

Skateboarding and the Changing City: Lessons from the Public Spaces of Reykjavik

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Abstract

Skateboarding has become a world-wide phenomenon that has the ability to fit into any culture. Iceland supports a healthy, vibrant skateboard culture. The city itself is young and undergoing many changes presently that have both positive and negative effects on the skateboard community. These redevelopment projects have an impact on the skateboarders' identities because they are formed out of occupied spaces. Qualitative methods such as participant observation were used to explore Reykjavik's skateboard culture. Understanding how skateboarders feel about public spaces can help in understanding how these spaces can be used to improve the city. Some of the most important skatespots in Reykjavik are Ingolfstorg and Harpa, both of which are part of redevelopment projects. Having access to this type of high quality public space has provided a setting for the development of a healthy skateboard community.

Terminology

Grind: the act of jumping onto a rail or ledge and grinding along it on the trucks/axles.

Transition: a type of skateboarding obstacle such as a quarter pipe that a skateboarder can ride up and transition from horizontal orientation to a vertical orientation.

Ledge: the edge of a curb or planter that can be used to grind.

Skatespot/Spot: Any location in a city where there is a reason to stop and skate, maybe there is an obstacle, maybe the pavement is just smooth or traffic is not so heavy.

Session: time spent skateboarding at a certain spot, could be a few minutes or many hours.

Ollie: One of the most basic skateboard maneuvers where the skater “pops” the tail end of the skateboard against the ground and then uses that momentum to lift all 4 wheels off the ground.

Kickflip: A basic maneuver involving an ollie and a slightly sideways kick that causes the board to flip around after which it is then caught in the air and landed on.

SKATE: A game played between any number of skaters. One skater attempts a trick and if they land it, the rest of the players must try it and if they miss they take a letter until they have spelled SKATE (a total of 5 misses).

Bail: When a skater misses a trick and falls or kicks their board away.

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Introduction

The evolution of skateboarding has resulted in a strong relationship with the city, skateboarders often understand the inner workings of the city and the places they inhabit. The city is full of spaces that ordinary people might not acknowledge as having intrinsic value, whereas but skateboarders have their own way of giving these spaces meaning (Borden, 2001). Skateboarding has developed its own culture across different regions of the world, skateboard culture from city to city would seem only subtly different to individuals outside of the culture. Skateboarders are often at the mercy of city planning officials (regarding by-laws and regulations) and architects (designs) when it comes to availability of space (Karsten & Pel, 2000; Nemeth, 2006).

The purpose of this research is to explore skateboarding culture in Iceland (specifically Reykjavik) to develop an understanding of the skateboarders' relationship with the city and the space it provides. There are four objectives to this research: 1) to identify the main spaces used by skateboarders and determine their importance; 2) to investigate skateboarders' opinions on future and recent city redevelopments in Reykjavik; 3) to examine how Reykjavik's open nature towards skateboarding and public space use has influenced skateboarding culture in Iceland; and 4) to explore the popular “Go Skateboarding Day” phenomenon in Reykjavik. While there has been some social scientific research on skateboarding and its use of public space, there has been no in depth examination of the personal relationships members of the skateboarding community have with their city and each other. Over the course of this research the topic of how city planning and redevelopment affect the people who use public spaces will be examined. The skateboarders of Reykjavik are certainly an integral part of the spaces they inhabit and through their occupation of these

spaces provide a unique cultural component to Reykjavik's urban life. This can in a sense be considered *as* important to Iceland's culture today as fishing or volcanoes. Reykjavik, not necessarily known as a globally recognized skateboarding destination, can offer skateboarders comparably enriching experiences such as cities well known for skateboarding viz., Barcelona, Los Angeles, Vancouver, and New York to name a few. Skateboarding in Reykjavik contributes positive energy to the city, while providing concomitant meaning to those spaces which otherwise carry little meaning among the broader population.

Reykjavik, the capital city of Iceland, is located on the southwest end of the island. Settled approximately 870 CE by Norwegian explorer Ingolfur Arnason, there was little city development until the 18th century (Karlsson, 2000). Skaters use various historic spots throughout Reykjavik and give meaning to them in their own distinct way. In spaces like Ingolfstorg or Hallgrimskirkja there is a historic nature that is centered around settlement, which caters heavily to tourists. By using these sites as skatespots they are reclaiming them for their own purposes as meeting places and creating meaning that suits their form of Icelandic culture.

Methods

The framework of my research is human geography within a cultural context. My belief being that the characteristics of our surroundings have an impact on the culture/lifestyle that develops there. Therefore, in relation to the cultural geography of skateboarding, the spaces occupied by skaters have an impact on the culture that those skaters develop. This thesis is not limited by a theoretical framework defined by other researchers, it has been formed by various disciplines that have contributed to knowledge on skateboarding, public space and city planning. Disciplines such as geography, architecture, and urban planning along with the ideologies of these fields. My research comes from a truly personal perspective in combination with those individuals I encountered during my personal experiences as a skateboarder, a researcher, and cosmopolitan/traveler all of which provide the framework for my research.

The research implements a combination of qualitative methods ranging from: semi-structured interviewing, autoethnography, and participant observation. During my time living, participating, and observing skateboarding culture in Reykjavik I gradually honed my skills in relation to the methods employed in this research. I was also privileged enough to be able to stay with my interviewee during my time in Reykjavik. This provided me with an opportunity to gain valuable insight. The research merges emic and etic perspectives, emic being the insider perspective and etic being the outsider or neutral perspective (Watson & Till, 2010). I started this research coming from a quasi-etic perspective which gradually progressed into an emic perspective. Being somewhat of an insider was beneficial to my research as it took very little time to be accepted into the community that I was studying. I also spent some time in Barcelona, Spain prior to my Masters and skateboarded with a

variety of people, some local and some from abroad. That trip to Spain was my first trip abroad and definitely inspired my fascination with public space use. It was mid-August and Barcelona was hot and busy with tourists. I feel I have a place in this research as I have been skateboarding for 16 years and have been to a few cities across Canada, as well as a few in Europe. These cities include Vancouver, Saskatoon, Calgary, Barcelona, Helsinki, and London.

My fieldwork experience in Iceland lasted 8 weeks, separated by 2 summers. I spent a month in Iceland when I took the University of Manitoba's Department of Icelandic Language and Literature travel study course in the summer of 2011. This trip helped me narrow my thesis topic because I was still struggling with various ideas. I had neglected to bring my skateboard with me as I figured Iceland would not cater to such activities. I was surprised to see a group of children skateboarding downtown at Ingolfstorg and even more surprised to have one ask me if I had come for Go Skateboarding Day. This encouraged my exploration into a totally different thesis topic than I began with. After experiencing much of what Iceland has to offer and purchasing a skateboard to ride during the last week, I decided to return to Iceland for another month in the summer of 2012 to conduct my research. A typical day of research involved most obviously skateboarding. Skateboarding provided a method of observing the variety of public spaces which will be disseminated in the research. Skateboarding also provided an opportunity to engage the locals to gain an understanding of how they use, perceive, and feel about public space.

At the beginning of my fieldwork I spent a week residing outside of the core of the city, from where I would skate along the seawall or through Borgartun (the financial district) to reach downtown. Following this I spent the remaining three weeks residing in the core.

Much of my time was spent with a group of about 7 or 8 of Reykjavik's skateboarders who met up on regular basis to go skate. Most skaters I met through Addi, my main respondent, but some would just show up at spots when I was there. The skateboarders of Reykjavik are a diverse group, some of them are immigrants and some have moved from small towns across Iceland. They reside in different areas of the city, many do not live downtown and actually live far off in the suburbs. By mostly spending time with a few of the well-known skaters in Reykjavik, I was able to meet a large variety of other skaters that knew Addi and his group of friends.

Participant observation is undertaken when the researcher spends extended time periods participating in and observing the culture and behaviour of the group being studied (Watson & Till, 2010). Both roles (participant and observer) complement each other with different ways of learning. Often participant observation is used in anthropology and other humanities fields to get an in-depth idea of how a group lives, acts, feels on a day-to-day basis. Full participation in the activities of the community will enable a deeper understanding of why they are the way they are (Watson & Till, 2010). I spent every day of my trip to Reykjavik going skating with the local crew, immersing myself in Icelandic skate-culture. I would go with them from spot to spot, all the while able to participate in a meaningful way as well as observe their interactions with each space and each other.

Semi-structured interviews are used when the researcher wishes to explore a topic in-depth due to a lack of previous research on the subject (McDowell, 2010). These interviews use open-ended questions to allow the respondent to drive the direction of the interview. This allows for the respondent to fully share their experience and knowledge of the subject (McDowell, 2010). My interview consisted of roughly 10 open-ended questions, some of

which were developed during time spent in the community and some were created during the interview because of the direction of the interview (See Figure 1). The questions were designed to explore Icelandic skateboard culture specifically and I chose topics relevant to the research focus of the skateboarders' use of public space. The questions were also based on noteworthy features of the Icelandic skate scene. The interview questions were important in gaining in-depth knowledge on important aspects of the Icelandic skate scene that I had noted while participating and observing.

Although many people may express interest in being interviewed, it is very difficult to find time when they are all able to participate. Due to this it worked out very well for me to engage many of the people I was observing in order to reduce the time spent formally interviewing. It was good to have done this because during the last week of my stay in Iceland I came to the realization that I would not be getting as many interviews completed as I had anticipated. I successfully interviewed the person I determined to be the most knowledgeable and the most willing/available. The participant filled out a consent form indicating the nature of the research and were provided with a copy for their records (See Figure 2).

This thesis also meant a great deal as a personal experience so I have also included an autoethnographic section relating my own experience to my research. Autoethnographies view a culture from a personal perspective. They examine how the self fits within the studied culture (Butz, 2010). This type of study allows the researcher to narrate experiences from their research and analyze them to aid in understanding that particular cultural experience (transpersonal). This is particularly relevant to my thesis because I have skateboarded for many years and have been a part of skateboard culture for most of my life. Autoethnographic

studies have been used to research sports and their related cultures (Allan-Collinson, 2012). Studies must be able to incorporate the researcher as a key element or player in the research, so only certain topics will work for certain researchers (Allan-Collinson, 2012; Butz, 2010). The researcher must be able to relate past experiences as well as those from their fieldwork within the context of the cultural experience being studied. The research is then shared as an autobiographic experience from the researcher's standpoint.

Due to my participation in the community as well as staying with my interview participant for a week, I had a very well developed relationship with him. This made conducting the interview easier and I could tell my participant was comfortable sharing what he thought was important. I feel that having such a relationship was the best way to determine good questions and have the participant willing to give his time to speak with me. Having a good relationship with my interviewee meant that it was not difficult to get consent to record the interview and conduct it in his home where he was most comfortable.

