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# **Lifestyle sport, public policy and youth engagement: Examining the emergence of parkour**

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**Key words:** lifestyle sport, parkour, youth policy; risk

## **Abstract**

In this paper we consider the development of parkour in the South of England, and its use in public policy debates and initiatives around youth, physical activity, and risk. Based on in-depth qualitative interviews with participants and those involved in the development of parkour in education, sport policy, and community based partnerships, we explore the potential of parkour to engage communities, particularly those traditionally excluded from mainstream 'sport' and physical education provision. We discuss how the perceived 'success' of parkour in these different contexts is related to the culture and ethos of the activity that is more inclusive, anti-competitive, and less rule bound than most traditional sports; and to its ability to provide managed risk-taking. More broadly, the paper highlights and discusses the emergence of lifestyle sports as 'tools' for policy makers, and the potential role these non-traditional, non-institutionalised 'lifestyle sports' can make in terms of encouraging youth engagement, physical health and wellbeing. Our paper therefore contributes to on-going debates about the ability of traditional sports to meet government targets for sport and physical activity participation.

## Introduction

It is widely recognised that over the past decade sport in the UK has gained a more prominent profile on political and policy agendas, with the British government - mirroring many other contemporary neoliberal states (see Green & Houlihan, 2006) - positioning sport at the centre of its 'cross-cutting approach to social policy' in tackling the linked 'problems' of youth obesity, anti-social behaviour and social exclusion (Coalter, 2007; 116). With the London 2012 Olympic Games looming this attention has intensified, with media and political discourse focused on guaranteeing that the London Games deliver a 'sporting legacy,' not just in terms of elite success, but also a more physically active nation (DCMS, 2008). As the current policy for sport and physical activity - set out in *Game Plan* and *Playing to Win* (DCMS, 2002, 2008) - suggests, participation in sport and recreation can lead to improved health, reduce crime levels, generate employment and encourage a more positive attitude to education. While the validity of these claims, and the nature of 'evidence' used to assess the multifarious policy interventions have come under sustained criticism (c.f. Coalter, 2007; Piggin *et al.*, 2009), our focus here is on the contribution of non- traditional and informal 'lifestyle' sports in these policy debates and processes.

Informal sports are increasingly central to the physical activity and cultural lifestyles of young people; indeed some argue they are becoming so central that they are beginning to replace traditional team sports and challenge the original sporting uses of playgrounds and urban parks (L'Aoustet & Griffet, 2001). L'Aoustet and Griffet claim that in France any observable increase in sport participation can be attributed to non-institutionalised informal sport activities, with surveys showing that 45-60% of the French population now practice informal sports. Similarly, in Germany, Bach (1993) discusses the intensification in demand for informal sport activities, recognising that a considerable part of 'sports' activity is not organised, nor conducted in official clubs, but is spontaneous in nature.

Thus, as academics such as Coalter (2004) have suggested, recognising the diversity of sport cultures and practices that exist outside of traditional sport provision has become increasingly relevant to policy analysts seeking to demonstrate sport's contribution to health, citizen engagement and the economy. In Canada, for example, research funded by the Canadian Population Health Initiative (e.g. Tremblay & Willms, 2003 cited in Kay, 2005) suggests that while participation in organised sport had *some* benefit for obesity prevention in children, the most profound effect came from unorganized sports, activities such as road hockey. The authors reasoned that children 'playing in the street' spend more hours on the

move than those in sport leagues. In the UK a study by Gratton (2004) similarly concluded that policy intervention to increase participation needs to be focused on ‘the non-competitive, informal area of sport participation’ as these are more likely to attract the groups that will ‘yield the highest health benefits from participation’ (cited in J Kay, 2005). Yet, as Tomlinson *et al* (2005) have argued, a fuller understanding is required of the contribution non-traditional, non-institutionalised sports such as ‘lifestyle sports’ can make in terms of various policy objectives (see also Kay, 2005). While there appears to be a growing recognition of the value of these activities, witnessed, for example in the appointment of extreme sports development officers in some part of the UK, there remains an absence of critical commentary and integration either by policy makers or academics as to the potential of lifestyle sports to meet policy objectives. Thus in this paper we highlight the emergence of lifestyle sport as a tool for policy makers. Our empirical focus is the emergence of the urban – based lifestyle sport parkour, also called *free –running* or *art de déplacement*, in the South of England. Despite being a relatively new and unknown activity, initiatives around parkour are burgeoning in the UK; here we discuss some of the ways in which the activity is being adopted in England to address a range of policy objectives, exploring stakeholders’ motivations for doing so, and the perceived benefits. Given the paucity of research or policy analysis in this area, our paper has a deliberately broad focus, exploring the potential of parkour for policy, examining policy processes, and offering an analysis of the participants and stakeholders’ experiential accounts, which we argue is central to understanding the activity’s potential to address policy objectives.

Our paper is structured as follows; first we outline what lifestyle sports are, offering a brief introduction to parkour. Second, we contextualise ‘lifestyle sport’ expansion both in the UK and more widely, and consider their role in sport policy. Third we describe our empirical research on parkour provision in England, and critically examine various policy initiatives using parkour. Our discussion then examines how and why parkour has been embraced in these different policy contexts in sport, art and education. We consider how parkour’s perceived value is related to its cultural values, specifically the opportunity for managed risk-taking, and its alternative ethos or philosophy of physical activity which is more inclusive, participant-driven, anti- competitive, and less rule-bound than most traditional sports.

## **Lifestyle sport**

Broadly, ‘lifestyle sport’ (and other related categorisations including new, whiz, action and extreme sports) refers to a wide range of mostly individualised activities, ranging from established sports like

climbing, surfing and skateboarding, to new activities like parkour, wake boarding, B.A.S.E. jumping and kite surfing (see Wheaton, 2004). There are numerous comprehensive commentaries on what lifestyle/action /alternative/extreme sport *are*, their histories, and ideologies, illustrating how many had – at least in their early phases of development - characteristics that were different to the traditional rule-bound, competitive, regulated, western ‘achievement’ sport cultures (see Booth & Thorpe, 2007; Rinehart, 2000; Rinehart & Sydor, 2003; Wheaton, 2004b). While recognising that each lifestyle sport has its own specificity, history, identity and development pattern, many share a common ethos that remains *distinct* from that of most traditional sports. There is also crossover in the industries that underpin the cultures, and participation between lifestyle sports; in some cases attracting seasonal shifts for example between surfing and snowboarding, or those who do a range of the activities (Wheaton, 2005).

