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The Community-Building Potential of Street Art: Ephemeral Communities Formed Around Ephemeral Art

Abstract

The article analyzes the phenomenon of street art in the context of its impact on the creation of local or global communities of both creators and audiences. It takes into consideration various forms of expression such as graffiti, community murals, or interventions by individual artists. It examines to what extent the communities formed around artistic activities are lasting and cohesive. Graffiti, as a form of art typical of the hip-hop subculture, represents expressions by groups that are closed and anonymous for the majority of society. Despite strong connections, these groups are usually temporary and may disband after the completion of specific projects. Other forms of street art are typically created by individual artists seeking to develop a unique style. Open, global networks of enthusiasts, activists, and organizations form around them, with the internet and social media serving as platforms used to maintain the connection between artists and their audience. Some street artists (e.g. JR or Swoon) are particularly sensitive to social issues and contribute to forming and sustaining local communities through their creations, even if they do not necessarily belong to them. A specific form of street art are community murals commissioned by a community to enhance its identity and cohesion. Street art and graffiti, therefore, have the ability to create communities on various levels, even despite their informal and ephemeral nature.

Keywords: street art, graffiti, art in public space, art and communities.

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Wspólnotowy potencjał sztuki street artu: efemeryczne wspólnoty wokół efemerycznej sztuki

Abstrakt

Tekst analizuje zjawisko street artu w kontekście jego wpływu na tworzenie lokalnych bądź globalnych wspólnot zarówno twórców jak i odbiorców. Pod uwagę bierze kilka odmiennych form ekspresji, jak graffiti, murale społecznościowe czy interwencje konkretnych, indywidualnych artystów. Analizuje, na ile tworzące się wokół artystycznych działań wspólnoty są trwałe i zwarte. Graffiti, jako sztuka subkultury hip-hop, stanowi wyraz zamkniętych dla większości społeczeństwa, anonimowych grup. Mimo silnych związków, grupy te są zwykle doraźne i mogą się rozpaść po zakończeniu konkretnych projektów. Inne formy street artu zwykle tworzone są przez indywidualnych artystów, którzy dążą do wytworzenia niepowtarzalnego stylu. Skupiają oni wokół siebie otwarte, globalne sieci miłośników oraz działaczy i organizacji, a Internet i media społecznościowe pomagają utrzymać związek między artystami a ich publicznością. Niektórzy artyści street artu (np. JR czy Swoon) są szczególnie wrażliwi na sprawy społeczne, pomagają więc poprzez swą twórczość zawiązywać i podtrzymywać wspólnoty lokalne, choć sami do nich nie należą. Specyficzną formą street artu są murale społecznościowe, zamawiane u artystów przez daną wspólnotę w celu jej identyfikacji i umocnienia. Street art i graffiti mają więc zdolność tworzenia wspólnot na różnych poziomach, choć są one nieformalne i efemeryczne.

Słowa kluczowe: *street art*, graffiti, sztuka w przestrzeni publicznej, sztuka a wspólnoty

Introduction

Cohesion and stability used to be the inherent characteristic of communities, but today we are dealing with the loosening of strong ties and the formation of temporary, one-sided relationships that arise from immediate interests and needs. In the context of the obvious atrophy of existing communities, on the one hand, and the processes of formation of new, unstable and short-lived communities, on the other, it is worth taking a look at art, which has always been an important element in the creation of cultural codes common to large groups (European culture, national culture, or even small but consolidated subcultures). Does contemporary street art, which is extremely popular around the world, have community-building potential? Does its transience encourage or hinder the accumulation of specific target groups around it? Are these groups homogeneous or diverse, are they permanent or more ad hoc? And finally, does the formation of such groups support art itself and does it compromise its sustainability and preservation? This article is a proposal to reflect on such issues.

