

On the Importance of the Plaza: Political Participation of Young Skateboarders in a Digital Society

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Abstract. Since April 2014, a so-called skateboard trick ban has been in effect in Graz, Austria, which allows skateboarding but prohibits leaving the asphalt with tricks or jumps. As a reaction, an urban social movement formed to protest the ban. This paper examines the political participation of the skateboarding community and its allies in Graz, focusing on their hybrid protest actions in digital and public spaces. Using a participatory research approach, a skateboarder and a sociologist jointly discuss the diverse perspectives of skateboarders on political participation and the significance of social media for the protest. The (co-)researchers analysed the digital platforms of a skateboard club, online content from political parties, and media coverage of the skateboard trick ban. Besides, they conducted participant observations in public spaces and interviews with young skateboarders. The analyses indicate that in addition to active political participation in the form of protest actions, some skateboarders expressed their protest through inaction and ignored the skateboarding ban. Despite the threat of fines, they continued to skate on their plazas and developed strategies to avoid being detected by the police. Social media played a central role in connection with the local skateboard club. They were not only used for sharing information or networking with allies but also for political protests in a narrower sense, e.g., for organizing an online protest song contest.

1 Prologue

This paper results from a participatory research project in which skateboarder Miran (from his insider perspective) and sociologist Susanne (from her scholarly informed outsider perspective) jointly research and discuss the skateboard trick ban in Graz, Austria. Inspired by the ideas of participatory action research (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019), I, Susanne, tried to reconnect the academic knowledge production with the knowledge production of the skateboarding community to comprehensively understand the social reality of skateboarders and their daily challenges. In order not to hide the skateboarders' voices behind the academic analysis and reflection, we wrote this paper

together. In some sections, we refer separately to the perspective of the sociologist and the skateboarder to emphasize our diverse concepts and approaches. We start the paper with a brief introduction of ourselves and our access to the skateboard trick ban.

Miran: As a Graz 'local' who has been skateboarding since 2003 and documenting the scene as a filmmaker since 2014, I was shocked by the skateboard trick ban. Therefore, I began researching for a documentary film about the ban and its effects to communicate 'the importance of the plazas' to the city council. During my investigations, I got in touch with Susanne. We met at a public event she organized to discuss the skateboard trick ban.

Susanne: My position is that of an outsider since I am not a member of the skateboarding community. However, in my research I have been interested in public space and political participation for a long time. For instance, I did research on regulations of public spaces in Graz with sociology students (Malli and Sackl-Sharif, 2015) or on citizens' initiatives (Sackl-Sharif, 2018) that also play a role in the context of the skateboard trick ban. Therefore, the ban has attracted my attention from the beginning, and I scholarly accompanied it from March 2021 to May 2023.

2 Introduction

The skateboard community has been part of the city life in Graz for many years. It meets in skate parks, skate shops, or on the streets. In 2014, some skateboarders founded the local skateboard club *GRÄB – Grazer Rollbrett Ästheten Bund* to promote the sport and lifestyle of skateboarding (GRÄB, 2021a). Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, inner-city public spaces in Graz have been increasingly used by young skateboarders, as there were barely any other opportunities for sporting activities. As many people were working in home offices at the time, the pandemic made skateboarders more visible and audible than before. In some central places, especially at the Kaiser-Josef-Platz, this led to complaints from residents about noise pollution and littering. Therefore, the situation at Kaiser-Josef-Platz shows conflicts of use and sometimes opposing opinions. In addition, the Covid-19 restrictions may have helped to amplify existing tensions between different interest groups (Sackl-Sharif, 2022).

In March 2021, the right-wing populist party FPÖ took up and intensified the residents' dissatisfaction on a website with the title *skaterlaerm.at*⁴² ('skaternoise'). Together with the complaint of a resident to the municipal penalties and enforcement office ('Referat für

⁴² The website *skaterlaerm.at* is offline but can be accessed at the following link: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210506141635/https://skaterlaerm.at/>.

