

# Young People's Participation in the Renaissance of Public Space— A Case Study in Newcastle upon Tyne, UK

**Peter Rogers**

*School of Environment and Development  
University of Manchester*

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## Comment on This Article

### **Abstract**

Clear tensions are apparent in the assessment and participation of young people in the cities of today, particularly in relation to changing decision-making structures in design-led regeneration strategies in contemporary city centers. These strategies are often driven by economic rather than civic imperatives, raising questions about the systems of participation and consultation throughout the regeneration process. This paper assesses these tensions by first giving a broad policy context to the "urban renaissance" and "Youth Matters" policy guidance in the UK and then grounding this with reference to an empirical case study of redevelopment targeting young people in the city center of Newcastle upon Tyne. This addresses both the *explicit inclusion* of young people as well as the *implicit exclusion* of youth from key spaces and decisions.

**Keywords:** youth participation, skateboarding, exclusion, participatory processes, Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom

In recent years the social geography of young people has become a central theme in social and spatial research, spanning spatial and cultural geography (Valentine et al. 1998), subcultural research and tribal youth debates (Bennet 1999; 2000; Maffesoli 1996), and policy-oriented debates on transitions from childhood to adulthood (Furlong and Cartmel 1997; MacDonald 1997; MacDonald and Marsh 2001; MacDonald et al. 2001). Research into the urban renaissance of towns and cities in the UK has also developed rapidly over recent years (Imrie and Raco 2003; Lees 2003; Morrison 2003; Raco 2003; Moulaert et al. 2004). This paper seeks to integrate the policy contexts of "urban renaissance" and "youth matters" with an overview of an empirical case study. The study explores the boundaries and paradoxes of youth participation in the context of urban space, the use of public spaces by young people, and a redevelopment project targeting youth skateboarding in the city center of Newcastle upon Tyne in the United Kingdom.

The empirical part of this paper draws from ongoing research into socio-spatial exclusion of young people occurring as a result of renaissance-driven redevelopment. This is often, as this case demonstrates, manifest as *implicit* exclusions or the "displacement" of young people through the process of consultation and design. Furthermore, these often coexist with more *explicit* tactics of targeted "dispersal" that seek to move the nuisance of youth from commercial areas. In the Newcastle case study, this is discussed with a focus on the erection of a skate park as an area specifically intended to be a prescribed space for youth located away from commercial redevelopment areas.

The coordination of these efforts will be discussed, highlighting specific examples of contradictions between the rhetoric of explicit provision and the reality of implicit exclusion as they appeared in the increasingly retail and commercial public space network of central Newcastle upon Tyne.

### **UK Policy Context: The Urban Renaissance**

"Renaissance" has become a buzz word in academic research on British cities largely as a result of the 1999 Urban Task Force report. This group was tasked with investigating British urban policy, setting the broad thematic agenda for arresting urban decline, and thus contributing to the redefinition of the city and its socio-economic role in the UK. The final report, *Towards an Urban Renaissance* (D.E.T.R. 1999; 2000), was an attempt to bring the UK into line with the high standards set by recent European urban redevelopments, "cultural" planning and regeneration (Evans 2001; Vigar et al. 2005). The Urban White Paper states that public space must be:

*somewhere to relax and enjoy the urban experience, a venue for a range of different activities, from outdoor eating to street entertainment; from sport and play to a venue for civic or political functions; and most importantly of all as a place for walking and sitting out* (D.E.T.R. 1999, cited in Amin et al. 2000).

It implicitly stresses that urban design needs to focus on mixed uses where "careful planning, design and siting can be used to resolve potential conflicts" (D.E.T.R. 1999, 72). Importantly, the wider agenda of "urban renaissance" has also highlighted the importance of "effective engagement and participation by local people, groups and businesses, especially in the planning, design and long-

term stewardship of their community, and an active voluntary and community sector" (O.D.P.M. 2004b).

These are important factors in the UK agenda of community sustainability as a part of the wider framework of local government attempts to engage with urban "renewal." However, meaningful and effective involvement of the community as a whole is apparently not a key priority of this agenda, which often appears to privilege the needs of commercial stakeholders over the input of street level citizens (Merrifeild 1996).

Other key aspects of the Urban Task Force report emphasized design-led regeneration prioritized the redevelopment of brownfield sites and open spaces in declining urban areas; pressed local authorities to create comprehensive strategies (detailing specific tactics of regeneration for the economy, planning and culture of the locality); urged redesign of streets and open spaces to promote and encourage more viable uses (for the integration of communities); the widespread regeneration of the urban environment and, most significantly, emphasized the importance of partnerships with the private sector (O.D.P.M. 1999; see also Lees 2003). These themes further bring out the potential tensions in consultation practices that target powerful investors instead of vulnerable citizens. The Task Force particularly lacked a meaningful focus on the role of young people in the city, especially in the city center (Rogers 2003b). This is also visible in the portrayal and tactical management of youth (Hay 1995; Doyle 1998; Hil and Besant 1999; Collins and Kearns 2001a; Aiken 2001), as well as other vulnerable minority groups such as the homeless (Daly 1998), the criminal (Beck and Willis 1995; Oc and Tiesdell 1997; Silverman and Della-Giustina 2001), and the disabled (Gleeson 1998).

The differential treatment of users in the tactics of spatial management suggests that an implicit categorization of citizenship underpins the urban renaissance (Rogers 2003a). New demographics of citizens are redefined and prioritized by the desirability or anti-sociability of their public activity, for example by rating the desirability of having cyclists against skateboards in the city center, or "straight" or "gay" couples demonstrating affection in public (Reeve 1996). Such prescriptive categories of acceptable behavior and activity are increasingly defined by legislation at the tactical, rather than strategic, level and championed by new managerial institutions of public-private partnership—such as Town and City Centre Management (Reeve 1996).

