



TAG AS AN IDENTIFICATION MARKER OF THE CULTURAL CODE OF SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the tag as an identification marker of cultural codes in society and a tool for authorial self-identification within the modern urban environment. The research analyses visual tagging practices through four key tags (#NoWar, #ClimateStrike, etc.) and three regional cases. Findings reveal that tags function not merely as visual elements but as multidimensional tools combining aesthetics, communication, and social interaction. They highlight the interaction of visual symbols with cultural and social dimensions of digital urban spaces. The study broadens understanding of the tag's role and provides practical value for scholars and practitioners of contemporary visual culture.

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1. Introduction

The topic's relevance is justified by the growing role of visual art in the urban social environment, where artistic images of hand-made graphic inscriptions are an effective means of interpersonal communication. In particular, the tag, as an author's signature, plays a key role in the self-identification process of the artist and the entire culture he or she represents (Fairchild et al., 2024). The study of the semantics and semiotics of the tag contributes to a deeper understanding of the mechanisms of identity formation in visual space and their impact on the socio-cultural transformations of the contemporary environment (Fan, 2022; Petitimberty, 2024). Today, urban space is perceived as a platform for expressing the artist's identity through artistic activity.

According to Baldini (2022), the tag is integral to graffiti. It acts not only as an individual signature of the author but also as an effective tool for forming a new identity in the urban space. However, despite the significant role of the tag, the study of the tag as an identification marker of the cultural code of society remains insufficiently researched. Most scholarly works focus on the general aspects of the emergence, transformation, and rapid development of the tag as a means of communication without providing a sufficiently thorough analysis of its manifestation as a carrier of authorial identification, often ignoring its specifics (Campos et al., 2021; Fransberg et al., 2023).

First, a tag is a tool for individual expression and collective identification. It reflects the unique worldview of individual communication participants and serves as a marker of belonging to certain social groups, uniting people around shared values, ideologies, and goals.

Second, the multifaceted nature of the tagging process as a way of authorizing through a work of art. A tag can create a sense of belonging to a community, giving a sense of kinship and involvement. It contributes to the dissemination of discourses and narratives that are common to a particular social group and the strengthening of identity. It is worth mentioning the use of tags such as #NoWar or #ClimateStrike, which demonstrate an illustrative example of how social media language can mobilise large groups of people, creating a sense of community and promoting social change.

Thirdly, hashtag can symbolise protest and resistance, uniting people around the fight for social justice. In the context of globalisation, the tag takes on a special significance. It allows for the formation of transnational communities across geographical and cultural barriers. However, the tag can also lead to the polarisation of society and the creation of echo chambers where people are surrounded by like-minded people (La Rocca & Boccia Artieri, 2022).

Despite the active theoretical discourse that has emerged around graffiti as a form of social communication in contemporary research, we believe that the problem of tagging as a social phenomenon that forms an identification marker of the cultural code of society remains insufficiently explored (Martínez-Carazo et al., 2021). Existing research on contemporary graffiti, in our opinion, focuses on the external aspects of this phenomenon, such as the technique of execution and social impact (Myllylä & Tolonen, 2023). At the same time, the deep connection of graffiti inscriptions with the processes of personal development and identity formation is often overlooked. Therefore, considering tagging as a means of communication at the intersection of the personal and the public opens up new horizons for understanding contemporary urban practices.

2. Theoretical basis of the study

2.1. *The problem of visual communication in the urban environment*

According to researchers Elharrouss et al. (2021), the flourishing of visual communication of artistic movements is fuelled by growing social exclusion, the fast pace of urban life, and limited usable space. The authors argue that ethos of the social community and elements of urban infrastructure, such as the digital environment and city walls, can serve as the main medium for creating various visual communications. According to Brown & Mourão (2021), an essential feature of pictorial messaging in the form of tags within urban environments is its variety and reliance on street art of the societal environment. The scholars assert that graffiti inscriptions, notices, advertising and other visual elements mirror social trends, political views, and cultural symbols. Each such element carries a rich layer of meanings that can be interpreted differently by different social groups. Thus, visual art in urban space is not a passive element but an active participant in the dialogue of cultures (Van Hoof et al., 2021).

