RUGLE WITH SOCIAL VALUE: AN EXAMINATION OF METHODS AND APPROACHES FOR ASSESSING SOCIAL VALUE IN HERITAGE MANAGEMENT AND CONSERVATION

Case Study Report: Sauchiehall Lane, Glasgow
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Researcher: Elizabeth Robson, University of Stirling

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Image 1: View of the Lane showing ‘The Musician’ mural and arch, which forms part of a listed building. This section of the Lane is cobbled.

Images all taken 17 November 2018 © Elizabeth Robson.

Image 2: Mixture of tags and a throw up, including use of an Edinburgh script (top left).

Image 3: Throw ups at the corner with Blythswood Street (top two are Canmore record 360185).

Glossary

Crew A group of associated graffiti writers, who often collaborate and work together
Hitting Placing graffiti works in an area, often on multiple surfaces
Mural A painting or relief executed directly onto or applied to a wall*
Scene The graffiti community of practice (to be ‘on the scene’, to be actively practicing)
Spot A site of graffiti practice
Street art Imagery created in an urban environment taking a variety of forms, but generally painted*
Tag A graffiti writer’s signature, normally written in pen or spray paint*
Throw up A graffiti name painted in bubble letters, outlined in one colour and in filled with another*

*These definitions follow the classification of graffiti developed by the Recording Scotland’s Graffiti Project.
1. Summary

This report is based on a relatively rapid investigation. The total amount of time spent on the study was approximately two weeks, spread over three months (November 2018 to January 2019). The aim was to identify the variety of communities and range of social values associated with Sauchiehall Lane in Glasgow.

The research suggests that there are a number of different communities that consider Sauchiehall Lane to be of significance and a diversity of social values associated with it. Key findings:

- The Lane is part of a complex, interconnected, urban location and its significance is inseparable from the wider social and physical context.
- There is a strong sense of ownership of the Lane as a public space.
- Various communities use the Lane to assert local knowledge, community identity and belonging.
- Within the communities there are graduations, of belonging, of permanence, of establishment and of engagement. Significantly, although there is a large resident population, several of the groups identified are not defined by living in close proximity to the Lane.
- Some values are shared across communities but there are also tensions, between and within groups.
- The Lane is seen as having potential to foster artistic expression and creativity.

There was a particular focus in this study on identifying the value of Sauchiehall Lane to the graffiti community and its importance to Glasgow’s graffiti heritage. Key findings:

- There are complex interactions between graffiti practice and place.
- City-centre locations like the Lane are important in the formation of identity and negotiation of community relationships.
- Aspects of graffiti heritage follow an oral tradition, which makes them difficult to evidence or record using a place-based lens and ‘mapping’ approaches.

This report provides a stepping off point for further research or future actions. It concludes with some of the implications of the findings. Key points:

- Changes to the Lane are likely to impact on its social value to multiple communities.
- There is cross-community support for more creative spaces and improvements to infrastructure.
- Irrespective of ownership, various communities consider the City to be accountable for the maintenance and improvement of this ‘public’ space.
- Potential challenges in engaging target communities in the implementation of the Lanes Strategy include negative attitudes towards authority-led initiatives among artists and residents.
2. Description of Site

**Location:** The Glasgow City Lanes are a series of access and service routes that run parallel to the major thoroughfares in the city. Sauchiehall Lane runs parallel to Sauchiehall Street (to the North) and Bath Street (to the South), from West Nile Street (in the West) towards the M8, with a continuous seven-block stretch from West Campbell Street onwards (see Annex I for a map of the area).

**Built Heritage:** The area of Glasgow containing Sauchiehall Lane (from here on ‘the Lane’) consists of a mixture of commercial and residential properties from the mid-19th Century that period and later. It falls within Glasgow’s Central Conservation Area, in the Business District and Blythwood Character Area. A number of the buildings backing onto the Lane are listed for their historic and architectural interest:

- There is one A-listed building, the original Willow Tearooms (between Cambridge and Blythwood Streets), where the period features are also evident from the Lane. There are also 14 B-listings (some listings are for multiple properties), and one C-listing.
- Some of the listings do mention architectural features to the rear or side of the buildings (i.e. Lane-facing) and one (record LB33170 on the Historic Environment Scotland Portal) includes an arch over the Lane as one of the architectural features of note (see Image 1).