The new urban renaissance appears thus to induct a specific form of governance, driven by a targeted thematic coordination of institutions, strategies and tactics of policy across a range of economic imperatives, framing renaissance as economic growth and environmental—as opposed to social—renewal (MacLeod 2002). Wider participation in the development of youth spatial provision as part of the planning process stands in sharp conflict with the needs of property-holders and developers (Simpson 1997b, 914-916). Nonetheless, studies have demonstrated that the means of participation and the nature of provisions for young people throughout cities carry significant implications (Cooper 1998, 469; Lees 2003, 74). As such, a deeper focus on the stated policy of youth participation is required.

### **Hegemony, Youth and Space: "Youth Matters" in Participation**

As key users of public space, a powerful consumer demographic and the "young professionals" of tomorrow, young people should be at the center of urban renaissance. Yet, they remain awkwardly balanced between policy rhetorics of provision and protection, and are subject to increasing demonization and legislation (Valentine 2004). Despite criticism levied at the UK government for a disjointed stance on community, and specifically youth, recent work from central government, particularly the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (O.D.P.M.), continues to privilege economic discourses of inter-urban competitiveness as the central focus of regeneration above concerns over citizenship for minority groups, such as youth (O.D.P.M. 2004a). A central quandary, thus, is the absence of a strong youth voice in the strategy, policy and processes of urban renaissance.

There are several key groups that lobby in defense of young people and their "right to the city." The National Youth Agency (NYA) and the Local Government Association (LGA) coordinated the development of the "Hear by Right" (Wade et al. 2001) operating standards for the inclusion of young people in local democracy in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), to which the UK has subscribed. Furthermore, emerging strategic guidance on youth services has been generated from a range of actors and published as a central government green paper through the Department of Education and Skills (DfES 2005). The *Every Child Matters* (DfES 2003) green paper identifies five key outcomes that need to be focused upon in improving the orientation and delivery of youth services:

1. being healthy: enjoying good physical and mental health and living a healthy lifestyle
2. staying safe: being protected from harm and neglect
3. enjoying and achieving: getting the most out of life and developing the skills for adulthood
4. making a positive contribution: being involved with the community and society and not engaging in anti-social or offending behavior
5. economic well-being: not being prevented by economic disadvantage from achieving full potential in life.

Proposals made in the subsequent *Youth Matters* DfES green paper (2005) further develop responses to these gaps in urban and other youth related policy and best practice and key action areas:

1. how to engage more young people in positive activities and empower them to shape the services they receive
2. how to encourage more young people to volunteer and become involved in their communities
3. how to provide better information, advice and guidance to young people to help them make informed choices about their lives
4. how to provide better and more personalized intensive support for each young person who has serious problems or gets into trouble

Though the DfES recommended responses to these above action points, they are currently in the consultation phases of ratification and lack a specific spatial emphasis in terms of giving young people a space to call their own in the city.

Tensions between the role and perception of young people in policy can be linked to the perpetual public panic over the morality of youth, which has hit new peaks in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. For example, the high profile given to the problem of young "gangs" and "yobs,"<sup>1</sup> represents a synchronous demonization of young people in the popular media (Anon 2004; Connor 2004; Craig 2004; Hastings 2004; Wheeler 2004) that legitimizes the increasing restriction of young people and their activities in public spaces (Eubanks-Owens 1997). This has been supported by a central government that encourages intervention and behavioral legislation within a broad, yet vague, framework of "ensuring respect" (HMSO 2003) in response to growing public concerns over apparently unruly and dangerous youths in public space (Rogers and Coaffee 2005).

The above performance targets in youth policy reflect a disjointed understanding of youth as a political demographic; the "zero-tolerance" (Collins and Kearns 2001b) approaches to "nuisance" behavior (Cloke and Jones 2005) has created a perception of youth as a problem to be solved.

The combination of privileging private sector interests in participatory processes, the lack of a spatial understanding of young people's needs, and the exclusion of youth from meaningful consultation have the potential to create a climate of "renaissance" that may mask an agenda of exclusion through the very policies and provisions that seek to provide youth-specific redevelopment.

### **Excluding Youth through Policy, Provision and Redevelopment?**

It can be argued that many of the changes in the conceptual orientation of urban renaissance embed a certain commercial aesthetic into consultation practices by emphasizing the benefits of close relationships with commercial stakeholders and large scale redevelopments over locally specific community requirements (Atkinson 2003). The ways this orientation is reflected in traditional youth provisions as well as in consultations with young people suggest that while the youth policy green papers introduced above have a bearing on the future of youth inclusion, they do not offer a more central position to young citizens in regard to the wider goals of renaissance. The problematic application of entrepreneurial imperatives to participation continue to privilege commercial stakeholders over young people, causing tensions in the redevelopment of central city urban public spaces (Merrifeild 1996; Pearce 1998; Atkinson and Laurier 1998; Morrison 2003). Presently, "new civic spaces appear to be concealing more active geographies of displacement and marginality" (MacLeod 2002, 613) as opposed to creating more inclusive urban environments.

Cloke and Jones highlight the challenge young people pose to the new, safe, clean and ordered aesthetics of urban space by looking at "acceptability" and the perceptions of young people as "disordering" the clean and safe adult-oriented commercial urban environment:

*However ordered or unordered those street spaces may be, children are able to disorder the street as an adult space when they transgress spatial and/or temporal boundaries and thereby enter a more liminal, hybrid and*

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<sup>1</sup> "Yobs" is a slang term in the UK denoting irreverent and often violent, undereducated young people, predominantly male but not exclusively.

*between world. Such disordering of space is often accompanied by a moral signification of the landscapes involved... The disordered spaces of childhood, then, represent moral landscapes subject both to romanticism and to the risk of unchecked desire* (Cloke and Jones 2005, 312, emphasis added).

The fears of general disorder and the potential criminality of youth embedded in the new agenda of "respect" have been expressed through implied moral imperatives that connect attempts to redevelop and regenerate the contemporary city with a redefinition and stricter regulation of anti-social behavior and public order in the new city. Consequently, the management of youth—and the perception of youths' often playful disorder in public space—need to be addressed in policy and research with more clarity.

