

# **The commodification of street art**

The graffiti community in Bulgaria

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### **ABSTRACT**

The graffiti subculture is a global phenomenon often placed in socio-cultural and media academic contexts. In recent years, significant changes occurred in respect of the distinctiveness of subcultures from mass culture, and the graffiti subculture as such. Its prospering coexistence with institutional forces such as the government or the market gradually erases its ideological primacy as an illicit practice (Borghini et al, 2010). The formation of a graffiti art marketplace and a semi-formalised global street art economy (Schacter, 2013) confronts graffiti subculture's initial purpose to challenge cultural hegemony (Hebdige, 1979). Economic and media forces intensify the processes of commodification, mediatization and commercialization of graffiti arousing graffiti artists to consider this renovation of graffiti's social implications.

The subculture's incorporation in mass culture was here examined in regard to the graffiti community in Bulgaria. As the increasing acceptance of graffiti by the mass are effects of the rise of a neo-liberal form of political-economic governance (Lombard, 2013) a developing country such as Bulgaria where neo-liberal governance has been recently applied arrives to give an interesting perspective on the global movement of graffiti's commodification. Hence, addressing the research question *How does the commodification of street art affect the graffiti community in Bulgaria?* fifteen qualitative semi-structured interviews with graffitiists from Bulgaria were conducted. Data analysis revealed the emerging challenges graffiti's commodification creates for the Bulgarian graffiti community and the emanating ways they find to tackle them. Key findings demonstrated the authenticity of graffiti subculture to be in question as graffitiists were rather open to use the graffiti skill for commercial purposes and might even compromise their personal artistic expression. Alternatively, in order to preserve the original nature of the subculture, Bulgarian graffitiists argued a mission to establish a clear distinction between *genuine graffiti* and *commercial graffiti* which would then be a potential method for the subculture to remain its existence as such.

KEYWORDS: *graffiti, street art, commodification, mediatization, subculture, interviews,*

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# 1. Introduction

*I don't see how an art that you can make money out of would be a protest (BN14).*

This quote belongs to one of the graffitiists interviewed in the empirical component of this study. It largely captivates the various challenges the graffiti community is facing due to the commodification of street art. The central challenge for a graffitiist is to preserve his integrity, as a paradox emerges of his desire to change the status quo, to destroy the *old* and build the *new*, and simultaneously to profit from his skills. What does this precisely entail in the world of street art?

Street art is a broad and contested category that generally refers to artworks installed in public spaces without authorization, and anonymously, including a range of objects and practices (Ganz, 2004; MacDowall, 2014; Schacter, 2013). Its commodification represents the process of these artworks acquiring economic value and becoming sellable objects, as well as these artistic skills transforming into means of financial profits. As graffiti is, arguably, the first and most recognizable form of street art, it was chosen as an exemplary activity to focus on in this study to examine how its commodification affects its community.

The problem arising of this commodification process is related to the radical shift in the socio-cultural meaning of street art, and graffiti in particular, as subcultures. Defining the concept of subculture has always been problematic: either typifying it through the principles of disobedience, disruption and grand anarchical potential, or describing it as an idealistic heroic act (Dengying, 2008). The difference in the two paradigms consists in the ways they undertake a subculture's implications for society determining them to be either negative or positive. This means it is hard to capture a subculture's socio-cultural meaning, especially as in the case of graffiti, its commodification further reshapes its original character. The rebellious nature of graffiti, its criminality and the ways it has been previously studied, are arguably sufficient enough to justify it as subculture, acknowledging a rationale of a subculture to be a group of people within a culture that differentiates itself from the majority as it does not accept commercially provided styles and meanings but it corresponds to subversive values (Riesman, 1950).

The above quotation demonstrates the complexity of the explored issue, showing the difficulties graffitiists meet in describing their own occupation: Is graffiti art?, Is graffiti rebellious?, Is graffiti a commodity? And most importantly, is graffiti still a subculture? These changes in the ways graffiti is being addressed and perceived by its own creators has recently been studied (Encheva, Driessens & Verstraeten, 2013), from a media perspective. Adding to this recent academic interest, this master thesis considers the graffiti community in Bulgaria in order to analyze how the commodification of graffiti affects its actors. The Bulgarian perspective provides a new and valuable insight on how the commodification of graffiti is taking place in a society that is still in transition from closed to open, from communist to democratic politico-economic shift in governance, as it was found in previous research to be an important factor in the ways graffiti is being governed and socially accepted (Lombard, 2013). Therefore, in the remainder of this first chapter the reader is familiarized with the notions of street art and graffiti, their social and political functioning and recent processes such as commodification, commercialization and mediatization that influenced the subcultures' evolution. In addition, it explains the social and scientific relevance of the study and the reason behind the choice to focus particularly on Bulgaria.

## **1.1 Street art and graffiti**

Street art has been defined as a global phenomenon encompassing various physical and virtual forms of expression such as traditional and stencil graffiti, stickers, posters, video projections, urban design, tags, poetry, guerilla art and street installations (Borghini, Visconti, Anderson, & Sherry, 2010; Droney, 2010). Its formal category emerges in the 1990's due to a combination of an aesthetic exhaustion of modern graffiti, activism regarding anti-globalisation and anti-war causes and the revival of art techniques such as spray-painted stencils, transitory sculptures and paper paste-ups (Ganz, 2004; Schacter, 2013; MacDowall, 2014; Young, 2014). It covers a diversity of practitioners, ideas and materials and it is produced informally, in various forms and sizes, ranging temporality, and it typically includes colorful alternations of urban space. However, street art remains a complex term to define mainly because of the range of extents to which it could be formalized and authorized. Moreover, as any creative field it has its variety of creative inputs and corresponding appreciations. Last but not least, street art has

been put in an assortment of social and political contexts, put forward for a discussion as an arena where meanings are constructed (MacDowall, 2014).

Street art is a form of visual art that is typically situated in urban environment including various artistic forms and techniques and graffiti is, arguably, the most recognized kind of street art. Graffiti is defined as an inscription or drawing produced by hand on a wall or a pictorial composition based on handwriting and sprayed on a surface, and a graffitist as an artist seeking self-expression through graffiti, tagging or spraying (Pereira, 2005). In fact, painting on walls begins even before we build streets and is part of our culture and society long before mass media. Under the form of cavemen markings at first, and evolving into the civilized world as spray-can calligraphy and illustrations in the 1970s, being perceived by the law as vandalism, eventually graffiti reaches a point in contemporary culture to be transferred onto canvases hanging in art galleries (Norvaišaitė, 2014). However, the criminalization of graffiti remains a controversial issue in local authorities' policies. Most of all, graffiti serves as an arena for individual expression of artists and it communicates their ideas and identities reflecting a social perspective (Bowen, 2010).

There is substantial research on the significance of graffiti and its various roles : for example as an assertion of gang territoriality and communication (Ley & Cybriwski, 1974), or political communication tool and protest act (Chaffee, 1993). Also as practice in shaping political agenda (Edelman, 1996), an indication and outcome of urban decline and de-industrialization (Austin, 2001), or as a means of producing differential forms of public space and resisting the authoritarian city (Borden et al., 2002). Graffiti has also been studied as an expression of the gendered and racial politics of identity (Keith, 2005), a conceptual tool for re-imagining the city (Amin & Thrift, 2002; Dickens, 2008), an *Iconoclash* and a factor in intersubjective dialogue (Schacter, 2008), and even as a mass medium (Groys, 2008; Nowak, 2008; Waldner & Dobratz, 2013). This shows graffiti has long been a part of social and political reality that has the potential to effectively influence social processes, shape social consciousness, increase opportunities for participation of neglected social groups and play the role of mediator between social strata (Chaffee, 1993). Part of the literature discussed in this paper is concerned with street art as a whole and the rest is engaged specifically with graffiti.

As the focus of this study is on graffiti as a form of street art, all academic findings remain relevant to it. As mentioned above, street art and graffiti have also been a matter of interest from media perspective.

## **1.2 Street art and Graffiti as media**

In Chaffee's work on street art in Hispanic countries (1993), street art is defined as traditional means of communication that give the power of expression to grass-roots groups that otherwise could not publicly comment on social problems. The study of Chaffee (1993) conceptualizes street art as a tool in understanding the conflicts between the state and civil society. Chaffee discusses street art as a collective expression of sociopolitical struggles and as a medium of political expression, comparing it to the press as a factor in shaping social consciousness. Street art combines the social functions of identifying events and political agendas, commentary, and presentation – a tool accessible to all ideological perspectives regardless of their social power or extent. It is a cheap and effective strategy for political communication used by both benevolent and not so benevolent, social figures and organizations. For instance, during the Second World War, the Nazis used it as a propaganda weapon inscribing street walls with hate-filled messages against the Jews and the rest of the enemies of the Third Reich (Pereira, 2005).

Although often being ambiguous and obscure, street art could also serve as a translator of political reality down to public's comprehension (Chaffee, 1993). Part of Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, for instance, was the "Hope" poster with an image of Obama designed by street artist Shepard Fairey (Pasick, 2009). Alternatively, it could also be considered a type of bottom-up media as the political messages come from the citizens themselves. Street art can give feedback on politics and document political history (Groys, 2008; Nowak, 2008). Moreover, Waldner and Dobratz (2013) describe street art as a form of micro-level political participation and again point out precisely to culture jamming and graffiti as types of alternative media. These and other functions of graffiti are what presumes it to be an interesting field of study from a media, culture and society perspective.



### 1.3 Graffiti as a subculture

From early 20<sup>th</sup> century the consensus among artists and critics was that one purpose of art is to shock people out of their perceptual complacency and to force them to view the world anew (Kester, 2004). Nowadays, art subcultures are, arguably, propping up this particular nature of art: if we understand culture as hegemony, we are to celebrate subculture as the challenge to hegemony (Hebdige, 1979). Although *subculture* as an academic term appeared in the 1930s, subcultures as phenomena are more than 400 years old (Dengying, 2008).

They have been described as deviant, uncertain and unproductive groups: traditional logic that is still followed by The Chicago Sociology School - the first major body of works specializing in urban sociology and research into the urban environment. However, another academic line of thoughts, The Birmingham School, takes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of culture, incorporating elements such as Marxism, post-structuralism and feminism, and is concerned with the ritual resistance of subcultures' anti-power politics (Dengying, 2008). In other words, it emphasized the examination of subculture's capacity to challenge dominant culture and oppose authoritative institutions. This shows there is a certain contradiction within academia because of the hybridity of subculture's identity. Hence, in sociology and cultural studies, a consensus definition of subculture would be a group of people within a culture that differentiates itself from the majority as it does not accept commercially provided styles and meanings but it corresponds to subversive values (Riesman, 1950).

The destructive and rebellious character of graffiti is justified not only, but mainly by its criminality. In this light, graffiti can also be placed in subculture. It is still an illegal activity in many countries, its legislation and criminalization have always been controversial topics and its positive and negative implications for society debatable in academia. Moreover, graffiti writing is, generally, an activity invested with considerable cultural meaning by many of those engaged in it and their understanding of graffiti is considerably at odds with prevailing political, media and policy discourse that sees it purely in terms of criminal damage (Rowe & Hutton, 2012). Graffiti represents for many young people a ground for struggle and transgression, a chance to reject the law, an arena where they experiment excitement, risk and heroic conduct (Campos, 2013). Hence, graffiti in its roots and nature is a riotous activity.

However, an interesting change in the social roles of subculture has been observed in relation to its counter-hegemony, namely, their incorporation into the mainstream – a process evolving once a subculture is (dis)covered by the popular press (Hebdige, 1979). The transformation from underground to mainstream concerns a subculture's relationships with mass media and commerce which may be scene-specific (Jacques, 2001). Accordingly, this study explores these specificities in relation to a relatively recent shift in the subculture character of graffiti from underground to mainstream culture as due to various social changes and processes such as its mediatization and commodification. This master thesis is interested in the consequences from these changes and the reactions of a graffiti community's members to it.

#### **1.4 Graffiti, its commodification and mediatization**

Commodity is a marketable item comprising goods or services (Marx, 1904). In today's globalized society, culture has become a commodity – a special type of commodity that is categorized in a special industrial and market environment (Harvey, 2009). It remains special as people tend to consider cultural objects as authentically different. By doing so, they regard them as being of higher value than what is found in mass production and consumption (Harvey, 2009). However, for any commodity item, they are part of the requirements of tradability. In other words, no item no matter how cultural or special can be entirely outside of the monetary system: a painting by Picasso could be assigned a money value as could a painting by Monet (Harvey, 2009). Thus, we have built a commodity society where to constantly evaluate economic and cultural values (Dunn, 2008). Moreover, sometimes the marketing tools used in commerce destroy the uniqueness of cultural products, especially if it depends on the purity of some aesthetic experience (Harvey, 2009). For example, creating Mona Lisa's T-shirts, shoes or bags would decrease the worth of its aesthetic features such as enigma, monumentality of the composition, subtle modeling of forms, or atmospheric illusionism. Besides the aesthetic specificities that could be damaged, in respect of graffiti, the commodification is rather influential in terms of its social meaning.

The process of commodification of graffiti has been examined by Luke Dickens (2010). As graffiti is a form of art on the street that could be freely available to view and often corresponding with the urban environment, is difficult to directly commodify (Dickens, 2008).

More importantly, as indicated earlier it is an activity within a subculture which points again to its subversive character and irreconcilability with the commercial world. Hence, the commodification of a subculture is seen as happening through the appropriation of its elements by the dominant culture where they are either dissolved or their origins erased (Hebdige, 1979; Root, 1996). Graffiti writing was first transformed onto canvas for sale way back in 1980's during the Manhattan art boom (Dickens, 2010). The commodification of it at this point was seen as a *sell out* to the exploitative interests of the art establishment that would be distinguished as a *post-graffiti* art movement (Dickens, 2010). Dickens (2010) also suggests that the reasons behind such post-graffiti aesthetic practices are now not only a question of the motivation of artists but depending on various cultural intermediaries, institutions and firms. The commodification of graffiti seems to be expanding and moving towards a shift in the perspective on it from a rebellious act that rejects dominant cultural forces into an activity within the respected art community and even the expensive art industry.

The process of commodification of graffiti is closely related to its mediatization. The concept of mediatization has emerged by the need of describing socio-cultural changes related to the intensification of media (Lundby, 2009). The expansion of media technologies and the integration of mediated communication in our culture have shaped what is addressed as *media-saturated societies* (Encheva, Driessens & Verstraeten, 2013). Mass media attention has been important from the very beginning of graffiti's revitalization in contemporary culture as it has been responsible for making the underground visible to society and graffiti's increasing popularity in New York City, thus transforming it into a sophisticated subculture (Austin, 2001). Its sophistication could be found in its inclusion in the high culture marketplace and its positioning among the highest esteem by the arts' circles. It is, on one side, the capacity of media to reconceptualise subcultures by situating them in new social context, and the choices of artists to use media in certain ways, on the other (Encheva et al., 2013).

Encheva et al. (2013) argue that these factors have a strong impact over the processes of commodification and commercialization of graffiti. Commercialization is defined by marketing and merchandising activities, and it is a process that can enhance the commodification of culture (Wasko, Phillips & Purdie, 1993). For example, images of graffiti's

essential features are included in advertisements, music videos or product placement or what Hughes (2009) calls *mass media outlets* of alternative underground cultures. Thus, the subculture members appeal to young consumers, accelerating its incorporation into the mainstream (Encheva et al., 2013) and going beyond its own original point and purpose. Additionally, graffiti writers actively embed various media (digital, mass, niche) to organize and promote themselves in order to manage their public relations and profitability (Encheva et al., 2013).

