many different users to the area.

Connectivity

The immediate surroundings of the site include an architecture firm, two restaurants, multiple bars, Leadership Memphis organization, an historic auto shop, and residences. Because the site is one of the only unused parcels on the street and is the only greenspace in the activated corridor, it functions seamlessly as a public gathering space. The corner lot visually and physically links the surrounding amenities and gives the street another layer of urban design that will activate and encourage more interaction on the street level. Design interventions are

employed to ensure that the space is inclusive and can be used by skaters and non-skaters alike, giving circulation throughout the site and connecting adjacent amenities. The adjacent building will be up for lease within the year, and therefore the building will be a part of the design of the skate space. The building will be assumed to be a coffee shop for this thesis. The coffee shop will have direct access to the patio that is incorporated into the design of the skate space.

Context/Atmosphere

Less than a mile from the center of the city, Beale Street, the Fedex Forum, the Mississippi River, and countless amenities in and around downtown Memphis, the location of the skate space in South Main allows it to function as another active layer in the urban fabric. At the convergence of three socio-economic neighborhoods the location promotes the diversity and inclusivity of users in and around the site.

South Main Skate Space
Memphis, TN

SOUTH MAIN SKATE SPACE
Land Use

- Government/Institution
- Residential
- Commercial
- Mixed Res/Com
- Industrial
- Park
- Skate Space
- Rail

ATMOSPHERE

The skate space is situated in a dense area, with predominately mixed use blocks. The balance of mixed use, commercial, and residential space around the site makes this an ideal location.

SOUTH MAIN SKATE SPACE
Median Income

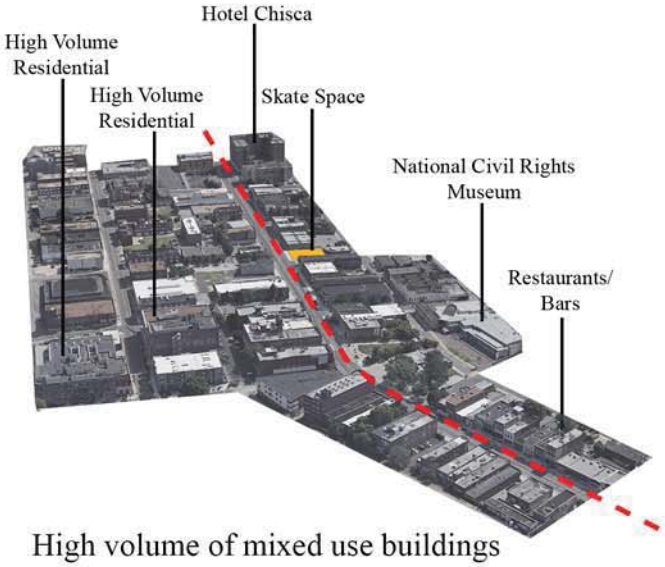
- low: $13,162
- mid: $54,042
- high: $82,931

NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

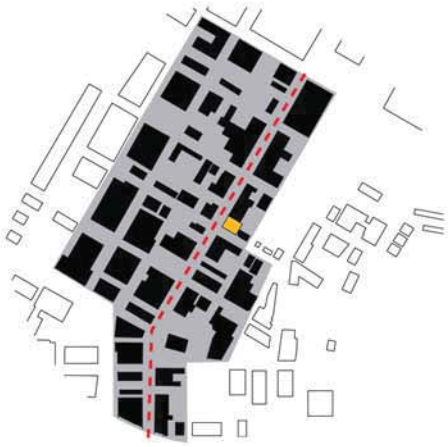
The skate space is located at the convergence of three neighborhoods to ensure accessibility and promote diversity. High end homes to the west and low income residences to the east.

Figure 5.1: Land use and median income

SOUTH MAIN HISTORIC DISTRICT:
CONVERGENCE OF NEIGHBORHOODS/ WITHIN A MIXED USE AREA



High volume of mixed use buildings lining the spine of the South Main District.



The location provides connectivity to diverse neighborhoods and links cultural and natural amenities.

Figure 5.2: Within a mixed use area

CHARACTER OF THE SITE

Figure 5.3: Section of the block. (Photo by author)

Figure 5.4: Facing south down South Main.
(Photo by author)

Figure 5.5: Facing north towards downtown.
(Photo by author)

EXISTING CONDITIONS

Figure 5.6: Site of the South Main Skate Space. (Photo by author)

Figure 5.7: Currently an underused parcel. (Photo by author)

Figure 5.8: Bocci ball court. (Photo by author)