The present trend toward "laws [that] tend to facilitate the control of children in urban spaces rather than to allow them to participate actively in the shaping of that environment" (Simpson 1997a, 909), exacerbates the "planner's dilemma" (Freeman and Riordan 2002) in locating youth-specific features—such as skate parks—that do not fit with the aesthetic and privileged uses of the commercially driven urban renaissance. Questions over the legitimacy of youth inclusion highlight the need for a better understanding of the role of youth participation and consultations on design and location, and demonstrates the need for a new appraisal of the success and failure of these methods to impact decision-making in real terms (Burton 2004).

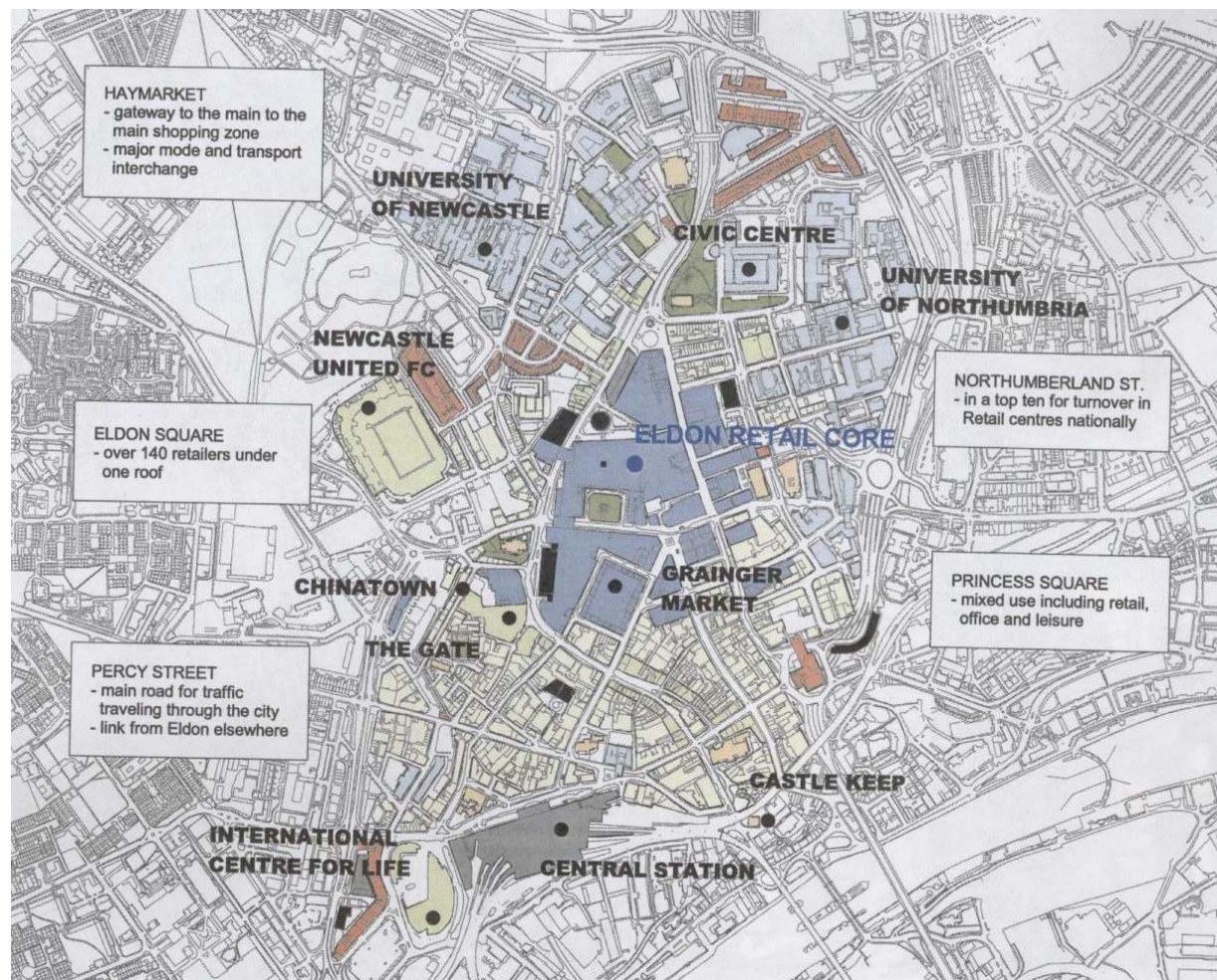
### **Skateboarding, Culture and the City: The Newcastle Scenario**

Attempts to bring on a new and inclusive urban renaissance in Newcastle city center began in earnest in the 1990s, building on the previous efforts of the so-called "evangelistic bureaucrats" of the 1960s, T. Dan Smith and chief planner Wilfred Burns, who created an autocratic and non-pragmatic "planning atmosphere" (Davies 1972). A renewed vigor in the Newcastle city council, inspired in part by a shift in power between political parties (Coaffee and Healy 2002), was complemented with a host of city center renewal policies funded by the national government. These were widely based on the renovation and re-use of the historic quarters of the city for mixed-use business developments and apartment housing. However, a range of attempts to improve public spaces were also "rolled out," with associated statutory efforts made to "tick the boxes" of required public consultation and push through the redevelopments—seen as necessary to create a regional capital of culture for the North East of England. These strategic policies included a series of comprehensive plans (N.C.C. 2002; 2003; 2005) which gave the compact city center (see Figure 1) a specific commercial emphasis, particularly around the large central shopping district. The plans also linked to international trends in attracting inward investment and the experiences of "new urbanism" in the U.S. (N.C.C. 2004).