The study confirms the conclusions drawn by Aghajari et al. (2023). It focuses on the study of personal expression in the information space. Tags, as a visual representation of artistic individuality, act as markers of social identity. They reflect the artist's connection to a particular subculture, helping to express one's own identity. Summing up certain consequences of these processes, we can conclude that the appearance of the tag in the field of visual art not only shapes new standards of communication but also contributes to the emergence of alternative cultural codes. Street art demonstrates that tags are turning into more than just space markers - they are becoming the basis for creating unique communities united by common values and a desire for free expression.

2.2. Tag as a form of visualisation of the artist's individuality

Scholars such as Lan et al. (2024) have concluded that the artist's visual identity expressed through a hand-made graphic typeface is individuality and uniqueness. Tag as a marker of a cultural code the signage integrates within an expansive cultural framework, allowing every urban visual element to gain significance amid intricate societal exchange and dialogue networks in the city environment. Mattei (2023) examines how a tag acts as an identity marker, and not just the visual form of the inscription. The purpose of the analysis is to demonstrate the semantic capacity of the tag as a sign in the environment of modern visual media and to examine its function in context with other street arts, focusing on studying signs and how these signs are connected to other social behaviours. Tags, an essential component of graffiti art, have always been important for the development of this art form. The tag acts as an initial platform on which complex technical methods and techniques of its execution developed, and other types of graffiti were formed and improved. Essentially, the tag serves not solely as an artist's signature but also as a symbolic "emblem" which has a unique font form that shapes the viewer's perception of personal identity and membership within a specific subculture prompting the author of the inscription to the graphic development of the tag as a standalone art form.

As the primary form of graffiti — tags played a key role in forming the whole artistic movement (Manik et al., 2022). Being the first step in the artist's creative path, it allowed the author to express himself in the visual environment and lay the foundations of his style. The instinctive desire for self-identification underlying the tag contributed to the formation of the artist's unique visual code and his integration into the graffiti community (Carrington, 2022).

2.3. Tag as a way of social emancipation in the visual environment

Tags like graffiti, in the past mostly perceived as an act of vandalism, is now recognised as one of the most influential artistic movements in contemporary art (Ho et al., 2023). According to Biljecki & Ito (2021), the transformation of this phenomenon from a marginal one to a recognised visual art form reflects shifts in art and the perception of the visual image of the city. Scientists assert that tag serves as an urban decorative feature and a formidable medium for societal discourse, enabling individuals to showcase their uniqueness, condemn systemic inequity, and concoct novel cultural lexicons.

Font handmade graphic form of tag often becomes a means for adolescents to express their individuality, challenging social inequalities and creating unique cultural systems. Graffiti is an integral part of the culture of many young people today, combined with such cultural phenomena as clothing style, music and other components of youth life. The tag helped to launch the street art style known as graffiti. Starting with basic signatures, it served as the basis for various stylistic changes, such as crosses, fonts, blocks and everyday drawings. Several contemporary graffiti artists who are now recognised started their journey by creating a "brand mark" (the development of graphic and stylistic techniques characteristic of author's style) that later evolved into an "emblem" (tag). It was the tag that served as the basis for various stylistic changes. Over time, the tag has evolved from an independent unit to a key component of large murals and various street art objects, increasing its potential as an artistic discipline. This research has to be thoroughly studied because this is one of the key questions in any kind of detailed study about the formation of a new identity by the tag in a visual environment. The answer to this question should entail examining how the tag is fairly understood in terms of aesthetic language, visual environment turned into a democratic platform for personal expression, and demonstration of belonging to a particular subculture. The opinion of Bonadio (2022) is that as the whole tag, recognised

in graffiti, it indicates ways of identification outside of the classic cultural sociohistorical levels. From analysing the tags, we can gain insights into the workings of an interaction between the artist's personality and the urban environment, enabling new forms of self-expression that shape further visual space and become a major character of contemporary urban culture.

The influence of such an tags an artistic phenomenon on the formation of the author's identity in the context of social emancipation in the visual environment still requires further scientific exploration on the topic of research. The involvement of the visual language of tags and cultural codes and how they affect the transformation of these codes are not yet properly understood. Among this circle, special mention should go to studies on tags in the digital environment and on tags that "live" in new cultural contexts.

