Love Malmö

Rethinking Urban Planning through Skateboarding

Love Malmö

En ny syn på stadsplanering genom skateboardåkning

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Abstract

This thesis explores the role of skateboarding in urban planning, using Malmö as a case study. Focusing on the installation **Love Malmö**, the study investigates how urban space is experienced, produced, and negotiated by local skateboarders. The theoretical framework draws on Henri Lefebvre's spatial triad and placemaking theory to analyse the relationship between conceived, perceived, and lived space. Through a qualitative methodology including interviews, observations, and thematic analysis, the research examines Malmö's official goals for skateboarding and how they are reflected in practice. The findings suggest that Malmö has made significant progress in integrating skateboarding into its urban fabric, but that challenges remain, especially regarding inclusion, accessibility, and outreach in suburban areas. The thesis concludes that user involvement and long-term co-creation are essential for sustaining Malmö's reputation as a skate-friendly city and offers reflections relevant for other cities seeking to incorporate skateboarding into urban development.

Sammanfattning

Denna kandidatuppsats undersöker skateboardåkningens roll i stadsplaneringen med Malmö som fallstudie. Med installationen **Love Malmö** som utgångspunkt analyseras hur urbana rum upplevs, produceras och förhandlas av lokala skateboardåkare. Det teoretiska ramverket utgår från Henri Lefebvres rumstriangel och teorier om placemaking för att förstå samspelet mellan planerade, upplevda och levda rum. Studien bygger på kvalitativ metod med intervjuer, observationer och tematisk analys och granskar hur Malmö stads officiella mål för skateboardverksamhet återspeglas i praktiken. Resultaten visar att Malmö har kommit långt i att integrera skateboardåkning i stadsmiljön, men att det kvarstår utmaningar, särskilt vad gäller inkludering, tillgänglighet och lokalt engagemang i ytterområden. Uppsatsen avslutar med att lyfta vikten av användarmedverkan och långsiktigt samskapande för att Malmö ska kunna behålla sin roll som en skateboardvänlig stad, samt ger reflektioner som kan vara värdefulla för andra städer i liknande processer.

Keywords

Skateboarding, Urban Planning, Love Park, Love Malmö, Creative use of space.

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1 Introduction

This section offers a brief historical overview of skateboarding's development, with an emphasis on how skateboarders have engaged with and redefined various types of built environments over time. From improvised use of urban structures to purpose-built facilities, skateboarding has continually shifted in relation to spatial and societal contexts. The section also introduces my personal connection to skateboarding, an activity that has not only shaped my everyday life for over two decades, but also influenced my academic interests and choice of study. By combining historical context with personal experience, this introduction sets the stage for a deeper exploration of skateboarding as both a cultural practice and a subject of urban planning.

1.1 A Brief History of Skateboarding

Skateboarding has evolved a lot since its origination in California in the 1950s. The first commercial skateboards were simply a 5x10 cm plank of wood with metal wheels, not optimal materials compared to today's standard. Metal wheels caused the skateboards to stop or skid whenever in contact with a less smooth surface (Borden, 2001, pp. 13-14). These boards were primarily used by a younger crowd as a form of transportation on the sidewalks during this period. In the 1960s-1970s, skateboarders were often surfers as well and would skateboard when the waves were bad for surfing, commonly known as "sidewalk surfing" (Borden, 2011, pp. 29-30). During the same period the skateboarders started to take advantage of other forms of built environment, starting with the many inclined banks commonly found in the schoolyards of Los Angeles, imitating the actions of riding a wave on a surfboard (Borden, 2001, pp. 31-32).

With the skateboard itself improving in the mid 1970s, with a bigger deck, urethane wheels and trucks making it more desirable to ride on, as well as making it easier to use other more challenging elements of the built environment. Skateboarders started to use private swimming pools to perform their activities. These pools offered a smoother concrete surface, but most importantly a curved transition from base to wall. These pools, as well as schoolyard banks, were the main inspiration when building the first commercial concrete skateparks in the mid 1970s (Borden, 2001, pp. 19, 33-35).

While skateparks offered superior conditions for skateboarding, the commercial skatepark industry declined in the early 1980s. A decrease in the popularity of skateboarding, combined with challenges related to profitable land use, led many owners to shut down and often demolish their facilities (Borden, pp. 174-176). As a result, skateboarders returned to the built environment where the activity had originally developed: the streets. There, they sought out architectural elements that resembled those found in skateparks, adapting and replicating skatepark-based tricks in urban settings (Borden, pp. 177-179).

By the late 1980s/early 1990s, skateboarding from a technical perspective regarding tricks had evolved a lot compared to the more vertical/skatepark way of skateboarding. The usage of urban elements such as stairs, ledges, fire hydrants, handrails etcetera became the most popular way to ride a skateboard and dominated the media/commercialisation of skateboarding. Coverage from urban plazas such as Embarcadero in San Francisco more or less replaced the coverage from official skateparks such as Pipeline Skatepark (Upland, California) that dominated in the 1970s-1980s (Borden, 2001, pp. 182-183). The move back into the streets is an important milestone for how skateboarding is performed in present tense, as well as for its worldwide popularity. Skateboarding went from being performed in more hidden skateparks, private swimming pools etcetera to downtown where places such as public urban squares, commercial office plazas, parking lots etcetera where anyone can perform the activity of skateboarding (Borden, 2001, pp. 185-186).

1.1.1 From Subculture to Urban Planning Tool

Skateboarding has always maintained a strong subcultural identity, characterized by a resistance to authority, DIY mentality and a preference for unsanctioned use of public space. This marginal status contributed to a strong collective identity and a creative reappropriation of urban space, reinforcing skateboarding's cultural role as a form of spatial resistance.

However, skateboarding has undergone a significant shift in recent decades. What was once a subversive street activity, is now increasingly accepted, and even celebrated by municipalities, institutions, and mainstream media. This transition is evident in the global proliferation of public skateparks, the rise of skateboarding in popular culture and

advertising and perhaps most notably, its inclusion as an Olympic sport in Tokyo 2021. Such developments mark a shift from skateboarding as a niche subculture to a globally recognized and partially institutionalized activity.

This mainstream acceptance has had multiple consequences. On one hand, it has brought greater legitimacy, funding, and access to safe, purpose-built environments, and it has opened up skateboarding to more diverse participants, including young children, women, and non-binary skaters who may have previously felt excluded from its more aggressive, male-dominated subcultural roots. On the other hand, some skateboarders critique this institutionalization as a form of co-optation that strips skateboarding of its political and creative edge, preferring to keep skateboarding "underground".

Skateparks as mentioned is a common sight worldwide, but an interesting alternative, or addition to this has appeared in the last two decades. The acceptance of skateboarding in municipalities has led them to include skateboarding differently in the built environment, including skateboard-friendly elements in public areas such as central squares or plazas within the city. The creation of these places is somewhat ironic for a skateboarder, squares or plazas that are good for skateboarding are commonly affected by hostile architecture or "skate-stoppers". The inclusion of skateboarding in urban planning is still unheard of in many countries and cities, but it has notably increased in the last decade.

The City of Malmö is known worldwide, especially within the skateboarding community, for its skateboard-friendly facilities, which this thesis mainly focuses on. The City of Malmö's approach reflects a broader trend where cities are beginning to recognize the social and spatial value of skateboarding and integrate it into public space design, both as a tool for youth engagement and as a means of revitalizing urban areas. A striking example of this trend can be seen in San Francisco, where city officials recently decided to allow and even encourage skateboarding at UN Plaza, a previously neglected and crime-affected public space. As reported by *The New York Times* (2025), local authorities shifted their approach from exclusion to inclusion, recognizing that skateboarders' presence could bring positive activity and community ownership to an otherwise underused space. What was once designed with anti-skate elements, is now being actively reimagined with skateboarding in mind, exemplifying a shift from defensive to collaborative urban design.

Fig 1*: Skateboard-friendly obstacles at UN Plaza, San Francisco. Photograph: Jay Barmann/SFist (2023)*

1.2 Personal relation to the aim of study

From receiving my first skateboard in 2001, as well as having an older brother who skateboards, skateboarding has been a huge part of my life. Growing up in a small city in Norway called Egersund which is not optimal for skateboarding due to lack of skateparks, especially an indoor one when the Scandinavian weather is challenging, as well as the whole local skate scene dying out around 2006. Despite the challenges, I stayed active and did as much as I could to go to Stavanger on the weekends where the circumstances for skateboarding were far better compared to my hometown. In 2013, in need of a change, mostly regarding skateboarding culture, I moved to Malmö to attend Bryggeriets Gymnasium. This stay was supposed to last three years to get a high school education, but currently 12 years have passed and the circumstances for skateboarding in Malmö has a lot to do with that.

When I moved here, I was lucky to have access to the different facilities for skateboarding in Malmö, e.g. an indoor skatepark at my high school, Stapelbäddsparken, the “DIY skateparks” but also true street skateboarding which has always been my main

interest. I have also been lucky enough to witness the City of Malmö's then new approach with skateboarding: designing skateboard-friendly public spaces that are not classified as skateparks. I found these actions unique as well as unreal compared to what I grew up with. Fast forward with spots like Värnhemstorget, adding ledges by Svampen (Konsthallstorget) and so much more made me curious on how this is done, or even possible.

Later, I ended up attending the urban planning, urban development, and planning program at Malmö University. During the different variation of courses on this program, I have always tried to relate the different subjects to something personal, and skateboarding could be used as an example in basically every course regardless of the subject, so for my final thesis there was no doubt on what was going to be the main theme: Skateboarding in urban planning.

1.3 Aim and Research questions

The purpose of this study is to explore how Malmö's public skate-friendly environments function from the perspective of local residents who are active street skateboarders, the main user group of these installations. As an example of a skate-friendly environment particular focus will be placed on their newest installation, Love Malmö, which replicates a section of the original Love Park in Philadelphia. I aim to investigate how street skateboarders in Malmö experience and interpret the design, accessibility, and symbolic meaning of Love Malmö as well as how they view the City of Malmö's broader efforts to support skateboarding through urban planning and public space development.

The study also seeks to examine how the City of Malmö's strategic goals for skateboarding, such as youth participation, social inclusion and urban attractiveness are reflected in practice. By comparing these institutional aims with the lived experiences of skateboarders, the study will explore whether the city's approach to skate-friendly urban development aligns with the actual needs and practices of its users. In particular, the case of Love Malmö offers a unique opportunity to study how global cultural heritage (through the use of imported granite from Philadelphia's Love Park) intersects with local urban identity and daily spatial practice.

Main research question:

To what extent do the City of Malmö's official planning goals for skateboarding, such as inclusion, youth participation and urban identity, align with the lived and perceived experiences of the skaters themselves?

Supporting sub questions:

How do skaters interpret the City of Malmö's role in developing skate-friendly public spaces, including Love Malmö?

How do Malmö-based street skateboarders perceive and experience Love Malmö in their everyday practice?

What tensions emerge between the city's strategic vision ("conceived space") and the skaters' actual use and interpretation of space ("perceived" and "lived" space)?

