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Master Thesis:

Street Art in Bulgaria – Past, Present and Possible Future

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The field of exploration in this thesis is the graffiti and street art in the broad sense of these terms - legal and illegal, commissioned or unauthorised, politically or aesthetically centered works by professional or amateur artists.

The focus of this study is the potential of street art to insert different types of positive impact on society. The analysis will be done mainly on the basis of academic literature, case studies and research from countries such as the UK, Canada, Australia and the USA.

Street art in those countries is largely treated, valued and fostered today as any other art. It is also explored for its potential as a great tool in the urban landscape field, the revitalization and regeneration of public space. There is also a solid ground to argue that street art develops an audience for the arts in general, cultivates and encourages the formation of a civil society and promotes interculturalism.

With discussing the potential benefits of supporting and promoting street art in a general sense, those empirical findings will be put against the background of Bulgarian reality.

The idea is to explore if the positive effects of street art abroad would still be possible and relevant in Bulgaria.

The goal is to answer the question why street art should be supported and fostered in my country. Overall my hypothesis is centered around the following statements:

– if supported and promoted, street art may be even more beneficial in Bulgarian communities than in other more developed countries because of many local social, economic and political factors

– street art may turn out to be one of the very few effective tools in Bulgaria to stimulate the audience, promote interculturalism, foster a civil society and develop local communities

– therefore it is especially important to support and promote the development of street art with the help of cultural policies and good practices from abroad. The latter may include legislation and regulations promoting a general tolerance and support for street art, financial, in-kind and moral support of street art events and use of street art in urban landscape solutions and development.

Mémoire de Maîtrise: Street Art en Bulgarie – Passé, Présent et Future Possible
Par: Bistra Andreeva

OBJECTIFS ET METHODOLOGIE

Le domaine d'examen de cette thèse sont les grafitti et le street art au sens général de ces termes. Cela comprend des ouvrages légaux ou illégaux, commissionnés ou non authorsés, d'intérêt politique ou esthétique d'artistes professionnels ou amateurs. Le terme street art fait référence seulement aux arts visuels mais il inclue divers types d'ouvrages et d'actions d'art qui naviguent dans l'espace public – des grafitti et des peintures à la craie faites par des enfants aux tableaux de musées exposés en plein air. Le centre d'intérêt de cet examen est le potentiel du street art d'influencer de manière positive l'ensemble de la société. L'analyse est effectuée en prenant comme point de départ la littérature académique, des études de cas et des recherches réalisées aux Etats Unis, au Canada, en Grande Bretagne et en Australie. Cependant, leurs résultats empiriques sont adaptés à la réalité bulgare. Celle-là est totalement différente des réalités dans les pays indiqués ci-dessus notamment en ce qui est du street art local, comment et pourquoi il est apparu et où est-il connu.

L'idée est de savoir si l'effet positif du street art à l'étranger est encore possible et applicable en Bulgarie. Le but est de répondre à la question pourquoi le street art doit être soutenu et encouragé dans mon pays. En bref, l'hypothèse est centrée autour des affirmations suivantes:

- S'il est soutenu et promu, le street art peut s'avérer même plus utile pour les communautés bulgares que pour les pays plus développés à cause de multiples facteurs sociaux, politiques et économiques locaux
- Le street art peut devenir un des peu moyens efficaces en Bulgarie pour stimuler le public, pour promouvoir l'interculturalisme, pour encourager la société civile et pour developer les communautés locales
- Donc, il est important de soutenir et d'encourager le développement du street art ayant pour appui les bonnes pratiques et les politiques culturelles étrangères

GRAFFITI ET STREET ART DANS LE MONDE

A la différence de la Bulgarie, la plupart des formes d'art designées sous le nom de street art ont déjà une longue histoire et sont bien développées dans le monde. Aujourd'hui ce qui était "graffiti" une fois est déjà appelé "graffiti traditionnel". L' éventail des outils et des techniques est considérablement élargi– les pots de spray ont été remplacés ou joints par les pochoirs, les stickers, les affiches, les photos, les collages, les dessins 3D, la peinture, les bande dessinées, les sculptures, les installations. Le street art représente plus les jeunes, les pauvres et les rebelles – il y a de nombreux peintres, animateurs, créateurs, photographes professionnels et artistes qui sont aussi des street artistes. Leur âge, continent, éducation et religion n'est pas d'importance. Ils sont plus réunis par une philosophie artisitique commune, ils sont différents – par leur expérience, leur point de vue, leur language artistique et par la façon de percevoir leur rôle dans la société. Toutefois ils sont unis par le fait d'utiliser la même plateforme pour leur messages artistiques individuels. Celle-là peut être utilisée pour diffuser des messages et des images politiques, humoristiques ou tout simplement beaux. Cela peut être effectué de manière légale ou non, peut être anonyme ou signé par une street art superstar, gratuit ou de grande valeur – parce que la vérité est que le street art récent est passé de l'underground au courant dominant.

La tolérance et l'appréciation du street art ont augmenté dans les vingt dernières années pour arriver au point culminant d'aujourd'hui – quand le street art obtient la reconnaissance internationale et connaît un boom. Cette Renaissance est démontrée par l'ascension à la gloire de l'artiste britannique Banksy ou par des événements inspirateurs comme l'exposition de street art à la Galérie Tate d'art moderne à Londres en été 2008.

Avec le temps, l'évolution et les débats sur le sens et l'importance du street art un grand nombre de ces formes ont été légitimées. Aujourd'hui dans beaucoup de pays elles sont traitées, appréciées et promues comme le sont toutes les autres formes d'art. Selon les études de cas les plus avancées le street art est encore apprécié à cause de son potentiel dans le domaine d'aménagement urbain. La France et l'Australie donnent l'exemple d'une coopération avec le street art afin de faire revivre et diversifier l'espace public, de rendre unique l'atmosphère locale.

GRAFFITI ET STREET ART EN BULGARIE

En Bulgarie à cause de l'ère communiste l'histoire du street art est beaucoup plus courte et spécifique.

Tout commence au début des années 90 par un simple copiage des exemples étrangers sans avoir pratiquement aucune information sur eux. Sans relation avec le faible courant hip-hop (ou avec la presque non existante break scène), sans message politique précis les premiers graffiti writers s'efforçaient de trouver le sens et le but des graffiti pour eux-mêmes.

Par la suite leur art ne suivait pas les étapes des street arts du monde. Comme les autres arts et industries (par exemple la musique, la littéature et la télévision) le street art devait rattraper son retard de décennies – se heurtant contre divers obstacles et sautant les étapes logiques de son développement.

Cependant dès le milieu jusqu'à la fin des années 90 la scène locale a fait des progrès. 2005-2006 étaient les années de pic avec l'affirmation de divers crews et artistes et la tenue d' événements spéciaux. Cela a été suivi par un rapide déclin du mouvement attribué à plusieurs tendances:

- Beaucoup des artistes déjà travaillent comme graphic designers ou font un autre travail (par exemple dans le secteur de la publicité), renonçant à leurs activités street
- Autres se sont transférés à Sofia, s'abandonnant à la drogue
- Il n'y a pas de nouveaux talents car la nouvelle génération trouve d'autres amusements et il devient de plus en plus difficile de susciter l'intérêt des jeunes, de les rendre motivés et persistants dans une seule activité (à la différence des années 90)
- L'hostilité et même l'agressivité physique entre les writers actifs. Ils sont divisés en deux camps – les libéraux orientés vers le street art légal et les conservateurs, fans des graffitis illégaux et oldschool

LES AVANTAGES DU SOUTIEN ET DE LA PROMOTION DU STREET ART

Face à la situation actuelle stagnante en Bulgarie (socialement et culturellement) et en pensant des exemples positives de l'étranger, nous pouvons conclure qu'il y a beaucoup de manières dont le street art peut et devrait être employé:

1) Le street art développe le public.

Il est particulièrement approprié employer le street art pour l'animation et le développement du public en Bulgarie pour deux types de raisons :

D'une part, il y a un intérêt très petit en Bulgarie pour les arts et la culture de nos jours. Peu de demande signifie peu d'offre. Les artistes actifs sont de la vieille génération critiquée ou des jeunes confus et inexpérimentés. Les institutions comme des musées et des galeries publiques ne sont pas du tout dynamiques ou attrayantes et extrêmement peu de personnes les visitent. La culture de Mass TV et le pop-folk règnent partout, bombardant les jeunes générations avec leurs esthétiques, les messages simples et les valeurs incertaines. D'une autre part, dans un temps transitoire turbulent sans des arts ou une culture en vue, le street art est le seul art que le grand jeune public découragé peut voir. Cela donne une alternative au divertissement des médias, des images publicitaires et les normes visuelles qu'ils favorisent. L'intérêt pour le street art s'est avéré mener à un intérêt pour les arts en général. Il ouvre l'horizon de beaucoup de jeunes pour devenir curieux au sujet des cultures, des événements et d'autres formes des arts visuels et des arts de la performance.

2) L'art de rue stimule la formation et le développement d'une société civile.

D'une part, la situation en Bulgarie en ce moment est caractérisée par une apathie et un manque primordialement de société civile. Il y a un besoin désespéré de réveiller les citoyens et de les provoquer pour former et manifester leur position. D'une autre part, le street art encourage la formation, l'articulation et l'expression d'une position civile. Il stimule le dialogue et la participation à la démocratie. C'est un milieu direct, qui est l'indépendant d'intérêt de corporation et politique et donne une alternative aux médias. Le street art est l'équivalent visuel des blogs.

3) Le street art comme une manière de favoriser le dialogue et l'échange interculturels

Les arts ont été employés de nombreuses périodes par toutes sortes de communautés afin d'explorer et d'affirmer leurs identités. Un rôle spécial est souvent réclamé pour les arts en termes de capacité de supprimer les frontières.

4) Le street art a un impact salutaire sur le développement des communautés et des villes.

Beaucoup d'exemples internationaux montrent que le street art est salutaire d'une manière sociale et architecturale - en termes d'aménagement urbain et de régénération communale.

Il amplifie l'économie, augmente le capital social et revitalise l'esprit d'une communauté. Le street art également stimule la décentralisation et peut aider beaucoup, en revitalisant la ville et les quartiers.

RECOMMANDATIONS DE POLITIQUE CULTURELLES

Sur la base de la recherche et de l'expérience étrangères combinées avec les détails de la situation locale, il y a un choix de mesures qui pourraient être adoptées afin de créer des politiques culturelles favorables au développement du street art. En générale, ceux ont pu être:

1. Inclusion dans la législation et les règlements d'une tolérance générale et des politiques de l'identification et l'appui du street art.

2. Lançant et/ou fournissant un appui financier pour des événements qui développent le street art

3. Développer le public plus jeune dès que possible

4. Utilisation du street art dans les solutions et le développement d'aménagement urbain

CONCLUSION

Comme les exemples partout dans le monde l'avèrent, si on utilise bien le street art aujourd'hui, il a un immense potentiel pour un impact positif sur la société. Ses avantages peu communs le rendent particulièrement efficace pour l'usage dans un pays comme la Bulgarie : ceux-ci incluent la surprise, l'urgence, l'honnêteté, l'essence démocratique, l'égalité entre le créateur et le spectateur, la capacité d'engager etc. Pour cette raison, c'est sage et nécessaire de considérer un développement et une utilisation de ce potentiel, en profitant des bonnes pratiques de l'étranger.

1. INTRODUCTION

The field of exploration in this thesis is graffiti and street art in the general sense of these terms.

1.1. KEY TERMS

Since the notions of "graffiti" and "street art" will be in the center of this text, it is necessary and important to clarify how I will use them and what will be implied by them.

Nowadays, in a broad sense, the term "graffiti" encompasses all forms of writing on walls: drawings or words that are scratched, painted, or sprayed on walls or other surfaces in public places. Graffiti is still predominantly associated with Bronx and Brooklyn hip-hop music, referring to the typical ghetto-born, over-sized, highly stylized colour-lettered words (Fig 1). Because of their old-school origins this type of graffiti today is called "**traditional graffiti**".