PROCESS SKETCHES: SEEKING TO RESOLVE THE TENSION BETWEEN SKATE AND NON-SKATE AREAS

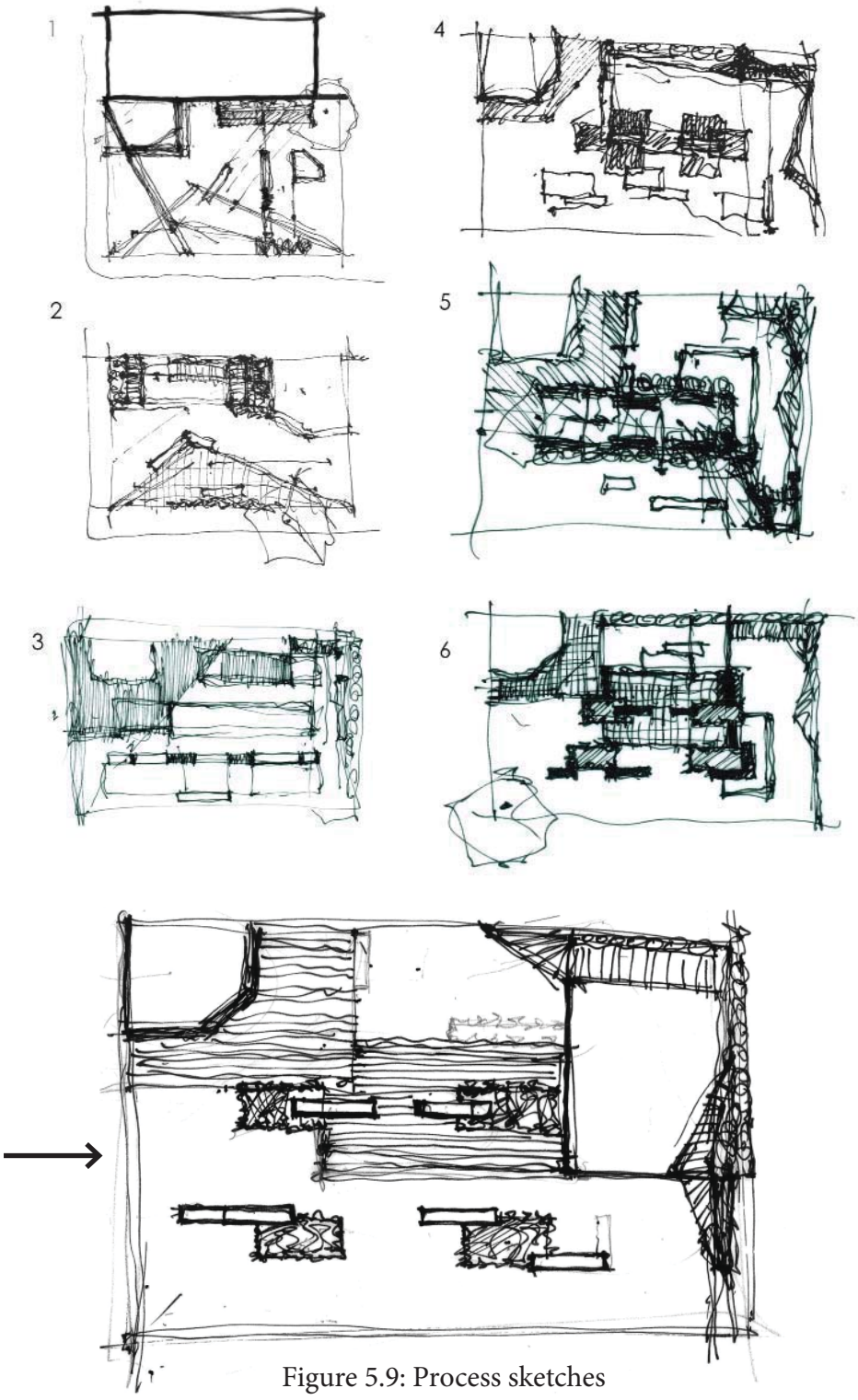


Figure 5.9: Process sketches

Figure 5.10: Rendered Plan View

SOUTH MAIN SKATE SPACE
PLAN VIEW