1.4 Structure of Thesis

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter 1 introduces the topic through a historical background on skateboarding, its shift from subculture to urban planning tool, and my personal connection to the subject, as well as the aim and research questions. Chapter 2 reviews relevant literature and presents the theoretical frameworks. Chapter 3 provides context on Malmö's skateboarding development, the history of Love Park in Philadelphia, the creation of Love Malmö, Malmö's official goals, and introduction of the interviews/interviewees. Chapter 4 presents the empirical results based on Malmö's policy goals for skateboarding. Chapter 5 discusses these findings in relation to the theoretical frameworks. Chapter 6 concludes the thesis with a summary of key insights, implications for Malmö's skateboarding strategy, and suggestions for future research.

2 Literature Review

While urban studies, architecture, and planning have generated extensive research on topics such as transport, housing, public space, and participation, comparatively little attention has been paid to the everyday practices of urban subcultures, such as skateboarding, and their relationship to the built environment. Skateboarding is often treated as a niche or recreational activity, rather than a lens through which to understand

how public space is inhabited, negotiated, and co-produced. However, during the last two decades skateboarding has generally become more accepted, and legitimate scholars as well as students have shown that the "subculture" offers rich insight in how space is used, challenged, and even shaped by non-traditional actors. This literature review explores how these perspectives have been developed in academic discourse, with a particular focus on how they relate to urban development and built environment, especially in the context of Malmö.

2.1 Skateboarding and Urban Space: Resistance, Reinterpretation and Practice

Iain Borden's Skateboarding, *Space and the City: Architecture and the Body* (2001) is a foundational work in theorizing skateboarding's relationship to the built environment and has been used as a reference in more or less every study previously reviewed. Drawing on Henri Lefebvre's concept of lived space, Borden presents skateboarding as a bodily and spatial practice that reclaims urban architecture through movement. Architectural features such as stairs, ledges, and handrails are reinterpreted by skateboarders as terrains for creative expression. In this way, Borden conceptualizes skateboarding as a form of critical urban engagement that reveals alternative ways of occupying and understanding space (Borden, 2001, pp. 94–115). The skateboarder becomes a mobile figure who contests dominant spatial orders and reclaims the city as a site of experimentation and play.

2.1.1 Placemaking and Co-creation: From User Appropriation to Institutional Integration.

In contrast to Borden's (2001) focus on appropriation and resistance, Karin Book (2024) emphasizes collaboration and recognition. In her article *No need to be rebellious: placemaking and value co-creation in the skateboarding City of Malmö*, Book explores how Malmö has become a global example of collaborative placemaking between municipal actors, civil society organizations, and skateboarders. Her theoretical framework is based on placemaking and value co-creation, emphasizing that urban spaces are not only designed by professionals but also shaped by everyday users.

Inspired by the concept of “Thirdspace”, Book underlines that space is both material and imagined, planned, and lived (Book, 2024, pp. 4–5).

Value co-creation, in her view, expands the idea of placemaking by showing how social, cultural, and economic value is produced through interaction between citizens and institutions (Book, 2024, pp. 6–7). Love Malmö is highlighted as a case of such co-creation, not just a skate spot, but a public space shaped through collaboration between planners and skateboarders (Book, 2024, pp. 8–9). Her study is based on interviews with institutional actors and international figures involved in Malmö’s skateboard development (Book, 2024, p. 4).

2.2 Student Perspectives from Landscape Architecture: Practical Engagements with Skateboarding and Public Space

Recent student theses from the Landscape Architecture programme at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU) offer practical design perspectives on skateboarding in urban contexts. Although these works are situated in a different academic field, they provide useful insights into spatial characteristics, planning tools, and multifunctional integration.

Fredrik Angner’s (2017) master’s thesis *Skateboard Urbanism* investigates how public spaces can support skateboarding through thoughtful design. Drawing on case studies from Malmö, Berlin, and Paris, he outlines key spatial characteristics: reinterpretability, centrality and authenticity, and argues that skateboarding contributes to urban vibrancy and youth culture. His work bridges subcultural practices and design principles (Angner, 2017, pp. 29–47).

André Svedberg (2023), in his bachelor thesis *Aktivering av offentliga rum i Malmö (Activation of public space in Malmö)*, explores how skateboarding can enhance perceived safety and activate underused public spaces. Through interviews and observations at Konsthallstorget (Svampen) and Nobeltorget in Malmö, he shows that spontaneous skateboarding can foster inclusivity and informal surveillance, while also noting that its subcultural image creates planning challenges (Svedberg, 2023, pp. 38–41).

Flemming Pedersen and Johan Bergljung (2024) propose a design concept in their master's thesis *Seamless Integration of Skateboarding in Public Space*. Their project combines skateable elements with stormwater management in Frihamnen in Gothenburg, arguing that multifunctional design can meet both social and environmental goals. They stress the need for authentic, non-staged skate features that are seamlessly integrated into the public realm, much inspired by how the City of Malmö has done. (Pedersen and Bergljung, 2024, pp. 46–51).

2.3 Relevance of Previous Research to This Study

The reviewed literature provides a diverse but interconnected understanding of skateboarding's role in urban space. From Borden's view of skateboarding as critical spatial practice to Book's emphasis on institutional collaboration, and from Angner's design-oriented spatial criteria to Pedersen and Bergljung's multifunctional proposals, the sources contribute theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives that shape this study. There are several key similarities. All studies recognize skateboarding as a meaningful interaction with urban space and highlight the skateboarder as an agent of spatial change. They also stress the need for inclusivity, adaptability, and user involvement in urban planning.

However, my study also differs from these works in several important ways. While the student theses approach the topic from a landscape architecture and design perspective, and Book combines planning and sport science, and Borden draws from architectural theory, my approach is grounded in urban studies and human geography. This disciplinary orientation leads me to focus on spatial meaning, lived experience, and qualitative analysis. Book (2024) primarily interviews planners, municipal officials, and international researchers, and the student theses rely on design proposals, expert input, and spatial analysis. In contrast, my study takes a different approach by interviewing local skateboarders, focusing on their perceptions of a completed planning project, Love Malmö. While the reviewed literature addresses design strategies, planning processes, or urban critique, my research centres more on the user perspective, how street skateboarders experience and interpret the outcomes of collaborative planning. This reflects Lefebvre's (1991) concept of lived space, shifting the focus from planned space to experienced space.

By centring the voices of local users, my study builds on and complements previous research. My main interest is to investigate how local skateboarders perceive the finished result of a collaborative planning process, specifically Love Malmö. This perspective requires a different set of interviewees compared to Book (2024), who primarily interviewed institutional actors, including planners, civil servants, and international figures. In contrast, my interviews were conducted with active local street skateboarders of various ages and backgrounds, making them more relevant to my research aim: understanding how the intended 'users' of such spaces experience the outcomes of participatory planning.

Book herself acknowledges this limitation and outlines it as a direction for future research, stating: "*...I plan to examine the new generation of skateboarders as part of the placemaking and value co-creation, in the skateboarding city where skateboarders do not need to be rebellious*" (Book, 2024, p. 11). While age is not inherently defining in skateboarding culture, the role of these individuals as local citizens and daily users of the space provides important insight into the effectiveness and meaning of the collaborative planning process from a user perspective. It offers a bottom-up perspective on value co-creation and placemaking, contributing to broader discussions on participatory planning, spatial justice, and public space in the skateboarding city.

2.4 Theory

Urban space is not just something that exist, it is shaped by how people use it, plan it, and experience it. To understand this, two key theoretical perspectives are helpful. Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space shows how space is socially produced through everyday routines, planning decisions, and personal experiences. Placemaking builds on similar ideas, focusing on how people create meaningful places through participation, use, and emotional connection. Together, these frameworks help explain how public spaces like skate spots are formed, used, and reimagined by different groups.

2.4.1 The production of space

Henri Lefebvre's theory of the production of space offers a powerful analytical framework for understanding how urban space is both shaped and experienced. Central to his argument is the idea that space is not a neutral container or static backdrop, but

something actively produced through social, political, and material processes. His conceptual triad, comprising spatial practice, representations of space, and representational space, is not simply a typology, but a relational model that captures the tensions and interactions between how space is used, imagined, and lived (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 33–39).

The spatial practice, or what Lefebvre refers to as perceived space, encompasses the routines and material patterns through which people move through, interact with, and inhabit the built environment (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 38–39, 96). This includes everyday activities such as commuting, playing (skateboarding), or shopping, the physical and functional dimension of space. It is grounded in bodily experience and the habitual rhythms of life, and although often taken for granted, it is deeply structured by economic and social forces. For instance, in urban settings, spatial practice reflects how access to infrastructure, mobility, and public space is unevenly distributed.

Contrasting this is conceived space, or representations of space, which refers to the space of planners, architects, engineers and bureaucrats, those who design, categorise, and map the city. This is the dominant space of abstraction and order, shaped by technical knowledge, ideology, and institutional power (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). It is here that strategic decisions are made about zoning, development, and spatial organisation, often in ways that attempt to rationalise or control urban life. Conceived space tends to prioritise legibility, efficiency, and coherence, but may obscure or suppress alternative spatial practices and lived meanings.

The third dimension, representational space, also called lived space, is the most directly tied to human experience, memory, and imagination (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 39, 134–135). It is through representational space that individuals and communities imbue their environments with symbolic meaning and emotional resonance. Lived space may resist or reinterpret the dominant logic of conceived space; for example, through informal uses, subcultural expressions, or collective practices that contest official narratives. It is often articulated through art, play, affect, and storytelling, modes of spatial engagement that are not easily captured by maps or plans.

Importantly, Lefebvre insists that these three aspects of space should not be analysed in isolation. Instead, they function dialectically: conceived space informs spatial practice, while lived space may emerge in response to both, creating moments of contradiction,

appropriation, or resistance. Urban space, in this view, is a field of struggle, not just over land or form, but over meaning and legitimacy. This approach is especially relevant when analysing how marginalised or alternative spatial practices, such as subcultural or grassroots activities, challenge or rework the spatial order imposed by institutions.

2.4.2 Placemaking

Placemaking is a multidisciplinary and evolving theoretical concept that spans planning, geography, architecture, and the social sciences. Istoriou and Pozoukidou (2024, p. 2) describe it as a "*global movement, an academic discipline, a field, a discourse, a process, and a tool*", reflecting its expansive theoretical scope. Originally emerging as a reaction to modernist planning paradigms, placemaking has become central to spatial planning's shift toward more human-centred and participatory approaches (Istoriou & Pozoukidou, 2024, p. 2).

The theoretical underpinnings of placemaking are shaped by foundational thinkers such as Jane Jacobs and William Whyte, whose work emphasised the social life of public spaces and the everyday practices of communities (Istoriou & Pozoukidou, 2024, pp. 4–5). Later, Henri Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad (perceived space, conceived space, and lived space) further informed placemaking theory by articulating how space is socially produced through routine practices, institutional planning, and symbolic experiences (Istoriou & Pozoukidou, 2024, p. 8).

