Creating Skateboarding Spaces or Corralling Skaters? The Rise of Public Skateparks in Rural Northeast Alabama

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ABSTRACT

The construction of a series of public skateboarding parks (skateparks) in rural areas in northeast Alabama came about between 2005 and 2007. Skateparks are expensive projects for rural Alabama city governments to undergo; yet, numerous parks have been built within the last decade. Our research explores why these parks were built, where space was allocated for the park, who funded them, and how the space is regulated. The majority of our data come from interviewing city authorities or parties that had a role in funding or campaigning for a skatepark. We have found the establishment of these parks had mix motivations with parties wanting to support skateboarders and others to keep skaters off the streets. Alabama skateparks were built as an annex to multi-sports complexes or preexisting public parks, were funded from a variety of private and public sources, and are regulated by signage and policing.

Keywords: Place, planning, skateboarding, space

INTRODUCTION

Skateboarding in the U.S. has been a popular recreation activity for over half a century. Although the activity dwells on the fringe of society, skateboarding culture is always present on the urban landscape. Skateboarders reimagine space and place repurposing city sidewalks for transportation routes, stair railings for spots to showcase and practice tricks, and abandoned lots for new skating territory. Drawing heavily from Borden (2001), this paper first presents a critical analysis of skateboarding and urban space. We then present a case study in rural Alabama to analyze how and why planners in smaller towns designate space for skateboarding.

Existing academic literature on skateboarding is generally found outside of the geography discipline: architecture, health...
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care, sociology, and sports. Within geography, the literature is primarily found within the confines of urban planning and has an emphasis on skateboarding parks (skateparks) in larger cities including, but not limited to, Portland, Bend, Eugene, Lincoln City, McMinnville, and Salem, OR (Jones and Graves 2000), Amsterdam, Netherlands (Karsten and Pel 2001), Sheffield, Manchester, and Cardiff, UK (Woolley and Johns 2001), Christ Church, New Zealand (Freeman and Riordan 2002), Oakland, CA (Howell 2008), Philadelphia, PA (Németh 2006; Howell 2008), New York, NY (Chiu 2009), Seattle, WA, Portland, OR, San Pedro, CA (Vivoni 2009), and London, UK (Carmona 2014). Our study is unique in that we address skateboarding parks in rural towns. We question the motives behind the development of these often-expensive parks while keeping an emphasis on the importance of space and place.

Northeast Alabama began seeing the rise of public skateparks since the turn of the millennium. We define the northeastern part of the state as being north of I-20 and east of I-65. In this region, there are a total of nine skateparks. Two of these exist within the northern urban area of Huntsville. In this preliminary case study, we gathered interview data for four of the remaining seven parks and determined these four were established in the timeframe of 2005 to 2007. The three other rural skateparks were established before 2008; however, we did not collect interview data to identify the specific years they were constructed. We leave these parks, as well as the other rural and urban skateparks in Alabama, for future analysis. Although outside of the scope of this paper, a combination of interview data and Internet searches reveals that Alabama has at least seventeen skateparks (Fig. 1).

Investigating the trend of rural skatepark construction, we present the following research questions: (1) What was the catalyst for the development of public skateparks across a region of northeast Alabama? More specifically, was the space created to keep children and young adults from skating in undesignated areas and community space (corralling them to the park and regulated skating outside of this designated space) or was it a community led push for a more suitable and safer place to skateboard? (2) How was the site location for the skateparks chosen? (3) How were these skateparks funded? and (4) How are these spaces regulated?

SKATEBOARDING OCEANS TO CITY STREETS

Skateboarding has been a popular activity in the United States since the 1950’s. The prototype skateboards (circa 1930’s) were actually scooters with the handlebars removed. In the late 1950’s into the 1960’s, skateboarding became popular in a variety of coastal cities in California. Surfers were looking for a means of continuing to surf when waves were low. When viewing skateboarding as a continuation of surfing, the history stretches back much further. He’e nalu is the Hawaiian word for surfing and has a history stretching back hundreds of years. Vivoni (2009, 135) captures the essence of the Pacific heritage in his description of skateboarding: “The ancient and spiritual practice of surfing combined with youthful ingenuity underline all variations on the skateboarding theme.” Although skateboarding can trace its lineage to surfing, Borden (2001, 33) argues that,

“On one level this activity appears as urban escapism, just as pot-holing and mountaineering make a ‘claim to nature’ and so ‘flee the deteriorated and unrenovated city’ in order to ‘really’ live. However, this early skateboarding was less a form of escape – as surfing might be construed – than it was a repositioning of the urban. Through surf-related moves, skaters recombined body, board and terrain, simultaneously copying one activity (surfing) while initiating a second (skateboarding). The modernist space of suburbia was found, adapted and reconceived as another kind of space, as a concrete wave.”