It does not require for graffiti to be the marketed commodity to become part of the commercial world. For instance, Borghini et al.'s analysis (2010) demonstrates how graffiti is being commercialized through advertising. It is one of many studies revealing the same interesting shift: the global street art movement is losing its ideological primacy as an illicit practice, allowing an idea of coexistence with institutional forces such as government or the market to prosper. The authors suggest that as street art became associated with cultural trends such as fashion, music, popular art, movies, sports and entertainment, a cultural compound of art, marketing and urban discourses reached a point where citizens could hardly distinguish authentic from commercial messages (Borghini et al., 2010). Obscuring the difference between genuinely inspired artworks and custom ones could modify the morals of the subculture, thus creating a division within it. Hence, it is necessary to explore the attitudes and opinions among graffiti community's members on the subject. The commodification of graffiti and the emerging practices within the community are socially relevant topics as they might change the overall social functioning of graffiti subculture.

### **1.5 Commodification of graffiti and the effects on its subculture**

Encheva, Driessens and Verstraeten (2013) suggest that the subculture of graffiti is losing its rebellious and oppositional image, increasingly becoming part of mainstream culture. Their analysis demonstrates how the mediatization of cultural sub-groups and their practices are closely related to their commodification and commercialization processes as they distribute their work through media not simply for the sake of art but also as an apparatus for acquiring sponsorships or job opportunities (Encheva et al., 2013).

The implications of graffiti's commodification are found in the occurrence of new business models in the creative industries such as graffiti walking tours, street art museums, integration of graffiti in advertising and sustainability (e.g. <http://greengraffiti.com/>). Graffiti enters the world of fine art, finding a place within galleries, museums, and on the walls of art collectors. From Banksy and Jean-Michel Basquiat to David Choe, street and graffiti artists' works have been auctioned at top dollar prices at popular auction houses, breaking down the hazy line between high and low art. Hence, an interesting phenomenon of an emerging graffiti art marketplace occurred. However, in this particular study the processes of commodification and mediatization cannot be discussed separately from the political economy of culture as it is relevant for the Bulgarian case examined.

## **1.6 Why Bulgaria?**

As the end of communist governments in Central and Eastern Europe is one of the profound changes in the last century that have shaped the political economy of communication and culture (Bogdanowicz et al., 2003) the Bulgarian case examined in this study could not be properly explained without paying attention to the recent political and economic changes in the country. Moreover, theory and literature described below show that the process of commodification is closely related to a political and economic shift from a socialistic to a neo-liberal system, making Bulgarian society an interesting case for this study.

Bulgaria was a single-party socialist state as part of the Soviet-led Eastern Bloc until in 1989, a transition into a democracy and a market-based economy began. Bulgaria is one of the countries with relatively new interaction between art and social activism. Nowadays, the Bulgarian society is still experiencing the transition difficulties of accepting its history, and graffiti is, supposedly, still an emerging medium and political communication tool, and a way of rebellious expression. From a political economy perspective it is interesting to track the commodification process of graffiti as it is proven to be what happens after a stage of adoption of the art practice by the democratized society, and is what is intensely happening in the developed democratic states.

## 1.7 Research question

Taking the above into consideration this has led to the following research question:

**RQ:** *How does the commodification of street art affect the graffiti community in Bulgaria?*

The social and scientific relevance of asking this question is that it approaches the theories on the commodification of graffiti art and the politico-economic shift to neoliberal capitalism to explore and evaluate the current state of graffiti subculture and community in Bulgaria. The study aims to examine the implications of graffiti as a medium on a micro level, a bottom-up study that points out to the stages and prospective directions of development of the graffiti phenomenon in a developing country. This master thesis is focused on the commodification of graffiti subculture, discussing graffiti activities as forms of street art, and situated in the theoretical approaches of political economy, commodification and mediatization.

## 2. Theoretical framework

Political economy, commodification and mediatization theories are bringing, some may argue overly, different aspects to the subject of this thesis. However, two points suggested a direction towards such a perspective. First, there has been found a common ground between political economy and cultural studies regarding many issues such as the meaning of citizenship, the commodification of audiences, and the production and circulation of meaning (Bogdanowicz et al., 2003). As graffiti is a cultural phenomenon increasingly used to produce marketed value (Jacobson, 2014) that is too, used as political communication tool (Chaffee, 1993) and practice in shaping political agenda (Edelman, 1996) it surely carries a cultural, political and economic capital.

Second, the commodification of graffiti which will be here explored as a factor reflecting on the Bulgarian graffiti community is a process emerging as a result of a political and economic shift from socialistic to a more open, democratized society or one defined by capitalism and the commodity as the *cell-form of capitalism* (Prodnik, 2012). Moreover, the thesis is concentrated on the community in Bulgaria, which is an example of a relatively recent political and economic transformation of this type. It began in 1989 when the frequent annual changes of government changing from communists to democrats, to reformed communists and back again to democrats started to typify a process of democratization. It was not until 1997 that the Bulgarian Socialist Party witnessed a major electoral defeat and a partial imposition of a market road to capitalism led to an economic crisis (Pickles & Smith, 2005) followed by a slow recovery. The end of the so called long lasting transition is still a debatable and relevant issue in Bulgarian media and society, and has also been discussed as a factor influencing culture and cultural values in Bulgarian society.

Finally, regarding mediatization, the role of media as cultural phenomenon itself appears to be a main actor in building the common ground between cultural studies and political economy. A conception of culture in the modern world cannot be complete if it fails to account for the space employed by *the media* – the institutional realm of communication and information, thus media are a central aspect of the political economy of culture (Bogdanowicz et al., 2003) and graffiti as part of it. Therefore, the readers will first be presented with street

art and graffiti placing them in historical, social and cultural context. Next, each theoretical view, political economy, commodification and mediatization will be further explained in order to better grasp their triangular relationship with respect to graffiti subculture. First, however, some historical context regarding the phenomenon of street art and graffiti is necessary.

## 2.1 Street art and Graffiti

The antiquity, continuity, and cross-cultural predominance of inscription as a means of positioning ideology are undisputed (Visconti, Sherry, Borghini, & Anderson, 2010). People have always needed to articulate themselves in a public way, by telling a story or posing a question, and many times by presenting a political ideology (Smith, 2007). Early humans were expressing themselves by drawing on cave walls, a practice seen as the first evidence of guerrilla art (Smith, 2007). Graffiti is also a very old tradition of visual communication and social commentary. The ancient city of Pompeii's excavations have uncovered over 1500 pieces of graffiti with messages of political discontent or sentiments resembling today's graffiti writers (Walsh, 1996). In modern times, graffiti is known to begin in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century as part of hobo culture, when migratory workers and homeless people began using the freight train cars in the U.S. as a means of free transportation, and graffiti on the trains was used to pass along information about food and shelter (Gastman, Rowland, & Sattler, 2006).

This study is concerned with the evolution of contemporary graffiti and its subculture. Contemporary graffiti began in the early 1970's with *tags* – stylized signatures or logos that are unique to each individual graffiti writer or *tagger* (Powers, 1996). Graffitiists within the developing subculture could identify and credit the works and *tagging* became a competitive activity for recognition among the community. Reputation of the artists would grow if the place of the *tag* was difficult to reach, thus trains and subway railcars remained common surfaces for graffiti performance (Powers, 1996). *Taggers* were sometimes sponsored by street gangs, which entailed that graffiti became a part of street gang culture as means to control certain streets and claim territories (Gastman et al., 2006).

Muralism emerged from this activity because of the will to increase the size or volume of the works. While a *tagger* would gain reputation for the wide spread and frequency of his *tag*, murals added the dimension of creativity as an important factor in it (Powers, 1996).



Graffitists started mentoring the rookies and subways were the means to expand the audiences, boost the competition and achieve broader fame. Thus, a collective activity widened and homogenized an entire subculture (Powers, 1996).

It started as a youth activity, teenagers would form alliances or groups they called *crews*, recruiting members from the city, transcending traditional neighborhood and gang territories. However, graffiti did not remain an isolated activity but a well adopted practice in hip-hop subculture as an additional way of expression to rap singing (Ferrell, 1996; Powers, 1996). Rap music, break dancing and graffiti-styled album covers were intensely promoting graffiti, making it an interesting media highlight, portraying the constant battle between authorities and minority adolescents. Alternatively, writers romanticized the youths performing it as heroic young men creating art by beating the system (Mailer & Naar, 1973).

These early forms of graffiti and guerilla art are today reviewed as forms of street art: a category occurring in the 1990's due to a combination of an aesthetic exhaustion of modern graffiti, activism regarding anti-globalisation and anti-war causes and the revival of art techniques such as spray-painted stencils, transitory sculptures and paper paste-ups (Ganz, 2004; Schacter, 2013; MacDowall, 2014; Young, 2014). The distinction between street art and graffiti is a challenging one. In the Oxford dictionary graffiti is defined as *writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed illicitly on a wall or other surface in a public place*, while street art is defined as *an artwork that is created in a public space, typically in an illicit way* (Oxford Dictionaries, 2015). However, differences between the two are found in the forms and purposes, authorial intent, target audiences and more. For example, DeNotto (2014) claims that while street art is an invitation for interactive experience, graffiti is more of a closed community activity. In definitional terms, graffiti is either subsumed under the broader cultural field of street art or it becomes a primary category (MacDowall, 2014; Schacter, 2013; Young, 2014). However, DeNotto (2014) claims street art is a sub-genre of graffiti with a logic deriving from the fact that traditional contemporary graffiti under the form of inscriptions is the first form of street art and all other forms such as stencil graffiti or 3D graffiti followed years later.

Street art has been addressed as forms of place marking (Borghini et al., 2010; Visconti et al., 2010) where place marking is an evocative form of place making. This is driven by various

extents of actors' will to resist, contest or beautify public place (Visconti et al., 2010). Visconti et al.' study (2010) acknowledges Borghini et al.'s findings (2010) of the following ideal-types of place marking: *tags* as an early expression of street art meant to spread an individual's name, contesting the marginality and ugliness of social life through the repetition of nicknames or rebellious words on public walls; highly stylized *writing* as an aesthetic exercise related to the need for self-affirmation within the *crew*; *sticking* as the practice of pasting drawings and symbols in public walls as to spread a message to a broader audience; *stencil* that mimics the marketing practices of advertising and branding by replicating the same form or symbol (e.g., personal logos) in multiple places; *poetic* assault as the writing of poetry on dull public spaces to infuse them with lyrical content; *urban design* as an aesthetic practice applied in favor of the beautification of public architecture. As one may notice, some of these so called forms of place marking within the field of street art such as *tags* and stylized *writing* were mentioned earlier as examples of graffiti (Powers, 1996). In addition, *stencil* has been commonly used in the word combination *stencil graffiti* (Kane, 2009). Hence, the usage of identical terminology for both of the cultural fields, graffiti and street art, in various academic works makes the establishment of a clear distinction between the two impossible. However, the majority of scholars discuss street art as the basic cultural field and if not explicitly concerned with graffiti, they address the community as one whole. Hence, this study also addresses graffiti as a form of street art. All artists employing the graffiti practice that includes writing or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed on a wall or other surface in a public place will be considered appropriate respondents.

Dwellers, art experts, and government officials face a dilemma: when to look at street interventions as acts of beautification or even public art and when to consider it as the ultimate defacement of urban order (Visconti et al., 2010). This dilemma is also represented in the media. For example, the documentary called *Graffiti wars* adds a connotation of graffiti and street artists based on the attitude of British police which is pursuing graffiti artists and erasing graffiti but not street art, letting police chief officers to decide on what is one and what is another.

Furthermore, the documentary highlights the story of the successful international street artist Ben Eine whose artwork was once an official gift from Prime Minister David Cameron for

President Barack Obama who comments: “I found it quite interesting because I’ve been arrested quite a few times, I got a criminal record.” (*Graffiti wars*, 2011). Before his success as a street artist he was an infamous graffiti writer and in order to avoid going to prison, he claims, he had to change his approach and evolve into a street artist and participant in the commercial art world. Hence, connotations of street art being aesthetically valuable and graffiti being a criminal act are suggesting that the commodification of the subcultures also changes the meaning of the definitions.

An emerging street art marketplace is constituted of practitioners whose works are now produced as sellable objects with clear authorship (MacDowall, 2014). The examples of Banksy, Shepard Fairey and Invader illustrate street art’s circulation within a semi-formalised global economy constructed of networks of artists, sites, exhibitions, brands and products (Schacter, 2013). However, not all street art fits in this marketplace as it is a more complex phenomenon that is also seen as the result of collective authorship, an accumulation of practices among agents together creating a *cultural scene* or *cultural ecosystem* that involves skills’ sharing, collaboration, imitation, mentoring and competition (MacDowall, 2014).

Street art is a form of public art that is often subject of its own ethic and implicitly encouraging interaction (MacDowall, 2014). The complexity of its ecosystem MacDowall (2014) suggests being due to the ongoing, unplanned and uncoordinated aggregate actions he finds worth examining through the theory of stigmergy - a theory used to explain social behavior of animals. Stigmergy is a biological term describing a mechanism of the indirect coordination between actions and agents. More precisely, it observes a phenomenon in which a trace left by one action stimulates the performance of another, thus creating a process where various actions of various agents reinforce each other and lead to the emergence of a coherent systematic activity (Theraulaz & Bonabeau, 1999). Mark Elliott (2007) has also used stigmergy to analyse graffiti arguing that even though, the variety of techniques and inspirations in graffiti characterizes it as qualitative activity within its community, it could also be seen as quantitative. The stigmergic effect could be seen outside of the community as the creation of graffiti in a particular place which attracts more actors to engage in the same area, thus accumulating, becoming a quantitative activity.

Similarly, the *Broken Windows Theory* of Wilson and Kelling (1982) explains the accumulation of street crimes in poorly maintained areas, arguing that urban disorder and vandalism provokes additional crime and anti-social behavior, including graffiti as one of the elements of vandalism that could attract more criminal activities. Despite their study being heavily criticized, it caused a downturn in political tolerance towards graffiti (Thacher, 2004). As a result, the birthplace of subway graffiti, New York in 1970's, acknowledged it as a social and political problem in 1980's that needed to be resolved (Austin, 2001). Hence, the *Broken Windows Theory* initiated a process through which graffiti comes to signify disorder and prompt a negative response.

However, in other contexts, graffiti got associated with more positive features such as becoming a sign of creativity and engagement with urban spaces, integrating into the urban fabric and even an element of a lively culture (MacDowall, 2014). The notions of graffiti and street art have been extended to greater amount of interference with the public space shaping a rubric of *urban creativity* (Boriello & Ruggiero, 2013). Flash mobs, chewing gum walls and attaching padlocks to streets' components are today globally adopted practices that all exemplify a quantitative form of stigmergy and demonstrate the logic of street art activities (MacDowall, 2014). However, MacDowall (2014) forewarns that due to the criminological character of *Broken Windows Theory* this stigmergetic perspective is usually associated with the view of graffiti as primal activity deprived of aesthetic value, yet it could be useful when discussing street art's capacity to generate active audiences, increase interactivity and collective creativity. However, this exploratory research is not concerned with the ways the community interacts with audiences, nor with the ways its members interact with each other but rather regards the ways the graffiti community is affected by certain processes. As indicated earlier, the processes of commodification and mediatization carry the potential to establish new distinctions, adjust or renew concepts (Dickens, 2010; Encheva et al., 2013) Hence, it is of great importance to define what are the graffiti community and the graffiti subculture.

## 2.2 Graffiti subculture and community

A subculture has been defined as subversion to normalcy, criticizing dominant societal standards and bringing together like-minded individuals who do not fit into these standards, allowing them to develop a sense of identity (Hebdige, 1979). In this sense, the concept of subculture seems close to the concept of community. Back in 1974, Sarason proposes a new community psychology which accentuates on a sense of belonging and responsibility among community members, called sense of community - a major base for self-definition (Sarason, 1974). Therefore, in general, but specifically in relation to graffiti the concepts of subculture and community could be interchangeable.

In 1975, Gusfield identifies two dimensions of community: territorial and relational. The first one indicates a geographical notion of community —neighborhood, town, city. The second one is concerned with the quality and nature of human relationships without reference to location (Gusfield, 1975). Hence, the street art subculture could be considered a transnational community that rejects dominant cultural forces through visual expression of rebellion ideas. The community in Bulgaria, however, would also depend on the geographical positioning of the artworks and origin of the artists.