The term **"graffiti art"** became popular in the 70s to signify art inspired by urban graffiti. Artists and critics began to see graffiti as a direct and genuine expression of urban culture, free of the manipulation of the art market. Leading graffiti artists were Jean-Michel Basquiat and Keith Haring (Fig. 2-3). Although its direct inspiration was everyday graffiti, graffiti art also drew upon surrealism and the art brut ("raw art") of French artist Jean Dubuffet. Graffiti art declined rapidly during the 1980s when it was absorbed by commercial art, advertising, MTV and the New York art market[1].

In the meantime from graffiti **street art** had started to form. In the end of the 70s, the French artist and painter Ernest Pignon-Ernest (currently at age 66) started to draw classic works, which were even influenced by baroque and the big masters of painting. Illegally, he used to stick those to carefully chosen building facades (Fig. 4). Around the same time the first stencils with artistic purpose showed up in the US. The same happened in Europe in '81.

"Street art" is nowadays quite a broad notion that refers to any art developed in public spaces. This may be used to include many arts forms - traditional graffiti, stickers and stencils (Fig. 5-6), photography on buildings (Fig. 11-12), street installations and sculptures, video installations, even flash mobbing. At this point street art is already quite far from the associations with break-dance and hip-hop music. It is still related to graffiti, since it

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1 Microsoft ® Encarta ® 2007. © 1993-2006 Microsoft Corporation.

originates from it - however street art has evolved into many diverse and distant directions and a large part of it has very little in common with graffiti. Street art has also been called post-graffiti, neo-graffiti, urban art.

On the other hand, the French use the term "urban art" and at the same time use the term "street arts" in a much broader sense. Saying "arts de la rue" they refer to every form of art that takes place in public space – from street circus and jugglers, through street musicians and street theatre performances to graffiti, exhibitions and installations in public space.

In this text, "street art" will be used not in the French, but in the generally accepted sense of the term. It will refer only to the visual aspect of street art, but it will include all types of art actions and works displayed in public space – from graffiti and chalk drawings by kids to museum paintings exhibited outdoors.

On another note, just like graffiti, the term street art is more oftenly used to refer to art of an illicit activist nature, as opposed to government sponsored initiatives, but there has been a trend to include in the term legal works as well. The subversive nature of street art is prevailing, but it is also not obligatory - there are many examples of street art that have only artistic, but not political ambition.

In this text I plan to analyse graffiti art and street art in the visual, artistic and social sense. The text will not deal with the aspects of vandalism and crime.

I will also presume that the reader recognizes graffiti and street art as legitimate art forms.

Overall, the two terms here will encompass professional and amateur, political or apolitical, commisioned or unauthorised, people-created art or "art in public space" that has been taken out of museums.

"Graffiti" and "street art" will be used here as interrelated and very much interchangeable terms. Normally that would not be acceptable since street art today has come a long way since its predecessor - graffiti. However, the focus of this text will be Bulgaria where street art is still at a level, quite close to graffiti. That is why it would be hard to discriminate the two here.

1.2. AIMS

The focus of study is the potential of street art to insert different types of positive impact on society.

The analysis is done mainly on the basis of academic literature, case studies and research from coutries such as the UK, Canada, Australia, France and the USA.
However the empirical findings of those are put against the background of Bulgarian cultural and social reality.
The latter is radically different from the reality in the aforementioned countries, especially when it comes to local street art, how and why it came about and where it is now. That is why, an overview and analysis of graffiti and street art in Bulgaria is attempted as well.

The idea of putting together foreign experience and local circumstances is to explore if the positive effects of street art abroad would still be possible and relevant in Bulgaria.

The goal is to answer the question why street art should be supported and fostered in my country. Overall the hypothesis is centered around the following statements:

– if supported and promoted, street art may be even more beneficial in Bulgarian communities than in other more developed countries because of many local social, economic and political factors

– street art may turn out to be one of the very few effective tools in Bulgaria to stimulate the audience, promote interculturalism, foster a civil society and develop local communities

– therefore it is especially important to support and promote the development of street art with the help of cultural policies and good practices from abroad.

2. METHODOLOGY

The key questions in this study required research in two very different directions.

On one hand was the ample experience with street art in foreign countries, where it is very much advanced, well-accepted and well-developed. There are many articles and papers which document experiences, experiments and projects and analyse the effects of street art on communities and society in general. I have consulted some of these to study their findings with the idea to learn and suggest applicable good practices for Bulgaria.

On the other hand however was the local cultural context and the current state of the weak and underdeveloped street art scene in Bulgaria.

It is important to note here that to my knowledge the subject of Bulgarian graffiti and street art has never been seriously explored, researched into and documented. There are no books, academic articles or official records and statistics about it. This made the research simultaneously difficult and precious.

It also naturally lead to a research mainly based on qualitative methods – mainly open interviews with artists, event managers, municipality organs, university professors.

Although this would normally be considered insufficient for academic research, I have found no other way to delve in to the history and specifics of Bulgarian graffiti and street art.

I believe the interviews provided valuable insight into past and current trends, attitudes and events and I trust that the data thus acquired represents an intriguing document, which could be used as a source for further research into the matter.

3. GRAFFITI AND STREET ART AROUND THE WORLD - A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE LATEST TRENDS

In this thesis I will discuss the potential benefits of fostering street art in Bulgaria stepping very much on the basis of its latest history and development around the world. Therefore I find it necessary to start with the latest developments around the artistic legitimacy of street art and its exploitation.

Today, what was once "graffiti" is now referred to as "traditional graffiti".

New terms have been devised to signify the following periods, movements and stages of evolution – post-graffiti, street art, urban art, neo-pop art, post art, cultural interventionism, public expressionism, etc. The latter still have their roots in graffiti and also use public space as a media. However, the number and variety of approaches, instruments, materials, themes, topics, aesthetics and agendas they employ have grown immensely.

3.1. "HOW" TRENDS

The use of different techniques is the smallest of the factors making a difference – spray cans have been replaced with or joined by stencils, stickers, posters, photos, collages, 3D drawings, paint, comic strips, sculptures, installations.

Some eloquent examples:

French artist Zevs creates images by cleaning only certain parts of dirty walls – calling them „proper graffiti". He also „kidnaps" pictures of models from billboards and asks for ransom.

Urban Blooz is an artistic project, which protests against the excessive commercial use of public space by putting on billboards the picture you would see if no billboard was there. (Fig. 7)

Lichtfaktor experiment with light projections (Fig.8).

Graffiti Research Lab experiment with projections, lasers, beamers, cameras, LED and all sorts of multimedia. (Fig.9)

The new sensational Italian artist Blu creates wall-panted animation - blurring the lines

between street art and video animation[2] (Fig.10).

3.2. "WHO" TRENDS

Street art has opened up and advanced immensely, giving way to everyone – from complete amateurs with simple good ideas put on stickers to professional artists using sophisticated methods and techniques. In the last decade the Internet has come to connect and bring out to light many of those artists and amateurs.

One thing can very easily be seen - that street art is no longer a trade mark of the young, poor and rebellious. There are many examples today of painters, animators, designers, professional photographers and conceptual artists who are also street artists. They may be of all ages, continents, artistic schools, class levels and religions.

These artists are no longer united by a common artistic philosophy (as used to be the case with graffiti). They are different – in their background, in their views, in their artistic languages and in how they see their own roles in art and society. They are united however in one thing - they use the same platform for their own individual artistic messages. The street has become an open microphone, a canvas, simply a media.

3.3. DOES IT HAVE TO BE POLITICAL?

Street art has a long history of being associated with politically-charged, subversive, even controversial messages. It still largely is – we could take French photographer JR's over-sized black and white portraits of ghetto people pointing a gun at you - he puts up the latter on suburbian facades (Fig. 11-12). Or we could take any of Mark Jenkins' installations of suicidal dummies (Fig.13), Blu's mutants as a commentary on social alienation (Fig. 14), any of Bansky's work – the examples are numerous (Fig.15).

However**,** there is a growing number of distinguished artists admired for their works, just because they are humorous (Norwegian artist Knudzich – Fig. 16), spectacular (the 3-D

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2   Blu website - www.blublu.org

drawings of Julian Beaver, Fig. 17) or simply beautiful (the comics/pop culture/comics influenced Faile, or surrealist Juan Miro influenced Siexeart, or burlesque influenced, puppet-drawing Miss Van – Fig. 18-20).

3.4. SO IS IT ART OR VANDALISM?

As the works and the artists have evolved, so has evolved the way they have been accepted - street art, urban art, neo-pop art, post art, cultural interventionism or public expressionism – all the terms underline a recognition of the artistic merits of the post-graffiti works in public space. There have been many examples of countries with liberal policies toward street art, with public authorities allowing and even commissioning projects. „Illegal" has dropped out as an obligatory part of the definition of street art and there is an overwhelming number of artists working partially or entirely with the authorities, such as the Dutch artist Henk Hofstra (Fig. 21).

3.5. THE RENAISSANCE OF STREET ART

Tolerance and appreciation for street art have actually been growing steadily in the last two decades to reach nowadays their peak – right now street art is gaining international recognition and experiencing a boom, even a renaissance which can be quickly tracked in the following series of groundbreaking events:

- In 2005 anonymous British artist Banksy was nominated by the public for the prestigious Turner Prize for contemporary art.
- In 2006 the City Hall of his native Bristol carries out a referendum concerning a work of his on the wall of a STD clinic (Fig. 22)– the people vote to keep it.
- In 2007 Banksy is voted one of the top three art heroes of the nation, and a work of his is auctioned for the staggering 288, 000 British pounds[3].
- In 2008 Banksy (still anonymous) organizes in London The Cans Festival[4] – an event for stencil art only. For three days, 30 000 visitors wait on long queues to catch a glimpse of 600 of the most impressive and talented street art names in the world

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3   http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/entertainment/6592739.stm
4   www.thecansfestival.com

drawing next to each other.

- A little after that, in May 2008, the Mecca of contemporary art - Tate Modern Gallery opened its first ever grand-scale street art exhibition, giving away the walls of its facade for the purpose to six of the best street artists in the world right now (Fig. 23). The exhibition in Tate Modern was considered to be the final proof that street art has gone form underground to mainstream.

3.6. DOES STREET ART HAVE TO BE STRICTLY NON-COMMERCIAL?

Street art has now received the last official seal of approval and recognition as an art. Its popularity is higher than ever and its prices at the street market are soaring.

Youth-targeted brands and companies striving to achieve a „cool" image have long been after street art (e.g. Nissan, Red Bull, Diesel). This year even the political campaign of Barrack Obama turned to street art[5].

Many artists have their own web sites with contacts and prices for their prints[6]. Others have agents and exhibitions, and participate in commercial projects.

All of that comes to say that street art nowadays is shaping up as the latest cultural industry. In its recent history it perfectly fits the definition:

"Cultural industries are defined as those industries which produce tangible or intangible artistic and creative outputs, and which have a potential for wealth creation and income generation through the exploitation of cultural assets and production of knowledge-based goods and services (both traditional and contemporary). What cultural industries have in common is that they all use creativity, cultural knowledge, and intellectual property to produce products and services with social and cultural meaning"[7].

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5   www.nypost.com/seven/04242008/news/nationalnews/paint_misbehavin_in_team_os_street_art_107876.htm
6   A good example is the web site http://www.scrawlcollective.co.uk
7   Backgrouner on cultural industries, prepared by UNESCO

4. GRAFFITI AND STREET ART IN BULGARIA – ORIGINS, CONTEXT, CURRENT SITUATION

To analyse the origins, significance and potential of graffiti and street art in Bulgaria, we have to look first at where and how these visual arts came about.