Placemaking is also inherently complex and contested. Scholars describe it as contingent, multi-layered, and shaped by its local circumstances (Istoriou & Pozoukidou, 2024, p. 6). It incorporates spatial, psychological, and procedural dimensions: from visible physical interventions to participatory processes and the symbolic attachment people develop toward places (Istoriou & Pozoukidou, 2024, p. 10).

Recent work has also emphasised that placemaking cannot be seen as a universally positive practice. Keidar *et al.* (2023, p. 146) stress its potential to foster equality and belonging by creating opportunities for diverse groups to interact as equals. At the same time, they caution that placemaking is often instrumentalised for strategic or symbolic purposes, for example in post-disaster recovery or as an urban branding tool, which risks producing exclusionary outcomes rather than inclusive ones (Keidar *et al.*, 2023, pp.

148–149). This perspective highlights that placemaking is a contested process whose results depend heavily on context, power relations, and the authenticity of community engagement.

In conclusion, this makes placemaking a powerful theoretical lens for analysing space as both material and social, planned and lived, particularly in the context of community-based urban transformations.

2.5 Methodology

This section explains how the study was designed and carried out. It describes the research approach, the reasoning behind the method, and the types of data that were collected and analysed. The study uses a qualitative and abductive approach, meaning it explores meanings and experiences while allowing theory and data to inform each other. It is based on a case study of a specific place and combines interviews, planning documents, observations, and photos to understand how space is used, planned, and experienced. The goal is to provide a deep and nuanced understanding of the topic through multiple sources and perspectives.

2.5.1 Research approach and logic

This study adopts a qualitative research approach, informed by an abductive logic. A qualitative approach focuses on understanding meaning, experiences, and social processes rather than measuring quantities. Abductive logic refers to a way of reasoning where the researcher moves back and forth between theory and empirical material, not starting with a fixed theory, but allowing both the observations and the concepts to influence each other (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, pp. 13–19). In this case, observations from the field helped shape the choice of concepts, and theoretical ideas helped make sense of what was observed. This dialogue between theory and data allowed for new insights to emerge during the study.

The main method used was semi-structured interviews, meaning the researcher used a flexible interview guide with open-ended questions. This gave space for participants to express their experiences in their own words, while still focusing on key themes. These interviews generated rich and detailed material, and revealed patterns that were not

anticipated in advance. The abductive logic made it possible to interpret these patterns in a flexible and iterative (repeating and evolving) way, where ideas were constantly adjusted as new understanding developed (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009, pp. 13–19).

This approach is particularly relevant for a study like this one, which aims to explore how planning ideals interact with people's lived experiences of space in a specific urban context. Since the topic involves both formal planning perspectives (such as policies or strategies) and everyday practices (how people actually use and experience space), it was important to allow unexpected themes and meanings to emerge, rather than forcing the data into a predefined theoretical model. The abductive approach supported this openness and allowed theory and data to inform each other throughout the research process.

2.5.2 Case Study and Empirical Material

In methodological terms, the study is designed as a qualitative case study (Yin, 2018, p. 15). A case study is a research strategy used to investigate a phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context. It is especially useful when the boundaries between the phenomenon (e.g. urban planning) and its context (e.g. everyday use of public space) are not clearly separated (Yin, 2018, pp. 15–17). This study follows a single-case design with embedded units of analysis, meaning that one overall case (in this study, a specific place or project) is examined through different perspectives or "sub-cases," such as different user experiences or stakeholder views (Yin, 2018, pp. 50–52).

The empirical material, or the data used in the study consists of four semi-structured interviews with key actors, combined with a review of planning strategies and prior research literature on skateboarding and the built environment in Malmö. In addition, the study draws on naturalistic observations and photographs taken during visits to the site. Although these observations were not formally structured or recorded using checklists, they occurred during interviews and also informally when the researcher spent time at the location. These visual and sensory impressions provided valuable contextual understanding of the site's spatial qualities and how people interact with it.

According to Yin (2018, pp. 113–121), multiple sources of evidence, such as interviews, documents, observations, and physical artifacts like photos, are central in case study

research. Using several types of data allows for triangulation, a process where findings from different sources are compared to strengthen the credibility of the results (Yin, 2018, pp. 126–128). For example, something said in an interview could be supported by what was observed on site or reflected in planning documents.

To ensure a systematic and transparent approach, a case study protocol was used (Yin, 2018, pp. 89–92). This included tools such as an interview guide and consistent ways of documenting data. All interviews were then analysed thematically, meaning that the researcher identified recurring themes or patterns in what the participants said. These themes were interpreted with support from relevant theoretical concepts, allowing a deeper understanding of how people make sense of space and planning in their daily lives.

3 Skateboarding in Malmö

To get an understanding on how skateboarding became such a meaningful asset for the city of Malmö a historical presentation is needed. In a historical perspective, Malmö was known as one of Sweden's leading industrial cities with a thriving shipbuilding and manufacturing industry during the post-war period (Stigendal, 2016, p. 134). Fast forward to the 1990s, this radically changed when several large companies shut down their operations which obviously led to economic and social challenges. However, major investments were made in the same period, most notably the Öresund Bridge between Malmö and Copenhagen and the establishment of Malmö University which can be linked to hopes for a new economic future (Stigendal, 2016, p. 209).

3.1 Brief History of Skateboarding in Malmö

Focusing on skateboarding in this period of crisis, Malmö was not an attractive city at all. In the early 1990s, it was performed mainly on rough street spots, and during rainy or cold days, the only options were parking garages (Vice, 2010). This changed for the better when Bryggeriet Skatepark opened its doors in 1998. This indoor skatepark became an important landmark for skateboarding in Sweden, as well as Europe due to big European competitions such as the European Championship three years in a row from 1999-2001. (Föreningen Bryggeriet, n.d.).

A huge milestone for skateboarding in Malmö occurred when the city of Malmö was to develop a new district that was presented in 2001 during the housing fair Bo01. With inspiration from concrete skateparks throughout Europe, John Magnusson of the association Bryggeriet presented a project idea for the city of Malmö, a big concrete skatepark within the development area (Föreningen Bryggeriet, n.d.). Fast forward to 2005, Stapelbäddsparken was completed, situated in the old shipyard slipway of one of the biggest actors during the industrial heyday. This is in many ways ground zero for the collaboration between the city and the skateboarders of Malmö. The City of Malmö was impressed by the way the skateboarders/Bryggeriet handled this process and saw the value in creating a skateboarding destination in Malmö (Skate Malmö, n.d.e).

Fig 2*: Stapelbäddsparken 2014. Photograph: Eken Eriksson (2014).*

After the success of Stapelbäddsparken, more skateparks were built by Bryggeriet in collaboration with the City Of Malmö, Sibbarp Skatepark in 2008, Oxie Skatepark in 2009, Åkarp Skatepark in 2012, Kroksbäck Skatepark in 2016 and Hindby Skatepark in 2022. Beside these skateparks, smaller instalments are also to be found in Malmö, such as in the schoolyards of Hyllievångskolan (close to Hyllie/Kroksbäck and Apelgårdsskolan (Rosengård) as well as a few miniramps placed in various locations in Malmö e.g. Folkets Park which is a popular destination for skateboarders in Malmö. Notable about Kroksbäck Skatepark is that it was donated by the footwear company Vans for their competition, Vans Park Series, where the World Championship Final was arranged in Kroksbäck in 2016. The skateparks used for these series of competitions are usually temporary and removed after the events, however the one in Kroksbäck is

permanent. This skatepark is a result of the City of Malmö's unique collaborations with the association Bryggeriet who built the park together with a crew from the world-famous US based Dreamland Skateparks (Skate Malmö, n.d.e).

Skateparks aside, the City of Malmö have collaborated with local skateboarders creating something unique, skateboard-friendly elements in public spaces that are not skateparks, which is as previously mentioned the whole reasoning for this thesis. First addition in this series was the facelift Värnhemstorget got in 2014, adding granite ledges/benches to the flatground area, and "hubbas" (downwards ledges) to existing set of stairs that have been used by skateboarders for decades. Henceforward the City of Malmö and partners continued creating public space in this style, e.g. adding granite benches to Konsthallstorget (Svampen), Bagers Plats as well as adding obstacles good for skateboarding in renovation projects such as Nobeltorget. The list of similar places like this in Malmö is long, some have been temporary and some more successful than others. With the latest addition being Love Malmö in 2024, Malmö has become especially famous in the world of skateboarding for their unique way of collaborating with skateboarders and including it in the evolution of the city.

3.2 Love Park – Backstory

To get an understanding of the phenomenon of Love Park, a historical perspective needs to be presented. How remains of an old public park in Philadelphia were moved cross the Atlantic to the City of Malmö might sound strange to a lot of people, maybe even a huge waste of tax-payers money, but for others it is miraculous event. This section introduces the history and evolution of Love Park in Philadelphia and how slabs of granite were moved to Malmö after the demolishing of the original part with the main reasoning to give an understanding of why and how this happened.

3.2.1 Love Park – Philadelphia

John F. Kennedy Plaza, more widely known as Love Park, is a central public space in Philadelphia created by city planner Edmund Bacon (1910-2005). Love Park was a part of a thesis about planning the future of Downtown Philadelphia which Bacon did at Cornell University way back in 1932 (Dianda, 2004). The planning of the park was

realized in the 1960s when Bacon was the director of the Planning Commission (1949-1970). He decided the park to be placed at the downtown end of Benjamin Franklin Parkway, surrounded by central buildings in downtown Philadelphia such as City Hall and The Municipal Services Building. The design itself was done by architect Vincent Kling (Dianda, 2004).

Although the site was not initially intended as a recreational facility, its granite ledges, stairs, and open layout inadvertently made it an ideal setting for street skateboarding. By the 1990s, Love Park had become an internationally significant site for skateboarding culture, drawing participants and media attention from around the world (Howell, 2005, p. 33). For example, this popularity led to the X-Games showing interest in arranging their competition in Philadelphia. In a documentary about Love Park, a section from ON Video Magazine directed by Kirk Dianda (2004), former professional skateboarder Ricky Oyola states:

"*They came to Philadelphia because of Love Park, and because of skateboarding in Philadelphia is huge you know, X-Games obviously saw that, they know all the popularity, that's why they tried to get it at Love Park but the city didn't want to have that so they let us have it at City Hall...*" (Dianda, 2004).

Despite this global reputation and popularity, city officials increasingly came to view the skateboarding activity as a problem. Already during the arranging of this competition (2001), skateboarding was prohibited at Love Park. Apparently, during this weekend you could skate Love Park, but right after the event finished it was back to normal: police arresting and fining people for skateboarding there (Dianda, 2004). The ban on skateboarding caused debates and conflicts within the community, even the creators of the park were critical to this ban, and in the words of Edmund Bacon:

"*It's an absolutely socially unacceptable thing for those Ponzi councilmen to sit there in City Hall and not being able to go two inches on a skateboard and say these kids can't do it, when there is absolutely no reason for it whatsoever. People come to the park to see the skateboarders for goodness sakes. Thousands of people went down and paid money to see the X-Games.*" (Dianda, 2004).