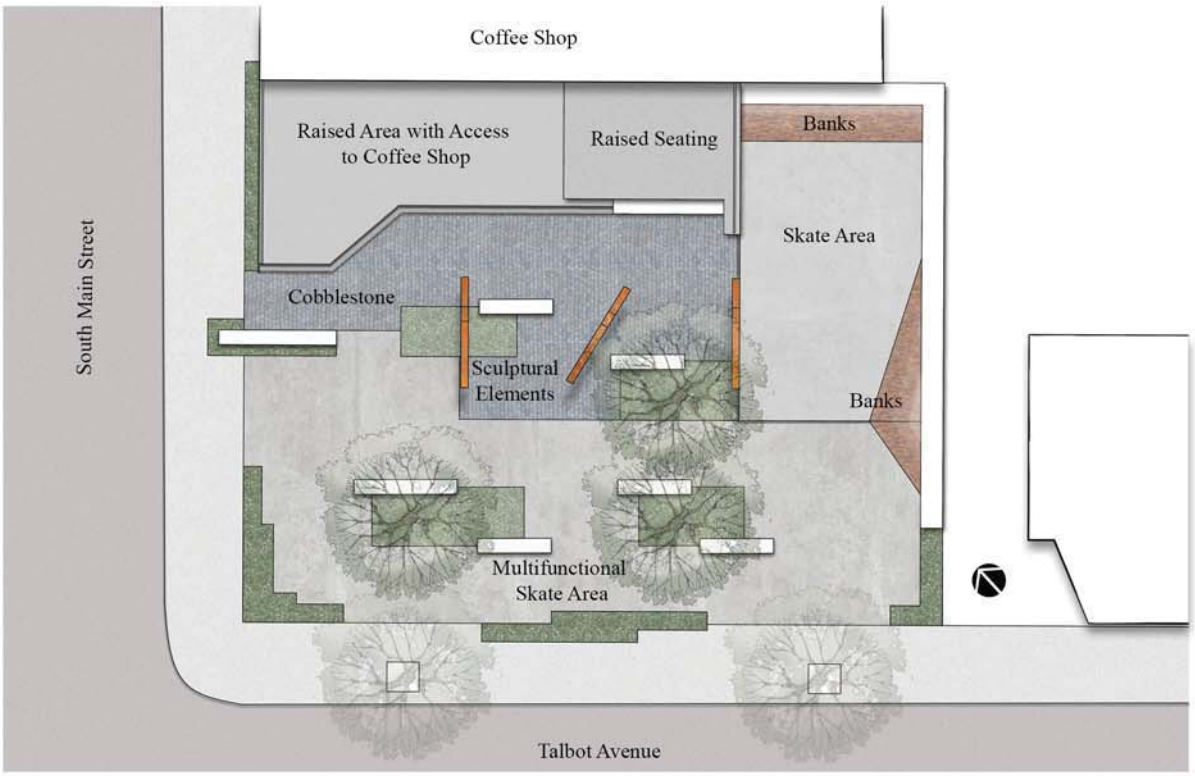


Figure 5.11: Labeled Plan View

PERSPECTIVES

Figure 5.12: View of Main Entrance Facing North

Figure 5.13: View of Protected Seating Area

Figure 5.14: Perspective of Main Skating Area

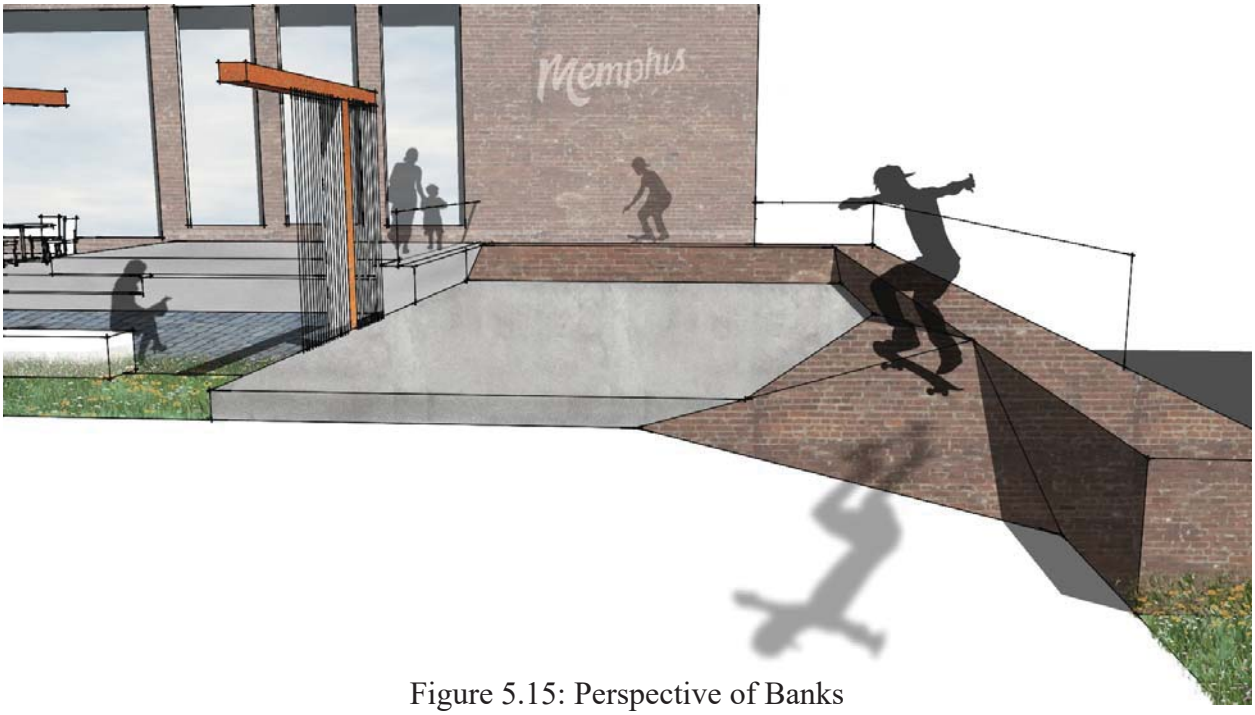


