

# The destructive distance between the ideological discourse and the practical management of the "creative city"

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## Abstract

In this paper I will use three illustrations to illustrate a gap between the discourse of the "creative city", and the way the concept is managed at the street-level. The illustrations draw attention to the phenomenon of the problematic inclusion of a certain definition of skateboarding into the concept of "the creative city", but spatial exclusion of other forms of street skateboarding from the city space. I will hence raise a critique about how the concept of the "creative city" tries to conceptually incorporate street-level cultures, but ignores the practical, everyday life of these cultures. To do that I use the case of skateboarding to show how it is defined as "in place" in the discourse of the "creative city", but still defined as "matter out of place" in the practical management of city space. The three illustrations in this paper will show how clashes and disputes are inevitable when only a certain narrowed-down definition of these subcultures is included into the discourse of the "creative city". As the illustrations indicate there is a need to address the distance that has been created between the discourse of the "creative city" and the reality on the streets.

## Introduction

Since Florida published *The Rise of the Creative Class* (in 2002) the "creative city" has become an increasingly promising concept that many city officials, city planners and economists believe contains a significant potential for city renewal. Florida (2002) identified the "creative class" as the developing force of contemporary cities, and hence city administrations have moved the marginal politics of cultural initiatives to be a central aspect in development programs. Shelves of academic literature on "the creative city" have also filled up with exceptional speed, including handbooks like *Handbook of Creative Cities* (Andersson et.al, 2011). In the process of "creativizing the city" [sic.] the "power of culture" (Lindeborg & Lindqvist, 2010) is often emphasized as a vital input for receiving the effects of the economic and social renewal that Florida (2002), Landry & Bianchini (1995) and Landry (2008) speak of with regard to "the creative city". This "cultural turn" (often containing both culture as art and culture as a way of life) is noticeable both in the literature (ibid.) and in the practises of "creativizing the city" [sic.]. An example of such a practise, also discussed more in detail later, is when Turku officials expected a major cultural initiative (hosting the European Capital of Culture (ECC) in 2011) to be a steppingstone for "creativizing the city" [sic.]:

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Turku 2011 is more than one year. It is a process through which Turku emerges as a pioneer and a creative centre of the Baltic Sea region cooperation, a city that produces and mediates arts and science. (Helander et al, 2007: 8)

In this paper I will reflect upon how using culture (especially in the meaning of a way of life), as a steppingstone to “creativize the city” [sic.], is far from unproblematic. I will do this by looking at one distinct subculture of contemporary cities, namely street skateboarding.

### Street skateboarding in “the creative city”

In the academic literature there are several words used to describe skateboarding: ‘Extreme’, ‘alternative’, ‘lifestyle’, ‘whiz’, ‘action-sports’, ‘panic sport’, ‘post-modern’, ‘post-industrial’ and ‘new’ sports (Wheaton, 2004). I argue, like Wheaton (2004), that the name lifestyle-sport illustrates skateboarding in a more representative way because it expands the definition to involve more than just the activity. Skateboarding as a lifestyle-sport stresses the participatory ideology, and takes the vital social, cultural and economical features of skateboarding into consideration. Skateboarding is a way of life, not a sport. (Wheaton 2004)

Hence, skateboarding is highlighted by Florida as an important part of the creative city: “Skate parks are very important to young people, an intrinsic part of their creative culture, part of their identity. We should be expanding skate parks . . . To take the park away is to tell them that they are not valid. Big mistake.” (Richard Florida in Howell, 2005:25). Emphasizing the importance of skate parks in the city is an example of how the “creative city”-discourse emphasizes street-level individuals (creative class) as agents who are supposed to bring life to “the creative city” (Florida 2002). But, this quotation also shows what occurs when the discourse of the “creative city” becomes distant from the practical, everyday cultural life on the streets. Florida (ibid.) argues that by building more skate parks we can attract young people to our “creative cities”, that skateboarding can be seen as a steppingstone to “creativizing the city” [sic.]. This might be true, but it also reveals a misunderstanding of what skateboarding actually is. Skate parks are used by only *one* form of skateboarding, transition skating, a faster style of skateboarding, with more fluid style than street skateboarding. Street skateboarding on the other hand uses benches, rails and urban obstacles to do tricks on, i.e. the “natural” terrain of urban space. Street skateboarding is formed around the creative use of “the use value” (Borden, 2001) of urban space and hence cannot be confined to a certain space like football to a football pitch. Emphasizing the role of skate parks in the “creative city” might be legitimate, but as I will show in this paper it is not unproblematic because it does not incorporate the diverse styles of skateboarding. So, in the same way as Borden (2002) uses skateboarding as a critical tool in studying architectural history, I will use skateboarding as a critical tool to study management of the “creative city”