The X-Games generated an estimated $80 million revenue for the City of Philadelphia when the Games were arranged there in 2001 and 2002. A non-profit lobbying group called Skateboard Advocacy Network (SAN), created by skateboarders and led by

skateboarder Scott Kip, found a report from 1999 from the City of Philadelphia that the City in 1998 spent approximately $3100 to repair damage to the park's granite caused by skateboarders, and that the City may have to spend approximately $50,000 in the near future to repair granite capping caused by skateboarders (Howell, 2005, p. 35). SAN later claimed that they easily could raise this amount, as a response the city's managing director, Phillip Goldsmith, returned with a report estimating if skateboarding were permitted, it would cost $100,000 for maintenance of Love Park. As a response to this, SAN with the financial backing of a California based skateboard shoe company called DC, offered a check consisting of $1 million over the next 10 years of maintenance of Love Park. This offer was later denied by the City, and the skateboarding ban remained (Howell, 2005, p. 35-36).

Fig 3*: Screenshots from Love Park Documentary. Controversy around X-Games Philadelphia and Police Officers confiscating skateboards at Love Park. Courtesy of Kirk Dianda (2004).*

Around April 2002, Love Park was officially fenced off order to convince the people not to skateboard there. Later that year the City of Philadelphia started to re-design the park, and as described by skateboard videographer Mark Brandstetter in the ON Video documentary (2004):

"*They put all these like pink garbage cans and pink flower planters in there that now all have urine stains down the side of them, it's real attractive. They put all these hideous wooden benches in everywhere, and it's not like they really designed anything, they just kind of took a bunch of stuff and threw it in, and that's how it felt."* (Dianda, 2004).

In addition to adding these physical elements to the park, they put grass in certain parts of the park to make it harder for the skateboarders to use the ledges etcetera. Despite these changes, it was still possible to skateboard in Love Park, but the high attendance of Police Officers made this as good as impossible (Dianda, 2004).

Brandstetter adds that all the City Council people used to say that Love Park was there for everybody to go eat lunch, but the only people he's seen eating lunch there are homeless people eating lunch out of garbage cans and describes the park as 'Bum Mecca' (Dianda, 2004). Love Park was a common place for homeless people, as well as drug dealers, ironically the skateboarders seemed to be the biggest problem for the City of Philadelphia. The skateboarders made Love Park a safer place. In the words of Ricky Oyola;

"*We should be able to do whatever we want here, we made this place, we made this place alive! Honestly, we made this place worth anything, it was just fucking drug dealers, dudes chilling out there fighting each other all the time everyday, you know what I mean? We came here and gave it life. We gave it to where people could walk by and not feel scared because you got these screwy kids on skateboards here next to these fucking big time drug dealers, if these little kids aren't scared, why should I be scared, I'm a 30-year-old coming from work"* (Dianda, 2004).

Fig 4: *Screenshot from Love Park Documentary Love Park fenced off, Courtesy of Kirk Dianda (2004).*

3.2.2 Last Days of Love

"*…the amazing thing is that the impulse to skateboard in Love Park is so strong that they still go there."* – Edmund Bacon (Dianda, 2004).

The hostile conditions caused by the ban of skateboarding in Love Park, as well as the rest of Philadelphia's well known skate spots, affected the popularity of skateboarding in the city, and led to huge names in the skateboard industry such as Stevie Williams and Josh Kalis leaving the city (Dianda, 2004) Despite this, a new generation of Love Park locals arose, a group of skateboarders widely known as 'Sabotage Productions'. Sabotage, with people like Brian Panebianco and Ryan Higgins, documents the skateboard scene in Philadelphia. Releasing series of videos from 2010-2017 (*Sabotage 2-5*), these videos were more or less the first coverage of skateboarding at Love Park (as well as other destinations in Philadelphia/the world) since the early 2000s.

The Sabotage videos are great documentation on how life at Love Park was, skateboarders giving the park life, homeless people doing inappropriate things, cops chasing skateboarders, a good summary of previous situations explained above. In the latest production documenting Love Park, "Sabotage 5", they show a well-documented presentation of the process of the "renovations" of the original park which happened in 2016. Once again Love Park was fenced off, but this time the renovations were more severe than the previous one, the whole park was basically demolished. The local Philadelphian skaters are seen skating a now construction site, using their creativity to as much done as possible until it was nothing of the original park left. When the original park was completely demolished, the building of a newer and greener Love Park took place between 2016-2018. The finished product cannot be compared at all to the park previously described and skateboarding at Love Park was a thing of the past.

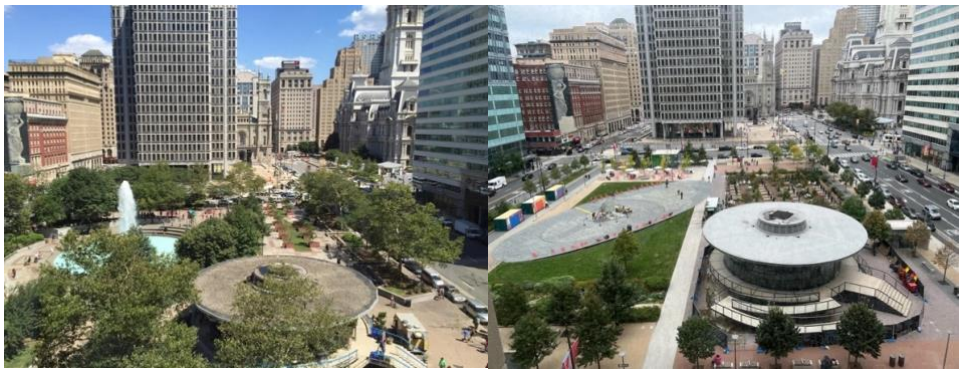

Fig 5: Love Park Philadelphia before and after renovations to make it greener, which is debateable. Love Park Transformation 2015-2021. Photographs by Reddit user u/see332.

3.2.3 Love Malmö

During the building of the new Love Park in Philadelphia, a lot of granite was saved and stored at an overgrown city storage lot. In 2017, news came out that that several large slabs of granite from Love Park were sent to a city in Sweden, the city of Malmö which is well known for skateboarding. The official "skateboarding coordinator" of Malmö, Gustav Eden, travelled to Philadelphia after getting in touch with Josh Nims, the founder of Franklin's Skate Fund, and requested to ship some of the leftover granite to Malmö. An estimated half a million pounds of granite was saved, so there was enough to share with the City of Malmö. Gustav Eden was very "hush hush" about how they were planning to use the granite, but that it was something that he thinks will "*…rock the skateboarding world."* (CBS, 2017).

The skateboarders in Malmö were thrilled about the news, with rumours circulating about where and when it was going to be realized. As many projects depending on democratic processes, some years passed before any more information was announced. This project was further talked about during an event in Malmö in 2019 on the "*Pushing Boarders*" conference, which shortly explained existed of different panel discussion about topics surrounding skateboard culture (Pushing Boarders, 2019). During the panel discussion called "*Sacred Spots: Defining Heritage in Skate Culture*" (available as podcast on Spotify etc.), the previously mentioned Brian Panebianco from Sabotage Productions were present to discuss Love Park in Philadelphia and parts of it being moved to Malmö.

"So when I first heard about this, Love Park was still there and we were skating it, and I heard some of the granite were going to Sweden and my first reaction was like; Why? What the hell is it going to do there?" - Brian Panebianco (Pushing Boarders, 2019)

After meeting Gustav Eden in Philadelphia, he explained what they were trying to do with the materials in Malmö, and this was a similar idea what the locals of Philadelphia were trying to do but they were unsurprisingly rejected by the City of Philadelphia (Pushing Boarders, 2019). Just in case a replica of the elements of Love Park could be possible in the future, Panebianco jumped the fencing and took measurements of basically everything in the park like heights of the ledges, distances and so on, measurements that later were handed to Gustav Eden. (Jenkem Mag, 2024).

Fast forward to November/December 2023, constructions began next to the cycle path at Klerkgatan between Rådmansvångens School and S:t Johannes Church in central Malmö. The announcement was made public by the City of Malmö through Skate Malmö early March 2024 with a video documenting part of the projects. In this video Gustav Eden is seen at the overgrown city storage lot in Philadelphia, picking out different tiles, trashcans, and even light posts from the original park. Cut to next scene, the materials arrive in Malmö in shipping containers and parts of the construction process is documented, as well as the announcement of the event "Love Malmö" from 30th May – 2nd June 2024, hosted by Skate Malmö and Skate Philly (Skate Malmö, 2024).

Notable about this event was that the City of Malmö invited a group of local skateboarders from Philadelphia at the city expenses, a group consisting of Love Park locals from the past like Ricky Oyola, Fred Gall etc. to the newer ones from the Sabotage Productions crew. The Philadelphia skaters were allowed to skate this new instalment before the grand opening on June 1st, which is documented in a video published online by Thrasher Magazine (Thrasher Magazine, 2024). After successful days of celebration of the City of Malmö's newest instalment of public skateboard-friendly space, Love Park Malmö was opened for everyone to use.

3.2.4 Summary

This instalment is unique in so many ways, either if you are a skateboarder or not. That the locals of Malmö, as well as rest of the world, are now able to visit or skateboard at the same grounds as people they grew up watching the original Love Park in Philadelphia is somewhat surreal in the mind of a skateboarder. This honour is perfectly summed up by Gustav Eden:

"*Malmö has no claim to Love Park. No one except the Philadelphia skaters have claim to Love Park. It's your heritage, you created it. This is about a homage to the cultural significance that you have achieved through skating Love and creating the space and iconography. The significance that has been massively important to us without even having been there."* (Jenkem Mag, 2024).

Fig 6: *Thrasher Skater of The Year 2021, Mark Suciu with original Love Park local Brian Panebianco filming during the opening weekend of Love Malmö. Photograph: William Paladino (2024).*

3.3 How Skateboarding Is Seen in the City of Malmö

At an early stage of this study, I was informed via a person involved in the planning of an upcoming event at Love Malmö that there existed a specific "steering document" outlining the City of Malmö's work and goals for its skateboarding program. However, upon contacting the city's official skateboard coordinator, Gustav Svanborg Eden, this turned out not to be the case. He clarified that there is no standalone document exclusively governing the skateboarding program. Instead, the work carried out by the program aligns with the overarching goals set by the City Council (Kommunfullmäktige/KF), and it is from these that the skateboarding efforts derive their direction (Eden, personal communication, 11 March 2025).

The goal-setting process in Malmö begins with the City Council, which formulates broad, strategic objectives for the entire municipality. These goals are laid out in the annual budget document and serve as binding guidelines for all municipal operations (Malmö Stad, 2024, p. 6). From there, each municipal committee (Nämnd) interprets and adjusts these goals according to its area of responsibility. Each committee is supported by an administrative department that ensures the practical implementation of the goals within its domain (Malmö Stad, 2024, p. 4).

