Teenagers and Public Space

Literature Review

Penny Travlou

OPENspace: the research centre for inclusive access to outdoor environments

Edinburgh College of Art and Heriot-Watt University

79 Grassmarket
Edinburgh EH1 2HJ

Tel: 0131 221 6177
Fax: 0131 221 6157
OPENspace@eca.ac.uk

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by Dr. Penny Travlou, OPENspace Research Centre

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1.1 Introduction

Over the last twenty years there has been a developing research interest in young people and their relationship with the urban environment. Various researchers from different countries and academic backgrounds as Kevin Lynch (1977), Colin Ward (1977) and Roger Hart (1979) were pioneering in their approach of observing the experiences of young people in the city. First, Lynch (1977) in his research *Growing Up in Cities* studied small groups of young people in diverse cities (Melbourne, Warsaw, Salta and Mexico City), in an attempt to discover how they used and valued their environment, and identified the importance of urban space as a vital resource in development from adolescence to adulthood. Then, Hart's (1979) major study *Children's Experience of Place* aimed to discover the landscape as it exists for children. His arguments were based on the findings of a case study he carried out in a small town in New England, US. The core conclusion of his research was that within each child lies a primary urge and desire to explore and come to know the larger environment. Meanwhile, at the same time as the above studies, the British anarchist and education reformist, Colin Ward (1977) carried out research in the

UK to produce a qualitative record of children's experiences and explorations in the urban environment through education and play. His radical study advocated children's rights in participation in urban planning and design and suggested that they should be included in the public participation process through strategies based on the recognition of their independent capacity to hold and exercise rights.

The above studies proved to be very influential in inspiring future research on young people and their local environment – both urban and rural - worldwide. A new era of social science research, environmental planning and design dawned in the late seventies with these researchers. Most studies have focused on young people's perceptions and experiences of their local environment and their participatory role in planning and decision-making of environmental projects. However, since the mid-nineties, researchers have shifted their interest towards more radical studies questioning governmental policies and strategies which lead to the exclusion of young people from public space through the criminalisation of certain activities (i.e. skateboarding, graffiti) and policing of their movement (i.e. juvenile curfews). The following sections in the literature review present the most important of these studies and critically discuss their findings.

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1.2 Young People's Perceptions of their Local Environment

1.2.1 Growing Up in Cities (GUIC) Project

Undoubtedly, the most prominent study on young people's perception and experience of their local environment is Kevin Lynch's (1977) project *Growing Up in Cities* which opened the way for numerous similar studies around the world. Nonetheless, this study remains unique, mainly due to its longitudinal and cross-continental character. As mentioned above in the introduction, Lynch carried out research in four different cities. His main intention was to conduct research with children in urban areas characterised by rapid change, which is why his approach is also known as 'action research' (Lynch 1977; Chawla 2001). To gather information on initiatives that would improve the life of urban children and youth, he recommended an approach with multiple methods, such as:

- the collection of census demographics and maps showing the local socio-environmental features;
- the collection of material related to the local culture of childhood;
- the observation of children's use of the community;
- individual interviews with small groups of children and youth;

- guided tours led by small groups of children;
- and, interviews with parents and local officials regarding their perceptions of how current environmental conditions and changes affecting children's lives.

Then, after almost two decades, his project was reinitiated with the support of UNESCO, including in the research eight international cities: Buenos Aires, Melbourne, Northampton, Bangalore, Trondheim, Warsaw, Johannesburg and Oakland (Chawla 2002). The main goal was to return to the original sites to investigate the longitudinal impact of urban changes on young people and the cultural impact of global mobility, and to add new sites in Asia and Africa. Although Kevin Lynch's initial project did not include an economic analysis, as it entirely focused on documenting children's use and perception of their local environment, this time the research focused on low-income areas where children were most dependent on the resources of their immediate environment. The principal objective of the reinitiated *Growing Up In Cities* (GUIC) project was to document some of the human costs and benefits of economic development by showing how the young people's use and perception of the resulting micro-environment affects their lives and their personal development (the micro-environment meaning in this case the urban neighbourhood's of 12- to 15-year-olds from low socio-economic backgrounds)s and to use young people's own perceptions and priorities as the basis for participatory programs for (re)shaping urban environments. It is about closing the dualities and differences between rhetoric and reality, research and action. The project also explores these notions across time and culture through its longitudinal and cross cultural dimensions.