The urban-based lifestyle sport parkour is the empirical focus of this article, which according to its founders is the “art of moving fluidly from one part of the environment to another” (McLean *et al.*, 2006; 795). The activity originated in the economically- deprived Paris suburb or *banlieue* of Lisses in the 1980s (Ortuzar, 2009; 61). Here David Belle, Sebastien Foucan and friends began training and founded the Yamakasi group, from which most of the parkour-inspired movements have originated (Mould, 2009). However, the extent to which it can be characterised as new is debatable and its modern-day founders and subsequent practitioners recognise a genealogy to the military training methods *parcours de combatant*, proposed by the French educational theorist Georges Hebert in 1913 (see Atkinson, 2009; Edwardes, 2007; Ortuzar, 2009).

Parkour is practiced predominantly in urban areas using either man-made or naturally occurring obstacles. While practitioners first learn a set of techniques, such as the *cat leap*, it does not have a set of rules or objectives. Each *tracuer* – the name given to those who practice parkour seriously - moves from A to B under, over, and through obstacles including walls, railing and roofs, in the most fluid, efficient way. Parkour does not fit easily into existing categories, being described variously as sport and art, and has forms that intersect with other activities such as dance and gymnastics. It shares some characteristics with other urban lifestyle sports like skateboarding, such as ambivalence to man- on-man (sic) formal competition, an emphasis on self- expression, and attitudes to risk, which tends to be carefully calculated and managed rather than taken unnecessarily (Oliver, 2006; Robinson, 2008; Stranger, 1999; Wheaton, 2004a). Nonetheless, the philosophy and meaning of parkour also differs from

other lifestyle sports in important ways. Like many post-subcultural formations (Muggleton & Weinzierl, 2003), the *discipline*, as practitioners refer to it, has fragmented into different variants such as *Free running*, which involves more acrobatic and dance like manoeuvres, is more commercialised and tends towards stunt-making and mass spectacle (Archer, 2010; Atkinson & Young, 2008; Edwardes, 2007).

Until very recently parkour was a relatively unheard of activity, but it has spread rapidly among young urban inner-city populations, through informal networks, internet forums, and particularly its virtual presence on sites such as YouTube. The UK is now considered as a centre for parkour, London seeing itself as the self-styled capital, the city being the base for many of the top teams of traceurs, including a number of the French 'masters'. A spate of media attention has also contributed to its growing cultural presence, such as featuring in the BBC channel ident *Rush Hour* starring founding traceur Danielle Belle, and in films such as *Jump London* (Christie, 2003) and *Casino Royale* (2006), featuring a chase between Daniel Craig (as James Bond) and Sébastien Foucan.

Parkour's increased visibility has provoked a spate of academic research across a range of interdisciplinary areas, much of which has explored how the activity provides a different, transgressive way of interacting with the (urban) environment, one that challenges the use and meaning of urban space, urban life, and forms of embodiment (Archer, 2010; Atkinson, 2009; Bavinton, 2007; Daskalaki *et al.*, 2008; Geyh, 2006; Saville, 2008; Thompson, 2008). In contrast, the media often depict parkour as a dangerous and sometimes deviant activity, contributing to misinformation, particularly about the degree of risk involved (McLean *et al.*, 2006). As Booth and Thorpe outline, many activities labelled 'extreme' are actually very safe (2007; 183). Parkour participants vociferously reject the extreme or high-risk label, recognising the importance of safe practice, and to 'train safely':

a lot of people just see what's in the media and they assume that's what they are going to be doing and it's just not the case (personal interview, participant/promoter).

## **The significance of lifestyle sport for sport policy**

Since their emergence in the 1960s, lifestyle sports have experienced unprecedented growth both in participation and in their increased visibility across public and private space, fuelled by wider socio-cultural developments, in particular the rapid expansion of consumer culture. Surveys across Europe and America, including Sport England's *Active People Survey* (2006, 2007) have pointed to the increased

popularity of non-institutionalised informal sport activities in general, and lifestyle sport specially. Given the difficulty of capturing participation rates in these informal, outdoor, non association-based activities (Bach, 1993) it is likely that participation rates are growing faster than these surveys suggest. Indeed when measures such as equipment sales (see sources cited in e.g. Booth & Thorpe, 2007; Howell, 2008), market research surveys (see Tomlinson *et al.*, 2005), and media commentaries (e.g. Asthana, 2004; Barkham, 2006) are included, it is clear that in the twenty-first century many types of lifestyle sports are attracting an ever-increasing body of followers, outpacing the expansion of traditional sports in many Western nations (Booth & Thorpe, 2007; Comer, 2004; Howell, 2008; Jarvie, 2006; Rinehart & Sydor, 2003; Thorpe, 2008; Wheaton, 2004b). This expansion in participation includes not only the traditional consumer market of teenage boys (Intel, 2003 cited in Tomlinson *et al.* 2005) but older men, and increasingly in a number of activities, women and girls (Wheaton, 2009). In practical terms, these sports which take place in spaces outside of the traditional forms of provision such as schools, clubs and leisure centres, represent avenues for sporting participation and social engagement for men and women across socio-economic groups, including the most socially disadvantaged (see Wheaton, 2009) and those who have turned their back on traditional school-based and institutional sport practices.

Yet, as Tomlinson *et al* highlighted in 2005, there was an absence of research and policy initiatives in this area.<sup>i</sup> Since then, an expansion in localised policy initiatives on, or using aspects of lifestyle/extreme sports provision is evident, often with a high degree of perceived 'success' in terms of engaging the targeted populations. Given the renewed prominence of sport across a range of policy areas under new Labour, this expansion in provision is not surprising. For example, 'extreme sport' development officers have emerged, new facilities have been constructed in areas undergoing regeneration, and lifestyle/extreme sports have been the focus for several *Active England* projects.<sup>ii</sup> There has also been an attempt by *Sport England* in the *Active People Surveys* to widen its vision of 'sport' to include many informal and lifestyles sports. Initiatives such as *StreetGames*<sup>iii</sup> suggest that *Sport England* has begun to recognise the importance of participation outside of traditional clubs. Yet, as we illustrate in this paper, locally based initiatives appear to take place without any links or awareness of similar projects, their problems and strengths. In short, there is an absence of integration or analysis, by policy makers and academics.