The city's skateboarding program operates within this structure. It is positioned under the Technical Committee (Tekniska Nämnden), within the Department for Public Environment (Avdelningen för offentlig miljö), and more specifically the Unit for Local Development (Enheten för lokal utveckling). Here, skateboarding activities are developed and implemented in line with specific municipal goals, including:

KF Goal 1 - Good conditions for children and youth

The skateboarding program aims to work closely with Malmö's skateboarding community to ensure accessibility to skateboarding culture city-wide. This includes developing spaces, events, and activations that enable children and youth to participate in, attend, and co-create cultural and recreational activities (Eden, personal communication, 11 March 2025; Malmö Stad, 2024, p. 12).

KF Goal 6 - Strengthening city attractiveness and business conditions

The program contributes to Malmö's identity as a skateboarding city by collaborating on events and initiatives that hold both cultural significance and public appeal. It also promotes cooperation between the non-profit sector, the city, and the skateboarding industry, while working to communicate Malmö's role as a skateboarding destination and supporting the development and operation of skate facilities (Eden, personal communication, 11 March 2025; Malmö Stad, 2024, p. 15).

KF Goal 10 - A city free from segregation

Together with the Urban Environment Unit (Stadsmiljöenheten), the skateboarding program explores the creation of new "active paths" and meeting places where skateboarding culture can promote playfulness, mobility, and spatial legibility for children and youth, particularly in segregated or underrepresented areas (Eden, personal communication, 11 March 2025; Malmö Stad, 2024, p. 22).

KF Goal 11 - Strengthened participation and local cohesion

By collaborating with All-Activity Houses (Allaktivitetshus), the program seeks to support the development of cultural meeting places in Malmö's outer districts, contributing to increased participation and a stronger sense of local cohesion (Eden, personal communication, 11 March 2025; Malmö Stad, 2024, p. 22).

3.3.1 Conclusion

While there are no single steering document exclusively guiding Malmö's skateboarding efforts, the work is clearly integrated within the city's overarching governance framework. Instead of operating in isolation, the skateboarding program is shaped by the City Council's strategic goals and interpreted through Malmö's administrative structure. This layered system from City Council's broad objectives down to unit-level implementation, ensures that skateboarding is not merely seen as a recreational activity, but as a tool for youth development, urban attractiveness, and social inclusion. The absence of a specific policy document does not reflect a lack of direction, but rather an embeddedness within Malmö's broader policy landscape, where skateboarding is treated as a valuable and strategic urban practice.

3.4 Interviews

For the interviews, a good variation of participants is prioritised. With a personal background as a skateboarder and strong connection to the local skateboard scene in Malmö could results in a biased approach or affection when questioning the interviewees, something that have been avoided in these interviews. My background is more a strength in this situation, both for the safety for the participants regarding the interviewer having an insight in the interviewee's passion: skateboarding as well as the possibility to relate to their answers and the usage of them.

All interviews were conducted on site at Love Malmö. Each interview was guided by the same set of basic questions, based on the official goals of the skateboarding program within the City of Malmö, with follow-up questions varying depending on the participant's responses. All interviewees have verbally approved the usage of their name in this study; however, their surnames have been left out as they have no significant value for this study. They have also been informed about the usage of their answers.

3.4.1 Introduction of the Interviewees

Steffen (32), originally from Stavanger in Norway but lived in Malmö from 2010 – 2013 (*to attend Bryggeriets Gymnasium as student*) and 2020 (*to attend Bryggeriets Gymnasium as employee*) - present. Picked by personally by interviewer due to his

longevity as a skateboarder. Interviewed on 27.03.25.

Jack (18) **and Linus** (19), originally from Gothenburg and Kalmar in Sweden, attends Bryggeriets Gymnasium and lived there for about 2,5 years. Handpicked by John Dahlquist, the vice-principal at Bryggeriets Gymnasium (with instructions/information about the study). Interviewed on 27.03.25 in group.

Axel (25), originally from Uppsala in Sweden but lived in Malmö for 7,5 years, originally moved here to attend Bryggeriets Gymnasium. Can be classed as a semi-professional skateboarder. Picked randomly by interviewer to get more insights. Interviewed on 11.05.25.

Ulrika (26), originally from Tranås in Sweden, but lived in Malmö for 4 years. Moved there for an internship and her love for skateboarding. Wanted to be interviewed when informed about by the interviewer's study to give insights from a female skateboarder's perspective. Interviewed on 12.05.25.

4 Results

The results are presented through four overarching themes based on the City of Malmö's goals for its skateboarding program: accessibility for children and youth, strengthening Malmö's identity as a skate city, reducing segregation, and promoting participation and local cohesion. These themes are grounded in what the interviewees expressed about Love Malmö and the city's broader efforts around skate-friendly environments. All interview participants expressed a fundamentally positive view of the City of Malmö's approach to skateboarding. They appreciated the city's long-term investment in skate-friendly infrastructure, cultural events, and the ambition behind Love Malmö. This baseline of support provides important context for understanding the critical feedback that follows. which was often framed not as resistance to the city's strategy, but as constructive critique from within the skateboarding community.

4.1 Good Conditions for Children and Youth

One of the City of Malmö's key objectives is to provide inclusive, accessible environments where children and youth can participate in and co-create skateboarding

culture. However, many interviewees expressed concerns that Love Malmö does not fulfil this function in practice.

The physical design was cited as one barrier. Jack remarked, “It’s a bit too high for kids. I’ve never seen kids skate here.” Linus echoed that sentiment, saying, “You need more leg power to skate this than you’d think. It’s not a warm-up spot.” Axel offered a broader view of the site’s atmosphere and challenge: “You really feel like it’s made for something more than practice. It sets a tone, like, this is where you show up when you’ve been skating for a while.” For Steffen, the issue wasn’t just about technical difficulty, it was about missed opportunities to foster accessibility. He suggested, “There’s nothing wrong with trimming one of the ledges to 35 cm. You’d still keep the soul.”. The ledges at Love Malmö are 45 cm tall, a challenging height for a lot of skateboarders, even the higher skilled ones.

While the symbolic value of the site was widely acknowledged, particularly the granite from Philadelphia’s original Love Park, that very symbolism may have raised the threshold for participation. Axel emphasized, “It’s meaningful that these stones are here. That stuff’s legendary.” Steffen added, “When I skate here, I think, maybe Stevie Williams did a switch pop shuvit right where I pop. That’s a crazy thought.”

Yet for younger skaters or newcomers, this legacy seemed to increase the pressure. Jack commented, “You don’t see the next generation hanging out here. They’re either at Stapelbäddsparken or somewhere where it’s easier to skate.” Linus agreed, stating, “You’re not going to bring your little cousin here to learn. You’d go to Sibbarp or something.” The shared view was that Love Malmö, though inspirational for experienced skaters, falls short of the City of Malmö’s inclusivity goals for children and youth.

4.2 Strengthening City Attractiveness and Business Conditions

The interviewees broadly acknowledged Malmö’s success in establishing itself as a skateboarding city. Love Malmö was widely interpreted as a symbolic and strategic investment that contributes to this identity through design, cultural referencing, and visibility. Axel praised its ambition: “Malmö didn’t just build another skatepark, they

did something big." Steffen appreciated the international connection, saying, "It's not just a place to skate. It connects us to something bigger; skate history lives here now too.". Ulrika highlighted the aesthetic quality: "It looks amazing. The trees and the church really frame it nicely. It's photogenic and unique, not like other spots."

Despite this symbolic power, participants raised concerns about the actual function of the site. Jack noted, "It's mostly old heads here, you know the older generation.". Linus elaborated, "It's a place that looks sick and has a story, but you need to know what you're doing. You don't just roll in like you would at a skatepark.". Axel, who appreciated the tribute, described it as "a museum spot", more of a cultural statement than a living plaza.

Several mentioned that the flow of the space limited its casual usability. Jack explained, "It's definitely got status, but I don't know if it has flow. You kind of go back and forth." Participants also noted a lack of ongoing activity between events. Linus remarked, "They throw a big event and that's great, but then it's kind of quiet again." While the site successfully contributes to Malmö's brand, the findings suggest that cultural significance and regular community engagement are not always aligned.

4.3 A City Free from Segregation

Reducing segregation through skateboarding is one of the City of Malmö's more socially ambitious goals. However, most interviewees expressed that centralized infrastructure undermines this ambition. Love Malmö was described as symbolically inclusive, but not practically accessible for youth outside the city centre. Ulrika was direct: "Everything is still in the city centre. I'd like to see more spots in the outer districts." Steffen added, "Kids from the "förort" (suburbs in Swedish) came by when it opened, but I don't think they felt they could stay or use it.".

A lack of social support or mentorship was also mentioned. Steffen emphasized, "They need someone to guide them. Otherwise, it's just intimidating." Linus reinforced the point: "You kind of have to already know what you're doing here.". The participants did not dismiss Malmö's ambition, but emphasized that reducing segregation requires active community-building and distributed resources, not just iconic central projects.

4.4 Strengthened Participation and Local Cohesion

This final theme explores Malmö's aim to build community through cultural meeting places. While Love Malmö was seen as a respected destination, most respondents said it had not become a place of everyday social connection. Ulrika reflected, "It's not a natural meeting place yet. I still skate mostly with people I already know." Linus noted, "You don't meet new people here like you would at Stapelbäddsparken. There's no mix." Axel described it as a place to film tricks, not to hang out. Jack added, "You just go back and forth. It gets boring after a while." Despite these shortcomings, several noted the space's potential. Steffen concluded, "It's got everything going for it; history, design, visibility. It just needs more life. More people who feel like it's theirs."

4.5 Results Summarized

Together, these results show that while the City of Malmö has made visible and symbolically powerful efforts to position skateboarding within its urban and cultural landscape, the implementation, especially regarding accessibility, inclusiveness, and community-building, remains uneven. Love Malmö embodies much of what the city wants to represent, but it is not yet a fully inclusive or widely used meeting place. It carries prestige and meaning for experienced skaters, but struggles to serve beginners, youth, or residents from Malmö's outer districts.

Despite varied opinions on design and function, all interviewees expressed appreciation for the City of Malmö's overall work with skateboarding. There was a shared sense that the city has done more than most to support skate culture, not only by investing in facilities like Love Malmö, but also by recognizing skateboarding as a legitimate part of the urban fabric. The interviews reveal that while Malmö's ambition is acknowledged and respected, gaps remain between strategic intention and lived experience.

Fig 7: *Overview of Love Malmö. 4 tall ledges in a row, described as challenging by interviewees. Photograph: Tormod Tønnesen (2025).*

5 Discussion

This chapter interprets and critically analyses the findings of this study in relation to its overarching research aim: to explore how Malmö's official planning goals for skateboarding align with the lived and perceived experiences of Malmö-based skateboarders. By drawing on Henri Lefebvre's (1991) spatial triad and placemaking theory, the discussion examines how spaces like Love Malmö are both symbolically powerful and practically contested, revealing deeper dynamics of urban space production and use.