Another unique feature of the project was its interdisciplinary nature. The recent work, as in the past, was conducted by interdisciplinary teams who combined experience in social research and city planning and design. The recent project involved architects, urban planners, geographers, psychologists, anthropologists, educators, community developers, activists and social workers from cities around the world. To accommodate and develop a holistic and interconnected research design across all these disciplines a multi-paradigmatic and multi-method approach was adopted by the original team leaders (a blend of both quantitative and qualitative methods). In the recent replication the emphasis has been on a participatory research methodology.

In addition, one of the goals of the revival of the 'GUIC' was to afford comparisons between children's experience in the past and present at two sites from the seventies that were revisited in the nineties: an old working-class district in Warsaw and an industrialised suburb in Melbourne. For instance, in the case of Sunshine in Melbourne, the results of the present study supplemented the findings of the initial study, showing that young people, then and now, value places in similar terms (Owens 1994). Many places that the original study recorded are still frequented by teenagers and their activities there are not much different than they were twenty years ago. However, other places identified in the recent study, such as streets, stoops and waste places, were not included in the previous studies. According to Louise Chawla (2001), the director of the reinitiated GUIC project, even if twenty-five years have passed from the original project and eight nations have been involved, similar constants emerged in terms of the criteria by which children judged their environments as satisfying their needs or failing them. All of the features that determined good environments in which to grow up in the seventies re-emerged in the nineties:

- a feeling of social integration and acceptance;
- varied, interesting activity settings;
- peer gathering places;
- a general sense of safety and freedom of movement;
- a cohesive community identity; and
- where available, green areas for informal play and exploration as well as organised sports.

There were also constants in the features that children associated with alienation and dissatisfaction:

- social exclusion and stigma;
- boredom;
- fear of crime or harassment;
- heavy traffic; and
- uncollected rubbish and litter.

While geographic isolation was a major concern for children in the seventies, racial and ethnic tensions as well as complaints about crime and environmental pollution were expressed more frequently in the nineties.

The revival of the project also indicated that beyond the provision of basic needs, what the children wanted most was a sense of security, acceptance and positive identity, in places where they could socialise, play with friends and find interesting activities to join or observe.

Finally, the findings of GUIC project showed that communities have to take seriously children's and youth's views on environmental decision-making and invest in the following ingredients of effective participation:

- invest in people who can facilitate participation;
- invest in training and certification;
- recognise action research as a significant contribution to agency planning and academic prestige;
- institutionalise children's inclusion;
- use qualitative as well as quantitative indicators of well-being;
- create community-based school and after-school curricula.

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1.2.3 Other Cross-continental studies

Inspired by GUIC project's cross-continental character, other studies carried out comparative research in more than one country. One such project was conducted in New Zealand, comparing children's independent access to their local environment in comparison with other cities in Australia, Germany and Britain (Tranter and Pawson 2001). The authors employed a variety of research methods – both quantitative and qualitative – to chart the variability of children's freedoms and restrictions of their movement in their local neighbourhood and school. Their international comparisons revealed the determining role of cultures of outdoor activity and individual versus collective responsibility in shaping parental behaviours and children's freedom of movement. In particular, comparisons between New Zealand and Australia, Germany and UK showed striking contrasts in the level of children's freedom, with German children enjoying the highest levels of freedom overall. These international differences are attributed to aspects of the compared cities, the state of public transport, a shared sense of adult responsibility for children's supervision in Germany as opposed to the ethos of individualism in the other three countries, and the greater use of outdoor space by German people of all ages.

In brief, longitudinal and cross-continental studies offer the opportunity to chart the dynamically evolving temporal and spatial parameters of the adolescent experience.

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1.2.4 Young People's Perception of their Local Environment in UK

In Britain, interest in adolescence studies is more recent than for instance in Australia and New Zealand. Few studies have explicitly examined the place use and behaviour of young teenagers in Britain. Instead, attention has focused on children from 5 to 11 years old. Hugh Matthews (1995) stresses that older children are invisible in the urban landscape, an argument that offers a more radical insight into the problematic position of teenagers in modern society. By failing to take into account young people's 'way of seeing', they become a significant outsider group. He suggests that there is a need to investigate the environment as young people understand it, as only in this way can they become fully integrated users of large-scale places. In this respect, it can be argued that older children, particularly those between 14 to 18 years old, are not only virtually absent from environmental planning and excluded from public space – as discussed above – but have also been ignored, until recently, from research.