Graffiti: a closed subculture

Many researchers and artists define graffiti in contrast to street art, demonstrating its distinctiveness based on specific criteria such as goals, legitimacy, content and legibility of the message, variety of forms and techniques, relation to the art world and the way in which street art is used (Riggle 2010: 53; Lewishon 2008: 63). However, graffiti is increasingly integrated into the popular understanding of street art, as evidenced by one of Google's largest portals: Google Arts & Culture, where under "Street Art: Discover the history, place and creators of street art" the first two tabs are "History of the Movement" – starting with Graffiti – and "Graffiti 101." I am also a proponent of classifying graffiti as a distinctive and original form within the broader phenomenon of street art (Gralińska-Toborek 2019: 12–13), but I must admit that in the context of the problem of commonality the two are quite distinct from each other and need to be analyzed.

Graffiti artists (also known as "writers") are anonymous to the general public and are known by nicknames rather than real names. They are an important part of the hip hop subculture (along with hip hop music and breakdancing). Many publications (Moch 2016, Macdonald 2001) attribute the subculture to young people, but it should be noted that hip-hop already has a tradition of more than 40 years and many of the artists who create the music from which the phenomenon is named have already turned 60 years old. So it can be said that hip-hop culture today is created by the second generation, which does not mean that the first generation has completely stopped its activities. The situation is similar with graffiti: old and very young graffiti artists create side by side on the street walls, although of course the younger ones have the advantage (more time, less responsibility, they are more willing to take risks). Even the older ones who want to develop creatively often prefer to create legal, large compositions. Therefore, graffiti is young in nature, but – repeatedly in popular culture, fashion and design – it has become a style used in the commercial world by professionals. Graffiti today has two forms: subcultural, created directly on the street, and commercial, suggesting a youthful and independent style¹. Therefore, today it is difficult to visually identify graffiti artists and hip-hop musicians – mass-produced oversized clothing inspired by 90s American hip-hop fashion, is appearing in chain clothing stores, and a sizable portion of streetwear fashion adopters are not fully aware of its origins. More than one teenage girl wears a sweatshirt with the image of Tupac, without knowing any of his songs².

Subcultures are, in fact, groups of people bound together by shared beliefs, actions, and lifestyles, such as clothing. For graffiti artists, action is the most important unifying factor. Usually illegal graffiti is formed by a small group – the crew (also known as squad), consisting of two or three authors, rarely larger. Individuals have their own nicknames (pseudonyms), written in the form of fancy "tags"

¹ Which makes it impossible to consider this subculture a counterculture today.

² Tupac Amaru Shakur – American rapper, one of the most influential musicians of the 1990s. He died in 1996 at the age of 25 as a result of gunshot wounds from gang fights.

(signatures usually written on a single line), but crews also have their own separate names consisting of several letters (e.g. B. TMS, NTK). “Taggers” often work in multiple groups, so that each collective graffiti is signed with individual artists’ tags. The collective action is not just about the painting itself, but about the entire process: design, choice of location, observation of the location while working, photo and film documentation, and finally sometimes the editing of the videos. In this process everyone has a role and everyone is committed to the principle of solidarity and loyalty (Moch 2016: 57). Intra-group relationships between graffiti artists, while strong, are ad hoc:

Group actions of graffiti performers in various pre-selected locations build community relations. They are very important, even if they are not among the most durable – graffiti groups generally disband after a period of organized actions, and their participants form new social-artistic constellations (Moch 2016: 57).

The different groups compete with each other, but show mutual appreciation. This applies to experienced graffiti artists who have great knowledge of painting. Inexperienced writers may find themselves being painted over or having their work labeled with the infamous term “toy” (amateur, beginner). In the broader hip-hop subculture, graffiti artists are divided into groups of several people, which are far more anonymous than music groups. The rapper’s image spreads quickly on the Internet and is recognized not only by the community. The writer (unless he is a rapper) usually hides his image to avoid being recognized as someone who breaks the law by creating illegal graffiti.