The concept of imagined community differentiates from that of an actual community as it is not and could not include constant face-to-face interactions between the members (Anderson, 1991). For example, Anderson points out that a nation is a socially constructed community as it is based on the imagination of the people in perceiving themselves as part of one group (Anderson, 1991). Additionally, theories of communities such as communities of interest defined by their collective concern with a problem (Fischer, 2001) and communities of practice (Brown & Duguid, 1991) are used in this study in order to determine what actually defines the graffiti community in Bulgaria. Thus, the study builds upon academia concerned with the ways communities are built and subcultures developed giving special attention to the specificities of political and economic transition in Eastern post-communist societies.

Conducting the literature review, it was examined what defines a subculture and how the graffiti subculture is analyzed: Subculture is defined by differentiation from the majority, non-acceptance of commercially provided styles and meanings and correspondence to

subversive values (Riesman, 1950). Opposed to subculture, mass culture and mass society have been discussed as the notions indicating a movement of culture from abundance, diversity and vitality to homogeneity and triviality (DiMaggio, 1977). Mass culture is defined by dissemination via the mass media, ideas and values that develop from a common exposure to the same media, tastes in art that are favored by the majority and promotion of consumerism (Browne, 2006). Additionally, popular culture also arises as a term in cultural studies to determine an arena where hegemony emerges, thus shaping a dominant culture shared by the majority of a population (Storey, 2006). In contrast, subcultures represent *noise* and are semiotically resistant to the hegemonic style of the mainstream (Hebdige, 1979). The graffiti subculture produces content that is often explicitly anti-authority and anti-mainstream (Droney, 2010). However, further explanations of the commodification and mediatization processes will demonstrate a progression towards the incorporation of graffiti subculture into mass culture.

The graffiti subculture was firstly studied as a rather negative phenomenon. Back in 1974, Mailer determines graffiti subculture as an assertion of primitivism against the modern city (Kurlansky, Naar & Mailer, 1974). Similarly, Stewart (1991) argues graffiti represent a threat to the system of meaning that constructs values of integrity and significance. It is only later that a more mature discussion of subcultures begins. They are seen as heroically opposing mainstream order of meaning and knowledge but are simultaneously characterized by far more complex stratification than previously suggested simple dichotomy of *monolithic mainstream—resistant subcultures* (Weinzierl & Muggleton, 2003). Nowadays, the commodification of graffiti adds to this complexity of fragmentation within the subculture as it provides the members of the community with the choice to participate or not in the economy of graffiti. For this reason, this study aimed at exploring the variations of this participation in the Bulgarian graffiti community. In order to do this, it was also necessary to more closely explore the perspectives on the relationship between commodification and graffiti subculture.

### **2.3 Commodification of street art and graffiti subcultures**

Commodification is not to be confused with commoditization. Commodification is used to describe the process by which something without economic value is assigned a value and from a Marxist perspective points to a replacement of social values with market values.

Commoditization is the movement from monopolistic to perfect competition market structures, thus a challenge for businesses relying on branding (Rushkoff, 2005). However, in anthropological studies the two terms are used interchangeably in describing the process transforming anything that was not available for trade into a commodity (Appadurai, 1988) and commodities as objects of economic value (Appadurai, 1994) or means of exchange, which are produced within fields of capitalism (Appadurai, 2005).

The social impact of commodification was first criticized by Karl Marx in relation to two concepts: commodity fetishism and alienation. Commodity fetishism is the vision of the social relationships within commodity production as less human and more economic. Marx (1867) argues it is how the abstract aspects of economic value become genuine for society. Alienation is the dehumanization as a result of social classes division (Marx, 1867). Commodification as a Marxist view was concerned with the market taking over the humanity. Communists criticize commodification because of their belief that some things should not be for sale but accessible to all, e.g. education, knowledge, art (Rigi, 2012). During the 1950s and 1960s, a multi-disciplinary post-Marxist group of theorists also known as The Situationist International (SI) described what they saw as the inauthenticity of life under image-mediated capitalism, or the idea of an empty and shallow life driven by consumerism and its attributes such as advertising.

The intellectual constructions of the Situationist International were built according to anti-authoritarian Marxism and the avant-garde art movements, Dada and Surrealism (Plant, 1992). Situationist theory synthesized these theoretical disciplines into a comprehensive critique of advanced capitalism. They rearticulated classical Marxist concepts, such as his theory of alienation and commodity of fetishism interpreting them as not only the misery of capitalist society, but also of every aspect of life and culture, arguing that capitalism's apparent successes such as increased income and leisure, and technological advancement, could never outweigh the social degradation of everyday life (Plant, 1992). The absorption of radical ideas into mass media culture Situationist's writers labeled *recuperation*. A recent publication in *Art Monthly Australia* accommodates the commodification process of street art in the Situationist's perspective and claims that seeing street art as a counter-culture is a common misconception as it is already homogenized with popular culture, and even denominate it "the most

mainstream contemporary art practice” (Vaneigem & International, 2013, p.42). However, they still noticed some components of street art that resists the so called *recuperation* such as *tagging* which is signature-based graffiti and *writing* (abstract lettering) and saw them as remaining closed subcultures. Additionally, as some street artists reject transitioning into commercial galleries, or as Situationists call them *street art purists*, they anticipated that such spectrum of practice could cause cultural conflict between artists at the opposing ends (Vaneigem & International, 2013), thus suggesting a division within the street art community.

According to Situationist International (SI), the expansion of street art audience accelerates populist motifs, thus street art as a *low-brow* culture is not appropriate for critical review because experts’ critiques would not affect popular opinion. To support the argument, SI’s article points out to examples of commercially successful artists whose work is saturated with mainstream iconography deriving from fashion magazines, anime, pornography and advertising, claiming this manner of work is not about finding beauty in new ways but reconstructing common commercial notions of beauty. SI also critiques Banksy’s works as non-complex ones whose appeal is due to the satire, *simple charm* or the audacity in placing them (Vaneigem & International, 2013). On what grounds do Situationists distinguish low-brow from high-brow cultures? They criticize street art on the grounds of techniques simplification, define the increased realism in the field as a synecdoche for artistic merit and claim there are not politically activated works, saying “Recuperated street art has renounced the ambition to give form to the world” (Vaneigem & International, 2013, p.43). However, this claim seems to lack justification. When it comes to street art, aesthetics are not the same dimension as they are in other artistic fields. As mentioned earlier, street art and graffiti as a sub-genre have always been socially and politically conceptualized, precisely why it has been studied outside of aesthetically relevant fields. Another argument for the diminishment of street art’s non-economic value Situationists use, is that it used to be a gift, freed of the physical or intellectual property of the artist, and precisely the lack of economic value and the altruism of the artists were what shaped its higher status but the commodification debased this ideal (Vaneigem & International, 2013).



Similarly to Situationists, some street artists believe that image-mediated capitalism generates a *crazed mentality* in the consumer (Droney, 2010). Alternatively, as many artists become part of what Daniel Bell calls *the cultural mass* defined as not the creators but the transmitters of culture in the media and elsewhere (Bell, 1978), the more facilitated the commodification of culture (Harvey, 2009). Hence, this study explores what are the opinions and attitudes of the creators of graffiti on the subject of values promoted by consumerism. Consumerism is a social and economic ideology encouraging the acquisition of goods and services. Consumer culture describes the mechanism in which the forces of transnational capital and the global mediascape interpenetrate local cultures (Appadurai, 2011). It conveys a marketplace ideology where certain patterns of behavior and interpretations of consumers are more likely than others (Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2002). Consumer culture theory suggests consumers actively transform symbolic meanings produced by advertisements, brands or material goods to attest their particular circumstances and shape their identity and lifestyle goals (Kozinets, 2001). In other words, the marketplace provides consumers with a wide-ranging palette of resources from which to construct their individual and collective identities (Murray, 2002). Exploring the attitudes of graffitiists towards consumerism is an important factor in determining the position of the community within the division of power between subculture and mass culture as it is one of their main opposing features. The examination of these power relations is endorsed by taking a political economy approach.

## **2.4 Commodification and Political Economy**

As political economy is often concerned with power relations, when it comes to the commodification and mediatization of graffiti these would relate to the dynamics between the subculture and mass culture, the underground and the mainstream, the interpersonal and the mass communications, the civil society and the state. The study of Chaffee (1993) discusses street art as a tool to understand the conflicts between the state and the civil society indicating that street art's importance is more visible in repressive regimes as it is a form of political protest, at the same time its ability to measure the spectrum of thinking enables it to become a valuable lobbying tool in democratic societies (Chaffee, 1993). Hence, this research is also exploring whether graffiti and the artists participate in political campaigns.

Apparently, a global shift towards neoliberal capitalism in political economy is what drives the change in the functioning of graffiti as social practice and the increasing commodification processes. Neoliberal capitalism is a politico-economic practice centered round commodity production and assuming the well-being of humans could be best achieved through liberation of individual entrepreneurial freedoms (Harvey, 2005). Noam Chomsky (1999) defines neoliberalism as the political paradigm that refers to the priority given to private interests to control most of the social order to boost profits. Neoliberal ideas count on free market policies encouraging consumer choice, private enterprise, personal responsibility and entrepreneurial initiative - they weaken the role of the government and declare it parasitic and inefficient (Chomsky, 1999). However, a recent study of Lombard (2013) examined the way governments control street art and how the attitude towards it changed with the shift to neoliberalism. The study demonstrates that there is in fact a softening of graffiti policy but this does not mean less governance (Lombard, 2013). It simply means that the increasing support for and acceptance of graffiti are effects of the rise of a neo-liberal form of political-economic governance (Lombard, 2013). Thus, this study explores what is the relationship between authorities and street artists from the perspective of the artists.

Not to condemn commodification, it is important to look at it also from a neo-liberalistic perspective. This will surely change the evaluation of this cultural development. For instance, Borghini et al.'s study (2010) regarding the relationship between street art and advertising finds that the process of commodification of street art could actually create *creative symbioses*. They argue that in an era when creative industries are constantly interpenetrating each other and hybrids proliferate faster than scholars could track them it is more useful to focus on a distinct sphere hosting a particular form of *creative symbiosis*. The study demonstrates that the ideological differences in surface structure do not interfere with the creation of a symbiotic relationship emerging out of resonant similarities in the deep structure of different enterprises. As advertising just like street art presents a mean of linguistic-visual communication of ideals, values and emotions and transmits messages beyond their literal meaning, a creative exchange of these is happening between the two. Even though advertising is a limited, not as free arena for expression as it is street art, it could yet serve as an inspirational platform. Moreover, from

a business development perspective it was interesting to examine whether adopting the street art practice in a developing country like Bulgaria creates new economic possibilities or job opportunities. The study evaluates what the stage of adopting the practice Bulgaria is in by posing questions to street artists about collaborations with advertising or other business institutions to determine if the community benefits from the process of commodification.

Borghini et al. argue that street art could be characterized as capitalist surrealism, postmodern realism, or even *subvertising* when it comes to its implications on advertising as it converts, diverts, and inverts advertising so that it promotes noncommercial consumption (Borghini et al., 2010). According to them, this is due to the similarities in visual and cognitive effects between street art and advertising and the ability of street art to carry messages of ideological critique and activist exhortation. Thus, the rhetoric in street art would stimulate advertising in two domains: idea generation and social engagement. The study points out to the division between artists who are employed in the advertising industry and those who rail against it and the consumer culture (Borghini et al., 2010). Droney's essay even points out to a paradox involving street artists who claim to be resistant to advertising but actually participate in the marketing strategies of the mainstream culture (Droney, 2010). He claims the street artists and marketers in Los Angeles are intentionally seeking to produce ostensibly subversive aesthetic works, blaming the street artists to be navigators of the subculture in the world of marketing and producers of irreverent and self-contradictory artworks. This study examines if such connotation exists in the graffiti community in Bulgaria and whether the subject causes a division within it. In order to do so, other two relevant processes were explored, mediatization and commercialization of graffiti.

## **2.5 Mediatization and commercialization of graffiti subculture**

Media are not pure reflection or a type of refraction of our reality but rather exist right in the middle of our society and affect us and our culture from within (Hepp, Hjavgard, & Lundby, 2010). Media follow every aspect of our lives, regardless if it is private or public (Poster, 2004) and become a ground point for social construction (Hepp, 2010). Mediatization is not purely about the change media might cause in society, but rather about the more complex and

long-term process involving media as moulding force in socio-cultural change (Hepp 2011; Hepp et al., 2010).

According to Kaun and Fast (2014) a broad understanding of mediatization is one that encompasses all processes of change that are media induced or related to a change in the media landscape. In their report, *Mediatization of Culture and Everyday Life*, key aspects of the relationship between arts and media explain the logic of mediatization and commodification processes within culture. Kaun and Fast (2014) follow Johan Fornäs' (2012) distinctions between anthropological, ontological, hermeneutic and aesthetic understandings of culture where the latter refers mainly to human artefacts constituting a specific sector in society. They collect and consider previous academic research that discusses social change in relation to mediatization that treats media as one factor of change applying a non-media centric approach to media studies. As the present study is also concerned on the subject and takes a similar theoretical approach, I am discussing some of these to clarify my reasoning.

Within the field of culture Bourdieu (1984) distinguishes *autonomous* and *heteronomous* poles where *autonomous pole* is the ground of the field's intrinsic logic and values, by contrast *heteronomous pole* is the ground of other fields' influence (Hjarvard, 2008). Drawing on this distinction, Hjarvard (2008) argues that media is such field that plays a prominent role in a growing number of cultural fields' *heteronomous pole* which creates a challenge for those fields' *autonomous pole*. He suggests that we should measure the degree of mediatization according to how much each field's *autonomous pole* has weakened. However, he also reminds us to bear in mind the fact that media as a field is also being influenced by other fields. As Bourdieu (1984) points out to artistic fields as more or less autonomous but Hjarvard (2008) argues that mediatization processes tend to obscure the boundaries between different fields, including those between art forms and popular culture, it is worth reflecting on this direction of development in culture. In addition, in their review of mediatization of culture research, Kaun and Fast (2014) also discuss projects where the blurred boundaries between the fields of aesthetic culture and media become obvious, displaying the diffusion of outer limits between art and popular culture and explaining the premises to search for the various ways this is happening such as the changing conditions of aesthetic culture. Thus, it appears art and

media are interdependent fields where media is the stronger force since it has the advantage to provide exposure opportunities that are the key to publicity and fame: important assets for art's value on the art market (Hjarvard, 2008). This comes to show the close interconnection between the processes of mediatization and commodification of arts and culture. Moreover, Kaun and Fast (2014) also refer to a study of Lundberg, Malm, Ronström and Sundqvist (2000) as contributing to academia with a more deliberate use of the concept of mediatization as they discuss the role of media in other fields to be important not only on the level of technological developments but also in relation to the overall media system's organization and economy, thus clarifying that mediatization processes are driven by other structural metaprocesses, besides technology and digitization, such as commodification, standardization and globalization (Lundberg et al., 2000).

The mediatization and commodification of graffiti subculture are some of the relatively recent media-related cultural transformations. In an on-going study *Kosmopolitism från marginalerna: Expressivitet, socialt rum och kulturellt medborgarskap* (Cosmopolitanism from the margins: Expressivity, social space and cultural citizenship), Miyase Christensen argues for the importance of transnational media as a producer of opportunities for new ideological or aesthetic marginalized groups to claim a more central position in the society (Kaun & Fast, 2014). One of these groups examined in the study is the graffiti subculture as it exists in various online social networks, which demonstrates new media to be, among other things, an intermediary between invisibility/ anonymity and public exposure (Kaun & Fast, 2014).