However in the mid-nineties, the absence of such research on young people was widely noticed. Academics from different disciplines - environmental and developmental psychology, geography, criminology, anthropology, sociology and even landscape architecture and housing – have realised the importance of studying young people's experiences and perceptions of their local environment. In 1996, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) announced a new research programme "*Children 5 – 16: Growing into the 21st Century*" consisting of twenty-two different projects with a common theme: looking at children as social actors (see www.hull.ac.uk/children5to16programme/intro.htm). Among those projects, there were some that focused, in particular, on young people's use and perception of their local environment. For instance, the Centre for Children and Youth at Nene College of Higher Education carried out a large-scale study in Northamptonshire on investigating the environment as young people (9 to 16 years old) 'see it' and how they make use of place (Matthews, Limb and Taylor 1999; www.hull.ac.uk/children5to16programme/intro.htm). The main argument of the study was that young people are seemingly invisible within the 'fourth environment', those public spaces beyond home, school and playground, provided only with 'token spaces', often inappropriate to their needs and aspirations (Matthews 1995; Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith 1998;

www.hull.ac.uk/children5to16programme/intro.htm). The study was based on three major themes: the street as a social arena; the street and social and environmental fears; and the street and social responsibility. Concentrating upon these three themes, the findings from both the questionnaire survey (1087 respondents aged 9 to 16 years) and the semi-structured interviews with young people 'hanging out' on streets, revealed that more than a third of the sample used local streets on a daily basis to 'hang around with friends' during summer, of whom forty-five per cent were girls, a finding which shows that the street is not a male-dominated terrain as the media tries to imply (Matthews, Limb and Taylor 1999). The vast majority of the respondents (82%) claimed that they preferred being out and about than staying in. The same study also showed that, for teenagers, places become imbued with cultural values and meanings, affording not only a sense of difference and of being special. The street corners, indoor shopping centres and vacant places of local areas may be seen as places whereby teenagers can meet and create their own identities. In their attempts to reclaim some of these everyday public spaces, teenagers leave their own territorial markers (i.e. graffiti) as symbolic gestures of their distancing from the world of adults. According to the researchers (Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith 1998), young people create their own 'microgeographies' within their local environment, trying to gain spatial autonomy from adults' control.

> "Through their developing environmental transactions, young teenagers frequently come into contact with places in ways not envisaged by adults. For example, children's play areas became convenient places where groups could hang out during the evening away from the adult gaze; the local shops became a social venue where teenagers from one group could come into contact with other groups and show off their latest clothes and hairstyles, and wait for things to happen; and alleyways and back passages provided spaces for exciting mountain bike races. […] Because these teenagers were developing their own and alternative patterns of land use, places were used in ways not anticipated by adults and this led to frequent clashes" (Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith 1998: 195).

Unfortunately, young people's independent mobility and spatial autonomy appears to be decreasing alarmingly as adults' spatial control is becoming stronger. This argument is demonstrated in another project, funded by ESRC's *Research Programme on Children 5 – 16*, which compares the survey data gathered during the study in London and Hatfield with Mayer Hillman's classic studies of the 1970s and 1990s (Hillman, Adams and Whitelegg 1990; Greenfield *et al.* 2000). The comparison between the two data revealed the

decrease in independent use of public space for younger teenagers with little change for the older group. The study showed that this happens because of the increase of parental anxiety over children's safety in public space. The study has also found uneven patterns of access to public space in relation to locality, gender and ethnicity, where girls and teenagers from minority ethnic groups appeared to be more restricted in their use of public urban space (Greenfield *et al.* 2000).

Besides being marginalised and excluded from *adults*' public space, young people have to confront, as well, the hostility of other teenage groups who want to control the local areas where they 'hang out' (Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith 1997; Woolley *et al*. 1999; Nairn, McCormack and Liepins 2000; Percy-Smith and Matthews 2001). In their study, Matthews, Limb and Percy-Smith (1999: 196) discovered that:

> "'hassle' from other, often older 'kids' and fear of assault among the girls and fear of attack and fear of fights among the boys, kept these teenagers to tightly defined areas, where they felt 'safe' and free to do what they wanted."

The research pointed out that the main reason why young people fear being in their local areas while other teenage groups are present is bullying (Percy-Smith and Matthews 2001). From the sample, 46% of the respondents from the inner area and 17% of those from the suburban area reported experiences of bullying. A further 11% of them from the inner area and 15% from those from the suburban area had changed their environmental behaviour by developing strategies of spatial and social avoidance as a result of bullies in their neighbourhood.