2.4. Objectives

This study aims to investigate the role of the tag as an identification marker in the context of the cultural code of society in the visual environment. For this purpose, the study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Analyze how tags reflect authors' individuality and stylistic evolution in urban visual culture.
2. Examine the interaction between tags and socio-cultural contexts, including their role in identity transformation.
3. Investigate the communicative function of tags within and beyond graffiti subcultures.

3. Research methods

3.1. Research analysis

The sociological analysis of tags allows us to explore their role in forming social identity and social ties and their impact on social processes. Cultural and anthropological analysis gave the opportunity to justify the connection of tags with cultural contexts and social movements, allowing us to reveal their symbolic meaning. Art historical analysis made it possible to analyze the visual series of tags and identify visual communication strategies, artistic and figurative features of the font used to convey social messages, compositional means and techniques of graphic expression, the emotional component of artistic stylistics, and the connection with the urban environment. The stages of the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Stages of the study

The research stage	Object of research	Results obtained
Stage 1 Analysis of visual characteristics	Formal characteristics of tags (style, colour, composition), social tags (#NoWar, #LoveIsLove)	A close connection between visual characteristics and the social significance of tags has been found
Stage 2 Analysing the symbolic and social meaning	Tagging's links to cultural and social contexts, reflecting societal transformations, self-identification, and protest moods	The deep level of communication between tags and the audience is revealed
Stage 3 Analysing the role of tags in community building	Symbolism of belonging to a group, creation of new social ties	It was found that tags are active participants in the formation of urban culture

Source: Own elaboration, 2025

The study's theoretical basis, which includes the concepts of visual culture, social identity, and urbanism, allowed us to consider the tag as a multifaceted art phenomenon that influences the formation of identification markers in society. It reflects the author's individuality and actively participates in socio-cultural processes. The empirical analysis confirmed that tag is a powerful tool for creating alternative cultural codes and shaping new social practices.

2. Sampling

The hashtags #NoWar, #climateStrike, #BlackLivesMatter, and #LoveIsLove were chosen for several reasons. Firstly, they are widely known in the visual environment of the city and frequently used on social media, which emphasises their relevance and impact. Secondly, they address pressing global

issues such as peace, environmental sustainability, racial justice, and LGBTQ+ rights, which are central to current academic debates. They illustrate how visual imagery, and linguistic elements can mobilize the consciousness of society, contributing to a sense of collective identity. Among the tags examined, #BlackLivesMatter and #LoveIsLove have proved particularly effective as they conceal narratives that reveal the interconnected nature of different forms of discrimination. The sample (N=120) aligns with established practices for visual semiotic analysis (Díaz et al., 2022), ensuring thematic saturation while accounting for regional diversity.

3.3. Research methods

The case study method was chosen for an in-depth analysis of specific examples of tagging in the urban environment. The criteria for selecting the cases were relevance in the current social context, visual expressiveness, and data availability. The study employed qualitative content analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) of 120 visual artifacts (tags, murals, social media posts) collected from 2020–2024. Cases were selected based on: (1) relevance to global socio-political movements, (2) visual diversity, and (3) data accessibility. Social media data was scraped using CrowdTangle API; street art was documented via fieldwork and partnerships with local artists. Three cases representing different topics and geographical contexts were selected for analysis: #NoWar in Kyiv, #LoveIsLove in London, and #ClimateStrike in Berlin (Table 2). Further analysis showed that these tags serve different functions, including mobilising public opinion, fostering social identity and expressing protest. On the contrary, the hashtag #LoveIsLove emphasised inclusiveness and tolerance with bright colours and positive images. In addition, the hashtag #ClimateStrike emphasised the global nature of environmental issues and called for collective action. The findings show that tags are a powerful tool for social interaction and expression of public opinion in the modern visual environment.