A further related issue is the lack of 'evidence' about participation and performance in most lifestyle sports (c.f. Tomlinson *et al.*, 2005). Information about *who* participates - their social demographics -

where, when, how often, or the reasons why, is extremely limited. In the cases of relatively new activities like parkour, 'evidence' is almost non-existent. Additionally, there are serious limitations in the survey-based methodologies that have been used to measure participation, making much of the 'evidence' policy makers have about the significance and scope of lifestyle sport unreliable. Factors contributing to this include; the unregulated, individualistic and often nomadic nature of participation in lifestyle sport; lack of governing bodies and club structures; and failure of even the most-recent mass participations surveys (such as Sport England's *Active People's Surveys*) to include questions suited to the nomadic, seasonal and weather dependent nature of lifestyle sports.<sup>iv</sup> These surveys tell us little about the *nature* of people's engagement. While some have attempted to differentiate between the regular and occasional participant; this simple dualism is insufficient for understanding the complex ways people engage with, and construct identities through participation in and consumption of lifestyle sports (c.f. Tomlinson *et al.*, 2005). In contrast, in-depth qualitative academic research about lifestyle sport that has emerged over the past 15 years which has illuminated the meanings and experiences of participation. This body of research, often ethnographic in nature, has revealed the wide range of different types of involvement from 'weekend warriors' to the very committed 'hard core' for whom participation becomes a whole way of life, one that may be sustained from youth to retirement (Robinson, 2008; Wheaton, 2004a). Strong social and emotional bonds develop between these committed participants - often described as subcultural communities or neo-tribal affiliations (Robinson, 2008; Wheaton, 2007) - linked by a shared attitudes, values and ways of life. Thus rather than focusing on individual sports, "data collection with respect to lifestyle sports needs to focus on the participants; the sports are very much an expression of their identities and lifestyles rather than existing as institutional forms in their own rights" (Tomlinson *et al.*, 2005; 4).

## **Research Context and Methodology**

The research that this paper is based on involved a community-focused<sup>v</sup> project that explored the reactions by stakeholders to plans to build a parkour training area, a purpose-built facility to encourage the development of parkour participation, in Peacehaven, East Sussex. The project was designed to gain a better understanding of the activity, its meaning, and social value, in support of applications made to construct the facility by the lead partner – REGEN (the Peacehaven and Telscombe Regeneration Partnership). Our research involved interviews with stakeholders involved in this process including the local participants, parkour training organisations, police, community officers, teachers, sport and art

development officers, members of REGEN and local councillors. Mindful of the recommendations from Tomlinson *et al's* report (2005) we also documented the various governance structures emerging in this rapidly evolving activity, involving interviews with personnel from key organisations involved with the institutionalisation and teaching provision of parkour/free-running in England more widely, exploring the institutionalisation and regulation processes, and how parkour has been used in other social inclusion and regeneration initiatives. The empirical research was conducted between September 2008 and October 2009, consisting of 18 in-depth qualitative interviews, conducted predominantly individually but in two cases, small groups. The interviews were fully transcribed and then coded thematically. We also used web-based research including parkour chat- sites, You-Tube and media reports about parkour.

We acknowledge that the small scale qualitative work we offer here has limited application, particularly in the context of a pervasive ideology of evidenced- based policy making (Coalter, 2009). Our objective is not to examine whether parkour actually benefits young people, nor is it to evaluate the impact (or delivery) of the policy interventions we examine; we don't have - or seek- evidence to suggest parkour is a 'solution' to a complex range of social issues. In contrast, the research we present in this paper is situated in a critical tradition that seeks to 'de-mythologize sport' (Houlihan *et al.*, 2009; 5), broadening our understanding of the boundaries of 'sport', through providing small-scale, localised, qualitative case-studies that "tease out deeper levels of meaning" and illuminate "what sports work for what subjects, in what conditions" (Coalter, 2007; 165). Our case-studies help to understand these policy initiatives from the perspective of key policy actors and participants; indeed as Green and Houlihan (2006; 51) argue, "if individual agency is deemed important in aiding the understanding of policy making, then the 'assumptive worlds' (Young,1977; 3) of key actors need to be explored". Like Kay (2009), our emphasis is on the *experiential accounts* of those who believed sport was benefiting young people, focusing on how those closest to this experience- as participants, or those who worked with them - felt parkour had contributed to this process. As Kay advises,

The inclusion of individuals' accounts of their sport experiences is, at the very least a legitimate and important component in assessment of the 'impact' of sport; alternatively and more ambitiously, they are a voice without which such work is incomplete (2009; 1180).

We hope that our research also contributes to the continuing conversation between researchers and policy makers both about the nature of 'evidence,' and the potential that lifestyle sports like parkour can make in terms of 'sports-based policy making.'

## **Parkour and Youth Policy Initiatives**

Given the pervasiveness of the media- fuelled belief that parkour encourages dangerous risk-taking, and endorses forms of deviant behaviour, it is perhaps surprising that parkour has also emerged as a focus for public policy. Indeed as one sport development officer we interviewed suggested “You know you get the same old analogies, “you are teaching the cat burglars of the future.” As Dumas and Laforest (2009; 19-20) argue in the similar context of skateboarding,

Even though public health institutions are engaged in unprecedented efforts to counter the sedentariness of youth, the promotion of lifestyle sport has been and remains tempered by the view of them having high risk of injuries.

Yet numerous youth policy initiatives are emerging around the UK using the activity of parkour in its various manifestations, including hybrid forms involving gymnastics, dance and other performance arts. Here we examine the range of initiatives we encountered across different policy contexts during our research in SE England. While they are not necessarily ‘typical’ or representative, they illustrate the variety of different and innovative ways in which parkour is being utilised by policy makers in sport, art, and education, and for cross-cutting community initiatives and partnerships drawing on several of these aspects. As Coalter outlines, under New Labour’s broad social inclusion agenda, sport has been seen to contribute to ‘community renewal,’ encompassing “improving communities performance in health, crime, employment and education”(Coalter, 2007; 116). Thus while these initiatives can broadly be categorised into sport provision and participation; regeneration projects; social inclusion initiatives and school-based schemes, in most cases provision cuts across and contributes to several of these agendas. In the discussion that follows we consider how the perceived ‘success’ of parkour in these different contexts it related to the culture of the activity, and to its ability to provide managed risk-taking behaviour. We also highlight some of the particular problems presented by the activity of parkour, particularly managing the perception of risk.

### ***Parkour and sport development***

In the London Borough of Westminster, an area with a mixed socio-economic demographic including several pockets of deprivation, parkour has been adopted and promoted by the Westminster Sports Development Unit since 2005.<sup>vi</sup> The Unit<sup>vii</sup> is one of the most avid and long-standing supporters of parkour in the UK, and the team are ambitious about their role in the professionalization of parkour (see

below). They are involved with expanding knowledge and provision- initially in the gymnasium and then outside in public spaces like parks and playgrounds - via a number of policy initiatives including *Positive Futures*, their *Schools Sports Partnership* and more widely in conjunction with the *Youth Sports Trust*. The provision in Westminster has expanded rapidly. It coordinates the teaching of parkour over fourteen schools across the Borough both in school PE and after school activities, runs three adult classes, a free weekly youth academy, and activities during school holidays (Interview). The parkour training and coaching they offer is approved via the *Assessment and Qualifications Alliance Examination Board* which recognises parkour for part of the national curriculum for gymnastics, and over 500 people have been through this scheme.

