

Title	In Search of a Commons of Centers - reviewing values and methods designed to assert benefit, harm or opportunity among unsanctioned visual urban practices
Type	Article
URL	https://ualresearchonline.arts.ac.uk/id/eprint/9290/
Date	2016
Citation	Willcocks, Marcus and Toylan, Gamze (2016) In Search of a Commons of Centers - reviewing values and methods designed to assert benefit, harm or opportunity among unsanctioned visual urban practices. Street Art & Urban Creativity Scientific Journal, Methodologies for Research, 2 (2). pp. 22-36. (Submitted)
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In search of a commons of centers - reviewing values and methods designed to assert benefit, harm or opportunity among uncommissioned visual urban practices

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Abstract

Photographer Martha Cooper points out that artists and graffitiists define street art as pictures and graffiti as words (Cooper, 2016). Meanwhile, municipal authorities, property and transport managers may tell us that street art is framed by what is legal and graffiti by what is illegal. This is not an article about art versus crime, rather it is about disparate and commonly accessible centers for discussing and understanding value, in ways that look toward easier dialogue across and between long-separated specialisms concerned with unsolicited visual urban practice and efforts to manage those. To Cooper the processes of painting and urban play are at the center, to authorities legal, political and commercial demands lie far closer to the center.

Each of us who variously associate or engage with uncommissioned street art, urban creativity or graffiti, bring new centers and peripheries, be those related to social personal interest, professional occupation, or spatial action. Artists, creative practitioners, urban managers, land owners, cultural consumers, transport providers, academics, activists and self-proclaimed vandals, each reframe what we bring to this terrain through highly disparate values and indicators that we consciously or unconsciously attribute to these informal visual urban practices.

This article draws on findings from a recent major European research project, Graffolution, plus separate socially responsive design-led insights gathered through the Graffiti Dialogues Network via the University of the Arts London, plus interviews with a wide range of individuals, diversely concerned with graffiti and related practices. It sets out to identify and discuss some of the value-sets and indicators which some consider as central and others consider peripheral in experiencing, managing, creating or otherwise intervening in urban contexts through visual practices. The article refers to cases that merge diverse value centers, in varying success, and discloses a number of immediate opportunities for prototyping new common and accessible ways to understand and respond to different centers and peripheries of value.

Keywords: Centers of Value, Equitable representation, Graffiti, Street Art, Urban Creativity, Design

1 Introduction

“For some [...] every incidence of graffiti is an act of vandalism which has a deleterious effect on the urban environment. But for others, every incidence of graffiti is an affirmation of life in the city, like a flower appearing through a crack in the pavement. And of course, there are others who occupy every conceivable position in between these two extremes. Graffiti, then, provokes disagreement. The question becomes: how should we handle this disagreement?” (Kurt Iveson, 2009b: 29)

Kurt Iveson’s insights are inspiring, as a call to action for finding more constructive ways to handle the disagreements he mentions, yet there is still much to do in this arena. Recently completed research within the EU Graffolution project has seen that much work on and through graffiti in Europe and other Western contexts still revolves around two misleadingly oppositional positions. Typically these reflect long-separated approaches of unsolicited visual

urban practice¹ and of efforts to manage or control those unsolicited activities.² In this article we refer to non-absolute frames of 'pro-social' and 'anti-social' (defined by Graffolution, 2014). These are used as broad fields across which different actions, responses, or interpretations may take root³, but make no assumptions about legal status or absolute value of any intervention. By no means does this paper wish to enter into another exchange about for versus against, pictures versus words, or other such contesting polarity that may come to mind. On the contrary, the text seeks to explore opportunities to recognize and better afford *multiple* centers of value, in terms of debate and strategy but also in terms of voices represented in practice and on street.

To date, efforts to 'handle' the disagreements mentioned by Iveson still often result in actions of attrition between extremes of interest, of dissent versus control. Meanwhile, those "who occupy every conceivable position in between" might not get a look in. What is of interest now is to consider how we could hear more from and more about the fuller spectrum of those positions, which Iveson alludes to, each as different centers of value rather than just two. This brings us to explore a more open commons (see for example, Bingham-Hall, 2016, 2-4) of value centers among visual urban practices including graffiti, street art and urban creativity.

This paper is informed, on the one hand, by findings which surfaced through (and affected the focus of) the Graffolution project - including 90 interviews within the UK, Germany, Austria and Spain, plus a 'state of the art' review of over 300 key publications in the context of graffiti and street art. On the other hand, the insights here draw upon separate workshops, desk-research, design-led events, pilot actions, and conversations within wider work we have undertaken

1 Including all uncommissioned or unsolicited instances of graffiti, street art and urban creativity.

2 Including policing and criminal justice processes but also municipal graffiti strategies, cleaning services and the actions of professional service industries, which have arisen in this field.

3 This is distinctly different to assuming the actual impacts of graffiti (or of efforts to control or facilitate it) as pro-social or as anti-social.

from Central Saint Martins (University of the Arts London), through the Graffiti Dialogues Network, involving highly diverse contributors concerned with graffiti and street art.⁴ The large network of empirical data represented between Graffolution and the Graffiti Dialogues Network enables this article to (a) identify and discuss samples from a wide palette of values relating to graffiti and street art practices, and (b) consider future tools to better accommodate multiple centers of value and understandings of success.

