

# Experiencing the texture of skateboard sounds can help bridge divisions, new research says

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Experiencing the harsh sounds of skateboarding can help bridge the gulf between the joy and distaste of the noises created by the sport, a new

study says.

Skate sounds can also help individuals sense and feel the [urban environment](#) in new and novel ways.

Skateboarders have a specialized knowledge of the texture of cities, and sharing this with the public could help to soothe conflict, according to the research. Paying attention to [sound](#) can give both sides "sonic" agency over spaces in the city.

Skate sounds, are a common basis of complaint from the [general public](#). Yet these sounds can act as a source of inspiration and joy for participants. This has an impact on the planning and construction of skateparks in cities. Complaints about sound can also lead to "hostile," costly and unsightly architecture like skate stoppers being added to [public spaces](#) as a deterrent to skateboarders.

The study, in the journal *The Senses and Society*, was carried out by Brian Glenney, from Norwich University, Max Boutin, from Quebec University and Paul O'Connor from the University of Exeter. The project involved exploring sensory perception of skateboarding and ethnographic work.

Researchers found the city's coarse textures and materials are actively played with by skateboarders. This is met with celebration by the trained ear of these participants and complaints by some members of the public.

Diverse "notes" and "tones" and "rhythms" of the skateboard are reflective of the speed at which the skateboarder rides, the surfaces upon which they ride, and the tricks the skateboarder selects in relation to the surfaces producing a sound "performance." The study says the skateboarder's ability to control their sound, or conversely lose control and let the environment create an unexpected sound, makes skate sound

such a powerful feature of the skateboarding experience.

Dr. O'Connor said, "For some people skate sounds may be merely subjective. For others it is associated with anti-social behavior. Perspective sharing may be the best strategy for finding common ground on skate sound. Rather than resorting to emotion when agreement is difficult to achieve, considering the basis of past associations of skateboarding and its participants may be more fruitful. Skateboarders possess a unique sensory knowledge of the surface materials and textures of the city."

When asked for a phrase to describe skate sound, participants gave particularly severe adjectives including "beer bottle on beer bottle," "irritant," "really harsh," and "bones on concrete." They knew skate sound is unpleasant to the public. Sometimes they said they delighted in their power to auditorily disturb and other times they were conscious-stricken, picking up their boards and walking over particularly coarse noise-making surfaces.

Dr. Glenney said, "Skate sound complaints by the public are padded with concerns of physical risk that skateboarders pose to local pedestrians. To skateboarders, skate sound is associated with the physical reward of skateboarding activity and community.

"Skate sounds reverberate in the body of the skateboarder and echo in the ears of those nearby to the tune of the city's textures and materials. Those adept at feeling and hearing skate sound thus possess specialized knowledge of the city. And those without a tuned ear find annoyance and a source of complaint.

"It is the skateboarder who understands the richness of the thick urban crust that pedestrians inattentively walk on every day. Skate sound can help the public to observe these surface conditions in a way never

experienced before, using both the vibratory sound and feel from the skate instrument."

**More information:** Brian Glenney et al, The sonic spectrums of skateboarding: from polarity to plurality, *The Senses and Society* (2023). DOI: [10.1080/17458927.2023.2245232](https://doi.org/10.1080/17458927.2023.2245232)

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