**Engagement and influence in local policy decisions: An examination of the enabling factors in the negotiations of a youth skateboard community**

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***Abstract***

This study examines the opportunities for and barriers to the inclusion and influence of young people in local recreation policy. Central to the analysis is the relative importance of young peoples’ cultural and social capital and the identity and place of lifestyle sport for empowerment by community stakeholders. The policy responses to and the opportunities for young people to influence the spaces for their sports are considered using a case study of the experiences of a group of young people in their interactions with their local council to ensure provision for their skateboard community. We present the notes, conversations and celebrations of these young people in their journey to challenge the conventional use of the small community park and to promote local investment in a place that more closely reflected their needs. We conclude with observations regarding the capacity of young skateboarders to effectively influence and identify the factors that empower them to contribute at a policy level.

**Introduction**

This paper explores both the opportunities for and barriers to the inclusion and influence of young people in local recreation policy in the UK. It will consider whether the national policy aim (Youth Voice Vehicle, 2012) to increase the involvement of young people in their community planning is effective and will identify the key enabling factors in this engagement. We focus on the empowerment of young people participating in skateboarding and the abilities within this youth subculture to engage with and influence policy. We find Bourdieu’s (1986) theory of power derived from the accumulation of capital useful for examining the chances of empowerment and for success for young people in policy development processes. In particular, we frame our discussion of these young people using the concepts of cultural capital, in both its institutionalized and embodied and linguistic forms, and social capital, which may be problematized by a form of subcultural capital. That is to say, we embark on this analysis with the assumption that while skateboarding, and lifestyle sports more generally, may have undergone at least a partial process of incorporation into the social mainstream (Crissey Honea, 2013; Donnelly, 2008), there remains a whispered deduction about the dissident homology or habitus of the ‘authentic’ youth sport subculture (c.f. Beal, 1995). The contested view of lifestyle sports and their participants provides an intriguing foundation for this study where on the one hand these activities are touted by academics and policy makers as viable strategic alternatives to dominant sports forms to encourage and sustain sport participation amongst the young (King and Church, 2014; Tomlinson, Ravenscroft, Wheaton and Gilchrist, 2005) and on the other hand are seemingly incompatible with the contemporary model of sport development funding in the UK (Turner, 2013).

**Power and influence in the planning and use of public spaces**

In recent years in the UK, the Localism Act (2011) and Neighbourhood Planning Regulations, which came into force in 2012, have shifted the power to communities to directly influence planning and policy. According gov.uk (2015) there is a growing number of proactive communities and by April 2014 around 1,000 communities had embarked on the process of producing a neighbourhood development plan. The central theme is one of dispersing power to non-professional community volunteers in a process of in-depth community consultation.

To fulfill these aims, communities will need to actively engage all of their members in this process. However, traditionally, these roles have been limited to mainly older members of the community. Young people have had little to no influence in this area, except where formal youth councils exist. This problem of youth engagement in policy is a global concern. In 2004 the Australian state of Victoria produced an extensive report on the significance of engaging with young people (Nabben & Hill, 2004). The report identifies a range of benefits including organisational aspects such as more effective planning, the creation of community networks and inclusion. However, more significantly for this article, the report also identifies personal and individual benefits such as challenging stereotypes and encouraging active citizenship. It is akin to a process of enculturation and acquisition of social capital ‘as a means to gain socially desirable ends’ (Lee and Bowen, 2006, p197; c.f. Lareau, 2001). Indeed, while Bourdieu (1986) conceptualized social capital as relating to memberships, Smart (2000) has emphasized the importance of social *connectivity* more generally, which, as Burnett (2006, p283) has argued in a community context

“may translate into different acts of reciprocity, the building of relationships [and the] development of social and emotional skills”.