My primary interview was conducted with Addi Ingvarson, whom I also was able to stay with for about two weeks. He lives in Reykjavik's city centre, has been skateboarding for many years and films/edits an online skateboard show called *First Try Fail Mondays*. This show provides a platform for Reykjavik's skaters to showcase their talent as well as experience each other's creativity. The show is often showcasing a skater trying a trick repetitively until they land it or give up. Some episodes include a reasonable amount of bails before the skater is successful. For this research I felt as though he was the perfect participant because he had lived through much of skateboarding's history in Reykjavik and is still working on progressing the sport in any way he can. Addi is close with the other skateboarders of Reykjavik, during my visit one of them referred to him as the “skateboard-

mom”. This is due to the encouragement he provides everyone and the influence he has on the young skaters. He is always encouraging everyone to go out and skate and push themselves in order to progress. Thanks to him I was introduced to many great people who have also contributed knowledge to this thesis. His knowledge of Reykjavik's spots is also quite impressive and without him I would not have experienced all the locations I was able to. Addi's lifestyle has been shaped by skateboarding. He has contributed a considerable amount back to Reykjavik's community of skaters with his show and his energy. In order to confirm that the data I collected in my interview was accurate I compared Addi's responses to all the knowledge I obtained from spending time among the skaters in Reykjavik. The idea behind the research was that the interview and participant observation components would complement each other.

Each of my adopted methodologies has contributed to certain objectives of the research. Participant observation contributed to objectives 1, 3 and 4. My interview contributed to objectives 1, 2 and 3. The autoethnography contributed to mostly to objectives 3 and 4.

The following is a description of my research parameters. Participants were Icelandic or had immigrated to Iceland, were over the age of eighteen and all skateboarders interacted with were male except one. My research area was mainly Reykjavik and the suburban area surrounding it (See Figure 3). But I also have been participating and observing in the Winnipeg skate scene for many years and have visited Barcelona which has helped me better understand what makes a city such an important destination for skateboarders. My first trip abroad was to go skateboarding in Barcelona the summer before I began my Masters. This trip was the event that sparked my interest in the use of public space in cities. The research

was conducted throughout 2012 (trip to Reykjavik during June/July of 2012) and focused mainly on street skateboarding. Personally, I use my skateboard as transportation and I don't do much street skating in Winnipeg, sticking mostly to the skateparks. This research has been a personal journey in the world of street skating and has taught me a great deal.

Participants were given gifts for participating in my study. Participants were made aware that their contributions to the study would help in developing a better understanding of how skateboarding fits into city life. I will be providing participants with copies of the finished product. The study involved minimal risk and did not require personal health information or any other information that participants would wish to remain private.

The research was limited by my inability to speak Icelandic. Limitations also included the focus on Reykjavik, a focus on the skateboarder perspective and the qualitative nature of the study. My research was limited by the fact that I was only able to conduct one interview. As well, I only spent approximately a month in Reykjavik and the focus is on street skating and only briefly examines park skating. I possess only basic knowledge of city planning and my research has not been informed by any sort of city planning professional.

Literature Review

Reykjavik is a city with multiple identities, known for beautiful women, rich historic culture, its coastal beauty, to say the least. These identities are formed by both the inward view of the Icelanders on themselves and the point of view of the visiting outsider (Johannsdottir, 2006). The city is currently reinventing itself, following the path of many modern cities with goals of revitalizing the city center/core. The first stage of this plan involved redeveloping the harbourfront area, which was accomplished with the completion of the Harpa Concert Hall and Conference Center which was finished in the spring of 2011 (Harpa, n.d.). The next step in this city centre overhaul is to recreate the Kvosin district, including big changes to Ingolfstorg square.

Reykjavik, a city on an isolated island in the North Atlantic and populated by just some 200 000 people (this is including all surrounding suburbs) (Karlsson, 2000). It has developed a considerable reputation for itself. Recognized as an island with a unique environment and lifestyle, but often depicted from a tourist perspective rather than a realistic one (Johannsdottir, 2006). These new developments in Reykjavik seem to be directed at tourists to boost economic growth, but are also being implemented in an attempt to improve life in the city centre (Magnusson, 2011; O'brien, 2012).

Skateboarding in the City

There has been some previous research on skateboarding and its place in public space. Skateboarding has a close relationship with public spaces and cities in general. Many studies focus on the transgressive nature of the sport and skateboarding's relationship with the law (Borden, 2001; Carr, 2010; Nemeth, 2004; Nemeth, 2006; Nicholas, 2003). Other research has been conducted on skateboarding's relationship with architecture and the spaces

that are inhabited by the sport (Borden, 2001; Chiu, 2009; Karsten & Pel, 2000; Vivoni, 2013).

The history of skateboarding is told by many magazines and videos created by the skaters themselves. This thesis will avoid an extensive examination of skateboarding history and simply touch briefly on this topic. Skateboarding was an activity that evolved from surfing in California (Borden, 2001). Initially, skateboarders were riding on flat ground and on gently sloped embankments, but then they began riding around in drained swimming pools. Skaters would drive around looking for pools that had been drained and skate in them until they were caught or chased away (Borden, 2001). At the time skateboarding was becoming increasingly popular and there was a shift to skating in specifically designed skateboard parks that imposed spatial limitations on the sport. This raised all types of liability issues and was not a long-lasting era in skateboard history (Borden, 2001). Once the idea of keeping skaters enclosed in skateparks had died away, they took their sport to the streets, basically anywhere offering the opportunity to practice something new (Borden, 2001). Throughout this early evolutionary stage, skateboarding began to develop its reputation for rebellious behaviour (Borden, 2001).

From an architectural standpoint, skateboarding has always been frowned upon because it does cause damage to concrete, spaces and buildings. Borden (2001) suggests that skateboarding redefines the spaces into some extension of the body that interacts with the architecture. Through this redefinition and performance involved the skateboarder creates an identity for themselves and a gives a sense of meaning to the space. Part of this identity and meaning is formed by being viewed by ordinary people in the streets and spaces of the city (Borden, 2001; Nemeth, 2006). Being viewed and accepted by ordinary people helps to

strengthen the feeling of belonging in a space (Borden, 2001).

Many cities impose bans through by-laws on skateboarding in certain spaces (Nemeth, 2006). Further measures are often taken to make inviting architecture unskateable (Borden, 2001). It is not uncommon for downtown plazas and buildings to be frequented by police and security. Encounters with these authority figures can be avoided, but often become more serious when escape tactics do not work out. Unskateable designs include bumps at the bottom of embankments and knobs along railings and the edges of ledges. The use of sand gravel is also common as it can ruin the surface for the skateboarder, but does not require structural changes to buildings and surroundings (Borden, 2001).

Nolan (2003) examines how skateboarding can be viewed differently throughout the city. If the social construction of the space allows it, skateboarding is often accepted and enjoyed. Cities are often made up of both spaces where skateboarding is tolerated and spaces where it isn't (Nolan, 2003). Nolan states "It is critical that attention is drawn to the needs of young people, as their voices are often absent in discussions about public space" (2003, p. 312). Young people need to feel as though they belong somewhere, skateboarding can provide them with that sense of identity and public spaces give them the opportunity to develop this identity (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012; Nolan, 2003).

Skateboarders are often excluded from public space because they are viewed as troublemakers and vandals (Borden, 2001). People view skateboarders as getting in the way or posing some sort of threat to others using the space. An excellent example of this is the situation that developed in LOVE park in the 1990's (Nemeth, 2004). The park is located in Philadelphia and was a very important location to the skateboarders from all across the city. It can be noted that spots with significance to the skateboard community are often found all

over the city and make up an interconnected map of public spaces (Nemeth, 2004). The city (Philadelphia) suggested that the skaters had damaged the park, yet when hosting the X Games they allowed skateboarding in the park and did not discourage the athletes from grinding the ledges and causing “damage” (Nemeth, 2006).

“In the mid-1990s, internationally known skateboarders flocked to LOVE Park and provided word-of-mouth coverage to the rest of the skateboarding world.” (Nemeth, 2006, p. 300). Skatespots and skateboard culture can be a huge attraction in a city, Barcelona, Spain is a great example of this. Skaters from all over the world are aware of the many famous spots found amongst the buildings in this great city. Barcelona is full of public spaces interconnecting its various districts and this encourages skateboarders to explore and experience what it has to offer. There are frequently placed plazas at important intersections across the city. A city as easily navigable on a skateboard as Barcelona attracts skateboarders from all over the world. Locations such as the MACBA (contemporary art museum) and Sants Estacio (train station) are known all across the world due to the rich skateboard culture that has flourished at these locations.

Often skateparks can be used as a way for the city to outlaw skateboarding in other areas. In Philadelphia when skateboarding was fully banned downtown and in LOVE park the city basically relocated the skateboarders to a skatepark far from the city center (Nemeth, 2006). This fully removed the skaters from the city center where they were most visible to the rest of the public. Instead of this approach, the city could have integrated a skatepark into the available public space downtown, much like the Plaza at the Forks in Winnipeg.

Many people suggested they felt safer with the skateboarders around, they kept the space alive and helped discourage illegal activity (Nemeth, 2004). With the skaters gone,

after the sun had gone down the park seemed like a more dangerous place (Nemeth, 2004). Often skateboarders are associated with criminal activity or harassment of pedestrians, yet clearly their reputation in a space such as LOVE park was a positive one.

A study of skateboarding in Amsterdam took a look at the various skate spots found throughout the city. The study found that the skaters moved through the city to the different spots throughout the course of a day (Karsten & Pel, 2000). Experiencing the city on a totally different level than the average citizen. The study found that the type of space determined how long skaters stayed at a certain location, spaces that were less busy and more friendly towards skaters were skated for longer periods and spaces where skateboarding was outlawed would be skated less often and for shorter periods (Karsten & Pel, 2000).

Skateboarding; as an urban practice; transcends social, racial, and cultural boundaries (Borden, 2001) and the skateboarding community is usually welcoming to foreigners. In this sense, skateboarding is an international phenomenon that can link people across continents. The culture of skateboarding is unique to each place, yet a skateboarder visiting a city from another city whose culture is vastly different can find a place within the new city's skateboard culture.

Skateboarders notice the spaces in the city that many people wouldn't look at twice. "Skateboarding locations, or spots, vary from university campuses, office plazas and urban squares to the more everyday spaces of streets, pavements and car parks. In many cases the skaters inhabit public spaces at times when they would otherwise be uninhabited. In this way, skaters exploit the ambiguity of the ownership and function of public space. They often use spaces when they have no other use, and in doing so create a meaning for that space." (Wooley & Johns, 2001, p. 214-215). Making something creative out of an unused space is a

contributing factor to the identity of skateboarders (Wooley & Johns, 2001), this makes skateboarders true participants in city life.