Skateboarding is perhaps an unusual object of study for a study in architectural history. But it is precisely its marginal position which enables skateboarding to function historically as a critical exterior to architecture. (Borden, 2002:1)

Via skateboarding I aim to raise a critique about how the concept of "creative city", although conceptually incorporating street-level actors, does not incorporate the practical, everyday cultural life of the streets. Before going into the problematic inclusion of skateboarding to "the creative city" (skateboarding as "in place" within the discourse) but with the simultaneous practical management of skateboarding as "out of place" in the city space I will use the first illustration, LOVE Park, as a build up to illustrate the inevitable problematic tension between the ethos of street skateboarding and city officials. In my illustration of LOVE Park my main source of information is a website run by *Independence Hall Association*, a non-profit organization in Philadelphia with the mission to distribute information about the Revolutionary and Colonial eras of American history. This organization has gathered most of the accessible information concerning LOVE Park and hence provides the most comprehensive source of information concerning its history.

## LOVE Park

The story of LOVE Park is also indicative of the treatment of young people in public space. The skateboarders were considered out of place in the space due to the inherently transgressive and alternative nature of their activity. Officials saw their use of LOVE Park as confrontational because public space is viewed predominantly as adult space; in this context these youth are often seen as 'out of order'. (Németh, 2010:309)

LOVE Park illustrates the inevitable tension between the ethos of street skateboarding and city officials' definition of public space. For skateboarders, LOVE Park was a perfect habitat for street skateboarding with its granite stairs and walls. LOVE Park became over the years not only a place for the activity of skateboarding but also a huge cultural symbol within the street skateboarding culture globally. LOVE Park is one of the spots where street skateboarding was born, and became in the 1990's a world famous landmark for skateboarding, attracting professional skateboarders who made their names there.

However, LOVE Park was not built for the purpose of skateboarding, so from the city officials' point of view the skateboarders were "matter out of place" (see Douglas 2002). In 2002 the city council hoped to erase skateboarders from the space by renovating LOVE Park and covering surfaces with grass and flowers to make it difficult to skate on. The city council also enforced a skating ban at the new park and positioned a 24/7 police watch. Banning skateboarders

from the park lead to many sponsored skateboarders leaving Philadelphia, and with them their entire fan base and salaries.

This tension, between skateboarders' use of public space and city officials' definition of public space, is inevitable, but due to the inclusion of skateboarders to "the creative city" this tension becomes more dynamic. As an example of that Anderson argues that the city officials in Philadelphia turned their back on something much bigger than just "matter out of place":

There are cities that pay PR firms millions to get the kind of buzz that LOVE Park brought us, and what did we do? We closed it. It's like we put the kibosh on all the youthful energy and enthusiasm that we're trying to cultivate. It's backward thinking that could keep us from being among elite cities in the country. (Anderson in Németh, 2006:306)

So, although skateboarders *per definition* are spatially "out of place", the *buzz* that skateboarders bring to the contemporary city is evidently increasingly valued. Beside the youthful energy and enthusiasm, the *buzz* also brought recognition and attention to the city of Philadelphia. LOVE Park was for example the reason why X-games (annual action sports event arranged by ESPN) were held in Philadelphia in 2001 and 2003, attracting approximately 150 million viewers worldwide and approximately \$40-50 million income each year for the city<sup>1</sup>. In 2000 DC Shoe Company released a new signature shoe with the LOVE park logo on the shoebox, and used the park for filming TV-commercials. LOVE Park was also featured in Tony Hawk's "Pro Skater 2", which boosted the recognition of LOVE Park to a level of internationally known skateboarding Mecca:

A significant number of college students and young residents moved to Philadelphia, solely because of LOVE Park. It has become a symbol of Philadelphia for young people worldwide. Over the past decade LOVE Park has attracted so many skateboarders that Philadelphia has gained an international reputation as the American capital for street skating.<sup>2</sup>