*Authentic* subcultures are largely constructed by the media and members of subcultures acquire a sense of themselves and their relation to the rest of society from their representation in the media (Bennett, 1999). Using Ferrell's definition of graffiti acts as *crimes of style* (1996) Encheva, Driessens and Verstraeten (2013) discuss mediatization as a concept relevant for understanding contemporary criminal cultures. They argue that underground or deviant subcultures are usually denoted by expressivity and lifestyle, and media as a dominant dealer of symbols is crucial to these groups. More concretely, media is harmonizing the rebellious identity or image of such subcultures with the new communicative environment, causing radical shifts in regard to the visibility and consumption of graffiti artists' works, as well as

graffitists' creative process. Their study demonstrates how increased mediatization changes the direction of thinking about graffiti artists as oppositional subculture to a skillful group that performs. Street art subculture is often criticizing corporate values but as mediatization and commercialization go hand in hand, a paradox in its social meanings has formed (Encheva et al., 2013).

The above described phenomenon is also seen in practice through the example of Banksy – the work of the street artist that heavily criticizes capitalism and the artist himself, who rejects to participate in the marketplace, is now consumed massively and in various forms. As Hooks (2006) also points out, sometimes revolutionary or post-modern cultural expressions can be sold to the dominant culture. Instead of being intolerable or in conflict with society, the underground is merging with the cultural mainstream (Duda, 2010). An explicit example of this paradoxical merging is also found in an incident involving the emblematic popular culture icon of youth generation, Justin Bieber who got caught by Brazilian police illegally spraying graffiti after a concert in Rio de Janeiro (“Justin Bieber charged”, 2013). According to Burnham (2010) the popularity and commercialization of street art is in many ways a positive development moving the scene forward. At the same time, with the rise of media usage and its adoption in the art world, research neglected the developments at street level in the scene (Burnham, 2010). Thus, a bottom-up study of the graffiti art scene is currently eligible.

Media and their increasing importance in social and cultural life, particularly in the street art community, make it interesting to explore how the members of the subculture embed media in their enigmatic world (Encheva et al., 2013). Therefore, questions about the ways street artists in Bulgaria use media were included in the study. Combining their argument with Dickens' argument (2010) that post-graffiti aesthetic practices depend on cultural intermediaries, institutions and firms made it eligible to examine how the artists as mediators between the subculture and the business evaluate the effects of mediatization, commodification and commercialization, thus exploring the way they affect the community. Moreover, media are pivotal in negotiating a sense of belonging in what Benedict Anderson has defined as imagined communities (Van der Hoeven, 2014). Therefore, the study also explores the media practices of the street artists.

Concluding, this chapter of the master thesis addressed the specific language of graffiti and street art and positioned them in historical, social and cultural context. It presented the ways the graffiti subculture has been previously studied and addressed the chosen theoretical perspectives within which the present research is analyzing the Bulgarian case, namely: political economy, commodification and mediatization. Furthermore, it clarified the used terminology, the relationship between the theoretical views and the social implications of the processes under exploration. The subsequent chapter explains the methodology used in the empirical research.

### 3. Research Design and Rationale

#### 3.1 Research methodology

The research question *How does the commodification of street art affect the graffiti community in Bulgaria?* is a *how* question which points out to the study as qualitative and exploratory (Stake, 1995). To answer the research question a methodological choice to conduct in-depth and semi-structured interviews with graffitiists from Bulgaria was made. The simple design of this type of interviews and their resemblance to a routine conversation in social life makes them appropriate and frequently used in students' research (Gilbert, 2008). Discussing interviews as a methodological approach, Nigel Gilbert underlines their usefulness in establishing the variety of opinions on a certain topic and relevant dimensions of attitudes. Generally, the objective of the interviews is to elicit detailed materials of what is happening (Gilbert, 2008). As Stake (1995) points out, interviews are useful when the topic of interest is a certain process that cannot be observed, thus, the information has to come from the actors who are part of the process. The study aims at examining the commodification which is then related to the commercialization and mediatization processes within graffiti on a micro level, and can be considered a bottom-up study interested in the vision of the main actors driving these processes today.

Following Gilbert's guidelines (2008) in conducting interviews, first, problematic and interesting aspects of the topic in question were written down. Second, these so called puzzlements were sorted to see how they are topically related, thus examining in what order they would capture best the phenomenon. Third, these puzzlements were transformed into questions displaying a logical sequence under the form of an outline. Last but not least, probes for each question were designed that were adjusted according to each respondent's behavior, way of comprehension and the kind of interaction the researcher experienced with him (Gilbert, 2008). During the implementation of the interviews, all respondents were informed that the conversation is being recorded and guaranteed anonymity and confidentiality of the data they share. They were provided with a consent form before the start of the interview (Appendix A). Notes regarding the demographics of the interviewee, the length of the interview



and other details were taken in order to help bringing back the context of the interview during the analysis (Gilbert, 2008).

### **3.2 Operationalization of theoretical concepts**

The literature review indicated three interdependent concepts should be taken into account, commodification, commercialization and mediatization. Additionally, the concept of community had to be explored in order to be specified.

Theoretical core concepts were translated into interview questions and were operationalized in the following way: In regard to determining the type of community, as Anderson (1991) defines an actual community to be one including constant face-to-face interactions between the members, participants were questioned if they have communication and relations with other graffitiists. As communities of interest are defined by their collective concern with a problem (Fischer, 2001) graffitiists' interests were discussed. As community of practice is one where members work together and exchange practices (Brown & Duguid, 1991) this was also a topic explored.

With respect to the concept of commodification, as literature review pointed to a trend of disappearance of the rebellious traits of graffiti subculture (Encheva et al., 2013) graffitiists were questioned about their motifs to engage in the graffiti activity and if they consider it an expression of protest. In addition, they were asked to discuss the illegality issue and the perspective of graffiti as vandalism, whether they have done graffiti on forbidden places or have criminal records. As graffitiists' collaborations with government and market institutions are erasing the riotous ideological character of the art practice (Borghini and al., 2010), the nature of these collaborations were also explored, as seen by the graffitiists. Firstly, they discussed experiences during projects implemented with state sponsorships and then those supported by business institutions. Previous research indicated a perception of the practice of selling graffiti to be a *sold-out* to exploitative interests (Dickens, 2010) that made the motivation of graffitiists dependent on economic institutions. Therefore, interviewees were asked to discuss their relationship with business institutions. As Hebdige points out, the subculture is supposed to be resistant to the hegemonic style of the mainstream so graffitiists were asked to discuss the messages promoted by their works, in searching for such resistance. As street art is seen as a

valuable lobbying tool in democratic societies (Chaffee, 1993) interviewees were questioned if they have been reached out by political figures and what their experience with authorities are.

With respect to the concept of commercialization, as creative symbiosis emerges out of collaborations with the advertising business along with a division between artists employed in advertising and artists railing against it (Borghini & al., 2010) all kinds of creative collaborations graffitiists had with economic institutions were discussed in and outside of the financial context. In relation to Droney's (2010) finding that street artists think image-mediated capitalism creates *crazed mentality* in consumers (Droney, 2010) the subject of values of consumerism was also included.

With respect to the concept of mediatization of graffiti art, previous research pointed out to the role of media in making the subculture visible, popular, and sophisticated (Austin, 2001). As an effect of mediatization, the underground is merging with the mainstream (Duda, 2010), hence, it was important to find to what extent this merge is happening. As it was earlier argued to be due to the way media present graffiti subculture and the ways graffitiists use media (Encheva and al., 2013) interviewees were asked to evaluate local mass media coverage, discuss their participation in mass media and usage of new media. Full topic list of the semi-structure interviews can be found in Appendix B.

### **3.3 Sampling and data collection**

Employing sampling methods in qualitative research leads to dynamic moments where unique social knowledge can be fruitfully generated (Noy, 2008). As the study is concerned with the case of the graffiti community in Bulgaria, the snowball sampling technique was considered appropriate way of finding the interviews' respondents. A snowball sampling procedure requires the researcher to access informants through contact information that is provided by other informants until the target sample is achieved through a repetitive process: informants refer the researcher to other informants, who refer her or him to yet other informants, and so on (Noy, 2008). Its central quality is in its accumulative and dynamic dimension (Noy, 2008).

Snowball sampling relies on and takes part in the dynamics of organic and natural social networks (Noy, 2008). Using snowball sampling as data accessing method while applying in-depth interviews as data collecting method could potentially contribute to an invaluable type of

knowledge, and is often employed as a particularly effective tool for obtaining information on and access to *hidden populations* (Noy, 2008). Although graffiti in Bulgarian legislation is still forbidden, local authorities policies are controversial on the matter as there are frequent graffiti initiatives encouraged by mayors. However, as persecution of graffitists as criminals is possible, the notion of *hidden population* could refer to the graffiti community in Bulgaria.

Point of departure of the snowball sampling was the case of the group *Destructive Creation* – the graffitists who caused a colorful makeover of the monument of the Soviet army in Sofia where Soviet soldiers were painted as popular superheroes and cartoon characters such as Superman, Santa Claus, The Joker and Ronald McDonald, followed by the message: *Keeping up with the times* (see Figure 1).

Figure 1



Soviet army monument, Sofia, Bulgaria

Retrieved from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-26346901>

Washed off by the municipality after one night, the street artwork provoked social and political debates and even became a matter of foreign affairs as the Russian Foreign Ministry demanded punishment for "*the hooligans who profaned the monument*" ("Destructive Creation", 2011) and Sofia District Prosecutor's Office decided to initiate an investigation for hooliganism against an unknown perpetrator ("Destructive Creation", 2011). The researcher

contacted a representative of that group through her personal social network, in order to then reach their social network.

Besides the graffitiists as the figures producing street art, David Harvey argues that the increasing number of workers engaged in cultural activities (production and trade) is worthy of consideration (Harvey, 2009). According to him they are at the creative core of what Daniel Bell calls *the cultural mass* defined as “not the creators but the transmitters of culture in the media and elsewhere” (Bell, 1978, p.20). The snowball approach led to such mediating figure becoming a research unit. As participant N6 recommended a conversation with a representative of a non-governmental organization that operates with the graffiti community, interview N7 was the result of this recommendation.

### **3.4 Describing the sample**

Overall, sixteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted in a period of one month April 15<sup>th</sup> – May 15<sup>th</sup> 2015. Nine of the interviews happened under the form of one-to-one conversations via Skype and six were conducted in writing, as preferred by the respondents. This preference was anticipated as a *hidden population* (Noy, 2008) such as the graffiti subculture would take measures in preserving its anonymity. The face-to-face interviews had the advantages of personal interaction and spontaneous responses. On the down side, a Skype call always carries the risk of technical glitches. Luckily, such problems were very rare and were not detrimental to the results. All of the conducted interviews via Skype were recorded (44 minutes the shortest and 59 minutes the longest), transcribed in the original language – Bulgarian and then translated in English. To ensure the validity of results, the language of the respondents was not corrected, nor paraphrased (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). However, the bilingual nature of the research had to be dealt with carefully. Translating the texts might cause the loss of meaning that is best conveyed in the original language. On the other hand, being a researcher, interviewer and translator allows awareness of the linguistic nuances present in each interview and a precise reading of the meanings, regardless of linguistic features like syntax or grammar. It is also very important to be mindful that constructing the interviews the researcher is not capable of complete impartiality as his own background and former research examination already formed certain bias in his academic horizon.

Fifteen interviews with graffitiists from Bulgaria were conducted, and one with a representative of a non-governmental organization that operates within the graffiti community. Aside from the interview with the NGO representative (N7) which was useful in better understanding of the community and provided interesting information that is mentioned later in chapter 4. Results and Analysis, the description of the sample of fifteen graffitiists goes as follows: Most of the respondents were male (87%) as anticipated from the fact that the graffiti subculture often contains very few female members (Encheva et al., 2013). The age of the graffitiists ranged from 20-36 which was also expected as graffiti has always been rather a youth activity (Mailer & Naar, 1973). This makes the mean age of the participants 26,6 years (sd=3,99). Additionally, most of the respondents indicated to be active as graffiti artists for a substantial amount of time, at least 7 years, with an average of 11,8 years active as graffiti artists (sd=3,46).

In terms of their education, the respondents were diverse, with 64% having obtained higher education, while 14% having obtained a master degree and 50% a bachelor degree, 36% having graduated secondary schools. Favorably, the snowball effect also led to representatives of various cities in Bulgaria, 33% acting mainly in the capital city of Sofia, 20% representing the second biggest city – Plovdiv, 20% the third biggest city – Varna and the rest 27% representing 4 other towns, which demonstrates an assortment of the Bulgarian graffiti community. In addition, Appendix C contains a table with the pseudonyms of the graffiti artists, their initials, the groups or crews they represent, if any, and provides links to their portfolios as evidence for their graffiti activities.

Table 1 contains information about the demographics of the participants in the study: age, gender, years of experience in graffiti, level of education and city of birth. Additionally, it indicates whether the participant represents a group or a crew, either the length of the interview or that it was conducted in writing. The first column (N) represents the chronological order of the conducted interviews and the second column (MARK) the way participants were marked in the transcriptions. Hereinafter each quotation of a participant is referred by his/her initials and chronological number, e.g. the first interviewee is referred to as IAN1.

Table 1. Demographics of the interviewees

N	MAR K	AGE	SEX	YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	EDUCATION	CITY	GROUP NAME (CREW)	LENGTH OF INTERVIEW
1	IA	24	M	8	BACHELOR	SOFIA	Destructive Creation	58 minutes
2	S	20	M	7	SECONDARY	SHUMEN	-	49 minutes
3	P	25	M	10	BACHELOR	SOFIA	-	45 minutes
4	F	24	M	13	SECONDARY	VELIKO TURNOVO	USA94	44 minutes
5	M	27	F	12	BACHELOR	SOFIA	-	59 minutes
6	O	29	M	14	BACHELOR	PLOVDIV	CMs	45 minutes
7	MB	-	-	-	-	-	NGO	-
8	N	36	M	20	BACHELOR	VARNA	-	45 minutes
9	R	30	M	14	SECONDARY	BURGAS	Me Click	50 minutes
10	R2	26	M	13	SECONDARY	DOBRICH	NLS	49 minutes
11	PC	24	M	11	BACHELOR	PLOVDIV	Pyrotechnic Crew	In writing
12	G	29	M	10	MASTER	SOFIA	SUNSHINERS	In writing
13	G	26	F	8	MASTER	VARNA	SUNSHINERS	In writing
14	B	30	M	15	BACHELOR	PLOVDIV	-	In writing
15	G	28	M	14	-	SOFIA	140 IDEAS	In writing
16	R3	21	M	8	STUDENT	VARNA	-	In writing

### 3.5 Data analysis

Following Flick (2002), studies conducting semi-structured interviews among a group that is chosen *a priori* in accordance to the research question, the method of *thematic coding* is best suited (p. 185). Therefore, the method of thematic analysis was used to make a systematic coding of the data collected from the interviews with graffitiists. The interview with the NGO representative was *not* coded or systematically analyzed but only useful for the researcher to

better grasp the examined community. Qualitative data analysis software [www.maxqda.com](http://www.maxqda.com) was beneficial in avoiding difficulties to define and distinguish codes, sub-themes and themes. A thematic analysis at the latent level enabled the identification of underlying ideas that shape the semantic content of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), thus, receiving an impression of the themes that are important in the context of the specific analysis and conducting a theoretical analysis with a thematic approach. The themes and concepts identified in each interview were compared and contrasted to each other in order to define thematically similar segments within and between interviews and new themes emerging in subsequent interviews led to reexamination of previous interview data (Gilbert, 2008). Reading and re-reading the transcripts was an essential part of the thematic analysis - starting point of the qualitative content analysis in this study (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The research was conducted from a more constructionist perspective, examining the ways in which meanings are the effects of public discourse. From a constructionist perspective, thematic analysis does not aim to search for individual motivations or psychologies, but rather considers socio-cultural contexts and structural conditions influencing the individual accounts. As thematic analysis at the latent level is often, but not always, constructionist, it could also lead to an overlap with thematic discourse analysis, sometimes particularly referred to as *thematic DA*, where broader concepts are at the base of the articulated data. However, even then, latent thematic analysis does not require the same level of detail as conversation, discourse or narrative analysis, but it could be compatible with discourse analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Following Braun and Clark's (2006) argument, to be able to decide whether a certain meaning of the text actually exists in the social context, the data analysis proceeded with discourse analysis. As Hall points out, the constructionist approach recognizes the social character of language (Hall, 2013). Meaning is being constructed by people using representational systems (Hall, 2013). Hence, choosing to start thematic analysis from a constructionist perspective and proceed with discourse analysis allowed me to reveal the true contextual meaning of the texts. Furthermore, looking for variations in the text, paying

attention to silences and reading for emphasis and detail allowed me to conduct an analysis that explores the intricate ways in which meanings are put together (Tonkiss, 1998).

