

English summary

Graffiti: An inventory of preventive measures

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This report presents a survey of graffiti prevention work that has been conducted in Sweden over recent years. Proceeding from a directive, which involved conducting an inventory of graffiti prevention measures and analysing the following up of these measures, a questionnaire has been sent to all the local authorities in Sweden and to the borough administrations in the cities of Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö. A similar questionnaire was also sent to the country's police authorities and to the police districts in Stockholm as well as the district police administrations in Gothenburg and Malmö. The response rate was very high, which suggests a strong interest in this issue. In addition, the National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) has contacted a hundred or so individuals representing other organisations and companies, such as electricity companies, property owners and companies working in the transportation and public transport sectors, in order to chart the graffiti prevention work conducted by these actors.

GRAFFITISTS NOT A HOMOGENEOUS GROUP - A VARIETY OF MEASURES ARE REQUIRED

Previous studies show that graffiti writers do not constitute a homogeneous group. One common denominator, besides the fact that they all write graffiti, is that graffiti writers are for the most part boys or young men. The majority are under nineteen years of age, and it is estimated that approximately one quarter of graffiti writers are under fifteen years of age. The most important reasons for writing graffiti are reportedly a) a desire for attention, b) looking for excitement and c) creative impulses. All attempts at generalisation end there, however, since graffitists may be divided into several different subgroups. Amongst these there are older youths who are

heavily involved in other forms of crime, younger persons with an interest in art, and boys whose involvement in delinquency is restricted to graffiti and graffiti-related offences. A majority of those who write graffiti do so for a limited period of time and then desist from this form of criminal activity. But the group of graffitiists also includes individuals where graffiti has been among the acts committed towards the beginning of a more extensive criminal career.

EVALUATIONS UNUSUAL – A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE REGARDING MEASURES THAT WORK

Graffiti is perceived to constitute a major problem in many western countries, and a large number of preventive measures have been employed. Evaluations and academic research on the effects of this work are almost entirely lacking, however, both in Sweden and in other countries. As a result, there are no grounds on the basis of which to determine what types of measures have worked or why they have worked.

PROMPT GRAFFITI REMOVAL IS EFFECTIVE IN COMBINATION WITH OTHER MEASURES

Experiences from other countries indicate nonetheless that the prompt removal of graffiti, in combination with other measures, may produce good results. Removing graffiti promptly requires collaboration between several different actors, however, since the objects exposed to graffiti have different owners. In Oslo and Copenhagen, a number of property owners collaborate by signing a form of graffiti insurance. What this involves is that the property owners pay a fixed amount per meter of frontage and in exchange receive an immediate, free graffiti removal service if this frontage is then subjected to graffiti. The measure is supplemented by informational campaigns directed at the general public. In Helsinki, the prompt removal of graffiti is a compulsory measure which the city requires of property owners. Here the measure is combined with active work to arrest and convict the most notorious graffiti writers. In the Belgian town of Brügge, the prompt removal of graffiti has been combined with informational campaigns, focused efforts to arrest the most active graffiti writers and a generous attitude towards those painting graffiti murals. Those youths who dissociate themselves from illegal graffiti writing have been given the opportunity to paint graffiti murals on legal walls prepared specifically for this purpose. Whilst these measures have not been evaluated scientifically, all of these cities report that the measures taken, despite some differences in their content, have served to reduce levels of graffiti.

THE LOCAL AUTHORITIES ARE A DRIVING FORCE BEHIND GRAFFITI PREVENTION WORK

In Sweden, it is first and foremost in the metropolitan areas that graffiti is perceived to constitute a major problem. Almost half of the boroughs in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö that completed the questionnaire report that they have a lot or quite a lot of graffiti. One quarter of the country's local authorities state that they have a lot or quite a lot of graffiti. Among these local authorities that are most affected by graffiti, however, only a small proportion have a general action plan for working to prevent

graffiti. Three quarters of the local authorities who report having a lot or quite a lot of graffiti have no general action plan for how to adequately deal with this graffiti. It is a great deal more common for them to have a policy for graffiti removal, however. Half of all the local authorities that completed the questionnaire reported having such a policy.

Despite the fact that there is often no general action plan in place, a number of different preventive measures are employed among the local authorities in Sweden. Often this work involves one or more isolated measures, however, that do not comprise part of a well thought out plan of action. The total cost of the graffiti prevention work undertaken by local authorities is difficult to estimate. Previous calculations show, however, that the combined costs for the local authorities' graffiti removal measures alone amount to an annual total of 500 million SEK (approximately 56 million Euro).

