

The City in Colour: Alternative Approaches to Graffiti Management for Kingston, Ontario

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Executive Summary

Graffiti sits firmly in the uncomfortable and precarious intersection between art, vandalism, protest, and performance. Graffiti is a complex and contentious issue in Canadian cities that stubbornly continues to occupy city streets and polarise public opinion. Over the last ten years, a turn to multi-faceted, formalized approaches to addressing graffiti at the municipal level has emerged in urban planning in Canada and across the world. Graffiti Management Plans (GMPs) have appeared in many communities with the purpose of responding to graffiti in a comprehensive and coordinated way.

The objective of this report is to explore alternative approaches to graffiti management for Kingston, a mid-sized city in Ontario, Canada that currently has no formal graffiti management plan. This report aims to gather and present information on a contentious issue that has not yet been examined thoroughly at the local level. The analysis and recommendations contained in this report are directed for the City of Kingston, although many of these points may be relevant to other municipalities across Canada. This report takes the standpoint that graffiti is a complex issue that requires exploration and the engagement of conflicting voices. There is no “right” solution for managing graffiti in Kingston; there are only alternatives that seek to satisfy stakeholder goals.

Rationale

Graffiti has not been a priority area for the City of Kingston in the past; however, graffiti and its management are inevitably implicated in other priority areas for the City of Kingston, namely the recent imperative for cultural development, the growing call for legal graffiti spaces coming from community members, and the on-going financial costs of graffiti for the owners of public and private property. Graffiti management touches many facets of city life and it has profound implications for citizens and

the public realm.

Background

For this report, graffiti is any mark or scratch applied on the surface of a building, structure, or street *without* consent. Graffiti encompasses a wide variety of forms that includes tags, pieces, stencils and many others. It is important to note that in Canada, gang-related graffiti is the exception rather than the rule (Toronto Police Service, 2011) though it may be a very serious issue in other countries, including the United States (Phillips, 2009). Vulgar, offensive or hate graffiti has been a problem in Kingston like in other municipalities.

The influence of the Broken Windows theory (Kelling and Cole, 1996) has informed a zero tolerance approach of regulating public space, which has resulted in the framing of graffiti as a social problem requiring strict policing. However, due to resistance from graffiti advocates and others over the past couple of decades, graffiti management has moved beyond being perceived as an issue for law enforcement uniquely. Municipalities are taking the lead in graffiti management and they have taken on the responsibility of bringing stakeholders together, coordinating action, and providing resources for various initiatives.

Findings

This report draws on qualitative, mixed-method approach that includes three key methods: an audit of graffiti in downtown Kingston, interviews with key informants, and a document review of graffiti management strategies from across Canada.

The document review revealed a variety of tools that Canadian municipalities employ to manage graffiti. These tools were analysed according to Halsey and Young's (2002) categorization of four

main approaches: *removal*, *criminalization*, *welfarism*, and *acceptance* (Figure i). This report has found that cities across Canada engage in elements of *removal*, *criminalization*, *welfarism* and *acceptance* to differing degrees. Three trends (Figure ii) were identified through the policy analysis: the Zero Tolerance approach, the Creative City approach, and the Community-Based approach.

Interviews were undertaken with key informants in Kingston to better understand the issues related to graffiti management specific to the context of Kingston. Interview participants came from a variety of backgrounds including police, the City, the arts community, the graffiti community, property owners, and the Business Improvement Association (BIA). Interview participants identified graffiti as both art and vandalism, as well as a form of activism and an alternative identity for Kingston. Furthermore, they identified spaces for new relationships and opportunities for cooperation, the importance of education and engagement, and raised the issues of accessibility in regards to arts and arts programming and the difficulty of creating a quality public realm in the development of a graffiti management strategy. Safety of graffiti artists and also those tasked with removing graffiti was another issue addressed by the interviewees.

Figure i Four Approaches to Graffiti Management

Removal	Criminalization	Welfarism	Acceptance
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Removal on public property – Removal on private property required – Paint vouchers/ Graffiti kits – Community paint outs – Incentives to stay graffiti-free – Anti-Graffiti coatings – Hotlines/Apps/Online forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fines for Graffiti Writing – Controlling graffiti tools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Education programs – Youth engagement programs – Restorative justice programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Murals – Temporary art opportunities – Sanctioned walls/Designated areas – Graffiti instruction – Community education on graffiti – Celebrations, events or festivals

Figure ii Results of Policy Analysis

Approach	Emphasis	Examples
Zero-Tolerance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removal - Criminalisation 	City of Calgary, City of Edmonton, City of Vancouver, Regional Municipality of Halifax, City of London
Creative City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removal - Acceptance - Welfarism 	City of Toronto
Community-Based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removal - Acceptance - Welfarism 	Ville de Gatineau, City of Ottawa

Discussion

Kingston already has a strong *removal/criminalisation* strategy in place as the Public Works department, the Bylaw Enforcement department, the Downtown BIA, and the Kingston Police Force have existing procedures and programs in place. However, this report has identified a much broader spectrum of actors that are involved in and affected by graffiti management including the arts community, the graffiti community, the general public, the Kingston Police Force, the Downtown BIA, City Council, property owners, school boards, Utility companies and a wide variety of City departments, not limited to Bylaw Enforcement, Public Works, Cultural Services, Recreational Facilities, Parks and Real Estate and Construction.

Recommendations

This report proposes four main recommendations for the City of Kingston. These recommendations are intended for Kingston, but may hold relevance for other municipalities. They are not meant to be rigid, but to explore the possibilities of a formal graffiti management strategy for Kingston.

Recommendation 1: Develop a formal and coordinated graffiti strategy

Graffiti in Kingston is inevitable and the City of Kingston has an important role in managing graffiti. The creation of a Public Art Policy is the ideal time for the City to take a leadership position on graffiti management. Coordinating actions between the various stakeholders is important in order to share information and build relationships.

Recommendation 2: Broaden the concept of stakeholders

Broadening the notion of those involved with graffiti management to include the City of Kingston's Cultural Services department, the Arts Council, and the arts community is in line with a more inclusive and coordinated approach to graffiti management.

Recommendation 3: Graffiti management should be multi-faceted

Strengthening actions and policy in the areas of *removal*, *welfarism*, and *acceptance* will seek to satisfy the range of stakeholder interests, including the arts community, graffiti artists, the Kingston Police, and City departments. A strategy that resembles the *Creative City Approach* or the *Community Based Approach* (see Figure ii) is recommended as it will be more likely to satisfy the diversity of stakeholder interests identified in this report.

Recommendation 4: Graffiti management requires program evaluation

The City must explore the evaluation of the formal graffiti management program, as many measures are insufficient to capture how a multi-faceted program affects graffiti.

Conclusion

This report is meant to guide the development of a graffiti management strategy for the City of Kingston. Next steps for the City will include choosing a strategy and identifying actions to support that strategy. The City may want to consider the role of a Graffiti Coordinator or a Graffiti Committee. Furthermore, as part of a graffiti management strategy, the City will also have to consider a consultation process and how to include members of the graffiti community in that process.

Further academic research on graffiti management may include the investigation of the link between economic development and graffiti, as noted by some participants in this research, the link between cultural planning and graffiti management, or how graffiti management can be used as a youth engagement tool.