So, and as indicated by Andersson (in Németh, 2006:306), skateboarders put city officials in a problematic situation when what is *per their definition* "matter out of place" evidently brings a lucrative *buzz* to the city. Hence one could argue that the historic tension between the ethos of street skateboarding and city officials' definition of public space have now entered an even more problematic era, an era in which "matter out of place" is seen as an important input in the contemporary city (and especially in "the creative city" (Florida 2002)). The following quote is an illustration of the attraction that skateboarding has gained due to the discourse of "*the creative economy*":

The City's 2002 enforcement of the ban on skateboarding in LOVE Park dealt a major blow to Philadelphia's ability to position itself as a magnet for youth and the creative economy, in the context of its ongoing urban renaissance. The young, hip, and connected demographic that Philadelphia seeks

to attract saw LOVE Park as an icon of its culture, and the City's stance as an indicator of its position toward youth and progress.<sup>3</sup>

This attraction does not change the fact that skateboarding is "out of place" in the city space. LOVE Park is hence not just an illustration of the tensions between stakeholder's definitions of city space (and hence also defining "matter out of place") but also an illustration of how the "matter out of place" in a city has become "in place" within the concept of "creative economy". I will now turn the focus to that, and illustrate the problems that such a turn can generate.

## Methods

This paper is written in an interconnection of two ongoing studies. On one hand, it is based on my work on "creative cities" via being part of a research team at Åbo Akademi University, *Creatin' – Analysing, Developing and Embedding Sustainable Creative Infrastructures: The Case of Turku 2011*. *Creatin'* is a research project that through four different approaches have been gathering empirical data about Turku's aim, via hosting the European Capital of Culture during 2011 (hereafter ECC), to become a "creative city". It is a longitudinal study, covering events before, during and after the year 2011. The four approaches consist of formal interviews, media coverage concerning the Turku2011 project, coverage of other documents and participant observation during 2011. As participant observers we have, as a group done informal discussions with members of the Turku2011 staff, city of Turku officials and other individuals connected to the political backstage of Turku2011. During 2011 we also used an ethnographical approach by living, experiencing and taking part in over 60 different events, seminars, workshops, exhibitions, and concerts relating to the Turku2011 event. Even though I do not directly use any of this empirical material in this paper, my research within *Creatin'* constructs one of the two mental (intellectual) platforms that I draw upon in this paper.

The second platform used in this paper is constructed by my research for my PhD thesis on the skateboarding and snowboarding subcultures in Finland. Especially central in this paper is my fieldwork with street skateboarding and urban snowboarding in Turku, where I have used an ethnographic method to "live" the experience of these alternative sports (Marcus 1998). My PhD research is based on an ethnographically inspired descriptive study of the social, cultural and economical structures of skateboarding and snowboarding. The material is gathered mainly from participant observation (both relevant companies and out among skateboarding and snowboarding participants), fieldwork, interviews, video analysis and written sources (extreme sport magazines). So, for this paper I use insights from two different fields, the field of "the creative city" (Turku2011's use of ECC as a steppingstone towards becoming a "creative city") and the field of skateboarding.

These two platforms are essential because when I during my research among skateboarders and snowboarders in Turku asked about their thoughts and expect-

tations on the upcoming ECC-year in Turku I was surprised about the answers I got. They stated, usually with a very indifferent tone, that it will not affect them, if in any way negatively because of the crowded streets. Since I knew from my work in *Creatin'* that Turku was planning to incorporate skateboarding to the ECC year (and that the “creative city” discourse is very much incorporating skateboarding) I was surprised about the answer. As a “creative city” researcher my assumption was that skateboarders would be enjoying the transformation from constantly being seen as “matter out of place” to finally be accepted and have a role within the new, “creative city” of Turku. Evidently the skateboarders’ indifferent tone about the transformation of Turku to a “creative city” did not match the promising tone that the “creative city”-discourse incorporate about the buzz that skateboarding brings to the “creative city”. Since I had the opportunity to look at this from both sides (through my two ongoing studies) I wanted to investigate this further, hence this paper.