The following sections discuss key themes that emerged from the interviews, such as tensions between authenticity and accessibility, the role of design in shaping everyday practice, and how symbolic values relate to questions of inclusion and participation.

These themes are connected to broader urban planning discourses and comparative examples, such as Philadelphia and Stockholm, to situate Malmö's approach within an international context.

This chapter highlights both the strengths and weaknesses of the City of Malmö's skateboarding strategy. While it focuses on Malmö as a local case, the city's approach may also offer useful ideas for other cities looking to work with skateboarding in urban planning. The chapter also reflects on key critiques and points toward how future planning can become more inclusive, collaborative, and responsive to cultural context.

5.1 Authenticity vs Accessibility

Interviewees widely recognized the ambition and cultural depth behind the City of Malmö's decision to replicate Love Park in Philadelphia. Many expressed pride that Malmö had managed to secure granite from the original park and reconstruct key design elements. From a Lefebvrian standpoint, this reproduction reflects conceived space, designed from above with symbolic, cultural, and aesthetic intentions (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 38). For some, it established Malmö as a serious actor in global skateboarding culture.

However, interviewees also observed that this same commitment to authenticity affected the perceived space, how the site functions in practice. The 45 cm ledges, modelled on those in Philadelphia, were identified as limiting accessibility for less experienced or younger skaters. Here, the idealized conception of space clashed with embodied, everyday use (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 38–39). Still, rather than opposing the design entirely, many participants suggested minor adaptations (e.g., one lower ledge, temporary obstacles) that could expand access without compromising identity.

Importantly, several respondents framed these limitations not as failures but as opportunities for future co-creation. They emphasized that the space's symbolic identity could evolve through use. One participant described the park as "super nice to have" even if they didn't use it frequently. Others said Malmö had "done something big" and showed rare municipal care for skateboarding, a perspective that aligns with the production of lived space, where emotional meaning and local identity merge through daily presence and symbolic reinterpretation (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 134–135).

Fig 8: *Philadelphia Locals lifting a tile to make a kicker vs how the City of Malmö made it a permanent installation. Photograph by William Paladino (2024) & Tormod Tønnesen (2025).*

Fig 9: *Heitor Da Silva demonstrating how the kicker is used to jump over a trash can imported from Philadelphia. Photograph by William Paladino (2024).*

5.1.1 Design, Flow, and Everyday Practice

The physical layout of Love Malmö, its narrow shape, symmetrical ledge arrangement, and linear flow, had mixed reception among participants. From a Lefebvrian lens, these physical patterns shape spatial practice, or perceived space, where movement, routines, and usage unfold (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 38–39, 96). Many respondents described the setup as somewhat restrictive, noting that it encouraged repetitive “back and forth” lines with limited variation.

Still, several acknowledged the design quality, material choices, and aesthetics as impressive. The stonework and setting were praised for contributing to Malmö's international skate identity. One participant even called it "cool just to be seen skating here", a comment that reflects how symbolic presence and visibility influence spatial experience, even when the functional layout is less dynamic.

Skaters also adapted creatively, expanding their use of the space into nearby bike lanes or incorporating nearby stairs. These appropriations exemplify Lefebvre's argument that space is not fixed by design, but constantly negotiated and reproduced through embodied use (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). While many preferred other Malmö spots like Svampen for daily sessions, Love Malmö retained high symbolic value and occasional functional appeal, especially for filming, events, or as a place to challenge your skills. Overall, the discussion of flow and routine did not simply express dissatisfaction but highlighted the skateboarding community's reflexive engagement with space, balancing reverence for design with practical improvisation.

5.1.2 Urban Belonging and Symbolic Ownership

Across interviews, there was strong emotional appreciation for the city's effort to create a culturally significant skateboarding landmark. Several interviewees emphasized that Malmö had taken skateboarding seriously, not just as sport or nuisance, but as cultural practice. For older skaters, the use of original Philadelphia materials gave the site deep symbolic meaning. These interpretations illustrate lived space, the realm of memories, pride, identity, and emotional connection (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 134–135, 222–223).

However, the symbolic meaning of Love Malmö was not equally distributed. Younger skaters or those without a strong connection to Love Park's history saw it more as a formal skate spot than as a site of personal resonance. The skateboarding culture embedded in the architecture did not automatically translate to lived experience for all. Lefebvre reminds us that lived space absorbs and reinterprets both design and use, producing attachments that are always situated and uneven (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 135).

Yet even those with weaker symbolic ties expressed respect and appreciation for the site. Many mentioned that the opening event and the educational materials surrounding it helped communicate the story and legacy of the park, broadening its social reach. One

participant commented that it's important for Malmö to have "something iconic," even if it's not part of everyone's daily skating routine. This suggests that the City of Malmö has succeeded in creating a symbolically rich space that fosters pride and identity, even if its deep emotional resonance is more fully realized among older or historically connected skaters.

5.1.3 Strengthened Participation and Segregation

One of the City of Malmö's key goals is to promote inclusion, reduce segregation, and strengthen participation through accessible, co-created urban spaces. While Love Malmö clearly represents an effort to achieve this, both through its central location and openness, the interviews revealed some gaps between policy goals (conceived space) and actual user experience (perceived and lived space) (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 38–39).

Several participants noted that the spot was most often used by experienced skaters, particularly adult men. Younger users, women, and those from Malmö's outer districts were underrepresented, not necessarily because they were excluded intentionally, but because the space demanded high skill and lacked features for diverse ability levels. This reflects how spatial equity is not just about access, but about how space is designed to invite or discourage different forms of participation.

At the same time, most interviewees praised Malmö's overall efforts and intentions. They acknowledged that no other Swedish city had invested as much in skateboarding, and several felt that Love Malmö was just one of many spaces in a broader network, including places like Stapelbäddsparken, which many used more frequently. This wider ecology of skate spaces shows that Malmö's strategy is not confined to a single site but reflects a distributed model of participation.

Lefebvre argues that for participation to be meaningful, users must not only access space but also contribute to its transformation (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 39). While few interviewees described formal processes of co-creation, some mentioned informal collaboration, event participation, and a sense that the City of Malmö was "listening" to the community. This signals that, even if imperfect, the city's participatory framework is making an impact on a local level.

5.1.4 Summary

Taken together, the interview responses offer a rich and layered view of how Love Malmö is experienced by local skateboarders. While each theme presents tensions, between design and use, symbolism and functionality and inclusion and limitation, it is also clear that the City of Malmö's efforts are largely recognized and appreciated. Interviewees did not reject the space, but rather engaged with it critically, as users who care deeply about how public skateboarding environment's function and feel.

From a Lefebvrian perspective, these insights show the constant interaction between conceived space, perceived space, and lived space. Malmö's planners and cultural actors conceived Love Malmö as a symbolic landmark and global homage. Skaters, through their daily routines, re-interpret and adapt this space, confirming some of the intentions, resisting others and creating new meanings altogether. As Lefebvre (1991, p. 39) argued, space is never static or singular. It is produced through use, imagination, and experience.

This study demonstrates that authenticity and cultural ambition can coexist with local adaptation and critique. While not all skaters feel equally at home at Love Malmö, and not all aspects of the park serve every user group, the site is widely seen as an important part of Malmö's skateboarding landscape. What emerges from these conversations is not a rejection of Malmö's strategy, but an invitation for continued dialogue, experimentation, and participation in shaping skateboard-friendly urban space.

Future planning could benefit from embracing this dynamic, where users are not just consumers of design but active co-producers of meaning. By staying responsive to how space is lived, Malmö can continue to set an international example in how cities support and celebrate skateboarding culture.

Fig 10: *Philadelphian skateboarders from different generations (Ricky Oyola, Fred Gall, Jahmir Brown, Kevin Bilyeu etc.) at Love Malmö together with Gustav Svanborg Eden from the City of Malmö.*

5.2 The City of Malmö's Innovative Approach to Placemaking and Skateboarding

Malmö's integration of skateboarding into its urban fabric offers a compelling example of how a city can embrace subcultures and use them as assets for urban development. The city's focus on placemaking, where urban spaces are co-created by municipal actors, civil society organizations, and local communities, has allowed skateboarding to become a central part of Malmö's identity. This approach, emphasizing collaboration and value co-creation, is particularly evident in spaces like Love Malmö, a skate spot that embodies both global skate culture and local urban identity.

In line with the work of Istoriou and Pozoukidou (2024, p. 2), who argue that placemaking is a collaborative process involving a blend of design, social engagement, and material transformation, Malmö has successfully integrated skateboarding into its urban planning. The city's efforts have made skateboarding a vital part of its urban landscape, ensuring both functionality and cultural relevance. While the city's initiatives have been successful in many ways, there are still aspects of this approach that could be refined to better serve the broader community.

5.2.1 Balancing Symbolism and Accessibility

While Love Malmö could be an iconic space for skateboarding, it also raises important questions about accessibility and inclusivity. Book (2024, p. 7) argues that Malmö's skate spaces contribute to social cohesion, with Love Malmö being a prime example of this. The park's connection to Philadelphia's Love Park brings cultural prestige and reinforces Malmö's identity as a skateboarding city. However, the very symbolism of Love Park can be seen as both a blessing and a challenge.

The original Love Park in Philadelphia was intended as a civic space for the public to enjoy, not a skateboarding spot. However, its architectural features like granite ledges, wide open plazas and stairs were soon adopted by skateboarders, leading to the park's transformation into one of the most iconic skate spots in the world. In the early 2000s, city officials, concerned about the damage caused to the park's surfaces and the behaviour of skateboarders, banned skateboarding, despite its popularity. The city's response was a contentious one, with skateboarders arguing that they brought life to the space, even making it safer (Dianda, 2004).

In contrast, Malmö's approach has been more inclusive and supportive. The creation of Love Malmö, inspired by Love Park's legacy, has been a celebration of skateboarding, with the city actively involving skateboarders in the design process. Rather than viewing skateboarding as a disruptive force, Malmö has embraced it as a cultural asset. This is evident not only in the design of Love Malmö but also in the city's broader policy of integrating skateboard-friendly infrastructure into public spaces. By doing so, Malmö has avoided the conflict that troubled Love Park in Philadelphia, where skateboarding was initially seen as an inconvenience. Instead, Malmö fosters a collaborative relationship between the municipality and local skaters, as well as a more open attitude toward skateboarding in public spaces.

5.2.2 Skateboarding as a Tool for Social Integration

Malmö's success in integrating skateboarding into its public spaces has fostered a sense of community and inclusivity, particularly in spaces like Stapelbäddsparken and Svampen (Konsthallstorget). Book (2024, p. 8) highlights how these spaces have become sites for social interaction, drawing together people from diverse backgrounds

and fostering a sense of belonging. This inclusivity is a critical aspect of Malmö's approach, and it reflects the city's broader goals of reducing segregation and promoting participation.