In this aim to gain individual benefits the Australian report (Nabben & Hill, 2004) reinforces the concept that young people should not be considered as a homogenous group but it should be acknowledged that they represent diverse individual characteristics. Central to Bourdieu’s (1986, 1991) theorizing about the attainment of social power was the interdependence of forms of capital and, in particular, the limits to the acquisition of one form of capital where an individual lacked one or all of the other forms. The compatibility of the individual’s habitus with the field in which they engage or attempt to engage is key to the social advantages and successes the individual will enjoy (Grenfell and James, 1998). In the context of community engagement and planning and policy development, a person’s character and outlook are likely to impact on their capacity to influence processes in an unfamiliar and potentially unreceptive field. The implications for youth empowerment are two-fold: Firstly, we must assume that the cultural capital of individuals, in the form of inherited educational and linguistic dispositions as well as academic credentials and qualifications, will create a habitus that is either more or less consistent with the processes of community planning and development. As a consequence, inequalities must exist in terms of access to and influence in these processes, and to the tangible and social and emotional rewards they bring. Secondly, if youth empowerment and engagement is the aim of local governments then policy makers must make it their business in the first instance to build capacity.

As was the case in Australia, a major aim must be

“building the capacity of people to actively engage in a wide variety of social, economic, cultural, recreational learning and civic amenities.” (Nabben and Hill, 2004, p6).

This requires a different way of working and, in part, the UK’s move to Neighbourhood Planning can be seen as an attempt to accommodate this role. However, capacity building cannot simply be a policy direction and it requires enabling actions to take place around the themes of information and resources and skills and knowledge. This infers the need for local government to become more nurturing and to provide the necessary resources and information to ensure that young people can engage with the process. In addition to individual capacity, an Advice Note by the Scottish Executive (2006) suggests the need for organisational capacity. This involves a change in working practice to be more accessible to young people and may involve adapting the style and language or formal meetings. This process requires that the councils consider how they can ensure that ‘adult and organisational perspectives do not dominate on either side’ (Scottish Executive, 2006). The enabling factor may require an individual or group of individuals to influence and encourage these skills.

**Skateboarding, youth subculture and dilemmas for empowerment**

Lifestyle sports are seen as ‘alternative’ to dominant or traditional sports (Wheaton, 2004). They are more autonomous forms of recreation that flaunt a deliberate distinctiveness that is produced, cosseted and reproduced by their participants (Crouch and Tomlinson, 1994; Wheaton, 2004). They are becoming increasingly popular, especially amongst children and young people under 25 years (Mintel, 2005) and as Tomlinson et al (2005, p34) suggest ‘given the continuing decline in curriculum physical activity at school and the often limited availability of non-school sports activities, regular participation in lifestyle sports between the ages of 15 and 24 could be highly significant in terms of government targets.’ King and Church (2014) highlight an accord between lifestyle sports and youth culture where young people consume leisure as part of wider lifestyle ambitions and their experiences provide a social context upon which they can construct their lifestyle and most importantly their identity. Skateboarding practice therefore expresses the defined identity of the individual and, in contrast to the conformist approach of many traditional sports, encourages young people to maintain a social distinction between themselves and other members of the community. Such theorizing, however, reveals a clear problem that while the popularity of lifestyle sports among Sport England’s target population of 15- 24 years suggests that it can provide an important vehicle for sustaining physical activity in this age group and for the associated agencies to achieve their targets, the connection with youth culture may also reduce the participants’ ability to engage with a formal policy process.