The engagements mentioned above repeatedly point us to conundrums about voices represented and resources invested in shared (public and private) urban contexts. Time and again we hear that tackling graffiti is an expensive activity, yet there appears little clarity or agreement over who it serves exactly. Whilst city authorities, managers of built environments and transport providers around Europe are under pressure to deliver more for less, most policies around Europe still position graffiti, or uncommissioned (including unsanctioned) visual practices, as indisputably worthy of prevention, removal, punishment, or a combination of these 'measures' (responses). Through law, policy or street management such visual practices continue to be framed and responded-to as intrinsically anti-social, irrespective of the context or communities implicated. These blanket understandings of value mean that responses are forced to incur great cost in street management, policing, 'reparations', legal cases and more. However, as most Street Art & Urban Creativity readers will know well, these same visual urban practices are also referred to as part of the fastest growing or largest worldwide art movement of our time (e.g. Elias and Ghajar, 2015; Kuttner, 2015; Nastasijevic, n.d.; Kostov, n.d.; Street Art Paris, n.d.), and are taken as a boost to cultural capacities and social opportunities. For example, one UK artist interviewee for the Graffiti Dialogues project suggested, "street art is the only real art movement since at least the 1990s" (GDNUK1, 2016). In parallel, major

4 Graffiti Dialogues is a design-led research and action network; a safe space for diverse actors to come together to exchange, contest and collaborate. Those involved include graffiti writers, policing professionals, creative practitioners, authority and government representatives, activists, urbanists, residents, land and transport managers, academics, street artists, community champions and more - each as experts of their own experience. www.graffitialogues.com

international galleries and dealers promote practices they refer to as street art (e.g. Tate, 2008, Christies, 2016) and graffiti (e.g. Serpentine, March 2016), and since 2014 the Google Street Art project has run as one of its worldwide online initiatives to “make the world’s culture accessible to anyone, anywhere” (Google Cultural Institute, 2015). Such popularizations indicate significant changes in attitudes to graffiti and street art. A far broader spectrum has been emerging, which hosts multiple and diverse centers of value. However, most legal frameworks and strategies for action relating to uncommissioned artworks (permitted or not) still do not acknowledge these shifts. To follow, we identify some of the centers in this widening spectrum, each as part of a commons where different positions are actioned and heard more equitably.

Globally, this article seeks to demonstrate the pressing need for some redesign in the landscapes and systems of sharing value, and ponders how we can bring more diverse voices into open and safe exchange. We look to opportunities that would allow us to be more intentional in exposing ourselves to views different from our own, and that could open up new ways to see, to respond to, and to engage with uncommissioned graffiti, street art and urban creative practices. In order to do this, we will in the next section, 2, discuss the terms of *centers and peripheries of value*, building on theories from design, urban geography, audience studies, literary analysis and social and cultural anthropology, in terms of graffiti related practices. We will explain and explore the frames of ‘anti-social’ and ‘pro-social’ that many actors of urban environments still apply to uncommissioned visual urban practices. We will highlight the problematic nature of these two frames as they work within a hierarchy. The empirical data will illustrate that peers and professional groups working through these frames tend not to engage with many others who support different values.

In section 3, we will discuss the notion of a *commons of value centers*. To illustrate something of the breadth of this commons, we will map out examples from the spectrum of values associated with graffiti-related practices, and chart the indicators for how each might understand ‘success’. This will also highlight opportunities for capturing or embracing multiple and diverse value centers and indicators of ‘better’. We argue that it is useful to experiment and

evolve innovations (as in workable new ideas) to facilitate greater involvement of people with differing views in both the thinking and the hearing of feedback, the strategy forming and the practice of graffiti, street art and urban creativity. Hence, we will look at present examples of ‘merged models’ that incorporate mixed activities with diverse value centers resulting from the wider commons. Finally, we will propose a small number of extant opportunities to prototype new common and accessible ways to discern different centers and peripheries of value. In other words, who is being served, who is not, and what can we do about it?

2 Centers (and Peripheries) of Value

It would be possible to discuss centers of value in terms of physical and geographically located nodes offering multiple benefits for publics⁵ - in the sense that Tuan posits “to attend [spaces or places] even momentarily is to acknowledge their reality and value” (1977: 18), or as Warpole discusses libraries (2013: 55) as centers of individual and family value. In these cases, the place (designed or made construct) acts as the center itself. Equally one could discuss a given ‘piece’ of street art, urban creativity, graffiti, etc. as the physical center around which selected publics may form or ‘attend’ in person, or digitally. However, our focus here is rather on the individuals and interest-linked publics as the hosts of values who in turn ascribe priorities and interpretations to any given context or activity.

Adam Cooper (2014) Creative Industries representative from the Greater London Authority, has asserted that understanding the value of graffiti and street art lies at the heart of understanding the nature of the contribution of graffiti and street art in the city. Cooper reflects a ‘creative cities’ perspective that connects urban culture and creativity, economy and city branding with the notion of a successful city. Coming from the perspective of a regional government representative, Cooper hints at a need now for legal structures to move beyond the notion that legal equals beautiful versus illegal equals degradation assumptions represented through

5 In using the term ‘publics’ we refer to Dewey (1927), who believed the term ‘public’ to be misleading, since it is never a single group but instead reflects a plural form where multiple publics emerge around common issue(s) of concern or interest.

the 'anti-social' associations (see also Young, 2014, 2013 and Shaftoe, 2011)⁶ to more openly discuss and assess the diversity of values linked to graffiti and street art.