Newcastle's new skate park was one of many medium-scale redevelopments built during the present period of urban renewal, but it is the only significant effort that has been made to provide a youth space near the city center. Nonetheless, the skate park has become a landmark success in the provision of a youth-oriented development. However, the tensions that arose due to the targeted nature of the youth consultation, and the decisions that were ultimately made, irrespective of request or requirement, demonstrate how youth may be

effectively displaced *through* the act of provision. Unpacking the development of the skate park with an emphasis on the consultation process focuses the following discussion of youth-specific provision on this key issue.

**Figure 1. Map of Newcastle upon Tyne city center**



Source: NEXUS and Newcastle University

### **Consultation Round 1: Youth “Needs and Wants” in the City Center**

Preliminary consultation exercises were franchised out to the voluntary community sector. These local experts then focused the initial consultation on “youth needs and wants” by conducting questionnaires and “vox-pop” styled interviews in the Old Eldon Square area at peak times of use. This is an area long renowned as the central gathering location of young people in the city—itsself a source of tensions in the local community and targeted for commercial redevelopment under the strategic renaissance plans.<sup>2</sup>

Young people’s needs and wants were highly fragmented. The dominant percentage wanted to see a BMX (bicycle motocross) or skate park (17 percent) or a youth center (7 percent). Others more generally described a need for more affordable leisure (15 percent), less police harassment (6 percent), or a place to

<sup>2</sup> The problems of supplying any holistic youth provision as a solution to “the problem of youth” in the city center are noted in this research.

get help or advice (4 percent); the most significant percentage, however, were loosely categorized as "other" (32 percent) (Thompson et al. 2001, 5). Significantly the "other" was considered so fragmented—the individual opinion of single respondents—that these were disregarded as statistically insignificant and were not considered in potential provisions.

Statistically the most requested provision suggested by this research was a skate park (17 percent). A skate park provision could also potentially provide more affordable leisure for a large demographic of young people. Additionally, it potentially represented a substantial financial investment as well as offered a solution to the tensions caused by the perception of skating as dangerous and potentially criminal, particularly with respect to public architecture (Young 2002a; Young 2002b).

Second to the skate park in the survey was a request for a youth center in the city center itself (7 percent). This had been previously raised by the youth parliament and, according to largely anecdotal evidence, was denied due to problems locating a venue and procuring funding. Further, there were concerns that the city center was not an appropriate location for a youth center due to fears of the potential criminality and social disorder created by young people, highlighted by the local press with headlines on the "blight" of "gang brawling" (Young 2003). This suggests that young people are seen as a "nuisance" when they gather for play in commercial public spaces. Thus, the only space perceived to be appropriate for young people is the pre-ordained "play space" of the urban park or playground—something not evident in the city center—and not the preferred "disorderly space" (Cloke and Jones 2005) young people create for themselves by re-appropriating the city (Miles 2003).

### **Consultation Round 2: Verifying the Need for a Skate Park**

The mobilization of key actors and broad consultation was a lengthy process, covering roughly two years (2000-2002). While the skate park represented a significant redevelopment targeting young people, the youth services division in the city council were engaged only marginally. The voluntary and community sector agencies played a much more active role, and parks management and street services liaised with these groups and took responsibility for managing the process, along with the local police. The significance of this in the Newcastle context is that the youth services in local government were unable to build on the successes that occurred due to their unintentional disenfranchisement that resulted from the empowerment of local experts in the voluntary and community sectors. These charitable agencies came to be regarded within the city council as key intermediaries or liaisons, yet they had no power within the government structure and as such their expertise remained advisory.

The council recognized the benefits of accessing specialized knowledge, and commissioned the skate culture specialist consultants Tribe to validate the prospective choices of site made by the council. A temporary skate park was created in conjunction with the Mela Asian food festival. This took place over a bank Holiday weekend in August 2002, and was located at the site identified by the council as a "preferred location" for any potential redevelopment. At this event, Tribe consultants assessed the number of skaters, charted the level of interest from the local skating community and compiled information through questionnaires (255 completed questionnaires were collected). The consultation



report provided by this group also identified measures that could be used to help focus skating activity away from the city center, including identifying key skate locations, suggesting anti-skate measures and looking at alternative locations for the skate park.

Expertise of this type was able to “promot[e] a pro-skating agenda with a word of caution,” (Grafham 2002) highlighting the pros and cons of development and tensions in the initial plans. They also recommended against an “out of the box” skate park, instead encouraging the engagement of local skaters in the design of the park. The aim was thus to provide an open-ended analysis of the skate culture in Newcastle and offer recommendations for the next steps towards provision of a youth facility that would benefit the council’s need to proactively manage the city center. Tribe’s assessment was that a large skate community existed in Newcastle, and the development of a skate park would relieve some of the pressure on the city center’s public spaces. They acknowledged, however, that this kind of provision would not be a wholesale solution to the problems associated with skating, and concurrent practices of anti-skating measures would be inevitable:

*The subculture that we are focusing on largely has its roots in the streets and urban architecture. In providing a permanent skate park, or purpose-built facilities, we are offering an alternative to the ‘adopted’ sites in the city center. It is a positive measure by the council with which to support anti-skate measures elsewhere in the city (Grafham 2002).*

The implicit aim in the review of the city center’s public spaces thus was to “reduce skaters on the streets” (Grafham 2002, 18) and in public spaces by combining provision of a sanctioned facility with legislative criminalization of the activity of skating elsewhere in the city center. The council would be able to achieve this without an antagonistic whole-scale ban of the activity, but instead by engendering a more gentle “displacement” through provision:

*...a good skate facility in the area, offering the challenges that the skaters need and a place they can take ownership of, will reduce skaters on the streets, and make it easier for skaters when restrictive measures are put in place (Grafham 2002, 18).*

### **Consultation Round 3: The Design Consultation**

The combination of these planning efforts, growing press coverage of the issue, and pressure on local councilors by small business owners to implement anti-skating legislation developed into an awareness among council officers that skating was “more than a fad,” as declared by one officer in an interview. The ongoing consultation over the next 18 months included follow-up sessions in central city venues and the gathering of a willing group of participants from the skating and BMX riding communities into a consulting panel on the design of the park—given the moniker “skate park steering group.” The skate park steering group was set up by contacting individuals who had participated in the Tribe consultation, including a range of skaters (skate boarders, BMXers, and inline skaters) aged 12-35. This further demonstrated that there existed a coherent community of participants across the city as a whole and that they gathered in certain areas of the city center to engage skating as a communal social activity legitimating the substantial provision of skating architecture.