A TED talk given by professional skateboarder Rodney Mullen explores innovation in skateboarding, specifically regarding tricks and obstacles. He discusses the way that skateboarding has continued to reinvent itself in response to new environments and challenges encountered. The talk focuses on the positive impact skateboarding has had on his life and the identity he has constructed from his experiences (Mullen, 2012).

Public Space Design, Access and Identity

Public space has undergone much evolution as cities become increasingly modern. The idea that public space is a commons that belongs to everyone is a concept that has been countered with an increasing amount of control and legislation placed on these spaces (L'Aoustet & Griffet, 2004). A natural corollary of this is people feel as if they have less of a place in the city. Cities are moving more towards privatization of space instead of encouraging access (L'Aoustet & Griffet, 2004).

Research has examined the contest for rights to public space, many spaces are multiuse and can be problematic in terms of who has the rights. It is not uncommon for spaces that are unclaimed to be seen as meaningless (Goheen, 1998). This can discourage use and maintenance, leading to degradation of the space and negatively affecting how people view the space. Everyone should have access to public space, especially to enjoy and interpret it in their own way (L'Aoustet & Griffet, 2004).

Gehl (2010a) suggests that public space is where many social interactions and mingling within the city takes place. *Life Between Buildings* (Gehl, 2010a) suggests that if public spaces are pleasant they promote citizens to venture out and take part in activities in

their neighbourhood. Three types of activities are outlined: necessary activities, optional activities and social activities. Good design is what Gehl (2010a) suggests is ideal for promoting culture and integration within cities. Cities that are designed to support pedestrian traffic and needs are more likely to accommodate life amongst the buildings than the automobile dominated cities that are common in modern times (Gehl, 2010a; Gehl, 2010b).

Llewellyn (2003) argues that the planning of public spaces must take into account the voice of the ordinary public citizen. It is suggested that in order to understand the space, you must gain an understanding of those who use the space and ignore the perspective of those that control it. With increasing privatization and decreased public life due to technology and the internet, the realm of public space is becoming increasingly empty (Banerjee, 2001).

A study examining the changes to street life in downtown Copenhagen was undertaken by Gehl (1989) that looked into how reduction in traffic allowed increased pedestrian use and consequently increased time spent in public spaces. Creating public space that serves multiple purposes is what makes people get out and interact in the city. Gehl (2010a; 2010b) suggests that cities that offer spaces for people to enjoy are often safer, healthier, more social cities.

Gehl (2010a) explains the different aspects to be considered when creating spaces. Certain features like the size of the space have a large affect on the way people experience it. Spaces that smaller tend to be seen as cozy and warm, in contrast to large spaces that seem cold and impersonal (Gehl, 2010a). His research emphasizes the need for both, but the way they will be used is important to consider before making the decision. When designing a space it is necessary to consider scale when assessing if it is better to provide a space for assembling or dispersal. Integration of the various forms of traffic is an

important concept as well (Gehl, 2010a; Gehl, 2010b).

Planning and City Centre Redevelopment in Reykjavik:

Reykjavik, Iceland's capital and largest urban center did not really begin expanding as a city until roughly the 19th century. Now it is a rapidly expanding city facing issues of urban sprawl due to the variety of planning strategies implemented and the emphasis on everyone owning their own vehicle (Reynarsson, 1999; Valsson, 2003). The city has continued to expand since it was established as the capital and its design has been influenced by a variety of European architects and planners. There were three main phases of planning, each of which had its own impact on the city (Reynarsson, 1999). The three phases were the garden-city ideology, the systematic transportation plan and the environmental sustainability outlook. All three phases occurred in about a hundred year span, limiting the influence of any one ideology (Reynarsson, 1999).

Reykjavik is currently a city which most prefer to traverse with an automobile, resulting in less interaction among people in the city center (Valsson, 2003). Planners are now turning their eyes on the downtown core at an attempt to revitalize the area and encourage the main industry, tourism. The newest addition to the Reykjavik city centre is the Harpa Concert Hall and Conference Centre. It was part of a project that was begun in 2002 to revitalize the harbourfront area (Harpa, n.d.). This space was designed as a reflection of the nearby harbour and it was created to be used in a variety of ways. The space surrounding the main building provides a spectacular view of the harbour and can be used for concerts and other events (Harpa, n.d.) (See Figure 4).

The public space that was created with the Harpa project was awarded with Best Nordic Public Space in 2011 (Iceland Review Online, 2011). Icelanders have mixed views on

the newest addition to their city, some see it as an economic stimulator, others as a big, unnecessary eyesore (Magnusson, May 6, 2011). The location has historic values and some Icelanders feel this value is overlooked and not preserved in the new design (Magnusson, May 6, 2011).

This was only the first of a variety of redevelopments that the city has lined up for the near future. The region of Ingolfstorg-Kvosin, just nearby, is slated for a complete face-lift to make way for a new hotel. It will still be a plaza, but it will be rearranged to better suit the needs of the tourist (O'Brien, August 1, 2012). The competition to redesign the space was held last year during the summer and a design was produced by ASK Arkitektar that was still inclusive of skateboarders (ASK Arkitektar, n.d.). The city has a great many hotels, hostels and guesthouses; making these new plans extremely unnecessary. There is no need to take space away from families who are downtown enjoying the city life and hand it over to capitalist ideology.

An example of the Icelandic community taking responsibility for producing quality public space in the downtown core of Reykjavik is Heart Park. Heart Park or Hjartagardurinn in Icelandic was once an abandoned lot owned by one of the banks and was going to be developed into a hotel or commercial space (Petzold, 2012; Staines, 2012). Due to the economic downturn several years ago these plans were laid to rest, but the lot was somewhat of an eyesore so some members of the community decided it was time to take action to change this (Petzold, 2012; Staines, 2012).

A few people from the 101 Reykjavik neighbourhood met with the owners of the lot and offered to create a community managed park that everyone could enjoy. Volunteers cleaned up the park and it has since hosted bands, barbecues, markets, skateboard sessions

and has contributed to a healthy, safe community (Petzold, 2012; Staines, 2012). This type of community based management helps to establish good quality spaces that reflect what the people actually want.

No studies have examined skateboarding's relationship with the changes and evolution that modern cities have been undergoing. As well, most studies just briefly examine the various spots that skateboarders frequent throughout a city without much focus on the spaces. Studies often also focus on nations where skateboarding is more ingrained in popular culture, there has been little research into skateboarding in nations where it has been less prominent in popular culture. As such, a study into the reclamation of public space and the city through the lense of “Go Skateboarding Day” celebrations is both necessary and relevant. Only a small amount of research has been done on city planning or public space in Iceland, perhaps due to its small city size and isolation.

Findings and Analysis

Autoethnography

Much research emphasizes the emic/insider vs etic/outsider perspectives within ethnographic research. My research placed me in a situation where I was an insider as a skateboarder, yet still an outsider as a non-Icelander. It was not difficult for me to approach skateboarders or communicate with them. Some academic studies on skateboarding suggest that some spaces are more difficult to integrate into because one might feel intimidated by the level of skateboarder present. If a space is full of advanced skaters, novice skaters could be intimidated (Borden, 2001). My research placed me directly in the skateboard community in Reykjavik and it was necessary for me to be accepted into the community based not only on my interests but also my skills and lifestyle. Reykjavik is an ideal city for this type of research because it is very small and many people have interconnected social networks which allowed for a diverse experience of what it means to be a skateboarder in Iceland. I was actually able to relate to my research participants on a personal level based on our similar experiences and our ability to create new shared experiences.

Several of the skaters that I spent much of my time with had also traveled to go skateboarding, mostly to Barcelona. This was a topic that we were able to connect on. Our experiences with the city were similar, both coming from cities where street skating is lacking. The Icelandic skaters were as impressed as I was with the ease one could skate through the city in Barcelona.

My place in the research is important because none of the studies I read were undertaken by a researcher who was also a skateboarder. They are all done by geographers, architects, and city planning academics such as Iain Borden. While all the previous studies on

skateboarding have contributed valuable knowledge, they lack an emic perspective into what is important to skateboarders. My own experiences growing up as a skateboarder provide me with a context on which to base my study. I know exactly what it is like to be discriminated against for being a skateboarder, as well as how often people consider you to be pursuing childish endeavors because you still enjoy skateboarding as an adult. I have been hassled by campus security for skateboarding at the university and still am unable to convince my parents that skateboarding isn't a waste of time. Also being able to earn the respect of the local skateboarders by playing SKATE (see Terminology) and basically proving my skills provided me with quick acceptance into the group.

Growing up in a small town such as Dauphin I was always fascinated with the city. The noise, the people, the vastness all held my interest because it was so different. Skateboarding was something I began doing as a child that I never expected to become as important to me as it is today. I have been skateboarding for 17 years and I do not see myself quitting anytime soon. It has defined who I am and the way that I experience the city by having a different appreciation for a city's spaces. One of my favorite things to do is to travel to other cities such as Barcelona, to skateboard and explore the city on my own terms.

Different cities have different experiences to offer skateboarders, often shaped by each city's culture. Some are more limiting than others, yet they all have something to offer. Sometimes it is an abundance of spots, sometimes it is a welcoming community. My experiences skateboarding are always different depending on where I go. It might be too hot, it might be too cold or too wet, but that won't hinder a skateboarder in a new city. This is because skateboarders are used to persevering through weather, security, and discrimination. These are all part of the lifestyle of a skateboarder.

Winnipeg is a city for that is full of skateparks. It wasn't always this way, but now with the increased popularity of skateboarding the city has created several excellent parks in various neighbourhoods. Skateboarding has been considered illegal in most areas of the city and the existence of so many skateparks has definitely not helped improve its image on the streets. No-skateboarding signs are located throughout most of the downtown area and it is for the most part illegal to ride your skateboard anywhere here, but that will not stop anyone. Another issue is that there are many amazing skateparks, but very little to skate in between. Similar to the rest of the city design it is necessary to get to most locations by car due to the distance involved.

Throughout my research I have explored a few different cities on my skateboard. The first was Barcelona during the summer before I began my Masters degree. I had never been overseas and was so excited to go to Barcelona to experience the skateboard mecca (known well among the skateboard community) firsthand. I was traveling on my own and interested to see what the city would offer me. It was August, one of the hottest months and also one of the busiest in Barcelona because August is the month that the majority of the country has holidays.

Upon arrival I decided I might as well go find somewhere to skate, it seemed like a good time since it was around 2 o'clock in the afternoon. I already had a couple of spots marked on my map and they were quite close to my hostel. Most of the very popular spots are just plazas at major metro stops. So I went down to the University plaza as it was only 4 or 5 blocks away. The sun was beating down and it must have been nearly 40 degrees Celsius. Even traveling to the spot was exhausting and after 15 or 20 minutes of skating at the plaza I felt disgusting and was unable to continue. It only took one short experience to

learn that often on a hot, summer day in Barcelona you can have any spot to yourself because nobody else wants to endure the heat.