The researchers approach neighbourhood bullying as an expression of young people's contesting microgeographies, drawing from McLaughlin's (1993) and James' (1986) insights on how:

> "…Different groups use particular places, such as the neighbourhood, to play out identity struggles between self and others […] in terms of shared interests, behaviours and circumstances which often give rise to multilayered mictrogeographies co-existing in the same location" (Percy-Smith and Matthews 2001: 52-53).

Inevitably, the outcome of these struggles influences young people's spatial behaviour.

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1.2.5 Young People's Experiences of Rural Environments

Most of the literature on young people's perception of their local environment focuses on those living in urban areas. Many social scientists claim that there is a significant absence in the research literature concerning children and young people in rural areas, although this is changing (Philo 1992; Valentine 1997; Matthews *et al.* 2000). One possible reason for the omission of rural children and teenagers from research may be the stereotypical notion of the countryside as an idyllic place for them to live and grow up. For instance, Valentine (1997: 137) writes that:

> "Perhaps the most powerful imagining is of the rural as a peaceful, tranquil, close knit community […] based on a nostalgia for a past way of life which is 'remembered' as purer, simpler and closer to nature."

These nostalgic impulses are mostly felt by parents rather than children themselves, whose perceptions about the 'rural idyll' depend on its separation from any urban influences (Ward 1990; Valentine 1997; Nairn, Panelli and McCormack 2003). In this sense,

> "[…] urban childhoods are often prejudged against underlying notions of country childhood idyll, and the contemporary lives of rural children themselves are lived within the shadows of the figures of children that play throughout the sunlit landscapes of popular and literary imaginations" (Jones 1997: 159).

However, recent studies have proved the opposite, arguing that rural places, particularly in the developed countries, have changed dramatically in the last twenty years and their differences with urban areas have been constantly decreasing (Valentine 1997; Matthews *et al.* 2000). According to Matthews *et al.* (2000). Young people in rural areas are as much excluded from public space as in urban areas, especially the least affluent teenagers. This argument is also shared by Colin Ward (1990) who stresses that children in rural areas are increasingly being denied access to open spaces (e.g. woods, forests, fields). In other words, the cultural construction of the 'rural idyll' varies with age and is most accessible to and enjoyable for those with economic wealth. More than that, Matthews *et al.* (2000) show how young people try to create 'urban' spaces in rural areas to perform sociability modelled on urban forms as portrayed in the media and popular discourse (see Nairn, Panelli and McCormack 2003). Under the same light, Gill Valentine (1997) suggests that, in contrast to common myths, rural places are not necessarily

settings in which children and teenagers can grow up in innocence, free from conflict. She shows how the rural can be understood as simultaneously both safe and dangerous.

Surprisingly, there are very few comparative studies on urban versus rural experiences of young people, particularly here in Britain. Most of the projects are either carried out in the one setting or the other as those discussed earlier in this section. In New Zealand, however, a group of researchers from the University of Otago carried out a study comparing a rural and an urban environment (Nairn, McCormack and Liepins 2000). The main goal of the study was to bring the 'rural' and 'urban' together by examining the differences and similarities of young people's experiences in both contexts and thus, avoid some reproduction of the urban/rural dualism. The study sought to demonstrate how young people construct a variety of meanings and understandings about sociospatial processes of the environments in which they live. Specifically, the researchers examined how young people described the sites and spaces where they 'hang out' and their experiences of inclusion and exclusion at these places. According to the project's findings, young people in rural areas, like their urban counterparts, experience both exclusion and inclusion in a range of sites and spaces and identify urban as well as 'natural' features as important elements of their respective locations (Nairn, Panelli and McCormack 2003). The research showed that young people associate inclusion with a range of spaces that provide a sense of ease and recognition. Alongside with feelings of inclusion, many young people experienced exclusion within their communities. While relatively few felt totally excluded many recalled instances when they felt excluded. These findings show that young people's responses could not be neatly defined in a simple binary of inclusion or exclusion. Young respondents appeared to experience both instances of inclusion and exclusion within their local environment.

Finally, the research also demonstrated that there is a rural/urban divide in young people's experiences of their local environment which reinforces any myth about this divide.

