

City Mill Skate

A proposal to develop and construct embedded skateable architecture within the new UCL East campus

City Mill Skate

Objectives:

Phase One:

- Development of interim skateable architecture on the UCL East construction sites via a series of community-led 'DIY build' ¹ test projects.

Phase Two:

- Application of key insights from DIY test projects, to inform a design strategy for permanent skateable architecture to be embedded within the completed UCL East campus.

Phase three:

- Activation programme to build community and consolidate placemaking at the City Mill Skate sites.

Key Considerations:

'Skate dot' vs skatepark:

- City Mill Skate is a proposal for a set of incidental obstacles or 'skate dots' to sit within the fabric of the UCL East campus, forming a series of interlinked architectural punctuations akin to a sculpture trail.

- City Mill Skate is not a proposal for the totalised and singular environment associated with contemporary skatepark design

¹. An established model for community-based construction projects, where groups of local skateboarders actively participate in the design and construction of a piece of skateable architecture, using readily available building materials and without the need for heavy machinery.

Research Methodology

Summary:

Our primary concern with City Mill Skate was to avoid imposing a prescriptive set of final outcomes on the local skate community.

Instead we immediately recognised the need to construct a proposal from the ground upward – that is to empower local users and use their insight as the fundamental foundation of the proposed strategy and outcomes.

This is to ensure the final spaces are accessible for a diverse range of users, spanning differing ages, genders, abilities and skill levels.

To achieve this, we identified two key research requirements:

- 1.** To gather a diverse blend of local viewpoints first hand, in order to build a varied series of dialogues with a range of differing user groups - in order to capture a rounded view of the ideal outcomes for the project.
- 2.** Build a suitable platform for promoting City Mill Skate and its aims to a wider audience - that both allowed for real time updates and engagement with the skate community as a whole, alongside providing a readily-accessible digital archive of the different stages of project development.

Research Methodology

Overview:

- Conducted a series of 5x focus groups capturing the opinions of 26 individual skateboarders.
- Each group targeted a different demographic within the local skateboarding community:



Group 1: E5 Skate Rats

A group of skaters aged 12 and under who are local to Hackney.



Group 2: Wickside Crew

Local skaters aged 30-40 and instigators of the *Wickside* DIY project at Clarnico Quay on the Olympic Park.



Group 3: Metal Pegs:

A group of local BMX riders and instigators of the Mabley Green DIY spot on Lee Conservancy Road in E9



Group 4: First of two female skate focus groups including skaters who are sponsored and involved in local skate tuition initiatives.

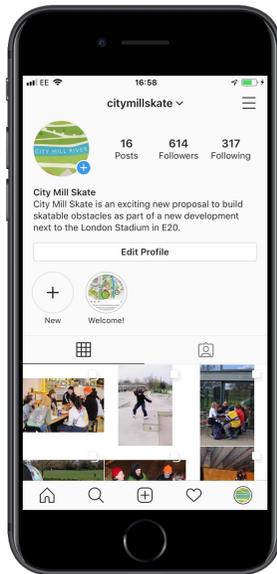


Group 5: The second of two female focus groups, made up of skaters who work with non-profit skate charities and live and skate locally.

Research Methodology

To build on the findings from the focus group phase and to provide an interactive platform with which to amplify the reach of the project, we identified the following as key actions:

- To create an identity for the project (including project name, logo and mission statement)
- To establish a comms channel appropriate to our audience (Instagram), to publicise the project, amplify the reach of the conversations and to encourage dialogue with the wider skate community.
- To research ideas for a program of public engagement and activations.



City Mill Skate Instagram channel



City Mill Skate site overview and mission statement

Key Insights

In order to capture a series of responses that could be easily cross-referenced, each focus group conversation began with the same set of standardised questions.

Analysis of the feedback collated from across the focus groups suggests a broad consensus across the following key topics:

Q1. What makes a skate spot attractive?

All focus groups said:

- Smooth, flat ground.
- Sufficient space between the obstacles.
- Space for multiple users.
- A range of obstacles at varying heights for beginners and more advanced skaters, instead of a smaller group of large obstacles.
- Good flow, variety, and a range of textures across riding surfaces.
- Being close to home.

Girl's Focus Group (1):

'Enough space between the obstacles - and they need to be fun for beginners and for people that can already skate'.

A strong argument emerged within this group for providing something that new skateboarders can learn on. Enhancing the opportunities to learn skating in the area.

Most of the female skaters began skating as adults – so when we talk about beginners we are not limiting that to children.

Girl's Focus Group (2):

'It's hard to learn if there's not stuff around of the right level (n.b. this is a reference to obstacle height). Smooth ground and not too busy. Not overcrowded with people and through traffic'.

E5 Skate Rats (under 12's):

'When you go to Barking, do you get a lift?' 'Oh, yes, my parents take us. we can get driven.' 'We're not going [on the train] because it's quite industrial.'