The main part of the graffiti works are colorful compositions of letters that make up the tag. Their content is thus reduced to the signature itself, and speaks of the presence and prowess of a person or group. For outsiders, there is no legible meaning (Baudrillard 2007: 103–104), so it is difficult to say that this art is intended for wide reception and carries a message. Outsiders only perceive its form, although it is judged negatively by the unwilling as an alien and stigmatizing element of the place³. Thus, it is an element that creates a bond only inside the subculture, although outside it may appear as a form that aestheticizes and even globalizes the city. Graffiti artists do not work for the wider community of residents, although they often display local patriotism. They identify with places – for example, with a “neighborhood,” i.e. a district or city. However, the various local graffiti scenes, documented meticulously on social media, do not show clear stylistic differences. Rather, graffiti is global, universal, repeatable all over the world. So if one can speak of a graffiti community, these are mainly close, local groups of performers who know each other and work together, and a global graffiti community that tends to associate with nicknames and communicate through social media. Thus, it can be said that there is a global observation of local activities.

³ It has become accepted to include graffiti as an example that confirms the broken glass theory (Kelling, Coles 2000; Gralińska-Toborek 2020: 63–64).

Street art artists – ephemeral collaborations that create ephemeral art

Unlike graffiti artists, street art artists (and I understand it broadly as all forms of stenciling, stickers, interventions, muralism, etc.⁴) prefer independent work to collaborations. Even when they come together in a single project, they flesh out their own style and remain easily recognizable (e.g. single collaborations: Os Gemeos and Banksy, or D*Face and Shepard Fairey). While there are some lasting duos, such as Herakut (Jasmin Siddiqui, Falk Lehmann), Os Gemeos (twin brothers Otavio and Gustavo Pandolfo) or Etam CRU (Mateusz Gapski, Przemek Blejzyk), where each work is a harmonious whole, they are rare. Unlike graffiti, which operates with certain universal letter forms and rather sparse iconography (arrows, stars, bubbles, streaks, crowns, “characters” – i.e. figures in comic book style), street art is extremely diverse and rich in references to art of all eras and trends. It has almost unlimited possibilities, with each artist seeking their own recognizable feature⁵. Although in many cases, especially in mural painting, one can see a fascination with various avant-garde trends, there are no art groups or schools in street art. Avant-garde communities of artists were based on the views they shared and the common goals they set for art (Sztabinski 2011). Thus, they often formulated manifestos that preceded artistic practice. Street art, meanwhile, is art without theory; artists do not issue platform proposals (Mancini 2019: 33–34, Gralińska-Toborek 2019: 19–21), are reluctant to speak about their art, do not write long texts and, above all, do not share common goals. They often express their goals in short slogans posted directly on their walls or on their own websites. However, these are individual messages that do not testify to the realization of some common goals of a group of artists; rather, they refer to the audience and it is with them that they want to establish a relationship. Artists often engage in dialogues with each other directly on the walls, as Suzan Hansen brilliantly reported, observing for years the wall of the Poudland supermarket in London, where the appearance of Banksy’s *Slave Labour* stencil and the story of its disappearance triggered a flurry of subsequent street art works there (Hansen, Fynn 2015, 2016). The artists feel they represent a broad artistic group – in fact, it could be called global –but they are not an “international” united by common ideological goals. They are usually “freelancers,” working on their own account and seeking originality. Tristan Manco called stencils and stickers that repeat the same tag or another image “street logos,” which can be understood as self-advertising, the artist’s trademark: “The tag is a small advertisement for the artist – a logo for the ego” (Manco 2014: 73). Interestingly, especially in mural painting, which is usually created legally and through various foundations or organizations, the principle of anonymity disappears. Artists, although they create under pseudonyms and sign their works with tags that act as signatures and logos, are well known by street art admirers as well as art market specialists⁶.

⁴ By the term intervention I refer to all techniques and strategies that do not stem from the painting tradition, such as moss graffiti, urban jewelry, guerilla knitting, mosaics, etc. A whole repertoire of these techniques is listed by Katarzyna Niziołek (2015: 55–56).

⁵ I don’t want to call it style, as it is not always about form – sometimes it is about technique, material, and sometimes it is about strategy.

⁶ Although Banksy’s identity is still unknown, he is considered one of the richest street art artists.