Along with urban/rural divide, there is also a gender divide identified by studies of rural girls' perceptions of space (Tucker and Matthews 2001). Rural girls experience exclusion and marginalisation on the basis of their gender, in addition with any exclusion stemming from their (young) age. In particular, Tucker and Matthews (2001) study in rural Northamptonshire showed that girls are restricted from using many of the outdoor spaces not only due to their age but also due to their gender. The research findings revealed that

where girls occupied public spaces, they were seen by adults as being the 'wrong' gender in the 'wrong' place as well as being exposed to risks in such unsafe places. A number of girls reported feeling unwelcome in the very places set aside by adults for their use – recreational grounds, parks and woods. Vigilant adults viewed young girls' presence in these recreational spaces, particularly after dark, as unacceptable since only young people who cause trouble go there at that time (Ward Thompson *et al,* 2002). In general, the ways in which the rural landscape is gendered excludes girls from particular opportunities (i.e. recreation). As a result, girls are often marginalised, compelled to stay outside the boundaries of 'boys places'.

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1.3 Crime and Teenagers

1.3.1 Vandalism

According to Lieberg "teenagers have no obvious right to spaces of their own. They often have nowhere to go except public spaces, where they often come into conflict with other groups" (1995: 720). It is commonly known that many teenagers often want to be independent of their parents. Since they have no real private space of their own, they often use public or quasi-public spaces.

Jacobs (1965) states that:

> "Both active and passive participation in the daily life of urban streets promotes a gentle transition into the adult world […] teenagers have always been criticised for this type of loitering but they can hardly grow up without it" (in Lieberg 1995: 730).

The problem teenagers face with regard to public spaces is that these spaces:

> "…Are designed underscore that they are not meant primarily for spontaneous social meetings, they are instead meant for certain specific activities such as transportation" (Leiberg 1995: 720).

Teenagers, thus, are often seen as loitering rather than simply meeting with friends. They are often not welcomed by others who feel that they are going to cause some sort of problem. Parents, in particular, seem to be anxious that older children many become the perpetrators of violence and vandalism or become embroiled in delinquent acts (i.e. drug taking, underage sex) (Valentine and McKendrick 1997). These hostile attitude towards young people's presence in certain areas is more apparent in central business districts (CBD) which have been transformed from public spaces into private. The CBD areas, due

to their nature of being 'commercial spaces', mainly attract people who want to consume, therefore people and particularly the young who use these spaces for non-commercial activities are seen as a nuisance by both business owners and police (White 1993). According to a report submitted by the National Affairs Research Scheme of Australia, 80% of young people aged 15 to 18 had been stopped by the police and of these, all but 17% had been stopped on the street. In addition, 53% of police officers who participated in the research thought that young people were causing problems in malls and shopping centres respectively (Adler et al. 1992). The problem lies particularly with those young people who do not or cannot consume what the commercial enterprise has to offer in these places. As a result, young people are excluded from the use of these so-called commercial spaces and are subject to heavy surveillance and regulation of their activities.

Various studies have revealed that those associated with vandalism and other delinquent activities within outdoor public spaces are largely young people, particularly males (Valentine 1996; Burgess 1998; Geason & Wilson 2000; Tucker & Matthews 2001). As a result, these groups are perceived and as responsible for a range of petty (graffiti, drinking) to serious (sexual assaults, drug abuse) crimes in public space. In the Woods Project (Burgess 1995) carried out in woodlands near London and Nottingham, all different (age, gender and ethnic) groups of respondents agreed that whenever they were alone in a forest they did not feel safe if they saw groups of teenage boys or male strangers. Women, especially, experienced a constant fear of being attacked when they were alone in the woods. Likewise, male respondents recognised that a woman on her own could see them as her potential attackers.

Generally speaking, vandalism in public spaces is a complex issue and needs to be examined in this light. Research is needed which not only focuses on vandalism's impact upon outdoor spaces and their users but also on the reasons why certain groups of people (and individuals) act as troublemakers within these places and how such groups are identified by the rest of the community. As discussed above, vandalism is largely associated with teenage boys, an often misunderstood age/sex group. While younger children are seen as too innocent and vulnerable to dangers in public space, older children are often confronted as the primary culprits of disturbance. In reality, public space is being produced as a 'naturally' adult space (Valentine 1996) but adults' spatial hegemony may be openly contested by teenagers struggling to assert their independence. The space of a woodland, particularly after dark, is often one of the few autonomous

outdoor spaces that teenagers are able to carve out for themselves (Ward Thompson *et al*, 2002). Hanging around, underage drinking, petty vandalism and other forms of non-adherence to order in the park become a form of resistance to adult power (Valentine 1996). This same strategy of resistance is read as a threat to the personal safety of other user groups of these places. Vigilant adults perceive teenagers' presence in these recreational places as unacceptable, since only young people who cause trouble go there alone (Tucker & Matthews 2001). As Cahill (1990: 339) has argued:

> "…The very presence of groups of preadolescents or adolescents in a public place is apparently considered a potential threat to public order [...] While adults treat younger children in public places as innocent, endearing yet sometimes exasperating incompetents, they treat older children as unengaging and frightfully undisciplined rogues. Among other things, the very violation of public etiquette that adults often find amusing when committed by younger children are treated as dangerous moral findings when the transgressor is a few years older."