Figure 5.15: Perspective of Banks

SPATIAL ANALYSIS

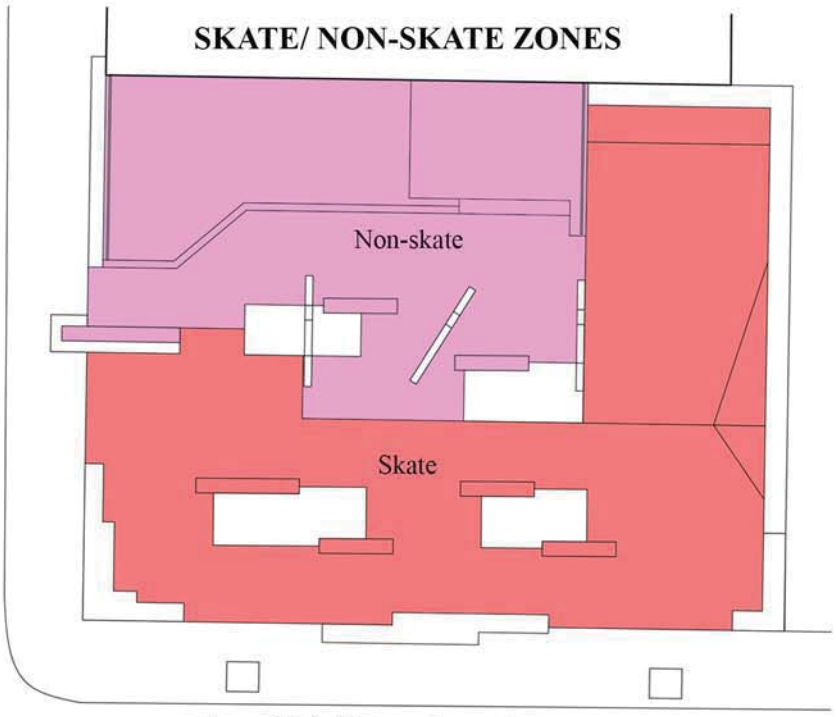


Figure 5.16: Skate and non-skate zones.

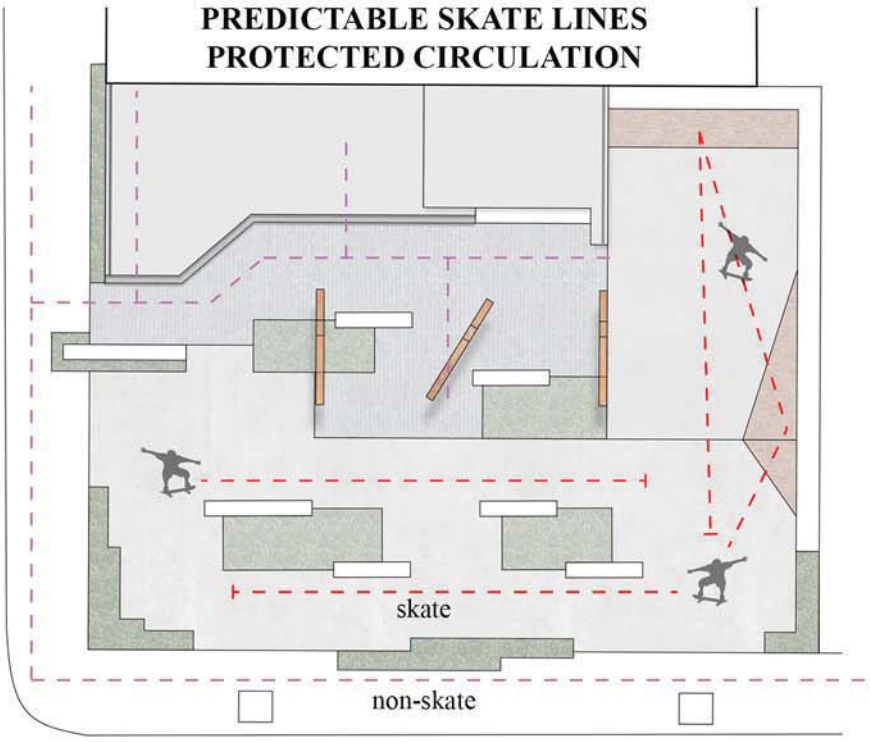


Figure 5.17: Skater and non-skater circulation.