As the research is concerned with the power relations between the underground and the mainstream, the subculture and mass culture, discourse analysis is considered to be an appropriate method of examination of the themes in question. Discourse analysis understands language and texts as forms of discourse that affect the creation of systems of social meaning and actively shape social relations and ideas (Tonkiss, 1998). As this particular study is concerned with the social meaning of graffiti subculture semiotic analysis would not have been sufficient methodological choice as it stays on the level of the content (Berger, 2013) and revealing the social meaning of street art requires contextual analysis. Discourse analysis is committed to challenge common-sense knowledge and disrupt easy assumptions about social meanings (Tonkiss, 1998). Overall, the subsequent report outlines the implications of the commodification of street art on the graffiti community in Bulgaria and the potential patterns of the process incorporating the subculture in mass culture.



## **4. Results and Analysis**

Firstly, it is important to address two questions that could not have been clearly explained through theory: defining the type of graffiti community in Bulgaria and how the graffitists in it distinguish street art from graffiti.

### **4.1 Community**

All data collected from the conversations with the participants confirmed that graffiti is a group activity beginning in early teenage years and usually exists in a circle of friends or quickly builds a friendly environment. When questioned about knowledge of other graffitists in the country, their practices and projects, all artists confirmed they are aware of the *scene* and the actors in it, and even know each other personally. As Anderson (1991) defines an actual community to be one that includes constant face-to-face interactions between the members, they were asked whether they had opportunities to meet and the majority of artists said they have done it multiple times during festivals and other graffiti events they organized themselves or were organized by various institutions. They also verified they have exchanged practices and are concerned with similar issues, proving them to be a community of interest (Fischer, 2001) and a community of practice (Brown & Duguid, 1991). It also appeared to be that they feel a sense of belonging which defines them as a community according to Sarason's (1974) new community psychology which accentuates on a sense of belonging and responsibility among community members, called sense of community - a major base for self-definition. Hence, the graffiti community in Bulgaria was determined to actually exist.

### **4.2 Street art and graffiti**

According to the majority of artists the concepts of street art and graffiti are merging or at least many of their elements overlap. The only difference between graffiti and street art that almost all respondents settled on was that street art is rebellious through the messages in the art form and the conceptual protest it carries, and graffiti as rather focusing on the aesthetical components such as shape, size, color, effects and place of performance. Graffiti was either seen as a protest in itself or not a protest at all. However, several respondents shared they have discussed ideas of incorporating political messages in their work, e.g. to illustrate or challenge

authorities which showed how the merger between street art and graffiti takes place through the artists' actions. This relates back to the case found in the documentary *Graffiti Wars* where a convicted graffitist claimed to redirect his work to be street art as to avoid going to prison and instead to participate in the commercial art world. The story suggests society or rather its governance leads a process in which graffiti transforms into the aesthetically valuable street art, thus transit in art and popular culture. Such processes could have positive implications for society as alternate ideas and views from subcultures would be translated in popular culture and diversify the information circle. Unfortunately, previous research on the matter demonstrates such translation would either be inaccurate or omitted, as the incorporation of a subculture by mass culture is always accompanied by its destruction or dissolution (Hebdige, 1979; Jacques, 2001) and accordingly ruin or at least change the external and internal logic of the graffiti community.

### 4.3 Themes

Four themes emerged of the data analysis, namely: 1. Commercialisation, 2. Media, 3. Authorities, Governance and Legality, and 4. Creativity. Within these four themes a discussion of two independent codes is incorporated: *Self-contradiction and Hesitance* which represents the internal conflicts of the graffitists and *Urban environment* which captivates the role of the relationship of graffitists with the urban environment.

#### 4.3.1 Theme 1: Commercialization

This theme concerns the attitudes among graffiti artists towards consumerism, advertising, money and business, thus the following sub-themes were established: **A/Consumerism, B/Advertising** and **C/Money and Business**. In this regard, opinions and attitudes based on the artists' experiences varied broadly: from extremely subversive attitude towards commercial industries, its methods and attributes (e.g. advertising), concern for overexposure of graffiti by advertising, an easy acceptance of graffiti's commercialization that was usually presented as a realistic way to evaluate the process and take advantage of it, a means to survive and an opportunity for professional development, admiration of advertising as a creative field and willingness to join the advertising business.

The code *Commercial involvement* was used every time a participant confirmed he has been part of any commercial graffiti projects or events and/or implemented commercial orders. Thirteen out of sixteen graffiti artists confirmed they have done it and five of them mentioned concrete brands' names which were indicated with the sub-code *Art for branding*. The only two graffitiists whose transcriptions were not coded for *Commercial involvement* were GN13 and R3N16 who both rejected answering the section of questions related to business. Hence, it could not be determined whether they have or have not had such experiences.

The code *Anti-commercial* was used when graffitiists expressed negative attitude towards the commercial world, for example:

*Well this is it, the clear boundary between graffiti and all else.. advertising, street art, fan crowds, and shit.. ridiculous festivals.. it is all against my principles because not everyone could make a cool graffiti event.. it may look cool for the media or the guests but not at its base (R2N10).*

This example illustrates the emerging problem for the subculture members to be guided by external interventions in their world due to the commodification process. This passage was also coded as *Self-contradiction* as the same interviewee admitted he has participated in such "ridiculous festivals" and worked for advertising projects, thus he turned out to be part of something he does not approve of. This could be considered a paradox occurring due to the commodification of graffiti.

In most of the cases examined the artists acknowledged they are part of both: the underground or illegal world of graffiti and the commercial one. This bivalency was seen differently by the participants, as it was described as "belief in dualism" (GN12) or was supported by the argument that clear distinction should be made by original graffiti and graffiti for commercial purposes and that one has nothing to do with the other but the spray can. On this ground, a conflict within the community could arise as others put it differently:

*I don't see how an art that you can make money out of would be a protest (BN14).*

The latter perspective belongs to an actor who defined graffiti as one of many artistic fields he is interested in and claimed to communicate only with those graffitiists who do it professionally. Unlike all other participants, he did not indicate the initial concept of graffiti to be something important for him. In this respect, only one participant was really sensitive on the subject and demonstrated a rebellious attitude that combined rejection of mass media, advertising, usage of new technologies in graffiti (digital graffiti), and even ridiculed those who make profit. However, even he shared having experience with business and state collaborations and commented on commercial graffiti as follows:

*At this stage I wouldn't bend .. in couple more years may be I will break as everyone else.. but.. I try to postpone it.. (PN3).*

This clearly points to the challenges commodification creates for those who stand by the illegal and subversive original character of graffiti. However, the majority of respondents did not see this as an issue.

Some of the interrogated artists who rather did not see business interventions as problematic, had an interesting idea. During the interviews, they explicitly stated that there is a clear distinction between “genuine graffiti” and “commercial graffiti” which was then observed as implicit hints in other responses. The distinction they argue to make is based on the conscious perception as one being a hobby, a pleasure and a genuine activity and the other “radically different” experience:

*Well, it is not in relation to graffiti because what you draw for the business is very rarely graffiti, it's something else.. it's not graffiti styles, it's not with a lot of artists.. it's different.. this is why it's business, this is why since I started doing it I am trying to keep both things separately because they are.. radically different things . . . I have found the balance, I know many people who work in various fields and keep graffiti separately from this.. I also take advantage of this skill to earn resources to then do graffiti undisturbed .. (R2N10)*

This indicates a perspective of graffiti usage in the business as a job assignment where graffitiists' approaches are different in the implementation, but especially in the psychological way of acceptance. This could be interpreted as another potential method for the subculture to remain its existence as such, in case its actors decide to build new morals or create new rules where commercial and genuine graffiti are plainly definite and recognizable which appears to be an actual idea among the graffiti community in Bulgaria. Moreover, similar vision within the community about distinguishing *graffiti art* and *graffiti vandalism* seemed to be already established as the former carries the connotation of aesthetically valuable and the latter does not. However, the fact that the respondent says he is taking "advantage of the business to then do graffiti undisturbed" shows that even though he distinguishes *genuine graffiti* and *commercial graffiti* as very different activities relevant to the same skill, he also feels disturbed when working for business related projects.

#### **4.3.1.1 Sub-theme 1: Advertising**

A sub-theme of Commercialization was its powerful attribute: Advertising. Overall, negative expressions towards the advertising business were found in 9 of the interviews. The code *Anti-advertising* was used in cases when anti-advertising attitude was expressed. For example, when asked about the perspective of graffiti as vandalism, one interviewee said:

*. . . but I could pose the same question! Isn't it vandalism over our consciousness what they are doing?.. Pumping ads absolutely everywhere, they pollute our minds .. and this is, for me, mental vandalism(NN8)*

This relates back to the theoretical concept of *crazed mentality* which represents the belief that image-mediated capitalism generates a crazed mentality in the consumer (Droney, 2010). Nonetheless, the above quoted respondent has also participated in advertising projects and even has his own brand for graffiti clothing. The violation of his principles he described to be related to concrete ideas that can be propagated by advertising, such as drugs, alcohol and meat. Hence, even though he expressed an anti-advertising attitude, he was not actually

opposing commercialization but rather felt that the responsibility falls on the consumer to either give in to it or resist it.

Advertising is, arguably, the most important factor in commercialization and commodification processes in general. Regarding graffiti's commodification it appears to be such certainly, as it is the context it is being put in most commonly. Borghini et al.'s study (2010) finds that the process of commodification of street art could actually create *creative symbioses* between the two fields: advertising and graffiti as they are a means of linguistic-visual communication of ideals, values and emotions and transmit messages beyond their literal meaning. According to it, the ideological differences in surface structure are not an obstacle for the creation of a symbiotic relationship emerging out of resonant similarities in the deep structure of different enterprises (Borghini et al., 2010). Hence, the present research examined this suggestion. Indications for such positive interaction were found indeed within the discourse of other creative industries that are interpenetrating each other:

*If you want to make a living out of drawing and to develop, there aren't many options – one is to become a tattooist and the other one – graphic designer and I chose the latter and I do not regret my choice. Advertising is very interesting and there are many creative elements of it that help me develop the visual (FN4).*

Thus, commodification of graffiti also contributes to the exchange of practices between the fields, which is weakening graffiti subculture's *autonomous pole* (Bourdieu, 1984, in Hjarvard, 2008). It was observed that "making a living" is the incentive for redirecting towards a professional perspective on graffiti. This could be explained with the difficulties of Bulgarian society to reach a steady state economy. As unemployment rates are high it makes it more likely for citizens to use all of the available sources for financial profits.

The career perspective on graffiti has been originally studied when New York graffitiists began to transform into professional artists (Lachmann, 1988). The challenge for a graffitiist to pursue a career is that his opportunity is determined to a large extent by the ways people outside his social milieu perceive the work (Lachmann, 1988) Thus, some of the original graffiti

styles such as *wildstyle* which is not easy to read by others than those who perform it might be unattractive for the advertising industry which usually aims to reach wide audiences. Thereby, those graffiti styles who appear to be unattractive for the business could also be used as a base to establish the earlier mentioned idea for distinction between *genuine graffiti* and *commercial graffiti* within the community which could in turn solve internal conflicts. What is here important is that the discussion of graffiti as career is already signifying a strong impact of graffiti commodification. In order for graffiti to become a profession it has to be recognized as such by the world outside of the subculture, and particularly the art world. We have seen that art worlds often incorporate artworks they initially rejected. This proves the embodiment happens irrespective of the artwork and rather dependant on the readiness of an art world to accept it and its creator (Lachmann, 1988). The label of deviance is not applied by the deviant but the people, as well as the standardization of graffiti could not be employed from the inside of its subculture (Lachmann, 1988). However, in order for graffitists in Bulgaria to use their artistic skills conducive to “making a living” they do not rely only on graffiti commodification but on advertising as art itself, as one participant who pursued a career of a copy writer said:

*In advertising there are many people who do or have done graffiti and now they became designers, copy writers . . . It's because they are very wakeful and creative so advertisers here are also people from art and very often graffiti art (MN5).*

A professional reorientation of graffitists takes place which means that the graffiti skill gained through participation in the graffiti subculture is being transmitted in economic enterprises. Thus, the graffiti community expands in other creative fields, including corporate ones, which then makes these transmitted or half-transmitted members the navigators of the subculture in the world of marketing (Droney, 2010). This was also confirmed in several cases when respondents emphasized on the benefits of using graffiti as an advertising tool in both, business and state institutional projects, presenting it as the less expensive and more effective approach. If artists are to promote graffiti as an efficient advertising tool, they might intensify the commodification of it, as again, an adverse economic society such as the Bulgarian one

could more easily embrace cheaper advertising opportunities. Furthermore, Droney (2010) also argues this transforms graffitists into producers of irreverent and self-contradictory artworks. Such promotion of graffiti as advertising tool was expected to be a generator of a division within the community as not all participants were willing to sell. However, this expectation was not confirmed as they expressed their respect to others:

*Me personally, I think that I do not want to commercialize what I do, I do it for myself, but I appreciate the fact that people try to make a living out of the love of graffiti they have (ON6).*

In general, the confluence of creative fields might be beneficial for community members as it diversifies graffiti styles and techniques making it a richer, wider phenomenon. From a business development perspective it appears that adopting the street art practice in the business, creates new economic possibilities and job opportunities for a developing country like Bulgaria.

#### **4.3.1.2 Sub-theme 2: Consumerism**

This sub-theme is concerned with the vision of graffitists towards consumer's culture as explained in chapter 2 of the master thesis. The code *Anti-consumerism* was used in cases when anti-consumerism opinions were expressed, as opposed to the code *Consumerism acceptance* used when graffitists were referring to consumerism as a natural process.

As Droney (2010) found, some street artists believe that image-mediated capitalism generates a *crazed mentality* in the consumer this study used his finding as point of departure and explored graffitists' opinions on the subject of values promoted by consumerism. When asked what they think of consumer's culture, only a few artists shared this idea of *crazed mentality*:

*I do aim to show ... the bad habits of people . . . to make them think whether these things that are considered by people as normal and are mass, actually, the fact that they are mass does not make them right . . . (SN2).*



The fact that most of the respondents did not express similar views might be considered as a sign of the subculture losing its rebellious character as it adopts the rules and values of consumerism. The same respondent later shared:

*It is normal for part of graffiti to be used for advertising but it is a good thing because this is how people can make money which does not make them worse than the rest (SN2).*

This comes to exemplify what was observed as *Self-contradiction* among graffiti artists where values of consumerism are at variance with their principles but advertising, which is consumerism's asset to create a need to buy, is perceived as an opportunity. This particular refraction of reality could be explained with the psychological need to distort certain elements in order to actualize personal comfort, thus applying something similar to autosuggestion - a psychological technique developed by Émile Coué (1996) implying people could develop delusions consciously or let it happen unconsciously. Alternatively, it is possible this tolerance towards advertising to be due to the relative poverty of the developing country of Bulgaria, as some of the comments of the artists were, at the beginning, judgmental towards consumerism and then quickly switched to being more tolerant to it. For example, when one participant was asked what a material person is, he said:

*Looking at his work, he always firstly thinks of money .. because I .. no matter what I do, a job or a hobby, graffiti, canvas.. I always rather look at the product and it's great if we make money out of it but first look at the product. If you do the opposite ... although I don't think it's reprehensible, in the times we live in .. if you have less .. why not? I don't judge it .. I don't know if a material person is a bad person .. people in Bulgaria don't have money, many of them don't .. but it's just not what I am (MN5).*

Contrastingly, one participant who, as well as all the others, firstly and squarely distinguished himself from consumers' culture, then expressed his desire to make the actors in it see the alternative point of view which graffiti as medium produces:

*This is my problem.. that these people do not even know about our existence, of the group .. and I wish we can do something .. not at the expense of the meaning... but to reach them, something that would be digestible for these people so that they become fans (IAN1).*

This vision of the artists that graffiti could reach intense consumers “not at the expense of the meaning” appears to be similar to the hopes of Harvey (2009) for a globalization in which the progressive forces of culture can seek to appropriate and undermine those of capital rather than the other way around. This optimistic view differs from Hebdige’s perspective on commodification of a subculture where the appropriation of its elements by the dominant culture happens through their dissolution or even erasure (Hebdige, 1979; Root, 1996).