Westminster's most widely cited parkour initiative is its *Positive Futures* programme. *Positive Futures* is a nationally- based sports based social inclusion programme for young people aged 8 to 18, established in 2002, and funded by the Home Office<sup>viii</sup> under the broad remit of crime prevention. It works with wards identified as the most deprived in the UK, and its broad aims are to improve behaviour, reduce drug misuse and increase physical activity. *Positive Futures* was one of the key sport-based policy initiatives launched in the context of New Labour's broad social inclusion agenda (Coalter, 2007) improving communities performance in health, crime, employment and education. In policy terms, parkour in Westminster has been hailed as a success, largely due to the *claims* of a reduction in crime rates; "39% in school holidays when the sport unit were running their multi-sport courses and 69% when running solely the parkour courses."<sup>ix</sup> It was highlighted for best practice within the *Positive Futures* report (Positive Futures, 2007), and as a consequence, other Positive Futures projects around the UK are now delivering parkour (interview). These projects raise interesting, important and not-well understood questions for policy makers about *how* and *why* these changes in behaviours occurred (c.f. Coalter, 2007), issues we return to later in our discussion.

Reflecting our observations above about pervasive negative public perceptions about parkour, James,<sup>x</sup> the community sport development officer at Westminster described the difficulties in securing support for parkour, both within his organisation, and with other bodies:

We know how long it took to get us to this stage, and a lot of that was around the questions of qualifications, insurance... you've got your liability, and is this *sport safe*?

For sport policy professionals, establishing parkour as a legitimate sporting activity, with recognised training and teaching structures was essential. To this end, *Westminster Sport Development Unit*, in

conjunction with *Parkour Generations*, who deliver the teaching in Westminster and are one of the premier groups of parkour participants/ teachers in the UK, are creating a parkour NGB with support from Sport England.

### ***Parkour as art***

In contrast to the Westminster Sport Development Unit, provision for parkour in Brighton is based around a theatre company, funded through the arts not as a sport. The Urban Play Ground team (UPG) teach and practice parkour under the remit of 'physical theatre; 'they initially gained funding for parkour training and to develop a training facility involving a set of movable stages from the *Brighton and Hove Arts Commission* under an initiative called *Making a Difference*. The movable facility has since been used in schools across Brighton, and for a number of public performances. UPG consider the arts "the most natural" place for parkour, and have used their former training as physical theatre practitioners to create parkour as an "artistic discipline". In part this was seen as a pragmatic response to gain funding, with the Arts Council being receptive to new forms of physical performance that animate public spaces. Furthermore, by defining parkour as an artistic practice, UPG felt, helped to circumvent health and safety concerns, which are overly-restrictive when labelled as a sport (Interview).

Crawley was another locale where parkour initiatives were funded through the arts rather than sports. *Jump Crawley*, has been running for over five years, with a remit to engage young men with "some sort of artistic notion of movement and physicality" using parkour (interview, Arts Officer). Mary explained, "We slipped some contemporary dance in there without anyone noticing; and it was very successful." Crawley subsequently employed an extreme sport development manager to work on both the construction of a parkour-dedicated training facility and other extreme sport projects; but the fusion with arts has continued through involvement with UPG, and both retain a scepticism toward the sportisation and institutionalisation of parkour, in particular its competitive and commercialised elements, which were seen as potentially damaging to the ethos and values contained within the parkour training area.

### ***Containment and the emergence of the parkour park***

The provision of parkour training areas or parks is a relatively new and uncharted development in the provision for parkour. At the time of writing this article one parkour park had opened in Crawley, West Sussex (Summer 2009) and 3 others were in various states of planning and building in London (alongside the sports unit headquarters in Westminster and Roehampton University), and Newhaven (near Brighton). There were reports about several other facilities planned around the country, (and in North America), and variants also existed such as the movable box structures used by UPG in Brighton.

The impetus for the Peacehaven park that was the focus of our research, was a group of teenage male traceurs who approached REGEN to help them find a dedicated outdoor space for practising parkour. Their motivation was because they were seen as a nuisance by the (largely elderly) public and police, so were unable to practice:

- BW                    Is that a problem- do you get hassled a lot?
- Participant 1        Every single day
- BW                    Who by?
- Participant 1        Residents, police, security.. anyone who wants to.
- Participant 2        We are always getting moved on. I have been stopped 3 times in one day by the police. That was my record.
- BW                    What do the police say?
- Participant 1        Basically, you are being anti social .. move on.
- Participant 2        Yep. Or this is private property

With support from REGEN and other stakeholders, architect designs were drawn up for a 'performance space' in a local Park in Peacehaven, which would incorporate an area for practising parkour. However these plans were rejected at public consultation in August 2007, largely due to (older) residents concerns about noise, and "'young people hanging around"' (interview). The local police confirmed that when parkour first emerged in the area they had 'constant' phone calls from (predominantly older) residents voicing concerns which included, the participants safety, 'youths gathering', and reporting 'damage to property' (interview). While recognising that these youth did fuel these prejudices by, for example choosing locales such as the street opposite a nursing home to practise, the police and other community officials we interviewed recognised there was little evidence of damage to property or anti-social behaviour:

There were reports of damage being done and youths gathering together and jumping on fences and things like that.. it wasn't so much damage - that they were jumping from one side to the other. I think people haven't really seen it for what they can do, you know, they've been seeing it initially as groups of youths hanging round (interview, community police officer).

Subsequently two new venues have been identified in the adjacent council's jurisdiction, and at the time of writing (early 2010) the council were looking at the project favourably, and substantial monies had been ring-fenced.<sup>xi</sup>

In both Crawley and Telscombe, the parks or training areas, grew out of the local councils seeing a need to provide physical activity provision, and in the case of Crawley to regenerate an area. Parkour was chosen – in both cases - by local youth as a priority in either public consultation activities, and/or following parkour sessions provided by local youth providers. Parkour was the most popular activity at a multi-sport youth festival in Brighton.

Although parkour training areas such as the one under discussion in Telscombe has been described as a performance and 'play space', as Howell remind us, "playgrounds were conceived of as places to contain young people who might otherwise be playing in the street, while simultaneously cultivating in those young people social values that advocates deemed desirable" (Howell, 2008; 478). Clearly, the provision of the park could potentially lead to a the containment of the activity, with street-based traceurs being marginalised and subject to increasingly stringent legislation as has been observed in skateboarding (see Borden, 2001). Misinformation and fear about risk and injury in street skateboarding has lead to regulation of the activity and its participants (see Dumas & Laforest, 2009) including containing them in skate-parks; enforcing rules about appropriate behaviour and protective clothing; and limiting street skating through legislation and modifications to the urban furniture (Borden, 2001).