According to interviews with key staff, the council came to see the creation of a skate park as necessary, both in the interests of providing for youth activity and for protection of the public architecture in the city center areas where skaters traditionally gathered. Financial research was also commissioned to assess the potential cost of such a project, and the consultation budget included hiring a specialist skate park designer to liaise with the steering group. The skate park designer worked with the panel on the scale of the area, the budget restraints and the types of features required by those who would be using the park, and to create a design that fulfilled all the requirements for safety, possible competitions, lighting (e.g., floodlights for night-riders), access (who and at what age may people use the park) and other issues.

In planning this project the city council had to be aware of other interests, such as plans for a botanical garden in the favored redevelopment area. Also, negotiating with local community groups and obtaining planning permission for the project had to be achieved before the final decision to give funding to this endeavor was made. Because of the size of the investment, it took approximately 18 months of negotiation to procure funds and begin consultation on the design and delivery of the park but this was approved in 2002. The planning proposal was submitted by the Head of Planning and Transport to the city council during August of 2003 (Davidson 2003). The skate-park redevelopment began quickly afterwards, and the build was completed in the spring of 2004.

### **Success, Failure and Missed Opportunities in Youth Participation**

Through the hard work and commitment demonstrated by several council members and local police officers, the wider strategic approach of engaging young people in governance to deliver the skate park demonstrated some key elements of good practice. However, there are also lessons to be learned from the issues raised by young people through these design consultation.

It was clear that young people wanted security and access to be main features of the park, and that they had the specialized knowledge of the materials used in other skating environments, this specialist knowledge would help in ensuring that the park would be well used. Also, the incorporation of young people from the skate community into the design process was a significant success—so much so that tentative attempts were made to incorporate this panel into other areas of the council's youth services. These attempts were met with mixed responses from young people; some simply shrugged while others were enthusiastic. Nonetheless, once the skate park build was undertaken, the contacts with these user groups that had been painstakingly built up through the steering panel sessions were allowed to dissipate. This may have been the result of poor internal links between the council services as well as the peripheral nature of youth services throughout the design meetings highlighted above. Whatever the cause, the potential to foster meaningful rapport with the skate community was a missed opportunity.

An example of where this has been successful, however, can also be found in Newcastle, through the use of "participatory appraisal" in research related to the city council's "graffiti forum" (Fuller et al. 2003). In participatory appraisal, community members themselves are tasked with helping to run research, are educated through the collection of information, the contribution of opinions and

dissemination of that research and information back to the sponsors. When successful, this leads to an increased potential for mobilizing and motivating the community into collective action on the key themes of research (Fuller et al. 2003, 13-14).

There were elements of this in the skate park consultation process. Mobilizing people through design created links with the graffiti community; using Tribe as a liaison group unpacked the cultural language of skaters and translated it for the council into terms they could understand. However, the use of temporary intermediaries meant that despite improving the form and content of what was actually provided for youth, little meaningful dialogue, understanding or respect was built between the community and the council (as an institution), only between the community and the intermediary. Despite this, the skate park steering group's connections to the graffiti forum led to the decoration of the park by local artists and a sense of ownership of the park among the contributors from the skate and BMX community (though this was limited to those few participants who attended the meetings).

The Newcastle city council followed up the good practice they began by trying to engage the skater community in events, though efforts rolled out slowly and with little further significant financial investment. A weekend skate event at the skate park was organized—heralded in panel meetings as a launch event— but it took place over six months after the official opening of the park to the public. The council sought to build on its successes by launching a dedicated website for youth-related services ([www.alreet.com](http://www.alreet.com)), but this was operated independently of the participatory consultations with the skate community by youth services. The park is now (in 2006) left largely under the management of the users. The financial investment of development apparently fulfilled the managerial obligation of the council. Although this hands-off approach could perhaps be seen as an effort toward empowerment, the fact is that the low maintenance requirements of the skate park were a significant reason it received funding. Similarly, the lack of a consistent follow-up on the focus groups gathered together during the design period suggests otherwise.