Skateboarding, as a lifestyle sport, attracts young people to both the activity and to the social identity. Beal’s (1995) almost solitary empirical examination of skateboarding revealed a largely counter-hegemonic attitude, albeit the reality of the skaters’ existence presented a number of contradictions. Examinations of lifestyle sports in general have also revealed a culture built on resistance to authority, competition and processes of commercialisation (Coates, Clayton and Humberstone, 2010; Edwards and Corte, 2010; Rinehart and Sydor, 2003) not dissimilar to youth subcultures. Arguably, then, lifestyle sports such as skateboarding afford their members a degree of subcultural capital. We use this term in part as Thornton (1995) does as mirroring cultural capital relating to status attached to subcultural authenticity, but also consider wider implications and align subcultural capital with a negative form of social capital. That is to suggest, subcultural capital may also be a disobliging and obstructive ‘credential’ linked to networks or relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (c.f. Bourdieu, 1986). As the media spreads the ‘authentic’ word of youth subcultures to their members (Thornton, 1995; Wheaton and Beal, 2003), those same discourses of resistance and deviancy must surely be received and interpreted by non-members. The implications of subcultural capital are many for lifestyle sport participants’ inclusion in policy development. They may resist the very idea of organisational control of their sporting spaces and of sports funding pots, and struggle to accept the need for organisational involvement at all, seeing it as interference and dilution of the subcultural image (Turner, 2013). Further, by placing themselves as different and on the outside of the community, young people may face greater resistance to their views and an increased possibility of stereotyping by policy makers (Turner, 2013, Wheaton, 2004).

There has been a significant growth in the number of publically and privately funded skate parks in the UK, which are located even in the smallest of villages. This is in part a response to emerging conflicts over urban space where a shortage of suitable, specialized venues cause the activity to stay in community spaces, adapting existing structures and ‘invading’ public areas (Jenson, Swords and Jeffries, 2012; King and Church, 2014; MacDonald and Shildrick, 2007). As a consequence, and a similar response to that of local government in the US (Borden, 2001), many towns and cities in the UK have introduced bans on skateboarding, reporting the activity as a public menace. In the London Borough of Barking and Dagenham, for instance, it was suggested that

“the introduction of a byelaw to ban skateboarding will help to encourage civic pride as it will mean protecting our open spaces and promoting a welcoming and safe borough.” ([LBBD](https://www.lbbd.gov.uk/news/skateboard-ban/), 2014)

This approach has been repeated across towns and cities such as Coventry, Norwich and Kettering where the ban has been based on the ability to disperse young people to avoid noise nuisance (Gilbert, 2014; Sandhu, 2015). Where skate parks are provided or deliberated, resistance from the community regularly follows despite growing evidence that provision for and the inclusion of lifestyles sports provides a number of civic benefits. Shannon and Werner (2008), for example, have considered the increased provision of community skate parks in North America and the positive impact this has had not only for the relatively small proportion of the community that use the facilities – for whom these are valued and symbolic spaces ‘creating a positive developmental setting for youth’ (p52) – but also for non-users because of the relocation of skaters and the consequent reduced conflict over space, which in turn has led to improved relationships, although not necessarily inclusivity. Others have argued against the need to effectively relocate and forget the skaters and instead to include and empower them (Turner, 2013). Notwithstanding the subcultural capital that comes with youth skateboarding communities, Roberts (2011) suggests that these lifestyle sporting identities are a ‘temporary embellishment’ and that core identity is more significantly influenced by factors such as gender, ethnicity, family occupations, and education. Therefore, although the skateboarding identity may create some initial barriers in the integration of young people in community policy making, cultural capital is perhaps more important for their engagement and influence in the long term. The process of empowerment of young people in the policy making process may rely more on the efforts of councils to address issues of social exclusion, to reject stereotypes, and to acknowledge and embrace the cultural capital and capacity for efficacy of young people. Jenson, Swords and Jeffries (2012), for example, while noting the struggle for urban spaces between civic and business interests and the skateboarding ‘blight’, found skaters to comprise strong creative, sociable, entrepreneurial and protective (of urban landscapes) qualities.

It is against this backdrop that we examine the experiences of a small group of young male skaters in their (successful) attempt to lobby the Parish Council to build a community skate park in a small village in the south of England. For community empowerment to be effective it is important to consider the local policy planning process from the perspective of the young people themselves. Therefore the objectives of this research are to:

1. Examine the extent to which lifestyle sports identity or cultural capital contributes to ability of young people to engage with the policy process.
2. To identify the factors which empower young people to engage with the local policy development process.
3. To identify how local councils address the barriers to effective inclusion for young skateboarders.
4. To present the experiences of young people of the process of community planning.