Naturally, the history of graffiti and street art in Bulgaria is much shorter and very different from the history of graffiti worldwide. There are different reasons that provoked their initial appearance, as well as different associations and different mechanisms that defined their development.

4.1. SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF THE FIRST GRAFFITI IN BULGARIA

Unlike in the US and Western Europe, the first graffiti start appearing in Bulgaria as late as the middle of the 90s.

At that time and place, the existing political, economical and cultural context is absolutely crucial to understand as a defining factor. Until that moment Bulgaria had been under communism until only a couple of years ago and had suffered it in its most severe forms. For decades the country had been practically cut off from the Western world (much more than former Yugoslavia for example), lacking any information related to lifestyle, cultural trends, arts, music. There had been no books, magazines, newspapers from abroad. Foreign radio was forbidden, TV aired exclusively Bulgarian, Russian and other Eastern or Central European content. Foreign tourists were practically kept separated as groups in special resorts, and extremely few Bulgarian people could ever travel and see Europe or other continents beyond the Eastern block. There was no Internet. It is hard to remember and imagine that today, but that means that practically no one (with the exception of a very few privileged to travel) at that time had heard of graffiti (among many other bigger and more important things).

In the first few years after the fall of communism, the cultural level, mentality and dispositions of people didn't change much - there was no ban on information anymore, but the channels for access were slow to develop. There was no Internet until the late 90s- and when

it was finally available it was expensive and hard to find and use. The connection to Western culture in the beginning was based on several TV shows (like the US chart show Hit Video), whatever a few progressive newspapers and magazines reprinted and wrote (mainly about mainstream music, film and fashion) and the first satellite dishes in the country, which re-translated MTV Europe, RTL, etc. (there was no cable TV at the time). Another important factor was every artefact brought in from abroad - magazines, CDs, clothes, all kinds of everyday objects which stood out and looked fascinating in terms of design.

4.2. FIRST ENCOUNTERS WITH GRAFFITI

As a result of all of the above, we have a variety of disjointed and very different, even individual first encounters with the notion of graffiti and street art in the different towns and cities in Bulgaria.

These are all the more specific and different because of the lack of community and contact among people who began to take interest in that type of visual expression. Networking was impossible because of the lack of Internet and any publications, as well as because of the exclusive criminality and vandalism associations with graffiti at the time. The latter prohibited both fans and beginning artists from revealing their identity and introducing themselves as such in front of families, friends, in school and at work.

Interviews show that in most of the towns where graffiti crews consequently began to form, graffiti and street art were introduced to local youth literally by individual kids who had access to Western culture. This most often meant kids who had traveled or lived abroad with their families or who had parents working abroad.

The town of Targovishte (considered the birth place of the Bulgarian scene) is a perfect example of the randomness with which graffiti culture entered Bulgaria. In 1995 in a company of skateboarders (accepted as cool among young people and delinquent among the adults), one of the boys had a mother working in Germany, who used to bring skateboard magazines to her son. The skaters learnt about graffiti through those magazines, accepting them initially as a part of the skateboarding culture. Since skateboarding was related to

rebellious, hardcore, destructive music at the time in the minds of the local kids, graffiti were not even that much a part of hip-hop culture.

Although unconditionally accepted as cool, graffiti were not even entirely understood - because of lack of information. Interviewees admit things like: "For a long time in the beginning we had no idea what these "tags" were - we thought they were just words, we didn't know they were the writers' names"

It is here that we have to note that graffiti (and subsequently street art) scene in Bulgaria found its existence in a very different way and for very different reasons compared to the scenes in the US or Western Europe. Graffiti here were not invented or discovered by the locals, but were rather an import of Western culture. They were not born out of a need for expression but rather emulated the foreign messages and style. They certainly were not related to hip-hop or ghettos or any political or social agendas and they didn't really have an agenda on its own either.

As a matter of fact, graffiti in Bulgaria were primarily associated with skateboard subculture, thus becoming attractive with their anti-establishment/punk/rebel nuance. It was the danger and adventure that were the most appealing in the first years of Bulgarian writers - one of the interviewees tell the story of the first ever "bomb"[8] in Targovishte, during which he was photographed. This comes to say that in the beginning writing wasn't so much an act of art or an expression or boasting a good technique. It was more of a demonstration and an attempt to be different.

Basically graffiti were an emulation of Western subculture and their attractiveness was very much due to the fact that their aesthetics was shockingly different from anything that was commonplace and normal back in that period.

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8   " Bombing "is the act of illegally drawing a graffiti piece on a wall or a train.

4.3. A BRIEF HISTORY OF GRAFFITI AND STREET ART IN BULGARIA

Based on the interviews with some of the first graffiti artists in Bulgaria, it can be summed up that the local regional graffiti scenes started to emerge independently from each other between 1995 and 1997.

By that time around the world most of the forms of art united by the term "street arts" already had a substantial and colorful history and had undergone quite a development. However, Bulgarian graffiti and street art did not undergo all of those stages, hence we could only talk about graffiti in Bulgaria at that time.

Like many other arts and industries (such as music, literature and television), street art in Bulgaria has later had to catch up and make up for decades of absence – taking a crash course and rushing through logical stages of evolution, entirely skipping some steps.

The first attempts to do graffiti were completely illegal, poor imitations of tags seen in magazines. They were done mostly on trains and lacked any message, style or coherence. However with time the aesthetics evolved and the tags clearly began to improve. The images began to incorporate characters as well.

Gradually, crews were growing in numbers and the interest for graffiti began to take certain kids to Arts School. This on its side boosted the scene even more as graffiti cliques formed in arts schools and academies. Many of their members were coming from their native towns, thus transferring and exchanging styles and techniques.

By 1998-99 regional crews started to find track of each other and meet - largely thanks to the first graffiti event and the first underground graffiti publication. At that time the Internet was slowly becoming more and more accessible too.

In 2000 graffiti exhibitions and events started to happen and that lead to a serious boost of networking and exchange of experience. It is interesting to note that one of the first big legal events in Targovishte was initiated by the municipality, who apparently had a big problem with illegal graffiti. At the time there was a Dutch-funded urban project called "Beautiful

Targovishte" and foreign experts advised the local municipality to give away a graffiti designated area as a way to cope with the problem. Thus the authorities approached local kids offering them the big walls of a derelict open-air movie theater - thus initiating a first graffiti event of its kind.

In 2004 there were already four festival events for graffiti organized in Bulgaria, two of which were part of international chains of graffiti events.

In 2005 and 2006 graffiti art had its peak in Bulgaria - there were quite a few interesting and popular artists. Many events took place, several of which were initiated and supported by commercial brands. The number of legal work clearly was on the rise - as evident from walls commissioned in shops, ads, legal competitions etc.

The first book with Bulgarian street art was published in 2006[9]. The first studio for graffiti design and interiors was open[10]. The online gallery Corporate Youth featuring young talented graphic artists introduced many graffiti names[11]. Many graffiti artists made a shift to design and were invited to work for advertising agencies.

Unfortunately, after moving to Sofia and joining advertising agencies, many of the young prominent artists gradually but quickly stopped doing graffiti and street art-related works.

Several possible reasons were pointed out in the interviews:

- with their jobs they experienced lack of time,

- the commercial projects became a priority for financial reasons,

- many young artists got into the drum 'n bass culture and subsequently into drugs.

Thus, the recognizable artists and their works quickly decreased. No new names came up to take over.

Currently, graffiti and street art in Bulgaria is losing momentum. This can be seen in the streets and is also clearly indicated in interviews, where most of the artists expressed severe disappointment about the development (and lack thereof) of graffiti and street art in the last two years. The lack of one united scene was mentioned many times - the artists cited lack of

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9   http://nasimo.blogspot.com/2007/09/napalm-graffix-book-preview-by.html
10 www.endend.eu
11 www.corporateyouth.org

enthusiasm, no mutual support among artists and lots of dominating hatred - especially in Sofia.

4.4. KEY CREWS

It is very interesting to note that in country with a cultural life extremely centralized around Sofia, graffiti is claimed to have emerged from a small town of 50,000 in the North-Eastern part of Bulgaria.

It is not clear if there are any specific reasons for that, but Targovishte is largely pointed as the birth place of the Bulgarian graffiti scene. It is also the birth place of the most prominent, talented and recognized street artist in Bulgaria to date.

The other most advanced crews in the beginning were also based in towns around the country - such as Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas. The general presumption is that Varna developed well as a scene because of its proximity with Targovishte and the constant flow of students from there. Similar is the case with Dobrich, which was also an important hotbed for an underground hip-hop movement.

Else said, there was an unusual, spontaneous and strong element of decentralization - Sofia is widely claimed to have had no big role in the development of the graffiti scene until much later.

Basically, know-how and enthusiasm are said to have been transferred along the following trajectories (thanks to the movement of people, who had friends in other cities, studied there, went visiting and writing etc.):

Targovishte --> Sofia

Plovdiv --> Sofia

Targovishte --> Varna

Targovishte --> Burgas

Plovdiv --> Burgas

Varna - ->Dobrich

Veliko Turnovo developed later as an active graffiti spot too - but mainly because several key graffiti writers went there to study in Arts Academy, thus forming a local crew.

Stara Zagora also appeared on the map, aggressively emulating the Targovishte style. Because of its distance form the other active spots, Ruse formed its won little community as well.

At the moment, Sofia is again cited to be one of the weakest places for graffiti and street art - due to the hostility between the few artists here and the fact that artists in Sofia channel their creativity either in commercial work, or in personal digital and canvas works.

Meanwhile, the general conviction in interviewees was that in the country the scene is doing considerably better - especially in Burgas (this year their crew was also behind one the biggest events)

4.5. ANALYSIS OF THE CONTENT

When we look at graffiti and street art works in Bulgaria, it is hard to analyse their content. The truth is they rarely have a strong, clear or original message. The majority of the works have no political or social agenda. This may be explained by the specifics of their origins discussed above - graffiti in Bulgaria were not born out of a need for expression or on behalf of a certain minority.
They were rather imported as an attractive piece of Western culture to emulate by adolescents. This to a large extent explains the predominance of graffiti in Bulgaria (tagging is mostly about style) and the lack (or weakness) of street art, which puts the message before the style.

The most discernible themes in graffiti and street art works however have to do with the surrounding reality - e.g. drugs (mostly mushrooms) or old, evil and corrupt faces (Fig. 24-31). There is an amount of works in a dark direction - portraying death, tears, disintegration, moral and physical corruption
Another recurring theme is a street interpretation of sexy girls (Fig. 32-36). Plenty of funny, twisted characters can be seen, as well as animal characters - stylized cats, leopards, etc. There is a stunning lack of any politics whatsoever or any anti-establishment works.

Just as in other arts, here too artists are still searching blindly for their identity and agenda.

"The lack of a tradition leads to a lack of confidence and lack of clarity. This leads to the following of accepted stereotypes and norms and facilitates a compromise with conventions," says Diana Popova in an article exploring the problems of Bulgarian contemporary art[12]. What she claims is completely valid for graffiti and street art as well: "The problem is that to be critical and destructive, you have to have a structure and a system of some sort. Which in Bulgaria we don't."

All that leaves Bulgarian graffiti and street art only with style and no content.

The issue of style however is another interesting topic. In the first years, local style happened to develop in a rather unique way.

As there was not much interaction and cultural exchange with the US, the local artists could not copy the eponymous classic New York style - as did most of the world. Instead, they were looking at Europe (mostly Germany, who copied form the US and other parts of Europe) and filled in the blanks themselves.

Thus, the situation in Bulgaria turned out much like in Brazil - because of the distance, partial isolation and lack of ample information, a unique local style was developed.

However, with the appearance of many events and the increasing access of information this uniqueness was gradually lost. Some of the writers attribute that to the continuing emulation of Western examples, claiming that instead of working on their own style, many local artists have made the mistake to give up their handwriting to copy foreign works.