What I realized early on while in Barcelona was that no matter where I went there were spots. And if you took the right streets and paths you could cruise on extremely smooth pavement and get there quite quickly. Pedestrians were very aware of skateboarders, not the same way that they are aware of them in Winnipeg where they look at them like they are criminals, but aware that they are moving through the city with them. When skateboarding through a crowd of people in the many interconnected alleys and streets, often the people moved out of the way for me. This is very different from Winnipeg where people on the sidewalk will pretend to not even hear or see you so that they do not have to move.

The city really has everything to offer skateboarders; great weather, a huge variety of spots with many that are quite unique, great public transport to get to any area of the city and in general a safe city that is easily navigated. Every day you can go out and find something different and with that discovery you will discover even more, maybe it is a great restaurant or a great scenic view, but you can be sure that the average visitor will not have the same experience because they are unlikely to visit all the same places.

One afternoon I decided to adventure further from the city center than my regular routine. I had spent a few days focusing on skateboarding and so I wanted to see the rest of the city, but was determined to do without the use of public transport. As I walked/skated I passed by many inviting spots but was determined to press onward. This was one of the first times I noticed that the sidewalks were sometimes very smooth and sometimes very rough due to the different sizes of bricks used (the smaller bricks were not interlocked so tightly). I eventually decided it was time to head back to my hostel, but had no idea where I was on the

map. It didn't take a long time to figure out based on some of the landmarks I had noticed that I was a very long way from the hostel, so far that my location was not on the map I had. So I was forced to use my own sense of direction to get back on the right path. But by having this experience I was able to create my own urban mental map of the city in a way that was meaningful to me using skateboard friendly routes.

Not every street in Barcelona is smooth and inviting to skateboarders. I learned early on that to get from one spot to the next on my skateboard I would have to determine the streets that provided both a smooth ride and less people. Some streets and alleys are very smooth, but at certain times of the day they crowded with people. As previously mentioned however, I have never been anywhere before or since where I could cruise through a giant crowd of people and dodge them at the same time they are dodging me.

After my first international trip, I was interested in somewhere that skateboarding wasn't necessarily the main attraction. I had been fascinated with Iceland and determined to visit on the travel study course offered through the University of Manitoba's Icelandic Department. Before leaving one of my friends suggested that I take my skateboard and I scoffed at the idea. This was a trip to be experiencing Icelandic culture, which skateboarding did not seem a part of. I could not have been more wrong, during my first day in Reykjavik I wandered down to the main plaza (Ingolfstorg) (See Figure 5) and was watching some kids roll around on skateboards. I asked them if I could try one and then afterwards they began asking me questions, the most interesting one being “was I there for Go Skateboarding Day the day before?”.

Reykjavik is a city where the culture and community definitely play a major role. Among the cities I have visited, Reykjavik offers the tightest community and best experience

for lone travelers. Everyone who skateboards wants to include you whether you are foreign or not. During this first trip to Iceland in the summer of 2011, I was without a skateboard at the beginning, but I decided that it was a necessary purchase. One must also note the distinct price differences between North America and Europe when it comes to skateboard gear. In Europe, and especially Iceland, skateboard gear is a considerably higher price.

Spots in Reykjavik are a bit harder to find than in Barcelona, but the majority are located downtown so it is just a matter of knowing where to look. Ingolfstorg had already presented itself as a potentially popular spot, but otherwise I hadn't seen many skaters. I went to the skateshop to ask someone where would be a good place to go and I was shocked that they said the space outside Harpa was usually busy by the early evening. The building was brand new that summer, which in my eyes made it one of the last spots I expected to be full of kids skateboarding. Back home a new building was definitely off limits in most cases because the police will often bust skaters. If you visited that type of spot for a short period of time or with only a couple people you might be able to get away with it for longer. The last thing you would want to do in almost any city other than Reykjavik would be to take a big group of skaters somewhere like that to draw attention. Regardless I headed down to the harbourfront to check out the spot and it was crawling with kids on skateboards, backlit by an amazing view of a sun that just does not quite set. Nobody came to tell us to leave, people stopped to watch but said nothing.

I spent the rest of my free time during the trip skating at either Ingolfstorg or Harpa, but did not see many other skateboarders. It all seems to have to do with timing and knowing where to go at what time. Since the city is quite small the skaters there seem to move from spot to spot quite frequently. Unless there is a big group at one spot nobody will stay there

for too long. What I did not realize was that there were all kinds of spots hidden downtown and throughout the suburbs, making it almost impossible to find a group of skaters at a given time if you didn't already know where to look.

There are also many hills in downtown Reykjavik, which is something I am not used to. Often the hilly streets do not have very smooth sidewalks, so you are almost forced to use the road. The roads are often rough as well but this can sometimes be a positive aspect because your wheels make so much more noise and people are better able to hear you coming their way. Getting used to riding down unfamiliar hills with intersections at the bottom of them can be difficult, its obvious that skaters in Reykjavik are always on the watch for cars. Often I would be gaining lots of speed down a hill just to notice a four way stop coming up with corners that you cannot see around. Definitely a city where it is important to watch where you are going.

While completing the second year of my Masters I made the decision to reshape my topic and this thesis is the product of that decision. Upon realization that this was the case I decided to return to Barcelona to have another look into a city where skateboarding has such a positive existence, since Reykjavik gave me quite a positive impression in terms of being welcoming to skateboarders.

I arrived in Barcelona just days after Europe had experienced a severe winter storm in mid February of 2012. It was colder than when I had been there before, but was basically the perfect weather to go skateboarding for extended periods of time, unlike before. The best part about my second visit was that I already knew my way around the city. There are always new faces in Barcelona since it is such a popular destination, every day you can run into different skaters. That evening I immediately went to the skateshop to get a board and then headed

down to the university plaza for a session.

While at the spot I met a few locals and people from abroad who I skated with and then after went down to a street cafe/park to hang out. I was told to watch out because the police were starting to enforce no-skateboarding rules at some of the major spots like the MACBA (a Catalan contemporary art gallery), which is one of the most famous places among skateboarders anywhere. The skateboarders that I was with informed me of extremely expensive tickets being handed out and boards being confiscated. Not the type of treatment someone would expect in a city where skateboarding has always been well tolerated. This might be attributed to an increased amount of foreign skateboarders due to Barcelona's fame. Often busts sounded like they were related to grinding and the “damaging” nature of skateboarders activities. Other people using the public spaces may have raised issues with the number of skateboarders in certain places.

I was not bothered during my whole trip, but I also avoided some of the spots that it was suggested they were cracking down most on. The authorities were obviously focusing on spaces that they view as more important and at some type of “risk”. For some reason although people had been grinding the ledges at the MACBA and other famous spaces for years they had just recently considered it a problem. Generally any damage done to obstacles is minor and mostly involves discoloration and slow weathering. The city must realize that the recognition of many spaces such as the MACBA would not be the same without the skateboarders. The city should communicate with skateboarders to establish a strategy to help maintain the buildings and spaces. A small amount of wear and tear on the sides of some buildings is a small price to pay to be recognized worldwide for providing an incredible skateboarding experience.

Upon returning to Reykjavik to do field work I was able to fully experience what Reykjavik has to offer skateboarders. Skateboarding intertwines with city life in Reykjavik quite successfully. People stop to watch and are often very impressed with the variety of maneuvers that they see being attempted. In the small island nation the community has always been quite accepting and tolerant toward each other's differences. Reykjavik's community encourages creativity, Iceland has always been a nation of artists and authors (Karlsson, 2000). Icelanders can therefore appreciate the creative nature of skateboarding, even if they do not skateboard themselves.

For myself, the spots in Reykjavik have not developed a deep meaning and are meaningful because of how tolerated skateboarding is. The youth and adults that identify as skateboarders in Reykjavik consider the spaces they inhabit to be like a part of themselves. Interestingly many popular skatespots in Reykjavik have historic significance to Iceland as a nation. Ingolfstorg being the square of Ingolf, the man who discovered Iceland (Karlsson, 2000). Hallgrimskirkja and Harpa also are Icelandic icons of history and culture. Harpa being a redevelopment of the site of the old harbour and Hallgrimskirkja is the imposing and impressive church found at the top of the hill in the downtown area. I feel a similar feeling for the Plaza at the Forks in Winnipeg, which has historic value, but also social and entertainment value for myself.

Skateboarding in Iceland is influenced heavily by North American skateboarding, but retains its own unique culture because of the way it developed in Iceland. Generally, skaters from Reykjavik never had an issue with the law like the skateboarders in North America. The city accepts the skaters as a group that is able to coexist in society. Basically from skateboarding's introduction to Iceland there was very little stigma associated with

skateboarders. This differs a great deal in North America where skateboarders have up until very recently been viewed as outcasts and criminals. This also means that in Reykjavik, skaters don't have to worry about how long they spend at a spot in terms of being kicked out.

In Reykjavik (and Iceland as a whole) the struggle has always been more about the spots. There were never many spots to skate when skateboarding first caught on in Iceland about 30 years ago. Gradually skaters have been able to take advantage of redevelopments and new projects throughout the city, having a skateboard federation has also brought them quite far in terms of having a small amount of designated facilities.

Many cities in North America have an abundance of smooth concrete, whereas Reykjavik has never been known for its smooth streets. Very few spots are really smooth and the sidewalks are often in even worse shape. Relying only on the use of a skateboard to get around in Reykjavik will mean that one's rate of travel will not be desirable.

Being from such an isolated, northern island, Reykjavik's skateboarders initially did not have any outside influence with regards to popular tricks or maneuvers. They had to rely on their own creativity to develop their skills, whereas in cities where skateboarding was more popular a skater could watch someone else attempt tricks and learn visually. This does not mean that Icelandic skaters were not learning from watching each other, but they had much less community inspiration than in some other cities. Presently with the internet and international travel becoming more common, Icelandic youth have the opportunity to watch videos online of skateboarders from all over the world.

Go Skateboarding Day - Iceland 2012

Enthusiasm for skateboarding among Icelandic youth and many adults is amazing, Go skateboarding Day on June 21st is very well attended and the community holds events during

the day as a celebration. Go Skateboarding Day was begun in 2004 on June 21 as an excuse to go skateboarding (IASC, 2013). It is a way for skateboarders to take ownership of the city and its spaces for one day and create their own interpretation of the holiday. It represents the freedom of skateboarding and the ability of the sport to transcend the cultural boundaries of the city. Go Skateboarding Day has become an international movement with participants spanning countries all over the globe. The event has been able to raise awareness regarding other social issues such as education that can be integrated with skateboarding (IASC, 2013).

During my fieldwork in June/July 2012 I attended the Go Skateboarding Day festivities in Reykjavik. The plan was to meet at Hallgrimskirkja (the giant church at the top of a hill in the city center) in the morning and participate in a mass “hill bombing” (cruise down the hill) to Ingolfstorg where there was to be a contest. People travel from around the island to come to Reykjavik on this day and even take the day off work to be a part of it. An event that mixes all ages in a movement of solidarity and visibility. Hallgrimskirkja is a space often relatively crawling with tourists although on this morning the weather was discouraging much activity. It was damp and overcast, everyone knew it was going to rain. This was not going to put a stop to the celebration however. A huge group of skaters had arrived and they were not going to be disappointed.

A light rain had begun once the organizers had waited for everyone to arrive and get ready, we then began our descent down the hill to Ingolfstorg. The skaters basically take over the street and cruise down the hill through the main street. The streets are so rough that generally while “bombing” the hill you never attain an uncontrollable speed. Nobody seems to care, they are all willing to sacrifice some comfort for the experience. People on the street watch with fascination at the spectacle moving past them. The sound of hundreds of

skateboard wheels on asphalt is hard to ignore. People on the streets of Reykjavik for the most part do not look upset at the group of skateboarders making a public spectacle. Iceland is known for its demonstrations and community activism (Johannsdottir, 2006; Karlsson, 2000).

By the time everyone made it to Ingolfstorg, it had begun raining heavily enough that skating there was not an option. The plaza is slippery like a skating rink when wet. There was some discontent, but luckily the indoor skatepark was an option. Many people decided to go there, but some people didn't want to be restricted to that space. A group of us went in search of dry pavement, the first place we went was the parkade below Harpa. This lasted for about an hour until we were kicked out, though it was virtually empty we were still asked to leave. The employee who asked us to leave was very polite about it, but though negotiations were attempted, would not be persuaded to let us be. Often in North America people respond to skateboarders with animosity. This can quickly escalate into the irritated person making a phone call to the police or physical confrontation, both quite unnecessary. We then went across town to the University of Iceland where there was a covered parking lot and a box (obstacle that one of the skaters has left there) that we were able to use.

Later in the afternoon I went to the skatepark to watch the competition. It was well attended by a large range of ages. While everyone was warming up it was apparent that the space they had available for all of the ramps was not sufficient for the size of the group. It is a tight set up and this provides plenty of opportunity for collisions. There is also considerable dust in the building and this causes some discomfort. It does however offer a wide range of obstacles and a bowl. It is a magnificent surprise to find such a skatepark on a small island like Iceland.

People were very excited for the competition and were not disappointed by the level of skateboarding. Skateboarding has come a long way since I started in my childhood and kids are presently taking it to new levels. Both the magnitude of the tricks and technical nature of skateboarding have come a long way. This is no different in Iceland, the youth are currently impressing the older skaters with their abilities. Once this was finished most people continued to hang out and skate, but gradually trickled away to rest after an exhausting day. This day not only celebrates skateboarding, but also the independent, yet unifying nature of the sport. Nobody is excluded, all walks of life, ethnicities, genders and ages are able to take part in the holiday in the same capacity.

This event is now worldwide and essentially makes up a network of global urban celebrations. This is a celebration of the city and the positive energy brought about by the spaces within it. In cities all over the earth where skateboarding has never seemed much more than a tiny sub-culture, people are organizing their own events. Because the events are often right in the public eye, this greatly increases the visibility of skateboarding and hopefully will help the general public in the city understand skateboarding better.

Observations

It is not unusual for cities to incorporate skateable architecture into the landscape, either by accident or on purpose. In Reykjavik with the redevelopment of Ingolfstorg in the works, many designs have taken skateboarders into account. This is a much different step than many cities would take, often the emphasis is on reducing the ability of skateboarders to use the space. The city values the skateboarders opinion on the spot, a news reporter interviewed a group of skaters about their thoughts on the matter. Addi's online skateboard show and methods of exposure such as the police Instagram account showing a police officer

doing a kickflip (See Figure 6) are strengthening the notion that the skaters are a legitimate user-group in the city's public spaces.

Local people in Reykjavik generally have an open-mind for what a healthy city lifestyle should resemble and those from the city-centre are especially interested in public space revitalization. The locals tend to view skateboarding as an activity that helps establish a healthy downtown community and gives meaning to empty space. Some of the most historic spaces of downtown Reykjavik are favorite spots for the city's skateboarders, a situation that would cause problems in many other cities. In Reykjavik however, people are quite free to make use of the available spaces and give them meaning. Giving purpose to the space is what created the culture in the first place, so re-purposing these historic spaces can give life to new culture. If the spaces were not used they would become neglected and forgotten like so many empty spaces in North American cities.

With a sky lit up basically twenty four hours in the summer, Reykjavik is an excellent city to explore through the evening and into the night on your skateboard. We went skating several times late at night while I was in Reykjavik. When arriving at a spot that had been frequented many times the skaters would often notice subtle changes (or drastic ones) that others would easily dismiss. One night we went to a spot by a beach and there had been some reasonable changes that the skaters noted, for instance a wall where there was no wall before. Such changes could affect how the space is utilized and even if it is to be enjoyed any longer by skateboarders due to the removal of obstacles, etc. With cities rapidly redefining themselves skateboarders are at the mercy of these new designs. Not that all reconfigurations are bad but the historic nature and identity formed by these spaces are still obviously of importance to skateboarders.

One evening that I was skating down at Ingolfstorg with a group of locals an intoxicated individual who was also spending time at the square smashed a bottle all over the ground. Everyone (the general public as well) was watching and it seemed like nobody knew what to do. Eventually one of the guys went over and began telling the person who smashed the glass to clean it up or leave and then soon enough the whole group of them were over at that end of the plaza to make sure something was getting done. They seemed to convince the man that his actions were irresponsible and in the end everyone shook hands and there were no further encounters. This shows how responsible the skateboarders in Reykjavik feel for the spaces they occupy.

Most encounters at Ingolfstorg are much more friendly and less extreme than this one was. It is not unusual to see families take a seat and watch the youth skate and compete with each other. Ingolfstorg is a great place to play S.K.A.T.E. as well because of its wide open design. This is when one skater tries to land a trick and if he does, everyone else must copy it or they receive a letter (for example first miss gets an S). Games of S.K.A.T.E are common at Ingolfstorg, often involve 5 to 10 people and everyone is invited to play. It is a way to learn new tricks by watching each other do tricks they may have each learned yet. By playing this game, skateboarders create a form of entertainment in the square that is far from what one would expect in Iceland, but is still uniquely Icelandic.

Icelandic skaters use a blend of Icelandic and English when talking about skateboarding. Since skateboard vocabulary is for the most part made up of English terms, it is interesting to hear the way that Icelanders have taken terms and made them sound Icelandic. For example when talking about a rail that someone would grind, they would refer to it as “railith” rather than use the Icelandic word (handrail in Icelandic is handrith). Further

research could be done on how the cross-cultural nature of skateboarding results in new phrases and words in different languages.

Icelandic culture has developed in isolation, concomitant to this has been the development of Icelandic skateboarding culture. This does not mean that skateboarding is much different in Iceland compared to say Barcelona, Vancouver, or New York, but there are subtle differences that can be found. The basic tricks are the same, however variations of tricks have developed without outside influence of photos and videos that in the past were less widely available to Iceland's inhabitants. The sense of community differs minutely from other places where there are often many smaller groups based on subcultures and ages. In Reykjavik these groups exist and also fit together into one city-wide network of skateboarders. This is quite prominent in Reykjavik due to its small population size.

Importance of the spaces

Public space, more important than designated space, is necessary for skateboarding to expand and evolve within a city (Borden, 2001). Reykjavik has abundant public space which is both accessible and welcoming to skateboarders. Designated space has also contributed to the evolution of skateboarding and modern skaters are seeing skateparks being built all over. There is however, a lack of designated skatepark facilities in Reykjavik. There are a handful of skateparks, but they are mostly located far from the city center or have limited hours of operation (in cases such as the indoor park with set hours). Public spaces may be easily utilized for skateboarding, but they often only have one or two obstacles. Skateboarders in Reykjavik would like a space with a good variety of obstacles. In a city with many hills, it is a benefit to not have to traverse the whole city just to find a ledge and then go somewhere else to find a set of stairs. It can get very tiring going uphill after you spent the majority of

your energy skateboarding (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). Two of the most important features of skateboarding spaces in Reykjavik are the location and availability of obstacles (architecture style). This does not mean that Reykjavik's skaters don't enjoy the experience of moving between the spaces, but there is something to be said for the usefulness of skateparks.

Ingolfstorg is basically the main meeting spot for skateboarders in Reykjavik. Even if they have to take the bus down to the city center to get there, that is usually where everyone goes to start their day. This spot provides the community of skaters a place to develop relationships with other skaters who they may never have interacted with if it were not for Ingolfstorg's existence. This spot also has extremely smooth paving stone that isn't found at any other spot in the city (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012).

Many spots like Ingolfstorg act as a basis for building a mental map of the city. A visit to Ingolfstorg can often teach a skater where many of the other spots are located and how to get there. Using the knowledge of spots you know of you can use what others say about the location of different spots to determine the route of travel (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). Skaters often know of short-cuts or the best skateable routes to get from one place to another. Some spots may remain hidden until there is a reason to have passed by them, the skaters often go on excursions to look for new spots.

Ingolfstorg is just as important to youth culture in Iceland as it is to the older generations of Icelanders. The space serves as an important meeting place in the city centre with a draw that bridges the generations. Ingolfstorg is historically significant as it is named after Ingolfur Arnason the first settler of Iceland. Geothermal steam escapes from vents attached to two stone pillars that represent Ingolfur's high seat pillars that were thrown into

the ocean to determine where to settle on the island (Karlsson, 2000). The space is therefore just as important as a representation of Reykjavik's settlement history as it is important to the history of skateboarding in Reykjavik. The value placed on public space usually changes with time. Someone from one subculture will not necessarily understand the value placed on a space by another subculture. This does not mean that a lack of understanding translates into a lack of acceptance.

Ingolfstorg in particular, is extremely important for the social development of Reykjavik's skateboarders. The existence of a main meeting place downtown, means that there is a central spot for the skaters in Reykjavik to convene. Without this space skaters would have to find somewhere else to socialize and practice their tricks. The space is open enough to accommodate a large amount of skaters. The tight community of skaters in Reykjavik may never have developed without this large, central space. If Ingolfstorg were never constructed and there were simply a few smaller spaces like the chess table spot, Reykjavik's skateboard community might not have become so integrated into the downtown. The space has allowed for the skaters to be extremely visible to the public and in this way they have a healthy relationship with the average citizen. It is possible that Harpa may become the new popular spot with Reykjavik's skateboarders if changes are made to Ingolfstorg that the skaters decide are not to their liking. Skateboarding is very adaptable, but one spot will never be the same as another, especially one enjoyed for so long. The various tricks and styles viewed at such a popular spot are like a timeline of the development of skateboarding in Reykjavik.

Currently Ingolfstorg is slotted as the site of new city development, which has brought about mixed feelings from the community. It is not only an important space for

skateboarders, but also regular Icelanders and tourists. “It is really sad that they are going to change it, because its like, for what it is going to be it is totally unnecessary you know.” (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). Ingolfstorg has been like home for a large group of skaters and they feel like they are being thrown out of it (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). The proposed redevelopment involves removing the stairs and some of the space provided by the plaza design to make room for another hotel. The skateboarders feel that at least if they lose one of their most precious spots, it gives them more of reason to push for the city to establish a proper skatepark (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). There is still a great deal of hope that if the redevelopment goes through, the spot will be re-imagined with skateboarders in mind.

Although Ingolfstorg could be changing, it doesn't mean that the city is ignoring the skateboarders. Almost every design for the new square/plaza includes some type of obstacle that the skateboarders could utilize. During my time in Reykjavik, a group of us happened to be downtown near where they were having a showing of all of the different concepts for the new square. We decided to go take a look and although it was a closed/formal event, the organizers had no problem letting us come in and take a look. They clearly consider the skaters a valid user group and want them to know what's happening to the spot. There were a large amount of designs, and a few of the skaters were asked by city officials what they thought of the variety.

The plaza at Ingolfstorg is quite unique by Reykjavik's standards because it offers a smooth, wide open space as well as an eight-stair set and a couple four-stair sets with ramps. Often the skaters bring their own obstacles to set up in the square as there is more than enough space to accommodate this. Sometimes it is just a simple box or rail and other times

many different obstacles are set up (often for special occasions like demos or competitions). These obstacles may be left at Ingolfstorg for quite some time for everyone to use, when not in use they are simply pushed off to the side to not obstruct others from using the space.

Harpa is a great new spot because it offers some obstacles that are less abundant downtown such as ledges. Many skaters in Reykjavik were pleased by this new public space because they were able to progress their skills in a new way. The key to progression is having a variety of obstacles to create tricks on. It is also located on the harbour and is a beautiful spot to go spend some time at. There were a few initial problems when people began skating there, but then after meeting with security and officials they decided to welcome the skaters. They noticed that having kids fill up the space helps make it a more vibrant place (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). Harpa, located not far from Ingolfstorg, thusly makes it a great addition to the spots that were already in the area. A short skate will get you from Ingolfstorg to Harpa and there are no hills to worry about.

The chess-table spot (See Figure 7) is in a little park only a few blocks from Ingolfstorg and Harpa . It is basically one of the first skate spots in Iceland. Home to the first skateable ledges in downtown Reykjavik, it can be noted that many Icelandic skaters landed their first kickflip here (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). Known as the “chess-table spot” due to the four small chess tables (used as ledges) found there. There is seating and a grassy slope surrounding the spot where people often stop to sit and watch. Not exactly a spot that offers a great variety of obstacles, yet it is very popular due to its location and the historic values and identity associated with it. The space is also a great example of how simple tables can be turned into something so enjoyable by skateboarders.

Another notable space is a school in the suburbs that had a variety of obstacles like

ledges and drops, but with no maintenance, the spot has become less popular. The concrete has become rough and this makes it quite difficult to enjoy as in the past. Several well-known Icelandic skateboarders attended the school and used to skate there often (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012).

The Reykjavik University is also a new spot that is being explored (technically not a fully public space, yet still relevant). It is a fair distance from downtown Reykjavik, but it offers a decent mix of obstacles. They are still adding to it, so there will be new spaces to skate there for the near future. The skaters have even added metal siding to one of the benches and the University has not taken it off or viewed it in a negative light. This is quite different from The University of Manitoba's approach to skateboarders. The University of Manitoba has outlawed skateboarding on campus and the security treat it as a serious offense.

In addition to the variety of public spaces found throughout the city, there are a few skateparks to be found on the fringes. Fifan, possibly the largest of the outdoor parks is located nearby a large sports complex far from the downtown Reykjavik. The park has a small variety of obstacles, but is too far for most people to make the trip from downtown, so mostly benefits the suburbs. All of the ramps are made of a slippery material that is impossible to skate when wet, so even a small amount of rain could ruin a session. I visited Loftskalin, the indoor skatepark located near the city centre. It is only open during the winter and is only big enough to accommodate a smaller group without becoming dangerously crowded. This means when it rains in the summer time, there is nowhere for the skateboarders to go to escape the elements. One of the only options if it rains is the underground parkade below Harpa. There are a few other outdoor skateparks located in the suburbs surrounding Reykjavik that are not used all that often due to their location.

The city is planning to redesign some areas that need to be updated as the city expands and they are going to make some regions within the city more conducive to skateboarding. Many of the plans include benches and other elements that are not specifically for skateboarding, but have been designed with skateboarding in mind. There are people now working with the city who grew up skateboarding and know what the skaters are looking for in a spot (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). This is different from the approach taken by many cities to create architecture that deters skateboarders.

Spaces occupied by skateboarders are important for various reasons. Often the reason is the location of the space within the city and what obstacles are found there. Certain spaces may be popular because they are not so busy with pedestrians that it impedes the skateboarders. When a skatespot is in a well-centralized location and is large enough to accommodate a big group it will likely become one of the more popular spots. This helps introduce skaters to others with similar interests. These groups of skaters will then share spaces they are aware of and go exploring for new spaces to enjoy. Therefore a city is often made up of many major (well known) skatespots that skaters then branch out from to find other smaller spots. Though the major meeting spots for skaters are very important, this does not mean that exploration for other spots is not vital to skateboarding. The act of exploration and discovery of new spots is what has allowed skateboarding to progress and grow. Every skater has a different vision of what they would use an obstacle for and so finding spots with something different to offer opens up many possibilities.

The geography of the surrounding city also plays a role in the importance and popularity of spots. Factors such as access from surrounding streets and the amount of pedestrian flow through an area at certain times often have a big impact. The topography of

the city is also important, spots that are downhill vs uphill will often be favored. Skaters in Reykjavik would prefer to begin an excursion at a spot located higher up and work their way down the hill to Ingolfstorg or Harpa. A skatespot that is surrounded by rough streets and sidewalks may be hardly accessible on one's skateboard so it might be used less frequently. It is not therefore always the spot itself that determines if skateboarders will frequent it, but also the orientation and design of the surrounding city.

City Development Perspectives

Northern European/Scandinavian nations are quite tolerant towards skateboarding and typically view the sport in a positive light. Due to this the cities in these nations often offer a wide variety of skateable architecture and numerous skateparks. City planners in places like Copenhagen often grew up skateboarding and they plan their public spaces with a skateboarding mentality (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). This is why there is lots of interestingly unique spots in Copenhagen and some of the other Scandinavian cities (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012).

Skateboarders from different neighbourhoods in the greater Reykjavik area are always finding new spots that they did not know existed. Often people will meet up at Ingolfstorg and skaters from one neighbourhood will suggest to others that they need to come to their end of the city to check out a new spot (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). They will also notice subtle changes to locations that other citizens would not notice or regard as unimportant. Changes to the city such as this will either enable skateboarders to use the spot in more ways, or they might result in the spot becoming abandoned. As previously mentioned there were some changes to a spot located near the beach that were not too drastic to cause any issues with the use of the spot.. The new

University of Reykjavik campus is seen as a positive space because they continue to add to the spaces around it.

Ingolfstorg is supposed to be redeveloped in the near future and the skaters feel it is sad that they are going to change it from what it is. The changes they are making are not necessary changes, they are going to put an old house on part of the square and remove the stairs and the stage. It is sad for the sake of the spot and everything that happened there and the generations of skaters that grew up on that spot (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). But the skaters feel as though the changes made to their home base will give them more power when lobbying government officials to provide them with a designated space such as a proper downtown skatepark. With Reykjavik's rough spots skaters often will go to a partially finished development and skate that even if it is not ready yet. As an example of this my informant Addi stated "When they were first building Ingolfstorg, we were already skating the curbs before all of the bricks were laid" (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). The loss of this spot means that the skaters in Reykjavik will be looking for a new open public space to use as their main hangout. It also means that other spots might become busier as people who used to frequent Ingolfstorg will find a new favorite spot. Ingolfstorg is also special because it is one of the only places in the city with the smooth bricks. According to Addi most places are contracted with a company that makes the rough bricks that you see all around the city (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). From what I saw of the sidewalks and areas that are getting worked on currently are being replaced with the rough bricks.

Reykjavik and many surrounding districts have made contracts with the company that makes the rough cement bricks that make up sidewalks throughout the city. They are not

great for skateboarders as they present too much friction. Though this might not have been a decision made by anyone who would be involved with city planning beyond the business aspects, it shows how communication through all levels is important to make the city more skateboarding friendly. Many of the skaters in the community do use their skateboards as transportation as well as for fun. Part of the skateboarding experience is the freedom one feels while cruising through the streets, the maneuverability of a skateboard allows for this freedom. However when a city is not conducive to skateboard transport some of this freedom is lost. It is not as fun and often difficult to ride on a surface that offers too much friction. Riding on the rough bricks requires a great deal of effort (pushing hard) for very little return in speed and distance traveled.

Ingolfstorg has also been the main space used for Go Skateboarding Day celebrations and competitions due to its central location at the bottom of the hill that everyone cruises down. The size of the square is also able to accommodate a large group. Go Skateboarding Day is important to the community of skaters in Reykjavik. One skateboarder mentioned to me that cities in general do not know how to control the way skateboarders move through it and so that is why skateboarders are often considered a threat. He suggested that people understand how to control automobile, pedestrian and bike traffic, but they do not understand the unconventional way that skaters move through the city. It was even suggested that many people are jealous of the smooth gliding nature of the skateboarders movements.

Skateboarders' movements in the city often defy the easily controllable nature of other forms of traffic that one could call less dynamic.

Transformation of spots such as the harbourfront into something new will not be popular decisions with everyone. People's perspective will determine the value associated

with a particular space. The space found at the harbourfront before was unappreciated by the average person other than for its historic value, now it is being appreciated by the skaters, tourists and normal citizens. In contrast to Ingolfstorg which is valued by skateboard culture and has some value to Icelandic culture, but the space itself does not hold significance historically it merely is representative of Reykjavik's history. The harbourfront was valued for its historic importance to Reykjavik's fishing industry by older generations, now it is being assigned a new value by the younger generation who may have never appreciated it in such a way before it was redeveloped.

The area surrounding Harpa is still partially under construction and so the skateboarders in Reykjavik eagerly await the space that emerges when construction is finished. There will also be some development in some different areas that need to be reconfigured due to traffic. As previously mentioned, some of the people working for the city were once skaters and they are exerting their influence on city decisions. (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012).

Through my observations and engagement with the skateboarders of Reykjavik I have noticed they have developed a closely bonded community in which they are all willing to support one another. There is a small park known as Heart Park located downtown that is like a hangout for the youth and young adults. It is located in a private lot, but an agreement was reached with the owners that it could be used as a public space if it was maintained (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). There have been suggestions to convert part of it into a little skatepark, but it is still up in the air what exactly will happen. The space has been used for concerts, community markets and children's activities. Addi was unable to comment but said that as soon as he knows what is happening he will try to be a part of it.

This is an example of the skaters taking available spaces into their own hands and making them into what they desire. This means that skateboarders should have their opinions heard on city redevelopment issues. Addi said he would like to establish the same standard in Iceland as Denmark has for skateboarding. A group of them traveled to Denmark and Addi and some parents went to the skatepark there to learn about how they made their skateboarding program work.

The Heart Park went through a few transformations. For a time there was a miniature skatepark (See Figure 8) in the park with a quarter-pipe against one of the walls. This lasted for a while and the park was well looked after, however eventually the owners of the lot were ready to develop on the space. This is just an example of how unstable available skate spots can sometimes be.

Skaters not only use public spaces, they are often lingering in these spaces for long periods and therefore observe the activities of others using the space. They take note of deterioration before most normal user groups would. Skaters often know when the spaces experience the heaviest traffic. They understand the rhythms of the space, recognize the people who frequent the space and are often helpful to people who may need directions or have questions about the city. I think that people ask skaters questions about the city because people would generally assume that skaters are locals and have a familiarity with the streets. Skateboarders have a great understanding of how people move through the spaces of the city and would be a well of information on city planning issues. Overcoming these issues requires little more than questioning the people who understand them the best, those that occupy the spaces within.

Tolerance, Acceptance and Understanding

Icelandic skateboarders have always had a reasonable struggle comparatively to skateboarders from other nations. They are from a small island nation where skateboarding began as such a small subculture that it went fairly unrecognized for a long time. Though there is an indoor skatepark, they still do not have as much access to it as is necessary for how many skaters are in the city presently. Copenhagen comparatively has a well-run skatepark that cooperates with schools in the city, so the kids have the option instead of only participating in regular team sports (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012).

In Reykjavik, the police will not bother you for skating. As long as you do not give any property owners a bad attitude they likely will not kick you out (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). Not once in either trip I made to Iceland did the police confront or scrutinize me because I was riding a skateboard. Everywhere we skated, whether it was on the streets, sidewalks, private parking lots and buildings, there was never a problem with the law. As long as the skaters are respectful to the others using the space or the people on the street there is no reason for there to be any problems. Skaters have been demonized in the media, but in reality they don't mean anyone any harm.

The organization that runs the skatepark has really pushed skateboarding in the right direction, but it could be progressing even faster and growing even stronger. The organization has established a standard, but as time passes there are always new challenges. They have done lots for skateboarding in Iceland, but more could still be done to strengthen it now that the community is so large (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). At the moment it is only being maintained, but it could be taken a step further to support bigger groups. There has been discussion between skaters about how they can establish another skatepark and better accessibility.

Harpa was described to me as the best skatespot Reykjavik has seen in a long time and is bound to attract skaters from around the island and even from abroad. There was an initial problem with security, but discussion led to an understanding of the need for the space and the positive nature of the space being used in this way. It is great that this space was created due to the potential loss of Ingolfstorg.

Spots need to be maintained, older spots from previous generations can fall into a degraded state if not looked after. There was a spot that I was not able to visit but I was told by Addi that it was a popular spot when they were growing up, but has since fallen into disrepair. There is rotting wood and screws sticking out of some places (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). I have noticed that some spaces are looked after much better than others, this is not specific to Reykjavik and is the case in almost every city. But in Reykjavik, spaces such as Ingolfstorg are maintained reasonably well, compared to spaces that others would not think to maintain. Skaters would surely be willing to be involved in maintaining many spaces that they make use of. Harpa will likely need to be maintained due to the nature of its construction. It was mentioned to me that due to its proximity to the ocean, the salt in the air is hard on the materials. The finish that was used on some of the wood parts has worn off and become discolored.

A skateboard school has been established in Reykjavik in cooperation with the skatepark and the city. Skateboarding is an important social networking tool for youth and can transcend culture and class (Borden, 2001; Chiu, 2009). When skateboarding is a shared interest, it encourages interaction with people that one might not normally meet in their normal social circles. Often groups of skateboarders are diverse and made up of many ethnicities and cultures. Even in Iceland where there is a small, yet growing amount of

immigrants, a variety of ethnicities makes up the skateboard community. The skate school in Iceland can be attended by people from any of the districts surrounding the city, this means kids will meet other kids with similar interests from across the city. It is a positive experience for the kids and for the community having the kids liven up the area. The teachers are showing the kids where they should and should not go downtown. They are also helping the kids explore other aspects of skateboard culture, while being able to avoid bad aspects and influences (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). Lots of kids want to get into filming skateboarding which is more positive than partying and drugs (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). Filming has always been important to skateboarding, as it preserves the history of what tricks have been done in what places. In these ways, the skate school is helping the kids have healthy competition and progression in their activity. Everyone needs to learn, was something that one skater teaching the skate school said to me one of the first days of my visit to Iceland to conduct my fieldwork. The skate school adds to the visibility of skateboarding, not only exposure to other skaters, but also just positive exposure to the general public.

Addi's online skateboard show known as First Try Fail Mondays showcases the city and allows ordinary people a glimpse into the world of skateboarding. At first the show was just a few skaters having a bit of fun, but then it evolved into a sub-cultural phenomenon. First Try Fail Mondays was quite successful and Addi has continued to pursue the idea of a skateboard show. Readytopop.is is a website that takes the idea even further featuring videos with subtitles for those who don't speak Icelandic. It has always been popular to upload skateboarding footage to the internet, but First Try Fail Mondays proves that adding some structure to the presentation is useful. The initial idea with the show was to bring

skateboarding to the people (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). It has been broadcast on a local newspaper website in Reykjavik. The show is meant to make skateboarding in Reykjavik and the nation as a whole stronger. At first people were not on-board with the idea of popularizing it, but then they began to understand (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). The show also creates a sort of time capsule of what skateboarding was like at that point in time. That way people who were on it can look back and remember what they were a part of (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). This can also be used to study the changes to the world of skateboarding over time.

Increasing the visibility of skateboarding will help ensure that skateboarders have a positive relationship with Reykjavik and its citizens. This is being accomplished in a variety of ways, the skateboard show, “First Try Fail Mondays”, helps people connect to the skaters and the spaces they occupy. “Go Skateboard Day” is a great way for the skaters to improve their visibility in Reykjavik, the bigger the celebration the more people will share in the experience. By involving so many skaters in a large event they are building bridges between everyday citizens and Reykjavik's skateboarders. This event is helping non-skateboarders to have an improved understanding of the sport and provides a great deal of public entertainment.

There was only one situation where I heard that the police were involved with putting a stop to a skate session. Someone called the police most likely because they were annoyed by the skaters being somewhat in the way, but the account I heard suggested they weren't bothering traffic and were moving out of the way for cars. Even in cases where skateboarders are being respectful, they often still find themselves dealing with confrontation. Addi said it was the first time they had ever been told by the police to leave because they were skating

(A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). The police did let them have an extra try at the spot before they made them leave and they expressed their enjoyment for watching them skate. They did not feel the need to kick the skaters out, but had to make them leave because it was their job to do so. People in Iceland think its interesting and they see how positive it can be. (A. Ingvarsson, personal communication, July 3, 2012). Reykjavik's citizens exercise their freedoms in public (drinking, smoking, etc), so they are able to appreciate skateboarding for the freedom it represents.

A local news-station interviewed a group of skateboarders at Ingolfstorg one afternoon. I was informed after that they were speaking about Ingolfstorg and some of the temporary things that have been added to the space, such as the grass pad that was not there during my visit the previous year. The people of the city recognize the presence of the skateboarders and feel that they have a valid opinion on the goings on of the space. They understand how observant the skateboarders are when at Ingolfstorg and can appreciate the input that they might provide. Skaters spend so much time at Ingolfstorg that if something significant happened there, it is likely that much of the skateboard community would know simply by word of mouth.

In Reykjavik, public interaction is quite common as it is a small enough community where almost everyone knows everyone else. Skateboarding occupies many public spaces in Reykjavik that are also suited to other activities. Ingolfstorg offers a place for the average citizen somewhere to stop to eat their lunch and watch all the downtown activity. It is also a popular spot visited by tourists. The square is like a hub that connects the other downtown areas and is bustling with activity throughout the day. The chess table spot is at times occupied by activities other than skateboarding. Sometimes there are people playing chess

with oversized pieces on the oversized board. If a space is too busy for skateboarders to make use of it, they will simply wait until it is no longer in use. This is a good reason to have more than one spot available downtown. Skateboarders in Reykjavik are shown respect by other citizens and therefore that respect is reciprocated when a space is not available to skate. The skaters recognize how tolerant the city is of their sport and so they are accepting of the fact that they cannot make use of every space all the time.

Community

The city of Reykjavik has a few different generations of skaters that all interact within the same spaces. The younger skaters are often watching the older skaters at spots like Ingolfstorg to see what kinds of tricks they are trying. Skateboarding is quite dependent on passing knowledge through the generations, often just simply using visual sense and no real communication. Tricks are often learned by watching someone perform them on video or in person. In Reykjavik many of the tricks that are learned are learned through playing SKATE.

This interaction across generations is not entirely unique to Iceland, however the small, tight knit community must have encouraged this development. That is not to say that there are not cliques in the Reykjavik skateboarding community, but rather these cliques all mesh together to form a cohesive city-wide community. This notion of community and supporting one another has been strengthened by the existence of Addi's First Try Fail Mondays show.

For the sake of discussion I would categorize skateboarders into three generational groupings. The youngest generation would refer simply to children who are from around 7 years old to those 15 years old. The middle group would refer to those skateboarders who are from 16 to 21 and the adult group would be those 22 and older.

The young generation of skaters in Reykjavik are still learning about skateboarding and are developing an identity based around what it means to them. These younger children are those that make up the skateboard school, so they have the least experience with the city and with skateboarding in general. These children rely entirely on their older peers when formulating an identity as a skateboarder. In some cases young skaters might not have the most positive role models to make use of, but skaters in Reykjavik are quite conscious of how they act around the younger crowd. The young crowd is less knowledgeable about where skatespots are.

The middle generation are probably the most active in the skateboard community. Many of them work at the skateshops and have become involved in the skateboard school idea. This group serves as the bridge between the young children and the adults. Skaters in this group potentially skate more than the other groups because they are at a stage in life that permits this. These skaters are usually the most competitive and impressive in the tricks that they attempt.

The adult group is the generation that is made up of some of Reykjavik's first skaters. They remember a time when there was much less available in terms of skatespots. To this generation, the chess-table spot holds a special significance as one of the best spots to skate downtown over 20 years ago. The adult skaters are always fascinated by the progression of the younger groups, and they are involved in movements to encourage that progression. They understand how important the new space at Harpa is to the community and how crucial a role skateparks play in the progression of the sport. Many of the skaters in this group are too busy to skate all the time, but try to find ways to be involved in the community such as helping with the skatepark and finding ways to improve access to youth.

Skateboarding is a lifestyle for many Icelandic youth and adults. Their social interactions are centered on meeting up to go skateboarding. Skateboarding is very dependent on available space, which Reykjavik's public spaces are able to provide. There are most likely a couple hundred skateboarders in Reykjavik, which may not be a huge number but relative to the population it is a fair amount. Reykjavik has enough public space to support this many skaters, but the loss of any available space would be damaging to the skateboard community as spaces are large enough, but not abundant. Skateboarding provides Icelandic youth with a creative outlet that is great for meeting new people. However, without an outlet such as this youth can sometimes get involved in the wrong crowds. With the city encouraging skateboarding they are making sure that the youth involved are getting a positive experience. If skateboarding were discouraged or if the city was not considerate of the skaters then problems could arise. Intolerance encourages skaters to become disrespectful and feel like outcasts. Being treated as criminals would make the skaters' experience a negative one.

Skateboard School

Skateboard schools and summer camp type ideas have been attempted in many cities, but they all generally have one thing in common, they are bounded by the limits of the skatepark. I have never before heard of a skateboard school that was basically mobile *throughout the entire city*. They are often either held at a single skatepark or they are mobile to the point that they can take the children/youth to a different skatepark. In Reykjavik, the skateboard school is open to kids from basically every surrounding district of the city. As well as being able to go to the few (very spread-out) skateparks, the teachers take the kids downtown to skate all over the 101 Reykjavik area. This is a concept I have never heard of

being attempted anywhere else.

Some cities may not offer the safety that Reykjavik offers to people exploring its downtown, but that does not mean that the idea is non-transferable. Many cities throughout the world could employ a similar program and encourage youth to reclaim the spaces in their cities. The teachers are also showing the kids where it is safe to go and what the best routes for getting around are. If they know what streets are less busy with traffic and pedestrians, they will be able to navigate downtown safer on their boards. They can also learn when the best time is to go to certain spots so they won't be so busy, to avoid being in the way of others using the space.

This idea could be taken further in some form of skateboard tourism. Rather than simply offering a program to children, a program could be developed that focuses on showing older/foreign skaters around the city so they know where to go to find spots and other skaters. Skaters could design a map that marks the location of significant spots for skaters to visit that you could obtain online or at the skateshop. Skateboard schools could benefit communities in various ways. The idea of the skateboard school has been evolved into a non-profit program known as Skateistan benefiting children and youth in developing nations.

The Skateistan project based in Afghanistan has contributed a great deal to communities of young people in a few developing nations (Afghanistan, Cambodia and South Africa) (Skateistan, 2014). The program has established a skatepark in Kabul and provides equipment for the participating youth. Although the program is structured around the skatepark, the encouragement provided to the youth has an affect that reaches far beyond the skatepark. The youth involved have access to recreation, education, leadership

opportunities and are given the opportunity to express themselves (Skateistan, 2014). The program is made up of about forty percent girls, this is important because girls in Afghanistan are not allowed to participate in sports, but skateboarding circumvents these rules (Skateistan, 2014). A program such as this is an example of how skateboarding can be integrated into education and community life to provide an empowering outlet for young people. This program encourages the youth involved to participate in the community and develop new social relationships (Skateistan, 2014). This project embodies and utilizes the many good qualities found in skateboard culture that the average person would be unaware existed.

Conclusion

Skateboarding has become a cultural phenomenon in cities throughout the world, contributing to a healthy, dynamic street culture. Reykjavik surprisingly supports a very diverse skateboard community that successfully mixes many age groups and lifestyles. The skateboard culture in Reykjavik is not vastly different from other cities, yet it is unique enough to embody a distinctly “Icelandic” element. Skateboarders in Reykjavik are well integrated into the downtown core and are able to give meaning to spaces that otherwise would be empty and lifeless.

Skateboarding in Iceland is very well tolerated and the city of Reykjavik has a surprising variety of spaces to attract skateboarders. Some spaces have been enjoyed for decades and others are just being discovered. With modern cities constantly trying to redefine themselves this process of discovering and reinventing spaces does not seem to have an end in sight. The city has recognized the skateboarders of Reykjavik as a valid user group and therefore their opinion on public space is respected. Some city planners and officials used to skateboard and so they are able to have a positive influence on many city decisions that affect skateboarders.

Reykjavik's downtown core has three great skatespots that are important for one reason or another. Ingolfstorg, a large open square with stairs, is one of the best and oldest spots in Reykjavik. The chess-table spot was the original downtown skatespot that existed before the square at Ingolfstorg was created. And Harpa is the newest skatespot in Reykjavik, designed as a tourist attraction and located on the harbourfront. There is however a considerable need for a larger, more accessible indoor skatepark.

The spaces skateboarders inhabit throughout Reykjavik play an important role in the

skaters' identity. Spots like Ingolfstorg are like a home away from home and without them these communities of skaters would be unable to form. Due to the amount of time that one can spend at a particular spot it is possible for many interactions to occur. In this way many skaters become acquainted, making up a diverse group from a variety of areas and backgrounds. Without these high quality spaces the skaters would not interact often enough or long enough to have the same sense of community.

Reykjavik can support an incredible skateboard scene similar to that of Barcelona by encouraging a positive outlook on skateboarding's contributions to the city. If climate and availability of usable spaces were the only desirable elements of a popular destination for skateboarders the number of destinations would be quite limited. The community of skateboarders in Reykjavik is one of the most inviting I have ever experienced thanks to the tolerance of Reykjavik's citizens. Better access to skateparks is the main issue that Reykjavik's skateboarders are urging the city to address.

Go Skateboarding Day is well established in Reykjavik, consisting of an entire day's worth of events and creating awareness of skateboarding throughout the city. This celebration is more than just a skateboarding event, it is a celebration of the city and everything within. The scale of the Go Skateboarding Day event in Reykjavik would be surprising to many skaters from other cities where they may not encourage such an event.

The skateboard school in Reykjavik helps to encourage the children involved to develop meaningful relationships and learn city navigational skills. It is not only educating them on skateboarding, but also on how to be safe downtown in the city. The skateboard school also provides positive role models for those involved.

There is a great deal more research that could be undertaken with regards to

skateboarding and cities. For example, a study on culturally relevant skateparks or city design that encourages skateboarding as transport are two directions that could be taken to further our understanding of skateboarding. Another noteworthy concept is how skateboarding can promote safe inner-city communities, this could be examined further by studying the placement of skateparks and the benefits they contribute to these communities.

Skateboarding has clearly developed into a vital aspect of Reykjavik's city life. The community of skaters in Reykjavik is as representative of Iceland as any volcano or lopapeysa (Icelandic wool sweater). Reykjavik's skateboard community is vibrant and welcoming, providing positive contributions to the city. While most cities are unable to see the positive influence skateboarding has on young people, the tolerant outlook within Reykjavik has encouraged this influence. The most significant contribution of this research is the knowledge that increased tolerance towards skateboarding in public will contribute to healthy community development, not only among skateboarders but throughout the entire city. This means that instead of over-regulating public space, it is more beneficial to the city to accept and tolerate that certain spaces encapsulate a variety of uses.

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Appendices:

Figure 1: Interview Questions

- What would you say separates Icelandic skateboarding from elsewhere in the world?
- How would you describe the community of skaters here in Iceland and specifically the city?
- How does skateboarding contribute to your understanding of the city and the way it is mapped out?
- What features of the city do you relate to most and why? Ie. What are your favorite spots?
- Describe any issues you have ever had using public space?
- What is your opinion on city redevelopments, such as Harpa and the future Ingolfstorg redevelopment?
- How does the city benefit from skating?
- What is your opinion on the skateboard school?
- Could we talk about your online skateboard show?
- Why has Iceland remained undiscovered by the global skateboard community?
- What is your most memorable experience when it comes to skateboarding?

Figure 2: Consent Form

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Informed Consent For Research Project

Research Project Title: Skateboarding and Reykjavik's Changing Public Spaces (working title)

Researcher: Colton Inkster



Sponsors: Olson/Jonsson Travel Scholarship for Study in Iceland
Colin Inkster Memorial Award
University of Manitoba Graduate Fellowship

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This research project will explore skateboarding in Iceland and its relationship with the city and the spaces within it. Ideas and perceptions on public space will be explored. I am interested in gaining a better understanding on how skateboarders identify with public space and how these public spaces are experienced on a daily basis. The study will also be examining how skateboarders react to changing public spaces and their opinions on the changes that are made to these spaces. The aim is to better understand how public space in modern cities is used and how ordinary user groups (in this case skateboarders) feel about how it is designed and regulated. The research will involve semi-structured interviews and participant observation throughout the month of June and on Go Skateboarding Day. The interviews will be face to face and may involve use of a video or sound recording device. Interviews should not take more than 1-1.5 hours each. Overall it should not take any more than 2 hours of your time.

This project involves no risk, no health information or personal information will be provided by participants.

All participants are eligible for full confidentiality if they wish. No personal or sensitive

information will be shared with any outside parties. Should the participant wish they may agree to be identified in the study and waive confidentiality. I hope to include the participant's name and any video obtained in the research, but if you wish you may choose to decline from this. Only myself as the researcher will have access to any of the information that is recorded as a result of this research. All information that needs to remain confidential will remain so throughout the research and following it. All participant records will be filed in my home office, only being identified by initials, which will ensure that they remain confidential if necessary.

Feedback regarding the study will be provided through mail/email and if possible a presentation after research has been concluded.

Participants may withdraw from the study at any point that they decide they no longer wish to continue.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject. In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researchers, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and /or refrain from answering any questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

This research has been approved by the Joint-Faculty Research Ethics Board. If you have any concerns or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat at 474-7122. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

I agree to have my name included in the research yes no

I agree to be recorded sound or video (circle one) for data collection purposes yes no

I agree for my interview footage (if collected) to be used in documentary form for dissemination purposes yes no

Participant's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher and/or Delegate's Signature _____ Date _____

Figure 3: Map of Reykjavik City Centre, from <http://www.visitorsguide.is/maps/>



Figure 4: Harpa public space, photo credit David Holm Juliusson



Figure 5: Ingolfstorg, photo credit Addi Ingvarsson



Figure 6: Reykjavik Metropolitan Police Skateboarding, photo credit Metropolitan City Police



Figure 7: Chess-table Spot, photo credit Addi Ingvarsson



Figure 8: Heart Park, photo credit Addi Ingvarsson