In the last half century, much has changed in this recreational activity: the design of the skateboard and wheels, the riding and
Figure 1. Map of Alabama skateparks. Counties are outlined, and stars mark the locations of skateparks.
trick techniques, as well as the various social aspects of the skateboarder (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity, peer groups). The activity of skateboarding broadened from recreation to a competitive sport and multi-billion-dollar industry and at the same time grew to play a vital role in peer-relations and social activities. Skateparks provide a means for youth to exercise social capital (Weller 2006) and significant place of gender identity construction (Pomerantz et al. 2004; Atencio et al. 2009; Carr 2017). Borden (2001) refers us to Lefebvre’s (1991) work on the construction of social identity through spaces of ritual and initiation. Skateparks provide this space; a space where skaters gather to show off their abilities and, in essence, compete for their social status through their movements and skills on the skateboard.

A DIALECTICAL PROCESS: SKATEBOARDING AND SPACE

Skateboarding spread throughout the U.S. and to other regions of the world began from its origins in California. Various techniques have evolved across a variety of space in a reciprocal fashion. Space has inspired new techniques of skateboarding with the capabilities of riding, grinding (sliding the skateboard across an obstacle with its trucks or board rather than the wheels), and ollieing (jumping the skateboard on to, off of, or over obstacles) while at the same time skateboarders creatively search for, modify, and adapt space for new challenges and skating styles. In defining this development, Borden (2001) draws many excellent comparisons to Lefebvre’s (1991) magnum opus. The idea of space can be thought of as a dialectical process between itself and human agency:

“Where capitalism sub-divides and controls, measures and turns land into a commodity – in short, produces abstract space – skaters created spatial enclaves within […] cities worldwide. This is one of skateboarding’s central features, adopting and exploiting a given physical terrain in order to present skaters with new and distinctive uses other than the original function of that terrain.” (Borden 2001, 29).

Space does not determine social action alone, nor does social action create space, rather the two interact and define one another. For example, a skateboarder using a city sidewalk for practicing tricks is repurposing the space for her actions; however, something preexisting about this space, perhaps a unique obstacle or smooth surface, motivated her to skate there.

In the rural towns of northeast Alabama, there is a lack of opportune space for skateboarders, leading them, consequentially, to creatively seek out public (and private) spaces for practice. In this region, it is still uncommon to find public support for bicyclists (in the form of bike lanes, share the road signs, parking racks, and other supportive city ordinances), let alone the practice of skateboarding, which is often perceived as destructive or delinquent as made evident by several reports of interviewed skateboarders and various signs posted specifically targeting “no skateboarding” in several locations in our case study.

Skateboarders have a rich history of surveying a variety of landscapes for new and innovative skating space from urban streets to suburban swimming pools to the abandoned infrastructure of old reservoirs and large concrete drainage pipes on the outskirts of civilization (Borden 2001). Their conquests have, in a sense, urbanized suburbia:

“Together, the tactics of appropriation, colonization and identity formation helped skaters to redefine both the city and themselves. By making a different edit of the urban realm from alternative locations and times, skateboarders transformed the sedately suburban character […] into dramatic concrete constructions, exploited under an air of espionage. […] Skateboarders, however,
made the suburban explicitly urban in character, rendering it more confrontational, hence disclosing the ‘schizophrenic’ character of urban space – the coexistence of spaces of play, spaces of exchange and circulation, political space and cultural space. In particular, skateboards resurrected the dead street of the suburb, not in order to reintegrate it with the residential home but with their own social life.” (Borden 2001, 53-54).

Although skateboarders treat newfound spaces as their discovery, Borden (2001, 54) argues that,

“What they thought to have ‘found’ was really not only a production as first created, but also a production of themselves seeking to use it for skateboarding. And in doing so, skateboarders’ reproduction of the architecture and urban space of the city conflicted with the reproduction of that same space by others. Thus the pools and pipes used by skaters were commonly reclaimed by these others (police, owners, developers).”

