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| Institution: University College London |
| Unit of Assessment: 16 – Architecture, Built Environment and Planning |
| Title of case study: <i>Facilitating culture change in perceptions of skateboarding</i> |
| 1. Summary of the impact <p>Borden's research into the history and contemporary urban practice of skateboarding, and particularly its role within cities and public spaces, has enhanced understanding of this global urban activity, leading to significant changes in how the public and media understand skateboarding culture in the UK and abroad. His work has also contributed to the campaign to save a historic skateboarding site at the Southbank Centre in London, and to moves to protect similar sites elsewhere. Finally, research by Borden has informed the design and development of some of the most influential skateboarding venues in the country.</p> |
| 2. Underpinning research <p>The Bartlett School of Architecture in the UCL Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment has a long history of study and creating knowledge about how cities are made by their inhabitants. Professor Iain Borden (researcher at UCL from 1989, Professor of Architecture & Urban Culture from 2002) uses theoretical and interdisciplinary perspectives to study the everyday and experiential aspects of urban space, focussing on previously overlooked quotidian spaces, practices, qualities and representations - and particularly those related to the urban practice of skateboarding.</p> <p>Borden's research into the production and experience of space, and particularly his work on skateboarding, has contributed new understandings of urban space in three ways: (1) Highlighting experiential aspects of cities, including the idea that cities and architecture are produced not just by urban professionals like architects, planners and urban managers but are constantly remade by the general public through everyday usage; (2) Introducing new and overlooked spaces and objects of study, such as the practice of skateboarding; and (3) Intersecting architectural history with disciplines such as anthropology, critical theory, cultural studies, geography and urban history.</p> <p>Borden's major monograph in 2001 used philosopher Henri Lefebvre's ideas to examine how skateboarders adopt cities as pleasure-grounds, thereby showing how architecture is reproduced through the everyday practices of different users [d]. This allows cities and architecture to be seen not just as the products of architects and planners but as being remade every time a skateboarder uses these spaces. The monograph included detailed studies of: (i) The origins of skateboarding and its 50 year development into a global phenomenon; (ii) How specialist skateboarding terrains – skateparks, ramps, skateplazas etc. – have been designed and constructed; (iii) Subcultural aspects of skateboarding including graphics, language and ideologies; (iv) Skateboarding practices in city streets and other urban spaces, including its value as a performative critique of society, and its consequent benefits to skateboarders and non-skateboarders; and (v) Art, video, photography and other representations of skateboarding.</p> <p>Earlier, from 1994, Borden also collaborated on <i>Strangely Familiar</i>, an interdisciplinary research project which included a major academic book in which his chapter explored how skateboarders undertake a cultural and political critique of city spaces [b]. He worked with Jane Rendell (now a Professor in the UCL Bartlett School of Architecture), Joe Kerr and Alicia Pivaro on a multi-venue exhibition with associated catalogue [a], with his exhibition contribution delineating the history of skateboarding in cities and public spaces worldwide. This project also, in more general terms, rethought the city through alternative historical narratives and everyday life, thus helping to 'understand the complex intersection of architecture, cities and urban living' [a; p. 8].</p> |
| 3. References to the research <p>[a] Borden, I. & Rendell, J. (1995, curators), <i>Strangely Familiar: Architecture and Urban Narrative</i>, exhibition with catalogue held first at the Royal Institute of British Architects, London (December 1995 – March 1996) and then the Cornerhouse, Manchester (April – May 1996); The Angle, Birmingham (June – July 1996); Matthew Gallery, Edinburgh (November 1996 – January 1997).</p> <p>[b] Borden, I., Kerr, J., Pivaro, A. & Rendell, J. (1996, eds.) <i>Strangely Familiar: Narratives of</i></p> |

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Architecture and the City, London: Routledge. [Available on request]

[c] Borden, I., Kerr, J., Pivaro, A. & Rendell, J. (2000, eds.) *The Unknown City: Contesting Architecture and Social Space*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press. Positively reviewed in *CITY, Environment & Planning A, European Planning Studies, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* and *Urban Design Quarterly*. [ISBN: 978-0262523356; Available on request]