Table 2. Composition of Tag Sample for Visual and Contextual Analysis

Data Category	Sample Size	Geographic Coverage	Data Sources
#NoWar tags	50 visual cases	Kyiv, Ukraine	Instagram, street murals
#LoveIsLove murals	30 artworks	London, UK	Public art databases
#ClimateStrike posts	40 items	Berlin, Germany	Twitter, protest archives

Source: Own elaboration, 2025

4. Results

4.1. Art historical characteristics of tags and their social significance

The art historical analysis of the tag study is a key stage in considering the peculiarities of identification markers of the cultural code of the contemporary visual environment. According to the authors of the study, the study of artistic and figurative features of style, colour, compositional techniques and methods, the emotional component of artistic stylistics, as well as the technique of execution thoroughly explains the deep symbolic meaning of tags. It also allows us to identify them in the context of contemporary street art. The font form of the tag varies from the simplest graphic elements to complex images (Murray et al., 2022), which embody the author's self-expression and belonging to a particular subculture. According to Yang et al. (2023), the colour palette 'serves not only a decorative purpose but also carries emotional baggage and reinforces key social messages'. Red and black evoke protest and mourning, while bright colours evoke energy and hope.

Compositional decisions and where the tag is placed in the visual environment also play a significant role in the perception of the tag. The placement of letter elements in the inscription, their size, proportions, and line dynamics affect the overall impression of the work and form its semantic load (Giari et al., 2023). The diversity of styles, tagging techniques (sprays, stencils, mosaics) and themes reflects the evolution of street art and shows the constant search for new means of expression. A visual analysis of the tagging examples allows us to trace the evolution from simple graphic images to complex compositions with a deep social meaning. The use of various techniques - from traditional graffiti to interactive installations - demonstrates the constant development of this art form. Tags 'decorate' city walls and perform important social functions: they express protest, convey emotions, form a collective identity, and reflect contemporary social processes (Figueira et al., 2022; Peykarjou, 2022;). A visual

analysis of the #NoWar and #ClimateStrike tags shows that they are effective for mobilisation and protest, analysing the use of these tags during rallies, which is their active use (Fig. 2).

The visual analysis of protest tags tends to use aggressive and hard lines. The typeface is more constructive letterform and is made mainly in contrasting colors: red and black are intended to enhance the emotional impact of the statements and focus attention on the idea of the visual message (Minarik, Berger & Jensen, 2023).

Figure 2. Use of #NoWar and #ClimateStrike tags during demonstrations.



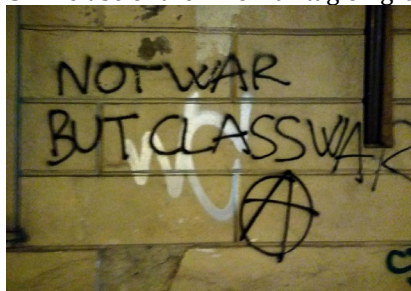
2.1. Source(s): Author unknown. (2022). against the war in Ukraine. *Photo by*

2.2. Source(s): Author unknown (2022). India: People participate in street art, as part of an awareness drive related to Climate Change. *Mohsin Javed*

Limitations

This visual aesthetic reflects the protesters' determination and willingness to fight for change. The hashtags #NoWar and #ClimateStrike are important communicators that convey a clear and understandable message to a wide audience. Their use at rallies, on social media, and in other public spaces helps to spread awareness of the issues and encourages people to take action (Figure 3).

Figure 3. The use of the #NoWar tag on graffiti.



Source: Author unknown. (2018). *Dosya: Not War but Class War graffiti in Turin.*

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/2/28/Not_War_but_Class_War_graffiti_in_Turin.jpg

A linguistic analysis of the contextual use of the hashtag #NoWar shows that this visual element can contribute to the formation of a new humanistic consciousness. The transformation of this hashtag into a universal symbol of anti-war protest demonstrates its ability to transcend national and cultural boundaries. The study of this phenomenon allows us to better understand the mechanisms of language's influence on the formation of ideas about the world around us. This gesture of resistance tries to generate a global identity based on peace, social justice and a certain form of anti-war internationalism.

In particular, the tags of expression of the author's feelings (#LovelsLove, #Forever), which are applied to the theme of love, demonstrate appropriate artistic graphics that reflect the emotional content of the artistic image of the inscription. The font graphics, as a rule, have smooth rounded letter shapes, complemented by additional images in the form of hearts or rainbows. Many of these tags opt for brighter colour gradients, graceful lines, and aesthetic and harmonious ways of graphic expression. The stylised display of these techniques emphasises the intimacy and emotional structure of social messages. Pastel colours and smooth colour transitions create a pleasant atmosphere of compassion, which is very important for conveying emotional content or feelings of concern (Yates, 2024). Love tags

are manifestations of the author's feelings and carry social meaning as such, and they also add a certain level of calm, if only a little more, to make personal expression practically 'safe' (Figure 4-7).