In his work within the city of Sydney, urban geographer Cameron McAuliffe (2014) distinguishes some of the regimes of value in the context of street art and graffiti. These include: aesthetic, economic, subcultural, gender, socio-spatial, regulatory, commodification, temporal, advertising and planning. Added to these, others uncovered during the Graffolution research⁷ include frames of law, of 'mainstream culture', local-interest (geographic proximity), environmental, health, wellbeing, social media, mass media, peer status or peer identities, public consent, political drivers, development or transport agendas, and more. If each person who makes, responds to or reacts against an instance of graffiti or street art holds different clusters of these regimes or frames closer to the center and others more peripherally, then we need ways to be able to consider and understand them in comparable ways, or at least on a more level field. Our interview respondents and workshop contributors repeatedly bring us back to the understanding that different centers are also bound to the vehicles or formats used to indicate perceived successes or value. For example at present, local and government-authorities predominantly have the capacity to hear graffiti complaints through specific feedback systems but few are able to capture positive responses, or new ideas in comparable ways. Meanwhile, communities who are active about graffiti on social media, readily share tweets, posts and comments and street art exhibition reports, discuss footfall and audience diversity frequently as indicators of success.

What is clear is that the understanding of value is highly dependent on who is being served (cared for, communicated with, or satisfied) and who is not. A transport company reporting that all their customers and affected publics are being served by maintaining a zero-tolerance approach is not so different to a street artist or vandal openly stating that they are simply not so interested in serving multiple

⁶ Graffolution interviews also revealed that such opposition are still commonly assumed.

⁷ Through literature review, semi-structured interviews and workshops.

publics through their actions and focusing on those included through their particular practice as peers. The measures used to 'serve' in relation to graffiti are of course different but neither truly reflects an ambition to include all publics in their actions. The transport operator may hold the appearance of cleanliness near the heart of their values whilst the graffitiists and even some transport passengers bring other values nearer to the center.

When actors with a duty of responsibility towards graffiti prevention work primarily on the basis that 'graffiti', 'graffiti vandalism' and 'anti-social behavior' are synonyms (Graffolution, 2014), this affects decisions about who should be served (those who lodge complaints or concerns) and how (through reporting devices designed to prioritize those voices). However, as Iveson (2009b) indicates, the assumption that any who perform uncommissioned painting activities are distinctly "unsocial", irrespective of what is painted, while others are somehow more social beings and more deserving to be seen or heard, is problematic. Further, when the service of property ownership as a reigning value center is threatened, paint can be construed as criminal damage, described as the devaluation or defacement of public or private property without the owner's permission (Graffolution, 2014). Henry Shaftoe (2014 and 2010) reminds us that statutory assessments of what constitute this defacement, or devaluation, revolve around property-rights and permissions as the only centers of value which can be heard, legally speaking. Bengtsen and Arvidsson (2014) assert that law affords fixed attributions of space through property rights. However, they make the point that this is different to spatial justice, which can only be achieved where oscillations are permitted over what might be valued or devalued. To them, the processes of "place-taking and withdrawal" between legal rights, involvements and informal actions in space are central to spatial justice (2014: 127).

Appadurai (2013: 15)⁸ and McAuliffe (2014) also concur that understanding value is a process, not intrinsic to an object, such as paint or a wall, but it is understood between particular cultures, as a localized system of meanings. Similarly, Simmel (2011 and originally 1907)⁹ defines value as

⁸ First published in 1986.

⁹ First published in 1907 and first English publication was in 1978.