However, this phenomenon (the practical relation between skateboarding and “the creative city”) has not yet been documented in any extensive way. LOVE Park gave us an illustration of the tension between skateboarders and the city officials, and the changes in attitudes towards skateboarding due to the “creative economy”, but the effects of consciously incorporating skateboarding to the “creative city” has not yet been documented. Hence, I will in the following use two illustrations of the relation between skateboarding and “the creative city”. The first illustration is based on informal discussions with skateboarders in Turku concerning their thoughts and expectations on the ECC year. The second illustration is from Tallinn and is covered by a small news article *Skateboarding a crime in the culture capital* by Ott Tamik<sup>4</sup> (to my knowledge the only documented material about the relation between skateboarding and Tallinn during the year of ECC). These illustrations illustrate a phenomenon that I argue explains the indifferent tone in skateboarders’ voice when asked how they expect ECC (“the creative city”) will change the relation between skateboarders and city officials.

## TURKU2011 – The double-edged position of skateboarding in the European Capital of Culture

This illustration is from Turku, which together with Tallinn (the second illustration) functioned as ECC during 2011. The phenomenon that I want to highlight through this illustration is the incorporation of skateboarding as part of ECC, and hence as a tool of “creativizing cities” [sic.], and simultaneous use of ECC as a justification to clean up the streets from skateboarding. To understand the nature of such an act we need to understand more about the idea of ECC. In June 1985 the concept of ECC was born, as a result of the initiative put forth by the Greek Minister of Culture, Melina Mercouri, in 1983. Since 1985, 30 cities have carried the flag of a cultural capital or city, and is today one of the most well known cultural initiatives of European Union. The basic idea is that the European Union nominates a city for one year to function as ECC, to promote the diversity, and

shared characteristics of European cultures, and to simultaneously improve mutual understanding among citizens of Europe:

to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures and the features they share, promote greater mutual acquaintance between European citizens, foster a feeling of European citizenship. (European Commission 2010)

We can see here that the core idea is to highlight cultures in the meaning of "a way of life". One of the core functions with the concept is hence to create a social belongingness between cities in Europe, and between citizens in a given city. One can see that the ECC concept, by trying to highlight the diversity in European culture, is a complex cultural event. The EU's policy and intentions with ECC helps us understand the underlying structures of each city's organized year and how each city have interpreted and concretized their own intention of ECC. And for Turku the intention was to use ECC (showcase of cultural diversity) to become a "creative city":

Turku 2011 is more than one year. It is a process through which Turku emerges as a pioneer and a creative centre of the Baltic Sea region cooperation, a city that produces and mediates arts and science. (Helander et al, 2007: 8)

So, in 2011 it was Turku's turn, and during this year major investments in different cultural initiatives were made. Selecting from 1500 projects, 150 projects were chosen to construct the official part of the program. These projects were widespread between different cultural scenes, locations and social classes. One can argue that the diversity in the program was aimed to fulfil the expectations that the European commission have on cities "to highlight the richness and diversity of European cultures" (ibid.). One of these 150 projects was related to skateboarding. This particular event, *Eurocultured*, took place during a weekend in May and focused on different youth street cultures, like graffiti, BMX and skateboarding:

The festival celebrates European street culture through live visual art, urban dance, live music, DJ sets, hip hop theatre and various action sports.<sup>5</sup>

My take on this is that the foundation, Turku2011 (organiser of ECC in Turku), hence acknowledges skateboarding as part of ECC, as part of the process of making Turku a "creative city".

Behind the scenes, however, during 2011 a dispute took place between skateboarders and the city officials in Turku. This dispute concerned the public space outside Sigyn-Sali. Sigyn-sali is one of the major cultural centres in Turku, and especially during 2011 Sigyn-sali hosted many cultural events like musical, plays and seminars. Problematically, the space in front of Sigyn-sali is also one of the best and most well-known skateboard spots in Turku. For years this space

has been a hangout place for skateboarders and they have used obstacles like an old park bench and a rail for skateboarding. When the year of 2011 began, city officials chose to remove these obstacles that skateboarders used in front of Sigyn-sali, which was, according to my skateboarding informants, done to clean up the space due to the high number of visitors to Sigyn-sali during 2011 (as in: it disturbs the (high-culture) visitors heading to Sigyn-sali).

The interesting phenomenon in this illustration is not the exclusion of skateboarding *per se*, but that while skateboarding (the same goes with graffiti) is incorporated as “in place” in the discourse of the “creative city” (ECC), the practical everyday cultural life of skateboarding on the streets are still seen as “matter out of place”. Although skateboarders still *per definition* are spatially “matter out of place”, city officials seemingly want to capture the *buzz* that skateboarders could bring to “the creative city”. This illustrates also a gap between the notion of cultural diversity as a steppingstone for “creativizing the city” [sic.] (EU Commission’s agenda) and the true experiences within the cultures itself. The form of skateboarding that is included (to be performed at a certain place at a certain time, like a showcase) into the concept of “creative city” is distant from the real experience that participants take part in when they redefine the city space on a daily basis.