Strafen und Vollstreckungen’), this FPÖ initiative led to a new interpretation of the Road Traffic Regulations (‘Straßenverkehrsordnung’) in April 2021. Since then, skateboarding has been allowed, but not leaving the grounds with jumps or tricks to maintain public safety. Those who did not comply with the ban had to expect a fine of 15 euros (Müller, 2021).

The skateboard trick ban provoked many protest actions. Parallel to demonstrations and art actions in public spaces (Sackl-Sharif, 2022), much of the mobilization of allies took place on social media platforms. The platforms of the skateboard club GRÄB played a central role in this regard, acting as a hub for the exchange and dissemination of information. In addition, some skateboarders did not organize themselves into groups and protested against the ban by simply ignoring it.

Against this background, we explore the political participation of the skateboarding community and its allies in Graz in this paper. We follow the definition of political participation by Verba, Scholzman, and Brady (1995: 38), who summarize political participation as “any activity that has the intent or effect of influencing government action – either directly by affecting the making or implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make those policies”. Examples of such political participation in this broad understanding are citizens’ initiatives and social movements that also play a role related to the skateboard trick ban. In this paper, we are especially interested in the question of what political participation can look like in a digital society (Lindgren, 2021). We use the term ‘digital society’ to describe the digital transformations of recent decades, which have led to social media increasingly becoming an integral part of social structures. We do not see digital transformations as merely technical but as “deeply politically charged processes embedded in broader social constellations” (Kannengießner and Kubitschko, 2017: 1). Therefore, the intertwined character of activism in digital and public spaces is relevant in this paper.

First, we will define public space and plaza, and we will describe our research design. Afterwards, we will summarize the most important events related to the skateboard trick ban in a chronology to make our results intersubjectively comprehensible. In the following two sections, we will present our findings related to the political participation of skateboarders in Graz. Finally, we will discuss the most relevant outcome of our joint research in a conclusion.

3 Definitions and theories

To provide a framework for better understanding the use conflicts around Kaiser-Josef-Platz, we will briefly outline our definitions of public space or skateboarders' plazas. First, Susanne will define public space from a scholarly perspective before Miran will describe the importance of the plaza from a skateboarder's point of view.

3.1 Susanne: Regulations of the public space from a scholarly perspective

I follow Henri Lefebvre's (1991) actor-centred theory of space, in which space is considered a product of social and historical practices that are part of social structures and power relations. Urban public spaces, in particular, are characterized by overlapping perspectives, uses, meanings, and interests of different actors (Massey, 1994). Therefore, in the discussion about public urban spaces, it is not only accessibility to them that is relevant. They should also enable and tolerate diversity, differences, and encounters (Schäfers, 2006). Public urban spaces in general – and plazas as a particular form – are simultaneously mirrors and producers of social, gendered, economic, and political power relations (Malli and Sackl-Sharif, 2015).

However, public urban spaces have been increasingly regulated based on the principles of economization, aestheticization, and privatization in the last three decades. Private economic interests and aesthetics are more and more oriented towards the ideal of shopping centres. They influence the shape of public urban spaces to create a safe and clean shopping atmosphere in the city centre (Reiners, Malli and Reckinger, 2006). It is common for private investors to determine what is possible and what is not in these regulated public spaces. It is common for homeless people, begging people, or young people to be displaced to keep inner-city consumer spaces free of disturbances such as noise pollution or littering (Malli and Sackl-Sharif, 2015). As a result, one-sided regulations can lead to a shortage of usage opportunities. Consequently, city residents can no longer exploit the potential of public space to facilitate encounters between different social groups and interests.