When different actors collaborate on the graffiti issue, the local authority is almost always the party that provides the motivation and co-ordination for these efforts. There are several examples of local authorities running collaborative operations both between different departments of the local administration and with other actors, including the police in a number of cases. As is the case in other western countries, however, there is an absence of thorough evaluations of these measures. There is thus often a lack of knowledge as to which measures, or rather which combinations of measures actually work.

THE POLICE PARTICIPATE IN THE GRAFFITI PREVENTION WORK

Almost half of the country's authorities report that one or more of their local police districts has a general strategy in the area of graffiti prevention work. The majority of police authorities also report that the local police organisations participate actively in work of this kind. This is done primarily by means of systematically registering graffiti writers and their graffiti signatures. In some cases, the police also collaborate with the local authorities, by informing young people about the damage and risks associated with graffiti, for example.

OTHER ACTORS MOST COMMONLY ONLY CARRY OUT PINPOINT MEASURES

In addition to the local authorities and the police authorities, there are a large number of actors who work with this issue, primarily because they themselves suffer as a result of graffiti. Central among these are actors working within the transportation and public transport sectors and others working within the housing sector. For these actors, prompt graffiti removal is the principal strategy employed. They may also introduce other forms of situational measures on occasion, such as the use of security guards, the use of protective anti-graffiti coatings on surfaces likely to be exposed to graffiti and other similar measures. Social responses, on the other hand, such as the provision of information, the organisation of alternative activities for graffiti writers and similar forms of measure are employed relatively rarely. The measures carried out by these actors most commonly take the

form of pinpoint efforts and thus rarely constitute part of any more general action plan. As with the preventive work conducted by the police and the local authorities, these measures have not generally been evaluated. The assessment of the actors concerned themselves is that that the prompt removal of graffiti is the measure most closely linked to any substantial effect.

THE LEVEL OF COLLABORATION BETWEEN DIFFERENT ACTORS SHOULD BE DEVELOPED

The overall picture of the graffiti prevention work being conducted in Sweden indicates that in many areas there is a lack of well thought out and developed action plans for the work that is carried out. The majority of graffiti prevention measures appear for the most part to take the form of pinpoint efforts. This is problematic, since the group of graffiti writers is comprised of several different sorts of individual. Measures that function preventively for one type of graffiti writer will probably not always function as well for graffiti writers from another category. In addition, there is often a lack of collaboration between actors and the co-ordination of measures is generally poor. This is true both of the situation within the organisations/companies themselves and of the contacts between them. It is also quite rare for the work that is conducted to be documented, which means that valuable experiences risk being lost. Finally, there is an almost complete absence of academic evaluations or follow ups. This survey cannot therefore provide any form of scientific evidence as to which measures work in various different contexts.

A NUMBER OF ACTORS TAKE A COMPREHENSIVE VIEW

Despite the flaws identified in the survey, there are a number of exceptions. Well thought out programs of measures are being put into practise in many places. The common denominator for these programs is that they are based on *collaborations* between police, and private, state and local authority actors, producing *joint* packages of measures aimed at preventing the production of graffiti. In these cases there is often a *carefully prepared action plan*, characterised by *a will to persevere*, which comprises *several different kinds of measures*. In a few of these examples, attempts are also being made to *evaluate* the measures, but in these cases, the methods employed to evaluate the graffiti prevention work need to be developed and refined.

IT IS IMPORTANT TO DEVELOP AND DISSEMINATE KNOWLEDGE IN THIS AREA

A majority of the local authorities that completed the questionnaire expressed a desire to be informed of improvements to the existing knowledge regarding how best to work to prevent graffiti. In order to disseminate the knowledge and experiences of graffiti prevention that do exist, the National Council for Crime Prevention intends to produce a brochure on the subject in 2004. This publication is intended to provide concrete examples of different types of graffiti prevention measures that may be put into practise. A little over one-third of the local authorities, and an even larger proportion of the police questioned, would willingly participate in some form of pilot project that could then be evaluated. In order to contribute to the develop-

ment of both knowledge and methodological expertise in the area of graffiti prevention, the National Council is therefore planning to provide financial support to local authorities who wish to work to prevent graffiti. The objective is to develop cost-effective measures that may also be disseminated to other areas. In order to achieve this, the Council will be insisting on the documentation and evaluation of the projects, and in addition, to being included to a certain extent in the planning and following up of the projects.