

“GRAFFITI IN URBAN SPACE” conference, organised as part of the City Day celebrations.

Time and location: 3 June 2013, Congregation Hall of the Krakow Municipal Office, pl. Wszystkich Świętych 3-4, Krakow.

The conference was opened by Professor Wiesław Starowicz – chairman of the Task Force for counteracting illegal graffiti within the Krakow Municipal Commune. He welcomed the discussion panel participants and other guests, outlining the key issues to be analysed during the meeting and elaborating on Krakow’s relevant experiences.

The first part of the conference was devoted to effective legal and technical solutions applied in counteracting illegal graffiti. Discussion panel participants included representatives from a selection of Krakow’s partner cities: Florence, Rochester, Trondheim and Vilnius, as well as the conference chairman, Professor Wiesław Starowicz.

In his presentation devoted to Krakow’s experience with the conference's main issue, Professor Starowicz drew attention to the fact that the central factor inhibiting the fight against illegal graffiti is the lack of legal instruments vesting private owners with the power to remove such markings from buildings which constitute their property. Unfortunately, the “Act on maintaining cleanliness and order in communes” does not impose such an obligation on them. Another problematic issue indicated by Professor Starowicz is the controversial and ambiguous regulations concerning the protection of image, which prohibit using city monitoring in fighting illegal graffiti. While discussing actions taken in Krakow in the fight against illegal graffiti, Professor Starowicz mentioned the following:

- 1) the operation of the Task Force for counteracting illegal graffiti within the Krakow Municipal Commune composed of, among others, representatives of municipal real estate administrators, the City of Krakow Municipal Guards, the Police, the Penitentiary Service, the Municipal Cleaning and Waste Collection Company, the Department of Culture and National Heritage of the Krakow Municipal Office, the Department of Social Affairs of the Krakow Municipal Office, the Department of Information, Tourism and City Promotion of the Krakow Municipal Office as well as the Social Committee for the Restoration of Krakow’s Monuments;
- 2) preparation (by the NGO *Interkulturalni*) of the “Strategy for preventing and reacting to events of a racist and xenophobic character in the city’s public space” – this also pertains to events involving illegal graffiti;
- 3) devoting this year’s Open House Day at the Municipal Office to the issue of graffiti’s presence in the city’s public space;
- 4) broadcasting informational and educational shorts devoted to the issue of illegal graffiti in public transport vehicles (BUS TV);
- 5) cooperation of the municipal authorities with the Presidents of the City of Krakow Borough Councils in prevention of illegal graffiti;
- 6) educational activities at schools;
- 7) making public spaces available for artistic (legal) graffiti;
- 8) cooperation with the penitentiary service in removing graffiti by individuals held in prison facilities;
- 9) creating a computer graffiti database and an interactive graffiti map by the City of Krakow Municipal Guards.

The next panel participant, Mr Giorgio Moretti, representing Florence, described the activities of the “Angeli de Bello” foundation, which brings together around 1,500 volunteers involved in such activities as fighting and removing illegal graffiti. Volunteers cooperating with the foundation also help care for municipal green spaces. The foundation provides legal assistance to the volunteers and helps them in obtaining the authorization needed to act not only in historical locations but also on private property (acquiring private owners’ permission). It benefits from the support of UNESCO bodies involved in cultural heritage protection, and engages tourists, students and prisoners in its activities. It also conducts large-scale informational campaigns and educational activities concerning the protection of municipal space in Florence.

The City of Rochester was represented at the conference by graffiti artist Shawn Dunwoody. In his presentation, he stressed the need to appreciate graffiti as a form of art. Furthermore, he postulated drawing a clear distinction between graffiti and vandalism, drawing attention to the fact that the division between “good” and “bad” is imprecise. Mr Dunwoody spoke about the methods of counteracting illegal graffiti applied in Rochester, i.e. educational campaigns directed at youngsters stressing the need to respect other people’s property and condemning all acts of vandalism, as well as about initiatives highlighting the artistic aspects of graffiti. While discussing the latter, he quoted the example of “wall therapy” projects, involving cooperation of graffiti artists with the public and private sectors, integration of artists in the local community and cooperation with artists from other countries, linked with designating special locations for street art.

Ms Ulrika Wallin, representing Trondheim, started her presentation by providing information on the subject of funding earmarked by the city for projects related to counteracting vandalism, which constitute approx. 1.25% of the municipal budget. Ms Wallin stressed that in Trondheim the problem of illegal graffiti is treated very seriously by the local authorities, and their actions taken to counteract this form of vandalism are bringing very tangible effects. These activities include effective cooperation with the police, who maintain a database of illegal graffiti, imposing large fines on vandals, conducting educational campaigns at schools, as well as prompt painting-over of illegal inscriptions and applying special substances to protecting surfaces from being defaced again.