The immense popularity of street art and its rapid spread around the world means that it is now difficult to speak of it as a trend in art, and of its creators as a community. Although many of them meet at festivals and work together in various projects, they do not form a grouping or community. They are ephemeral, ad hoc groups binding themselves around a specific project (Gralińska-Toborek 2022: 326–329). Street art realizations are also not very permanent. Even mural painting is subject to deterioration. Paints fade, flake off the walls, building owners make repairs and upgrades, sacrificing the works in the process⁷. Everyone agrees that street art is an ephemeral art. All except the viewers who attach themselves to its manifestations the most.

Global network of connections

While the artists themselves do not form a narrow and powerful community, they are connected by a global network to street art enthusiasts, activists and organizations that popularize street art. Street art organizations, such as galleries, museums and foundations, mediate between artists and street art audiences and sponsors. The aforementioned Google Arts & Culture portal lists 100 street art collections created by a variety of organizations. These are “physical” collections – including specific works in urban spaces and displayed inside galleries or museums. At the same time, street art is being popularized virtually. Countless websites and social networks that collect and present photographs of works and private collections of photos (such as Pinterest and Flickr) make street art documentation available to all web users. Phone apps for locating street art works in specific cities and online maps of murals are also being developed to promote street art tourism – both organized and individual.

In addition, the artists themselves not only share their comments and photographs of finished works with viewers on social media such as Facebook and Instagram, but often also show the process of creating the work itself (Gralińska-Toborek 2022: 329–330). While in urban spaces it is rare to see artists at work (mostly muralists, who usually paint for several days on a boom lift, or during planned festivals), on the Internet it is possible to follow day by day, how they realize their projects, and find out more about their plans. The most famous have an audience of millions: Shepard Fairey is followed by 1.3 million people on Instagram, JR by 1.8 million, and Banksy by 12 million (as of the end of 2023). Although these sites are called social networks, they do not create communities of people who know each other. Rather, they are neo-tribes in the sense proposed by Michael Maffesoli (Maffesoli 2008), which are united by an interest in street art, although they are not, as the creator of this concept wanted, closed and small-scale groups, but rather a network of interests or a global mosaic of complete strangers⁸.

⁷ In the catalogue of works created thanks to the Urban Forms Foundation between 2009 and 2019 in Lodz, 32 out of 167 works no longer exist. Among them were temporary installations, but also murals (Kazimierska-Jerzyk, Latuszewska-Syrda 2020).

⁸ Interestingly, some forms of street art, especially murals, arouse great interest among older people, as I observe during lectures for Universities of the Third Age and during excursions along mural trails. Street art workshops are as often dedicated to seniors as to children and young people (Gralińska-Toborek,

Art for the community

Street art, while global, can also have a local dimension and significant community-building potential on multiple levels. Lindsey Mancini (2019) argues that the two fundamental principles of street art are impermanence and community. The latter factor is related to the idea that the work of art is a gift to everyone who interacts with it (Mancini 2019: 33–34). That’s why artists leave their works on the street, in public spaces, so that they are accessible to many viewers. This direct access and the lack of a specific “owner” make this work of art a gift that is, in a sense, placed “in the care” of the viewer. That may sound lofty, but street art often becomes a source of concern for residents. The above-mentioned situation, when Banksy’s work removed from the wall of a supermarket was put up for auction, caused not only a reaction from other artists, but also protest from locals who viewed the work as a gift from the artist. Residents who are friends with “their” murals usually do not have the means to take care of the work themselves, but often ask the artists or initiators of a particular project to renovate or maintain the work. This was the case with Victor Puzin’s mural in Lodz, which was partially painted by football fans. The artist, at the request of local residents and the Urban Forms Foundation, incorporated the fan inscriptions into his work and left room for possible further interventions of this type. Those who directly contributed to the work feel especially responsible for it. After all, many art projects are carried out on the initiative of residents or wall owners. It is the desire to have a mural in their neighborhood that mobilizes them to act together⁹.

