Author’s final version of article for Young People Now (published April 2000)

**No Hiding Place**

As public and private space becomes a focus for development values, contests occur between the unequal parties having a stake in the use of public space, such as central and local government, young people, communities and site developers.

It is within the monitoring, recording and control procedures that young people’s use of public space is constructed as a threat to social order in need of surveillance and exclusion. This forms a major and contemporary feature in shaping thinking about urban and rural working class young people in the UK.

The use of closed circuit television (CCTV) technology in public spaces is now an established and largely accepted feature of the surveillance of everyday life in the UK. The assertion that it is there for the protection of law-abiding and consuming citizens has broadly gone unchallenged.

With little or no debate to question the claims made by a burgeoning security industry that CCTV protects people, the state-at both central and local levels-has provided for the installation of CCTV apparatus across the nation. A recent report on Channel 4 News suggests in excess of one million cameras operating in public spaces whereby pedestrians and vehicles may be photographed up to 300 times while walking or driving through a shopping or business area.

Some areas pride themselves on the fact that the centre of their shopping and leisure zone is fully covered by cameras in order to reassure visitors that their personal safety is a matter of civic concern. Even small towns and villages are expending monies on sophisticated and expensive CCTV systems.

The use of curfews is another example of a measure employed to restrict and exclude certain young people from the use of public space. A curfew in Hamilton, near Glasgow was explained by the local police to young people as being for their protection, as a child safety initiative, and to local residents who had lobbied for it to be in place as a crime and control measure.

The perception of young people’s use of public space as problematic is not new. It has, however, become a central feature in debates about young people and it is in this climate of opinion that, in staking claims for the legitimate use of public space which collide with the wishes of other local residents, young people rarely win.

Two recent international conferences on young people and social exclusion provided a platform for the consideration of these issues by youth work practitioners, policy-makers, local authority officers and elected members.

The Living at the Edge International Conference on Young People and Social Exclusion, held at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, late in 1999, featured papers and presentations on
the general topic of social exclusion and young people from a cross-national perspective. The issue of the use of public space by young people emerged as an important theme with a paper presented by Phil Crane of Queensland University of Technology entitled, *Young People and Public Space: Developing Inclusive Policy and Practice*. The paper discussed initiatives in Brisbane, supported by Brisbane City Council, to develop guidelines in respect of young people—including women and Indigenous young people and others who use public space, such as retailers and shopping centre or town centre managers—towards the creation and maintenance of young people-friendly policies and practices where previously there had existed considerable mutual distrust, lack of information and a degree of hostility.

Another presentation on this theme was given by Patsy Eubank Owens, Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture at the University of California, USA, in a paper entitled *No teens Allowed: The Exclusion of Adolescents from Public Spaces*. This paper explored the tendency to overlook or intentionally exclude young people, often by ‘designing the out’ of public landscapes altogether in public policy design practice and local programmes. While there are instances of good practice that recognise young people as a legitimate constituency to be fully involved in design decisions that affect them, young people, when viewed as troublesome, may find themselves not catered for in public malls perhaps by the removal of seating where they might have chosen to ‘hang out’.

The 1999 International Federation of Social Worker’s conference held in Brisbane reflected the topic of social exclusion in its theme, *Promoting Inclusion-Redressing Exclusion, The Social Work Challenge*. In presenting a paper entitled, *Young People and the Social Exclusion of their Public and Private Space* which considered the contest for public and private space between young people and the wider social and political community, I discovered that a number of other people were working, writing and researching on broadly similar lines.

One example is the paper given by Francis Win-Lin Lee of the University of Hong Kong on *Services for Young Night Drifters in Hong Kong-The Youth Mobile Teams: An Inclusion Movement?*, which focused on the use of public space at night by homeless young people and young people who choose to be out late at night. A proposal stemming from the paper is that mainstream youth services could be provided at the times when young people wish them to be available such as during the night or early morning. This could include the young night drifters rather than excluding or segregating them.

Another example is the paper given by Anne Coleman of the University of Queensland entitled, *Down and Definitely Out: Social exclusion through the eyes of people experiencing homelessness*. This paper considered the increasing commodification of public space, whereby public space can become transformed into privatised space owned by corporations, through the processes of urban renewal programmes. A further impact of some urban programmes can mean that the revitalisation of public space can bring the destruction of the space and way of life of the long-term homeless, resulting in their exclusion from their own neighbourhood, as they are prevented—in some cases forcibly—from re-occupying ‘their’ space.
Concern about creating and preserving democratic urban and rural public space for use by young people fuelled the momentum to pull together the work generated at the Glasgow conference and then extended at the Brisbane conference, in the formation of a network known as the International Youth and Public Space Network, or yspace which aims to:

- Support research and critical examination of issues around young people’s utilisation of various types of space, identifying areas of commonality and difference across different states and localities;
- Share ideas and strategies which respond to contests about space involving young people, with a view to their being acknowledged and valued as members of communities and as citizens with legitimate rights and interests;
- Promote a recognition that public and community accessed space form key sites for young people’s participation in social, cultural and economic life and should be designed, planned and managed in recognition of this; and
- Encourage the development of inclusive and youth friendly policies and practices which can be disseminated to governments, business and community interests.

The International Youth and Public Space Network is not a closed academic gathering and actively seeks the involvement of young people, those who work with young people and communities, and those who research, write make and manage policy and practice in this area at all levels. Contact Mike Dee, m.dee@qut.edu.au today!