4.6. GRAFFITI/STREET ART EVENTS

Given the modest scale of the scene it is extraordinary how many specialized graffiti/street art events are taking place in Bulgaria. Since the beginning of the 90s there have been several regular international events every year - such as the local qualifications for the prestigious worldwide graffiti events Meeting of Styles and Write 4 Gold, as well as the local Sprite Graffiti Festival which took place for the sixth time this year. Many events have been organized out of Sofia as well. There have been many one-time events organized by sponsors - e.g. Snickers Street Art session or the Gravis Street Art Exhibition.

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12 Popova, Diana *Bulgarian Contemporary Art - In a Search of a National Identity Abroad,* article for Kultura newspaper, July 2007

5. BENEFITS OF THE SUPPORTING AND THE PROMOTING OF STREET ART

This chapter will aim to explore the multi-faceted potential of street art and the beneficial impact it could bring to society and culture in a community or a city - in general and to Bulgaria in particular.

The claims made here rest on, quote and refer predominantly to academic studies and case studies from abroad. However, they also take into account the specifics of the local cultural situation.

I will attempt to analyze if and why those claims would probably remain valid in a Bulgarian context as well. In many cases I would claim that the impact of supporting street art as a tool for developing culture and society would be even more relevant, necessary and beneficial for Bulgaria than in other more developed countries.

5.1. STREET ART AS A TOOL FOR AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

In his essay analyzing a two years project called Visual seminars (a series of debates between artists, politicians, architects etc. on Sofia's look), Alexandar Kiosev discuses how the beginning of the 21st century and the contradictory process of globalization have reshaped the relationship between visual culture, art, and social life and how visualization turns out to be more and more the dominant cultural code of the late industrial society.

"This social change redefines the role of the visual in contemporary society by giving new form to public taste. As main transgressors of dominant rules and limits in the contemporary visual sphere, artists should question this situation by challenging the automated visual habits of the "average citizen"[13].

All this is especially true of the East European societies in transition because the public life and aesthetic standards in these countries bear the marks of the communist visual environment - the burden of the totalitarian visual legacy is present in the urban surroundings, architecture, monuments and in the everyday material culture.

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13 Kiosev, Aleksandar (2005) *The city in shadow - short notes on visual philosophy and sociology in Sofia*

Meanwhile, the same burden of totalitarian legacy has also marked heavily the reputation of the old cultural institutions - state-run galleries and museums are experiencing financial, managerial, and public image problems and certainly have a problem attracting visitors.

In a national representative survey on "Problems of Museums in Bulgaria today"[14] arts and culture are the least popular choice of people for their free time after socializing, sports, TV, radio etc.

There has been a hesitant wave of private initiatives in the last couple of years, but those attempts have largely remained known to a narrow artistic community and their reputation is often intimidating and elitist to the wider audience.

The situation with the artists is similar. On one side is the old generation of artists. As Kiosev puts it: "Groups of visual bureaucrats and post-official artists are still using and misusing the old visual codes in favor of aggressive neo-nationalism and premature anti-globalism"[15]. At the same time the new generation are still struggling to find their own identity to step on, relevant problems to comment and worldwide trends to catch up and align with[16]. Both generations lack the support of the public and appear unable to establish rapport with the potential audiences. Thus, the mass audience ends up consuming mostly mass media and advertising imagery, completely detached and oblivious of the traditional "temples" of art. Or as Yuri Vylkovsky put it "There is equal, but rather insufficient access to culture"[17]

Therefore, it is necessary and only logical (in a country like Bulgaria more than any Western European country) to look for new, alternative ways to cross the paths of people and the arts. Street art then comes as a natural solution and it has several serious advantages as such.

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14 Commissioned by the National Center for Museums, Galleries and Visual Arts in September 2005, executed by Fact Marketing Agency

15 Kiosev, Aleksandar (2005) *The city in shadow - short notes on visual philosophy and sociology in Sofia*
16 Popova, Diana *Bulgarian Contemporary Art - In a Search of a National Identity Abroad,* article for Kultura newspaper, July 2007
17 A quote from the summarizing of conclusions of the discussion at the Technological Park Culture 2 Round Table in Plovdiv. Yuri Vylkovsky is TPC initiator& Tema Consultant

5.1.1. Street art goes to the people.

If Mohamed won't go to the mountain, then the mountain has to go to Mohamed - the saying needs no empirical proof.

Street art's first and most obvious advantage as a tool for audience development is the fact that it **does not rely on the audience to take the initiative**. It is pro-active and literally breaks into the daily routes of countless people. Thus it becomes a part of their routines whether they want it or not - giving them a chance to get accustomed to the image, grow an appreciation for it and develop an interest for visual art.

"Graffiti writers are them most influential artists of their time, in terms of the number of people they reach and the the number of people making work influenced by them "[18] American curator and arts expert Jeffrey Deitch is quoted to have said.

Certain percentages of these people would arguably never look at a painting or go to a gallery on their own will. However, that does not necessarily mean that they would not acquire a taste for it - Keith Haring for example maintained that position and considered the world to be almost a museum of his own kind. He thought that many people didn't have the means or the knowledge to go to museums, so he was bringing the art to them[19]

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5.1.2. Separating art from the institutions

There is another advantage to taking art out of the galleries and museums and placing it on the street, which is particularly valid in Bulgaria.

Taken out of the serious, institutional context, **art is accepted in an easier, less prejudiced way**. There is no pressure to "understand it", there is no requirement for a background, and there are no negative connotations with the notion of galleries and museums, hype, high-brow art or intimidating elitism.

With state institutions run by the old generation and new ventures often overly intellectual, the street as a platform is one of the few platforms in Bulgaria, that hasn't been compromised

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18 Lewisohn, Cedar (2008) *Street Art - The Graffiti Revolution* Tate Publishing;

19 Ibid

and distanced in the eyes of ordinary people. On the contrary - it is not yet accepted as a place where anything valuable can be seen. This makes it a new, virgin media that could be used to raise an interest in visual arts, which on its side could lead on to further development of the interest for arts and culture.

5.1.3. Setting aesthetic standards

Art on the street and in public places does not only develop an interest in arts – it creates and molds the aesthetic standards of those living around it.

It is common knowledge that the space a given community inhabits is to a large extent a reflection of this community's mentality (which unfortunately speaks rather lowly of many Bulgarian quarters).

However it is also true that the visual norms of the residential space shape and impact mentality as well. As a candidate for mayor of Sofia stated:

"What I have been dreaming about is to give those ugly blind walls in the poorer residential projects to be drawn on by the local school. Just to cover them with huge graphics. My viewpoint is very simple – I am thinking about what the future Sofia citizens see the most. They leave their run-down apartment building and they see the other ugly one across the street . What you see in front of you most often is what you have to start fixing first. Because if you manage to create in a person a sense of intolerance for ugliness on his street, then it is very probable that he will be engaged in improving the look of the downtown part of a city too – although it is not a part of his permanent living environment. "[20]

5.1.4. An alternative to the visual aesthetics of mass culture

By providing a view, aesthetics and messages that are different from the ones bombarding the audience from mass media and advertising, street art might as well be the only possibility to provide an alternative to mass culture to a wider audience**.**

20 *Do You See Sofia? (*2002 - 2005) a series of reports from the initiative *Visual Seminars* at the Institue for Contemporary Art

This is especially effective as street art sneaks like a Trojan horse onto a platform usually reserved and associated with commercial and populist imagery. Thus, by regular exposure it could be used to push the limit of mass taste and eventually develop it.

It would be interesting to note here a key difference between the situations in Bulgaria and in Western Europe. Whereas in the more developed countries street art is an opposition of bourgeois art, selected and owned by a few, in Bulgaria it's an alternative to the chalga[21], turbo-folk, mass commercial aesthetics.

5.1.5. Reclaiming the Streets from Commercials

Although this view angle may seem too remotely related to the previous subtopics discussed, I find it especially important to touch on.

The subject of street art as a tool to educate visual taste and raise aesthetic standards has already been discussed earlier. We have also mentioned the fact that street art is one of the few alternatives of mass media and commercial aesthetics.

This leads us the point where we must analyze the presence and surrounding context of graffiti and street art outside in the public space of Bulgaria. Nowadays one witnesses a new visual wave: in the global world the culture of the public image and the "society of the spectacle" (Guy Debord) are gradually transformed by the new complex structures of the "display", "interface", "billboard", scanned-and-sent images. Along with the home video, the video clip, and the post-MTV culture, along with the expansion of design, lifestyle and fusion cultures, these new visual-informational hybrids have started saturating everyday life[22].

Sofia too has been flooded with commercial imagery - ads, billboards, sign, etc. Somewhere in the middle of the 90s Sofia started to have two visual identities: one of them were the ugly grey panel buildings in the residence neighbourhoods, and the other - the upbeat, colourful

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21 An informal term used to describe the lowest form of pop-folk music for the masses, usually associated with overly simplistic lyrics (about money, sex and partying), kitch aesthetics (blonds with big busts) and low values.

22 Kiosev, Aleksandar (2005) *The city in shadow - short notes on visual philosophy and sociology in Sofia*

imagery of consumerism and capitalistic paradise. "The city of ruins, beggars and social emptiness versus the (virtual and visual only) city of the highly anticipated European standards and Western lifestyle. A mixture of depression and and entrepreneurial energy," as Kiosev says[23].

However, Kiosev speaks of another, even more important conflict. This conflict is between the city as a chance for commercial exposure and the city as a public space for the citizens, the two merging uncontrollably and resulting in one omnipresent commercial campaign:

"Sofia is more and more a screen city and the business has the visual monopoly. As we have discussed in our Visual seminars, advertising in public space in inevitable, but but it cannot be left to exist out there everywhere and alone on its own...Today we live in this post-modern, post-socialist city, not particularly visible ourselves. It imposes an environment on us, which we didn't choose - just like we didn't choose the shops we go to, like it's less and less up to us what shows we watch and even what politicians we elect. The choice has been narrowed by the spotlight. "

In this sense, the presence of graffiti and street art violates that visual monopoly of Kiosev. It reclaims parts of illegally acquired and invaded public space.

Thus street art reminds of the civilian possession of public space and their right to enjoy and define it. It gives a basic sense of appropriation: making the city your own by claiming the space.

5.1.6. Developing the concept of public art in Bulgaria

Naturally, all of the above brings us back to the classic definition of public art, which is a vast topic and certainly not a new one. "Public art is a particular practice characterized by bringing art from the private sphere of studios and galleries into public spaces especially in urban areas"[24]. Public spheres within cities are seen as hotbeds for **exchanges that foster new**

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23 Ibid

24 www.citymined.org – a description of the project Tri(p)olis, Urban Art and the Public Sphere - Public Art Harnessing Social Capital

identities, innovation, experiment and social change. The project TriPolis (a project promoting art in public spaces,which ran from June 2005 - June 2006 in London, Barcelona and Brussels) saw the "public sphere as the site 'par excellence' to explore *innovative art forms new modes of governance.*"[25].

Indeed throughout the world this trend is explored more and more vigorously, recently spanning not only to numerous commissions for art in public spaces in many European cities, but also "taking art out on the street" in a very literal way.

The Pushkin Museum in Moscow for example is exhibiting copies of its most famous paintings out on Moscow's streets (Fig. 37). Fifty-one works of art, including works from such artists as Monet, Rembrandt and Van Gogh, are hanging all over central Moscow, notably to the north and west of the Kremlin from June until October this year. A similar program ran in London last summer, when the National Gallery displayed 30 paintings in the same manner.

In Bulgaria however, public art has so far mainly translated as the aforementioned propaganda monuments. Although one of the most famous public artists Christo is of Bulgarian origins, the concept for public art here is not well-known and all of its great potential and benefits are yet to be explored.

Since street art may be relatively inexpensive to produce, it would be a suitable way to begin work in that direction – especially given that other forms of visual arts in Bulgaria are still in a period of stagnation and identity crisis as well.