3.2 Miran: Regulations of the 'plaza' from a skateboarder's perspective

Almost 60 years after its invention in the 1950s, skateboarding became an Olympic sport. For the first time, the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games featured two skateboarding disciplines, street and park skateboarding, which shows that skateboarding is not limited to skateparks (Worldskate, 2017). It is also a street sport since its origin, and skateboarders use empty public spaces to practice their sport and artistic tricks. Especially so-called 'plazas' – easily accessible and exciting urban public spaces – play an essential role in

the skateboarding culture. Because they offer different obstacles and atmospheres, plazas cannot entirely be replaced by (more or less) standardised skateparks.

Large cities such as Barcelona, Paris, and London recognized the value of integrating skateboarding into public life. They accomplished building new training facilities for skateboard athletes and implemented skateboarding opportunities in the design and architecture of public spaces. One of the most famous plazas is the MACBA in Barcelona. It is located opposite the Museu d'Art Contemporani in the neighbourhood of El Raval and attracts many (skateboarding) tourists (Garcerán, 2011).

From the perspective of skateboarders, regulations of the plazas are also necessary to avoid disturbing residents. But a complete ban on skateboard tricks is a step in the wrong direction and one that the skateboarding community is unlikely to accept.

4 Research design

4.1 Susanne: Particularities of participatory research

Besides being interested in doing research with the skateboard community, I, Susanne, was also motivated to reflect with skateboarders about their challenges and desired solutions for the skateboard trick ban.⁴³ Therefore, I decided to use the ideas of participatory action research (Chevalier and Buckles, 2019), an approach developed for the analysis of social problems and advancing solution strategies with people affected. Due to my outsider perspective, I needed to gain knowledge about the skateboard trick ban and the skateboarding community in Graz as a first step. Therefore, I did some media analysis, participant observations, and expert interviews (see 4.2). Based on my findings, I was able to make the second part of the case study participatory (see 4.3).

I started working with Miran in the summer of 2022. In contrast to non-participatory research, it was essential to provide him with decision-making power (Machin-Mastromatteo, 2012). Therefore, he decided which method was most appropriate to discuss our topics with other skateboarders and selected the interviewees himself. This approach required more planning time to equally pursue practice and scholarly goals as a sociologist and skateboarder (von Unger, 2014). Following the ethical principles of the

⁴³ This case study is part of the international research project "U-YouPa. Understanding Youth Participation and Media Literacy in Digital Dialogue Spaces". The project is funded by The Research Council of Norway (SAMSKUL, project number 301896). It is carried out between 2020 and 2025 at Oslo Metropolitan University (Norway), Malmö University (Sweden), FH JOANNEUM – University of Applied Sciences (Austria) and University of Music and Performing Arts Graz (Austria). For more information, see <https://uni.oslomet.no/u-youpa>.

Centre for Social Justice and Community Action (2012), I aimed to create an environment of mutual respect to facilitate active learning from each other.

4.2 Part 1: Susanne's research activities

Between March 2021 and September 2022, I conducted a media analysis on three levels to gain knowledge about the skateboard trick ban. Since this analysis aims to provide an overview, I applied a summarizing qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2021) and used the software MAXQDA22.

- To create a detailed chronology of the events and to identify the main actors and their positions, I carried out an analysis of the media coverage of the skateboard trick ban. I conducted this analysis by searching the APA-DeFacto database of the Austrian Press Agency using the search query 'skate* + Graz'. After reviewing the initial search results, I saved all articles that contained information on the skateboard trick ban. All in all, I analysed 118 articles from local, regional, national, and international media, providing a comprehensive survey of all articles published during the survey period.
- To explore the perspective of skateboarders, I analysed the online platforms of the skateboard club GRÄB because this club has the largest reach in Graz when it comes to skateboarding. In addition to 16 blog posts (GRÄB, 2023a), this analysis contained 22 Facebook posts (GRÄB, 2023b) and 24 Instagram posts (GRÄB, 2023c), including reactions, comments, shared videos, and photos. It encompasses a complete survey of all published content during the survey period.
- To gain a deeper understanding of the political actors' perspective, I analysed the online platforms of the parties that frequently spoke out in connection with the skateboard trick ban in the media. In the centre of these analyses were the web presences of the right-wing populist party FPÖ (FPÖ, 2021; Wir Grazer – TV, 2021), but I analysed also selected channels of the Greens Graz (Die Grünen, 2023) and the socio-democratic party SPÖ Graz (SPÖ, 2023) as these two parties joined the protests against the ban. In addition, I also studied the minutes of municipal council meetings with a focus on the skateboard trick ban (Gemeinderat, 2023).