Along with the above studies on the geography of public space and its use and abuse by different groups, there are other studies dealing with the behaviour of juvenile delinquents in public space from a psychological and criminological perspective. Most studies cite boredom, alienation, family and community breakdown, lack of leisure opportunities and youth unemployment as causes of this behaviour (Geason & Wilson 1989). The Australian Institute of Criminology (Geason and Wilson 1989) stresses that vandalism should not be seen as a senseless behaviour with no motivation, but as a very complex behaviour which might be the result of a number of different motivations, ranging from revenge, anger to boredom, even to the aesthetic experience and existential exploration. However, there are not many studies that focus specifically on each of the above motivations for delinquent behaviour. Only one study of adolescent substance abuse associated boredom susceptibility with deviant behaviour (Iso-Ahola & Crowley 1991). This research suggested that if leisure activities fail to satisfy an adolescent's need for optimal arousal, leisure boredom results and drug use and delinquent behaviour (as vandalism) may be the only alternative. In addition, the same study showed that there is a high probability of an adolescent becoming involved in delinquent activities if hers/his time is more unstructured and unoccupied.

To summarise the above arguments, teenagers even if not actually responsible for vandalism and violence in outdoor space, are seen as potential troublemakers and

excluded or marginalised, as a result, from these places. In a research project commissioned by the Countryside Recreation Network (Joseph *et al.* 2001), it was found that there is persuasive evidence of socially structured exclusion of certain groups. Undoubtedly, young people belong to such an underrepresented group in outdoor activities while central and local government have insufficient resources with which to deal with adolescents' exclusion from these places.

Crime and Teenagers

1.3.2 Teenage Curfews

One question arising from the literature review is whether young people are "devils or angels?" Whatever the answer may be, teenagers seem to be treated with caution for being either the perpetrators or the victims of crime in public space. This is reflected in government policies, particularly in Anglo-American countries, which use various surveillance and policing methods to control young people's behaviour and activities in public space in order to tackle - as they argue – crime and juvenile delinquency. The implementation of juvenile curfews is one such government policy to control crime in public space by imposing strict spatial and temporal restrictions on young people in an era when many adults view them as a menace to be contained. According to Collins and Kearns (2001: 401):

> "Curfews are legal mechanisms which produce public space as adult space by banishing young people from the public realm at certain times. […] Indeed, curfews not only (re)assert adult spatial hegemony but also (re)inforce the social boundaries between adults and young people, keeping the latter "in their place" by reserving certain basic rights (e.g. freedom of movement, association and peaceful assembly) for adults."

In fact, the proliferation of curfews in recent times is closely connected to the pervasive moral panic centred upon young people. For sociologists, the concept 'moral panic' is "an instrument of social control used to demonise particular groups", in this case, young people (Collins and Kearns 2001: 390). In Britain, the association of moral panic with young people became stronger after the murder of a three year-old boy, Jamie Bulger, by two ten year-olds in 1993. The media, in particular, reinforced the image of older children as 'devils' and encouraged the British Conservative Government to initiate juvenile curfews as a weapon to 'crack down' juvenile delinquency.

However, studies on whether curfews as a strategy to control crime are successful conclude that this is quite debatable. According to a major study (Males and Macallair 1998) of the effects of curfews on youth crime in 21 cities of 100,000 or more people in Los Angeles and Orange Counties:

- Curfews cannot be shown to reduce youth crime or violent death over time or by locale as cities without curfews showed the same patterns as cities that enforced curfews;

- Curfews may actually increase crime and reduce youth safety by occupying police time removing law-abiding youths from public space, leaving emptier streets and public places which urban planning experts argue are conductive to crime;

- In Monrovia, California, after the introduction of curfews in 1994, the crime rate did not decline. More surprising, it declined only during the summer months and school-year nights and weekends when the curfew was not enforced;

- In Vermon, Connecticut, police reported no instances of criminal activity among the youth they cited for curfew. Thus, the effect was to remove law-abiding youths from the streets.

According to this research, young people are not 'out of control' as the media and authorities wrongly portrayed them. Instead, it is adults, particularly those over 30, who display 'skyrocketing rates' of serious crime, drug and alcohol abuse.