Figure 4. The use of #LoveIsLove tags on murals.



Source: Unknown artist (2018). *Ukrainian south*. <https://culturemeter.od.ua/v-odesskom-dvorike-muraly-love-is-na-vsju-stenu-67848-2/>.

Figure 5. Love is Love mural in Twisp, USA



Source: Amy Gard (2018).

Figure 6. Love is Love mural in Sydney, Australia



Source: Author unknown (n.d.). <https://mumbrella.com.au/mini-australia-brings-australians-miniactsofbiglove-to-life-in-three-new-sydney-murals-725383>

The mural, created as part of the #MiniActsOfBigLove campaign in Sydney, is a vivid example of the use of public art as a tool for social mobilisation. Through visual analysis and semiotic decoding, it can be revealed that the mural combines key symbols of the marriage equality movement: the colours of the rainbow and images of people of different identities. The graphic elements depicted in the mural can evoke positive emotions, strengthening the sense of community. According to the study's author, it is worth emphasising that without the widespread coverage of social issues through social media, there would not have been a single mural that would have drawn attention to LGBT+ issues and public discourse about them. The study of online comments and hashtags shows that the #Love tag depicted on the mural has become a visual 'emblem' of community cohesion around one topic in the public sphere. In the context of public art and social movements, this case demonstrates the significant impact of visual art images on shaping public opinion. According to the authors, the tag, as an element of the contemporary socio-cultural visual environment, often manifests as a manifestation of social change.

Figure 7. Love is Love mural in London, UK



Source: Author unknown (n.d.). <https://valenciasecreta.com/mural-love-is-love/>
A mural titled 'Love is Love' from the London neighbourhood of Shoreditch, known for its bohemian

The mural titled 'Love is Love' from the London neighbourhood of Shoreditch, known for its bohemian atmosphere and tolerance, symbolises the struggle for LGBTQ+ rights in the UK. The mural on one of the main streets, which adorns the city's space, reminds us that equality and acceptance play an important role in shaping a healthy democratic society - a powerful message using simple symbols (love) that are visually stunning and emotional. The matte finish of imitation lettering is combined with vivid imagery, making it a universal language of feelings. The #LovelsLove tag on urban murals has become an important symbol of support and inclusivity for all types of love. Its use is another way to promote equality and fight discrimination based on sexual orientation. The colours (pink, red and white, symbolising great love), flashing in bright, emotional spots, tell a story of love, acceptance and unity. This creates a friendly and open atmosphere with the soft rounded shapes of these graffiti elements using this tag. As Van Wijkhelen, Loose, Dhoest & De Ridder (2024) note, the #LovelsLove tag usually fits into a cultural discourse that promotes LGBT+ rights and inclusion (Van Wichelen et al., 2024).

The author of the article came to the conclusion that the tag has a specific font form, which is characterized by street aesthetics with the use of certain artistic means of expression, which is a way of revealing the tag as an identification marker from the position of the author's rethinking of the idea embodied in the inscription in the form of a mural. In urban space, street artists not only practice technical skills and techniques, but also try to reveal the chosen topic as clearly and concisely as possible for better memorization and for convenient and quick distribution by other representatives of the subculture of the presented inscription. Such a position is evidence, first of all, of the creative approach to creating a creative visual environment in which urban communication of different strata of society is formed.

4.2. Symbolic and social significance of tags

The study of street symbols in visual art focuses on the identification markers that represent cultural and social values, as well as societal issues that are used to express them in graphic inscriptions. For example, the #NoWar tag is an anti-war symbol, and peace symbols, such as the dove or the peace sign,

express society's need for peace and security. Tag symbols are culturally determined codes that change in different contexts and political situations (Drijvers et al., 2021; Qin et al., 2022). Throughout history, the symbols have had notable meanings; for example, the triangular #ClimateStrike sign has gradually become an “emblem” of global environmental activism and increasingly contains calls to action on pressing climate issues (Zainubi & Ciptadi, 2024). As can be seen, the tags effectively reflect social change, most likely as a response to current issues and movements. #NoWar and #BlackLivesMatter are just two examples, both of which refer to global campaigns against war and racial injustice, respectively. Not only do hashtags reflect familiar issues, but they also encourage people to take action. They are a key part of self-identification, whereby individuals and groups of individuals mark their attributes/positions.