I also did ethnographic research (Gobo and Molle, 2017) at demonstrations against the skateboard trick ban and Kaiser-Josef-Platz in 2021 and 2022. Furthermore, I conducted some expert interviews (Bogner, Littig and Menz, 2009): two with members of the skateboard club GRÄB for a better understanding of the activities on their digital platforms and one with a lawyer who is a specialist in public space regulations. In addition, I organized two public events to discuss the skateboard trick ban with the public in the summer of 2022. I met Miran at one of these events and have worked with him ever since.

4.3 Part 2: Miran's interviews

I conducted ten problem-centred interviews (Witzel and Reiter, 2012) between December 2022 and February 2023 to include the perspective of skateboarders who are not members of GRÄB. To collect different opinions and ideas, I used the maximal variation sampling strategy (Patton, 2015) and approached as diverse members of the skateboarding community as possible. The sample consisted of four female and six male skateboarders aged between 16 and 29 years, with an average age of 24.

At the beginning of the interviews, I provided a brief overview of the research project and introduced myself as a co-researcher. I also notified the interviewees about my partnership with Susanne, and they signed a consent form that was created in accordance with GDPR guidelines. The main part of the interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and focused mainly on the following topics:

- History as a skateboarder: How did it all begin, and how has the story evolved until today?
- The digital self: What are the most important social media, apps, and websites you use daily? What do you like and dislike about them?
- Skateboard trick ban: How much does this affect your everyday life as a skateboarder? What has changed for you since the trick ban? What solution do you wish for?
- Political participation: What digital platforms do you use for political information or protests in general and related to the skateboard trick ban?

I conducted the interviews in German, and we translated the quotes used in this paper into English. We anonymised all interview partners and referred to them using abbreviations (IP1 to IP10) in this paper. We jointly analysed the transcripts and discussed our different perspectives. As every detail of the interviews is relevant to our research, we applied a structuring qualitative content analysis based on an inductive categorization (Kuckartz and Rädiker, 2021), and we used the software MAXQDA22.

5 Findings

5.1 Chronology of the events: On the initial situation on the 'Kaiser'

In March 2021, the skateboard club GRÄB published a blog post on their website regarding discussions with representatives from the City of Graz (GRÄB, 2021b). The city received complaints from residents and market stallholders about the presence of skateboarders on Kaiser-Josef-Platz. The market stallholders were annoyed because

skateboarders used their tables for their tricks, while residents found it too noisy, especially at night and on Sundays. The City of Graz will consider preventing skateboarding at the 'Kaiser' if it can prove the complaints. GRÄB has requested the skateboarding community to respect the quiet times and keep the place clean.

A few days later, the political party FPÖ launched the website skaterlaerm.at ('skaternoise'). They promoted it through their YouTube channel "Wir Grazer – TV" with a video titled "Stopp dem Skaterlärm" ('Stop the skater noise') (FPÖ, 2021). The video shows skateboarders performing tricks in public spaces, accompanied by dark music and the sounds of the skateboards. It also displays terms such as 'damage to property', 'danger to persons', 'littering' and 'noise' with corresponding scenes or images, such as empty alcohol bottles when 'littering' appears. The video ends with the slogan "Enough is enough!" followed by a reference to the website skaterlaerm.at. On the website, the FPÖ addresses the topics covered in the video, focusing on the noise pollution caused by the sound of skateboards as they pop.