In Britain, Matthews, Limb and Taylor's (1999) large-scale study, carried out as part of the "Children 5-16: growing into 21st century", came across similar findings to the research in California about the validity of juvenile curfews in the country. The study revealed that a curfew does not offer a way forward as it reinforces a sense of powerlessness and alienation for young people. In reality, it only portrays how contemporary society perceives children and young people:

> "From being innocent and vulnerable 'angels', victims of circumstance, in need of care and protection, children in trouble have been systematically reconstructed and (re)presented in the late 1990's as 'demons', the knowing perpetrators of malevolent and evil acts" (Matthews, Limb and Taylor: 1713).

The same research showed that young people themselves feel quite vulnerable in public space, which makes the discourse on and effectiveness of juvenile curfews even more ambivalent and questionable. According to the research findings, half of the total sample perceived streets to be fearful places when they are out alone and one fourth of them felt

the same when they are out with friends. By far the most articulated dangers after traffic were bullies and gangs, fear of attack and fear of strangers (Matthews, Limb and Taylor 1999). The results suggest that young people' s place fears are largely the products of how adults use places. The findings also revealed that being with friends when outside the home is very important to young people. Yet, it is when young people congregate together that they are often seen as discrepant and their behaviour as threatening. The survey showed that in most cases all they are doing is making themselves feel safer by being together.

Another large-scale study on older children's perceptions of their local urban centres in Britain, and in particular, on their concerns and fears when using these centres, showed that one third of them found their own town centre as dangerous and one fifth as violent (Woolley *et al.* 1999). Likewise, in the larger towns, teenagers described the presence of threatening or dangerous groups of people – drunks and drug users – as 'dangers'. Many of the young participants also mentioned that they worried about being abducted or raped.

In general, discourse on curfew portrays young people on the street as either a potential threat to the moral fabric of society or as a group in need of protection from menaces beyond their control. There is no better way to describe the above argument than Goldson' s proclamation that "he miners of the mid-1980s have been replaced by the minors of the mid-1990s" (Goldson 1997: 134).

Rejecting the validity of the curfew orders, the above studies suggest that the streets could play a positive role in the lives of young people, affording them settings in which they can escape from being with adults (away from the adult gaze), socialise with people of their own age, and develop their own sense of identity.

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1.3.3 Skateboarding and Exclusion from Public Space

One teenage group who faces major exclusion from using public space, and quite often penalisation, is skateboarders. Interestingly, this group of 'active' teenagers have caused such a major impact with their presence in public space (i.e. parks, streets, public steps) that the public has been divided into those who support skateboarding (and the creation of skateparks) and those who dislike them. Along with the public, local authorities, planners and policy-makers worldwide have taken a stand either in support of or against

skateboarding. Particularly in the last decade, when skateboarding has become a trend among teenagers, the debate on the sport is immense. This is probably because skateboarding cannot be defined as a real criminal activity like alcohol and drug abuse, vandalism, shoplifting and other forms of juvenile delinquency. Instead, it is a young urban counterculture that seeks to challenge power relations by questioning the privatisation of public space (Loukaitou-Sideris and Banerjee 1998; Urban Action 2001). Due to its ambiguous character, skateboarding's position has shifted from the urban street to the political arena (Borden 1998a; Stratford 2002). According to some academics who study the spatial conflicts of skateboarding:

> "The 'problem' of skating has been conflated with a 'problem' with young people in public spaces, reflecting a rise in fear of crime from the mid-twentieth century and referencing more general questions about public space and citizenship" (Stratford 2002: 193).

Ian Borden, who has extensively commented on the 'politics of skateboarding', argues that:

> "Skateboarders have encountered a politics of space similar to the experiences of the homeless. Like the homeless, skateboarders occupy urban space without engaging in economic activity of interiors, to the annoyance of building owners and managers. As a result, the urban managers have declared skaters as trespassers, or cited the marks skateboarding causes as proof of criminal damage>" (Borden 1998a: 2)

As the above extract shows, skateboarders deny the production of architecture and urban space as a commodity for exchange, or as a place where the exchange of commodities might take place (Borden 1998b; 2001). As a result, these teenagers experience similar exclusion from public space to those from low income backgrounds who are also not potential consumers and therefore perceived as a nuisance by shop owners and the general public (White 1993). Where the latter group is ejected from business and commercial centres by such measures as juvenile curfews, so the former encounter similar treatment. The intensification of skateboarding in public space has led to a pervasive form of repression and legislation (Borden 1998a). An increasing number of cities in Britain and abroad have placed curfews banning skateboarding in public areas. For instance, in Melbourne, skateboarders were banned from the forecourt of the State Library.