However, while Malmö has made significant strides in using skateboarding as a tool for social integration, some challenges remain. As the interviewees pointed out, while spaces like Love Malmö are seen as symbolic milestones, they are not always fully accessible to the communities the city aims to serve. For instance, the highly designed nature of Love Malmö may make it feel exclusive, particularly to younger or less experienced skaters. This highlights an ongoing challenge; while Malmö's skate spaces are celebrated, there is still room to ensure that these spaces are more inclusive and welcoming for all members of the community, especially those who may not feel at home in more formal, high-profile spaces.

As Keidar *et al.* (2023, pp. 148–149) argue, placemaking can risk turning into a "buzzword" when it serves primarily symbolic or branding purposes rather than fostering genuine participation. In Malmö's case, Love Malmö's strong symbolic value may at times overshadow the everyday needs of less experienced or marginalised skateboarders, raising questions about how inclusivity is enacted in practice.

5.2.3 Professionalization and the Risk of Losing Grassroots Spirit

Malmö has also navigated the professionalization of skateboarding, particularly with events like the Vans Park Series and the increasing commercial investment in skateboard infrastructure. Book (2024, p. 9) acknowledges that these events have brought global attention to Malmö, helping to position the city as a skateboarding destination. While this is undoubtedly a positive outcome, the commercialization of skateboarding in Malmö also brings risks. The shift toward more professionalized events and spaces could lead to a disconnect between the city's grassroots skate culture and the institutionalized approach to skateboarding development.

This shift is not inherently negative, professionalization can provide much-needed resources and legitimacy for the sport. However, it is important that Malmö does not lose sight of the DIY ethos and community-driven spirit that initially made the city's

skateboarding culture so vibrant. While Love Malmö is a valuable addition to the city's skate scene, future spaces should continue to reflect Malmö's commitment to inclusivity and grassroots engagement. This can be achieved by ensuring that skateboarding remains a community-led activity, with opportunities for local skaters to shape the spaces they use.

Fig 11: *Pictures from the DIY project TBS (Train Banks Spot) in Malmö. World famous DIY Spot built by Pontus Alv & Friends (2004-). Photographs by Nils Svensson (n.d.).*

5.2.4 A Sustainable Model for the Future

Looking forward, Malmö's skateboarding infrastructure faces the challenge of maintaining its dynamic, inclusive culture while adapting to new needs and trends. Book (2024, p. 11) suggests that the city should focus on engaging younger generations of skateboarders to ensure that skateboarding remains a relevant and evolving practice. This is crucial not only for the continued success of Malmö's skateboarding scene but also for maintaining the balance between professional development and grassroots involvement. The city's ability to integrate the next generation of skaters into the planning and development process will be key to sustaining the vibrancy of Malmö's skate culture.

In this context, Malmö can further develop its model by emphasizing user engagement and co-creation. While the city's formal structures have been effective in creating iconic skate spaces, there is a growing need to involve local skaters more actively in the

ongoing development of these spaces. By maintaining strong ties with the skateboarding community, Malmö can continue to set an example for other cities, not only as a destination for skateboarding but as a city that actively listens to and values the input of its residents, this will be discussed furtherly in the next section in this study.

5.3 New Developments in Skateboarding Urbanism: Malmö as a Model for Other Cities

As mentioned in an early stage of this study, skateboarding has gone from a subcultural activity to a planning tool, with examples from San Francisco where they renovated a previously hostile space for skateboarding (with "skate stoppers" etc.), building skateboard-friendly obstacles in hopes of improving the problematic situation regarding the United Nations Plaza being and non-attractive unsafe environment in the city (New York Times, 2025). While there is no legitimate or factual source for this, Malmö is undoubtedly used as an example of a city where similar actions have had a positive effect.

5.3.1 Malmö's Influence on Skateboarding in Urban Design

Malmö's success in integrating skateboarding into urban life has set a precedent for other cities, demonstrating the potential of skateboarding as an urban planning tool. This shift towards embracing skateboarding is increasingly recognized, and cities like Philadelphia are beginning to adopt similar approaches. Malmö's emphasis on collaboration and value co-creation has provided a blueprint for other cities to integrate skateboarding into their urban spaces in a way that benefits both the skateboarding community and the broader public.

In Philadelphia, a notable shift is taking place with the redesign of Thomas Paine Plaza, known as Municipal Plaza or simply "Muni" by skateboarders, located on the other side of road of the original Love Park. Historically, Philadelphia had as mentioned a contentious relationship with skateboarding, particularly with the original Love Park, which became an iconic skateboarding spot. However, the city's response was initially one of exclusion, skateboarding was banned in Love Park, and the park was redesigned to make it less skateable. This response led to years of tension between the skateboarding community and the city's planning authorities.

Recently, however, Philadelphia has begun to embrace skateboarding as part of its public space strategy, likely inspired by models like Malmö's. The newly approved design for Thomas Paine Plaza integrates skateable features into the public space, reflecting a more inclusive approach (OCF Realty, 2023). This shift mirrors Malmö's focus on working with the skateboarding community and acknowledging skateboarding as a positive, culturally significant urban activity. The redevelopment of Thomas Paine Plaza represents a move towards viewing skateboarding not as a disruptive force but as a vibrant addition to the urban environment, much like how Malmö has transformed its skate spaces.

5.3.2 Contrasting Approaches - From Exclusion to Inclusion

The shift in Philadelphia highlights a key contrast between the city's past approach to skateboarding and Malmö's model. When Love Park became a hub for skateboarding in the 1990s, the city's response was to restrict and eventually ban skateboarding, viewing it as a nuisance. In contrast, Malmö has adopted an inclusive strategy that recognizes skateboarding as a legitimate, valuable urban activity. This approach is particularly evident in Love Malmö, where the city collaborated with the skateboarding community to create a space that reflects both Malmö's identity and the cultural significance of skateboarding.

Malmö's approach has been more successful in fostering a positive relationship between the city and skateboarders, ensuring that skateboarding spaces are not just functional but also symbolically meaningful. By engaging local skaters in the planning process and ensuring that their needs are met, Malmö has created a model that other cities, like Philadelphia, are now starting to emulate. Gustav Eden's visit to Philadelphia, as well as collaboration with local Philadelphian Councilmen and skateboarders has without doubt inspired these actions.

5.3.3 Skateboarding as a Tool for Social and Cultural Regeneration

The recognition of skateboarding as a tool for urban regeneration is also evident in the redevelopment of Thomas Paine Plaza. By incorporating skateable elements into the plaza, Philadelphia is following Malmö's lead in using skateboarding to revitalize public spaces. Skateboarding can contribute to the vibrancy and social cohesion of public areas, turning them into dynamic spaces where diverse groups of people come together.

In Malmö, skateboarding has long been a part of the city's cultural identity, with spaces like Stapelbäddsparken and Svampen becoming important hubs for social interaction. The success of these spaces reflects the city's broader commitment to inclusivity and community-building through skateboarding. As Philadelphia moves toward a more inclusive skateboarding strategy, it acknowledges the positive impact that skateboarding can have on public spaces, following Malmö's example of co-creating urban environments that are welcoming to all.

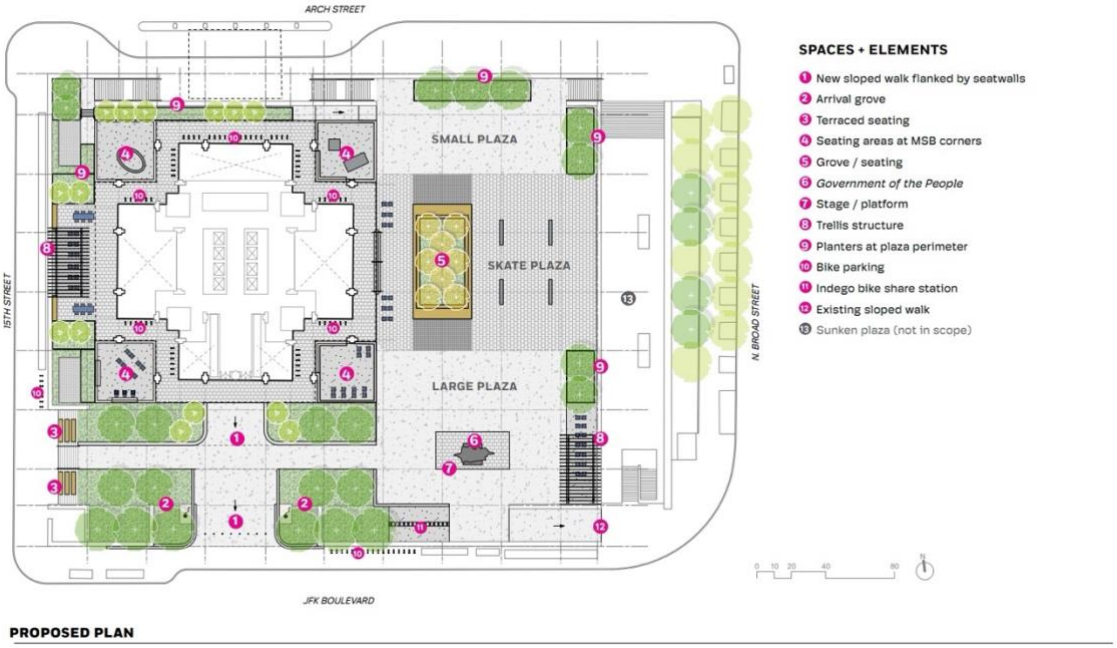

Fig 12: *Overview of the proposed plan of Thomas Paine Plaza, including a Skate Plaza. Courtesy Philadelphia Department of Public Property (2023).*

5.3.4 Malmö as a Model for Future Skateboarding Cities

Malmö's model has proven to be highly effective in integrating skateboarding into the city's urban planning and cultural identity. By embracing skateboarding as a valuable part of the public realm and fostering collaboration with skateboarders, Malmö has created a thriving skate culture that enhances the city's vibrancy and appeal.
As Philadelphia and other cities look to replicate this model, Malmö's influence continues to grow, showing that skateboarding can be a key element of urban design, contributing to both social integration and the cultural vitality of public spaces.

5.4 Critique against Skateboarding in Malmö

By now it is clear that you have access to various skateboard-friendly installations in Malmö, and that it is greatly accepted in the city. However, this is not always the case, especially when using the spaces not intended for skateboarding, commonly known as street skateboarding. Much like scenarios described previously, interference between skateboarders and e.g. people living in a building not being to keen on skateboarding making noise outside their buildings, or authorities telling you are not allowed to skateboard in certain places. “Why don’t you go to the track in Västra Hamnen and skate instead” or “I don’t like that my tax money is being spent on repairing this bench you’re destroying with your skateboard” are common comments in these situations. The problem described is truly a luxurious problem for skateboarders in Malmö, but as previously mentioned the professionalization could arguably have a negative effect for the ones not seeking to just use the spaces intended for skateboarding.