**Graffiti and Street Art:** There are seven contemporary graffiti and street art records from the Lane in Canmore, Scotland’s online catalogue of heritage.

- Two ‘throw ups’ at the corner with Blythwood Street have been identified as particularly significant by the graffiti community on account of their age and authorship (record 360185, see image 3). From the dating of this work, it is apparent that the Lane has been used as a site of graffiti practice since at least 2000, and quite possibly since the graffiti scene emerged in Glasgow in the 1980s.
- The Lane currently includes two murals featured in the City Centre Mural Trail, which showcases street art around Glasgow. The section between Wellington and Hope Streets contains ‘The Musician’, created by Rogue-One and Art Pistol in January 2016 (see Image 1), and at the corner of Sauchiehall Lane and Elmbank Street, Australian artist Stormie Mills painted ‘The Lost Giant’ in 2017. The Mural Trail itself diverts up to Cowcaddens after The Musician, before re-joining Sauchiehall Lane at The Lost Giant. The Musician is in a self-contained section of the Lane, not continuous with the next block, and sections further to the West were previously gated, so a route down the Lane is not possible. In addition, the Lane itself was not surfaced to thoroughfare standard until after the second Glasgow School of Art fire in 2018, when it became part of the cordon around the closed area.

**The Lanes Strategy:** In December 2016, Glasgow City Council produced a draft Strategy for redevelopment of the City Lanes. This was approved in March 2018 and includes an emphasis on retention of the area’s historic features, as well as the provision of new spaces for art installations.

- The ‘Action Projects’ proposed for Sauchiehall Lane focus on heritage (to the East) and entertainment/evening economy (to the West).
- Following the ‘broken window’ theory of urban decline (Wilson & Kelling 1982, adopted in New York policing in the 1990s), the Lanes Strategy describes graffiti as anti-social behaviour, linked to wider crime and safety concerns. Two sections of the Lane are identified as having a particular problem: Renfield Street to West Nile Street and Holland Street to Elmbank Street (Lanes Strategy p52).
- However, there are also ambitions to use art, including graffiti art, in the transformation of the Lanes. While proposed developments to help diversify the Mural Trail (a separate City initiative, see above), could support graffiti artists to gain the experience needed to transition to formal muralists.
3. Research Process

This study sought to complement other research already conducted, i.e. in the development of the Lanes Strategy and Sauchiehall/Garnethill Area Regeneration Framework, which were reviewed as part of the process. It is based on evidence gathered from semi-structured interviews (8 respondents), an analysis of Instagram posts including #Sauchiehalllane (60), and a physical-traces mapping conducted by the researcher. The overall amount of time spent on the study has been approximately two weeks spread over a period of 3 months. Connections have mainly been with key informants, but it is recognised that the limitations of the study (time and access) mean that there are communities whose views are not represented. These are noted below under Implications as avenues for further investigation. The data gathered is in no way comprehensive, but there is some triangulation, providing a degree of confidence in the findings.

4. Communities

The Lane is a place of residence (tenanted and owner-occupied), employment and opportunity for a number of very different communities. Some of these have been approached and engaged through the Lanes Strategy development and consultations. Others, although visible, remain marginalised or are characterised as part of the ‘problems’ associated with the Lane.

**Communities of interest, identity and geography** identified during this case study were:

- school pupils
- absentee landlords
- photographers
- university/college students
- homeless people
- street artists
- temporary residents
- office workers
- graffiti artists
- recently-arrived residents
- catering workers
- club and pub goers
- longer-term residents
- service industry workers
- tourists
- displaced residents
- business owners
- commuters

This is not necessarily an exhaustive list and individuals may identify with more than one of these groups. All have some connection to the Lane and experience of it, but a relatively small percentage are actively engaging with formal community governance processes. Significantly, although there is a large resident population, several of the groups identified are not defined by living in close proximity to the Lane.