5.1.7. Viewer becomes artist

One positive effect of street art that can be proved with facts, it is that in many cases curiosity in graffiti has lead to interest in higher/wider forms of visual arts – even back to the classic painters.

The whole first wave of young people in the 70s and early 80s that started channeling their

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25 Ibid

frustration and boredom into visual art had little or no art-school training or knowledge, but later many of them went on to become involved with artistic professions.

One of the most popular artists of our time Barry McGee remembers" I had no real interest in graffiti before. I never noticed it, but once I was introduced to it I was fascinated"[26]

Similar is the case with the most prominent Bulgarian street artist Nast, who used to study in a technical school to become a car mechanic. He only discovered his talent and attraction to drawing after he started doing graffiti. Later on Nast started bribing his school teachers with paintings to get good marks and finally ended up in the Arts Academy.

Other graffiti friends of his went on to become involved in graphic design, music and video.

Even Picasso is quoted to have said that when he was young he would often copy the graffiti from walls.[27]

5.1.8. The street as an exhibition space for the artists

It is important to note here that if we start talking about professional, semi-professional or experienced street artists, the street is again a valuable media, but in a different way. Like for the viewer, who accepts the image on the street without prejudice (without being prepared by reviews, information materials, critics, etc.), the artist uses the street as one of the few tribunes that haven't yet been compromised or politically charged. By cutting out the middleman and going on the street people with art school backgrounds are trying to find place for their work that is not dependent on the business, marketing and selection rules of galleries. "Or they simply may not want the hassle of having to deal with what is perceived as a very elitist art world"[28]

"For over a hundred years context has been a vital factor in the construction of artworks. The very fact that something was placed in a museum or gallery was enough to give it credibility. This related to the reputation and perceived good judgement of those institutions. This system of qualifications is also reflected in the material value of things and what the context says

26 Lewisohn, Cedar (2008) *Street Art - The Graffiti Revolution* Tate Publishing

27 Ibid
28 Ibid

about the material value. People might not like Picasso's work, but they appreciate that it's worth a good deal of money and therefore understand that it's important as a work of art. If you remove the financial worth and the imposing museum setting, what are you left with? Only the artwork"[29]

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Or else said "Street art is a part of a legitimacy crisis in art - giving artistic expression away from what is believed to be the dominant culture of a prescribed mainstream art."[30]

5.2. STREET ART AS A TOOL FOR DEVELOPING A CIVIL SOCIETY

Before starting to explore street art's potential to cultivate civil position and strenghten civil society, it is necessary first to take a look at the situation in Bulgaria.

5.2.1. The current state of civil society in Bulgaria

In the last 20 years of transition civil society has proven to be notoriously weak and passive in Bulgarian political and social affairs. There have been numerous cases of evidence for the extremely low participation and leverage of the third sector in public decisions. There are many NGOs, but the majority of them have problems with membership, reputation, efficiency and effectiveness. They lack structure, network, transparency and tradition. They appear unable to defend citizens' interest or to put pressure on the government. They also mainly fulfill political and not civil, economical or professional functions. The rare cases of cooperation between the NGO sector and the government are still mainly project based and as a whole the sector has an unsatisfactory impact on people's daily lives - in a survey only 3.4% of people surveyed confirm that there is an NGO in their community which has improved their life[31]. There is a low civil spirit prevailing in society, conclude the statitsics.

Of course this comes from and goes back to all possible levels of society - institutional, communal and personal level. Statistics and surveys show discouragement and

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29 Ibid

30 Rafferty, Pat (1991) *Discourse on Difference - Street Art/Graffiti Youth* Visual Anthropology Review Volume 7 Number 2 Fall

31 The data and observations quote " The Index of Civil Society "survey, realized by Balkan Assist association in the period 2003-2005

disillusionment with the system, the transition outcome and the government[32]. The feeling of helplessness has lead to apathy and loss of interest in politics and public affairs, even in cases of blatant political corruption or institutional incompetence and inadequacy.

From the 1990s on voter turnout has been steadily and seriously declining hitting the bottom of 29% voter participation last year on the first elections for Bulgarian representatives for the European Parliament.

5.2.2. Street Art's Relationship to Politics

Because of its very origins and essence, street art has always shared a very close bond with political and social **activism**, subversiveness and anti-establishment thinking.

Public city space has always been a powerful vector of protest[33]. There is a substantial number of people who believe that "politically engaged" is an inseparable part of the very definition for street art.

Today a part of street art has grown out of this association - as discussed earlier in this paper, there are many examples of street art simply with an aesthetic, social or humorous agenda.

At the same time however, recent years have also seen certain trends of an even more vivid crossover of art movements and political activism. Brandhacking, Culture Jamming and the „Reclaim the streets" movement are strong manifestations of a new breed of activists focusing on symbolic interventions.

5.2.3 Beneficial effects of street art on a civil society

In this part of my work I will claim that street art is a healthy phenomenon and a stimulating tool for democracy.

Actually, in more developed countries of Western Europe street art can be viewed as an expression and a sign of that democracy. Although it often carries a message questioning or fighting the system, it is the exactly the system that allows and tolerates the existence of that

32 Ibid
33 Dichev, Ivailo (*2005) Space of Desire, Desire for Space*

message on the first place. This is an advanced level of democracy where people feel compelled to say something and to act, to state their opinion. The civil spirit is there and street art is only a relatively new channel for that.

Clearly, this is not the case in Bulgaria. This is exactly why I maintain that street art should be encouraged and promoted. I believe that this support will introduce people to a new tool for expression, get them acquainted with it and place it in their hands. Then, hopefully they will be tempted to use it.

Based on the experience in other countries and having in mind the social and political local circumstances, we have the basis and evidence to argue that the support of street art in Bulgaria will eventually have the following beneficial side effects on civil society:

5.2.4. Stimulation of Participation

Devoting a whole book on that topic as early as back in 1993[34] Lyman G. Chaffee argues that media in general and street art in particular, elicit certain emotions. Posters, murals, graffiti, or wall-paintings can be inflaming just as speech, pamphlets, leaflets, or other visual symbols. Indeed it is common knowledge that like music, cinema, and other media, street art can arouse base emotions in their audiences, and can increase the climate of tension. Logically, the open possibility to provoke reaction tempts artists and regular people to take their chance and use it. Once pronounced, their position or message actually becomes a part of a larger dialogue.
By physically engaging with the city, graffiti artists and street artists enjoy a special relationship with the cty. It's a refusal of apathy - being a creator in stead of a consumer, forging an identity on the walls of the city.

In other words, street art can be a means to inspire people to express themselves, to energize them, to raise spirits and generate morale. This is most pronounced at times of crisis, war, or revolution. "Wars motivate governments and citizens to turn to street art in an attempt to inspire the citizenry."[35]

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34 Chaffee, Lyman G. (1993) *Political Protest and Street Art: Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries* Greenwood Press.

35 Ibid

"It was all about the social voice of it all" says in an interview the international artist of the Goldie (electronic music artist and DJ, who started out as a graffiti writer)[36].

More than 50% of the interviewed Bulgarian artists also admit that they have been tempted to express their thoughts and feelings in public space as they saw it as the only media, that was open and inviting for their opinion.

Although coming from a different place, Ivaylo Dichev has a similar theory on the way the street calls for action and expression. In his book *Space of Desire, Desire for Space* he quotes Arent for whom "...the city is not a physical space, it is "a space of speech", of the appearance in front of the other, it is the right to be seen, heard, remembered[37]. In this perfect sense today the French use the word "cite" - which is different from "ville". Dichev says it is because of this that it's impossible to translate Rousso's famous phrase from " The Public Contract ": " Les mesons font la ville, mais les citoyens font la cite ".

5.2.5. Stimulating the formation and articulation of civil position

French philosopher Ranciere elaborating on Aristotle has said: "Man is a political animal, because he has the power of speech". If we consider this in terms of graffiti, it could be argued that the general public who never reply to establishment forces are simply passive receptacles. They merely consume the visual language of the public realm - advertising and architecture without ever answering back. There is no dialogue: it's a monologue delivered by the corporations and the governing bodies to the public. When people take it on themselves to speak back, no matter what they say, they become political animals[38].

Public space in the city has long been exploited by businesses to convey messages for advertising purposes. We have seen in recent years how street art has begun to reclaim parts of that space it as a platform too - only not for commercial, but social and artistic purposes. And while graffiti isn't so much about connecting with the masses (it's more like an intercom -

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36 Lewisohn, Cedar (2008) *Street Art - The Graffiti Revolution* Tate Publishing
37 Dichev, Ivailo (*2005) Space of Desire, Desire for Space*
38 Lewisohn, Cedar (2008) *Street Art - The Graffiti Revolution* Tate Publishing

about connecting with different crews), street art is much more open. Street art is more about interacting with the audiences on the street and the people, the masses. Its' an open society." as street artist Faile says[39].

Street art is literally a means of communication in contemporary society.
In Belfast for example the Irish use public space a a comment board or a forum, where they can state their position. They frequently paint huge murals with which they express strong and definitive opinions on all kinds of issues - be it religion, soccer to Bush's policies (Fig. 38-40). To the rest of the world these murals are presented as "anger pent up against the wall"

However, while yielding itself very easily to anyone to exploit, it is to be noted that street art is not an easy platform to speak from. It demands a very brief, strong, well-formulated message. Unlike articles in newspapers or interviews on TV, on the street an intermission usually has to be extremely concise, powerful and to the point - at least in the cases of politically or socially driven, illegal works by amateurs. If we are talking about a legal, community/municipality commissioned work, then it is a different case, but there again the bigger scale, space and time raise the bar for the quality even more.

On another hand, street artists often make their work before putting it up on the street (as is the case with. stencils).
Thus if they feel the urge to participate, people are forced into thinking and formulating their position, as well as visually mastering a way of expressing it.

5.2.6. Street art as an alternative to the media

Naturally, not 100% of what we see on the street has artistic, social or rhetorical value.
This drawback is due the same reason that makes street unique and precious - it is the only mass media today apart form the Internet that does not monitor, pre-select, censor and edit content. The messages or works are published directly and this is their biggest advantage - it is a direct form of communication with a large audience.

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39 Ibid

In this sense, street art is today a great alternative to traditional mass media. What was subculture has now gone mainstream and the audience is much bigger than one scene.

On the other hand the mass media is largely compromised (that is especially true in Bulgaria) and not trusted as objective media serving people's interests. As Chaffe puts it:
"The revolutionary changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, where state-controlled media were monopolistic, provide evidence that the dominant media cannot pacify the citizenry over the long term. People who want to be informed, independent, and intelligent thinkers can; those who do not care, will not "[40].

Street art does not have these negative connotations - on the contrary. The political atmosphere around the world is obviously ripe for people who want to listen to art as the first word of a collective consciousness. People know what's going on, bu they need to see it in the arts to confirm it[41]. This is why their messages are popular.

Finally, it is not so easy for a regular person (who is not a journalist) to gain access just to state his opinion on TV or radio. The newspapers also are not open to immediate publication of any unsolicited or controversial material. Street art is free of the layered editorial complicity that we experience in so much of the media. There is no prerequisites, selection, institutional clumsiness. There is just one editor - the artist - in direct dialogue with the viewer.

5.2.7. Street art as the visual equivalent of blogs

From the above discussion of street art as an alternative to the media, there is an obvious analogy to be drawn with another platform - the Internet, and blogs in particular.

- Comparison of the basic characteristics of street art and blogs
Street art and blogs share a slew of common characteristics.
In their earlier stage, blogs were sometimes compared to graffiti - unsolicited, uncensored and highly personal forms of self-expression in a public space for everybody to see.