Having something local and therefore being close to home is important as children rely on parents to take them if further away.

Not all young people can get a lift – for inclusivity we need local skate spots.

Key Insights

Across the board, each group was keen to focus on their differing experiences of learning, developing confidence and self-esteem, and their opportunities for self expression and increased social capital:

Q2. What does skateboarding teach you? What are its benefits?

Little Wednesday:

“Well, you learn, and as a kid this is really useful, about how to fail a hundred times before you succeed”.

Girl’s Focus Group (1):

“Skating makes you patient, stronger, more confident mentally as well as physically, builds self-esteem, makes you happy, feel free, having fun, something just for you”.

E5 Skate Rats (under 12’s):

“Learning to take turns so that other skaters get chance to land their tricks” – they express feeling bad if they cause someone to not land a trick by getting in the way.

“Learning to wait once you’ve had a go before it’s OK to take another turn.”

Learning through skateboarding is a social activity. “One thing I don’t like about skating alone is that with skating with people, like your friends, you learn a few things. They push you to do the tricks. They encourage you. They like hype you up to do different stuff.”

Q4. What elements make a skate spot bad?

The consensus across the groups is as follows:

- Rough ground
- Bad design
- Obstacles that are too advanced
- Too much regulation
- Danger from traffic.

Girl’s Focus Group (2):

“I’m so scared of getting hit by a car. Just skating from the train to the skatepark is terrifying to me”.

E5 Skate Rats (under 12’s):

“When obstacles are too ridiculous to actually skate on. When there’s a good obstacle, like a 4 stair, and then it runs onto a road. That’s dangerous”.

Key Insights

In addition to a focus on learning and self development, there were also a series of extended discussions about wider social interactions: In particular, the codes governing who feels they have a right to be at the final ULC East spaces, and who are intended custodians of these environments and their associated communities.

A consistent theme across the discussions was a focus on questions around who obstacles would be for and how this might widen participation at UCL - understood in the context of changing the physical environment of the proposed site, the human interactions and thus the resultant cultures at the UCL East Campus.

Q4. How is skateboarding seen by society?

All groups spoke about it being a leveller, inclusive, diverse and social. Many of the groups extended this to discuss what skateboarding offers the individual.

Thinking about public engagement we talked to each group about building a community:

Girl's group (2): this group addressed the value added to society by skateboarding:

"Because it means it connects people that wouldn't otherwise be connected because of their different backgrounds, genders, races, ages. And it teaches you something which can get a bit lost in today's society which is just how to treat people and how to share something and just watch out for other people".

This group also talked about having a communal approach to looking after the skate obstacles.

"Big bags, a bin or sweeping stuff so people can collectively look after it".

This sentiment was echoed with the BMX Focus group who talked about how they build a community by working together to develop the obstacles by self build and to keep the place tidy. Brooms, bin bags and even a wheel barrow are kept under one of the ramps so that they are available to all users to keep the space clean:

"We keep stuff underneath that ramp. Don't leave rubbish, we don't want graffiti, just want to keep it looking as, sort of, respectful as possible".

This point was also expanded on by Little Wednesday focus group:

"What should be celebrated most about skating from an outsider perspective in this day and age, in the current climate of identity politics and all that kind of thing, is that skating, for the most part, has always been inclusive. For gender, race, ability, all that kind of thing".

Recommendations

Primary phase:

- In the interests of building an engaged and invested social community around the City Mill Skate project, we recommend using areas within the construction sites at The South Lawn and Marshgate as form of urban laboratory, where we work alongside groups of local skaters to develop a series of small scale 'DIY' construction projects to design, build and test skate obstacles.
- DIY build projects are an embedded element of contemporary skate culture – and crucially provide an egalitarian and participatory forum within which to test ideas and drive active participation in community-based projects in the short term, alongside establishing a sense of 'place'. Thus encouraging use of the resultant skate obstacles in the medium to long term.



Documentation of the first and second phases of the 'Wickside' DIY build project at Clarnico Quay, Stratford initiated by local skateboarders in July 2017

Recommendations

Secondary phase:

- Develop a series of 'skate dots' i.e. – incidental skateable obstacles resembling (in terms of scale) items of conventional street furniture, to be embedded on a permanent basis within the fabric of the completed UCL East campus.
- Key design considerations:
 - Provision of a variety of obstacles of differing dimensions (esp. height) to cater to skaters across all levels of proficiency.
 - Provision of a smooth riding surface to place the obstacles upon is paramount.
 - Final design must achieve an equitable balance between incorporating successful skateable elements and providing a habitat rich in biodiversity.

Reference projects:



Southbank Undercroft skate space, London

A combination of pre-existing and purpose built architectural elements at the oldest continually used skateable space in London.



South Eveleigh Skatepark, Eveleigh, NSW, Australia:

Skate spot as landscape architecture, with skateable elements programmed around an extensive planting scheme, to create a park-like space.