#### **4.3.1.3 Sub-theme 3: Money and Business**

This sub-theme concerns the role of money in graffiti subculture, the ways graffitists think of it as a factor in decision-making processes, as well as the role of the business and their relationship with business institutions.

Money was discussed exclusively often and in many occasions it was coming out regardless the researcher’s interview guidance in another direction. This demonstrates the relevance of it to graffiti subculture in Bulgaria. In addition, it appeared to be creating the most prominent self-contradiction among the graffiti artists. During data analysis the following *Self-contradiction* among the artists was found in respect of the subject of money: When explicitly asked about the role and importance of money for them, the majority argued for being driven rather by ideological incentives:

*We still look from a romantic perspective and what is very important is the attitude of the person, what he likes, who he is and what he wants from us, etc. We don’t do things at any price so we have missed many orders through the years (GN15)*

On the contrary, in other occasions and various contexts they were frequently bringing up the subject of money. For instance, when discussing graffiti projects supported by business

institutions, the respondents were asked: “When you work in such projects, besides the financial benefits, what would you say you win and lose of such work?” to which one participant answered:

*The positive things are that while working in such projects, there are money and we are not limited by the lack of money and not being able to buy some simple materials, supplies that we need.. and we don't have to think where to get it from for less money.. we can do something nice, cool. (IAN1)*

This tendency to discuss money even when explicitly asked not to, suggested coding the dataset for texts indicating the *Importance of Money* and such indicating the *Unimportance of Money* as it comes to illustrate the power relations between the subculture and the business which are the baseline of the commodification process. Overall, money was very frequently used word in the dataset which made the whole discourse around graffiti very economically oriented. Graffiti was discussed by some of the artists as business itself which also put the authenticity of graffiti in question:

*People would fund absolutely any nonsense in modern times, and when it comes to graffiti, just for some ridiculous amount of money they say NO to art ... really, I have given great offers to paint without a fee, and for some 100-150 leva, [50-75 EUR] they say “too much”, I say “people, you do business, what are you talking about? - 100-150 leva is too much” .. (SN2)*

However, when asked: “Do you think that graffiti art is dependent on business institutions?” most of the artists were denying such dependence:

*No, it's absolutely independent. Real graffiti artists depend only on God. If you are really doing it from the bottom of your heart, nothing could stop you.. you would always find the materials, graffiti is not being done just with sprays.. (NN8)*

What graffitiists liked about collaborating with the business was that institutions have better communication and people from the business “move forward the administrative things, take care to use a central spot in the city, take out permissions” (IAN1). As the business and the state work together more easily, they facilitate graffiti artists as they free them from obligations that are usually not pleasant for their artistic nature. What is problematic is that allowing an idea of coexistence with institutional forces such as government or the market to prosper, the global street art movement is losing its ideological primacy as an illicit practice (Borghini, 2010) and what I observed is that Money is the main engine in this process of commodification in graffiti, with greater weight than that of Media or the ambition for popularity.

Results showed tension within the power relations between the forces of the commercial world and the graffiti artists in terms of *who exploits whom*. For instance, when asked about the role of the business in graffiti, one respondent said:

*Business is not getting involved with anything that wouldn't bring dividend to it. Therefore, these projects are not the dream of the artist but it is usually related to good money .. and everyone needs this (BN14)*

On the contrary, many others rather neglected such perspective, for example:

*Well it is necessary to the extent that allows artists to have the opportunity to implement their own projects. I definitely think that business is not important but as it exists anyway someone should take advantage of it, if not us, someone else.. (PCN11).*

#### **4.3.2 Theme 2: Media**

This theme was intentionally explored because intensification of mass media and the expansion of media technologies have been responsible for making the underground visible to society and graffiti's inclusion in the high culture marketplace which makes the role of media relevant to the process of commodification. Therefore, based on the suggestions of Encheva et al.'s study (2013) participants were asked about their observations on the ways mass media in

Bulgaria conceptualizes the graffiti subculture and how they use new media tools. The theme concerned experiences of mass media participation and new media usage, as well as the opinions of graffitiists on mass media coverage. These varied from strong media confrontation, negative or positive experiences of mass media participation, approval and disapproval of mass media coverage, will and disinterest towards media exposure.

The main issue for Bulgarian graffitiists emerging from the way media portrays them and their community appeared to be the positive or negative extremeness it is being used. When discussing the image Bulgarian mass media create of graffiti and graffitiists, the majority of respondents expressed a disappointment of Bulgarian media coverage. When referring to media, participants frequently used phrases such as:

*They don't have an idea what they are talking about (FN4).*

Such and similar statements were coded as *Media confrontation*. The concrete concern many shared was that media draw a differentiating line between those who participate in legal projects and those who do illegal graffiti. Interviewees saw this extreme differentiation in Bulgarian media as misrepresentation of the subculture. As they see it, the same people who were once the pioneers of graffiti culture in Bulgaria, considered to be in the years 1994-1995, were then movers of illegal graffiti but are today the main actors in legal graffiti. Graffitiists were demanding a genuine depiction in traditional media that explains that both activities, legal and illegal, are being performed by the same people who shape the graffiti community. I am here reminding their other demand that is the formation of clear distinction between *genuine graffiti* and *commercial graffiti*. It appears that they want graffiti as an activity to be kept in its original version and also develop in its new commercial aspect. At the same time, they would like for the constructed by media distinction between *legal* and *illegal* graffiti actors to be blurred. Those seem to be very complex demands to be fulfilled simultaneously. It appears they are in a difficult position where a demand of better understanding of their subculture is arising. This could also mean they prefer that the subculture is better understood and recognized from the outside world. Recognition could then again lead to its incorporation into the mainstream.

On the other hand, these details to which the graffitiists paid attention point to stratification within the subculture. As suggested by Weinzierl and Muggleton (2003) subcultures are now characterized by far more complex stratification than previously suggested simple dichotomy of *monolithic mainstream— resistant subcultures*. On the outside, the graffiti phenomenon is usually studied, as it is also in this paper, in the line of the entire perspective on it in relation to certain process, such as here, commodification, commercialization and mediatization. Thus, it might be unfairly assumed that the process of commodification creates fragile foundations of the subculture but seen from the inside it may be that the community finds ways to establish new rules, adapting to commodification processes by preserving its elements of dissolution or disappearance.

When discussing the image Bulgarian media creates of graffiti, statements were coded as *Media coverage* in order to collect a chunk of data with the ways graffitiists evaluate media coverage and then contrast and compare the various opinions. The concern of the graffitiists in respect of Bulgarian media coverage was that media are being extreme when presenting graffiti and choosing either a positive or a negative frame: they either demonstrate its negative implications for society and the urban environment or present it as a graceful artistic activity. As one participant put it:

*We are either “the good painters who make amazing facades” or “the drunk vandals who scratch” (ON6).*

However, most of the interviewees said that the artistic aspect was way more accentuated in media. This evaluation of media coverage points to the one of the consequences of subcultures' commodification: dissolution. The commodification of a subculture is seen as the appropriation of its elements by the dominant culture where they are either dissolved or their origins erased (Hebdige, 1979; Root, 1996). If Bulgarian media put an emphasis on the artistic aspect of graffiti it would mean they cause disappearance of the subversive element of graffiti and dissolution of the element of creativity.

With respect of media participation, when graffitiists were asked whether they have given interviews for mass media such as radio, television or newspapers all participants answered confirmatory. These answers were coded as *Media participation*. However, the majority of respondents said it was a disappointing experience that made them rethink such participation in the future:

*My experience shows that there is almost no case when you can see a citation, or you always see it has been edited in a way that changes the meaning, so it happens that people who are asking me questions don't even have an idea what they are asking, why they are asking it, or if they have an idea, they later change my answers .. so I got disappointed and I avoid it (ON6).*

Due to these letdowns many of the participants decided either not to give interviews anymore, to give it only in writing or only for graffiti specialized media. Additionally, some seemed to even see media as potential threat:

*I stubbornly stay away from exposure and the media. The media in Bulgaria are extremely clumsy, clueless and ill-prepared, and much more likely to harm you than to raise you (BN14).*

On one hand, such rejection of media institutions points to a conservation of the rebellious character of the subculture. On the other hand, it could again be explained with the particular Bulgarian case as trust in all public institutions in Bulgaria is very low (Konrad Adenauer, 2015) In this case, the negative opinion of community members would then overlap with the opinion of the majority, thus it might not be exceptional for the subculture.

The theory of mediatization of culture suggests that the conception of culture in the modern world cannot be complete if it fails to account for the space employed by “the media” – the institutional realm of communication which makes media a central aspect of the political economy of culture (Bogdanowicz et al., 2003). In respect of graffiti subculture, media influence was observed in relation to the code of *Urban environment*. *Urban environment* as a code

indicates graffitiist's relationship with the urban environment which is then expressed in their desire to improve, to diversify and gentrify it through graffiti. *Urban environment* occurred as a code also in relation to media. For instance, when asked to describe his and his group's activity, one respondent said:

*We are doing art in the urban environment.. We intervene with the urban environment .. or it is how it was called by the media, we did not call it so when we started, we called it street art (IAN1).*

This demonstrates an impact media has on Bulgarian graffiti community on the way graffitiists describe their activities. The example comes to demonstrate Bennet's (1999) finding that *authentic* subcultures are largely constructed by the media and members of subcultures acquire a sense of themselves and their relation to the rest of society from their representation in the media. Additionally, when a deliberate discussion on media began, same respondent clearly referred to media as an important factor in the evaluation of his work:

*They are like an index that shows whether you managed.. right.. Not the best index.. an indicator for how well you do what you do, but also.. an indicator of.. now, if you did something that impressed a lot of people the media will cover it (IAN1).*

This relates to Hjarvard (2008) argument that media plays a prominent role in a number of cultural fields' *heteronomous pole* which creates a challenge for those fields' *autonomous pole*. As the *autonomous pole* represents the field's intrinsic logic and values in the graffiti subculture these would be related to its subversive nature and the non-acceptance of commercially provided styles. Hence, the statement of the interviewee comes to demonstrate a media penetration in the ways actors define their own activity, thus challenging the subculture's *autonomous pole*. By contrast, the same respondent later referred to his group's activities as to be having the purpose "to diversify in a way the point of view.. to produce for people a different point of view but the one given from television" (IAN1) which comes to show the



deviant character of the graffiti activity and exemplifies a confrontation to mass media. Therefore, again a *Self-contradiction* was found, rather caused by the power relations between subculture and mass culture.

On the matter of media exposure, as mentioned earlier, all participants stated they have given interviews for mass media but most of them were disappointed and claimed to have taken measures to prevent themselves of such *mistakes*. In addition, when explicitly asked for their willingness to expose in media and whether they think media is useful, answers were diverse. Those who were more nostalgic to the original idea behind the graffiti subculture were confronting media exposure as helpful, for example:

*I rather count on myself (R2N10).*

*We are the Media, it's precisely the beauty of graffiti, it is the mouth-to-mouth principle, basically, it spreads, you go, you see, you talk, it starts spreading, you can't imagine how fast..*

*(PN3).*

This was again coded as *Media confrontation*. Others preferred to keep their anonymity but were willing to expose their art, for example:

*We aim at exposing our art but not ourselves (GN15).*

Or as PCN11 stated:

*I prefer not so much to be known as for my art to be known (PCN11).*

Only a few participants expressed desire to use mass media in their advantage, coded as *Media approval*:

*It is like an investment for us as the things we do are going to be seen by many people (IAN1).*

Nowadays, mediatization is not only concerned with mass media and mass culture. Social media enables people to become media producers and empowers them to actively participate in the media realm (Blank & Reisdorf, 2012). Precisely, to such media exposure all participants confirmed to be part of without having the concerns they remarked on when discussing mass media. The social network services they use included Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, YouTube, Behance, Linked In and Deviant Art. This would link back to Miyase Christensen's on-going study examining the importance of transnational media as a producer of opportunities for new ideological or aesthetic marginalized groups to claim a more central position in the society (Kaun & Fast, 2014). Thus, it demonstrates new media as, among other things, an intermediary between public exposure and invisibility or anonymity (Kaun & Fast, 2014).

Social media was rather seen as a necessity and a tool to communicate, to be informed and to inform. As social media networks' initial purpose is to build communities, its usage alone could not be determined as an indicator for participation in popular culture. However, when explicitly asked whether they use it to promote their graffiti works, about half of the interviewees confirmed, for example:

*The main way we advertise is Internet (PCN11).*

Some believed it is even making mass media obsolete:

*Nowadays, the exposure you can also get yourself.. if you do something of good quality you can achieve popularity (SN2).*

Or as this respondent put it:

*These social networks are here because it makes it easy to connect with people which helps a lot... you get yourself familiar very fast with entire communities for graffiti and street art .. so some people become very famous exactly because .. namely in this way (FN4).*

The last quote most likely refers to the internal logic of graffiti subcultures where fame is interpreted as important to achieve within the community and not outside of it. Therefore, social media usage in this study could not be related to the subculture incorporation into mass culture. However, it still relates to commodification as almost all participants saw it as a tool for promotion of their graffiti works.

#### **4.3.3 Theme 3: Authorities, Governance and Legality**

This theme concerns the relationship between state authorities and the graffiti community, the way legal graffiti projects are governed by the state institutions and how they are perceived by the graffitiists, what their experiences with authorities and the police are. The study of Lombard (2013) on the way governments control street art and the changes in the attitude towards it as due to the political shift to neoliberalism, discusses graffiti's softening policies. In this sense, it was relevant to also examine the relationship between authorities and graffiti artists.

According to the explanations of the participants in this study there are two types of graffiti: *legal* and *illegal*. *Legal* graffiti would be then either graffiti performed after an official permission of authorities or graffiti performed in abandoned places with no security. *Illegal* graffiti would then be graffiti either performed on private properties, without permission, and usually at night. Nonetheless, as the study is interested in the theme of legality as the softening of policies on graffiti (Lombard, 2013) *legal* and *illegal* graffiti are distinguished as graffiti allowed or forbidden by the authorities.

Many artists confirmed that the punishments for graffiti are not too harsh and rather exercised only in case of destruction of public space or private property. The latter appeared to be a reason for graffitiists to hesitate and even avoid the *illegal* practice of graffiti as they felt bad for the people who end up to be victims of it. Even though all participants had some interactions with the police as all have had at least tried the *illegal* side of graffiti and several have had spent a night behind bars, they said the attitude of policemen is not too harsh, nor are the punishments, particularly when graffiti were more complex than *tagging* or *writing*, with a creative element and rather attracted the aesthetical perception of policemen:

*Policemen are open when we explain what we do.. they say “ok, just make sure you make it prettier than it is, ok?” (IAN1).*

This illustrates that policemen’s behavior as rather tolerant which Lombard (2013) argues to be an effect of the rise of a neo-liberal form of political–economic governance. The increasing support for and acceptance of graffiti are in fact a softening of graffiti policy but this does not mean less governance (Lombard, 2013). What is problematic in this situation is that such softening slowly erases the subversive feature of graffiti (Borghini et al., 2010). It is worth mentioning that in this case, *to subvert* would not be precise if seen as *to destroy* but its meaning is rather *to overthrow* as the respondents in this study were willing to change, to control, to be active in their urban environment and gentrify it but not damage it.