Many artists who create in public spaces have high social sensitivity. Not only do they feel they are expressing the needs of marginalized or disadvantaged groups, but they also seek to collaborate with different, often difficult communities. The projects of an artist working under the pseudonym JR who creates large-format portraits and presents them in the environment of the portrayed people are a great example of pro-social action¹⁰. Portraits of Palestinians and Israelis pasted on both sides of the wall (Face to Face), the faces of mothers of juvenile gangsters on the walls of houses in the slums of Brazil (Women are Heroes), or portraits of old people - residents of big cities like Istanbul, Berlin and Los Angeles (The Wrinkles of the City), are just some of JR’s projects that required the involvement of local communities. It takes relationship-building skills to persuade strangers to pose for the portraits and to create a group of helpers who will then put up the portraits in various places in public space (not always legally). “I want to use art as a bridge to get people to talk to each other,” JR declares in a TED lecture (JR 2022: 14.14s.). He confirmed this with the example of his project in a prison (Tehachapi), where he not only photographed prisoners and put up a collective portrait in the courtyard with them, but also recorded their personal stories and made them available online. This changed the relationship between the prisoners and their guards, and in some cases led to a reconnection between the prisoners and their families.

Kazimierska-Jerzyk 2014: 149; Urban Art Workshops...).

⁹ Other examples of public reaction to the destruction of street art works are given by K. Niziołek (2015: 57).

¹⁰ These have such strong overtones that some critics have even begun to accuse JR of demagoguery.

An artist who also portrays people in specific places, entering into deeper relationships with them, is Swoon (Caledonia Curry). The Road Home is her social project for the benefit of addicts. Having the personal experience of a child growing up in a family of addicts, she decided to help those who suffer from the same problem. She returned to her hometown of Kensington, Philadelphia, where opioid use had already become an epidemic. There, among the community of residents, she led art workshops and other therapeutic activities with specialists, organized a conference where people connected to the problem told their stories (Swoon was among them), and then created a colorful mural, including portraits of those who participated in the workshops - both addicts and staff at a help center for people experiencing addiction and homelessness¹¹. "We believe that any healing process begins with respect, caring and human connection," Caledonia Curry declares, and strives to make this the guiding principle of all her artistic endeavors, which she also directs to people in crisis due to natural disasters (she worked in New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina, for example) and long-term trauma (Curry, n.d.). Her high standing in the world of street art, ensured by her highly decorative, subtle drawings, means that these warm and respectful portraits of specific people can be observed not only on the streets of many cities around the world (Mexico City, Honolulu, Los Angeles, São Paulo, Prague or Hong Kong) but also on the Internet, as spreading photographs of street art masterpieces. It is the artist's peculiar style that makes her projects, although involving specific communities, different from typical community art. Although they are often created as a result of collaborative workshops, they always carry Swoon's distinctive touch¹².

When community involvement is more important than aesthetics

Mural painting has been particularly popular for many years and is colloquially classified as street art, although there are theorists and practitioners who do not categorize it as such, considering only the fruits of illegal activities as street art (McCormick, Schiller, Seno 2010; Bensaïd 2016). Among the various murals, community murals are a sizable part, being an obvious example of street art closely linked to the community, which means they can be considered in connection with the idea of community arts (socially engaged art). It has been developing since the late 1960s, first in the United States and later in Europe, Canada and Australia. It is a broad and diverse movement, encompassing theatrical, dance and visual arts, film, music or literary activities, and in various ways involving artists and amateur creators, who become members of the community (Bird 2008: 37, 41–43).

As Katarzyna Niziołek explains:

Community art – where the local community actively participates, creating something together. Joint participation is the central moment of this type of

¹¹ The entire project is described in detail on her official website.

¹² Descriptions of Swoon's projects can be found on her official website (swoonsrudio.org).

activity. Participants direct the artistic process themselves: they take a direct part in the planning, the actual creative work and its result – a mural, a performance, a concert, a film, an exhibition, etc. They often use the help of professional artists, but this is not the rule. The premise is to treat the creative process itself as equal to the result. Community art is a means of overcoming the division between artists and non-artists; it allows participation regardless of the level of competence (Niziołek 2015: 54, footnote 7).