**Methods**

The data presented in this paper are produced from a single case study selected in response to the proposed need to provide a greater understanding of the young skateboarders’ experiences (Turner, 2013, Wheaton, 2004). This infers the need for a qualitative and in-depth approach to data collection drawing on ethnographic techniques to ensure that the experience and accounts reflect the young people. The research was conducted over a number of years taking a relatively unstructured semi-ethnographic approach, drawing data from a number of emergent sources including the public blogs and online discussions of the skaters over 3 years from 2011 to 2014, local press reports, and parish council and local planning meeting minutes.

The researcher was immersed in the process and recorded their observations from a community perspective including the build-up, proposal, implementation and continued use of the facility in a field diary, to include press cuttings and local observations. Publically available sources of social media were analysed. These were open groups created to promote and discuss the new skate ramp and the local community discussion board. Although open forums, all posts referred to in the research are anonymous (Roberts, 2012). Beninger et al (2014) stress the potential problems posed by using data derived from social media sources in the reliability of the comments to reflect the real world responses. However in this case it was felts that young people are particularly comfortable with social media and were unlikely to significantly misrepresent their views.

Finally an in-depth retrospective interview with one of the young people involved was conducted in 2012 to understand their reflection on the process. This interview offered the opportunity to explore their feelings about the process and the extract both positive and negative experiences.

The data was analyzed using techniques from document analysis for the formal records. The blogs and social media were analysed using thematic techniques and aspects of discourse analysis to identify the significant conversations throughout the process.

**The case study**

The chosen case study reflects a prosperous community with good schools attracting many families. Many traditional sports such a football, cricket, golf and sailing take place at clubs within the village and form an important social focus for village life. The adult community are actively engaged in community planning through the mediums of the parish council, the local conservation society and a community web based discussion board. These forums have successfully influenced planning and development in the area and reflect a general pride in the existing community environment but also a concern to resist significant changes to the status quo.

Young people are rarely represented in these dominantly adult forums. However in 1998 a local youth project was formed to represent the needs of the growing adolescent population and provide a focus for activity in the community outside of the popular traditional organised groups such as Scouts and sports teams. The Youth Project is a registered charity and is run by a Management Committee, which includes representatives from the parish councils, and the sports club who provide a physical venue.

However, despite a young population and the large well-maintained central open space there was no provision for skateboarders. The local sport development team ran a very successful mobile skate park on the recreation ground in the summer of 2004 supported by the local youth project in response to demand from young people as shown below:

“Just a shame there isn't a dedicated skateboard park for such talent.  Come on the Borough Council - where's our skate park” (young resident, community webpage, 2004)

Despite the success of the temporary skate park in no subsequent action was forthcoming and the ability to repeat this facility on a regular basis was restricted by the £2000 cost involved. From a planning perspective, a large urban skate park had been constructed in the neighbouring town approximately three miles way. However three miles is a long distance to travel for young people without their own transport. Additionally younger skaters who felt uncomfortable mixing in the urban culture voiced some concerns regarding the social environment, including the dominance of some other groups and the fact that as venue it had a reputation for attracting anti social behavior. Therefore in 2011 a group of four skateboarders decided to attempt to get a small facility in the village for local young people. They were four young males aged 13 -16 years at the start of the process, all residents of the village, who had attended the local primary school.

**Positive adult mentors and timescales**

Two factors were identified from the analysis that empowered young people in the planning process; positive adult mentors and timescale. The young people benefitted from having strong support from a number of key adults in the community. As Bourdieu (1986) suggests, the level of ‘profit’ to be earned from social and cultural capital is dependent on the capital possessed by one’s networks, so political support from the local councillor was invaluable in a number of ways. Firstly, the young people were able to receive general advice and wisdom, especially in regard to how they might build their network and win the community support. Moreover, that the proposed project had the support of the councillor, who had represented the community for many years, was itself a strong message about the volume of social capital held by the young people. Such capital, according to Bourdieu, is able to establish and reproduce social relationships that escalate the social capital of the agent. Indeed, in the past the support of the local councillor had given planning proposals better credibility in the local adult community.

