



This half-pipe at a skatepark in Reus is said to be the best in Catalonia/J.F.

Skateboarders welcome park plan

CATALONIA TODAY

● "Build skateparks as God commands and we won't have to go in the middle of the plazas or the street," said one skateboard enthusiast on the La Vanguardia website. Although the news he commented on was positive – a new skatepark will be built in the Zona Unversitària by 2011 – his frustration reflects the neglect skateboarders feel in Barcelona.

"Barcelona hasn't built proper skateparks in 16 years," said Dave, president of the Club Skateboard Barcelona, who added that despite the lack of dedicated parks, the city had become a European capital for the sport. The popularity of skateboarding has led to conflicts with pedestrians in public spaces, especially plaça del Àngels, in front of MACBA.

Young people spend €130 a month

CATALONIA TODAY

● Young people aged 12-25, apart from university students, spend an average €130 a month, with most of it going towards dress and personal care products, leisure and technology, particularly mobile phones, according to a study by the Agència Catalana de Consum. The study, based on a survey of 4,187 young

people, said the average monthly income is €268 and the average monthly rate of savings is €40. As to the source of their income, 43% said they had a regular income outside their family. The survey said young people are important consumers based not only on what they buy, but on the influence they have over what their parents buy.

Teens and mobile phone addiction

A local clinic focuses on strengthening social skills to wean kids off phones

BRETT HETHERINGTON

● A recent survey in England found that teenagers' favourite activity during school lunchtimes was not playing a sport or even talking with friends, but sending text messages on their mobile phones.

Young people in Catalonia are no less vulnerable to the pull of mobile phones. Vega González Bueso, a psychologist and assistant medical director at Barcelona's Atenció i Investigació en Socioaddiccions (AIS), or Organisation for the Research and Treatment of Social Addictions, says AIS is dealing with a growing number of cases related to this behavioural compulsion.

"The first patient with a mobile phone addiction was treated at AIS in 2003," she says. "The trouble is that mobile addiction is socially accepted and this makes it more difficult to detect the problem. Generally, requests for treatment come from a relative who has, for example seen a very high telephone bill, and they then force the person in question into starting treatment."

While high phone bills are a problem, mobile phone addiction can take a psychological toll, leading to isolation from the user's social environment. Ironically, a technology that is supposed to make us more



closely connected can instead create mistrust or feelings of separation between an addict and friends.

In one case described by Vega González, 18-year-old Susanna began to use her phone more and more, to the point where she became unable to suppress an impulse to send messages and talk at all hours. She began failing all her subjects in school and her mobile bill climbed to €800 a month.

"Susanna sold some family jewellery to earn money to top-up the credit on her mobile," Vega González said. "She even communicated with people she did not know and ended up losing lots of friends because she was relating less and

less to her environment."

Vega González said the high bills tipped off her family, prompting them to seek help. After a year of therapy, Susanna is better, but "went through terrible moments when at the beginning she was forbidden to use the cell phone," she said.

Treatment at AIS includes the family or partner, whose involvement is seen as an important in solving the problem. One aim is to train the affected person to develop greater social skills so they can relate to people more without the use of a mobile phone.

Infatuation with mobiles is found more among males than females, according to AIS, but those at risk of addiction tend to share similar problems of low self-esteem, communication difficulties, insecurity and emotional instability. Vega González says an inability to control phone use despite knowing the negative consequences of the behaviour is usually a clear sign of a significant problem.

"If they stop doing important activities such as study or work because of this addictive behaviour or have continuous thoughts about their phone when he or she does not have access to it, this is the time to seek treatment," she said.

HEADING FOR THE HILLS

My favourite tree

Vines are all the rage, almonds and hazels linger on from past days of greatness, yet the wise old olive shades them all.

Here in the Priorat groves, the nets have been out for nearly two weeks. The village cooperative mills are hives of industry, and vats are slowly filling with the green juice of life. As ever was.

We have a hundreds trees on our dinky farm, of which only a third bore fruit this year after spring rains knocked down so many of the flowers before they could set. Even so, harvesting lasted three long, blissfully sunny days, for we always share labour and profit with the families of three neighbouring, equally small farms. When one has a bad year the others always seem to balance it, and this ritual, this sharing, is one of the joys at the close of every year.

We work and talk and picnic and work some more until dusk, then before we know it the fruit is bagged and pressed and we have our oil for the year: job done.



Well not quite.

The olive and its fascinating story are a huge part of my life all year round. We guzzle fresh oil, of course. It is at the heart of our diet through the seasons. But it is also my business, and for four

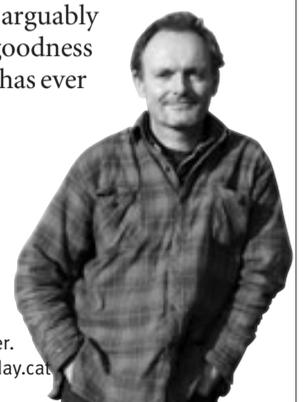
years now I have been building sales of fresh Priorat olive oil in England.

Sometimes I feel I am pushing water uphill and return for long spells to my main work as a writer. Such is the gulf of knowledge between Mediterranean

nations and northern Europe regarding healthy eating that I wonder if they will ever come to their senses.

(I look at the plethora of fast food outlets sprouting up here and wonder if the Catalans are losing theirs, but that is another story).

Then – bingo – Mother's Garden Priorat olive oil wins an award, a top chef lists it in her new cookbook and on we go, handwriting the pressing and bottling dates and trying not to sigh when, despite the mass of information available, people still show how precious little they know about arguably the greatest goodness food the world has ever known.



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