Hence, Kaiser-Josef-Platz is a place where different interests and uses overlap, leading to conflicts. The term 'pollution' is used by political actors to refer to both littering and noise pollution. In addition, the argument of the endangerment of people by skateboarders also plays an important role, which leads to a reinterpretation of the Road Traffic Regulations in April 2021. Based on §88 of the Road Traffic Regulations, they argue that skateboarding on squares and pavements is prohibited if it endangers other people, and skateboard tricks are considered dangerous in this context. Therefore, it is now only allowed to ride skateboards without leaving the ground for jumps or tricks (Cetin, 2021; Michalek, 2021).

5.2 The formation of an urban social movement and its protests

Our media analysis and expert interviews indicate that the skateboard trick ban evoked activism and alliances around the skateboard club GRÄB. For a short period, it is possible to speak of an urban social movement (Lebuhn, 2008) as various actors from the fields of science, art, culture, sports, politics, and other social movements (such as Fridays for Future) collaborated and joined the protest of the skateboarders. Moreover, the skateboard community did not initiate all protest actions. Instead, other protesters used the skateboard trick ban to express frustration with the political agenda in general.

For many protesters, the ban on skateboarding was just one example of the commercialization of public spaces in Graz. Siegfried Nagl, the former mayor of Graz and member of the conservative party ÖVP, introduced numerous bans during his tenure from 2003 to 2021. These bans placed various restrictions on using, occupying, and appropriating inner-city spaces. Examples of such bans included a ban on alcohol

consumption in some inner-city areas, a ban on begging (later deemed unconstitutional), and new regulations on street music (Malli and Sackl-Sharif, 2015). In 2015, Siegfried Nagl also aimed to make Graz a quieter city (Sharif et al., 2015). These regulations share a common political agenda centred around the principles of economization and privatization. The City of Graz has displaced or banned individuals who cause disturbances and noise to ensure that the city centre remains attractive to consumers and tourists.

From the beginning, the skateboarders received a lot of declarations of solidarity. For example, the Institute for Movement Sciences, Sport, and Health at the University of Graz formulated an open letter condemning the ban on skateboarding in public spaces and the relocation of skateboarders to parks on the city's outskirts, which they described as an unfriendly policy towards youths (Wieser, 2021). Besides, the representatives of the association < rotor > *Zentrum für zeitgenössische Kunst* ('Centre for Contemporary Art') published a guest commentary in the *Kleine Zeitung* in May 2021, criticizing the commercialization of public spaces and the gradual reduction of areas where people can stay without having to buy anything (Lederer and Makovec, 2021). The skateboarding community acknowledged these expressions of solidarity and shared them on their digital platforms (e.g., GRÄB, 2021c).

The social movement also expressed its anger through several protest actions in the public space. For instance, an artist projected the slogan 'Skateboarding is not a crime' on some buildings in Graz, attracting a lot of attention (Michalek 2021). Furthermore, the association Move it Graz⁴⁴ and Fridays for Future organized the demonstration 'Platz für uns Menschen' ('Space for us people') in June 2021. These social movements respective citizens' initiatives invited the skateboard community to join them. The protest aimed to ensure equal access to public spaces for all residents (Move it, 2021). At this demonstration, the skateboarders arranged a skateboard contest accompanied by a concert to generate attention for their protest. GRÄB covered and promoted all these protest actions on their digital platforms to raise awareness about the skateboard trick ban.