[d] Borden, I. (2001) *Skateboarding, Space and the City: Architecture and the Body*, Oxford: Berg. Positively reviewed in *International Journal of the History of Sport* and *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*. [ISBN: 978-1859734933; Available on request]

The quality of the underpinning research is demonstrated by positive reviews in scholarly publications noted above, in addition to the high esteem of the publishing houses, public bodies, arts organisations and galleries that commissioned or produced the outputs. The RIBA is the main UK body for architects; while Berg, MIT Press and Routledge are globally respected publishers.

4. Details of the impact

The general public and most journalists view skateboarding with bemusement and bewilderment, being unable to understand how an activity largely regarded as child's play should be practiced by millions. Borden's research has played a key role in challenging this notion. He has demonstrated that these informal spaces are an important part of urban space, and thus has helped create a paradigm shift reaching across the world in how the general public, media professionals and design professionals – as well as skateboarders themselves – understand these spaces and the communities who inhabit them.

Impacts on the public understanding of skateboarding:

The *reach* of Borden's impact is demonstrated by the number and wide range of media and public engagement outlets, reaching a diverse international audience through feature articles, interviews (in print and on television), exhibitions, public talks and documentaries. Its *significance* is demonstrated by the broad shifts in public opinion regarding skateboarding, whereby the public now no longer consider skateboarding to be a craze enjoyed by children, or a disorderly activity practiced by troublesome youth, but a positive form of exercise with widespread benefits to modern society. Thanks to this shift in understanding, the 'Long Live Southbank' campaign to keep skateboarding at London's Southbank Centre (see below) has gained over 50,000 members [1].

As the first and only major account of skateboarding, this monograph [d], and Borden himself, are the major resource for journalists and organisers of public events seeking to better understand skateboarding and its rise in popularity from the 1970s onwards. Articles such as Borden's 'Skateboarders are essential for our cities' in *The Independent*, originally written in 2001, remain widely read, with its great public significance demonstrated by this having been that newspaper's seventh most viewed article in March 2012 [2]. The research reach extends beyond the UK – for example, Borden has been interviewed by the *Salt Lake City Weekly* (4 September 2008) [3], and for a Spanish television news documentary on skateboarding by Televisa (February 2008).

The comprehensive exploration in his book of the history and value of skateboarding has also been of great interest to artistic producers seeking to investigate skateboarding, and for whom Borden's research provides intellectual frameworks, interpretive categories and specific data. For example, an extended interview with Borden – along with book extracts – provided the main rationale, structure and inter-titles for the avant-garde film *Hacking the Streets* (directed by Sangam Sharma, 2009-10). This film explores the 'appropriation of urban space and the perception of architecture by the subculture of skateboarders' by using Borden's research on Lefebvre's concepts of space, skateboard-city interfaces, super-architectural space, micro-spaces, spatial-degree zero, political meanings and cultural values. Borden's commentary forms over 50% (17:32 minutes of a total 34:50 minutes) of that film, which was shown at the Jihlava Documentary Film Festival in the Czech Republic (2010), Festival OFNI in Poitiers (2011) and Festival Cinéma Brive (2011) [4].

Borden's 2001 book has also impacted on the preparations, rationale and content of art exhibitions such as *Rise of Rad: Influence of Skate Culture on Contemporary Art*, Torrance Museum, California (24 July – 4 September 2010), which quoted from it in both the exhibition and catalogue. Borden has advised and been interviewed about skatepark design for the Nutopia and National

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Geographic television documentary on *The 80s: the Decade That Made Us* (May 2013), and for the Channel 4 documentary, *Concrete Circus* (2011), directed by noted documentary-maker Mike Christie, and which had 916,800 viewers on release [5].