Indeed in some locales urban managers have attempted to regulate parkour using similar techniques to those adopted to deter street skate-boarding (see Borden, 2001). For example, in the Paris suburbs where parkour originated, the civic authorities built fences on the edge of roofs. However this failed to limit the activity; on the contrary it provided new obstacles to climb (interview). Thus traceurs were certainly aware of the potential for parks to "become a way of containing the discipline" (interview), which is an on-going theme in our research:

If it's called a parkour *park* we're saying this is where you do parkour. If we call it a parkour *training area* then we are saying we accept that you will do parkour elsewhere. Because one of the big problems with the skateboard parks in the past has been 'we've given you a park and now we're going to put no skateboarding signs everywhere else'. And it doesn't work. It doesn't stop people skateboarding. It just means that every skateboarder necessarily has to adopt a kind of two-fingers up attitude to authority in order to be a skateboarder, which is stupid (Sport Development Officer).

There was surprisingly little contact between the different groups involved with building the parks (or indeed involved in any initiatives). They all discussed the difficulties in the process, including the design, location, getting support and involvement from local traceurs, safety concerns, and the need to consult experienced parkour gurus. Yet projects were being conducted in isolation; indeed the team in Westminster first heard about the Crawley Park during our interview. This fragmentation is not surprising when one considers the informal networks that characterises parkour, and the fragmentation of the discipline with a range of different bodies with quite divergent understandings of parkour, who served the community. In the absence of a recognised NGB, or training/ teaching association sanctioned by all traceurs, those bodies wanting to build a facility had to rely on local participants to inform their understanding of the process. Various different coaching qualifications offered by insider groups and bodies had proliferated; one interviewee described the situation as an 'accreditation bandwagon'. Stakeholders discussed that it was hard to assess their legitimacy, or credibility. These concerns as well as the on-going questions about the sports safety (see on) were driving the professionalization of parkour:

Because nobody ever asks 'are we going to do rugby at school,' oh well 'that's dangerous' you know because there is, there is the assumption that there is safety standards, which there is. So if we do that for parkour it will just legitimise the sport for other people out there that are risk adverse (interview, Sport development officer).

These debates are particularly visible in the PE context where, as the next section explores, there has been intense and on-going debate about the role, use and value of parkour in school, both as extracurricular activities but latterly in the context of the PE curriculum.

### ***Parkour and the PE profession: negotiating discourses of risk and safety***

Our objective here is to highlight the importance of school provision in these wider policy debates about parkour risk and responsibility. However to do so, the impact of the New PE curriculum introduced into secondary schools in England in 2009,<sup>xii</sup> needs recognition. While views about this development are mixed, its intention is to shift the emphasis from a focus on *activities* (such as team games) towards *core skills* (such as balance, flight and creativity). Evidently, *some* schools have expanded their provision including incorporating a range of non-traditional sports such as skateboarding, Ultimate Frisbee, street surfing, and parkour:

We have been offering loads of new age activities that are highly successful, that are a great leveller. [...] We are games dominated within our curriculum, and we are very conscious that we believe in the aesthetic activities. We want to keep them. ... with the new curriculum we are certainly open to be able to move that forward. (Interview, PE teacher)

However parkour has had a contested and contradictory reception within the PE profession, largely due to health and safety fears. A bulletin produced for afPE (Association for PE Professionals) early in 2008 stated “afPE cannot support an activity that appears to fly in the face of safe practice and acceptable risk on several counts. [...] In short, it is inappropriate, misguided and dangerous” (Glen Beaumont afPE’s health and safety officer cited in Cornford, 2008). However, the interpretation of these recommendations appeared to be regionally variable, with locales like London having already provided parkour in PE for several years, and others like East Sussex County Council banning parkour in curriculum time (interviews). Moreover, a few months later afPE issued a second statement recognising media- fuelled misperception about parkour, and its potential benefits:

afPE believes parkour-related activity has the potential to offer young people an alternative movement experience that is both challenging and fulfilling in both its skill and aesthetic demands(Beaumont, 2008).

The need to establish parameters of acceptable and safe practice was widely recognised by all those interviewed for this project, although they differed in the bodies or organisation they believed would be best placed to represent parkours’ and children’s interests. In this context a number of attempts to regulate and institutionalise parkour and free-running were under discussion, with initiatives from both within (eg Parkour Generations) and outside (e.g. British Gymnastics) of the discipline.

## **Discussion: Parkour as a tool for youth engagement**

The overwhelming attitude of this small group of school teacher, sport/art development officers, and community stakeholders was extreme enthusiasm about the potential of parkour, detailing the numerous ways in which they believed it had benefiting children. Yet most of these - such as better behaviour, attendance, bringing students from different background together, boosting self-esteem and confidence - mirror the perceived benefits of participation in *all* School sport/ PE programmes and policy interventions, which as is widely recognised, are often based on generalised and unsubstantiated 'positive outcomes' (see Coalter, 2007; 93). Clearly there are numerous and complex sets of cultural, economic, social and psychological influences that may influence individual children's behaviour. However it is worth reflecting on Coalter's (2007) appraisal of the (predominantly) psychological research that attempts to understand the mechanisms that lead to improvements in confidence and self efficacy in such interventions. He surmises " for many of the groups likely to benefit most from improved physical self- worth, body image and self-esteem, the traditional competitive, ego-centred, sports might not be effective" instead advocating non-traditional, "task and mastery orientated" activities that seeks to develop intrinsic motivation (Coalter, 2007; 102). Parkour certainly proves an apposite example of such an approach.

Here however, our focus is on *understanding* the aspects of parkour's *culture, and cultural values* that enabled children, teachers and policy makers to *feel* parkour had contributed to changed attitudes and behaviours. The first, and most prevalent factor, was a recognition of the unique ethos of parkour, and belief that this philosophy, one that is more inclusive, anti- competitive, and less rule bound than most traditional sports, made the activity appealing to young people who tended not to engage in traditional forms of sport and physical activity. The second was the opportunity it provided for managed risk-taking particularly in urban context. Lastly we offer some of our own observations based on both the culture, and broader the socio-political context in which parkour is emerging. Of particular relevance is a recognition of a political shift that has reframed risky, counter-cultural, deviant lifestyles - like parkour and skateboarding- as instruments of urban development.