Secondly, this political support was also central to the success of the young people in that it provided access to resources that might otherwise have been uncertain or unobtainable. Although they were aware of local fund raising events they acknowledged that without more significant levels of capital investment the project would not precede. Initially the young people reported that they had hoped that the parish council would fund the majority and they had already provided facilities for younger children and team sports. This logic ignored the difficulties of local community budgets and timescales. One young person reflected that even after the council had agreed in principle to the development, capital investment was still a major factor in the perceived success of the project. Therefore the support of the councillors in accessing further funding for the next level of local management was pivotal:

“*We heard at the Parish Council last night that the Borough Council have allocated 5k towards the skate ramp. Great news! Well done!*” (Parish Councillor, Facebook, 2012)

One could argue that the young people lacked the specific linguistic and knowledge capital required for this political and economic arena, but their levels of cultural capital more generally allowed them to compensate with a building of social capital for both material and symbolic ‘profits’ in the planning process (c.f. Bourdieu, 1986). While the young people were naive about the structures of local councils, support was also readily available from the Chair of the local ward. His local council manifesto, which supported the creation of facilities for young people gave a strong political direction in ward.

The existence of the village youth project and the clear structural links between the project and the parish council were significant in empowering the young people to engage with the local planning systems and understand the processes. This reflects the analysis of cultural capital and community cohesion (Jeanotte, 2003), which concluded that Bourdieu’s theory of cultural capital is reliant on the actions of agents acting within fields. The fields consist

“ of “a space of possibilities” where socialization of the agents is governed not by intersubjective ties but by objectively defined relations between agents” (Swingewood, 1998: 94–95 cited in Jeanotte, 2003,p4 ).

In this case study the relations were supportive of the younger ‘agents’ and acutely aware of the importance of listening to the views of the young people. In a Telegraph interview the youth workers suggest

“*There are masses of activities for teenagers ……., but often they don't want what adults offer them’*”(Lonsdale,2005, p)

Although the process did involve the young people engaging in formal meetings the scale of a village community resulted in a swift response at every stage. This empowered the young people as they could see the results of their activity and were enthused, motivated and empowered by the responses. After the initial creation of a Facebook group in August 2011 to elicit the views and support of young people in the community they were able to set short term targets

*“There will be a Footpaths and Open Spaces Committee meeting late September which will discuss the possibility of a skate park, and then if they give it the go ahead, it will go before the Parish Council on 4th October.”* (Facebook post August 2011).

Although the young people found navigating the complex array of committee dates confusing the main consultation evening was held within a month of starting out. This did cause some panic as seen in the social media feeds:

*“Sorry for the late notice but can any of you get to the parish meeting tonight?”* (Facebook post October 2011)

However reflective thoughts from the young people suggest that this was in many ways positive and they did not have too much time to build anxiety or expectations. One, who responded to this late call, recalled spending the previous evening discussing the plan before arriving at the centre. It was not a well-rehearsed proposal but he felt that as it was something very familiar and important to them they instinctively knew what they wanted to say. When asked whether they were nervous he commented that they were all familiar with other forms of public speaking and therefore confident. This demonstrates that the young people reflect the observations of Swords and Jeffries (2012) with many skills and attributes, which contributed to their social capital. The skateboarder did not feel that presenting was a worry to the group but they had been taken aback by the questioning from the attendees which although not confrontational was rather ‘nit picking’. The group benefited from the fact that several community surveys had already been conducted and the opportunity to voice concerns had already been given so their reception was relatively friendly. However the concerns raised were remembered after subsequent problems with the completed site one resident commented on the community blog:

“*In 2003, when a public consultation questionnaire returned 60 responses, but neighbours raised concerns about noise and anti-social behaviour as parish chairman ….. said: "XXX isn't exempt from bad behaviour, anti-social behaviour and vandalism,* “ (Community Blog, 2012).