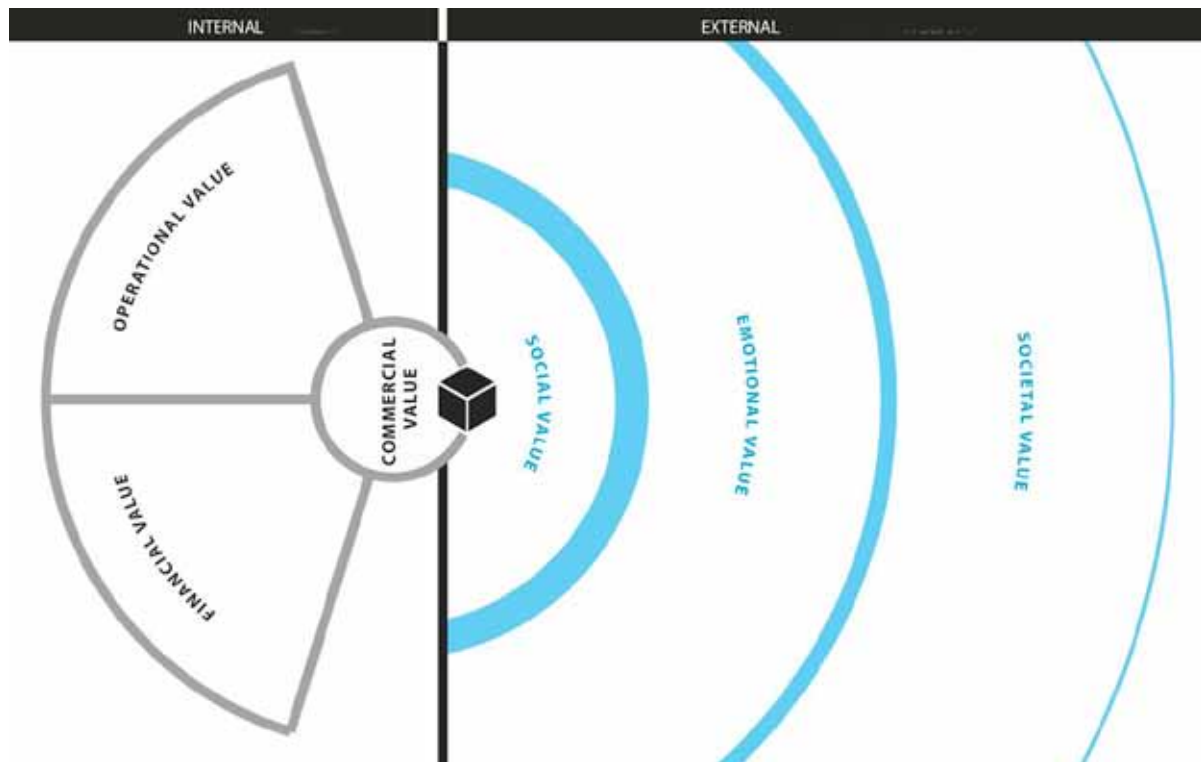


Fig 1. Leurs & Rezaei - Social Innovation Value Canvas

judgments made about objects as subjects (see Appadurai, 2013: 3-4). This means that the value of a mark on a wall or a bridge is located outside its material existence and within the contexts of value such as emotional, social, aesthetic, or cultural characteristics. Such arguments relate to the discussions in audience studies, where a text's meaning (including instances of graffiti and street art) is very much linked to the reader (audience), which cannot be separated from the context. In reporting on the field of texts, Syson (1998) also tells us that "Australian literary culture used to have three vital centers of value: the academy; the literary writers, performers and reviewers; and the publishing industry. They formed a network of relations and tensions that benefited Australian writing. Today we have but one centre: publishing" (270). If Syson's observations in literary culture are mapped to the realms of graffiti and urban creativity, perhaps the value center of law and regulation positions itself to remain as the only vital center around which the rest are edged towards the periphery, and out of consideration. However, Frow (2001: 301) contends, in line with Syson, that every act of reading and every act of ascribing value is specific to the particular regime, or in this case center, that

hosts it. This means each reader may center on those values that s/he feels closest to but must acknowledge and be ready to engage with different experiences of other readers.

Designers have for some time worked to develop diverse methods to understand or capture centers and peripheries of value in both commercial and societal contexts. For example, Leurs and Rezaei (2013) use the Social Innovation Value Canvas (Fig. 1) as a visually useful way to consider a design proposal in relation to values that lay more centrally and which are more marginal. The figure shown gives an interpretation whereby commercial value lies at the center. This is institutionally informed by economic and operational values and uses a hierarchy of frames to understand impact upon others, where social value first, followed by emotional and wider societal value. In other cases however, individual or collective (organizational) readers could bring their own hierarchies of which values to pull closest to them. At the peripheries lie different takes on what is perhaps less-social, or even anti-social for different 'readers'.

Separately, designers working on the Graffiti Dialogues Network, Extending Empathy project and the European

Graffolution project, recently facilitated a Human Graffiti library workshop, which involves an interactive experience that engages two people as 'living books' (that came from a wide range of backgrounds such as public administrators, curators, policy makers, security consultants, as well as those who identified as 'vandals') and 'readers'. Here, living books could be taken out for one-to-one exchanges about personally held experiences and values in relation to graffiti and street art.¹⁰ The organizers were surprised by the level of positive feedback from the event, as a designed 'device' (Ehn, 2008), which sought to enable diverse centers of value to cross paths, as participants compared and heard from others in the terrain of graffiti, street-art and urban creativity.

Whilst attempts to discuss how we frame artistic perspectives in relation to legal, commercial or even citizen views may be unpopular with some¹⁰, we observe that incomparable ways of sharing (i.e. indicating) values between diverse centers are part of what hinder new possibilities for many forms of urban creativity. Those who place The Art of these practices at the center are frequently expert at communicating cultural value among cultural consumers but will show little interest in evidencing the value of what they do to a crime prevention community, to give one example. It is as if many peer- or professional groups still feel compelled to calibrate their relationship to graffiti to either 'pro-social' or 'anti-social' frames, and to open out discussion to other ideas or action is somehow problematic. Ultimately, this restricts opportunities for existing and new publics to benefit, to engage, or even to simply leave space for these practices.

To follow we discuss the anti-social and pro-social frames a little further. These are not just about the activity but also the motivations and priorities of those involved. For example, the interventions facilitated during the 2016 Manchester Cities of Hope¹¹ as collaborations between charities and street artists are pro-socially centered not because of the

10 During Graffiti Dialogues workshops run in London and Barcelona, land managers, artists, crime prevention professionals, academics and designers have all variously expressed some level of disdain at the thought of subjecting their own actions to the perspectives of others.

11 See <http://citiesofhope.global>

impact of the paintings created but because of their focus primarily to promote pro-social ends. In contrast, an anti-graffiti coating painted on an historic building is anti-socially centered, not because of the rights or wrongs of anti-graffiti coatings but because the focus is on intervening in the 'anti-social' rather than in the 'pro-social' frame. One frame is typically about mitigating something that exists and the other is about promoting something new.

2.1 Anti-Social Centers

In discussing anti-social centers of value, we are referring typically to strategy and policy, and action-linked values that presume most instances of uncommissioned visual urban practice to be 'anti-social' by default. In this context, the indicators of success or failure of an action are most normally centered on legal requirements (related to property) and political pressures. The legal context recognizes graffiti having either negative or no value (McAuliffe, 2014; Iveson, 2009b). Unsurprisingly, this stance is mainly seen among national and local municipalities, policing, law enforcement, transport operators and property managers.