### ***The ethos and values of parkour***

Parkour has its own unique philosophy or ethos that differs in key ways from both traditional and other lifestyle sports. Indeed traceurs reject the label 'sport' fundamentally because they are opposed to

formal competitions. Yet paradoxically many aspects are sports-like, including their physically demanding training regimes (see also Atkinson, 2009). Devotees are extremely physically fit individuals, who train hard, often around 20 hours a week, and tend to adopt what is generally regarded as a 'healthy lifestyle' including abstaining from smoking, eating healthily, and drinking alcohol in moderation - or not at all (personal interviews). Traceurs see parkour as a non-competitive activity; participants challenge themselves, and their level of skill, they don't compete *against* others:

It is a *discipline* that gives us strength, freedom and a deeper understanding of our physical bodies and mental strengths and weaknesses [...] no other discipline I know, offers the same level of freedom that parkour does. There is no dogma, no rules, no guru's, no competition. Each individual is free to explore and develop within their own interpretation of parkour and the art of movement (girlparkour website).<sup>xiii</sup>

As one participant explained, effort and attitude, not ability is rewarded. He explained there was "no competitiveness" between traceurs, so a particularly high-jump performed by an experienced participant was given the "same values" the "same amount of credit and praise" as a beginner would "being just able to get over a barrier." Traceurs described their group as 'non- hierarchical' and explained the ways in which everyone takes "responsibility for training everyone else in what they know." This inclusivity and sense of responsibility is manifest in many ways, including attitudes to public space, and in the ways in which beginners and 'outsiders' are embraced and supported, not derided as is often the case in lifestyle and mainstream sports:

I kind of find skate culture and BMX culture, they're kind of a bit 'we're BMX's, this is our place' no one else's... parkour's a bit more, its got a different kind of background and it's a lot more kind of 'everywhere is kind of yours' (participant).

Indeed traceurs have an 'ethic of care' for the self (Foucault, 1988) other and the environment more broadly (Atkinson, 2009); Individuals view their relationship to self, others and their environment differently to most other sporting practices (e.g. Atkinson, 2009; Bavinton, 2007). As one sport development office explained, "every technique is underplayed with a philosophy and idea of responsibility a responsibility about the environment one practices parkour in and the other users of that environment."

Our interviewees agreed that these values, specifically the non- competitiveness, supportiveness, and responsibility, were central to the ability of parkour to engage a wide-range of participants.

It goes back to that non competitiveness so it's around the small achievements you make even though there's other people in the class that are excelling. [...] You know you get some people looking at their environment differently, looking at it through new eyes (Sport Development Officer).

While newcomers took time to understand this ethos, it infused their practice even in formal teaching settings:

Some of those young people that haven't participated [in parkour] or organised workshops are into the competitive strength aspect. But it's about highlighting it's not about competition, it's not about strength, it's about working with your own head, and own physicality and dealing with your environment whether it's the balancing beam or another obstacle. The minute it becomes a competition is the minute you lose out. And that ethos is played out all the time. And you see those young people, and it is the 13 and 14 year-olds taking it on board, trying harder with themselves and not trying to push each other, but they are supporting each other (Arts Development officer).

Parkour's ability to engage participants who had previously shown little interest in sport, especially team games, was cited by several interviewees; as one sport development officer suggested, "You know, the typical EMOs<sup>xiv</sup> will be the ones who will go into parkour". They arguing that as well as being different, parkour was flexible, allowing pupils to be self-directed, brining in "ideas of self expression and self-challenge, so they can set their own standards that they want to achieve" (PE teacher).

The main thing that makes it so attractive is it engages the disengaged, so the ones that don't want to do netball, football, [...] they're the ones that we want to target with this and what we found by using parkour [...] we got young people re-engaged in doing physical activity and sport at school (Sport Development Officer).

In the school setting this ability to bring together diverse social groups and networks appeared to translate across context. As the head teacher of one school observed, the friendships developed through parkour had lead to "the sorts of students who wouldn't naturally" mix, "working together in normal class-room activity, working together and learning from each other and supporting each other " (Head teacher).

In Westminster, parkour had been used to target various 'hard- to -reach' youth including those on the *Positive Futures* programmes, girls, children with special needs, and programmes for children targeted

as overweight (interview). It had proved popular with some unexpected groups such as ‘Muslim girls who typically are “very difficult to engage in physical activity” (Positive Futures report, 2007; 17). As their teacher recounted:

We had a group of (about 15) girls who absolutely loved it... and they would always turn up, always. You know, these are kids who are usually quite hard to reach in normal curriculum time but who really enjoyed the internally paced, self-motivated, in my own time, closed skills that were involved, as well as the body conditioning (PE teacher).

As illustrated by the popularity of parkour among groups such as these Muslim girls, parkour’s ethic of inclusivity appears to also impact how social difference is marked, which has important implications for parkour’s potential for social inclusion initiatives. While a discussion of ‘race’, gender, equality discourses and inclusion/exclusion in parkour is beyond our scope here, it is noteworthy that parkour does not have the white imagery and participant-base associated with many other lifestyle sports, which as commentators have noted can be a powerful cultural barrier for non-white participants (Wheaton, 2009). Indeed, from the outset traceurs in the French suburbs were a racially diverse group (Ortuzar, 2009). Parkour’s growing popularity in many inner-city contexts, and the high media profile of Black traceurs such as Foucan and Belle, suggest it has appeal across ethnic groups.

Our research also revealed some surprising insights about parkour and gender suggesting that the masculine identities performed by these male participants was less tied to the performances of hegemonic masculinity prevalent in many sports. Rather than heroic displays of strength, speed and power, these young men embraced the aesthetic side of parkour valuing ‘feminine’ physical skills such as balance and agility, supporting rather than competing with other participants. These values infused policy discourses, such as participant-promoters claiming to want a more progressive attitude to women than many traditional sports, discussing various initiatives to increase female membership. Innovative parkour- hybrids such as *Dare -2-Dance* are emerging which exploit the dance parallels to promote parkour to teenage girls, and conversely, as noted above, other like *Jump Crawley* used parkour to engage young men with aesthetic and creative activity.

### ***Risk and responsibility***

In contrast to the media depiction, those who do parkour, or are involved via teaching the activity, reject the extreme or high-risk label recognising the importance of ‘being safe’. As one advocate explained,

“it’s always broadcast as big, difficult moves”, so people don’t “realise that at a very basic level it’s a safe activity”(Personal interview, sport development officer). Although videos participants posted on You- tube or websites tend to show the most difficult and spectacular part of performance repertoires, parkour practice involves slow- paced, repetition of manoeuvres close to the ground. Many practitioners conceptualise the activity as a form of art that uses many eastern philosophies requiring discipline (see also Miller & Demoigny, 2008). Furthermore, academics examining parkour’s injury rates claim that serious tracers are “tremendous athletes” (Miller & Demoigny, 2008; 63), who learn and practice stunts in a controlled environment like a gym; serious injuries, are rare, and tend to occur when untrained neophytes attempt dangerous tricks without proper training (Miller & Demoigny, 2008).

Parkour was widely seen as providing an opportunity, particularly for urban –based young people to experience risk and adventure in a relatively safe way. As recent Government reports have highlighted, and the media have widely pursued (e.g. Asthana, 2008), there is a widespread belief that young people have limited opportunities to challenge themselves, and are living increasingly ‘bubble-wrapped’ lives. For commentators like Furedi (2005), the medias’ fixation on risk is symptomatic of broader social process; that in Modernity, risk management becomes a powerful form of discursive control (Furedi, 1997).