Riverside Transport Museum, Glasgow:

An array of skateable elements embedded into the rear garden of the museum site.

Recommendations

Additional proposed activations:

- Throughout the development and construction of both the first and second proposed phases, the sites at The South Lawn and Marshgate are also open to a wider program of different events to further engage the local community:
 - Skate lessons with qualified instructors.
 - Competitions/jam events.
 - Ideation, design and build workshops.
 - Outdoor film screening events.
 - Panel discussions.
 - Performance/theatre workshops.
 - Artist commissions
 - Local history walks.

Reference projects:



Film screening event at Enghave Plads skatepark, Copenhagen

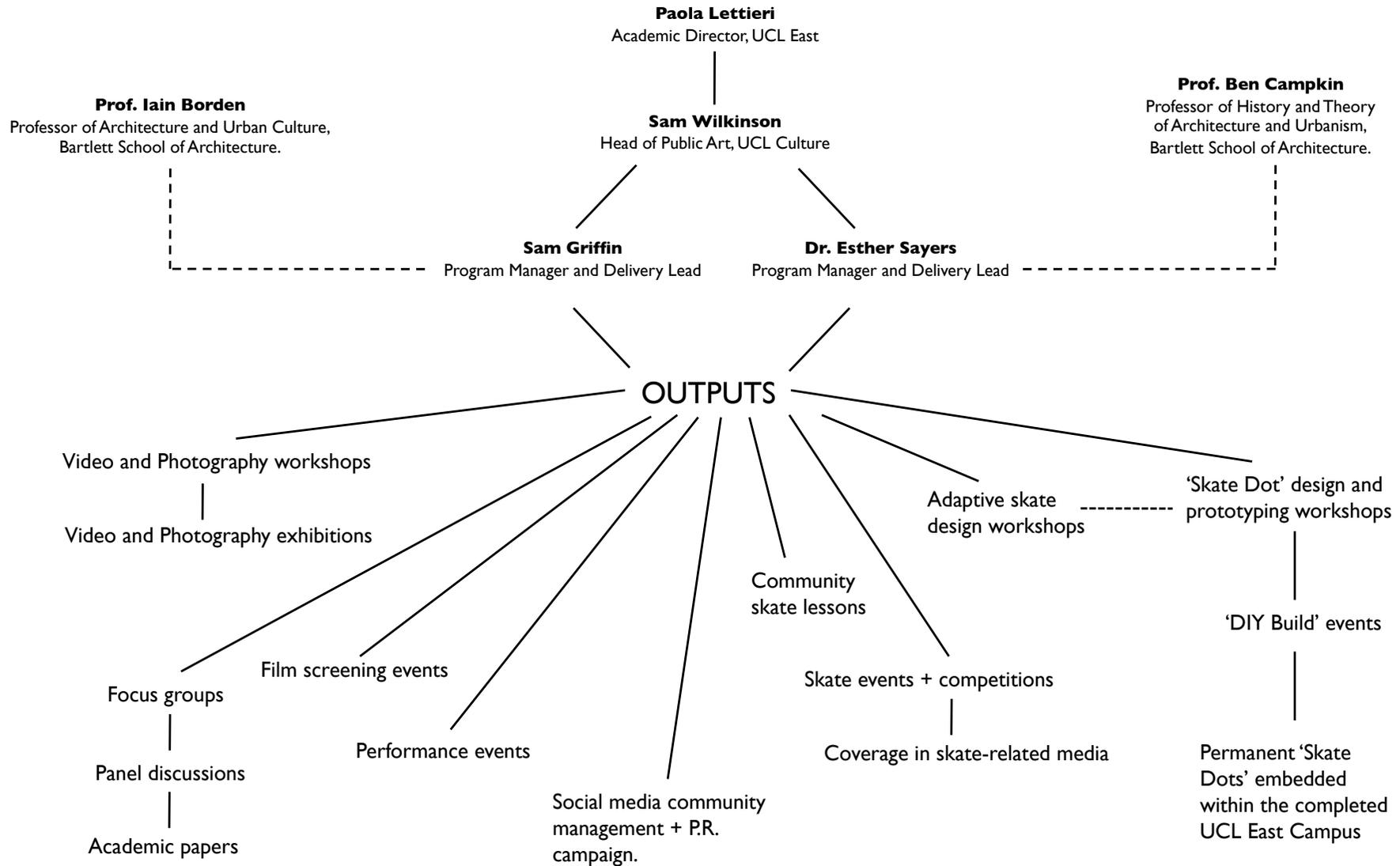


Community play and performance at Jayyous Skatepark, Jayyous, Palestine.



Hackney Bumps skate lessons and community fundraiser event, Homerton, London.

Delivery structure



Key Contacts:

Dr. Esther Sayers

Senior Lecturer and Head of MA Arts and Learning (MAAL), Goldsmiths, University of London

Sam Griffin

Artist, researcher and writer.