The still-debated foundations of the zero tolerance approach go back to Kelling and Wilson's (1982) much contested broken windows theory, which argues that urban disorder and vandalism, if not eradicated instantly, will lead to additional crime and anti-social behavior. Thus, graffiti writing is defined as an anti-social behavior, seen as an activity that may link to further criminal activity and is associated with raising feelings of insecurity (Keizer, Lindenberg and Steg, 2008). From this perspective graffiti is described as an infectious disease that spreads like an outbreak and causes major changes in a society (Gladwell, 2002). Graffiti is also seen as a signal of a careless and indifferent society (Stafford and Petterson, 2000). As Cresswell (1992) suggests, from this zero-tolerance perspective, graffiti does not have a place in the fabric of the city. Through the years these arguments came to influence and define public policy. Within Europe, when local and national laws are examined it becomes clear that graffiti is described as an anti-social activity, as vandalism and criminal damage to property. One Graffolution interviewee (OUK2, 2016) explains:

I speak about graffiti from a very parochial perspective, that is from a transport authority's perspective. For us graffiti is criminal damage. It's unauthorized spraying, painting,

scratching, etching of any surface where that spraying, painting, scratching or etching shouldn't be.

Approaches like the one expressed in the above quote (especially focusing on criminal damage) exemplify value judgments principally based on permission and property ownership (discussed further by Young, 2014; Shaftoe, 2011). Whilst the ambition may be to reduce what people want less of, the zero tolerance and broken windows discourses of anti-social centers may in fact enhance moral panic (social or political). For example, actions such as the restriction or removal of legal walls¹², are justified by, but can also boost fears about the possibility of spillage ('spread') of tags to non-permitted areas (Iveson, 2009b: 32, 2010b; McAuliffe, 2014). However, changes have been surfacing among criminologists, urbanists and some municipalities about public opinion to crimes including graffiti vandalism, and whether and how to deal with them (Weisburd, 2016, Young, 2010; Iveson, 2009a, 2009b; Halsey, 2006; Halsey and Young, 2002). Impact as experienced in-context (rather than in relation to law, for example) has become more important in criminology *and* in designing policy and strategy, in response to criminal and anti-social events (Weisburd, 2016). Yet, the changing approaches and perspectives identified continue to occur predominantly in silos, separated by discipline but also by value centers. For example, the research conducted during the Graffiti Dialogues and the Graffolution projects included conversations with some police officers who were frustrated that the law and the criminal justice system were not keeping up to date with the changing mood of communities and some regional authorities.

2.2 Pro-Social Centers

The discussions in this section refer to the values that center primarily on the promotion or addition of social factors, more than the removal of something which a given actor or group may consider anti-social. It acknowledges graffiti and street art's potential as (a) an environmental, cultural or economic asset, (b) a device for social engagement and material contributions in public spaces and (c) a visual form of voice among many voices expressed in democratic society. Such factors can be linked in part to the political, industry and academic discourses around 'localism' (DCLG, 2011),

12 Legally permitted graffiti and street art walls.

people-centered planning (TCPA, 2015) and 'creative cities' (e.g. Hewison, 2014; DCMS, 2008; Landry and Bianchini, 1995). It is against this context we observe the rising emergence of pro-social art programs, mural projects, self-organized community activities, urban festivals and social projects encapsulating graffiti and street art for a variety of reasons such as education, commerce, rehabilitation, social innovation, community cohesion, and community regeneration (such as the Signal Project in the UK).

Within the arts-led regeneration in urban environments we observe street art's capacity to enhance urban social life and living spaces. Here the indicators of success are street safety, activity support and enhancement of the design or look of urban spaces. For instance, examples from the UK and Australia (Leake Street in London or May Lane Project in Sydney) illustrate how, with the use of street art and collaboration of various actors, dysfunctional spaces can be turned into functional and safe public spaces, where various members of the communities can enjoy spending time in or using them as part of their communal route. These may also refer to emotional value attached to a space as well as socio-spatial value where there is an increase in social interaction (BBC News, 2014; Tooth, 2011; Austin, 2010; Iveson, 2010a).¹³

Some street art and graffiti (legal and illegal in some instances) have been recognized as an economic asset, having a commercial value, being used as part of a city's image and place branding¹⁴, increasing touristic, artistic and everyday appeal. For example, it may increase footfall (bring tourists to these areas as well as becoming hotspots for residences), increase property values and increase business for traders (BBC NEWS, 2014; Young, 2014; Watts and Feeney, 2013; Bristol City Council, 2011; Leach and Baker, 2010). Within the UK London (Leake Street and Shoreditch) as well as Bristol (Stokes Croft) examples reveal that street art and graffiti attract tourists (Watts and Feeney, 2013; Leach and Baker, 2010). In relation to these indicators graffiti or street artists become valuable players in the gentrification of urban spaces (Young, 2014), in the branding of cities,

13 See Graffolution, 2015a

14 Place branding as discussed by Vitiello and Willcocks, 2006

as well as in reducing insecurity and fear of crime in public spaces (Gamman and Willcocks, 2009).¹⁵

There is also a view of street art and graffiti allowing the creation and evolution of democratic spaces where different groups within communities can express themselves, as seen in the Southbank areas in the UK (Stephenson, 2011; Borja and Muxí, 2003). Other indicators of success here include emotional value, aesthetic value and subcultural value attached to a space. Urbanist Borja and designer Muxí (2003) describe how culture and publics are defined through the activities and discourses played out in all kinds of shared urban contexts, be they public, privately managed open areas, or transport contexts. Such spaces, they say, should guarantee (pro-social) equality through forms of appropriation on behalf of different social or cultural collectives. However inclusive this may appear, a pro-social focus in planning, place management, or even wall provision among artists usually comes bound to a hierarchical structure (see also Fig. 2) that fixes some value centers as greater and pushes others to the peripheries of the terrain. For example, Stafford and Pettersson (2003) argue that legal walls and mural projects create the possibility for the spread of graffiti to wider areas, which hosts of anti-social value centers want less of.