Tags perform a communicative function by quickly and effectively informing many people about an issue. If we consider tags as visual identification markers, they represent a kind of cultural code of a society, its social movements, individual views and feelings. In other words, they act as ‘visual slogans’ that are built on international symbols and concise refrains to have a meaningful appeal to the general public of their time. A few examples are #NoWar or #Love is Hate, which speak for themselves politically and socially (Goel & Kumar, 2021; Rittershaus & Eschenberg, 2021).

4.3. The role of tags in the formation of communities and collective identity

Research shows that tags are important for creating and strengthening communities, as they are ‘strong’ markers of a society's cultural code from a sociological perspective. Tags are elements for creating virtual and physical spaces for friendship and sharing experiences around common values (Denton et al., 2021). An analysis of case studies, including street art, shows that tags such as #NoWar or #LoveIsLaw demonstrate mechanisms for creating new social groups that support peace (Díaz et al., 2022). On the other hand, researchers Ajzen and Taskin (2021) argue that studying the visual and semiotic elements of tags allows us to identify standard codes that unite communities within the same culture, forming a shared collective identity.

Through the use of tags in the visual environment, new social connections can be created, turning virtual space into a place for dialogue and exchange of experience. They help people around the world find each other, unite around common aspirations, and create global communities (Meier & Sharp, 2024). Visual art elements often form the basis of urban legends and tell a story as a cultural artefact that evolves from generation to generation (Wang, et al., 2024). Research shows that tags in visual space actively contribute to the formation of new cultural codes, changing the urban landscape and influencing urban culture (Poppi & Copes, 2024). Tags are an integral part of street art, providing young people and socio-economic groups with a platform to communicate who they are. In this way, they can give new meaning to urban environments and promote the development of alternative cultural practices, allowing marginalised groups to create their own identities (Loidova, 2024).

4.4. Regional and cultural peculiarities of tagging in visual space

A comparative analysis of tagging in different social and cultural contexts has revealed significant differences in its goals and application. In Western democracies, street art is often a powerful tool for community mobilisation and the promotion of social values. For example, hashtags such as #MiniActsOfBigLove inventively combine universally recognised symbols of the LGBTQ+ community with local elements, embodying characteristics of Western public discourse. In contrast, in Eastern Europe, where authoritarian structures continue to exert considerable influence, tags are used as tools of protest and defiance. These symbols are often coded or hidden to avoid censorship or punishment. This adaptability highlights the ability of street art to play different roles depending on the socio-political context. The influence of globalisation on street art is manifested in the spread of specific visual motifs and ideals, which are subsequently interpreted through the lens of local culture and politics. Thus, graphic tags function not only as a means of visual communication, but also as a platform for addressing issues of social transformation and cultural differences.

5. Discussion

The study aligns with identity theory, semiotics, and visual street art, focusing on the role of tags as key elements in forming both individual and collective identity markers. Tags serve as a medium for demonstrating membership in specific social or political groups and facilitate self-identification. For instance, examples such as #NoWar or #BlackLivesMatter illustrate how tags unite people around shared values and principles. From a semiotic perspective, tags function as signs reflecting socio-cultural contexts and embedding hidden meanings within cultural codes. Tags such as #ClimateStrike, for example, highlight social phenomena and cultural characteristics. These findings are consistent with researchers such as Dehouche and Dehouche (2023) and Shahriar (2022), who emphasize the effectiveness of visual art in shaping individual identity.

The analysis revealed that tags play a significant role in self-expression within visual spaces. By using semiotic features such as symbols and signs, tag authors convey their artistic and technical skills alongside their values, emotions, and social status. This individuality is particularly evident in the font form of tags, where visual characteristics become emblematic of personal and ethical messages. Tags like #LovelsLove and #NoWar, often accompanied by images, illustrate moral and ethical meanings, turning these inscriptions into recognizable artistic images. Achlioptas et al. (2021), as well as Liu and Yao (2024), discuss how such visual representations create resonant cultural symbols.