In parallel, a large part of the protest and the mobilization of allies happened on social media. The digital platforms of GRÄB, such as Instagram, Facebook, and their blog, were central hubs for exchanging information. Journalists, in particular, noticed these platforms. On the one hand, the members of GRÄB received many interview requests from regional, national, and international media. On the other hand, many media institutions quoted directly from their digital platforms, especially from its blog. Despite having fewer subscribers or friends than other social movements in Graz, such as Fridays

⁴⁴ Move it Graz is a cross-party campaign of associations, companies and citizens who advocate for a socially just and ecologically sustainable mobility system in Graz.

for Future, GRÄB's Facebook and Instagram accounts have a significant reach given the size of the city and the specific interest in skateboarding. On Instagram, GRÄB has about 2000 subscribers, posts have been liked up to 1700 times and include up to 90 comments. On Facebook, they have about 1500 followers, posts have up to 300 reactions, and include up to 55 comments and 140 shares. The contents of the comments are relatively uniform: The commentators support the concerns of the skateboarders and share their outrage about the skateboard trick ban. Counter-opinions are hardly – if at all – present.

GRÄB utilized digital platforms not only for sharing information and exchanging ideas with their allies but also for organizing protest actions in a narrower sense. For instance, they collaborated with the music association Graz Connected to initiate the online protest song contest #skatenbleibt ('skating stays'). The contest received ten song submissions plus videos, each with a different musical style ranging from punk, death metal, and hip hop to singer-songwriter (GRÄB, 2021d). All lyrics are in German and include references to skateboarding tricks, point to political actors who are to blame for the ban, or to the ban's effects. For example, the winner Vuko Jebniac sang "Graz becomes a cemetery", and he concluded, "Politics comes and goes but skating stays". At the end of the contest, GRÄB and Graz Connected organized a concert with the winners in public space. Therefore, the online protest song contest is not only a prime example of the skateboarders' use of digital tools for their activism but also exemplifies the interconnectedness of protest in digital and public spaces.

5.3 Political participation of non-institutionalised skateboarders

Besides the members of GRÄB, an organized group of skateboarders that existed before the skateboard trick ban, many skateboarders in Graz do not belong to any association. To reach this group, Miran conducted his interviews. The interviews revealed that the skateboarders were disappointed with the ban on skateboarding tricks because there had already been agreements between skateboarders and residents regarding specific quiet hours prior to April 2021: "Of course, it totally disturbed me that this [= the ban] is suddenly the matter, although we had already agreed on the specific skate times before" (IP2). While many skateboarders were dissatisfied with the new plaza regulations, not all protested against the skateboard trick ban like GRÄB did. Instead, some chose to ignore the ban and continued to skate in public spaces despite the risk of being fined. As one interviewee stated, they preferred to skate in defiance of the ban rather than actively fighting against it:

We kept going even during the pandemic. Of course, we didn't let ourselves be stopped by any laws passed by people who have no idea about our sport. [...] and we repeatedly had confrontations with the police, and it became unpleasant. Sometimes, the cops knew

us personally by name. And then they said: “Yes, if you come again, it is enough. Then we want you to pay a 100 euro fine.” And we did not want to risk that. So, when they drove by, we just tried not to skate, hid the board very quickly, pretended we were drinking beer and having fun, just like everyone else there. (IP3)

On the one hand, skateboarders understood political protest in this context as not changing the typical skateboard actions. On the other hand, they developed new strategies to avoid drawing attention to themselves in public spaces. Some skateboarders preferred to move in groups with non-skateboarders who used the public space to meet with their friends. This practice made it more difficult for the police to identify them, creating a form of ‘herd protection’.

These skateboarders rarely transferred their actions in public space to the digital space. Our analysis showed that the interviewed skateboarders are reflective – or even sceptical – social media users. They are annoyed by influencers and advertisements, especially if they are related to the skateboarding community. In the sense of digital detox, some interviewees deactivated or even deleted some of their social media accounts. Almost all interviewed skateboarders only stay online to be informed about events or important news. They use YouTube or Instagram to watch skateboard videos but barely actively produce content or interact with others. Therefore, it is not possible to generalize the interwoven character of GRÄB’s protest in digital and public spaces to the whole skateboarding community of Graz.

