

Urban Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage: Graffiti and Street Art. Part 2

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(Summary)

The present article is part of a bigger text dedicated to the study of the practices of understanding graffiti and street art as cultural heritage. While in the first part I introduce some basic terms and discuss the earlier stage of the debate about the possibility to classify, preserve and safeguard this type of heritage, here I focus on understandings dating back from 2010 to the present. For the purposes of the article I leave aside both publications analysing how graffiti and street art contribute to the popularisation of some other elements of heritage and the ones that classify graffiti and street art as tangible and/or intangible heritage but do not go into the heart of the debates. I also do not include texts concentrating solely on the definition of graffiti and street art while believing that this turns them automatically into heritage. Little or no attention is also paid to publications focussed on the different regulatory mechanisms concerning graffiti and street art as far as the heritage debate in them tends to be more or less on the periphery of scholarly interest.

As a result of my analyses I come to the conclusion that in the last 15 years the debate on the processes of defining and safeguarding graffiti and street art as cultural heritage is on the increase. This brings forth growing scepticism about their preservation and safeguarding within the traditional cultural heritage framework. Actually, the introduction of concepts such as alternative heritage and subaltern heritage seems to reflect some of the specifics of graffiti and street art as prospective heritage and this scepticism, too.

By contrast with the previous decade, the understandings of graffiti and street art as cultural heritage (and as tangible heritage, intangible heritage or both in particular) rarely opt for preservation and safeguarding within the framework of UNESCO Conventions of 1972 and 2003 or the Burra Charter. At the same time tangible heritage and intangible heritage tend not to be considered an opposition, while the very notion of intangible heritage implies different subjectivist readings.

Keywords: graffiti; street art; tangible heritage; intangible heritage; intangible cultural heritage; urban heritage

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