SPATIAL ANALYSIS

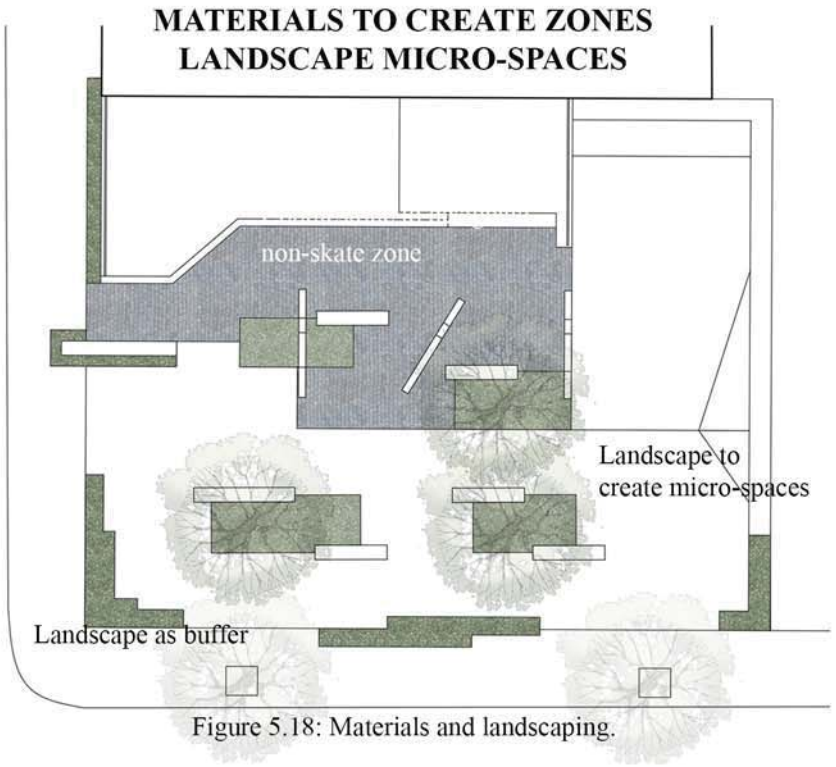


Figure 5.18: Materials and landscaping.