In addition to the group of skateboarders who tried not to change their typical behaviour, some interviewees also observed that the ban had an effect and that fewer and fewer people skated in public spaces. Consequently, the individual skateboarder became more visible, as one interview partner noted:

But you have already noticed that there were just fewer people compared to the situation before the skateboard trick ban. There was a larger community that used the plaza heavily, and that has diminished. [...] The ban may have deterred some people from entering the square, as they might have thought, “If I go there now, I’ll just get a fine.” There were only a few survivors left who didn’t care about the consequences. (IP4)

For some, the presence of the police led to diminishing processes: “I was once at the Kaiser, and then the police came. I thought to myself, ‘What should I do there?’ I didn’t really like being at Kaiser anyway. And when there is even more stress, I was no longer interested” (IP5). As a result, the skate parks became increasingly crowded, which some perceived as demotivating for skateboarding beginners:

The only thing I noticed is that other skate parks were more crowded than before because there were hardly any public spaces available anymore, such as the Kaiser. They [= the skateboarders] had to go somewhere. [...] And then it was more exhausting to drive. I find that if you’re a beginner, it’s even more difficult. (IP7)

Besides, it was not only the ban in a narrower sense that contributed to the diminishing effects, but also the reactions from other citizens:

Skating in public spaces was often uncomfortable. You would receive weird looks and comments from people passing by and snapping at you. And you ignored it and knew you were better than them. You don't have to respond to such things, but it was a challenging period [...]. They vented their frustration on you, and you were powerless to do anything about it. [...] You noticed that many people are afraid of skating due to the negative stereotype associated with skateboarders. (IP3)

The skateboard trick ban illustrates the impact of the regulations in the public space also at a general level. It has changed the perception of all citizens, with some not accepting skateboarders anymore due to a lack of knowledge. They believed that skateboarding was generally prohibited and began attacking the skateboarding community. Some interviewees have stressed the importance of interacting with these citizens and convincing them that 'skateboarding is not a crime'.

6 Conclusions

The skateboard trick ban in Graz triggered the formation of an urban social movement, in which, in addition to the skateboard club GRÄB and skateboarders, actors from academia, art and culture, sports, politics, and social movements or civic initiatives participated. This social movement considered the skateboard trick ban a prime example of the commercialization of public spaces in Graz that had already manifested itself in similar regulations in the decades before. Using activism in digital and public spaces, the protesters spoke out against a policy of exclusion that uses rigid bans to push people out of the city centre. Furthermore, they demand easily accessible and non-consumer-oriented public spaces for all citizens.

The digital platforms of GRÄB were relevant hubs for sharing news, networking with allies, promoting declarations of solidarities and providing information for journalists. Since the digital platforms already existed, networking between skateboarders and other actors was possible relatively quickly after the discussions about a skateboard trick ban became public. Therefore, the emergence of a social movement was probably faster than it would have been in times before social media. Furthermore, the members of GRÄB tried to raise awareness for their protest and shape public opinion through hybrid activism in digital and public spaces, e.g., with an online protest song contest that was accompanied by a concert held in a public space. In a similar way as other social movements such as Fridays for Future (e.g., Boulianne, Lalancette and Ilkiw, 2020), GRÄB utilized the digital society's hybrid communication and protest possibilities to inform about their challenges, mobilize for their actions, and actively influence government action.

However, interviews with non-institutionalized skateboarders and our observations indicated that some skateboarders in Graz expressed their protest through inaction and had a different perspective on political participation. In the spirit of the saying 'skateboarding is not a crime', they remained in the public space and left the asphalt with jumps and tricks despite the ban. In contrast to the skateboard club GRÄB, they also did not integrate social media into their protest and stayed offline.

In this case study, the participatory research design contributed to tracing a manifold picture of the skateboarding community in Graz and exploring various understandings of political participation. In particular, access to non-institutionalized skateboarders would otherwise have been difficult, and the focus might have remained only on the skateboard club and its allies.

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