Within these communities there are graduations, of belonging, of permanence, of establishment and engagement, which may not be apparent to those from outside the community.

- **Among the residents** there are separate communities of origin, language and experience.
  - This is an area characterised by generations of migration and displacement – whether that is stories of emigration from the early 1900s or the recent displacement of residents following the second fire at the Glasgow School of Art (June 2018).
  - **Changes and events** (e.g. the fire) affect multiple communities and form new communities of interest. People expressed strong feelings about these events.
- In the case of the graffiti ‘scene’, there are people using similar methods and media who are not considered part of the community (i.e. gangs, ultra-football fans, fine arts artists).
- There are common values expressed across groups that don’t necessarily result in a shared sense of community (i.e. around respect for craftsmanship, art and creative expression).
- There are also tensions between these communities, e.g. over access to and use of the ‘public’ space.
5. Findings

5.1 Context: The Lane is part of a complex, interconnected, urban location and its significance is inseparable from the surrounding social and physical environment. For example:

- After the Glasgow School of Art fire, the Lane became part of the cordon for the closed area, diverting people down the Lane and becoming part of that wider story/experience.
- The fire also resulted in physical changes, as parts of the Lane were reopened, resurfaced, and new waste management regime was adopted, which in turn resulted in changed patterns of use.
- People are visiting the Lane due to the connection with the city-wide Mural Trail.
- For local residents, the Lane is not only a service area or a place to visit for the ‘night-time economy’; it is part of an integrated neighbourhood, with day-long, year-round multiple uses.

5.2: Ownership: Sauchiehall Lane is privately owned by the properties on either side but there is a strong sense that it is a public space, which is reflected in people’s concerns, expectations and actions. Familiarity with the Lane is used as an expression of local knowledge and belonging.

5.3 Physical Environment: Formally, there was a focus on retaining the more ‘historical’ features, such as cobbles. Modern air-conditioning units were cited by some respondents as examples of a lack of ‘historic’ character in the Lane, but they contributed to an urban ‘New York’ feel that others found positive.

- Exposed pipes, bricks and industrial features (as well as cobbles), which might be covered up or removed elsewhere, were all physical aspects people referenced or captured in images.
- The connection between graffiti and New York reinforces this “urban” sense of place, while the association may also contribute to the appeal of the Lane for graffiti artists.

5.4 Experiential Aspects: How the Lane is valued does not necessarily (or only) depend on the physical environment, but the wider circumstances within which it is encountered and the experience it provides.

- How the Lane is perceived can depend on ephemeral characteristics, like the time of day or the light.
- There is a sense that the Lane is a hidden, marginal space and the experience of discovery is part of its attraction.

5.5 Art and Creativity: There is a sense that the Lane is in a “vibey”, artistic area, with artists and craftspeople living locally, as well as formal arts-based institutions.

- The Lane allows for and inspires a range of artistic responses.
- Graffiti and the murals were significant features in how people depicted the Lane.
- From across different communities, the Lane is seen as having potential for fostering creative practice.

5.6 Graffiti Practice and Place: The significance of graffiti spots was described principally on account of the potential for practice and visibility rather than the specifics of the location. However, it was noted that:

- The Lane’s city-centre location was described as significant in the formation of identity and negotiation of relationships within the graffiti community (between crews and artists).
- Attachment to a site can develop through continuous expression and shared practice.
- There is engagement with temporality and age (as well as authorship) in attributing value.
- In addition, while graffiti practice normally (not always) results in sited works, aspects of the heritage follow an oral tradition, which also finds expression online.
6. Implications

The evidence from this study suggests that there are a diversity of social values associated with the Lane and that it is of significance to a wide range of communities. Although the Lane is privately owned, the extent of public access and use suggests that many of the communities identified could be affected (positively or negatively) from changes to the Lane. That the Lane is considered a public space also suggests that these communities would expect to have a voice in decision-making about any changes and would hold the City accountable for the outcomes. Private ownership presents difficulties when it comes to current Lane management regimes, but there are expectations of the City to maintain the Lane’s physical infrastructure. A variety of respondents expressed anger and disgust at the poor state of the Lane (smelly refuse, flooding, uneven surfacing, insufficient lighting and visible homelessness) and concerns about safety.