5.4.1 Debates in Media

With the announcement of Love Malmö, it was criticised in a debate post in the local newspaper Sydsvenskan by politician Daniel Källenfors, chairman of Moderaterna (The Moderate Party) in Lidingö, an island outside the Swedish capital Stockholm, considered as one of the richest municipalities in Sweden. In this post he criticises Sweden’s municipal equalisation system, which redistributes tax revenue from wealthier municipalities to cities like Malmö. He argues that Lidingö’s taxpayers are unfairly forced to fund what he calls “jippon”, symbolic or unnecessary initiatives, with a focus on Malmö’s municipal skateboard coordinator, skateparks, and the recent import of granite slabs from the iconic Love Park in Philadelphia (Sydsvenskan, 2024; Ärlemyr, 2024).

He also refers to previous spending he considers wasteful, such as a pink unicorn statue used during World Pride. According to Källenfors, Malmö engages in “nonsense, socialist experiments, and benefit politics,” and he views these projects as examples of poor economic governance. In response, Malmö’s skateboard community sent him a postcard signed “With love, Malmö,” emphasizing that in Malmö “the team has always been greater than the individual” (Ärlemyr, 2024). Malmö politician Andreas Schönström (Socialdemokraterna/The Social Democrat Party) also responded publicly,

defending Malmö's investments in public meeting places like skateparks and arguing that all municipalities benefit from shared welfare systems, since many people work in Malmö but pay tax in other municipalities. He welcomes the ideological debate, framing it as a classic conflict between left and right (Ärlemyr, 2024).

Personally, I agree with Schönström's perspective. Investments in inclusive and culturally relevant public spaces like Love Malmö have value beyond their immediate function, they foster community, social integration, and identity. The critique voiced by Källenfors mirrors the everyday resistance that skateboarders in Malmö face when using public space, comments about noise, damage, or the misuse of taxpayer money. Both represent a broader tension about who public space is for, and what kinds of activities and users are seen as legitimate.

A recurring critique against the City of Malmö's work with skateboarding is the economical perspective of it. The city obviously spends a lot of money on this, granite blocks as well as the transportation of them are not cheap and paying for manpower to place them/build the different installations is an expense as well. Wear and tear are also to be put in consideration, however if it is built properly with proper materials it could end up being a single cost for something that can be used for decades with minor repairs.

Fig 13: *Local Malmö skateboarders' response to politician Daniel Källenfors (M), a "postcard". Photograph by Malmö Stad (2024).*

5.4.2 Re-use of Material

Something that the City of Malmö and the association Bryggeriet have done properly through their collaborations are the re-use of material. A good example of this was the temporary indoor skatepark inside of Folkets Park in Malmö, which have been indoor alternative during wintertime on different occasions. This park was free to use for everyone, with opportunity to loan and try skateboards with instructors available at all times (Bryggeriet, 2020). After these events, the skatepark is placed in storage, but have since 2022 gotten a new life in a new environment at the previously mentioned Hindby Skatepark in the suburbs of Malmö.

This skatepark is built on an abandoned tennis court, that by encouragement from local skateboarders got a well needed renovation. The biggest change to the actual tennis court was that the rough asphalt got resurfaced with concrete, a cost covered by the City of Malmö (Skate Malmö, n.d.a). After the resurfacing, the court was ready to get obstacles used in the temporary skatepark in Folkets Park placed, which results in a full functionable skatepark that is being used by many skateboarders (as well as scooters/kick bikes etc.) in Malmö. Measures like this are important, especially in places that classifies as dead and underappreciated places like the original tennis court in Hindby. There are similar places like this in Malmö, e.g. a old tennis court in Limhamn (Suburbs in Malmö) that have gotten a similar treatment and support, however it is more towards the DIY skatepark (concrete obstacles etc.) in comparison to Hindby.

Fig 14: *Overview of Hindby Skatepark, made from re-used obstacles located at an abandoned tennis court. Photograph by Skate Malmö (n.d.).*

5.5 Extending Inclusion

While Malmö has made significant strides in creating accessible and symbolically rich skateboarding environments, several interviewees highlighted that these efforts are often concentrated in central or highly visible locations. Suburban areas were described as under-supported in terms of permanent or recurring infrastructure. This criticism was framed not as opposition to Malmö's strategy, but as constructive feedback, calling for a more equitable spatial distribution of resources and attention.

From a Lefebvrian standpoint, this tension illustrates a gap between conceived space, where planners define inclusion at a city-wide level, and lived space, where daily access and routine use shape how people actually experience that inclusion (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 38–39, 134–135). While Malmö's central installations symbolize cultural recognition and municipal support, they may not serve the practical needs of young, less experienced skaters in non-central neighbourhoods.

There are, however, positive examples to build upon. In previous years, the City of Malmö and the skateboarding association Bryggeriet have organized workshops in Lindängen, where children could try skateboarding and design their own board graphics with support from instructors. These events show that the city has both the tools and experience to engage suburban communities in meaningful ways. A more recent and ongoing example is the drop-in skateboarding sessions at Stapelbäddsparken, part of the city's "*Kul i Malmö"* summer program, where young people can participate without any registration or prior experience (Malmö Stad, 2025). These activities are free, supervised by instructors, and provide all necessary equipment, offering a low threshold, yet formalized way to engage youth in public space. Still, as some interviewees suggested more broadly, these kinds of initiatives remain largely centralised. A consistent local presence is needed in areas like Lindängen and Rosengård to foster long-term inclusion and participation.

Fig 15: *Parts of obstacles placed at Lindängeskolan for the organized workshops. Photograph by Skate Malmö (n.d.).*

5.5.1 Initiatives in Other Cities

A compelling comparison can be made with Skate Nation, an initiative based in Stockholm that has taken a long-term, embedded approach to social inclusion through skateboarding. Founded during the refugee wave in 2015, Skate Nation has evolved into a national network offering free weekly sessions, day camps, and low-threshold programming in areas such as Tensta, Kista, and Rinkeby (Skate Nation, 2024). In these settings, young people receive free equipment, coaching, and a safe space to participate regardless of background, skill, or gender.

Crucially, Skate Nation is also involved in the development of a new indoor skatepark in Rinkeby, set to open in autumn 2025. Built in collaboration with Fryshuset and local authorities, the project transforms a disused bowling alley beneath Rinkeby Torg into one of Sweden's largest indoor skateparks. In doing so, it brings long-term investment and cultural capital to a suburb that is often misrepresented in national media due to its association with crime etc. (Mitti, 2024a).

Skate Nation's approach offers key lessons for Malmö. Rather than relying solely on large, symbolic sites like Love Malmö, the city could benefit from a distributed network

of smaller, community-rooted skate spaces supported by recurring programming. As Lefebvre (1991, p. 39) argues, participation in space is not just about access, but about everyday presence and the ability to reshape space through use. In this light, Malmö's previous outreach in Lindängen and its successful reuse of materials in Hindby provide strong foundations for similar efforts in other suburban districts.

Skate Nation also actively challenges barriers to participation through inclusive design, providing free gear, welcoming environments, and culturally sensitive practices. These features address the same underrepresentation of youth, women, and beginners that Malmö interviewees identified in central skate spaces. By adopting more of these practices, Malmö could further democratize skateboarding and strengthen its placemaking agenda in areas where such investments are most needed.

Fig 16: *Viktor Telégin (Founder of Skate Nation Stockholm) with kids from the Skate Nation program in Stockholm. Photograph by CHPO Brand*.

5.6 Limitations of This Study

As with all qualitative research, this study is shaped by the conditions under which it was conducted. Several limitations should be acknowledged, both in terms of methodological scope and practical constraints.

Firstly, the number of interviews conducted was relatively limited. While the interviews provided rich and nuanced insights into the lived experiences of Malmö-based skateboarders, a broader range of participants could have offered a more comprehensive understanding. In particular, more voices from younger or newer skaters, as well as from

those active in different parts of the city or from more diverse backgrounds, might have deepened the analysis of inclusion and access. In this regard, the study does not fully capture how factors such as ethnicity or socio-economic background may shape different groups' opportunities to engage with skateboarding in Malmö. This limitation partly reflects the challenge of reaching certain groups within the available time.

Secondly, although I have access to a personal network within Malmö's skateboarding scene and, to some extent, within planning circles, I did not fully utilize this resource to approach planners or city officials such as Gustav Eden, who has played a central role in the development of Malmö's skate infrastructure. This represents a missed opportunity to include perspectives from the "conceived space" side of the planning process more directly. However, I made a deliberate choice to focus the study primarily on skaters' voices, aiming to centre lived experience and everyday practice. While this strengthens the user perspective, it also limits the balance between top-down and bottom-up narratives in the material.

Lastly, the scope and depth of the study were affected by time constraints and personal factors. As with many student projects, the research process had to be conducted within a fixed academic timeline, which inevitably influenced both the data collection process and the extent of the analysis. While these limitations did not prevent the study from achieving its core aims, they are important to acknowledge when assessing the generalizability and depth of the findings.

Despite these limitations, the study contributes valuable insights into how Malmö's planning efforts are experienced from the ground, and it opens up directions for further research and engagement across user and planner perspectives.

6 Final Words

This study has examined how the City of Malmö's official goals for skateboarding, such as inclusion, youth participation and urban identity, align with the lived and perceived experiences of local skateboarders. Based on interviews and thematic analysis informed by Lefebvre's spatial triad and placemaking theory, several key findings emerged.

Malmö's model for integrating skateboarding into the city fabric is widely appreciated among local skaters. The city's efforts have contributed to a sense of belonging and

cultural recognition, particularly through symbolic spaces like Love Malmö. These spaces are seen not only as skate spots, but as public statements of skateboarding's legitimacy and value in urban life. However, despite this symbolic success, practical challenges remain. Skaters described issues with the design and accessibility of Love Malmö, especially for younger or less experienced users. Inclusion and youth participation, two central goals of the City of Malmö's skate strategy, were not fully realized in practice.

A gap was identified between the city's strategic vision ("conceived space") and how skate spaces are actually used and experienced by skaters ("perceived" and "lived space"). While Malmö has fostered a collaborative planning culture, some skaters expressed a need for more continuous, low-barrier engagement, particularly in suburban areas where formal activities and quality infrastructure are lacking. These findings suggest that Malmö's skate-friendly identity could be deepened by further prioritizing co-creation and ongoing dialogue with everyday users.

Beyond Malmö, this study also sheds light on how urban approaches to skateboarding differ internationally. For example, Philadelphia's long-standing anti-skateboarding stance at Love Park contrasts sharply with Malmö's inclusive model. Yet recent shifts in Philadelphia's planning, toward re-integrating skateboarding into public space, suggest a global trend toward recognizing skateboarding as a legitimate urban practice. Malmö's early and proactive engagement stands out in this context, but the city also faces the challenge of maintaining that progressive edge through inclusive follow-through.

In sum, this study shows that Malmö's planning goals for skateboarding are partially aligned with skaters' lived experiences, but that the full potential of inclusion, participation, and spatial justice has not yet been reached. Future planning efforts would benefit from deeper, more continuous collaboration with the skate community, especially in everyday and peripheral spaces. The case of Malmö also offers valuable lessons for other cities seeking to integrate skateboarding into the urban landscape in ways that are culturally meaningful, socially inclusive, and spatially just.

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Figures

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Appendices

Full audio files and fully transcribed interviews with questions can be provided by request.

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