An important factor from the young peoples perspective was the immediate attention in helping them the maintain momentum:

*“It was really encouraging to get the opportunity to put the idea to the parish quickly, it made it feel exciting and possible”* (Young Person interview, 2012)

The previously mentioned political agenda to address the needs of young people and the close association of the youth project and the parish council may have been particularly significant in the speed of the process. The timeline in Figure 1 demonstrates how quickly the young peoples ideas became and reality. This time frame also helped the young people build support and credibility with other young people in the community. Analysis of social media such as Facebook revealed that the initial conversations among young people were somewhat negative presenting a perception that it was unlikely to happen. However as the project progressed posts soon gained the support of the young community. This ‘buy in’ was important in the later delivery and maintenance stages of the process.

Figure 1 Timeline

**The experiences of young people in the process of community planning.**

This section relates to an analysis of the in-depth interview with the young people taking a retrospective, reflective position and ethnographic observations from conversations throughout the process. The young person was asked about their experience of the process from the initial idea to the on-going involvement with the facility.

It was clear that all of the young people identified themselves as skateboarders but had more complex identities linked to other more traditional interests such as the local scout group and choir. For this reason this team may not share some of constraints identified in the literature where it is suggested that those who are attached to lifestyle sports are ‘outside’ of main stream society (Coates, Clayton & Humberstone, 2010) making it more difficult for them to engage with the wider community particularly in the planning process. This potential for exclusion from formal processes may be linked to a rejection by these groups of authority and a desire to be non-conformist. Although these young people enjoyed the freedom of skateboarding they did not necessarily see the need to reject all structure, this mirrors the observations of the Scottish study that identified that young people were generally keen to engage with community planning. In effect this group may demonstrate several of the aspects of cultural capital such as social networks, trust and reciprocity, a sense of belonging, qualifications, skills and memberships (Morrow, 1999). For example all of these young people also shared links to more conventional aspects of the local community such as the church and local scouting groups. This would suggest that subcultural capital for the skateboarding identity provided credibility with specific peer group but that the young people were able to transcend these values to draw on alternative forms of cultural capital in order to gain acceptance in the wider community as suggested by Roberts (2011).

When talking about their interests one said:

*“ I have tried lots of sports over the years and enjoyed most of them but I really like to freedom you get from skateboarding, (pause) I mean… I can chose when, where and how I do it, I don’t need to wait for a set day or time….. it is good to be able to just go and skate when you feel like it”‘* (Skateboarder, 2012)

Therefore the option of choice and control was important to this participant but they did not necessarily reject other more traditional and structured forms of recreation. This also contradicts the idea that lifestyle sports implies a rejection of other more organised activities (Turner, 2013, Coates, Clayton & Humberstone, 2010)

“*Loads of stuff is organised from school to sport and other things, I do enjoy them …err .. explorers (scouts) is great and the leaders help us to do some really good things’*”(Skateboarder,2012)

The impetus to campaign for a skate ramp in the community was not driven by a desire to reject structure but by a need to provide greater empowerment and choice for young people.

“ *We thought it would be great if we could have something really local that we could all get to easily. It can be more difficult to get to the town and you can only do it when you have more time as it takes longer… the ramp in the village is there for everyone and we can quickly go an see if anyone is there…*” (Skateboarder, 2012)

Evidently there is a sense of belonging and community within this group and they feel connected and safe within this group. Demonstrating aspects of cultural capital identified by Morrow, (1999) the alternative identities of this group enabled their engagement with the policy process.

The strength of social networks enjoyed by this group also played a key factor in the success of this project. As part of a small community the young people knew many of the adults involved in the planning process and were able to trust the relationship based on experience:

“*When we started to look at how to get this going we met xxx(*local councillor*), she was really supportive as she had lived in the village for many years and could remember when her kids were young that there was nothing to do… it was easy to talk to her and she understood our ideas straight away”* (Skateboarder, 2012)

The importance of complex social networks in creating opportunities for the young people supports the theories of Bourdieu who acknowledged that the level of social capital possessed by an individual is directly a reflection of the scale of their network connections and the economic and cultural capital possessed by those that that are linked to. He goes on to suggest that this creates a multiplier effect on the capital an individual has, which is reliant on their investment in social relationships. (Bourdieu, 1986: 249). In this scenario the groups ‘multiplied’ their social capital by their social network connections to councillors who offered greater social and economic capital.