Despite the concerns vociferously expressed by afPE (noted above), other public bodies like The Royal *Society for the Prevention of Accidents* publicly endorsed the sport. Its safety education adviser, (Dr Jenny McWhirter), said: "Anything that encourages young people to be active and try new challenges in a supervised environment will help them learn to manage risk. Free running is like any other activity in that it tests their limits. It is better they learn it in schools than on the streets" (cited in Johnson & Wroe, 2009). Our interviewees also saw parkour as a way to reintroduce some sort of risk into sport and play, to give young people in urban settings a sense of challenge and adventure, and to enable them to learn to use risk safely so they understand how to challenge themselves:

Parkour does offer an element of danger and an element of challenge. This is a good thing if managed sensibly and students take decisions[...] [They] embrace the level of risk they are happy with, and become stronger people as a result (PE teacher).

You can take whatever risk you want but then you've got that real 'I can. I can do this'...And I think that's something they take into other area of their lives, that positive attitude (Head, teacher)

Despite such endorsements of the benefits, the contradictory discourses of danger and risk infused many of our interviews. Managing the risk, including aspects such as providing liability, insurance cover, was one of the central concerns for policy makers across all areas of provision.

### ***Social context***

Our own observations of the activity also provided some possible explanations for parkour's perceived value for targeting various hard-to reach communities. Parkour provides few of the economic and cultural barriers participants face in many traditional sports. The costs are minimal; there is no fee for facilities or coaching, the clothing requirement and style are just cheap trainers<sup>xv</sup>. It can be conducted alone or with friends, anywhere, at any time, without rules, or restrictions: "they can climb on things and run around things and just be physically active in their communities and on their doorsteps again" (interview). Knowledge of the activity is gained on-line or through joining other participants in meetings or *Jams*, gate keepers recognise the importance of being welcoming and inclusive. The image of the activity is not especially 'sporty' and has an edge urban feel, which may appeal to those attracted to other popular aspects of youth culture such as street dance. The informal but extremely strong networks that developed amongst the traceurs in our research, certainly developed in Putnam's (2000) terms 'bonding capital', that is "networks based on strong social ties between similar people- people 'like us' – with relations, reciprocity and trust based on ties of familiarity and closeness" which can lead to the development of social capital (Coalter, 2007; 59; J Kay, 2005).

### ***'Active Citizens'***

In the East Sussex Case study it was also evident that thorough their involvement in lobbying for a parkour training area, these teenage traceurs had been involved with forms of civic engagement. Having instigated the process, they then helped in the planning, community-lobbying and even building the parkour park. Their resourcefulness, maturity, self-direction and creativity positioned them, in the eyes of leisure providers and community stake holders as 'good citizens'. This shift from urban based lifestyle sports participants being perceived as deviant, to good active citizens appear to be a more widespread and significant trend in the urban politics of lifestyle sport. Until quite recently skateboarders were

excluded from public spaces, and marginalised in decision making processes (See for example Chiu, 2009; Howell, 2005; Jones & Graves, 2000; L'Aoustet & Griffet, 2001; Stratford, 2002; Vivoni, 2009). However these negative public perceptions of skateboarders have been challenged, highlighting their social benefits (Dumas & Laforest, 2009); illustrating, for example, that successful skate parks can become an important social space in which young people - not just skaters - can gather, socialise, and take responsibility to preserve and protect the park and wider locale, fostering a sense of “responsibility, ownership and control” among the users (Jones & Graves, 2000; 137). As Howell suggests, skateboarding is being “reconfigured as an instrument of development” (Howell, 2005). He describes an explosion in provision for skate parks in North America over the past decade, suggesting that the motivation for ‘urban managers’ (meaning the plethora of people involved in commercial and state funded leisure provision) to provide new facilities is linked to the characteristic behaviour of skateboarders which includes “refraining from bringing liability cases for injuries”, informally policing the neighbourhoods surrounding the parks, and showing creativity, “personal responsibility, self-sufficiency, and entrepreneurship” values that are desired personal characteristics of young citizens in neo-liberal societies” (Howell, 2008; 477).<sup>xvi</sup> While Howell’s research is focused on the North American city these political processes and ideologies have wider resonance in other neo-liberal contexts like the UK, helping to understand this shift in the motivation and behaviour of commercial and state funded leisure providers of lifestyle sports.

While the reasons given by those involved with the Peacehaven parkour park were often quite vague and even contradictory, they too viewed the ‘parkour lads’ as ‘good’ and engaged young citizens, not deviant youth in need of discipline and containment. Parkour was credited by teachers, community workers, and indeed some participants, as having developed the confidence and maturity of the boys involved; in one case it was attributed to completely changing the attitudes and behaviour of a pupil on the verge of being expelled from school. As a member of the REGEN team commented, through the activity these teenagers learnt to think and behave in more ‘creative’ and ‘productive’ ways:

They approached problems in a different way, it wasn’t just A to B a bit of lateral thinking, a different way of looking at problems which was really interesting. I just thought, it’s absolutely amazing, it’s outside and its one of those things you’ve got to train to do and it’s inexpensive and if it can help at school it takes credit (interview, REGEN member).

One of the teenage boys told us “I used to be really unconfident before I did parkour... I think once you do parkour, it definitely changes you.” Like the skate boarders discussed in Howell’s (2008) research,

their maturity, resourcefulness, self-direction, disciplined-approach and creativity positioned them, in the eyes of these leisure providers as 'good citizens.'

## Conclusions

In his paper we have described policy interventions using parkour that cut across different policy agendas including social inclusion, anti-social behaviour, and increasing physical activity. We have explored the benefits of parkour from the perspective of those running the projects in sport, the arts and education, providing managed risk-taking and engaging a wide-range of traditionally hard to reach groups. Our objective was not to 'measure' improvements, nor evaluate these policy interventions and the politics that underpin them, but given the paucity of research in this area, to firstly highlight their existence, and secondly, begin to understand how the culture of parkour has contributed to changed attitudes and behaviours in these contexts.

