

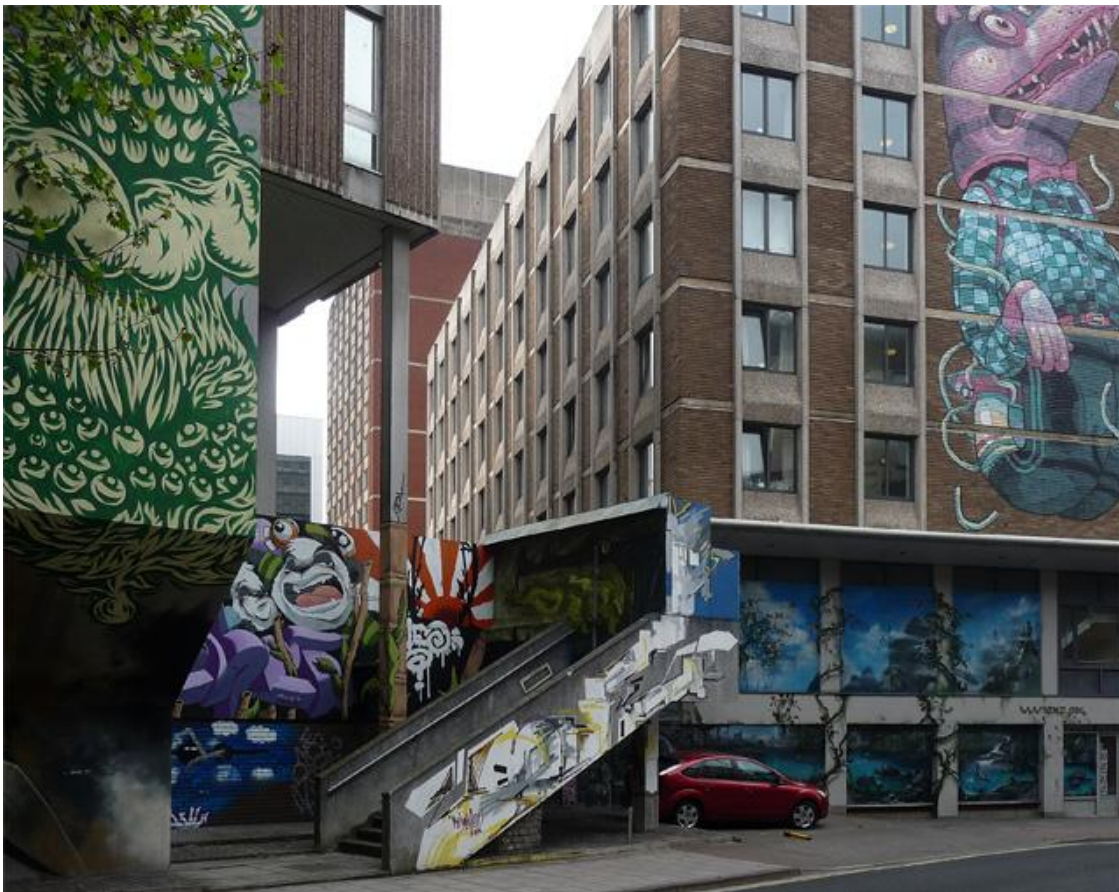
A Less Conventional Tourist

HOW GRAFITTI ASSIGNS NUMEROUS ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR LOCAL ECONOMIES

Article by Joseph Andrews | @joeandrews2009@aol.co.uk | September 30th, 2019, 17:19

Distinctions between artistic expression and vandalism have blurred both public and authoritative perceptions regarding Graffiti or street art, since the advent of the subculture's emergence.

Graffiti values misuse over an absence of use, using ambiguous ownership as a gateway for appropriating function.



Nelson Street Graffiti, Bristol. www.geograph.org.uk

To some, it's merely faceless deviancy with a conniving gesture of a 'tag' left to trademark one's work. Others observe it as satirical criticism of current political, social and societal environments. With the subculture's members operating within the urban underbelly, they transform the city's decaying and empty spaces into more vibrant and exciting exhibits.

But what function is present otherwise?

I would argue that the form's ambiguity and subjectivities indicate its position as, not only an artistic expression, but also one that is playfully willing to dance on the junction between illegality and meaningful articulation.

As with many subcultural groups, solidarity of its members and a resistant momentum has plunged graffiti into the pool of more widely accepted, even favorable practices.

This integration has undoubtedly encouraged a new type of tourist, seeking a more authentic experience of the city. Like the phenomenon of skateboard-related tourism noticeable in cities which are iconic to the activity's evolution, graffiti tourism has transformed cities into exhibitions.

Formal organisations in the shape of guided tours are now available to tourists, documenting a history of street art evolution in cities such as Bristol, the mecca of UK graffiti, London and New York. This resembles a semi-structured path of subcultural integration that implies a group's acceptance derives from a potential economic gain for those who aim to capitalise on its authenticity.

For Bristol, graffiti culture is so deeply woven into the knitwear of the city's aesthetic, with *'Wherethewall'* employing tour guides, detailing Banksy's work.

Beyond the immediate growth of economic capital through this extension of cultural tourism, local restaurants, bars and cafes all experience benefits, through increased foot traffic in the city. The unconventional tourist will similarly reach parts of the city which are not immediately locatable.

Creative expression has the potential to transform how a city is navigated, with graffiti-seeking tourists exploring quieter areas, as skateboarders similarly venture into the 'no-go' pedestrian areas, mining the city in search of idea terrains.

Through a more progressive approach to subversive activities such as graffiti art, local economies undergo growth as a by-product.

The authentic and distinguishable characteristics of a local culture will always be a desirable attraction for those seeking new experiences through travel.

Supporting diverse groups and subcultural practices will similarly hold unforeseen benefits for local economies, beyond these places showcasing entertaining and exciting environments for its inhabitants.