

Socio-Psychological Significance of Vandalism in the Urban Environment: Destruction, Modernization, Communication

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Abstract : Vandalism is a common phenomenon, but its definition is still not clearly defined. In the public sense, vandalism is the blatant cases of pogroms in cemeteries, destruction of public places (regardless of whether these actions are authorized), damage to significant objects of culture and history (monuments, religious buildings). From a legal point of view, only such an act can be called vandalism, which is aimed at 'desecrating buildings or other structures, damaging property on public transport or in other public places'. The key here is the notion of public property that is being damaged. In addition, the principal is the semantics of messages, expressed in a kind of sign system (drawing, inscription, symbol), which initially threatens public order, the calmness of citizens, public morality. Because of this, the legal qualification of vandalism doesn't include a sufficiently wide layer of environmental destructions that are common in modern urban space (graffiti and other damage to private property, broken shop windows, damage to entrances and elevator cabins), which in ordinary consciousness are seen as obvious facts of vandalism. At the same time, the understanding of vandalism from the position of psychology implies an appeal to the question of the limits of the activity of the subject of vandalism and his motivational basis. Also recently, the discourse on the positive meaning of some forms of vandalism (graffiti, street-art, etc.) has been activated. But there is no discussion of the role and significance of vandalism in public and individual life, although, like any socio-cultural and socio-psychological phenomenon, vandalism is not groundless and meaningless. Our aim of the study was to identify and describe the functions of vandalism as a socio-cultural and socio-psychological phenomenon of the life of the urban community, as well as personal determinants of its manifestations. The study was conducted in the spatial environment of the Russian megalopolis (Ekaterinburg) by photographing visual results of vandal acts (6217 photos) with subsequent trace-assessment and image content analysis, as well as diagnostics of personal characteristics and motivational basis of vandal activity of possible subjects of vandalism among youth. The results of the study allowed to identify the functions of vandalism at the socio-environmental and individual-subjective levels. The socio-environmental functions of vandalism include the signaling function, the function of preparing of social changes, the constructing function, and the function of managing public moods. The demonstrative-protest function, the response function, the refund function, and the self-expression function are assigned to the individual-subjective functions of vandalism. A two-dimensional model of vandal functions has been formed, where functions are distributed in the spaces 'construction reconstruction', 'emotional regulation/moral regulation'. It is noted that any function of vandal activity at the individual level becomes a kind of marker of 'points of tension' at the social and environmental level. Acknowledgment: The research was supported financially by Russian Science Foundation, (Project No. 17-18-01278).

Keywords : destruction, urban environment, vandal behavior, vandalism, vandalism functions

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