The ‘found’ space to a skateboarder is reproduced into a new space, albeit temporarily. To them, the production space has no alternative value. The water drainage pipe does not drain water from the city to the hinterlands; it serves as space to practice half pipe and other unique tricks.

**SKATEBOARDING SPACE**

Skateboarding takes place on a variety of surfaces and spaces. The most common of which are skateparks, skateplazas, skatespots, as well as public cityscapes and private properties. Skateparks are the focal point of our case study and are the most common type of purpose-built skating facility. These parks can be public or private and act as a space for practicing and mastering tricks to be later executed in the streets. In some cases, newer park design replicates aspects of street skating, incorporating various obstacles such as ramps, rails, kickers, half-pipes, quarter-pipes, fun-boxes, roll-ins, and manual pads. The foundations for these arenas are typically built upon a square or rectangular concrete slab, which allows the ramps, rails, and other structures to be firmly bolted to the ground for stability. The ramps and other skating surfaces are positioned in a way to establish fluidity while skating; however, the fluidity of the park depends a great deal on the amount of time, knowledge of skating, and effort put forth by the planners of the skatepark. Other park designs mimic and elaborate off of earlier swimming pool skatespots, having various bowl-shaped forms. These parks provide unique skating and freeform opportunities that cannot be replicated on the streets.

Skateplazas are also purpose-built skating facilities but vary from skateparks in several ways (Vivoni 2009). Plazas are comprised of surfaces built or maneuvered in order to mimic the urban landscape with the sole purpose of producing an area where a fluid, smooth ‘run’ can be executed. They are comprised of rails, staircases, slopes, ledges, large concrete bowls, banks, curbs, and anything that would mimic skateable surfaces in the cityscape (Vivoni 2009).

Another form of skateboarding space is the smaller, skatespot. Unlike the previous two arenas, skatespots are typically not purpose-built facilities (Vivoni 2009). They are generally an area of public or private land found to be suitable for skateboarding and out of society’s way enough to occupy for long periods of time. These spaces are commonly found under bridges, on slabs of concrete where buildings once were, sidewalks, and anywhere on the urban landscape that can be used to display tricks. Woolley and Johns (2001) found that skaters choose these spots in urban centers based on three criteria: accessibility, sociability/compatibility, and opportunities for practicing tricks. Skateboarders may modify skatespots to increase the skating potential.
SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND BEHAVIORS OF SKATEBOARDERS

The term “social exclusion” was initially a term used in France to describe individuals who were administratively excluded from the social insurance system by the state (Burchardt et al. 1999). As the term spread across Europe, it continued to be associated with issues pertaining to economics, most commonly with the impoverished. Although discussion of this term is still dominated by economic factors, there has been a great deal of debate over the complexity of social exclusion and its scope beyond the impoverished. Burchardt et al. (1999) expand social exclusion to incorporate any individual that is prevented from participating in normal social activities allocated to citizens of the society they live in.

In the context of our study, skateboarders are often excluded due to decision-making beyond their control. City planning and ordinances are controlled by non-skating adults and, resultantly, often cater to the needs of adults while neglecting, and sometimes outlawing the needs of young people in public space. This form of exclusion is illustrated by regulations banning skateboarding in city centers and other public domains. Vivoni (2009) also discusses various strategies urban designers have developed and implemented to ‘skateproof’ new city structures. There is not a standard procedure; however, common forms of ‘skateproofing’ include the addition of knobs to commonly used surfaces such as ledges and rails, as well as adding structures to sidewalks to disrupt the grinding and rolling of the boards, trucks, or wheels skateboards.

CASE STUDY: THE RISE OF RURAL ALABAMIAN SKATEPARKS

Alabama is a less populated state with 4.8 million people, and has four cities with populations >100,000: Huntsville (180,105), Mobile (195,111), Montgomery (205,764), and the most populated city, Birmingham (212,237) (U.S. Census Bureau 2010a). Outside of these urban areas, and the cities Tuscaloosa and Auburn, Alabama is very rural ranking 29th in U.S. state population density (244.5 people per km²) (U.S. Census Bureau 2010b). With the aim of studying small town skateparks, we center on the northeastern region of the state, which we distinguish as the region north of Interstate 20 and east of Interstate 65. Jacksonville was chosen because it is the base for our research and because observations in this city led to the interest in researching the subject. In addition, several other known skateparks exist to the north and to the south of the location.

