



INSTITUTIONEN FÖR SOCIALT ARBETE

Graffitins spänningsfält

En studie av graffitikultur och interventioner på en lokal arena

av

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Akademisk avhandling

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ABSTRACT

Title: The Conflictual field of graffiti. A study of graffiti culture and interventions on a local arena

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The overall aim of the thesis is to explore and analyse graffiti in a trans-local context, by asking questions about the actors' view on activity, meaning and interaction. The study has been located to a physical place, Jönköping, where actors with different interest perform graffiti-related activity. The study is based on qualitative data where participant observation and interviews form the two main methods. The study also utilizes other materials, such as newspaper articles and municipal documents. Central for the theoretical orientation is that empirical data has been collected that is first-hand information on how the actors themselves find meaning in graffiti. This implies a constructivist perspective on knowledge where meaning shifts depending on whose perspective is analysed. Theoretically, the study also is linked to Becker and his arguments that research in deviance must take notice of the interaction between actors who are perceived to deviate and those actors who respond to the deviant group.

The actors consist of two main groups; graffiti writers and interveners. Graffiti writers mainly consist of young men who describe themselves as belonging to a global graffiti culture. The word "interveners" has been selected as a generic name for actors who are involved in graffiti issues due to professional duties. Similar to the graffiti writers' interveners find the meaning in graffiti by actively select information from an "outside", which corresponds with their professional commitment. The analysis links different approaches to perspectives of *combating crime*, *confirming art* and *caring* for the young men's socialisation. From those different understandings, three parallel patterns of interaction are observed. Interaction developed around graffiti as a crime has elements of a battle situation. From the graffiti writers' perspective, this fight is important when designing the local scene as an integral part of a global graffiti context. At the same time there are disadvantages managing an enemy. On a personal level, individual graffiti writers have to make an estimate how graffiti writing will affect life in the long term. Interaction developed around graffiti as an art form unites graffiti writers and interveners in an ideological consensus where graffiti can be seen as an art form that adds creative qualities to urban space. One significant difference is that the graffiti writers find the local arena as an important place. This local orientation is not necessary when actors from a cultural sector put attention on graffiti. Youth workers way of caring for graffiti writers follows a tradition of social work. This approach focuses the graffiti writers themselves and how to redirect them to accepted forms of artistic expression. The youth workers have good potential to make contact, but it seems difficult to establish long-term relations because graffiti writers themselves do not find it necessary to formalize graffiti as a scheduled activity.

A conclusion made is that there is something locked up about graffiti issues because actors see graffiti from their "own" perspective, and at the same time they remain critical of alternative approaches. Somewhat contradictory to an interaction structured around distinctive perceptions, the study shows that actors express uncertainty about what they are doing. Such critical self-reflections seem to be perceived as personal objections and are not shared with others. This, together with the fact that interest in graffiti comes and goes in waves, adds ambivalence to the conflictual field of graffiti. The thesis ends with a hypothetical discussion of how the conflict level could change if graffiti would be met with a differentiated policy.