While this project is just a starting point for understanding the relationship between lifestyle sports, parkour and sport policy, some interesting issues are raised in terms of the wider agenda proposed in Tomlinson et al.'s report (1995). To summarise; first, are problems in the evidence-base underpinning our understanding of the significance of lifestyle sport; the positivistic drive for simplistically- conceived participation data has limited understanding. Parkour illustrates how lifestyle sports can, in specific circumstances, contribute to physical health, wellbeing, community and civic engagement, appealing to groups of male *and* female participants not engaged by traditional sporting activities, and particularly team games. We have raised some implications for our understanding of how social capital is developed through sport participation, and the potential role of (post)subcultural communities (Wheaton, 2007) like parkour. It is also apparent that policy initiatives, such as the ones we have discussed, need to be driven from the community level (Kay, 2005), with an understanding of the meaning given to participation, and ensuring that the participants continue to determine the form and circumstances of the activity. In these contexts, seemingly individualistic deviant activities can, in the right circumstances, lead to wider community engagement and civic responsibility. The fluid and ever evolving nature of parkour allows it to be re-defined to fit different policy agendas across the arts and sport, and indeed to propose 'alternative' and seemingly more inclusive forms of 'physical culture' (Atkinson, 2009). Yet, there is a need for evaluation of these policy interventions, particularly from the perspectives of

participants, to understand the mechanisms leading to the claimed outcomes, and to recognise the specificity of the circumstances leading to changes in people's behaviour (c.f. Coalter, 2007).

The research also supports Tomlinson et. al's (2005) contention about the need to understand the governance structures of lifestyle sports, and indeed the (impact of ) the contradictory role of NGBs in lifestyle sport and informal sport more widely. In this context Sport England's emphasis on funding through Governing Bodies,( NGBs) which have been tasked with, and funded to promote and increase participation in their sports, presents particular difficulties for developing and promoting lifestyle sport provision. Parkour's fluidity does not easily fit the rigid boundaries imposed by many organisational structures involved in the policy making process;<sup>xvii</sup> to understand and develop the place of non-competitive and aesthetic-style sporting activities in policy development, evidently requires work across agencies' (in sport, the arts, physical activity, education and health) traditional boundaries. The discourse of risk and how it is managed by policy makers and stakeholders in the context of parkour is a central issue, one that is infused with pervasive disciplinary discourses serving to produce normative 'healthy' (McDermott, 2007) self-responsible and productive neoliberal citizens. While participants remain resistant to having regulations imposed on them, most acknowledged the need for training and teaching to be regulated. However, akin to many other risky lifestyle sports including mountaineering and surfing, subcultural codes, rather than imposed sport rules, are seen to ensure the safety of participants (Beedie, 2007; Tomlinson *et al.*, 2005). While lifestyle sports like parkour clearly provide numerous challenges for traditional sport-based policy making, it is also an untapped potential that policy makers can no longer afford to ignore.

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<sup>i</sup> Their report develops an agenda for research, suggesting ways in which lifestyle sports can be brought into the policy arena in England. Key areas include, examining the potential for new and different forms of engagement, and new ways in which governance structures – and governing bodies – could work with Sport England and other agencies (Tomlinson et al., 2005, p. 5).

<sup>ii</sup> e.g. Active X, Great Yarmouth's kite-project, and CREST Cornwall, Rural and Extreme Sport.

<http://www.aelz.org/files/documents/Using%20water%20based%20activities.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> <http://www.streetgames.org/drupal-5.0/index.php>

<sup>iv</sup> In evaluating the various survey data available Tomlinson et al. claimed “These are limited in terms of scope and data reliability, with little trend consistency” (2005; 2). To illustrate the extent of this problem consider the various data sources on UK surfing participation. According to the BSA, the sport's NGB, there are 500,000 regular surfers in the UK (2006). They also claimed that it is a fast growing activity with membership up 400% in the past five years (cited in Barkham, 2006). However according to the Sport England's *Active People Survey*, the number of adults (over 16) who take part at least once a month is only 58,439<sup>iv</sup>, a ten-fold difference. Moreover the survey did not show a large increase in the year on year data (from 2005-6 to 2007-8). In contrast another national survey focusing on water sport participation, the *Watersport and Leisure Participation*<sup>iv</sup> survey (2007), suggested there were 606, 802 surfers in the UK. Such variation in the survey data on lifestyle sport participation is typical.

<sup>v</sup> The research was funded by the *Brighton and Sussex Community Knowledge Exchange* programme (BSCKE). Our community partners were the *Peacehaven and Telescombe Regeneration Partnership* (REGEN) who were the partnership trying to raise money for the parkour training area.

<sup>vi</sup> Sport development is a widely used, but contested term, that 'can mean the development of sport for sports sake and equally the use of sport and physical activity opportunities for the development of society - sport as a social instrument'. (<http://www.sportdevelopment.info/>). In the UK, most local councils have *Sport development Units*. They are usually responsible for coordinating the local provision (and budget ) for sport and active leisure provision in that locale, including sports to Schools, Youth /Community Centres, Parks, Clubs, and various Sport Centres/Complexes and Open Spaces.

<sup>vii</sup> <http://www.westminster.gov.uk/services/leisureandculture/active/findoutmore/unit/>. A documentary film about parkour in Westminster titled *Jump Westminster* is available on You Tube.

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvP\\_HfVa2Rs](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yvP_HfVa2Rs)

<sup>viii</sup> In partnership initially, between Home Office Drugs Strategy Directorate, Sport England, the Youth Justice Board and the Football Foundation. It initially targeted 10-19 year olds. See [www.positivefuturesresearch.co.uk](http://www.positivefuturesresearch.co.uk).

<sup>ix</sup> These figures were given during interviews with personnel from/involved with Westminster Sports development Unit, and are also cited in a range of newspaper reports, e.g Johnson, A., & Wroe, S. (2009, 25 January ).

<sup>x</sup> While the locations, and names of programmes are given their full details, the names of individuals involved are changes for reasons of anonymity.

<sup>xi</sup> During writing this paper several developments occurred. The Telescomb site was rejected, and in Feb 2010 the parkour park was moved to Newhaven and was under development, due to be opened in Spring 2010.

<sup>xii</sup> See for example [http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/physical-education/keystage3/New\\_opportunities\\_in\\_PE.aspx](http://curriculum.qcda.gov.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/physical-education/keystage3/New_opportunities_in_PE.aspx)

<sup>xiii</sup> <http://www.girlparkour.com/page25.htm> accessed 10 Nov. 2009

<sup>xiv</sup> Emo is a term that is used to refer to a type of teenage subculture in the UK- children who dress in a particular way and are not sporty.

<sup>xv</sup> Traceurs told me that the cheaper trainers in a brand- range tended to be better for parkour.

<sup>xvi</sup> Indeed, as several analyses of Action/extreme/lifestyle sport have suggested the current expansion of lifestyle sport provision is related to the growing ethos of neo-liberalism within North American (as well as Australasian and European societies). (Banks, 2008; Lesley Heywood, 2007a; Lesley Heywood, 2007b; Howell, 2005, 2008; Kusz, 2004)

<sup>xvii</sup> In Canada, for example, parkour does not easily fit into sport policy at all as Sport Canada's operationalisation of 'sport' requires some form of competition.