We searched for other rural skateparks based on city populations under 50,000, the U.S. Census designation for rural. In northeast Alabama, only Huntsville has a population greater than 50,000. Cities in our study include: Weaver (3,038), Piedmont (pop. 4,878), Jacksonville (pop. 12,548), and Gadsden (pop. 36,856) (U.S. Census Bureau 2010a) (Fig. 2). It is worth mention-
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Figure 2. Map of the skateparks in northeast Alabama. The skateboarding icons represent the approximate locations of the four skateparks in the study. Going from left to right, the cities included: Gadsden, Weaver, Jacksonville, and Piedmont.

ing that Jacksonville is home to Jacksonville State University, which has an approximate enrollment of 9,000. Many of these students commute, and it is presently unclear as to how many university students use the local skatepark (Figs. 3 and 4).

METHODS

The data gathered for this project were derived from semi-structured interviews with city authorities and parties that had a role in funding or campaigning for a skatepark. These parties included business owners, community organizations, and other various community members who played roles in petitioning local governments to fund skateparks or donated directly to the effort.

The initial phase of our project determined which cities in the surrounding counties of Jacksonville, Alabama had a public skatepark. Methods in this procedure included analysis of zoning maps and Google Maps, talking with local skateboarders, and conducting fieldwork (Fig. 3). With the list of cities, we implemented snowball sampling with semi-structured interviews both over the phone and in person. Phone calls were made to the appropriate city government departments.
Figure 3. Skaters enjoying the Jacksonville skatepark.

Figure 4. The Jacksonville skatepark as seen from a distance. The fields on the left and right forefront are also part of this public space. The skatepark sits on top of the hill in the left side background.
(typically the Parks and Recreation Department) to inquire who we could contact for information about the parks. As more information about the skateparks was gathered, we began organizing the information. Interview questions were designed with the goal of addressing our more complex research questions: (1) Why was the park established? (2) How was the site location chosen? (3) How was the skatepark funded? and (4) How is this space regulated? The interviews followed a list of questions, centered on our research objectives, but also allowed for discussion to deviate from the question topics. This semi-structured format allowed us to modify the question list for the following interviews. Since the purpose of the interviews was to gather relevant information, modifying the question list served to enhance our data gathering, not inhibit the process or add bias to the study. Furthermore, using the snowball sampling approach, we were able to quickly identify a network of key actors involved in the skatepark constructions. Since it was generally a small number of individuals playing significant roles, there was overlap between actors in different cities. After the conclusion of our interviews, we organized the information into categories, each related to a specific research question. Analysis of the information was conducted, highlighting patterns in responses among the interviewees. We will discuss these patterns and their relevance in the next section.

Subsidiary information was recorded via numerous, random observations at all parks in the study with the exception of the Piedmont skatepark through the course of two

Figure 5. Segment of a City of Jacksonville zoning map with the arrow and oval indicating the public area designated as “skateboard park”.

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years. Both Gadsden and Piedmont require approximately 30 minute drives from Jacksonville, while Weaver is only 15 minutes and Jacksonville’s skatepark is right in town. Trips were made to Gadsden instead of Piedmont since Gadsden has a higher population and was known to be frequently used. These observations were both participatory and non-participatory and were conducted by both authors. On several occasions, informal interviews were held with skateboarders.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

(1) Why were public skateparks appearing across a region of northeast Alabama over the last decade?

Determining whether the development of skateparks was to corral or support skateboarders was found to be a complex question with no straight-forward answer. The issue is non-binary, as the interviews indicated mixed motives; however, it is evident that there was an overall support from the community to establish these parks for the benefit of skateboarders. Owen (2015) has also noted a similar mix of motives, indicating that community motivators wanted to provide young skateboarders with park space while at the same time prohibit skateboarding in other areas. In comparison with urban skatepark decision-making, Chiu (2009) suggests the leading motivation for the creation of 16 skateparks across New York City was an effort to corral the skaters. Chiu (2009) noted that the 16 parks were created as an alternative to street skating after the city enacted a law in 1996 that prohibited skateboarding on sidewalks and public plazas. Another instance of what appears to be corralling is the banning of skateboarding in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania’s Love Park and the construction of a fenced in skate park within the boundaries of Love Park (Németh 2006). Several interviewees discussed problems between skateboarders and law enforcement. Anti-skateboarding laws had led towards skateboarders being asked to leave public spaces, numerous fines for skateboarding, and the confiscation of skateboards. These types of actions taken against skateboarders are also experienced in urban environments; in New York City, police officers and employees of the Departments of Transportation, Parks, and Sanitation are authorized to write tickets and confiscate skateboards (Chiu 2009). The degree to which law enforcement led toward the pushback from the skaters to petition for a skatepark is not clear. The exclusionary laws against skateboarders have been around for decades and the skateparks arose more recently in the 2000s. The local attempts to remove skateboarding from public space correspond well with examples provided in the urban planning literature (Németh 2006; Vivoni 2009).