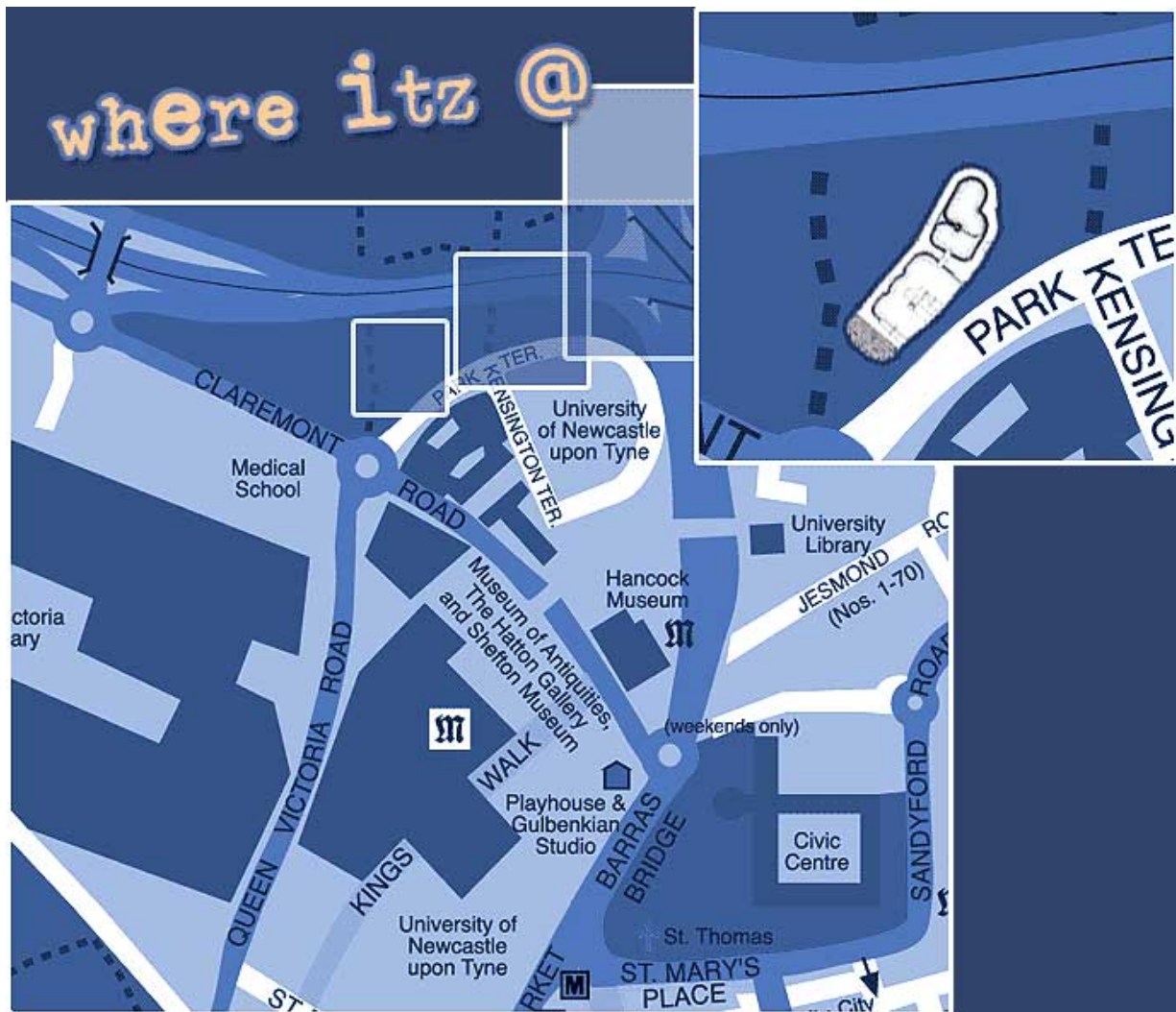
### **Location, Location, Location**

The location of the skate park reveals how the decision-making process resulted in the implicit displacement of young people from the city center. The fact that wider issues of youth policy and participation are problematic for the city council was made evident by the contract of specialists such as Tribe. Despite the potential for an integrated urban redevelopment, the Tribe report upheld the council's request that the location of skate park be directed towards the periphery. This was made more explicit by the directive of the council that Tribe use Exhibition Park (see Figure 2) for the temporary skate park event—an indication that this location was favored *before* the discussions with skaters took place. Further, Exhibition Park was suggested very early on in the process during an interview with a senior representative of the council as “an out of the way” spot where skaters “wouldn't be a bother to anyone”:

*We've talked to some of the young people about that and most of the ideas that they've come up with has been for a skate park, but most of all the skate park has been directed outside the city center to the exhibition park.*

It was made clear that the dominant request from young people was for a dedicated *city center* venue in which they could gather in safety and socialize without fear of reprisal or dispersal from security agencies. The skate park has potential to fulfill this requirement (Thompson 2001), although it does not take into account the fact that youth are not a homogenous group and not all young people are skaters. Despite these concerns the city council, on the advice of the Tribe group, fast-tracked the decision for a skate park with a peripheral location on the northern edge of the city center.

**Figure 2. Location of the skate park on the northern periphery of the city center**



source: Newcastle City Council [www.newcastle.gov.uk/skate.nsf/](http://www.newcastle.gov.uk/skate.nsf/)

The council's initial intention, negotiated with the Brandling Park Trust (a form of local residents association who are the custodians of the area), was to put the skate park underneath a nearby overpass at the far rear of the park. However, this raised concerns among the younger members of the steering group about safety, and the potential for such a marginal space to become derelict and dangerous. A subsequent renegotiation relocated the skate park to a well-lit and

open air location at the front of Exhibition Park, near the Newcastle University campus. The site had easy access routes to the city center and local transport, and was adjacent to a busy roundabout that would help cover the noise during the day. This was debated and contested as the skate event had taken place on the tennis courts in the park and the parks trust did not want to lose one form of sporting space for another. At the same time, the area proposed for the skate park had been suggested as a potential site for a botanical garden. The desirability of a peaceful and hazard-free redevelopment meant that there were debates over the appropriateness of bringing the skate park nearer the city center than the dividing line posed by the motorway overpass that splits Exhibition Park (see Figures 1 and 3). Such tensions were highlighted as another attempt to displace and disperse young people, as stated by a representative of a city center voluntary and community sector organization:

*To me its just about moving young people outside the city center which is just to get rid of the problem somewhere else, the young people are saying that they want to be in the city center; its where they meet people and what they want is a safe meeting place, they divven' deliberately go anywhere with the intention of upsetting anybody but that's the place where they gather and that seems to upset people for some reason. It's mainly because they're young I think.*

Locating the park at the northernmost edge of the city center was seen by this Voluntary and Community Sector representative as another attempt to redirect young people out of the commercial areas of the city center through strategic provision of youth-specific facilities. The youth consultation undertaken by the Tribe group was on the surface a positive effort made by the city council; however, it seems as though the expert knowledge of Tribe was used to gather knowledge that was then fitted by the council to its own commercial agenda. Significantly, of the seven areas highlighted as key skate "spots" by the Tribe report, four of them are now affected by a bylaw making skating an illegal activity. Most of these have also been targeted by new regeneration schemes with a commercial emphasis (Rogers and Coaffee 2005).