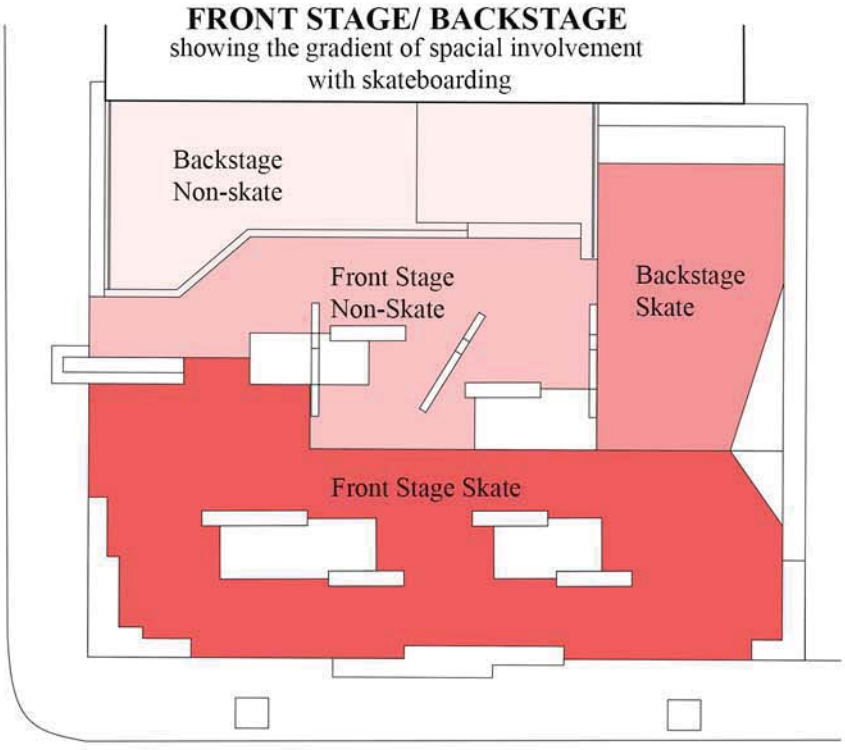


Figure 5.19: Front stage/backstage

SPATIAL ANALYSIS

ADJACENT TO URBAN ACTIVITY
POROUS EDGES
AVOID FENCING
AVOID EXTREME OBSTACLES
RAISED AREA FOR VIEWING
MINIMAL DESIGN

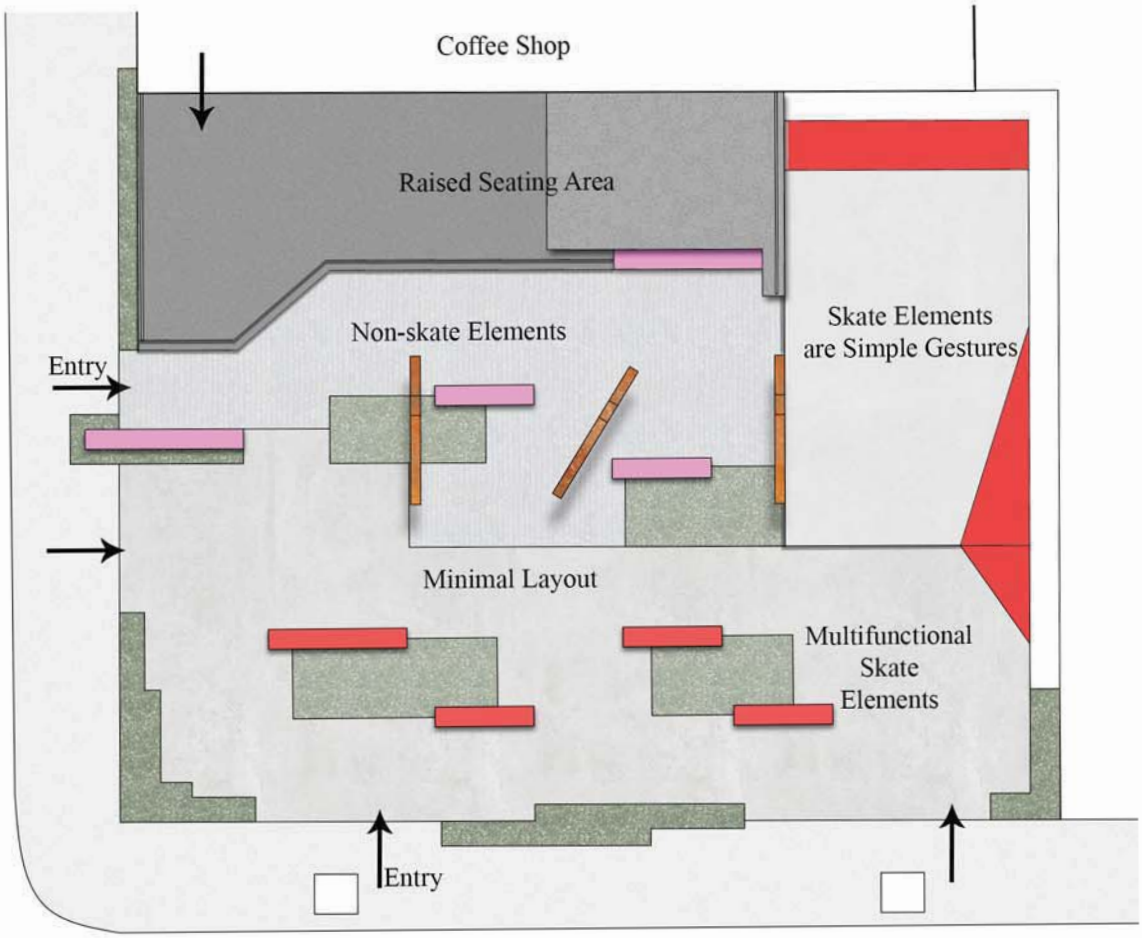
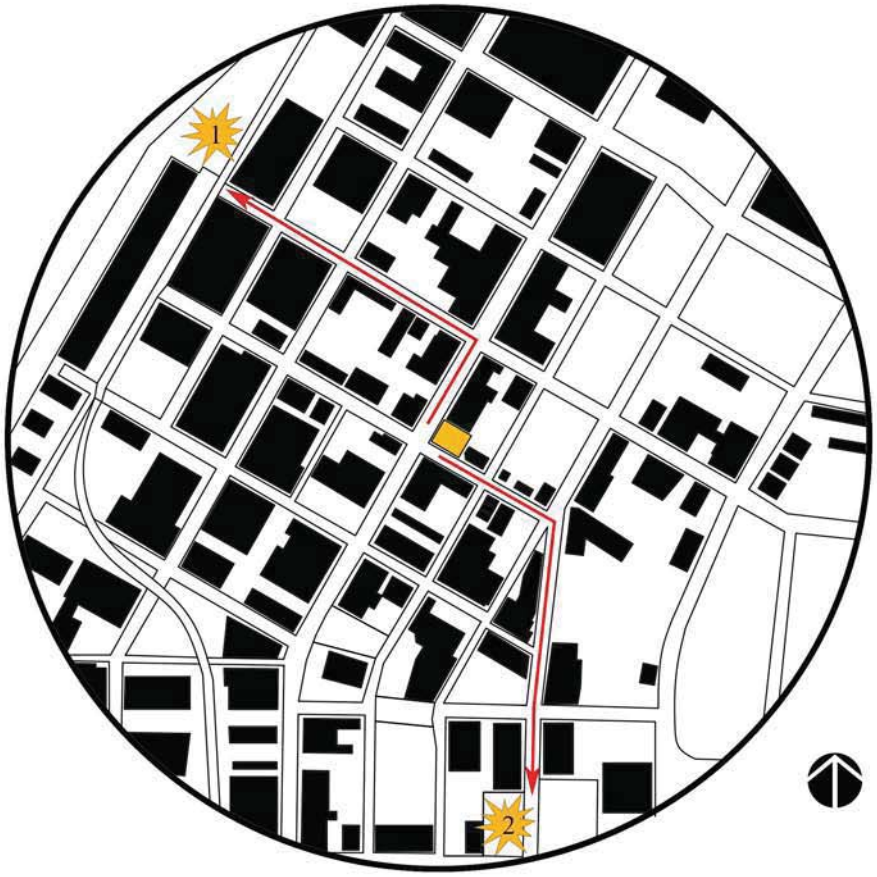