Reducing the nuisance of street and public skating was most likely a consideration of the city governments; however, there were also a considerable number of factors suggesting these purpose-built parks were for the benefit of skateboarders. For instance, in the rural city of Weaver, AL, the skatepark displays a sign of sponsors ranging from the non-skateboarding affiliated Anniston Morning Rotary Club to the Skate Calhoun County Committee (Fig. 6). From a skateboarder’s perspective, having more options, street and public skating and a skatepark is desirable. Skateparks provide a suitable place to practice and master tricks, while street skating provides unique opportunities to attempt alternative tricks as well as a viable means of transportation (Chiu 2009). One interviewee was a part of a city council meeting in which approximately sixty skateboarders attended to petition for a park. Our interviews also revealed these efforts were initiated predominantly by both skating and non-skating adults in the community who wanted to create this space for the skateboarding youth. We suspect the strong community ties with the youth provided the political environment to support the interest of skateboarders.

Another perspective to consider is that the skateboarding industry (when measuring by participants) was at its highest in the last ten years around the time when skateparks were...
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Figure 6. Sponsor sign at Weaver skatepark.

Figure 7. Weaver skatepark. Other areas of this multi-sports complex include a BMX area to the left of the skatepark and playground area in the background. Also, the building in the immediate background is the Weaver Police Station.

built in northeast Alabama. The skatepark constructions may have been a part of a national trend. Statista Inc. (2018) reports the number of participants in skateboarding in the U.S. as 10.13 million in 2006. It has steadily fallen to 6.44 million in 2016. Observations at the skateparks were not recorded during their early years to compare; however, park use in 2015 and 2016 was observed as minimum in Jacksonville, Weaver, and to a lesser extent, Gadsden.

(2) How were the site locations chosen?

We found that each skatepark was an annex to a multi-sports complex or preexisting public park, which is consistent with the literature (Howell 2008). Having an existing park space greatly facilitates the effort in establishing a skatepark. Each skatepark was a relatively small size compared to the encompassing public space (Fig. 7).

With the exception of Jacksonville, each city constructed the skateparks in a central
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location so that, as one city worker put it, “the police could keep an eye on them”. There was
also a skater who reported frequently being stopped by the police and checked for drugs
while skating at the Weaver Park. To avoid the unwelcomed police searches, he and his
friends no longer skate at this location. The Jacksonville skatepark is located in an older
and smaller public park between the downtown and a popular pedestrian trail running
near the western boarder of town. This park
is located near a public housing division and,
as a result, has seen some social (different age
groups, races and genders) mixing in its use.
It has also been described as being a space of
delinquency, full of misbehaving youth who
graffiti, litter, and sell drugs. Our visits to the
park, however, did not witness delinquent
behavior.

(3) How were these skateparks funded?
The average cost of a skatepark is around
$484.40 per square meter, which results
in the total cost in the tens to hundreds of
thousands of dollars (Spectrum Skatepark
Creations Ltd. 2009). In our study, each
skatepark was a relatively small size com-
pared to the encompassing public space and
measured smaller than the average skatepark
size of 929 square meters. (Boarder 2001;
Gembeck 2001; Taylor and Khan 2011).
Despite their small size, the cost is still
significantly high for city budgets in rural
Alabama. Public-private partnerships are a
common means of funding skateparks across
the nation (Howell 2008) and we found this
to be the case in our region of study. The
funding for the skateparks were a mix of city
funding and charitable donations.

One influential individual in Jacksonville
was responsible for a collection of $65,000 in
donations. A local chapter of the Rotary Club
donated an additional $45,000 towards the
Jacksonville skatepark, thanks to the efforts of
one of the club’s influential members. With
the additional city contributions (we were
unable to ascertain the dollar amount), it was
the most expensive skatepark. Piedmont’s
skatepark cost the least at $10,000, which
was primarily used to pour the concrete slab.
The ramps were supplied by used govern-
ment wholesale websites, old skateparks, and
the city employed local welders to refurbish
them. Visiting these parks ten years after the
construction, we can subjectively say the du-
rability of the most and least expensive seems
to be on par. Each park was constructed on
a concrete slab, so variations on longevity is
comparable. Weaver and Gadsden skateparks
are a part of much larger multiplexes (basket-
ball courts, trails, baseball fields, bmx bike
trail, and playgrounds) and, as a result, were
funded through those enterprises.

(4) How are these spaces regulated?
At each location, the parks and recreation
departments play a small role in the regula-
tion of the skateparks. The literature suggests
this is contradictory to the urban, as urban
skateparks are regulated by the Parks Depart-
ment and often have attendants on duty, as
well as specific operating hours (Chiu 2009).
The city police is responsible for their safety
and proper use. Interviews with several parks
departments revealed a pattern of initial po-
licing by officers to a transition to less police
presence. The reasons for which were not
known by the interviewees, but it is worth
noting that the use of signage can transfer
liability and responsibility from the city to
the park users (Howell 2008). Currently, the
mechanism for regulation of these spaces is
mainly signs posted on the premises (Fig.
8). Although liability is reduced by signs,
interviewees mentioned policing does still
occur, but mostly after park hours.

CONCLUSION

Since the mid-1900s, skateboarders have
redefined space and place reimagining street
and public space for the purposes of practic-
ing their riding skills and tricks. Without a
space of their own, skateboarders are left to
search for innovative ways to express their
skills. Setting up homemade ramps in aban-
doned parking lots, using stairs and railings
for grinding, and congregating outside of
private establishments has been an activity
of skateboarders for decades. These activities
often create conflict among skaters, business owners, police, and the general public, and have presented challenges to urban planners. Skaters have refined their craft over the years, sometimes slowly, and other times with rapid changes in skating styles and skateboard design. Space has played a central role in these changes. Boards, wheels, and other smaller components of the skateboard evolve with new spaces rediscovered and repurposed. Drained swimming pools and large drainage pipes required different skills and different skateboards to perfect new moves. These reimagined spaces have paved the way to the creation of new spaces, skateparks. Purpose-built parks and obstacles made to perfect the rugged urban environment.

Skateboarding may have started in urban and suburban California but has quickly spread around the world and from the urban to the rural. Between 2005 and 2007, skateparks were constructed in several rural areas in northeast Alabama. Interested in the planning decision behind this movement, we conducted semi-structured interviews with key actors in the cities of Weaver, Piedmont, Jacksonville, and Gadsden, Alabama. The interviews revealed that there was a mix of motivations behind constructing the skateparks. The investment in skating space was enticed by the rationale that it would alleviate street and public skating, which is unlawful in most public areas in the study. At the same time, the community pushed for a skatepark to be carved out of public space and to be designated just for skateboarders. We conclude that these efforts were in part corralling, but also creating space for skaters.

Site locations for each skatepark were established in preexisting park spaces or constructed along with the development of new multi-sports complexes. Park expenses varied, and in cities with the larger and more
technical parks, public-private partnerships were established to raise funds. Although initially regulated by park and recreation departments, the responsibility has shifted to local police and more recently signage dictates rules and liability for proper park use and prevention of injury is placed on the individual park user.

This study has opened the doors to new questions and future research. We would like to extend this research to other cities throughout rural Alabama to search for similar trends behind the urban planning decisions to construct skateparks. Additionally, the number of skateboarders has seen a downturn since its peak in 2006. It is conceivable to think these spaces may some day be converted to alternative uses if the decreasing trend continues. It is, however, unlikely given the ups and downs this recreational activity has undergone since the 1930s.

REFERENCES


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Mark Allen Jones, Jr. received his Bachelor of Science in Geography at Jacksonville State University in 2016. He is currently seeking a master’s degree in Emergency Management and is a teaching assistant for physical geography and geology labs. His research interests are broad but is currently working at the cross-section of human geography, hazards, and GIS. In addition, he is currently producing archeological maps of local Native American sites using GPS and GIS technology. His future plans involve working towards a Ph.D. in geography.