

Consuming street art: Reclaiming public places

March 22 2010

Some people love it, and others hate it, but street art provokes meaningful discussion about our urban landscape, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Wherever we look, we observe a recurrent emptiness and disenchantment in the way citizens negotiate urban spaces," write authors Luca M. Visconti (Università Bocconi, Italy), John F. Sherry, Jr. (Notre Dame University), Stefania Borghini (Università Bocconi, Italy), and Laurel Anderson (Arizona State University). "An ambivalent and multi-faceted phenomenon, street art stimulates lively discussion about public space and its ties to the market."

The authors examined the phenomenon of street art from the perspectives of streets artists, dwellers, passersby, journalists, policy makers, retailers, and managers. They conducted a multi-site study in the United States, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. They analyzed reactions to various types of visual art including graffiti and tags, "sticking" (which involves pasting and drawing symbols in public spaces), stencils, and "poetic assault" (writing poetry on dull public spaces).

For those who feel that corporate logos are taking over the landscape, street art rejuvenates public spaces while talking back to the culture of over-consumption. "Several disciplines, including sociology, urban studies, and anthropology have commented on the rise of non-places we all consume with little real enjoyment," the authors write. "Other social

observers have lamented the domination of the market over common [public spaces](#)."

Although the authors found that various stakeholders have different reactions to street art, these art forms initiate important conversations regarding the search for common space and the democratization of art.

"We show public space can be contested as private and commercialized by companies and artists, or offered back as a collective good, where sense of belonging and dialogue restore it to a meaningful place," the authors write. "Many issues might be usefully disentangled by locating them in relation to stakeholders' fluid definitions of what is public and what is private."

More information: Luca M. Visconti, John F. Sherry, Jr., Stefania Borghini, and Laurel Anderson. "Street Art, Sweet Art? Reclaiming the 'Public' in Public Place." *Journal of Consumer Research*: October 2010. A preprint of this article (to be officially published online soon) can be found at journals.uchicago.edu/jcr

Provided by University of Chicago

Citation: Consuming street art: Reclaiming public places (2010, March 22) retrieved 25 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2010-03-consuming-street-art-reclaiming.html>

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