Skateboarding at the South Bank Centre:

In 2012-13, the contemporary relevance of Borden's research was demonstrated when it was announced that London's Southbank Centre (SBC) intended to turn its Undercroft beneath the Queen Elizabeth Hall into a retail destination. The Undercroft space was first skateboarded in 1975 and has long been considered as the sport's original home in the UK. From the beginning, SBC managers considered skateboarders an unwelcome nuisance, and so considered moving them off the site. Borden's research was used in the arguments against this plan. The campaign has now led to wider public understanding of the place of skateparks, and particularly the Undercroft, as part of London's lived heritage; it is ongoing and intensifying at the end of the REF impact period.

As an example, Borden was interviewed about skateboarding's art, design, cultural and social worth, subculture and politics in the *Save the Southbank* documentary on skateboarding (directed by Winstan Whitter and Toby Schuall, released 1 February 2008), where his comments form over 25% (5:53 minutes of 22:45 minutes) of the running time, using his research to contribute to the argument to retain skateboarding at the venue [6]. This video had over 3,900 plays on Vimeo and was, in 2013, an integral part of the concerted campaign to retain skateboarding at the Southbank. It was used by popular skateboard websites to mobilise skateboarders; Stereophonic Supply Co., for example, stated that *'this excellent and well reasoned documentary goes straight to the heart of the debate'* [7]. Borden also contributed through his writings in the skateboard-specialist press, such as "Hallowed Grounds: Skateboarding at the Southbank Centre" in the alternative sports magazine, *Huck* (June/July 2013) [8]. In 2013 alone, Borden was interviewed and/or consulted on this subject by Al Jazeera TV, ARD TV (Germany), BBC London Radio, LBC Radio. *Building Design, Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Independent, The Times and Tampa Bay Times*.

From April to July 2013, Borden was involved in negotiations to retain part of the original Undercroft area, contributing both to the SBC proposals for and to the 'Long Live Southbank' activist group [9]. His longstanding research into the cultural value of skateboarding fed into to public talks at the SBC, and into giving advice to its managers, which in turn facilitated a reversal of SBC policy, with the allocation in March 2013 of £1 million funds and a permanent SBC site for skateboarding and other urban arts such as BMX and graffiti [10]. This new, prime site under the Hungerford Bridge will offer 1,200m² of space and 9 million footfall per annum (improving on the 1,100m² and 7 million footfall at the Undercroft location). Using his research into skateboarding subculture, practices and politics, Borden, with Richard Holland, acted as lead SBC consultants for the new site and were responsible in mid-2013 for writing its design brief (finalised 26 July 2013), inviting specialist skateboard facility designers, assessing their proposals, and undertaking initial consultations. This design brief was a major development of Borden's ideas, first implemented at Milton Keynes (see below), of creating everyday designs for skateboardable urban spaces – here with even greater consideration of using common urban materials such as brick and stone (not smooth concrete), street steps and benches (not spectacular forms), and encouraging the integrated use of the site by skateboarders, BMX riders, graffiti-writers, parkour and general public.

Provision of tailored skateboarding facilities by architects and urban managers:

An important question for architects and urban managers today is how to provide and design facilities suitable for alternative sports (like skateboarding) without diminishing their counter-cultural nature. Borden's work on the history and development of skatepark design, together with his exploration of skateboarding practices and subcultures, enabled him to give valuable advice to municipal authorities, charities, architects and urban designers, leading to the establishment of skateboarding facilities and recognition of the need to preserve them in the UK and United States.