Figure 5.20: Highlighting lessons learned employed in the design.



Map showing the connection between South Main Skate Space and proposed sites for future skate spots.

Site 1: Proposed site for a skate spot at a park along the Mississippi River. (Photo by author)

Site 2: Proposed site for a skate spot at an underused park south of the South Main Skate Space. (Photo by author)

Figure 5.21: Proximity to future skate spots.

Design

The design of the skate space allows it to function as a public plaza. Circulation is provided for non-skaters around and through the space by using design interventions: cobblestone to designate non-skate zones and landscaping and sculptural elements to create micro-spaces and barriers. All of the skate-able elements in the site are multifunctional and can be used by skaters and non-skaters alike. The skate areas and non-skate areas have essentially the same features aside from the ground plane material which is used to designate zones of use. This effectively blends the skate area and the non-skate area such that the entire plaza is understood as a cohesive, public space. Three sculptural elements were added to give a sense of enclosure to the non-skate area. The far eastern sculpture was designed with wiring that also protects the non-skate area from the bank skate area, while remaining transparent. Large windows were added to the adjacent coffee shop to provide views of the entire outdoor space.

The design was intentionally minimal and simplistic as informed by the lessons learned. Benches, brick banks, and smooth concrete are the simple skate elements skaters can reimagine and reinvent on their own accord. These elements are equally functional as a gathering space, space for art festivals and musical performances, and so on. The flexibility of the space allows it to serve different users and uses, making the plaza more than simply a skate area. Non-skaters and skaters can move throughout the site safely and comfortably, adjusting their circulation path based on the activities currently taking place at the site.

Multifunctionality/Integration

All of the design interventions employed in the skate space promote and encourage multiple uses. The western section of the raised seating area gives the patrons of the coffee shop a place to enjoy a view of the space as well as the streetscape of South Main. The eastern raised

seating area provides a sweeping view of the entire plaza including the western skate area which has the brick banks. Thoughtful wire railing allows non-skaters to safely engage with this area if there are skaters present. All of the skate elements also serve non-skaters. The benches in the skate area provide extra seating if there is a festival or musical performance taking place. The banked area can be transformed into an outdoor art gallery or have tables added to it for larger functions. The entire space is visually connected and encourages spectating, action, and interaction. Users can approach the space through multiple entrances and can navigate the spaces as they chose based on the activities taking place.

Lessons Learned

All thirteen of the lessons learned garnered from the previous chapter were successfully employed into a small, multifunctional plaza. The lessons learned guided the design process and helped ensure that the space was functional and engaging for both skaters and non-skaters. The plaza was designed as a public space with the flexibility and versatility to accommodate many uses and promote the relationship between skateboarding and the city. Skateboarders will activate the space providing another layer of activity in the "sidewalk ballet." Ample safe, viewing areas enable non-skaters to participate in the activation. Because this is a truly public space, the use of the plaza is entirely up to the desire of the users. By considering skateboarders in the design and location of the space, the plaza will serve as a signifier of culture, generating a unique positive energy that will be reflected throughout the surrounding neighborhoods and city. Diverse user groups will come to the space to participate in the unique blend of activities, inherently supplying the area with the added benefit of instilling and fostering community, providing skaters and non-skaters a versatile place to interact, create, and learn.

One of the lessons learned in Chapter 4, was to place the skate space near another skate destination. Because there were no designated skate spots in the area, two areas for future skate spots were selected to link the South Main Skate Space to future skate-able landscapes. The sites selected for future skate spots were both public parks that could easily include a small skate-able feature to activate the space. As the research in this thesis has shown, simple design gestures can entertain skateboarders, and these sites should be considered for future research and development. The first site was chosen to link the South Main Skate Space to the Mississippi River and provide another destination (Figure 5.21). The second site, an underused park, links the South Main Skate Space to a lower income neighborhood (Figure 5.21). This connectivity promotes vibrancy throughout the South Main District and can attract and draw more users from diverse backgrounds.