Graffiti was present throughout the Lane and (together with the murals) contributed to the ‘urban’ sense of place. The fact that the Lane is densely covered with graffiti, despite periodic repainting, as well as the range of tags, indicates it is an active spot for a number of artists. While responses suggest that the Lane is not uniquely significant to the community as a site of practice, which might suggest it is easily substitutable by other locations with similar affordances, there has been continuous activity dating back to at least 2000. It is likely that changes in access to the Lane would result in changed patterns of use at other city-centre locations.

There was support for enhancing the potential of the Lane to support creative practice. However, there may be some challenges in engaging the target communities through the planned street art initiatives:

- Artists indicated a strong desire for creative autonomy and there was pride in community-led initiatives, suggesting that, while the opportunity would be welcomed, extensive application and screening processes could be a hurdle to participation.
- There were also negative associations with past projects, when work valued by the graffiti community was removed to make way for formally-sanctioned pieces, and when the artistic community invested in street art projects, only for works to be moth-balled.
- There is potential to work with the legacy of graffiti practice in the Lane and the fact it is a known spot to provide legal spaces, though this is not without complications and would not easily allow for the envisaged degree of City oversight.

When it comes to recording Glasgow’s graffiti heritage, the community place emphasis on practice, visibility and being part of the scene. Traditional ‘mapping’ approaches (used by systems such as Canmore and the Mural Trail) focus on documenting the resultant works and their specific locations. Unless these place-based approaches are complemented with qualitative data, they risk missing important aspects of graffiti’s practice-based heritage and the changing relationships, cultural influences and social issues that inform it.

The approach taken in the development of the Lanes Strategy and, to some extent, in this study was to engage with formally organised groups and businesses, rather than approaching individual residents, visitors or workers in the area. In terms of addressing the recognised limitations in representation and scope, complementary research could be conducted with:

- Individuals, in particular from communities that are less active in formal groups and processes.
- Homeless people, who are visibly present in the Lane but have not been consulted on the potential impact of the proposed changes.
Graffiti artists, of all ages, to further elucidate differences in the values and usage of the Lane within this community. It may be valuable in this regard to undertake further analysis of online interactions, such as on Instagram (#glasgowgraffiti for example has 11,155 posts).

Annex I: Statement of Social Value

This Statement is an attempt to illustrate the range of values associated with Sauchiehall Lane. Values are not static and are liable to change over time. In addition, this Statement is based on a limited number of inputs and individuals who do not claim to speak for or represent the views of their entire community. It should therefore be considered as indicative of the diversity of values for communities with interests in the Lane, rather than comprehensive or definitive.

Experiential Aspects: Positive and negative impressions of the Lane co-existed. This suggests it is not necessarily (or only) the physical structures that are significant to how the Lane is perceived and valued, but the context within which it is encountered and the experience it provides.

- What was described as “magical”, “urban” and “cool” by one person, could easily be interpreted as “grimy” and “dangerous” by someone else, or by the same person at another time. One respondent was among those who described the Lane as unsafe, especially for young women (a warning they had received from their mother, so a long-standing concern) but described finding it “romantic” at another time.
- Views of the Lane could be contingent on ephemeral characteristics, like the time of day or the light.
- The experience of discovery is significant to users of the Lane, mentioned as part of the “mystery” and “excitement” for graffiti writers and in Instagram posts. There is a sense that the Lane is a hidden, marginal space, “tucked away” behind the imposing facades of the main Street.
- A counterpoint to this idea of discovery is the established residents’ desire to see the Lane incorporated into the wider area, with a holistic approach to its use (not just the ‘night-time economy’). This was connected in part to concerns about safety but didn’t preclude the idea the Lane could be a “quiet, more intimate” space.