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40 Chaffee, Lyman G. (1993) *Political Protest and Street Art: Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries* Greenwood Press.
41 Lewisohn, Cedar (2008) *Street Art - The Graffiti Revolution* Tate Publishing

However, today blogs are called "the new paradigm for human communication"[42]

Being comparatively young phenomena, both street art and blogs are primarily used by young, liberal and open-minded people. Statistics confirm the cliches concerning European bloggers - they are young, politically and socially engaged, active, urban and in the top 10% of educated people.[43]

There are no statistics on street artist, but the stereotype for graffiti artists being mainly poor juvenile delinquents is now largely gone. People placing their work on the street - legally or not, as a hobby or a job - are now perceived as regular artists and can be of various ages and backgrounds. However, they are generally thought of as a progressive, forward-thinking and critical crowd as well.

Both street art and blogs are participatory media i.e. generated by people from within the very audience, who are not necessarily qualified or professional for the matter. In that way both are more democratic and less hostile - they are open to everyone, based on sharing and contributing, thus breaking the traditional model media produces - viewer consumes. This is especially valid for blogs who are a more and more serious threat to traditional media.

Just as street art (or even more so), blogs are associated with democracy. Most of all, blogs are a new platform for social debate and action, based on merging the individual voice with the community and vice-versa. With millions of blogs in different countries, the blogosphere can certainly be an influential factor for change. Being connected with others provokes thought and being well-informed provokes debate.

The community effect of blogs is mostly visible when they unite to support causes like human rights and environment protection. Blogs keep one's individuality and allows them to be a part of society at the same time. It makes heard voices that were never heard before, making them important in public debate - just like street art.

- Street art as an off-line extension of web 2.0
All of the similarities listed above are actually leading us to the definition of web 2.0.

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42 Kline, David and Burstein, Dan *Blog!: How the Newest Media Revolution is Changing Politics, Business, and Culture YEAR??*
43 www.bloggingeurope.net

Web 2.0 is an expression which was used for the first time in 2004 and referred to the second generation of Internet (aka Internet with a human face). The notion concerns a new "revolutionary" approach to the use of the web. It treats the Internet merely as a platform and is centered around the following elements:

- free user-generated content

- collaboration and information sharing

–   creativity

–   interactivity

Web 2.0.'s most emblematic applications are MySpace, YouTube, Wikipaedia, the blogosphere. They have literally broken the traditional business models and changed the situation drastically since their appearance - making obsolete the traditional marketing tools (such as big budget advertising), changing the concept of copy rights, abolishing media's monopoly over information distribution. They have changes the whole idea of "success" and "celebrities" by cutting out the middle man.

And although the notion Web 2.0. applies only to online applications, street art can be characterized in the same way. As The Guardian put it:

"Just as MySpace bands rocked the music industry, blogs scooped the newspapers and YouTube proved far more entertaining than TV, Street Art appears to be the art world's first taste of internet-fuelled people power"[44].

- Blogs in Bulgaria

The fact that I am paying ample attention to the parallel between street art and blogs is not random. It is very important to note that if the two work in similar ways, then this should be very good news for Bulgaria. The reason is the small, but active, well-developed and cosmopolitan blogging community that has managed to turn into a factor here and replace daily media for many young people.

The most influential political/economical weekly newspaper in Bulgaria even devoted an

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44 www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2008/may/11/art.exhibition

issue for them, saying "The virtual civil society is here. Next is the real one..."[45]. Bulgarian media expert Neli Ognyanova also says that in 2007 "the blogosphere was a subject with a position: for active defense of civil rights and civil control over the actions of the administration".

Indeed, blogs here often compensate the inadequacy and corruption of media and authorities on important social and political issues. They voice opinions that are predominant in public space, but somehow cannot get through to national TV channels. They are often thought to be representing the most progressive and educated part of young people. In a post called "A Portrait of the Blogger as a Young Man" one of the most famous Bulgarian bloggers Orlin uses the following terms to describe the Bulgarian blogging community: "socially engaged", "never satisfied", "environmentally friendly", "democrat".

Blogs have had a visible and interesting influence in politics, emerging from nowhere to become a factor not to be neglected. In many cases they have single-handedly provoked events, changed the outcomes of others, even brought to resignations. This is especially true when it comes to thorny, sensitive or hidden issues, covered insufficiently or with bias by the media. It was the blogging community who many times raised much noise online about outrageous law violations by businesses harming the environment. In some of the cases the noise lead to protests and later to results.

Bloggers also make censorship very difficult to work - if a political party or figure is influential and corrupt enough to shut up the media, there is little they can do about blogs. Another recent example from Bulgaria is a scandalous video of our ex-internal minister, making bad taste jokes. The video was taken off from the first site where it appeared, but this instantly provoked reaction and soon you could find it all over the Internet.

There have been attempts by the authorities to put blogs under their control, employing most undemocratic means. Programming specialist Michel Bozgunov was summoned to the police arrest last year "to report". There he was forced to sign that he will refrain from using his personal blog to distribute information "regarding illegal civil protests" (one year earlier

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45 Capital, issue 38 of 2007, Sept 19 - www.capital.bg/show.php?storyid=552502

Bozgunov had copied an appeal for a demonstration in favor of environment protection). This precedent of course was immediately told on his blog and provoked a massive and unified reaction of solidarity and support from people, provoking a massive debate on state issues in public space.

In a world where media, communication and information are controlled by the governments and business, blogs carry the potential and the characteristics of the new independent, interconnected and progressive community. They bring back the human face of the Internet and almost have a bit of a New Age hope, sensitivity and readiness for revolution. They come together with many other contemporary trends aspiring for a change of world order and end to consumerism - like the other Web 2.0 instruments (based on active participation and sharing), the return of individual human values, the concern for the environment.

On the other hand, as we have noted above street art works on the same principles and has the same potential as blogs.

Therefore, we have a reason to believe that its support and development could lead to substantial progress in the development of an independent arts scene, an independent platform and above all a civil society.

5.2.8. Street art as a tool for fostering democracy

To summarize the analysis of street art as a tool for developing civil society: in a country where we have substantial problems with population emigration, apathy and extremely low voter turn out, the power and potential of street art to involve citizens are not to be underestimated. On the contrary, they should be fully employed in an attempt to provoke a change in the status quo.

"In countries using street art, the messages conveyed augment the existing availability of information and ideas."[46]
Street art is reflective of its creators political opinions and creative desires, and these change from country to country. After all, if there are fewer limits for people's right to expression

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[46]   Chaffee, Lyman G. (1993) *Political Protest and Street Art: Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries* Greenwood Press.

(including aesthetically), there will be more messages and voices heard - and our society needs that. This is what democracy is all about - the right to informed choice.

Participating in street art may in fact be more of a lifestyle choice than a serious act of political defiance, but what more can we realistically ask of any artwork?[47]

5.3. STREET ART AS A WAY TO PROMOTE INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE AND EXCHANGE

The arts have been used numerous times by communities of all sorts to explore and affirm their identities.

A special place is often claimed for the arts in terms of a capacity to break down barriers

Street art could certainly be an effective instrument in that sense as well.

Its potential is even more enhanced by the fact that it could be used in several ways

1) as an art - introducing "other" cultures or elements of other cultures, mentalities and lifestyles to certain communities

2) as a technique - simply as a stylish/more original form to convey messages related to interculturalism. (just as graffiti and street art have already been used in that way numerous times by many brands for advertising purposes).

3) as a media - to raise debate on thorny issues. A case of that kind would be the competition Write4Gold in Sofia in 2006, when the topic of all the works had to be religion (Fig. 41). Another good example would be British artists Banksy's works on the wall in Palestine (Fig 42-44).

Altogether, that makes street art a great tool and a platform for pushing any agenda. However, it is especially suitable for promoting interculturalism for several reasons:

- Street art comes from graffiti, which comes from neighbourhoods that have had to deal with racial prejudice and many other similar problems. Today street art is largely accepted and embraced as an art form by all races, religions and cultures (even in the Arab world). That makes it a relevant platform to use to support interculturalism.

47 Lewisohn, Cedar (2008) *Street Art - The Graffiti Revolution* Tate Publishing

- Street art works on a very direct, personal level. As already discussed above there is no curator or editor and that makes the communication much more honest and effective.

- It can also get to narrow/specific/site specific audiences who may not trust or consume traditional media - by directly entering their daily environment.

– Street art also has a hip, „cool" credential that can be used effectively to reach young urban audiences.

– Additionally, as discussed in the beginning of this paper, street art has gone from underground to mainstream in the last couple of years and that makes it understandable and interesting to a much wider audience today.

- It is a great occasion to summon together artist of different cultural backgrounds/races/religions/cultures, thus fostering tolerance among them. As in most of the arts, this is especially effective with younger people and audiences.

- Street art has great potential to promote interculturalism, just because of the fact that the works are not movable, but the artists are highly so. A big part of street art is travelling a lot and leaving marks in strange places and foreign countries. In a very spontaneous and unpretentious way they meet and converse with other artists. If they create a cite-specific work they leave a trace and this is interesting because if the work in question comments a local issue, but the artist himself is of a different background, this is already creating a dialogue.

- Finally, street art has a certain credibility that institutions themselves (even the private or civil ones usually in charge of promoting interculturalism) generally lack. This is especially true in Bulgaria.

The message of a street art piece may be accepted or not and its aesthetic value may be questioned, but one doubt that street art does not arouse is the motivation behind it. It leaves the feeling that the message is coming directly from a human being, not from a governmental institution that paid an advertising agency to come up with a creative campaign.

In a post 9-11 era with numerous conspiracy theories in the air, people are not willing anymore to trust public institutions and are too cautious of propaganda and manipulation on the traditional mass media. That certainly gives street art an advantage as a tool of communication - of course depending on the subject.

In that sense, the street art "propaganda" popping up in the US in support of Senator Obama's candidacy for president was extremely interesting. Despite some isolated voices asking if this is a professionally organized campaign, generally the posters of street art superstar Shepard Fairy and other street artists were met with great interest, approval and enthusiasm (Fig 45-47). As it later turned out, in most of the cases the Obama offices had been directly responsible - although they very carefully kept plausible distance, for the purposes of "street cred" and obeying the law[48].

However, that fact did not bring any negative response - neither to the campaign, nor to the artists. The limited edition posters of Fairey were sold out immediately to resurface later on e-bay at much higher prices. Successful exhibitions were organized later to collect all the works popping up throughout the big cities. The general public remained fascinated with the idea and kept the presumption that the street artists "wouldn't have done it, if they didn't believe in Obama for real".

A similar Bulgarian example is the truck that candidate-mayor for Sofia Martin Zaimov used in 2007 – it was also drawn by the most popular Bulgarian artist Nast (Fig 48)

5.4. POTENTIAL FOR USE IN DEVELOPMENT OF COMMUNITIES AND CITIES

No matter if we are referring to arts projects by professional artists or activities that engage amateurs, youth and completely unsuspecting audiences, it is a fact that culture and arts have long been recognized to bring substantial and recognizable benefits (both measurable and non-measurable) in city and community development, regeneration and re-vitalization.
Arts and culture can improve the physical and emotional state of urban space through creative means.
Although encounters with the creative arts are frequently described in terms closer to epiphany than to a simple learning experience[49], the impacts of the arts are often described in terms of their effects on personal, communal and economic factors.