### **"Designing Out" Skate Activity**

The locally elected councilors expected that the skate park would solve all of the problems related to skating in the city center. Their view is reflected in the following words of a senior official, discussing the Old Eldon Square war memorial—another key area where young people gather:

*...we're not going to have policemen standing at every corner to kick them [young people] out. What we want is for there to be a natural change—a natural rebalancing of things—in Old Eldon Square.... If we've got more normal people walking through the center, going through Old Eldon Square and passing back into the center, more normal activity passing through the square, then it'll balance out how its used [emphasis added].*

This suggests many things. Of most importance is the implication in this statement that young people are not "normal," enforcing a conceptual "otherness" on young people. Second, there is the assumption that there would be significant changes to the city center, around Old Eldon Square in particular, once the skate park was redeveloped and changes to the design of the space

encouraged more footfalls in the area. Thus, once young people are displaced, there becomes “no real need...to impose any anti-skate measures at this site because the public [will be] doing a good enough job already” (Grafham 2002, 12).

The key point emerging from this is that the participation and provision processes surrounding the skate park appear to be driven not by the desire to provide a youth space, but by the need to remove young people from areas of the city center where their presence might discourage more affluent people from engaging in *normal* consumption. Increasing normal consumption by the affluent is arguably the key driver behind the wider renewal and regeneration of the city center—as specified in the key strategy applied to the city center (N.C.C. 2002).

In this situation, young people have been treated as passive subjects unless directly addressed by intermediaries. As a result, they have been subject to a wide range of efforts made by managers on their behalf, but with an undercurrent of an intention to relocate them to a more appropriate facility. This emphasis on relocation implicit in managerial policy in effect undermines the intentions of youth participation in the generation of policies for urban redevelopment.

### **The “Right to the City” vs. Displacement and Dispersal**

Skaters’ tensions with urban renaissance policy arise out of an active engagement with the space through the re-appropriation of use, i.e., skating (see Borden 2001a; 2001b). This leaves them subject to behavioral legislation as tactics of *displacement*. Other youth groups who gather in the city center are affected differently. Though an in-depth demographic discussion of the differences between youth cultures is not the purpose of this paper, it is useful to note that different youth cultures have different practices of “use” with regard to urban space. These are reflected in the disparity of “needs” (e.g., in the 32 percent of “other” responses in initial consultations), they are not reflected in the nature or form of the youth facilities provided.

Several young people interviewed in the city center related feelings that they may not be welcomed in the area by all other users. However, they simply did not let this negative external perception affect their social activity: more than one youth stated, “we’re not going anywhere—it’s our place to hang out.” Despite strategies targeted at relocating young people into a music-oriented venue as well as increasing interest in the use of antisocial behavior orders (ASBO’s) to control criminally inclined young people, they continue to gather in the liminal public spaces of the city center (Rogers and Coaffee 2005). In fact these marginal, disorderly spaces have been connected by other research (Cloke and Jones 2005) to the needs of children to enact autonomous activity free from the authorities that bind them in other spheres, such as the home and school. These spaces thus may be seen as central to the successful transition into autonomous and socially responsible adulthood. Yet, they are increasingly eliminated from the urban landscape (Cloke and Jones 2005; 321-323), in this case by targeted redevelopment aiming to engender a displacement of young people from Old Eldon Square in the center of the city through “designing out” the area in which they gather and concurrently providing an alternative location for a significant group (i.e., the skaters).

Further, this is coordinated with specific dispersals of young people occurring in Newcastle upon Tyne city center by the police who are the key group in keeping the "public order." In reality, the local police can only enact what are described in this work as "dispersal" tactics—i.e., moving on young people—if there are real, reported incidents of anti-social behavior.

Despite the focus of behavioral legislation on more serious "disorder" rather than nuisance behavior, such as skating, there are increasing indications that legislation of this type may act alongside explicit displacement tactics with implicit dispersal strategies. Thus displacement and dispersal coexist and affect a marginalization of young people from, and in fact through, the very process of engagement that aims to increase youth participation in governance. Thus the agenda of engagement in fact *masks* the broader social and spatial exclusion of young people underpinning the whole process of providing a voice in governance and a space in the city.