The speaker from Trondheim also referred to the experience of Bergen, striving to become a leader in the fight against illegal graffiti. Its strategy is focused on highlighting the opportunities brought about by street art, i.e. the possibility of expressing oneself as an artist. Bergen tries to increase the visibility of artistic graffiti in public spaces, strives for the designation of a sufficient number of spaces where graffiti artists can create, is attempting to set up an international organisation associating artists from this very sphere, promotes festivals devoted to street art (e.g. the Urban Expression Festival), as well as works to increase awareness on the subject of graffiti among the employees of municipal services and local authorities. Another interesting solution promoted by the authorities in Bergen is to guarantee to private tenement house owners the right to demand that graffiti remain on their buildings’ walls.

Ms Eglė Daugėliatė was the last speaker during the first part of the conference, and she described how Vilnius fights against illegal graffiti. She stressed that in 2012 the municipal authorities earmarked 86,000 euro for this purpose. Additionally, she explained that the powers of the Vilnius Municipal Office include issuing permits to create graffiti, removing illegal graffiti and conducting mediation with graffiti artists, while the obligation to clean buildings of illegal inscriptions rests on both building owners and administrators. Among the

solutions implemented by the authorities in Vilnius to counteract and prevent illegal graffiti, Ms Daugėliatė listed indicating locations for the legal painting of graffiti (currently there are 15 such sites, including six where street art can be created without the obligation to obtain a permit), cooperation with the police, issuing official bans on writing on walls, supervision over building administrators and users, educational campaigns, conducting campaigns involving painting over illegal inscriptions with the participation of NGOs, students, private companies and sponsors, as well as organising events promoting graffiti art.

The second part of the conference was devoted to graffiti art and to the successful provision of creative space to graffiti artists. Among panel participants in this part were representatives of Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Tbilisi, Vienna and Krakow.

Yury Marychev, representing Moscow, showed the Russian capital as a city extremely open to this type of emotional expression. He explained that, along with fighting all acts of vandalism, Moscow places strong emphasis on cooperation with graffiti authors and providing support by local authorities to street art projects. Under such cooperation, the local authorities in Moscow, an architectural committee and building owners issue special permits to artists, allowing them to create graffiti. They also provide the opportunity to obtain municipal subsidies and initiate contact with companies (potential sponsors), the media and developers providing equipment for creating graffiti. In Moscow, as part of events devoted to graffiti art, murals are also created to replicate works by famous artists and illustrators of Russian fairy tales. A Municipal Graffiti Centre is also being set up in the Russian capital as a place to perform research and create graffiti, and it will also operate as an educational centre.

Aleksiej Sawin, representing Saint Petersburg, showed a film depicting the creative process of local graffiti artists.

The next speaker, Mr David Aleksidze, representing Tbilisi, started by stressing that illegal graffiti is a relatively new problem in Georgia, since graffiti art itself is a recent phenomenon in the country. It is often of a political or religious character or constitutes an element of conflict between street gangs or hooligan groups. On the other hand, in Georgia graffiti art is often used to change the images of cities, serving as a form of art existing outside gallery and museum walls.

Franz Kratzer, representing Vienna, talked about the “Wienerwand” programme. Under this programme, space is made available to present and create street art. Thirteen such sites presently functioning in Vienna have a total area of over 4,000 m² and are marked with special notice boards showing the image of a dove. Informational folders are also being prepared to promote this type of artistic expression, a website devoted to legal graffiti is maintained, and large thematic events are organised with the support of local authorities.

Ms Urszula Twardzik, representing Krakow and speaking on behalf of Krakow’s 8th Borough, spoke about the competition for the design and execution of a legal graffiti project, entitled “Eighth in spray”. The competition is addressed to young people from Krakow. Ms Twardzik presented a report from the competition’s 1st edition, which was conducted in cooperation with the City of Krakow Municipal Guards, the Siemacha Association, Podgórze Cultural Centre and the Municipal Buildings Administration.

Summarising the experiences presented during the conference by the representatives of Krakow's partner cities and describing the fight against illegal graffiti, Professor Wiesław Starowicz formulated a number of conclusions important from Krakow's perspective:

- It is worth taking street art and its creative potential seriously. Krakow is still at the beginning of this process, although we are already familiar with initiatives presenting art in public space. As far as financial issues are concerned, it is worth studying the examples of other cities engaging extensive public and private funds in the fight against illegal graffiti and other acts of vandalism.
- It should be explored whether Krakow could involve volunteers in such activities.
- It is worth considering the idea of "positive action", such as designating large spaces for creating legal graffiti with the involvement and support of local authorities, graffiti artists, sponsors and the local community.
- It is necessary to set clear boundaries and differentiate between street art and vandalism.
- The need to conduct large-scale social campaigns and educational activities directed at youth should also be considered.
- It is vital to consider passing more restrictive legal regulations for counteracting illegal graffiti.