The previously and numerous studied conflict between *legal* and *illegal* graffiti emerged as a code but was not as consistent to become an independent theme. This may be as it was not the focus and the goal of this study but it could also be interpreted as simply not that relevant for the community anymore, as graffitiists seemed to be uninterested in the subject and did not define it as a problem for the community. It is possible that an overexposure of the theme and novelties such as graffiti commercialization made it less prominent. In fact, what was relevant to commodification of graffiti and interesting about the theme of legality was that legal graffiti projects led by state or business institutions were providing graffitiists with some practical advantages. For example, they claimed to be attracted by such projects as it would allow them to have as much time needed to create and elaborate on their artworks, in contrast to their illegal experiences where time is limited. Apparently, time constraints are often used by graffitiists as an excuse when the aesthetics of the works are criticized. This was explained by the interviewees as a reason why they prefer working on legal projects as they would avoid such criticism. This comes to be an advantage for governments when aiming to engage graffitiists in their activities. As Lombard (2013) discusses it, the softening of policies on graffiti does not mean less governance but rather a new type of it. Authorities using graffiti for their own public relations purposes was confirmed also by several artists as they admitted to have participated or at least to have been invited in politically colored projects such as election

campaigns, which illustrates what Chaffee (1993) claims to be graffiti as valuable lobbying tool in democratic societies. It appears to be that in Bulgaria graffiti is a strategy for political communication that could be used by both benevolent and not so benevolent, social figures and organizations. For instance, during the seventh interview with a representative of a non-governmental organization it was mentioned that a nationalist political party in Bulgaria, which is known for using populist rhetoric, has addressed the organization to cooperate on a project where graffiti artists would draw the faces of national heroes on street walls.

Interestingly, the interest for collaborative projects between state institutions and graffiti artists arrives to be mutual since several examples of graffiti artists taking the initiative and applying for such projects were given by the interviewees. Although it may not be a common practice it still indicates that artists could also be navigators of the subculture into the light which Borghini et al. (2010) argue, is erasing the riotous ideological character of the art practice. Therefore, if graffiti artists' initiatives for state projects expand it would again reflect on the original concept of graffiti and its subculture. However, this depends also on a society's trust in institutions. Trust in social and political institutions is vital to the strengthening of democracy, but in post-Communist Europe, distrust is the predicted inheritance of Communism. A study on this matter displays that the predominating skepticism in such societies is indirectly related to the legacy of socialization under Communism and rather truly affected by economic and political performance assessments (Mishler & Rose, 1997). The indirect connection between skepticism and communist heritage was noticed in one of the interviews when discussing the ways artists work with local authorities:

*They can't change their mind easily.. they have a certain idea in their heads which is not really negotiable.. they have seen this to be done in other countries but they haven't seen it here and this prevents them (SN2).*

The respondent is skeptical towards authorities and their conservative thinking that is, perhaps, associated with the historical background of Communism rule. Additionally, it appears to be that the level of trust in institutions reflects the synchronization of public dissatisfaction

with present economic performance, optimism about forthcoming economic performance, and the achievement of greater individual liberties by contemporary political institutions (Mishler & Rose, 1997). In this regard, negativism of Bulgarian society could also play a role in the commodification process. Bulgarian citizens have a sustained and exceptionally low level of evaluation of their well-being and quality of life in comparison with all other EU member-states, as indicated by the authoritative European Social Survey, conducted in 2006 and 2009 (Tilkidjiev, 2011). Therefore, the idea Borghini et al.'s study (2010) suggests that collaboration with governments intensifies the commodification process of graffiti would be less likely to get actualized. It happens to be that the low trust in institutions acts as a force in the power relations between graffiti subculture and mass culture that resists mass culture.

When asked if and how graffitiists see Bulgaria to be different than developed countries in relation to graffiti, one respondent compared it the following way:

*People there, on higher positions, know this [the usage of graffiti] and here, in the municipalities, for example, the information would possibly reach them and eventually they would say to themselves: "oh, cool, let's do it here as well" ... we don't have to impose it as something cool with potential do be good (IAN1).*

This illustrates the advantage of a developing country to replicate the methods, technologies and institutional approaches of developed countries (Bell & Pavitt, 1997) and points to the idea of the *catch-up effect*, or convergence in economics, which is the hypothesis that poorer economies tend to grow at faster rates than richer ones (Korotayev & Zinkina, 2014). It is important to indicate here that this may intensify the commodification of graffiti as it is an already widely embraced practice in developed countries, thus developing countries like Bulgaria would more likely violate the natural evolution of graffiti in order to catch up.

In addition, the code *Urban environment* appeared once again when discussing state institutional projects. One respondent said his group participated in "a competition of Sofia municipality for good ideas that improve the urban environment" (IAN1) which demonstrates that *Urban environment* appears to be a common way for state and media institutions to build

a positive context around graffiti. It is also possible that by using this term which seems to be something graffitiists have a strong relationship with, state institutions that organize graffiti projects manage to attract more actors of the subculture to contribute to their projects.

#### **4.3.4 Theme 4: Creativity**

This theme is concerned with the freedom of creativity of the graffiti artists and the ways it is being violated by the interference of state and business institutions. Passages were coded as *Freedom of creativity* in occasions when the artists define it as valuable or when they were provided with it in institutional projects. *Limitation/Interference with creativity* was coded in the occasions where second parties have tried to participate in the creative process of the graffitiist or have requested particular drawings to be depicted.

*All artists think freely. We do not want to be told how to think (IAN1).*

Freedom of creativity was addressed as a well treasured value among 14 out of 15 interviewees and appears to be the main issue graffitiists meet when working on institutional collaborative projects. For example, describing such project one participant said:

*They were people with no imagination. They did not want to let us make something that we imagined as beautiful. Instead, they wanted us to draw pictures that they have gotten from the Internet.. and they were just .. mediocre (IAN1)*

He also stated his group is very careful not to get in similar situation in the future. The disappointment he expressed was observed in six other cases. These resentments are promising to be a force in the power relations between subculture and mass culture that could pull graffiti subculture back to its original nature. The will for freedom of creativity was the most common reason for an opposition of the graffitiists to projects organized by institutions, thus appeared to be the most likely motif for them to resist commodification processes and maintain their subculture belonging.

That limitations of creativity are part of the world of commercial graffiti usage was admitted by most of the artists and some expressed their concerns on the subject:

*Some of them think that you are the executor and they have this amazing idea that you have to bring to life.. which is.. dumb (IAN1).*

However, possible division within the community may arise on the subject as others already perceived themselves as executors:

*Most people try to be artists and think their own stuff but I am not ready for it, I have to work a lot, it takes time, for me it's not easy, although I have some things.. but in general, I wouldn't take out of my time for commercial orders to do something 'mega wow'.. they want something, you do it on Photoshop and everyone's happy (RN9).*

Such perception of graffiti is likely to provoke wrath among others, especially those who are still resistant to some extent to the idea of selling graffiti, for example:

*It's not my idea to sell myself online, for me, it's the street, .. I don't like the digital art, I prefer paper, I don't like Illustrator, Photoshop and those kind of bullshit (PN3)*

In fact, interviewee RN9 was the only exception in which freedom of creativity was not an established value:

*Most people don't want to do others' ideas, I don't mind, though. . . . They tell you what to draw, you create a project.. whether you use Google images or something else.. (RN9)*

The graffitist seems to be driven by commercial incentives. However, the respondent was a deviant case in the study. However, as this is not a quantitative research, it may turn out that similar attitude develops among certain graffitists, meaning an attitude towards graffiti activity



as an executive work. Moreover, another case exemplified also an adaptation to the *rules* of the market:

*In most of the cases there is a certain limitation of expressiveness but you agree on this from the beginning (PCN11)*

Nonetheless, another graffitist who stood by his choice not to commercialize graffiti pointed to creativity limitations as one of the main reasons for his decision:

*I discovered that I don't want to because if you make money you would have to conform with this deprivation of creative freedom.. and the feeling gets different .. (ON6)*

On the other hand, there were some community members who were convinced they can control the demand for graffiti adjustments in institutional projects to some extent:

*When you have freedom each project you can break through your perspective.. right.. so I see that worldwide there are many successful projects between artists and big companies... it's cool! (FN4)*

Such perspective points to a readiness to conform with outside interventions in graffiti and compromise personal artistic expressions.

## 5. Conclusion and Discussion

The literature review on graffiti subculture indicated that the activities its actors perform have been part of human nature for a substantial amount of time. In modern times, the graffiti subculture has quickly become a global phenomenon of social and political interest and its legality a widely controversial issue. Withal, in recent years, significant changes occurred in respect of the distinctiveness of the graffiti subculture. Highly paid, popular artists worldwide, their sites, exhibitions, brands and products came to exemplify the formation of a graffiti art marketplace and a semi-formalised global street art economy (Schacter, 2013). The original character of the subculture that suggests a differentiation from the majority, non-acceptance of commercially provided styles and correspondence to subversive values (Riesman, 1950) has been contested by economic and media forces.

The subculture's incorporation in mass culture was here examined in regard to the graffiti community in Bulgaria. What made the Bulgarian case more complex is the role of political economy in the process of graffiti's commodification. When examining the way governments control graffiti Lombard (2013) discovered the increasing acceptance of graffiti by the mass are effects of the rise of a neo-liberal form of political-economic governance (Lombard, 2013). Therefore, a developing country such as Bulgaria where neo-liberal governance has been recently applied arrives to give an interesting perspective on the global movement of graffiti's commodification. Hence, the research question of the master thesis was phrased as follows: *How does the commodification of street art affect the graffiti community in Bulgaria?*

From the empirical study of the graffiti community in Bulgaria it came out that its definition as a subculture could be disputed, as anticipated by the literature review. Results and findings were discussed in relation to the power relations between graffiti subculture and mass culture as dependent on the commodification process, and exemplified through the Bulgarian case. Based on prior research that shows the transformation from underground to mainstream concerns a subculture's relationships with mass media and commerce (Jacques, 2001) these were explored. As they are often scene-specific (Jacques, 2001) the derived themes and codes from data analysis could also be considered as representative of these specifics.

The four themes emerged of the data analysis were interpreted as dual for the power relations between subculture and mass culture, namely **1.Commercialization**, **2.Authorities, Governance and Legality**, **3.Media** and **4.Creativity**, including the three sub-themes of **Commercialization**, namely: **A/Advertising**, **B/Consumerism** and **C/Money and Business**. Table 2 categorizes the themes in a way that explains which aspects of a theme speak for a party in the power relations between subculture and mass culture (Table 2). In order for such categorization to be made the first theme **Commercialization** in this context should be seen as the process of incorporation of graffiti and its production into the market-based economy and the second theme **Media** should be renamed into the theoretical term **Mediatization** as it is the more appropriate way to describe the relationship between the graffitists and the media.

Table 2. Illustration of power relations

<b>SUBCULTURE</b> Defined by differentiation from the majority, non-acceptance of commercially provided styles and meanings and correspondence to subversive values. (Riesman, 1950)	<b>THEMES</b> and SUB-THEMES	<b>MASS CULTURE</b> Defined by dissemination via the mass media, ideas and values that develop from a common exposure to the same media, tastes in art that are favored by the majority and promotion of consumerism. (Browne, 2006)
Rebellious attitude towards or Disapproval of Advertising, Consumerism and the Commercial. Unimportance of Money and the Business.	<b>COMMERCIALISATION</b>  <b>ADVERTISING</b> <b>CONSUMERISM</b> <b>MONEY and BUSINESS</b>	Commercial Involvement, Advertising Participation and Will to Sell Importance of Money and the Business.
Media confrontation; Negative Observations and Experiences in Media	<b>MEDIATIZATION</b>	Mass Media Participation; Positive Media Coverage; Will for Exposure
Rebellious attitude towards State and Authorities; Preference of <i>illegal</i> graffiti	<b>AUTHORITIES</b> <b>GOVERNANCE</b> <b>LEGALITY</b>	State Involvement and Cooperation; Preference of <i>legal</i> graffiti
Freedom of Creativity	<b>CREATIVITY</b>	Creativity Limitations and Interference

This visualization of the emerged themes illustrates which aspects of the themes take side in the power relations between subculture and mass culture. It summarizes the most prominent factors relevant to the implications of graffiti's commodification on the graffiti community in Bulgaria. Additionally, the code *Self-contradiction and Hesitance* represented how the conflict between subculture and mass culture disturbs the graffitists, thus affecting the community. The code *Urban environment* captivating the role of the relationship of graffitists with the urban environment appeared to be a factor rather used by the party of mass culture.

Addressing the research question: *How does the commodification of street art affect the graffiti community in Bulgaria?* the discourse analysis of the transcriptions of fifteen interviews conducted with graffiti artists from Bulgaria demonstrated the ways graffiti is being discussed: graffiti as a youth activity, a friendly environment, an art, a gentrification of the urban environment, a business, an industry and a career, the last three already signifying a strong impact of graffiti commodification. Key findings from the empirical research suggested that a professional reorientation of graffitists has been taking place which illustrated how the graffiti skill gained through participation in the graffiti subculture has been transmitted in economic enterprises. Thus, the graffiti community appeared to be expanding in other creative fields, including corporate ones, making these transmitted or half-transmitted members the navigators of the subculture in the world of marketing (Droney, 2010). It was observed how commodification of graffiti had contributed to the exchange of practices between creative fields, weakening graffiti subculture's *autonomous pole* (Bourdieu, 1984, in Hjarvard, 2008). In general, the confluence of creative fields might be beneficial for community members, diversifying graffiti styles and techniques making it a richer, wider phenomenon. Alternatively, such allowance of coexistence of graffiti and institutional forces erases the ideological primacy of graffiti as an illicit practice (Borghini et al, 2010). Furthermore, a discussion through the chosen theoretical viewpoints, political economy, commodification and mediatization is provided.

## **5.1 Commodification and political economy**

Key finding of the research was that the conditions provided by state and business institutions in graffiti projects such as good location (surface) for the artwork, long timeframe

for the creation of the artwork and handling administrative formalities played an important role in the movement from *illegal* to *legal* graffiti performances. These were found to be the assets of governments when aiming to engage graffitiists in their activities. As Lombard (2013) discusses it, the softening of policies on graffiti does not mean less governance but rather a new type of it. In addition, it appeared that graffitiists were also initiating projects with the support of the state and the business which also reflected on the original concept of graffiti and its subculture. However, as trust in social and political institutions is vital to the strengthening of a democracy and previous research displayed there is a predominating skepticism in societies in transition from closed to open, such as the Bulgarian (Mishler & Rose, 1997), this pattern was seen as less likely to evolve. Moreover, the negativism of Bulgarian society also occurred to be a party in the power relations between graffiti subculture and mass culture that is resistant to the mass. Bulgarian citizens have a sustained and exceptionally low level of evaluation of their well-being and quality of life (Tilkidjiev, 2011) which makes collaborations with governments not as likely as it is in countries with higher index of positivism. Thus, the idea of Borghini et al.'s study (2010) that collaboration with governments intensifies the commodification process of graffiti is less relevant to the Bulgarian case.

From a business development perspective it appeared that adopting the street art practice in the business creates new economic possibilities and job opportunities for the developing country of Bulgaria. Moreover, the adverse economic state of the country was rather an intensifying force of commodification as financial profits from graffiti were never determined by the graffitiists as negative. The graffitiists seemed to be put in a difficult position where they even feel obliged to violate their principles in order to *make a living*. On the other hand, previous studies on countries in transition from closed to open societies indicated components such as the negative self-evaluation of well-being and the low level of trust in public institutions to also influence the power relations between subculture and mass culture and rather delay the incorporation of the former into the latter.

As money was a topic of conversation even when the researcher was trying to avoid it, it could be considered as very important and relevant factor for the graffiti subculture in Bulgaria. The self-contradiction among the respondents to argue for independence of the business and a

drive by ideological incentives for graffiti and simultaneously to point out very frequently to money as a factor in their decision-making processes indicated a discomfort in admitting their financial incentives. Overall, money appeared to be a main engine in the process of commodification in graffiti, with greater weight than that of media or the ambition for popularity.