### TALLIN2011 - The double-edged position of skateboarding in the European Capital of Culture

This illustration is from Tallinn, the other European Capital of Culture during 2011, and concerns the space of Freedom Square. It is similar to the Turku-case in the way that it is an illustration of the use of skateboarding as part of ECC for “creativizing the city” [sic.], and simultaneous use of ECC as a justification to clean up the city space from skateboarding. Freedom Square in Tallinn was planned to be a central space for cultural events during 2011, problematically a certain part of this space had also been a popular place for street skateboarding. This raised some concerns when Tallinn kicked of the year 2011 as ECC:

Skateboarders, rollerbladers and bmxers are up in arms against Tallinn, which allegedly told the Street Sports Association that it was considering banning extreme sports in Freedom Square - the capital's shiny doorstep.<sup>6</sup>

City officials did not go as far as to ban extreme-sports from the square, but wanted to sit down and discuss the problematic situation with the youngsters who had used Freedom Square for extreme sports. The dispute never really took off since the extreme-sport participants were only interested in a certain part of the square:

Youth activities organizers have agreed that the monument should be off limits, but said that no one usually rides there anyway. The over-



sized steps constructed on the square, they said, are the preferred place to ride.<sup>7</sup>

Like in Turku, this dispute was brought to light during 2011 when Tallinn hosted ECC. The phenomenon I want to highlight through this illustration is also the paradoxical inclusion of skateboarding into the discourse of "the creative city" but spatial exclusion of the same in the same city. On one hand ECC is used as justification to clean up the city space from skateboarding, on the other hand, like Turku, Tallinn sees skateboarding as part of ECC by organizing a big event for extreme-sports (Simple Session):

Simple Session 11 is one of the most anticipated international highlight events of European Capital of Culture Tallinn 2011 program.<sup>8</sup>

This event was organized on 5-6 February and attracted over 150 riders from all over the world. As the quotation indicates, it was a huge event for both the extreme sport scene in Tallinn and the overall year of ECC in Tallinn. Hence, one can see that Tallinn appreciates subcultures like skateboarding, and wanted to incorporate it into "the year of culture". The problematic phenomenon that is highlighted in this illustration is that it is only the city officials' definition of skateboarding that is allowed into the "new city". This, again, illustrates the phenomenon of the problematic inclusion of skateboarding (performed at a certain place at a certain time) into the discourse of the "the creative city", but using the same discourse to redefine the practical, everyday cultural life of skateboarding as "matter out of place".

The LOVE Park illustration is somewhat different from these two other illustrations, but I see them useful in constructing my argument. Skateboarding was banned from LOVE Park, while city officials in Turku and Tallinn tried to implement their own notion of skateboarding to their own notion of "the creative city". While LOVE Park illustrated the inevitable tension between skateboarders' use of public space and city officials' definition of public space, and that due to the *buzz* that skateboarders are expected to bring to "the creative economy" this tension have become more dynamic, the other two illustrations indicates another problem. They illustrate the problematic phenomenon of defining and incorporating skateboarding as "in place" in the "creative city" (to avoid the tension) but still practically manage skateboarding as "matter out of place" in the practical management of city space.

## Discussion

I argue in this paper that the illustrations above indicate a distance that occurs when a culture, as a way of life (in this case skateboarding), is included into the discourse of "the creative city" but the real experience within the culture is ignored. I draw the conclusion that in the practical management and enforcement of the "creative city", there are signs of managing out what is discursively in-

cluded in the notion of the “creative city”. The notion of the “creative city”, as it is today portrayed with all its dynamic ingredients (Florida, 2002; Andersson et.al, 2011), is not fulfilled in the management of the same at the level of the street. I see this is an outcome of at least two factors.

The first one, as the illustrations indicate is about the definition of city space, and the use thereof. Space, and how it is used, is the defining aspect of a city. The city space is framed according to certain definitions, where certain spaces within the city have certain functions (Borden, 2001). The illustrations in this paper indicate how the transformation of a city to a “creative city” also redefines and re-establishes the functional aspect of city space. This re-establishment of urban space, and with that, inevitably, the ideological exclusion of certain ways of using space, is yet not evident in the literature on “the creative city”, but highly evident in the clashes on the street-level. Although the transformation of a city to a “creative city” is supposed to highlight cultural diversity it still redefines and re-establishes much of this diversity as “matter out of place” when it comes to city space.