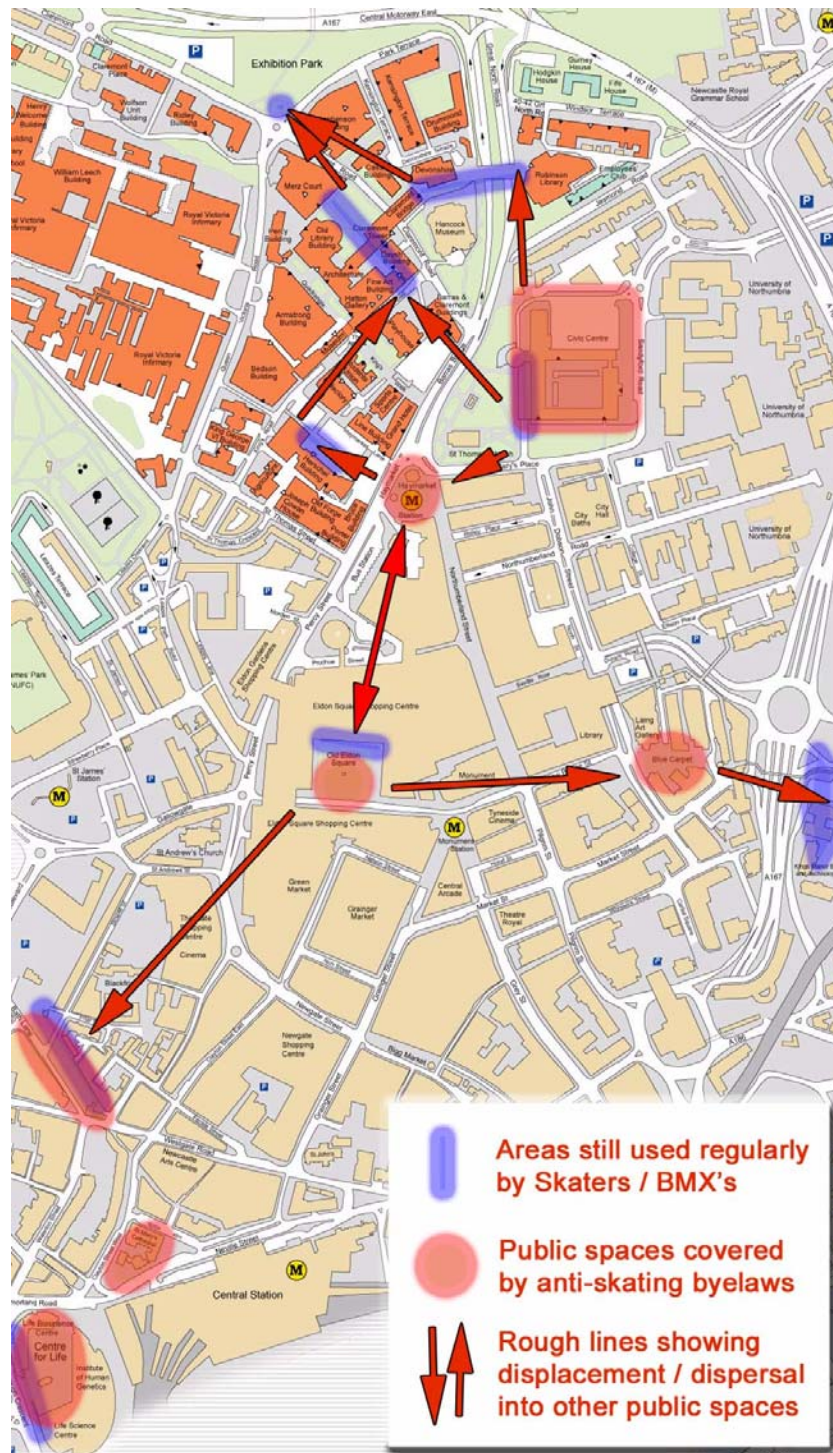
The numbers of skaters gathering in key public spaces of the central city has been greatly reduced, in part due to the application of bylaws affecting the areas, and in part due to the skate park itself. Exclusion tactics are wedded with provision, because as the Tribe consultants noted,

*It is unrealistic in any area to assume that once the skate park is built, the streets will become free from the clatter of wheels. Even with measures in place, it is difficult to impose fines, and account for every step, curb, rail, or bench in and around the city center. It is with this in mind that it is necessary not only to identify where to stop skaters, but also where to allow them to skate (Grafham 2002, 3).*

Preventative legislation (bylaws) and ancillary legislation have been enacted in potential displacement areas to attempt to force skate culture towards the edges of the city center (see Figure 3). The reality of this as a tactic of spatial management has been explicit, excluding the group from a whole series of key pedestrianized public spaces throughout the city center—though this is variable due to the piecemeal enforcement of the anti-skating byelaws by regulatory agencies (such as the street wardens and local police). Further, as emphasized throughout this discussion, the focus on spatial provision in the form of a skate park has consistently been linked to a displacement of young people to the periphery of the commercial city center.

The significant pathways of displacement show two key impacts (Figure 3). First, that the council has used provision as a displacement tool, supported by legislative attempts to disperse activity through criminalization of spontaneous performance. Secondly, despite these attempts to disperse and displace street culture, the Tribe group was correct in its assumption that it is impossible to completely remove such a culture from the street where it was founded; and as such consultation practices must strive to incorporate a deeper understanding of the cultures they seek to provide for if the needs of commercial stakeholders and young people, as valid users or consumers of space, are to be developed over time.

**Figure 3. Map showing areas of skating activity and bylaws, suggesting potential and actual lines of displacement and dispersal created by managerial tactics**



Young people still skate in the city center despite the bylaws and the provision of the skate park however, the central area at Old Eldon Square has been abandoned in favor of the periphery (where skating/riding is legal). In other areas, skate damage can be seen in public spaces—at the Blue Carpet and



around the Haymarket area (see Figure 1), though this now only occurs irregularly and in particularly hot holiday periods.

## Conclusions

This paper has argued that although the consultation process is the significant source of a youth voice in urban regeneration and renewal, its tensions are the manifestation of the gulf between commercial needs and those of young people. This separation has been widened because of the imbalanced local interpretation of "social inclusion" in the urban renaissance strategy. The ideal, user-oriented notion of free access and expression in urban public space has been perverted into increasingly regulated managerial representations of the "appropriate" form of public space and public activity. This does not respond to the differences and unpredictability of the existing public; rather, it privileges consumer activity and either displaces or disperses anything or anyone that might threaten the "orderly flow of commerce" (Flusty, 1994). It does seem as though a deeper understanding of the identity of youths in the city center will give depth to the nature of the hegemonic dialogue between subcultures and managerial or business led sub-groups and stakeholders. The coordination of interests between the designers, financiers, liaisons in the local authority (as managers) and the skaters (as users) proved how useful this can be in practice in the evolution of the Newcastle skate park, though there is still room for more meaningful engagement in the follow up phase of development. The question for future research is how this tension might be managed through inclusive rather than prescriptive participation to encourage integrated spatial provision.

*Peter Rogers* completed his Ph.D. at Newcastle University's Global Urban Research Unit, in the Department of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, in 2005. The ESRC funded Ph.D. was entitled "Young People, Urban Management and Commercial Public Space: Reconciling Urban Renaissance and Social Exclusion." This interdisciplinary research connected socio-geographic policy debates with dynamic ethnographies in the form of "street phenomenology." He is also deputy editor on the British Sociological Association's newsletter Network and convener of the new Urban Theory and Research Study group. He has worked with several institutions, including the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and the Open University, and is currently working on "urban resilience and terrorism" at the University of Manchester on the ESRC's New Security Challenges Program, having just moved into a lectureship in cultural sociology at Manchester Metropolitan University in 2006.

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