

a different view

a manifesto from the Geographical Association



© 2009 Geographical Association

Running free: whose space is this?

In some places in the UK 'youth' is almost a pejorative term. Young people are associated with hanging around street corners, gangs, rowdiness, violence and worse. This photograph of a little innocent 'free running' in a town centre captures aspects of this issue. The teenager wants to show off his attitude or skill. The older people in the picture are not bothered – yet – but look closely and we see the camera. This space, not untypically in the UK, is regulated. There have even been experiments (though not in this town centre) whereby the CCTV controller can speak remotely to people on the street ('please pick up that litter you have just dropped').



Such observations introduce notions of 'public' and 'private' space, and the difficulty sometimes in distinguishing these – as in the classic case of the National Parks of England and Wales, where studies of land use conflicts can easily cause us to ask whose space this is. Young people have direct experience of using space – and will know which spaces to avoid, or where they are made to feel unwelcome. But this topic need not be limited to young people! Excellent contemporary geographical enquiries look at space from the perspectives of different user groups including older people, disabled people, families with very young children and so on.

Whose space is this? is a *powerful* 'big question' that geography helps us consider.