This may make this case study unique, as it is unlikely that young people would know and recognise local political figures in more urban communities. However this trust, familiarity and empathy was significant in the successful engagement of young people with this project. Social network integration for young people is fundamental in the engagement of the young people in the community process (Morrow, 1999, Youth Voice Vehicle, 2012). This case study suggests that despite subcultural capital associated with skateboarders, these individuals can still possess cultural capital in the form of social networks, which enable engagement in the community policy process.

Skills and knowledge as cultural capital to increase capacity (Morrow, 1999) also played a role in driving the funding. The project gained funding from the youth service and local development contributions. The skills and educational background of the young people and their families helped them to understand the options available. However it was the support of key adults within the council, which proved the most significant in identifying potential funding routes. As reported in the local paper

“*The £15,000 ramp was jointly funded by section 106 developer contributions, XXXX youth services and ward councillor contributions”*.

It is likely that without support the young people would not have been aware of the 106 contributions. These are described as follows:

“*Developers may be asked to provide contributions for infrastructure in several ways. This may be by way of the Community Infrastructure Levy and planning obligations in the form of section 106 agreements’*” (<http://planningguidance.communities.gov.uk/blog/guidance/community-infrastructure-levy/other-developer-contributions/>, accessed 2015).

In small communities this can be a significant funding source to support small-scale community infrastructure projects. Therefore, despite high levels of cultural capital, the young people still found that understanding the potential funding options difficult to access, this has implications for the success of neighbourhood plans, and they relied on help for this aspect. They recognised that they were lucky to have the support of council officers with this.

“*Without her support I am not sure the ramp would have happened, urh, or, well maybe if it would but it would have taken much longer and I’m not sure whether we would have been able to keep the campaign going, anyway it was really good to have someone who know the system and could set us in the right direction”* (Skateboarder, 2012)

This reflects the findings of Jeannotte (2003), when considering the role of arts in community cohesion, who noted that the interactions and dialogue of shared knowledge were indicators of sustainable communities. In essence these young people benefited from ‘handed down knowledge’ that contributes to their capacity to engage in citizenship.

Ownership and continued involvement also contributed to building the young people‘s capacity for citizenship which Nabben and Hill (2004) viewed as a essential outcome for young peoples engagement. It was the young people’s responsibility to provide exact specifications of what the ramp should be. This was aspect that they really enjoyed in the process:

“*Once we had a set budget we were able to contact skate ramp suppliers, when we started we all had ideas about the perfect solution but soon understood that we would not get everything…. listening to the companies was really interesting and I learnt more about my sport from getting involved*.” (Skateboarder, 2012)

However although reported as a really positive part of the process they also had to learn to cope with criticism from their peers. This was mainly on the social media page and was normally to do with unreal expectations:

“*Oh metal! Bit of a let down, still nice job though!”*(Social media post, May 2012).

The responses from the team were generally positive and they learnt to motivate and influence their peers, building their capacity to engage as active citizens.

*“Yeah I know man, not as good to ride and all, but there were no good concrete quotes in our budget. It was basically a choice between rubbish concrete and good metal so it was a no-brainer. Thanks”* (Team member, Facebook 2012).

The ability of the team to promote and justify their actions to the community and their peers may reflect that the process also enhanced their cultural capital. This also supports the Australian study’s (Nabben & Hill, 2004) assertions regarding the longer-term benefits in terms of positive citizenship.

The ownership of the project by the young people has remained an important theme in its success. Despite several instances of vandalism the ramps remain a popular feature of the park. Although vandalism has been reported even directly after the opening

*“The side was ripped off on day two and there are elements that will want to spoil it for others.”* (Local Paper, 2012).