This is the subject of *The Art of Regeneration* for example, which was written by Charles

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48 www.nypost.com/seven/04242008/news/nationalnews/paint_misbehavin_in_team_os_street_art_107876.htm

49 Newman, Tony, Curtis, Katherine and Jo Stephens (2001) *Do community-based arts projects result in social gains? A review of literature.*

Landry, Lesley Greene, Franзois Matarasso and Franco Bianchini. It is based on over 10 years' experience of art and urban regeneration policy in the UK, Western Europe, Australia and the United States. One of its main findings in that cultural projects have played an increasingly important role in British urban regeneration since the mid-1980s, but recent developments have focused less on capital projects, and more on the capacity of arts activity to support community-led renewal. Charles Landry and Franзois Matarasso from Comedia summarise recent experiences of arts programmes in British cities in the following way:

"Arts and cultural activity have become an increasingly important part of urban regeneration in Britain, though the bulk of effort and resources to date has been on capital investment.
- Recently, increasing interest has been shown in participatory arts programmes which are low-cost, flexible and responsive to local needs.
- This use of the arts coincides with a shift in emphasis in regeneration strategies towards seeing local people as the principal asset through which renewal can be achieved.
– Arts programmes have been shown to contribute to enhancing social cohesion and local image; reducing offending behaviour; building private/public sector partnerships; promoting interest in the local environment; developing self-confidence; enhancing organisational capacity; supporting independence and exploring visions of the future."[50]

Looking at the tens of cases where arts programmes have made a positive contribution to local vitality and urban renewal, it is logical to presume that other types of social programme would have been equally productive. In some cases the answer that would certainly be true, but the arts do have a special impact:
They engage people's creativity, and so lead to problem solving.
They are about meanings, and enable dialogue between people and social groups.
They encourage questioning, and the imagination of possible futures.
They offer self-expression, which is an essential characteristic of the active citizen.
They are unpredictable, exciting and fun.[51]

Altogether, Landry and Matarasso defend that arts programmes are not an alternative to

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50 Landry, C., Greene, L. and Matarasso, F. (1996) *The art of regeneration: urban renewal through cultural activity,* Stroud, Comedia

51 Ibid

regeneration initiatives like environmental improvements, training schemes or youth development projects, but they are certainly a vital component which, "like yeast in dough, can transform a situation" in many ways.

5.4.1. Boosting the Economy

Discussing city problems Landrey and Green claim that urban renewal initiatives have in the past tended to overlook the importance of social factors in their pursuit of economic growth. This situation is beginning to change, they say:

"Many of those working to renew our cities have come to see the human potential of a community as its most important asset. They accept that wealth creation, social cohesion and quality of life ultimately depend on confident, imaginative citizens who feel empowered and are able to fulfil their potential. And they have turned increasingly to the arts as a mechanism to trigger that individual and community development. They have prioritised cultural programmes above capital investment for several reasons:

- Cultural programmes are relatively cheap and very cost-effective.

- They can be developed quickly in response to local needs and ideas.
- They are flexible and can change as required.
- They offer a potentially high return for very low risk.
- They can have an impact out of all proportion to their cost.[52]

Indeed there are numerous cases where urban regeneration through the **arts have empirically proved to be able to spur local economic growth and development**. Roberts and Sykes point to the example of the formerly derelict Custard Factory in Birmingham, UK, which was turned into a creative epicenter of the city. This happened with the help of a city grant, which lead to twice as much private investments, thus creating eventually 1,000 jobs[53].
The redevelopment of Liverpool docks, which included the 'Tate of the North', a maritime museum and TV studio, was a high-profile cultural regeneration initiative which set the tone for the 1980s. Major cities like Glasgow, Manchester and Birmingham put in place cultural development strategies, and committed millions of pounds to them. The notion of the 'cultural

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52 Ibid
53 Roberts Peter W. and Sykes, Hugh *Urban Regeneration: A Handbook SAGE, 2000*

industries' was launched.

The use of cultural activity to fuel urban regeneration was principally economic in conception and purpose. Its credibility was given a significant boost by a Policy Studies Institute survey, *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* (1988), which presented the arts as employer of 500,000 people, the fourth biggest invisible export earner and generally a major contributor to productive employment and prosperity in Britain [54].

In the US they have similarly shown how they can contribute to urban renewal, often through the creation of studios and 'cultural quarters' in run-down central districts.

The Canadian government has also often resorted to arts and culture initiatives as the first initiatives to be introduced into communities that suffer from low economic and social conditions, and they most frequently produce positive and nourishing results. Regeneration initiatives such as street façade improvement contribute to economic regeneration for ailing commercial streets[55].

Retelling old heritage buildings (or landmarks) historical significance can give heritage resources new life.

Another approach is revitalizing urban landmarks which can promote cultural tourism and regional economic benefits.

5.4.2. Enhancing Social Capital

Since the evolution of the community arts movement in the late sixties, it has been widely argued that the economic benefits of arts activity are only part of the picture.

There is another way in which arts projects have become an important part of community development strategies.

Alongside any creative achievements and educational benefits, arts interventions are

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54 Myerscough, J *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain* Policy Studies Institute, 1988

55 Creative City Network of Canada, *Making the case for culture: Urban Renewal and Revitalization: Key arguments for renewal and revitalization through culture-based initiatives* - http://www.creativecity.ca/resources/making-the-case/urban- renewal-1.html

increasingly credited with having **positive and measurable impacts on local social capital[56].**. This has been cited as a process which establishes networks, mutual trust and co-operation within communities for the benefit of all.

When the UK government's Social Exclusion Unit reported on the role of arts, sport and leisure for example, one of their key findings was that **supporting participation in arts and sport can aid neighbourhood renewal through improved performance on indicators of health, crime, employment and education[57]**.

5.4.3 Revitalizing the Spirit of a Community

Apart from their positive influence on measurable social and economic factors, arts and culture probably make their strongest contribution to cities and communities in the form of non-measurable impact - boosting the local spirit, sense of community, notion of identity and idea for belonging. Thus arts and culture can help regenerate a city's core in many ways[58].

The book *Cool Places: Geographies of Youth Cultures* by Tracey Skelton and Gill Valentine for example quotes three projects in which public art generated by youth contributed to the creation of public spaces that provide either a vision of change or an occasion for celebration and enjoyment.
One of these examples is the Detroit summer project - an inter-generational youth program centered around street art aiming to rebuild, redefine and re-spirit Detroit from the ground up. Its goal was to establish new relationships - between young and old, workers and unemployed. The project proved largely successful.

Another example is based on a main street revitalization programs that include arts and culture programming and proved to increase community vitality.

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56 Newman, Tony, Curtis, Katherine and Jo Stephens (2001) *Do community-based arts projects result in social gains? A review of literature.*
57 Ibid, a quote from a report of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, 1999

58 Creative City Network of Canada*, Making the case for culture: Urban Renewal and Revitalization: Key arguments for renewal and revitalization through culture-based initiatives* - http://www.creativecity.ca/resources/making-the-case/urban-renewal-1.html

Many other positive experiences result in identity-related developments. Arts and culture can re-identify negatively stereotyped communities. A Canadian study argues that cultural branding and community identity building, through commonly designed or characterized infrastructure, can create a new character in a typecast community[59].

Revitalization and regeneration can lead to the rediscovering of the local heritage and local history, as well as to redefining the meaning of neglected historic centres. This in itself leads to increased awareness of the place's and the local population's identity.

At the same time, public art can not only rehabilitate the past, but also to explore visions of the future. The artist's ability to see problems from a different perspective and offer previously unheard-of solutions is vital to urban regeneration. Artists like Angie Hiesl in Cologne or Christo in Berlin have created work which has challenged residents' ideas of their cities. Arts festivals have been organised as a way of drawing attention to the possibility of change and helping people imagine what the future might be. Small changes can have a great impact on urban life, as authorities in Manchester, Bradford and elsewhere have found.

Finally, artistic detailing of public space can foster community cohesion and perhaps interconnected identities[60].

According to Lewisohn: "Art is a primary mode of expression, an unmitigated aestetisizing of how people see themselves in relation to the world and as integral to their immediate space or surroundings. Physically connecting with the street through art or graffiti is an uniquely corporal way to integrate with the city or with your neighbourhood.[61]"

5.4.4. Branding the City

In the light of the identity and image-related findings above, it is important to note the increasing potential of street art as a positive element of a city's overall looks and image. Cities become brands. They are managed like companies and marketed like products in order

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59 Ibid
60 Ibid
61 Lewisohn, Cedar (2008) *Street Art - The Graffiti Revolution* Tate Publishing

to attract citizens, tourists and investment.

With the recent popularity and the transition of street art into the mainstream, its vibrancy has turned into an indication of the general vitality of a city. Street art has now become an important characteristic and a tool that helps the process of branding or re-branding the city. It is used by officials to market cities as culturally charged, vibrant and exciting places.
In this way street art is also increasingly an attraction for cultural tourists.

A good illustration of that trend is an article in The Guardian back in 2006:
"Melbourne is the proud capital of street painting with stencils. Its large, colonial-era walls and labyrinth of back alleys drip with graffiti that is more diverse and original than any other city in the world. Well, that was until a few weeks ago, when preparations for the Commonwealth games brought a tidal wave of grey paint, obliterating years of unique and vibrant culture overnight.
This may seem like no great tragedy to readers of the Daily Mail, but Melbourne's graffiti scene is a key factor in its status as the continent's hothouse of creativity and wilful individualism. "[62]

As Sarah Shiller, a co-founder of the highly regarded web site for celebration of street art Wooster Collective notes: "There has definitely been a shift in the attitude of conventional media and the art circles as a whole. Five years ago the New York Times would always talk about vandalism while referring to street art, and last week in their travel section they wrote about how street art is one of the main reasons to visit New York."[63]
Other street art projects and initiatives that have had a great PR for the cities they have been conducted in are:

Tate Modern's Street Art exhibition - In the first commission to use the building's iconic river façade, and the first major public museum display of street art in London, one of the most popular touristic attractions the Tate Modern gallery presented the work of six internationally acclaimed artists whose work is intricately linked to the urban environment. A Street Art Walking Tour accompanied the exhibition: an urban tour of site-specific art from a group of

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62 www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2006/mar/24/art.australia
63 A quote from an interview for Magazine One, issue 73 of July, 2008

five Madrid-based street artists.

The Cans Festival in London - an event organized by iconic (and still anonymous) street art figure Bansky. This festival for stencil art attracts some of the world's most amazing stencil artists to fly into London to create new work in a derelict tunnel over a weekend. With permission, the tunnel was closed down in May 2008 to make way for an onslaught of color and sculptural installations. The tunnel's location was kept secret while the artists set to work making their mark in the center of London. On Saturday the address was announced and crowds, who were invited to bring their own stencils, flocked to Waterloo numbering more than 30,000 people.

The Graffiti Project - an unique project in Scotland, where in 2007 four of the worlds' top graffiti artists (two of whom were Brazilian) have been commissioned to paint the oldest castle in Scotland Kelburn Castle with vibrant colours.

In New York a prime example was the 2006 11 Spring Street project in New York, which saw several stories of prime real estate in Soho covered in graffiti by street artists from all over the world. Opened up to the public for one weekend before the developers moved in, the project was a bang-up success drawing crowds numbering in the thousands.

5.4.5. Stimulating decentralization

It has to be noted that the approach to branding a city, boosting its vitality and attracting more artistically-savvy visitors through street art (among other things) can be beneficial in one more way - it facilitates the decentralization of culture and arts development in a country.
This is a rather important point in Bulgaria as the Sofia-centered cultural life is very hard to break out of.

On the other hand, the historical overview of local street art in the beginning of this study shows that graffiti and street art have existed first independently in cities and towns throughout the country - thus creating strong youth communities around them.

Hence, street arts and public arts have a potential to be explored and developed in terms of developing small towns and boosting local character and confidence.

6. CULTURAL POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

So far we have explored the multi-faceted potential of street art to have a substantial and positive impact on society. We have also touched upon its inarguable relevance in the light of the current political, social and cultural situation in Bulgaria. Many case studies have been cited in this paper and there are of course many more to be mentioned.

Should the Bulgarian public authorities consider and accept the arguments laid out above, there are many good practices and positive examples to follow to create cultural policies supporting and developing street art.

Among the most obvious, tried and tested cultural policy measures and tools for this purpose would be the following:

6.1. EMBEDDING IN LEGISLATION AND REGULATIONS A GENERAL TOLERANCE AND POLICIES IN RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT OF STREET ART

Those could include designating graffiti areas, as well as creating outlets of expression for street artists - opportunities that would channel creativity and prevent vandalism to a certain extent.