Artistic Responses: The nature of the Lane allows for some forms of creativity and artistic production (graffiti and murals) and inspires others (e.g. photography and film).

- Graffiti artists described their practice as creative expression - “modern day calligraphers” - connected to longer traditions of mark making and using public spaces and art to have a voice. Within the community, artists distinguish between the quality of works and between recognised practice (part of the scene) and vandalism or other uses of graffiti as a medium for different purposes.
- Of the 60 photographs tagged #Sauchiehalllane on Instagram, 21 featured one of the two murals. A high number of posts mentioned #murals (12) but a higher number mentioned #graffiti (18), even though there were only three posts that specifically focused on the non-mural graffiti. The images were also tagged as #streetart, #graffitiart or just #art in many cases. This suggests that people outside the scene do not make the same distinctions between ‘graffiti’ (which principally uses lettering) and ‘street art’ or other types of street writing as the community themselves.
- From across different communities, those involved in artistic production expressed the positive benefits of creative practice - “everyone needs a creative outlet”, “these kinds of things are healing for everyone”. There was a desire to see more art in the City and more artistic opportunities for locals, with the Lane seen as having potential in this area.
The area’s creativity was expressly linked by residents to a “feisty” community activism and a desire to have a direct input into decisions and actions – a feeling amplified by recent experiences connected to the Glasgow School of Art fire and Sauchiehall Street development, which had left people feeling “raw” and with their “hackles up” over the lack of communication.

**Ownership and Belonging:** Although the Lane is privately owned, there is a strong sense that the Lane is a public space, over which various communities feel a sense of ownership. This is illustrated by the concerns over infrastructure and maintaining the public right of way. In a different way, a similar sense of ownership is expressed by graffiti writers ‘hitting’ the same ‘spot’ repeatedly, and “reclaiming” or “taking back” sites after cleaning. For these and other communities, demonstrating familiarity with the Lane was an expression of local knowledge and belonging.

**Graffiti Practice:**

**Community Connections:** There is an emphasis among graffiti artists on developing personal style and being part of the scene. Most of the graffiti in the Lane (as distinct from the formal murals) is placed there as part of establishing and maintaining a connection to or standing within the graffiti community itself.

- Respondents described the role city-centre sites like the Lane play, particularly at the early stages of artists’ development, i.e. initial exploration and connecting with other practitioners, “bumping into each other on walls”. Although, the inclusion of crew acronyms (e.g. BTS, SNS, PPP) suggests that more experienced, crew-affiliated writers are also using the site.
- Some of the tags are in a script used by Edinburgh writers (see Image 2), illustrating that artists will travel to various spots and underlining that places like the Lane are sites of interaction for the wider Scottish graffiti community.

**Relationships to Place:** The significance of graffiti spots was described more on account of the potential for practice than the specifics of the location or the presence of earlier works. For example, affordances of the Lane were mainly noted in terms of opportunity and visibility. However, respondents also indicated that:

- Attachment to a location can be developed through continuous expression and shared practice.
- Spots that become widely used, containing many pieces, and/or are used over an extended period, do accrue a sense of ownership, belonging, and coming together within the community.
- Parts of a site can also be suitable or unsuitable for a particular writer on account of pre-existing works, the other writers that have used the site, or the nature of the building (i.e. church) or its construction. These principles were described as a respect for other artists and craftsmanship (such as sign-writing or stone masonry) that is communicated among writers and, to some extent, upheld within the community through shaming of bad practice. The site at the corner of Blytheswood Street is therefore not only significant for the ‘throw ups’ but also due to the evidence of earlier sign-writing (see Image 3); while ‘The Lost Giant’ mural was criticised for obscuring the earlier Griffin mural.

**Temporality:** There is an expectation that individual graffiti works (particularly those placed in illegal spots) are ephemeral and temporary. However,

- As noted above, individual works may form part of an on-going practice that includes repeatedly “taking back” sites.
- Other artists invest in finding spots where works are less likely to be removed, sometimes travelling considerable distances and not disclosing the exact location of the site publically. This demonstrates
an interest in greater longevity and potentially deeper connections to place - “leaving a piece of yourself”.