3 Towards a Commons of Value Centers

The frames of pro-social and anti-social do not between themselves act as umbrellas over all value centers. There remain many untapped opportunities to more widely acknowledge the multiple and diverse centers at play in relation to visual and informal urban practices. This section explores the notion of a *commons of value centers*, which brings disparate values into more open dialogue around uncommissioned visual urban practices. By this we mean a commons where value centers can exchange, co-exist, or contest as adversaries in open, visual and generative dialogue, rather than as enemies in spatial stalemate. This builds upon Bingham-Hall's (2016) discussion of urban commons, to include social *and* physical space for verbal and practice-led discourses. This can be through art, through management, cleaning, cultural interventions, and more. Figure 2 iterates an exploration of frames of value,

¹⁵ See Graffolution, 2015a

as understandings and responses to graffiti, street art and urban creativity, in both strategy and on-street activity. Through the commons of value centers, we look towards more developed and accessible approaches for sharing, indicating and understanding value, beyond simply the frequent antagonisms that may be assumed. For example, one interviewee from a UK anti-graffiti industry body describes success through rapid removal: "the policy is to clean it, obliterate it, get rid of it as fast as practically possible" (PLEUK2, 2014). On the other hand, an architect interviewee explains that "... many people in Hackney and Tower Hamlets are walking around photographing it [graffiti] and kind of tour groups are going around looking at different bits of graffiti. You kind of think, well, it's become a... something of like a real cultural value" (EUK4, 2014).

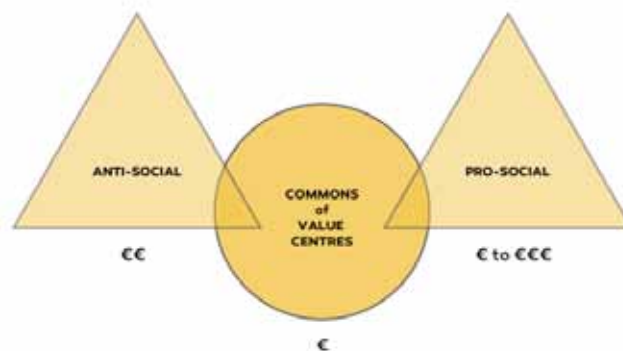


Figure 2. An exploration of frames of value

Part of the sense in moving beyond the broad frames of 'anti-social' and 'pro-social' is to identify or design opportunities to acknowledge wider ranges of value centers through which people assess activities such as graffiti and street art. Figure 2 is one iteration of our attempts to illustrate some of this variety and acts simply to reflect the recurring tendencies that emerged as we set out to map centers of value and related challenges. Relying exclusively upon anti-social or pro-social frames for attributing value tends to be more hierarchical (illustrated via triangles), more expensive (expressed via € symbol) and less adaptable to context or situation. Firstly, more hierarchical because given value centers trump others by default in these frames. In the anti-social frame understandings of success might be bound tightly to reductions in anti-social activity, by achievement of environmental enforcement targets (e.g. CCTV installed) or by prosecution numbers. In pro-social

3.2 Merged models

CENTERS OF VALUE: GRAFFITI; STREET ART & URBAN CREATIVITY	Indicators of success 1	Indicators of success 2	Indicators of success 3
Regulatory	Decrease in legal costs; Increase in convictions	Decrease in instances of illegal mark making / crime figures	Decrease in cleaning costs
Economic	Commercial value, increase in revenue (shops, markets...)	Increase in touristic image, artistic and everyday appeal	Increase in footfall
Social	Increased community engagement	Increased community involvement; increased accountability and transparency	Increase of communal or social ties
Cultural	City image, place branding	Increased attendance records	
Aesthetic	Development of new styles	Enhancement of the design and look of urban spaces	
Environmental	Local quality indicators	Enhancement of the design and look of urban spaces	Reduced pollutants - from spray paints or cleaning chemicals
Subcultural	Increase in walls/spaces	Increase in painting activity	Increased activity support
Gender	Increase in gender equality and opportunity		
Health	Decrease in GP visits; healthcare costs	Emotional wellbeing	
Well-being	Increase in positive emotions (safety, comfort, happiness, health...)	Increase in 'quality of life'	
Socio-spatial	Increased social interaction		
Commodification	Increase in commercial value; Increased publicity	Increase in the number of commercial by-products	Increased attendance records
Advertising	Uses in commercial advertising	Uses in social campaigns	City image, place branding
Planning	Increased regeneration	Increased renovation	
Arts-led regeneration	Increased street safety	Enhancement of the design and look of urban spaces	Increased activity support
Social media	Increased social media feedback	Increased followers	
Mass media	Increased mass media coverage		
Local-interest (geographic proximity)	Increased community engagement	Increase in communal spaces	Increased street safety
Public consent	Unprompted public or service user satisfaction	Increased attendance records	
Political drivers	Increased public support	Increased private and public investment	
Transport operator agendas	Service user satisfaction	Decrease in cleaning costs; minimize 'outage' time of rolling stock	Decrease in the instances of graffiti
Emotional value	Increase in the emotional connection to a space (positive connotations)		
Societal value	Increased community involvement	Increased social interaction	
Event-organizational value	Increased attendance records	Print and online media coverage	