As the illustrations indicate, viewing skateboarding “as matter out of place” is largely due to the difference in how city officials and skateboarders each interpret urban space. City officials try hard to designate certain spaces in the city for skateboarding (to be performed at a certain place at a certain time), but that does not, as we saw, fit the ethos of street skateboarding. Hence, one can see that the tension between skateboarders’ and city officials’ perception of city space is situated in the intersection of bodies and institutions, where skateboarders do not submit to the control of bodies through disciplinary practises (e.g. designating space to discipline the body, see Foucault 1977 for more on this). Practitioners of skateboarding use their board as a bodily extension (a tool of interpretation) when they move through the city space, hence the activity of skateboarding cannot be segmented and disciplined to a specific location in the city. Practitioners usually see skate parks as important elements in the city, and cities that build skate parks signals that skateboarding is appreciated and taken into consideration (Borden, 2002, Németh, 2010). However, as we saw in the illustrations, building these parks and designating certain space and time as a disciplinary practise (Foucault 1977) will inevitably create tension between the ethos of street-skateboarders and city officials.

Borden (2001) illustrates this in *Skateboarding, space and the city*, where he offers an extensive and thorough investigation of skateboarding in the city space. The defining aspect of street skateboarding is the way skateboarders interpret the city space, and the illustrations presented above indicate that there is a difference in skateboarders’ interpretation of the city space and the city planners’ interpretation of city space. To understand this difference better, we need to understand street skateboarders’ interpretation of the city space, and Borden (2001:219) illustrates this interpretation like this:

Architecture is intended for the production of things - either products as commodities in factories, knowledge in universities and museums, labour power in housing, information and decisions in offices, and so on. In this

sense all buildings are places of the expenditures of energy, engaged in the production and distribution of things. Skateboarding, however, offers no such contribution, consuming the building while not engaging with its productive activity. Consequently, it implicitly denies both that labour should be productive of things and that architecture should be directed toward that purpose.

City officials, evidently, think of city space and architecture in the "production of things"- sense, but skateboarders do not contribute to this. Skateboarders only consume city space and architecture. Hence, cities have always treated skateboarders, like homeless people, as a disturbing factor to be forced out (i.e. misplaced in a space intended for some other purpose) and wanted to segment skateboarding to certain defined places or buildings meant for these activities (see Foucault 1977). Skateboarders do not interpret the city space in the same way that city planners intend it to be interpreted. Skateboarding constructs hence a critique and reconceptualization of city space:

We find here, then, that skateboarding is far more than a simple physical inscription on the city. There are also suggestions that it involves a critique of objects (skateboarding marks urban objects), a reconceptualization of how such objects are mapped and recorded (skaters represent objects through their actions upon them), ownership (skateboarders do not own the things they mark) and consumption-production definitions (skateboarders are 'productive', but not of things). (Borden, 2001:213)

This difference between skateboarders' and city officials' interpretation of city space is hence the first issue that I argue creates the distance between the discourse of the "creative city" and the practices on the street level. This because even though skateboarding is incorporated into the concept of "the creative city", the difference in interpreting and using public space is not, and can not be incorporated (since it is contradictory). Even though skateboarding is defined as "in place" within the discourse of "the creative city" it will still be using city space differently from what it is intended for and hence be misplaced on the "streets" of the city. Skateboarders' interpretation, reconceptualization, and non-productive use of city space will still clash with the city planners' interpretation of space as intended for a certain function. The lack of knowledge about this difference makes the inclusion of skateboarding into the concept of "the creative city" problematic because the practices of street skateboarding can never be included.

The illustrations above indicate that if the actual, everyday use of urban space is ignored it can create the phenomenon when certain cultures are incorporated to "the creative city" (as skateboarding "in place" within the discourse) but simultaneously being practically managed as "out of place" on the streets of the city. This creates a distance between the ideological notion of the "creative city" and the street-level notion of it. This distance is destructive in the sense that "the

creative city” becomes foreign to the street level actors (as the indifference the skateboarders illustrated to me in Turku), and this will allow even more paradox inclusions of city officials’ own definition of different cultural forms into “the creative city”, but exclusion of the way these cultures actually is experienced the city.