The adaptability of tags to socio-cultural contexts was another critical observation. They actively transform urban environments into platforms for communicating social ideas, as demonstrated by tags associated with environmental movements, such as #ClimateStrike, which are often placed in symbolically significant locations like administrative buildings and public spaces. This enhances their social impact and introduces new meanings into the urban context. The study also explored the dynamic interaction between tags and cultural codes, which are continually enriched with new symbols reflecting contemporary challenges and aspirations. These findings align with the results presented by Bengamra et al. (2024) and Hada et al. (2024), who highlight the role of visual art in forming active identities within socio-cultural contexts. The communicative function of tags extends beyond graffiti subcultures. Within these subcultures, tags serve as forms of communication, expressing the authors' worldviews and beliefs. The stylistic and graphic similarities of tags within a subculture contribute to community formation and mutual recognition. Beyond subcultural boundaries, tags facilitate cross-cultural communication due to their universal symbols and messages. For instance, tags like #RIP or #MementoMori carry universally understood meanings, eliciting sympathy across diverse audiences. This communicative versatility is reflected in the works of Muratbekova and Shamoï (2024) and Wang et al. (2024), who examine the bridging role of visual symbols in connecting social groups.

The study's theoretical implications enrich the understanding of contemporary visual art by examining the socio-cultural and identity-related dimensions of tags. This complements art historical analyses of identity formation, social media influence, and urban transformation within visual street art. Additionally, the findings have practical applications, particularly for urban planners who may use insights from street art to develop strategies that enhance the visual identity of urban environments.

Regarding the study's objectives, the analysis confirms their achievement. First, it effectively demonstrated how tags reflect the authors' individuality and stylistic evolution in urban visual culture. Second, the interaction between tags and socio-cultural contexts, including their role in identity transformation, was thoroughly examined through their adaptability and communicative impact. Lastly, the study comprehensively investigated the communicative function of tags both within and beyond graffiti subcultures, highlighting their significance in fostering cross-cultural and community dialogues.

6. Conclusion

The study's results demonstrate the important role of tags in forming an identification marker of the cultural code of society at both the individual and collective levels. As the analysed scientific literature and case studies presented in this study show, tags have multifunctional attributes. The study emphasises that tags represent the author as a unique personality and have a symbiotic relationship with the macro-discourse of the socio-cultural environment, creating the genesis of new cultural codes. The study results can be used to develop curricula for art historical analysis of street art, social media analysis, development of artistic features of font graphics, and own creative projects that use tags as part of such a tool as appropriation. As a dynamic and creative space, the city is a favourable

environment for the emergence of new visual forms. Prospects for further research are seen in the study of the tag's influence on the formation of identification markers of socio-cultural and political narratives. This study demonstrates that tags are powerful markers of cultural identity, functioning at both individual and collective levels. They serve as tools of self-expression, socio-cultural communication, and community formation, effectively bridging personal identity with broader social movements. The findings have practical implications for urban development and cultural policy. Integrating sanctioned tagging zones into city planning could harness creative expression while mitigating vandalism. Public art initiatives might adopt tag-inspired visuals to advocate for social causes, such as the impactful #LovesLove murals supporting LGBTQ+ rights. Additionally, educators could use tag analysis in visual literacy programs to help decode urban semiotics. Despite these contributions, the research has limitations. The sample (N=120) focused on Western urban contexts like Kyiv, London, and Berlin, which may limit its global applicability. Digital tagging, such as AR graffiti and social media trends, was not systematically explored, despite its growing cultural significance. Furthermore, the qualitative approach prioritized depth over broad statistical generalization. Future research could address these gaps by exploring digital tagging's role in replicating or transforming traditional practices, expanding the study to include cities in the Global South, and conducting longitudinal analyses of tags like #ClimateStrike to track their evolution in prolonged social movements. While these directions offer valuable opportunities, this study establishes tagging as a critical lens for understanding the role of visual culture in societal transformation, particularly in hybrid urban landscapes where physical and digital dimensions increasingly intersect.

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