The City of Sydney for example has found that integrated management approaches to graffiti and street art reduced graffiti vandalism by 66% in the Gold Coast and by 37% in Ipswich[64].

In this sense, Sydney's aerosol art and graffiti policy would be a brilliant example.
The constructive and respectful approach to graffiti and street art implied in it can be considered as revolutionary when it comes to designing public policy related to that issue. It is also abundant with simple and appropriate measures for supporting, protecting and promoting street art. To quote only some of the key points in it:

- **"5.08** That graffiti can act as a voice for marginal peoples and can provide a unique insight

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64 Graffiti Crime Prevention Plan, Dept. of Justice

into issues that may otherwise be ignored[65];

- "Aerosol Art as Public Art

Legally produced aerosol art forms part of South Sydney's public art collection. These works will be documented and included in the aerosol art and graffiti database.

Occasionally an illegally executed work, because of its quality or subject matter may remain in the public domain."[66]

- "Aerosol Art Programs

Council will establish on-going aerosol art programs. These programs will:

• Identify, create, publicise and manage legal aerosol art sites, including temporary building site hoardings.

• Research, document and communicate procedures and methods for establishing legal aerosol art sites.

• Provide mentoring master-classes for established aerosol artists to pass on their skills and techniques to less experienced practitioners.

• Provide opportunities for artists to create, exhibit and sell their work.

• Link artists with training and employment opportunities.

• Respond to community needs, especially in relation to special incidents, for example when a tribute or memorial mural is required." [67]

- "Funding for specific activities can be sought from organisations such as the Australia Council for the Arts, the NSW Ministry for the Arts, the Queens Trust for Young Australians, the Australian Youth Foundation and the state Attorney Generals Department."[68]

Apart from being open to graffiti/street related project on public property, the city of Sydney also acts as a middleman between street artists and private property owners.

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65 *Aerosol, Art and Graffiti* (2003) The City of Sydney's aerosol art and graffiti policy

66 Ibid
67 Ibid
68 Ibid

6.2. INITIATING AND/OR PROVIDING FINANCIAL AND OTHER SUPPORT OF EVENTS DEVELOPING STREET ART

Such events could be exhibitions and competitions of different types and scale, possibly as well as with different topics and focus.

An especially effective measure is the organising and supporting of big-scale events with international participation - those have proven to be highly attractive and better trusted if there is a presence of successful foreign artists. They bring in a good example, showcase different contemporary styles and techniques, contribute to networking and learning.

Events are also believed to unite the local scene and inspire in it a desire to prove quality. They create a sense of local style and pride (especially if the event is hosted here) and decrease hatred and negativity.

In the same way, supporting financially and morally Bulgarian participation on international street art forums would produce similar effects - creating a sense of achievement and local pride in the Bulgarian street art community, especially in the cases of success.

A good example in that sense is the first participation of street artists Nast and Esteo in a graffiti jam in Poland. There the two artists represented Bulgaria internationally for the first time, provoking excitement with their style and ending up on the cover of a magazine.

This comes to say that export and import of street artists definitely boost interculturalism, tolerance and integration. It promotes us as a scene and creates awareness of our culture. Certainly, international exposure also encourages local artists to progress and gives them a chance to network

6.3. DEVELOPING THE YOUNGER AUDIENCES FROM AS EARLY AS POSSIBLE

To popularize street art as an art and not vandalism, it would be only logical and relevant to include an introduction to it as a part of the curriculum in arts classes - at regular schools and certainly art schools.

Working with art schools to develop new projects and initiatives involving street art and art in public space are also a viable option (even on the simple level on painting on the school facade).

Another way to go about is through initiating and funding children events related to arts on the street. One similar event was the socialist international assembly of children "Flag of peace", in which kids from all over the world would gather to sing, act and draw - including with chalk on the asphalt in all of Sofia.

6.4. EMPLOYING STREET ART IN URBAN LANDSCAPE SOLUTIONS AND DEVELOPMENT

This can be done by attracting and engaging street artists in projects of renewal and revitalization of run-down neighbourhoods, streets with bad reputation or just buildings in bad condition.

Giving away central/emblematic public spots even in good condition for site-specific artistic works is also an option to bring colour, art and diversity in to the urban community environment.

By creatively and practically involving the street artists or simply the local residents and youth, a positive effect on the community is almost guaranteed.

One example that proves that is the Placeworx project - an innovative community-university partnership between the University of Illinois at Chicago and the Mexican Fine Arts Center Museum located in Pilsen, the heart of Chicago's Mexican community. It provided opportunities and spaces for young people to creatively participate in planning the future of their community.

Another simpler and smaller-scale example was the Electric Beacon Project in New York. For one weekend street artists gathered toto paint 24 big murals (8' x 12' each) that were installed in the windows of a vacant 19th century factory. The street was closed and visitors were able to listen to live music and watch artists create their pieces. There was also be a gallery show

featuring many of the artists involved in the windows project.

The Australian authorities have also developed a in interesting and obviously effective project called LikeArt **Street Art.** It invites citizens on a journey through the urban villages of Leichhardt and Annandale, where they can engage with large artworks as they walk through winding streetscapes, canal paths, and parks nestled beside historic waterways meandering down to Sydney's harbour.

This project includes elements like The Wall2Wall Mural **Art** Competition. The latter calls emerging artists to create a large scale public art murals on large, highly visible public walls with all materials paid, plus a prize for the commission. Thus the project wants to improve the local area and highlight the contribution that young people make to public spaces. This is also a great opportunity for emerging artists to get noticed, to explore issues which are important, and to positively contribute to the arts.[69]

Finally, an example on a grand scale would be Marseilles, where a whole City of Street Arts is being built near the city. It will provide 36, 000 sq. m. for exploration and development of all kinds of urban arts.[70]

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69 www.leichhardt.nsw.gov.au

70 www.lacitedesartsdelarue.net

7. CONCLUSION

Street art and graffiti in Bulgaria have a relatively short history, but they have proved to be one of the few artistic activities that spontaneously excited and influenced a part of the young generation in the 90s and the beginning of the 2000s.

With the events and works that appeared during the peak of the local movement in 2005-2006, the presence of potential and talent became clear. This talent later on moved to realize itself in different more commercial spheres, thus proving that graffiti and street art can produce real artists and cultural industries cadres.

Presently, we observe a demise of quality, quantity and enthusiasm in grafiiti/street art works. There is a loss of momentum and it is obvious that an external interference and encouragement is needed to give a boost and a motivation to the new generation of street artists.

This however is only the first and most basic reason to support street art. As this research shows, its impact is actually reaches far greater than it seems. It reaches many more people than the kids involved in the drawing. Its effect can be traced much later after a mural has disappeared.

Street art in all of its possible forms has proved to educate a taste, stimulate an interest in arts and raise the visual standards of a community's residents. It creates a sense of ownership and right to public space, otherwise invaded by corporate and consumer culture. It also encourages participation and provokes for dialogue, thus engaging people in an integration process.

Street art works for fostering democracy and strengthening a civil society. It gives a unique local air to a place, thus boosting the local spirit.

It can also be a solution to many landscape issue to a great effect - if only considered and used right.

As evident, there are many ways in which street art could be used. However, what I tried to prove in this work goes further that that: I believe that not only it could, but it *should* be supported and employed vigorously in favor of many causes in Bulgaria.

First, because of its unique advantages - street art is largely inexpensive, different, trusted, people-powered, popular in mainstream culture and above all - effective.

Secondly, because it is *especially* suitable for the Bulgarian social and cultural context.

We are now a post-communist, post-transition country where most institutions and traditions have been discredited. The arts and culture have a hard time, struggling to find a model of existence, identity and sustainability. There is a wide gap between the old and young generations in all spheres - be it arts, architecture, management, government. The old are usually incapable to catch up, adapt and be adequate with the contemporary world and the young do not yet have access to a power, that would allow them to cause change.

Fresh blood, new approaches and action are needed in many spheres - such as audience animation, arts education, city branding, landscaping, community building, civil position formation etc.

Street art may not be the only possible solution, but it certainly is one well worth the attention and support of public authorities.

Fig. 1. Typical traditional graffiti

Fig. 2. Jean-Michelle Basquiat

Fig. 3. A mural by Keith Harring

Fig. 4. A work by Pignon Ernst-Pignon

Fig. 5. A selection of Banksy's work – perceived as typical stencil art.

Fig. 6. Typical sticker art

Fig. 7. Urban Blooz

Fig. 8. Lichtfaktor

Fig. 9. Graffiti Research Lab

Fig. 10. A frame from Blu's animation Muto

Fig. 11-12. JR

Fig. 13. Mark Jenkins installation of a homeless person

Fig. 14. Blu & JR

Fig. 15. Banksy in Palestine

Fig. 16. A work by Knudzich on elevator doors

Fig. 17. 3-D street art by Julian Beever

Fig. 18. Faile

Fig.19. Sixeart
Fig. 20 Miss Van

Fig. 21. Henk Hofstra – Art Eggcindent

Fig. 22. Bansky on the clinic walls in Bristol

Fig. 23. Tate Modern facade

Fig. 24. Mural in Varna

Fig. 25. Header piece by Nasimo
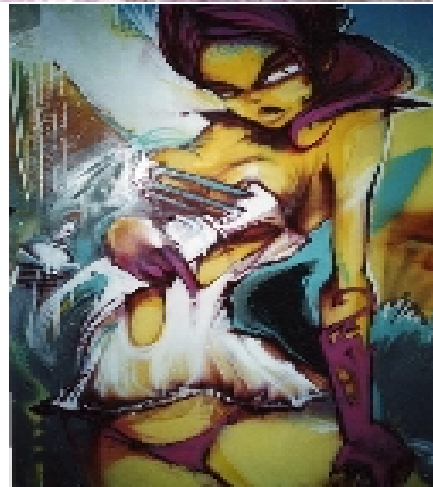

Fig. 27. Porn

Fig. 28-29. Porn

Fig. 30-31. Porn

Fig. 32-36. Nasty girls

Fig. 37. A painting form Pushkin museum on the street of Moscow

Fig. 38. Befast mural

Fig. 39-40 Belfast Murals

Fig. 41. Write4Gold competition Sofia 2006

Fig. 42-44. Banksy in Palestine

Fig. 45-47 Barrack Obama street art campaign

Fig. 48 Campaign truck

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www.capital.bg

9.3. INTERVIEWS

Artists:

Nast
Zka11
Erka
Scum
Tomek

Municipality representatives:
Sofia
Targovishte

*Company representatives***:**
Nissan (Yavor Kolarov)
Gravis (Rossitsa Karatoteva)
Sprite (Maya Anotnova)
Events:
Street Art Fest Varna (Tsvetelin Yolov)
Jam on It (Boyan Pehlivanov)
ND2ND Graffest Nesebar (Stanislav Trifonov)
Media:
Magazine 1 (Ivaylo Spasov)
graffart.eu (Zka 11)
Harsh magazine (Tomek Lazarov)

10. VITA

Bistra Andreeva was born in 1978 in Targovishte, Bulgaria.

She studied in the English Language School in Ruse, Bulgaria and later graduated from the American University in Bulgaria with a BA degree in Journalism and Mass Communications (and a minor in Fine Arts).

She worked for five years in Bulgaria's leading independent TV production company, where she was an executive producer and a market researcher.

For the next two years she worked as an editor for Magazine One, Bulgaria writing and editing stories on music, culture and arts. There she also edited the first book about Bulgarian graffiti and helped actively in the organization and promotion of cultural events.

In 2007 she moved to Belgrade to pursue an MA degree in Cultural Management and Policy on the Balkans. Upon returning to Bulgaria, she joined the team of Sofia Dance Week – the first festival for contemporary dance in the country, where she was responsible for the marketing, PR and web site of the event.