The other issue that I suggest creates the distance between the abstract notion of the “creative city” and the practical street-level of the “creative city” is the inevitable incapacity to manage the diverse reality that exists on the street-level, although this diversity is incorporated into the concept of “the creative city”. Our cities are containers of a wide diversity of lifestyles and cultures. While this diversity is seen as vital input in the concept of “the creative city”, it is done so with pragmatic interest, not to represent the true nature of this diversity. Chatterton (2000: 396) addresses the same issue when he argues:

However, the weakness of the current creative city concept is that for it to be acceptable for a liberal audience of policy makers and politicians it has to dilute or exclude unpalatable definitions of creativity (ibid.).

Within the concept of “the creative city” there is no room for “matter out of place”, while the concept is portrayed as more or less all inclusive. This paper is not a critique against the exclusion *per se*, but a critique against trying to turn the “unpalatable” “matter out of place” into “in place” within the concept of “the creative city” by defining and managing diversity in a way that suites city officials (e.g. trying to incorporate only a *certain* definition of skateboarding into “the creative city”). When that happens, as is demonstrated by the illustrations, the real cultural experiences at street-level are in danger of becoming foreign to the abstract notion of the “creative city” (cf. in regard to city space the “creative city” was in danger of becoming foreign to the street-level actors). When the concept of “the creative city”, while emphasising cultural diversity which potentially includes everything and nothing, is to be managed with practical actions at the street-level, paradoxes and clashes will occur because the “unpalatable” “matter out of place” on the street-level could not be predicted. It might even be the case that although diversity is emphasized as the key factor for a “creative city” (Florida 2002), this diversity might be unmanageable at the street-level. ECC, as a tool for “creativizing cities” [sic.], functions as a good example of this unmanageable diversity:

The coming of age of the ECOC after 25 years brings new responsibilities, as cities now have to deal with a wider range of issues, including more diverse communities, reconciling the needs of past, present, future, transforming daily life, responding to current global challenges, still ensuring the promotion of imagination and beauty, fostering integration. In organizing the contemporary ECOC, there is a need to design new forms of civic engagement as tools for change. (Palmer et.al, 2011:11)

In other words, our cities are today more diverse, and this diversity is conceptually included in the "creative city" (Florida 2002). This, however, becomes problematic if diversity is just seen as a gilt-edged input in the concept of the "creative city" and the real diversity on the streets is ignored, which I argue the illustrations in this paper indicate. Lahdesmaki (2010) has also illustrated this problem when three ECC cities tried to implement cultural diversity (also strongly emphasized by the EU) into the program. Her conclusion is very revealing, also, for the illustrations I presented above:

Cultural diversity, as well as multiculturalism, are profoundly political concepts and their definitions and representations involve inevitably the power structures and production of cultural and political hierarchies. In the discourse of cultural diversity some groups or cultures seem to be more important than others: only some cultures and groups are promoted in the discourse. Moreover, the discourse itself is often produced from the power position of some majority group or culture. In the application books and promotion material, the discourse of cultural diversity is often outlined narrowly, mainly in reference to nationality, ethnicity or religion, not emphasizing, for example, as much social class, sub-cultures or sexual identity. (Lahdesmaki, 2010:39)

Lahdesmaki (2010) argues that when it comes to the discourse of cultural diversity, diversity is usually narrowed-down to fit city officials' preconceptions, and this I argue is also the case of the "creative city". Diversity becomes just a gilt-edged input in the concept of the "creative city" and the real diversity on the streets is ignored. The illustrations used in this paper indicate also this dilemma when street skateboarding (even though incorporated as part of the "creative city") does not with its diversity (alternative interpretation of city space) fit into the narrowed-down notion of "the creative city". Only the manageable form of skateboarding is included in the "creative city" (e.g. the form of skateboarding that is practiced at a certain space at a certain time, *Eurocultured* and *Simple Session*). The illustrations above indicate also a mismatch between subcultures and the company-ization (Czarniawska, 2000) of cities. The company-ization of cities (Czarniawska, 2000), or the narrowing down of diversity in the discourse of the "creative city" (Lahdesmaki, 2010), excludes (or cannot incorporate) the real experience of skateboarding with its alternative interpretation of the city. Hence, I argue that the lack of knowledge, unwillingness or incapability to manage the diverse reality at street-level is one factor that creates the distance between the discourse of the "creative city", and the street-level reality of the city. The incapacity to cope with the street level diversity (e.g. the diverse interpretations of city space) have formed the "creative city" concept to only concern an ideal, utopian vision of street-level reality, a picture that is alien for the subjects within that vision. As the saying goes: one person's utopia is another person's dystopia.