In June – September 2002, Borden drew on his research on skateboarding design and subculture to advise Milton Keynes on how it could take advantage of its status as *'as one of the top five cities in the world for street skating'* by producing skateboard facilities which were more like ordinary streets ('skateplazas') and less like distinct purpose-designed terrains ('skateparks'). Borden gave a talk to Milton Keynes council planners and participated in two workshops sessions with an architect, Richard Ferrington, community workers and local skateboarders, following which

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Ferrington and skateboarder Rob Selley designed the £100k Buszy facility (opened March 2005). Widely acknowledged as the UK's first skateplaza, it has been described by some professional skateboarders as *'the best spot they have ever skated'* [11]. Its success led to the establishment of 100+ similar municipal facilities in the UK, ranging from the 600m² Fisher Lane Park in Mansfield (established 2009, budget of £96k), the 900m² Kingshill in Cirencester (2013, £200k), the 3,200m² Central Forest Park in Stoke (2005, £561k), and the 2,400m² Prissick Plaza in Middlesbrough (2006, £600k). All were based on principles laid out by Borden's research and as first implemented in Milton Keynes. These skateplazas remain extremely popular amongst both planners and skateboarders, as indicated by a comment in 2012 by *Skates and Ladders*, the respected UK guide on where to skateboard, that the Buszy *'is easily one of the best block spots in the country'* [12]. This experience hence shaped Borden's more recent contribution to the SBC redesign.

Finally, Borden's pioneering research into the history of skateboarding facility design and provision – which recognises skateparks as important architectural products of design and cultural value – has also had an impact on their historic preservation. For example, Borden in January – February 2013 advised English Heritage on the listing of an original 1970s skatepark, and as a result of this advice an application to list the 3,150m² Rom skatepark in Essex was underway in June – July 2013. Borden also provided video evidence on 11 June 2013 to Tampa's Historic Preservation Commission regarding the 1978 Perry Harvey Skatepark in Tampa, Florida, USA, which, on 25 July 2013, was duly recommended by the Florida National Register review board for official designation and protection on the National Register of Historic Places [13].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

[1] 'Long Live Southbank' membership figures, indicating the shift in public opinion towards support for retaining skateboarding at the venue [<http://www.llsb.com/membership/>]

[2] Screenshot of statistics on Borden's *Independent* article of 12 March 2012, showing the enduring significance of his writings on skateboarding for the general public (Available on request)

[3] Press article showing the public significance of Borden's research [<http://tinyurl.com/q8v33k9>]

[4] *Hacking the Streets* documentary film, showing the degree to which Borden's research has impacted both on the film's content and structure [<http://vimeo.com/64492566>]

[5] Viewing figures for the *Concrete Circus* film, showing the widespread public interest in skateboarding and other urban sports [Available on request]

[6] *Save the Southbank* documentary film (released 1 Feb 2008); with its viewing numbers showing the impact of Borden's research on the arguments used to support skateboarding in public spaces [<http://vimeo.com/32716340>]

[7] Borden's work in the public sphere has been used as an integral part of popular and public campaigns in support of skateboarding, e.g. Stereophonic Supply Company [<http://bit.ly/HtXZ9S>] and also the UK Skateboarding Association [<http://bit.ly/17w2qvh>]

[8] For the way in which his research is an integral part of public campaigns in support of skateboarding, see Borden, I., 'Hallowed Grounds: Skateboarding at the Southbank Centre', *Huck* 39 (June/July 2013), pp. 74–75 [Available on request]

[9] Two articles demonstrating how Borden's research is used as an integral part of public campaigns in support of skateboarding [<http://tinyurl.com/pzqfabc> and <http://tinyurl.com/o7jzprc>]

[10] Web article and also official press release from Southbank Centre (9 September 2013) reporting on work completed by June – July 2013 on the briefing, identifying and assessing design proposals for a new permanent SBS space for skateboarding [<http://tinyurl.com/pesqjxu>]

[11] Items showing popularity of the skateplaza format in Milton Keynes, e.g. Buszy as the best spot some have ever skated [<http://bit.ly/17rS55F> and <http://www.rudi.net/books/6911>]

[12] Endorsement by *Skates and Ladders* of Borden's 'skateplaza' format [<http://bit.ly/19RfydY>]

[13] Successful campaigns to preserve old skateboarding facilities in Tampa [<http://bit.ly/Hezq9B>, <http://bit.ly/16kHTJ7> and <http://tinyurl.com/o47cvwm>, in which Borden appears at 58:10–01:01:35]