The engagement with the community and clear sense of purpose has ensured that these setbacks have been overcome. The on-going positive dialogue with the council has been important. Overall evidence would suggest the feared increase in vandalism has not resulted, and although the park generally has suffered from significant acts of vandalism, this is not directly related to the skate park.

The young people have taken ‘ownership’ of the ramp and are proud of their achievements. As such they work hard to maintain standards of use and celebrate its presence in the community. Using social media and continued links to the parish council they have continued to ‘police’ the use of the ramp. This level of engagement and social responsibility has been identified by a numbers of studies in Australia (Nabben and Hill 2004), Scotland ( Scottish Executive, 2006) and the Youth Voice Vehicle (2012) as having long-term benefits for communities. On an annual basis the original campaigners organised a skate jam – inviting local businesses to support competitions and prizes at the ramp. This event is organised by the older members of the team who suggest:

"*It was pretty good I think…the music created a good atmosphere, there was a lot of people there. Plans are now in place to make the competition a regular event and get even more people involved.”* He added they wanted to "*It gives the ramp a purpose."* (Older Skateboarder newspaper report, 2013)

Therefore the process of engagement in the campaign for and maintenance of the skate ramp has demonstrated several aspects of good practice in positive youth engagement with community planning. This will be an increasingly important aspect of local policy due to the Locality Act (2011) and the increasing take up among local communities of neighbourhood plans (Gov.org, 2012). From a lifestyle sport perspective this case study demonstrates the importance of social networks as suggested by Bourdieu (1986) in empowerment for young people who identify with these activities. The case shows that both the choice to engage with the sport and the ongoing commitment to the facilities are linked to concepts of freedom, choice and ownership but these are not barriers to building capacity for citizenship. Provision for lifestyle sports must reflect the needs of the users and to be successful in terms of ongoing use, the young people need to have a feeling of ownership or responsibility for the site.

Therefore returning to the discussion in the introduction, the external provision of skate ramps without consultation or the banning of activities with the community is unlikely to be successful (Sandhu, 2015). In addition this case study lends support for the assertion of Roberts (2011) who suggested that although the lifestyle image may be outwardly important the ability to engage with a policy process is more significantly affected by other aspects represented by cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

From the evidence in this case study and reference to the literature explored previously the following conclusions are suggested in the form of a framework for future practice in engaging young people for lifestyle sport in the planning process:

Figure 2 Summary of enabling factors and barriers to engaging young people

Furthermore good practice identified in the case study suggests that the following actions by local communities can reduce the barriers to effective inclusion for young people with subcultural capital. The findings demonstrate the observations of Bourdieu (1986) that social networks and formal links between the youth workers and the parish / local council including representation on committees result in greater opportunities for dialogue and understanding of local opportunities and issues which increases their cultural capacity. In addition as indicated by Nabben & Hill (2004) there must be a clear local political agenda to address the needs of young people. From their political election manifestos councillors in the village gave a transparent and open indication of their support for improving opportunities for young people in the community. To build young peoples cultural capital the location is important. Meetings housed in familiar community facilities make the process of attending and presenting at council meetings less daunting for young people. In this case the meeting were held in the village library building, adjacent to one of the village primary schools. This was both familiar and physically accessible for the young people with transport. The organisational structure and clear timeframes for action enable young people to fully engage and contribute to the process. In this case study the complete time scale was less than a year.

Effective engagement of young people in community planning is essential for the sustainability of cohesive communities. Young people who identify with lifestyle sports such as skateboarding may be viewed as resisting organisational structure (Coates, Clayton and Humberstone 2010). However this case study suggests that Roberts (2011) observations which suggest that this subcultural identity is a ‘temporary embellishment’ and that their core identity can be influenced by external factors leads to positive engagement with community policy development. Furthermore this case study supports the assertion of Bourdieu (1986) that social networks are a significant contributor to the creations of cultural capital for these young people.

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