Many forms of street art (including graffiti) are created illegally and anonymously and therefore cannot be classified as community art, since collaboration with a local community requires time and mutual understanding. However, there are artist-activists who work for and with certain groups, advise their projects, or even want to implement them “according to the dictates” of those involved. Large-format paintings painted directly on the external walls of houses are created thanks to the initiative of organizations and small communities that allow access to the walls and invite artists who see in their actions a way to aestheticize the space easily and relatively inexpensively (Gralińska-Toborek, Kazimierska-Jerzyk 2014: 5–10) or to express one’s own views (in Poland, for example, these are the so-called patriotic murals)¹³. The invited artists create compositions tailored to the needs and expectations of local communities.

A good example of an organization emphasizing the community nature of mural art is the CitéCreation cooperative, which operates in France, Germany and Canada. The idea of creating a better community life by highlighting the genius loci, increasing the visibility of the collective memory of a place’s history, is carried out in collaboration between artists and residents (Bensaïd 2016: 156–157). This happens in a process of consultation, mediation, checking the needs of residents. Australian artist Guido van Helten works in a similar way: before making a mural, he collects stories, takes a lot of photographs, and researches the history of the place. In Lodz, at the request of the residents of a residential area, he made two murals on the side walls of high-rise buildings, in which he included fragments of images presented to him earlier by residents during talks and workshops.

Through participation, an attachment and concern for the artwork and its surroundings can build up in the local community. Residents internalize the art of the murals; they are proud of them even when they themselves did not participate, because they feel they were created for them. The popularity of tours along mural trails or fanpages with photo collections indicate the need for a collective experience of

¹³ The phenomenon of commissioning or creating murals together is not new, as it dates back to the inter-war period, the work of Mexican painters (Diego Rivera, Clemento Orozco) and the public art created as part of the US Federal Art Program during the Great Depression. Murals with ideological and political themes were created in places of strong social tensions: in Mexico, Nicaragua, Northern Ireland, Venezuela. They tended not to be community-based; rather, they were a propaganda tool for specific political groupings; in their content, they were often against someone rather than for someone. A similar function - a visual rhetorical tool - is fulfilled by community murals in the United States. Problems of cultural and ethnic identity and related social inequalities are a constant theme of murals in, for example, Balmy Alley (Los Angeles), filled with the work of Chicanos (Americans of Mexican descent), or among African-Americans in Philadelphia (where Mural Arts Philadelphia is active).

this art. Rarely, however, does a community have the strength and capacity to realistically care for large-scale work exposed to the outdoors.

It should be emphasized, however, that custom-made art serves not so much to establish new communities as to strengthen long-established ones:

Murals cannot magically begin the process of community formation, and they cannot become part of that process unless it has actually already begun. Murals can act as a catalyst and make a community stronger and more visible, but for this to happen, they must be vehicles for redefinition, a reformulation of common values (Cockcroft, Weber, Cockcroft 1998: 72).¹⁴

Community murals in many countries, especially in the United States, Brazil or Spain, can leave much to be desired in artistic and aesthetic terms. However, this is a risk of both muralism and other forms of socially engaged art that include amateurs in the creative process. Artists-activists working for the community face many dangers and challenges, such as reluctance and criticism from the art world (mainstream), choosing compromise solutions, abandoning authority in favor of equalizing relationships, mediating between the requirements of art and the needs and perceptions of community members, the uncertainty of the results of long-term work with the community, and finally the realization that the work will be deprived of institutional protection while remaining in public space (cf. Lippard 1984: 355–356, Juskowiak 2010: 71). However, murals are considered the most democratic art (Conrad 1995: 98, 101); they play an educational and expressive role – they express the needs and views of the community, and their longevity depends on the involvement and sustainability of the community itself – hence murals are commonly considered ephemeral art.