Table 1: Evolving table of indicators for diverse Centers of Value

frames, understandings of success might be headed by high attendance or participation numbers from an event, or by shares among certain social networks. Secondly, more expensive because less resource sharing is possible between diverse disciplines, departments or communities of interest, so the economic burden of particular actions is not shared. The fact that the triangles do not overlap each other betrays the fact that centers do not naturally cross between anti-social and pro-social frames. By contrast, in a commons of value centers we see a more equitable structure within which value centers exist (illustrated via the circle). This reflects a more open and agile negotiation of what is important for whom exactly and in what context, including dissimilar perspectives (expressed by the two triangles overlapping the circle). Next, we will start to expose opportunities for using a commons of value centers approach.

3.1 A Commons Tabled

This subsection starts to give form to the discussions on the centers of value for graffiti-related practices, and maps out sample indicators for how each might define 'success' or 'better'. Table 1 is an early iteration, which likely showcases the tip of an iceberg. Even in its current prototype form the table in itself already acts as a commons device, like a lens, making visible a number of the multiple value centers relating to value uncommissioned urban practices in a leveled manner. Among the variety of centers¹⁶ each hosts localized systems of meanings. The meaning of a paste-up that appears on the side of a shop is likely very different for the shop-owner who holds commercial value at the center, than for a passer-by who holds their emotional response at the center. Through such meanings, value is ascribed and the indicators of 'success' or 'better' are established. For a train [graffiti] writer, the successes and ways to indicate (share) them will be different than those of a journalist, a community safety professional, or an art dealer, for example. Each value center differentiates itself from the 'others', variously establishing those others as peripheries from the position taken by that center. This does not however preclude the possibility for capturing or embracing multiple value centers and indicators, discussed further below regarding merged models.

16 Which largely emerged from the Graffiti Dialogues and the Graffolution research.

Part of the point of a commons is that it can be resilient to adapt and reorganize as contesting and desirable priorities change. As will be discussed in this subsection, there are several cases where such inclusive steps have been taken and to cross or redress the pro-social and anti-social divide in constructive ways.

Merged models bring together diverse value centers between activities of urban management and graffiti or urban creativity. They represent clusters of mixed, coexisting activities resulting from the wider commons portrayed in Figure 2. For example, combining open-walls with improved lighting, or greening with restorative justice practices, or painting opportunities with maintenance opportunities. They combine disparate values and efforts among specific communities and contexts. Brighton, for example, maintain a hard-stance on what can be demonstrated as problematic among given areas or communities whilst staying far more agile to collaborate with, facilitate or leave space for street artists in other contexts. Such merged positions can involve more efficient, more appropriate public spending. They help mitigate antagonisms in identified contexts, while supporting multiple types of facilitated (organized) or afforded (permitted) activity (see Norman, 2013). A Graffolution interviewee describes the merged outlook in Brighton that both aims to control specific problems in a certain context and to be more open elsewhere:

We're not in a position to have a fortress Brighton. We can't have gates and cameras everywhere. It wouldn't resolve our problems and it would bring a host of other things but it is very difficult still trying to work on that [...] one of the strengths [here] is that the street art community do a lot of work with us and make a lot of the decisions for us and we can work with that and we can help it go in a positive direction. (AUK1, 2014)

In the early 2000's Brighton and Hove City Council started to evolve its graffiti strategy from cleaning off any graffiti and street art to making a distinction between disruptive and innovative works and encouraging high-quality art via designated urban creativity areas and commissioned works (Leach and Baker, 2010). This decision was reached after experiencing degradation and unmanaged spaces during

the preceding decade. Brighton identified an opportunity to involve graffiti writers in a process, which aimed at merging cultural, economic and crime prevention agendas. The Council has since explored ways to work with graffiti artists to revitalize degenerated spaces especially in the center of the city. Artists were given a number of prominent wall surfaces with the understanding that they would help maintain them. This approach makes effort to recognize and adhere to the centers of value represented by the Brighton and Hove City Council (by reducing maintenance costs) but also by those local artists (by giving over more space) and local residents and businesses (by offering the possibility of commissioning work for themselves and of increased footfall in particular areas).

To give another example, speaking at a Graffiti Dialogues workshop in Bristol, Ruth Essex (2011) describes:

Councils are very diverse institutions: I came in as an arts officer without any targets in my job about cleaning or crime reduction. So when I went into council discussions, I initially found that our goals and targets were somewhat opposed to some of the other departments I was working with, who had their work generated by complainants.

She further describes how she came to find herself working between artists, other citizens and diverse city departments and slowly managed to link up different ambitions, budgets and resources and support for actions to “[...] learn from the positive responses, and free up unused creative energy in the city” (2011).

At a municipal level, or that of property management or place creation, with a merged model multiple drivers are accommodated, seeking to serve diverse agendas and encourage more astute and more contextually relevant concepts for response (Graffolution, 2015c). This means where, for example, centers can appear to conflict with multiple desirable outcomes, it is still possible to develop artistic or strategic responses from across these and hear, and account for, multiple voices in a single space. In the next section we will explore a selection of possible future tools (envisaged during the Graffolution project) that have the potential to cater for multiplex ties in the contexts of graffiti, street art and urban creativity.