## Conclusion

This paper illustrates through three different cases the phenomenon of including a certain narrowed down definition of skateboarding in the concept of “the creative city”, but simultaneously excluding spatially the real form of street skateboarding from the city space. I have raised a critique about how the concept of “the creative city”, although incorporating street-level actors, does not incorporate the practical, everyday cultural life of these actors. The illustrations in this paper draw attention to how only a certain form of skateboarding is incorporated and defined as “in place” in the “creative city”, but the real experience of this culture is still defined as “matter out of place” in the practical management of city space. I have hence argued in this paper that the concept of “the creative city” hence contains a risk of becoming a concept that is foreign and distanced from the street-level reality. The illustrations indicate that although skateboarding is incorporated in “the creative city” a distance between the discourse of “the creative city” and the street-level reality is created when the differences between the city officials’ interpretation of city space and the skateboarders’ street-level interpretation of city space becomes evident. I also argue that another factor creating this distance arrives from narrowing down (Lahdesmaki, 2010) the diversity of street-level reality to a certain manageable form of diversity into the concept of “the creative city”. In this case, skateboarding was narrowed down to a manageable scope, a scope that fitted the “creative city” concept, but the real form of skateboarding was managed out. As the illustrations indicated this lead to the paradox inclusion of city officials’ own definition of skateboarding into “the creative city”, but spatial exclusion of what street skateboarding actually is.

Without the understanding of the distance between the discourse of “the creative city” and the practical enforcement of the same on the streets, we are in danger of turning the concept of “creative city” to only concern certain cultural initiatives, only a certain cultural ideology and a certain way of using urban space for cultural activities. We are in danger of turning what could be a dynamic notion of “creative city” to a buzzword only concerning a small portion of that cultural diversity that our cities withhold. Chatterton’s (2000: 392) is harsh in his critique, but in the light of the three illustrations in this paper it becomes legitimate:

In many instances, then, the creative city is little more than a rhetorical device which can placate the hearts and minds of local councillors and politicians that they are actually doing something whilst doing hardly anything at all.

Hence, in managing “the creative city”, there needs to either be a comprehensive effort to understand the true nature of the cultural diversity on the street-level or a halt in efforts to include “matter out of place” to become “in place” in the “creative city”. This, because the narrowed-down, compressed, manageable

form of skateboarding that was in the illustrations above tried to fit into the notion of the "creative city", is far from the real experience of street skateboarding. Hence I want to end with a quote as a reminder of how "our understanding of culture is usually much more fragmented and superficial than the reality":

When we observe culture, whether in an organization or in society in large, we are observing an evolved form of social practice that has been influenced by many complex interactions between people, events, situations, actions, and general circumstances. Culture is also evolving. Though at any given time it can be seen as having a discernible pattern ... this pattern is an abstraction imposed on the culture from the outside. It is a pattern that helps the observer to make sense of history in retrospect, but it is not synonymous with experience in the culture itself. Our understanding of culture is usually much more fragmented and superficial than the reality. (Morgan 1986:139)

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## Notes

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<sup>4</sup> Ott Tamik, *Skateboarding a crime in the culture capital*: <http://news.err.ee/culture/2f8fc290-31b4-413e-bbfe-3242854e4680> (Date of access: 27.2.2013)

<sup>5</sup> The official homepage of Turku2011. [http://www.turku2011.fi/en/event/eurocultured-festival\\_en](http://www.turku2011.fi/en/event/eurocultured-festival_en) (Date of access: 27.2.2013)

<sup>6</sup> Ott Tamik, *Skateboarding a crime in the culture capital*: <http://news.err.ee/culture/2f8fc290-31b4-413e-bbfe-3242854e4680> (Date of access: 27.2.2013)

<sup>7</sup> Ott Tamik, *Skateboarding a crime in the culture capital*: <http://news.err.ee/culture/2f8fc290-31b4-413e-bbfe-3242854e4680> (Date of access: 27.2.2013)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.session.ee/2011/about/> (Date of access: 27.2.2013)