Community means public

Analyzing street art in terms of community and community-making is not an easy undertaking, because not only has street art itself not been clearly defined so far (hence, for example, the problem of qualifying graffiti and murals as such), but the understanding of community has begun to change since the mid-20th century, as prominent thinkers such as Jean-Luc Nancy, Zygmunt Bauman and Julia Kristeva have been pondering. Impermanence, diversity, networking, fluidity, locality observed globally, virtualization, coexistence with singularity and even strangeness – these are new features of contemporary communities. Street art allows us to observe different variants of community: artists (they are formed rarely, ephemerally, unless they are close, small teams); established between artists and audiences (when artists collaborate longer with a particular

¹⁴ Possibly this is why patriotic murals, created in Poland by both top-down, political orders and grassroots initiatives, are not popular outside of nationalist-conservative groups and do not expand their audience. They are not compelling or intriguing, they do not bring to light something that would be unknown, and their iconography and the quality of their workmanship often arouse embarrassment.

group and create art for a particular community¹⁵); non-artists, who wish to express their identity through a commissioned work of public art; audiences, who are fascinated by street art; local, who feel responsible for a particular work. In addition to typical communities – that is, groups of people who know each other, meet, interact, survive, based on strong ties arising from similar views or common interests – in street art we find mostly looser groups that can be called neo-tribes, sometimes subcultures (as in the case of graffiti artists), and more broadly – circles, communities, networks.

Street art (perhaps with the exception of graffiti) can be considered public art, not only because it occurs in public places – right on the street – but also because its main purpose is to present something to the general public or communicate on its behalf, not necessarily interested in the art itself. Art in public spaces fulfills many functions: decorative, symbolic, commemorative and propagandistic. It can be a tourist attraction or a way to stimulate social discussion (Litorowicz, n.d.). Street art, in its various forms, therefore fulfills the above-mentioned functions and is part of the changing paradigm of public art: from “art in public space” and “art of public space” to art “for the community” and “art of community” (Juskowiak 2010: 69–70). Due to the fact that street art creates low-commitment, diverse, open and ephemeral groups, its community-building potential is greater than that of mainstream art confined to gallery or museum spaces, and even than that of official, institutionalized public art – because it does not require any special skills and relies on greater communication skills (Niziołek 2015: 65). Its volatility, however, is compensated for by the almost unlimited documentation on the Internet, which – provided, collected, cataloged – is another way to make street art public and provides an impulse for the formation of groups interested in it.

Street art, which continues to expand and evolve, is worth watching and supporting because of its community activities. Ephemeral communities and art are also a way to overcome alienation and maintain social bonds, especially since they do not evoke fear of loss of individuality and autonomy in complete identification with the group and a promise of loyalty.

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¹⁵ I am looking at community murals as an obvious example of this type of art, but it is worth signaling that there are many forms of street art that can be done communally, such as guerilla knitting, guerilla gardening and flash mob.

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About the Author

Agnieszka Gralińska-Toborek – graduate in history and art history from the University of Lodz, has an extensive academic and research background. She began her career as an Assistant Professor in the Department of Aesthetics and the Department of Ethics at the University of Lodz. Currently, she holds the position of professor at the University of Lodz in the Department of History of Painting and Sculpture. She is the author of numerous articles on aesthetics and art theory and has also written the book *Graffiti and Street Art: Word, Image, Action*. Additionally, she is a co-author of the book *Experience of Art in Urban Space: Urban Forms Gallery 2011-2013*, which is a qualitative research report supported by funding from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage. In addition to her academic work, Dr. Agnieszka Gralińska-Toborek has conducted workshops for children and young people as part of the “MURA LOVE GRY” project, funded by the Orange Foundation. She also leads sessions for children, young people with disabilities, and individuals aged 60+ as part of the “Łódź Art in the Context of European Art: Excluded/Included” grant project, which is carried out as part of the NCBiR competition.

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2011–2013*, która jest raportem z badań jakościowych prowadzonych dzięki dofinanso-
waniu ze środków Ministerstwa Kultury i Dziedzictwa Narodowego. Poza pracą nau-
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także zajęcia dla dzieci i młodzieży z niepełnosprawnością oraz osób 60+ w ramach grantu
„Sztuka łódzka na tle sztuki europejskiej. Wykluczeni/włączeni” realizowanego w ramach
konkursu Narodowego Centrum Badań i Rozwoju.