## **5.2 Mediatization and commercialization**

The main issue for Bulgarian graffiti artists emerging from the way media portrayed their community appeared to be the positive or negative extremeness used. The majority of the respondents expressed a disappointment of Bulgarian media coverage because of misrepresentation through extreme negative or positive frames with predominance of the positive frame. It appeared a demand of better understanding of the subculture has arisen which could again lead to its incorporation into the mainstream. On the other hand, the range of perspectives of the participants illustrated the stratification within the subculture. As suggested by Weinzierl and Muggleton (2003) subcultures are characterized by far more complex stratification than previously suggested simple dichotomy of *monolithic mainstream—resistant subcultures*. Seen from the outside, the entire perspective on the graffiti phenomenon and its commodification, commercialization and mediatization, suggests fragile foundations of the subculture. However, seen from the inside, it seemed that the community was searching and finding ways to establish new rules in order to preserve the subculture elements of dissolution or disappearance (Hebdige, 1979) and yet adapt to the commodification processes.

The rejection of media institutions among the majority of the graffiti artists indicated it as force in the power relations between subculture and mass culture pulling towards a conservation of the rebellious character of the subculture. However, this could not have been plainly concluded as trust in media in Bulgaria is generally low (Konrad Adenauer, 2015). However, some of the collected responses confirmed Hjarvard's (2008) argument that media has a strong impact on cultural fields' *heteronomous pole*, creating a challenge for those fields' *autonomous pole*. In addition, social media usage in this study appeared to be related to graffiti commodification as almost all participants saw it as a tool for promotion of their graffiti works.

The subculture seemed to be losing its rebellious character, accepting the rules and values of consumerism. Often graffiti artists were self-contradicting claiming values of consumerism are at variance with their principles but advertising was rather perceived as an opportunity. Otherwise, this tolerance towards advertising might be due to the relative poverty of the developing country of Bulgaria, as it was a common argument when justifying *commercial graffiti*. Overall, the authenticity of graffiti subculture was confirmed to be in question, also in Bulgaria, as graffitists were rather open to use the graffiti skill for commercial purposes, ready to conform to outside interventions in graffiti and might even compromise their personal artistic expressions.

In conclusion, commodification of graffiti was proven to create challenges for the actors within the graffiti community in Bulgaria. The challenge in this context could be found in various forms. For graffitists who stand by the illegal and subversive character of the graffiti subculture, the challenge represents a hesitance whether to use the graffiti skill for financial benefits or not, as it is not part of its initial purpose. Even though, such actors were deviant cases among the research units in the study, the qualitative perspective of the research advocates it is a possible idea pattern. For the participants who are already involved in the world of commodified graffiti but also want to preserve the original nature of the subculture, the challenge represents a mission to establish a clear distinction between *genuine graffiti* and *commercial graffiti* which would then be a potential method for the subculture to remain its existence as such. In case graffitists decide to build new morals or create new rules where *commercial* and *genuine graffiti* are plainly definite and recognizable, they could fulfill to some extent the hopes of Harvey (2009) for a globalization in which the progressive forces of culture can seek to appropriate and undermine those of capital rather than the other way around.

A limitation of the research was the lack of background information on the graffitists' activities as it would have made the collected data more precise. Knowing better the differences in styles, techniques and purposes of doing graffiti would have also facilitated the clarification of the terms graffitist, graffiti artist and street artist, the *legal* and *illegal* types of graffiti and the *graffiti art* and *graffiti vandalism* distinction as phrased by the actors in the graffiti community. As to the methodological choices in this study, the snowball effect was

indeed an effective way to reach such *hidden population* (Noy, 2008) and the interviews an effective way to understand how it is affected. However, the fact that six of the interviews were conducted in writing and not through one-on-one conversations might have also violated the richness and precision of the data. Firstly, as a conversation would allow the researcher to react on particular replies and secondly, as two of the participants answering in writing rejected to respond to a very important section of the topic list, namely, collaborations with business institutions. However, as respondents were informed of their rights through a consent form (Appendix A) the lack of information was anticipated. Moreover, a *hidden population* (Noy, 2008) was also expected to take various measures in preserving its anonymity. Furthermore, from the conducted interviews it became clear that the graffitiists had very disappointing experiences from previous interviews and half of the participants who answered in writing claimed these resentments are the reason behind their decision not to allow live interviews.

Further research could benefit from this study as it would be interesting to compare studies of the effects of commodification on graffiti communities (subcultures) from developed and developing countries, developing and under-developed countries in order to examine the different stages of incorporation of the graffiti subculture into mass culture. It would also be interesting to explore the stratification within the communities as it seems to be the only way to actually understand how they navigate the evolution of the subculture. In this way, future research would be able to better grasp the negative and the positive implications from the process of commodification as literature review rather indicated more simplistic examination with an emphasis on the negative. Another suggestion for future academic research would be to focus on collaborative work between graffiti artists and non-governmental organizations as it appeared from the one interview with a NGO representative that such organizations play a very important role in the communication process between state and business institutions on one side, and graffiti artists on the other. Non-governmental organizations that operate in the field of graffiti arrive to be a mediator between the artists and society that carry the potential to influence and even manage the consequences of commodification processes.



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## **7. Appendix A**

### **CONSENT REQUEST FOR PARTICIPATING IN RESEARCH**

#### **FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY, CONTACT:**

Teodina Ilcheva; Bulgaria, Sofia, str. Car Simeon 160, ap.7; [teodina1808@gmail.com](mailto:teodina1808@gmail.com); +359 88 77 11 256

#### **DESCRIPTION**

You are invited to participate in an academic study about the graffiti community in Bulgaria. The study is conducted by Teodina Ilcheva – an MA student in Media, Culture & Society programme of Erasmus University Rotterdam, as part of her MA thesis research. The purpose of the research is to understand how certain changes of graffiti as a cultural and social phenomenon reflect on the graffiti artists in Bulgaria.

Your acceptance to participate in this study means that you accept to be interviewed. In general terms, the questions of the interview will be related to the ways graffiti artists think and talk about graffiti, what motivates them, how they use media, collaborate with government and business institutions, experience those collaborations.

Unless you prefer that no recordings are made, I will use a tape recorder for the interview.

You are always free not to answer any particular question, and/or stop participating at any point.

#### **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

As far as I can tell, there are no risks associated with participating in this research. Yet, you are free to decide whether I should use your name or other identifying information such as your pseudonym or only your initials when using the data in the study. If you prefer, I will make sure that you cannot be identified, by mentioning only a letter, your age and gender. I am aware that the possibility of identifying the people who participate in this study may involve risks if they share information for actions they have taken in the past that are still forbidden by the law of the country they live in or actions that they consider a threat for their reputation. For that reason—unless you prefer to be identified fully (first name, last name, occupation, etc.) I will not keep any information that may lead to the identification of those involved in the study.



I will use the material from the interviews and my observation exclusively for academic work, such as further research, academic meetings and publications.

### **TIME INVOLVEMENT**

Your participation in this study will take approximately one hour of your time. You may interrupt your participation at any time.

### **PAYMENTS**

There will be no monetary compensation for your participation.

### **PARTICIPANTS' RIGHTS**

If you have decided to accept to participate in this project, please understand your participation is voluntary and you have the right to withdraw your consent or discontinue participation at any time without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer particular questions. If you prefer, your identity will be made known in all written data resulting from the study. Otherwise, your individual privacy will be maintained in all published and written data resulting from the study.

### **CONTACTS AND QUESTIONS**

If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact –anonymously, if you wish, my supervisor Joyce Neys, [neys@eshcc.eur.nl](mailto:neys@eshcc.eur.nl)

### **SIGNING THE CONSENT FORM**

If you sign this consent form, your signature will be the only documentation of your identity. Thus, you DO NOT NEED to sign this form. In order to minimize risks and protect your identity, you may prefer to consent orally. Your oral consent is sufficient.

I give consent to be audiotaped during this study:

*Name Signature Date*

I prefer my identity to be revealed in all written data resulting from this study

*Name Signature Date*

This copy of the consent form is for you to keep.

## 8. Appendix B

### INTERVIEWS TOPIC LIST

Name/Pseudonym/Initials:

Link to portfolio: .....

Part of a group: Yes/No Group name: .....

Gender:

Age:

Education:

#### *Basic*

1. To begin with, in this study I am addressing graffiti as a subculture and social phenomenon but I do not know how do you as an artist discuss it? What do you actually do? How do you define yourself?
2. Let's go back in time.. Since when do you do this?
3. How did all that start for you? (Did you know anyone else doing it?)
4. Street art or Graffiti? Where is the boundary?

#### *Community*

5. What do you have in common with other graffitiists in Bulgaria? (Do you communicate to each other?)
6. Do you exchange practices? Are there some projects for exchanging practices with artists you have participated in?
7. Do you think you have common interests with your "colleagues" as part of the graffiti subculture?
8. Do you know what kind of projects do they participate in?
9. Do you think there is a certain moral followed by Bulgarian graffitiists? What do you think is the moral they should follow?

#### *Expression of protest*

10. What is the reason for which you began doing graffiti?
11. Do you think graffiti is an expression of protest? (If yes, a protest against what, are they for you?)

## *Vandalism*

12. There was and probably still is an opinion that graffiti are a form of vandalism, it is also still officially forbidden by law. What do you think about this?
13. Promising, I will keep this information unrelated to your identity, would you tell me, have you done graffiti on illegal places? (What is the feeling?)
14. (If yes) Have you had troubles with authorities because of it? (Tell me a story?)

***However, the policies towards graffiti are controversial and there were some projects organized by Sofia municipality [show a picture] that seems to be encouraging the graffiti culture, e.g. <http://bgyoungpeople.com/events/id/8/first-capital-graffiti-festival-for-children-and-young-people-urban-legends/>***

## ***Projects' institutional collaborations***

### *Collaborations with State Authorities*

15. Have you participated in cultural projects, organized by Sofia municipality or the state?
    - If no,.. N16
  16. Do you know other graffitiists that have done that? What do you think about this type of projects?
    - If yes,.. N17
  17. Tell me more about your experience and feelings while working in such projects, organized by the state institutions? How does it work?
  18. Have political figures or their representatives invited you to work in projects/campaigns by doing graffiti?
- \*N18 and N19 are appropriate questions for participants above the age of 30.*
19. How do you evaluate Bulgarian policies on graffiti? Has the government's attitude towards graffiti changed in the last 10 to 25 years. If yes, how?
  20. If yes, to what is this change due? (Do you think it is a natural process due to political and economic changes, part of the advent of democracy and capitalism?)

*There have also been some projects that involved the business into the graffiti culture, e.g.*  
[http://curious.actualno.com/Sofia-Ring-Graffiti-Fest-sybira-naj-dobrite-grafiti-artisti-v-Bylgarija-na-1-uni-pred-Sofija-Ring-Mol-news\\_30977.html](http://curious.actualno.com/Sofia-Ring-Graffiti-Fest-sybira-naj-dobrite-grafiti-artisti-v-Bylgarija-na-1-uni-pred-Sofija-Ring-Mol-news_30977.html)

#### *Collaborations with the Business*

*“Economics” (“Creative symbioses”, “economic possibilities or job opportunities”)*

21. What other projects have you participated in? Any collaborations with business institutions?  
If no,..N21
22. Do you know other graffitiists that have done that? What do you think about this type of projects?  
If yes,..N22
23. Tell me more about your experience and feelings while working on such business projects? (How is it working with a business institution?; What did you win and what did you lose from the project?)
24. Do you think that such collaborations contribute to the graffiti culture and community with other than the financial benefits? (Have you ever felt a “creative symbioses” during such projects? If not, have you ever felt unfairly used?)
25. How would you define the role of business in graffiti culture? (rather positive or negative; in comparison with the role of the state?; Dominating or not?)
26. Is graffiti art dependant on business institutions?

#### *Advertising*

27. Have you worked for advertising projects?
28. Give me an example of working in such, what did you win and what did you lose from the collaboration?

#### *Decision making*

29. How do you take a decision whether to participate in a certain project or not? (What are your hesitations or doubts, if any?)
30. Have you ever felt like working on a project against your principles? (value system)

### *Money*

31. Do you make money out of graffiti?
32. Is it the main financial resource for you? Could it be such?
33. When did you figure that you can actually make money with graffiti art?

### *Mediatization*

*Media is part of our everyday lives. It is also a way for artists to achieve popularity or at least to be exposed, to be viewed.*

34. Do you aim at this type of exposure? (Do you aim at getting popular?; Do you think media can give you that?)
35. What would media exposure give to a graffiti artist, if anything?
36. How do you use social media in relation to graffiti? (Do you use it for work? With what purpose?)
37. Do you use other modern technologies or new media such as mobile applications to promote graffiti?
38. What image do Bulgarian media create of graffiti culture, community and its members?
39. Have you ever given interviews for radio, newspapers or TV in relation to graffiti (Have you participated in cultural projects covered by such media?)

### *Values of Consumersim*

40. What do you think about the so called "Mall culture" (consumer culture)?
41. What does a material person mean? (Do you think you are such?)
42. What do you think about the advertising business? How do you explain the influence of commercials as visual images on the way we think? (crazed mentality)

### *Society*

43. What do you think the messages in your art for society are? Are there such? What would you like them to be?
44. Do you think you have criticized social norms with you art? Or criticized the consumer's culture?
45. What do graffiti give to the world? (What is their influential potential?)
46. What are your predictions for the graffiti culture in Bulgaria?

47. Do you think that Bulgaria is different from the developed countries regarding graffiti culture? If yes, how?
48. What does Bulgarian society think of graffiti? (How do you explain this to yourself?)
49. Do you think that graffiti is a subculture, assuming that the definition of subculture would be: part of society, which distinguishes itself from the mass and the mainstream?
50. Do you think graffiti becomes part of the mass culture?

## 9. Appendix C

N	MARK	PSEUDONYM (GROUP/CREW)	LINK TO PORTFOLIO
1	IA	- (Destructive Creation)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/TheDestructiveCreation?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/TheDestructiveCreation?fref=ts</a>
2	S	Solar (-)	-
3	P	Punto (-)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/puntisimo?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/puntisimo?fref=ts</a>
4	F	Felon (USA94)	<a href="https://instagram.com/thefelon/">https://instagram.com/thefelon/</a>
5	M	Mysa (-)	<a href="http://behance.net/mysa">http://behance.net/mysa</a>
6	O	Ozone (CMs)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/ozone.cms?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/ozone.cms?fref=ts</a>
7	MB	NGO	<a href="http://amorpha.org/">http://amorpha.org/</a>
8	N	Nasimo (-)	<a href="http://www.nasimo.org/">http://www.nasimo.org/</a> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/golokapro?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/golokapro?fref=ts</a>
9	R	Raveo (Me Click)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/mecburgas?fref=ts">https://www.facebook.com/mecburgas?fref=ts</a>
10	R2	Rate (NLS)	<a href="http://graffitiisthebest.tumblr.com/">http://graffitiisthebest.tumblr.com/</a>
11	PC	Dark (Pyrotechnix Crew)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Pyrotechnixcrew">https://www.facebook.com/Pyrotechnixcrew</a> <a href="http://pyrotechnixcrew.com/">http://pyrotechnixcrew.com/</a>
12	G	NikkaWhy (SUNSHINERS)	<a href="http://www.youmustbettersee.blogspot.co.uk/">http://www.youmustbettersee.blogspot.co.uk/</a>
13	G	MOUSE (SUNSHINERS)	<a href="http://www.mishkathemouse.com">www.mishkathemouse.com</a>
14	B	BoZko (-)	<a href="http://www.bozko.eu">www.bozko.eu</a>
15	G	- (140 ideas)	<a href="http://www.140ideas.eu">www.140ideas.eu</a> <a href="https://www.facebook.com/140ideas">https://www.facebook.com/140ideas</a>
16	R3	Rock (-)	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/rockgraff">https://www.facebook.com/rockgraff</a> <a href="http://streetpins.com/members/rockone/">http://streetpins.com/members/rockone/</a>