The most difficult aspect of designing a plaza like the South Main Skate Space was the fundamental pursuit of this research: creating a multifunctional space. Considerations for skaters and non-skaters in every design move make the process both difficult and rewarding. The design proposed for the South Main Skate Space has the potential to be a transformative space that promotes vibrancy, inclusivity, and diversity. The development of the space would add to the ongoing resurgence and revitalization of the South Main Historic District, providing a central gathering space to a burgeoning streetscape and further invigorating the livability of this district. In providing a multifunctional skate space, the full potentials of skateboarding are realized and the relationship between skateboarding and the city are presented as cohesive and vital. The design interventions and site location promote the vibrancy values of skateboarding and allow the space to contribute to the momentum surrounding the area.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

Reflections and Future Directions

Skateboarding is an important part of the urban experience and plays a role in generating vibrancy in the city. Skateboarding activates spaces, promotes use and exchange value, and provides a range of social benefits to individuals and communities. The history of skateboarding reveals the inextricable relationship between skating and the urban realm, which throughout time has been pushed and pulled between two spaces: skateparks and city streets. The new wave of skate urbanism has signaled a change in the way skateboarding is interacting with the world (Angner 2017, Borden 2015, Lombardy 2016). The surge of evidence surrounding skate urbanism inspired the central question that guided this thesis: *what are the unique contributions and challenges skateboarding offers urban spaces and how might landscape architect's leverage and address these to create and support vibrant, diverse, and inclusive urban spaces?* Evident through the research, both skateparks and appropriated skate spots have strengths and weaknesses in promoting the relationship between skateboarding and the city. Multifunctionality was identified as a key component in allowing skateboarding's value to be reflected to its surroundings. Skateparks are often inflexible and skate spots often lead to conflict. By gathering the key lessons learned from the precedents and case studies, a resource was created for designers to reference when considering not only skateboarding but multifunctional spaces.

The design of the South Main Skate Space employed all thirteen of the lessons learned into a small parcel of land. The design is effective in creating a multifunctional space that

incorporates skateboarding and promotes vibrancy through multiple uses. The design and location of the space answered positively to the criteria and related questions, and in doing so promotes the value of skateboarding to the city. Designing such a space is inherently challenging, because the designer must consider the skateboarder and the non-skater. The size of the site selected proved to be limiting, as there was only so much that could be introduced to a small parcel of land. Interestingly, the designer is at once faced with designing for skateboarding and designing against skateboarding. In order for the space to be multifunctional it has to be useful, safe and inviting for all users, so some of the design interventions served to discourage skateboarding in areas to provide safety and comfort to non-skaters.

The research suggests that a key component in promoting skateboarding is to provide for multiple types of skate spaces throughout the urban landscape. South Main Skate Space introduced a multifunctional plaza that can complement Tobey Skatepark and Al Town, providing another landscape in the Memphis skateboarding scene. More connections and links must be provided throughout the city in order to prevent the spaces from facing the same criticisms of skateparks identified in Chapter 2, such as boredom and inflexibility. The design of South Main Skate Space proved that the contributions of skateboarding can be leveraged through design interventions and suggests that more spaces would need to be developed in order to create the urban journey.

Dimensional requirements were outside the scope of this thesis, though it was explored in order to make some of the technical decisions in the design. Future research should explore the ideal dimensions in providing safety and comfort to non-skaters. Input from non-skaters and skaters was also outside the scope of this thesis, but the public process is vital when implementing any successful public project. Skateboarder input might have changed some of the

skate-able elements selected and the spacing between those elements. Non-skater input would have revealed perceptions of skateboarding (residents and business owners) and would reflect the potential of the skate space to be accepted by the surrounding community. The size of the selected site also poses more questions and the need for more research. The selected site was very small, and a larger site would have warranted different design interventions and may have produced a completely different design. Therefore, models for multiple sizes of multifunctional skate spaces should be explored in future research.

Specific demographics such as age, race, and gender were outside the scope of this thesis. Time constraints limited the ability of this research to explore demographic layers thoroughly enough to generate findings. These are critical factors to consider for future research, but this thesis was more concerned with the built environment than the social makeup of the surrounding environments. Noise was not addressed in this this research although it is often a general concern with regards to skateboarding, as it can be a loud activity. An extensive body of research and design techniques involving optimal material selection to minimize noise has been explored by skatepark designers. Because the site selected in this thesis is surrounded by a very urban setting, noise was only minimally considered. More research on design interventions to reduce noise caused by skating should be explored in future studies.

The evaluative guideline created through this research provides designers with a place to start when selecting sites and creating designs that promote skate urbanism. The lessons learned garnered from the analysis of skateparks and skate spots can be used by designers to leverage and address the contributions and challenges of skateboarding when designing public spaces. The design of the South Main Skate Space provides a model for designers to reference when considering the implementation of skate urbanism tenants in designs throughout the urban

landscape. Therefore, the foundational discoveries made in this thesis allow the value of skateboarding to be reflected in creating a more vibrant, urban experience and are applicable to an array of urban landscapes.

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