3.3 Future tools

We posit a small sample of tools and approaches where multiple indicators, measures, centers of value and understanding of success can be accommodated more openly and more equitably¹⁷. Throughout the research carried out in the contexts of the Graffiti Dialogues Network, Graffiti Sessions and Graffolution, our engagements and collaborations have included some self-proclaimed vandals who are very open, as well as some self-proclaimed artists who hold their priorities very close to their chests. We have also encountered individuals in cultural, commercial and governmental organizations who would apparently prefer far greater shifts in legal and urban strategies, and more creative actions than they are able to implement right now. These voices plus other communities and urban scholars consulted (Graffolution, 2015b) have together led us to see a moment of change - and we think, opportunity - at many levels for urban creativity and uncommissioned visual practices. The notion of a commons is about bringing peripheries into clearer view for those who wittingly or unwittingly miss the point being made by some, and it is about allowing others to evolve their own centers of value, ideas and practices by increasing exposure to difference. This can happen through wider verbal debates but importantly also through the inclusion of urban practice as part of the same open discourse. Emergent ideas discussed and encountered during the Graffolution research included:

- Multi-agenda feedback tools: These are resources that question who is being served by what actions or responses, and who defines ‘success’ for example within a given graffiti-related scenario. They also question what would best indicate reduced attrition, reduced antagonisms, or other improvements for each actor (initiator, collaborator, victim or beneficiary). The Graffolution platform is beginning to prototype one version of this through its aggregated ratings system, found here <http://www.graffolution.eu/respond/response-finder> (Accessed 10 March 2016).

- Valuometers: These are live and connected visualizations of issues or actions, shown according to diverse indicators as illustrated in Table 1, or according to wide-ranging actor

¹⁷ See Graffolution, 2015b

group perspectives (e.g. registered users can feedback once they select the actor group which best represents them).

- Intervention mixer: This is a toolkit that helps combine interventions to form unique and context-specific strategies. This toolkit would present mixes unconstrained by value centers. For example, it may combine a street art event with CCTV monitoring where videos/live stream is shared via social media making an event more recognized or form discussions on CCTV monitoring of public space, transparency or civil rights.

- Visual Data Aggregator (McAuliffe, 2014): This is a platform that combines and collects images as visual value indicators of graffiti (positive or negative) from various channels - council cleaning teams, cleaning contractors, residents, tourists, writers and artists. Photographs by different actors across different databases and social networking systems can thereby be brought together. This aggregator acts as a more accurate reflection of the multiple positive and negative impacts of graffiti activity and allows a range of values to be collected through the visual medium rather than just negative values coming in through graffiti hotlines.

These represent a fractional sample from wider and evolving sets of possibilities (including but not limited to those mentioned in Graffolution, 2015b). They are of course yet to be proven in terms of their capacity to open out the commons of value centers discussed. Nonetheless, they can act as prototypes - prototypes towards new innovations in how uncommissioned visual and creative urban practices are contested.

To our knowledge, very few people ask for practices like graffiti to be legalized per-se. Rather the calls we hear are for more publics to have voices that can be heard in more equitable ways, in respect of the richly polyhedral values, responses and actions around graffiti. Small attempts to uncover and innovate in the commons of this terrain might enable the strategies and tactics of policy and urban management to find greater freedom to spend less (they have to) while authentically achieving and serving more.

4. Conclusion

Actions to promote, afford or impair instances of graffiti, street art and urban creativity reflect personal perspectives, collective priorities or professional positions, which each assume particular forms for attributing, hearing and expressing 'value'. As discussed above, those value attributions - centers and peripheries - are closely related to who is being served and who is not. Centering value on a single principle forces other values into periphery, and can hinder new opportunities for open 'successes' (i.e. serving more of the communities that they impact). In response, a commons-approach reveals multiple chances to prototype new alternatives that enable diverse experiences, specialisms, interests or practices to exchange, contest and collaborate - each in different ways but within an accessible common of communication and space. These are chances to:

- 'Hear' more diversely, to increase inclusivity through urban and creative practices (Gamman and Thorpe, July 2014).
- Design space for unusual collaborations to happen.
- Increase appropriateness in resource-allocation.
- Reduce public or societal spending on matters that do not warrant spending on courts, cops and corrections.
- Reduce unnecessary criminalization of uncommissioned visual urban practitioners (Essex, 2011).
- Pool effort and resource investment between diverse stakeholders and agendas.
- Widen the palettes accessible for both the debates *and* the visual practices of urban commons.
- Evolve (mature) our collective lexicon of responses to informal urban practices, such as graffiti.

This article has sought to break down some surface oppositions of center and periphery, and to identify direction for incumbent and emerging opportunities, such as those above. These reflect chances to redesign the ways that we understand what 'better' might look like when we include multiple centers of value in contexts of graffiti, street art

and related practices. In this terrain of activity we can see glimpses of a new *commons*, where value centers can exchange, co-exist, or contest as adversaries in open, visual and generative dialogue, rather than as enemies in spatial stalemate. Through future tools that can expose actors in this context to diverse values and understandings of success, we may increase the chances for people to have a more nuanced view of graffiti and other creative practices in urban public space. All of this of course takes effort to create, to innovate, to hear, to have a go. Importantly also, it takes willingness to fail, willingness to be surprised and willingness to be open about the changes we each want to see.

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Fig. 1. Leurs & Rezaei - Social Innovation Value Canvas

Fig. 2. An exploration of frames of value.

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