"Anyone caught skating there now faces $200 fine. And this is a scenario that's happening in urban centres all over the world, as skateboarders, and those who engage in other forms of street sport, are increasingly being regarded as a public nuisance and public liability" (ABC Radio National 1999).

In Britain, similar laws have restricted skateboarders' movement for the last decade (Woolley and Johns 2001). For example, local authorities in Sheffield, Manchester and Cardiff have passed a by-law banning skateboarding from the whole of their city centre. However, the ban has not discouraged skateboarders from using public areas for performing their sport. As with any other group of teenagers, the idea behind skateboarding in central urban areas is the opportunities that these places offer for gathering, relaxing and 'hanging out' with friends. According to studies on skateboarding, the enjoyment of the sport comes from watching and learning from others and that can happen only in large areas like parks and streets (Woolley and Johns 2001). The problem, of course, with these places lies on the fact that they are favourite 'hang out' spots for other users (e.g. elderly people, parents with toddlers), too. As a result, tension and conflict is created among them. Many people, because of their lack of knowledge about skateboarding practices, confuse skaters with teenage delinquents. According to Woolley and Johns (2001), this hostile attitude towards skaters is unreasonable as, contrary to what it is believed, they seem to be fairly understanding of other users and happy to 'share' the same spaces with others.

Due to 'spatial antagonism' between skaters and other users of public space, local authorities and planners are forced to take direct action. In most cases, the solution provided is the creation of a skatepark, offering teenagers a place to gather and recreate without necessarily mingling with other users who may be hostile towards them and their activities. For decision-makers, this is an easy and successful plan, with the public applauding the direct outcome of it: the creation of a ghettoised youth space. Apparently, skateparks have become

> "Much more complex places where public and private agendas clash with the desires of teens who want a place to recreate, hang out and have fun. [...] In terms of power, control and skateboard parks themselves, it becomes clear that the parks themselves are often-times gifts of a sort, as well as being 'battlegrounds between users and between groups (homeowners versus skateboarders, for example)" (Jones and Graves 2000: 136, 146).

Through research into six skateparks in Oregon, Jones and Graves (2000) came to the conclusion that these teen places are often misunderstood and misused by those in power and designers as a way to control young people's spatial mobility. Skateparks were seen as a way to fence the activity, constructing boundaries to a sport and young trend in a manner that most likely results in a facility-based mentality that supports the sport without supporting the needs of the users as people.

> "In short, the skatepark became a compromise to get the skaters off the streets, and gave the skaters a place to skate where they 'wouldn't be hassled'" (Jones and Graves 2000: 146).

However, 'getting skaters off the streets' by creating skateparks is not a simple solution. Planners and decision-makers forget that young people have additional needs than just engaging with their favourite sport: they also need places where they can feel independent and free from any control (Borden 1998a). As, most of the times, young people are not consulted about the facilities provided for them, these places do not fit their real needs. It is not rare to see skaters going back to the streets to perform their sport and reclaim their independence (L' Aoustet and Griffet 2001; Woolley and Johns 2001). Older and more experienced skateboarders, especially, feel that skateparks, resembling playgrounds, are not designed for them.

> "To escape the crowd of novices, the experienced participants adopt two strategies: they either meet up at late hours (with the implications that can generate: delinquency, non-attendance at school), or they abandon the place and invade other public spaces, squares, parks or streets" (L' Aoustet and Griffet 2001: 415).

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1.4 Suggestions for Further Research

Two gaps in our empirical knowledge of adolescent experience of public space are identified in this survey. First, longitudinal and cross-continental studies, capable of providing us with a better understanding of temporal and spatial parameters of the adolescent experience, are very few. Relevant to this point, the utilisation of foreign language publications (e.g. the large French literature on the subject) by English-speaking researchers has been minimal. Second, the older teenager group (15-18 years old) is particularly underrepresented in the literature, even though this is the crucial age of

'teenage experience' for many young people. Most studies of this group follow a criminological approach, dealing mainly with issues of teenage delinquency, possibly reflecting negative social images of adolescents as the deviants *par excellence*. Finally, academic research should be available to local authorities, planners and policy-makers for consultation in their future youth strategies. In order to formulate friendlier policies and more beneficial initiatives for young people, decision-makers have to get a more in-depth view on daily experiences and life expectations and aspirations of teenagers.

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