- Respondents also indicated that the longer a piece lasts, the greater respect it is accorded within the community. Age can therefore be a factor in attributing value and significance. Within the Lane there are a few pieces that are “ancient” (when seen within the appropriate temporal scale) and therefore of potentially greater significance. Some of the works may be accorded significance on account of the artist, when they have standing in the community (e.g. Akme) or have passed away.

**Substitutability:** The Lane’s city-centre location was mentioned as important, but the Lane itself does not have the recognition or iconic status of some other graffiti spots in the city. The view was that if the Lane became unavailable then the activity would move elsewhere. However, while the Lane may not be uniquely significant to the graffiti community, as a site of practice it clearly does have social value. The affordances of the Lane make it significant in the formation of identity and negotiation of community relationships (between crews and establishing partnerships/collaboration).

**Non-Place-Based Aspects:** Although graffiti practice normally (not always) results in sited works, aspects of the heritage follow an oral tradition. Awareness of who is on the scene is maintained not only through visiting sites but also via word of mouth and through social media platforms. Other studies have suggested that social media sites like Instagram are more than just a sharing platform and have become integral to the creative process (e.g. MacDowall & de Souza 2018). Sharing of information, development of technique, and expression of crew and community identity all take place online as well as offline. Graffiti is also an evolving and varied practice, currently manifesting in ways that appear to be moving away from its roots in New York’s subway/trackside sites and hip-hop culture to reflect contemporary social influences and artistic trends.

**Annex II: Map of Location**

Map downloaded from Canmore. Black spots indicate records returned in a search for ‘Sauchiehall Lane’.
Annex III: Comparators and References

The Lanes Strategy includes details of several comparison initiatives (see ‘Section 3: Learning from Elsewhere’ pp21-48). Studies of how urban artistic heritage has been treated elsewhere, including in some of the cases identified in the Strategy, mirror some of the findings and implications from this study. For example:

- Avery’s article (2009) suggests that Glasgow faces a similar challenge to Melbourne in recognising the City’s graffiti heritage as part of the cultural landscape and preserving an ‘urban’ and ‘artistic’ sense of place that is attractive to some communities but not valued by others.
- McAuliffe (2012) uses the case study of Sydney to examine how the concept of the ‘creative city’ has led to a reevaluation of graffiti practice. He highlights the complex understandings of practice that graffiti artists deploy, a finding also mirrored in this study.
- Harris’ (2011) describes how informal ‘guerilla art’ contributes to community building and sense of place. The examples (including autonomous engagement in ‘dressing’ a statue in Perth) highlight the use of creative practice to re-claim public space, also seen in the Lane.

According to one respondent in this study, “Glasgow is being taken more seriously as a significant city for graffiti and street art”. This growing international reputation was thought to rest on having strong pieces in the City (by local and international artists), resident artists practicing locally (although it was noted that there are currently no legal graffiti walls), and activities like festivals that build appreciation among the wider public. On this last point, Avery proposes that engaging in “dialogue and celebration of living cultural practices” (2009: 152) can help in reconciling differing views and values associated with graffiti and street art. This approach has also been followed in Sydney (alongside enforcement and removal), with engagement initiatives designed to limit more destructive practices and validation of ‘illegal’ but valued works.

While these approaches all recognise an active community of practice, some of them make a distinction between ‘street art’ and ‘graffiti’. There are genuine differences between communities and artists when it comes to the adoption or commodification of graffiti practice as formally sanctioned ‘art’; however, from an institutional perspective, McAuliffe highlights the “discontinuities between the way we are seeking to regulate creativity in the city and the informal creative practices that are an integral part of the creative city” (2012: 204). He identifies the City of Sydney’s extensive vetting process as a barrier to incorporation of ‘good’ graffiti into formal initiatives (2012: 197), a potential challenge also noted for Glasgow.

References and Further Reading: