ARE WE ON THE SAME PAGE?

A THESAURUS IN LEAVING MARKS THROUGH STREET ART
Title of the thesis:

Are we on the same page?:
A thesaurus in leaving marks
through street art

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This thesis examines social sustainability through the relationship between Helsinki’s street art, public spaces, and nature. The focus is on the canal between Ruoholahti and Jätkäsaari, where the impact of water on the built environment and creative expression in that area is studied. Water and the seasons play a large role in how spaces and surfaces change over time, and how the way residents interact with these spaces changes as well. The thesis examines past/current policies and ideas regarding street art in more detail. In terms of this thesis, street art includes chalk, paint, stickers, posters, yarn bombing, guerrilla gardening, and more. This leads to questions, such as, who or what curates Helsinki’s surfaces? Divided into three parts, this thesis examines the past, present, and future through three books that all come together to tell a story. The sections are a thesaurus, a yearbook, and a coloring book, which are not literal books, but rather larger themes to group and structure the information. The thesaurus covers the past by examining how wording relates to attitudes and politics. The yearbook is meant for today, presenting designs through photographs. The coloring book gives hope for creativity in the future when people can interact differently with their environment. Together, these sections support creativity and interaction in various settings. A small group of participants was asked to take photographs of their surroundings while walking. Participants’ photographs were then analyzed to find similarities, differences, and interesting new observations between their photographs and my own. Following the changes along the canal highlights street art’s impermanence and accessibility, and reveals how the city’s resources are used to remove this art. The built environment is often inspired by nature, but it still feels contradictory when some people want to keep the surfaces exactly as they were originally designed. Allowing public spaces to change, like the people who pass through them, can help bridge this disconnect.

Keywords: citizen engagement, street art, public spaces, nature, creativity
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INTRO

Connection to Social Sustainability & Creative Sustainability

Public spaces and street art have the potential to bring people together, be interactive, and create conversations. Similarly to how there are various types of street art, public spaces can look and function in a variety of ways. Within Helsinki, past policies and current actions impact how street art in public spaces appears and transforms. Looking at the influence of the environment on Helsinki’s city planning and culture highlights similarities in details between graffiti and nature. Visual research in this thesis centers around the Ruoholahti Canal, which is located between Ruoholahti and Jätkäsaari, as it strongly represents the relationship between the natural and built.

Our environment, both natural and built, is usually shaped around water (State of Green, 2020). Water is needed for biotic components, as plants, animals, and organisms make changes and adapt in their environments to be able to survive and meet their needs (Brenner, 2019). Water influences where and how private and public buildings and spaces are constructed (State of Green, 2020). Water is a necessary element for humans to survive, but is also included for practicality, aesthetics, and recreation (State of Green, 2020). Water is usually one of the focal points in Helsinki’s city planning, so why is that connection not being appreciated in graffiti-related policies? Slowing down and paying attention to how water interacts with our surroundings and influences the decisions being made, helps in seeing the role that nature, especially water, plays in citizens interacting with public spaces, particularly street art. Ruoholahti and Jätkäsaari are built around the sea and are connected by the canal, which was mentioned earlier. The location influences the architecture in these neighborhoods and provides spaces for bridges and underpasses, overlooking the water. These bridges and underpasses are common points of crossing for residents of the area, and over the years, especially the past year, have been the backdrop for graffiti (paint, stickers, posters/paste-ups, etc.). The underpasses, tucked away from the main views, have become spaces for individuals to be creative and leave their mark in different ways. While there have been plans to create a legal graffiti wall in Jätkäsaari, there have been major delays in its construction (OmaStadi, n.d.). Similarly, even though residents in the area tend to support graffiti, city resources are often still being spent on removing that graffiti (OmaStadi, n.d.). This disconnect is further explored through this thesis, looking at various cities and situations around the world.

Organization & Research Questions

To confine but also organize the information presented, the thesis has been divided into three main sections. The sections are a thesaurus, a yearbook, and a coloring book, which are not literal books, but rather larger themes, ideas, and participants’ own photographs from a group walk) and making connections through patterns and organization. The coloring book section explores creativity by looking at the future, based on past and present findings. The creativity aspect aims to give the public more opportunities in public spaces and expand how surroundings can be interacted with. Examining these three sections separately and together helps with seeing how social sustainability could be improved through graffiti and public spaces in Helsinki. Social sustainability is defined more in-depth in Section 1, however, as an overview, in the context of this thesis, it includes looking at how citizen engagement and participation can be increased in Helsinki to strengthen communities, reimagine public spaces, and have more voices be represented.

This thesis is guided by curiosity, examining how questions lead to answers and more questions. Through this curiosity, there is room for growth and change, appreciating how our surroundings are made up of a collection of connections.

Figure 3. Ladder
THREE OF THE MAIN RESEARCH QUESTIONS BEING EXPLORED IN THIS THESIS INCLUDE:

1. How does photography contribute to exploring social sustainability in an urban setting?

2. How might the ideas of impermanence and collaboration within nature impact changes in graffiti-related policies and perceptions?

3. How might public spaces look and feel different if playfulness, curiosity, and interactiveness were emphasized to foster community?
START OF THE WALK

Figure 7. Map 1

Figure 8, 9, & 10. Walking 1, 2, & 4

Figure 11, 12, & 13. Walking 3, 5, & 6
Figure 14, 15, & 16. Walking 7, 8, & 9
Figure 17, 18, & 19. Walking 10, 11, & 12
Figure 20, 21, & 22. Walking 13, 14, & 15
Figure 24, 25, & 26. Walking 16, 17, & 18
Figure 27, 28, & 29. Walking 19, 20, & 21
Figure 30 & 31. Walking 22 & 23
Figure 32, 33, & 34. Walking 24, 25, & 26
Figure 35, 36, & 37. Walking 27, 28, & 29
Figure 38, & 39. Walking 30 & 31
Figure 41, 42, & 43. Walking 32, 33, & 34
Figure 44 & 45. Walking 35 & 36
Figure 46 & 47. Walking 37 & 38
Map 3
END OF THE WALK

Figure 48 & 49. Walking 39 & 40
Figure 50 & 51. Walking 41 & 42
Figure 52 & 53. Walking 43 & 44
Figure 54 & 55. Walking 45 & 46
Figure 56. Map 6
Figure 57 & 58. Walking 47 & 48
Figure 59 & 60. Walking 49 & 50
Figure 61 & 62. Walking 51 & 52
Figure 63 & 64. Walking 53 & 54
Covering Figure 65.

Figure 65.

Significance of Photography

While my own walks and participant walks could have consisted of solely taking notes while passing through public spaces, I was drawn to the medium of photography for several reasons. Photography has had a historical impact on documentation and continues to be used for documentation. Photography can also be used to gain new insights both in the moment and later on, and can give a glimpse into what the photographer is viewing, through framing, zoom, focus, and more. Notes can be a helpful addition to the photographs, making those previous observations clear and concrete, especially when comparing spaces over time, and adding information that may not be obvious in the photographs themselves. Lastly, I am intrigued by the permanence and impermanence of using one art form, photography, to capture images of another art form, graffiti.

Photography has been used in the past to document important events and moments, providing an alternative to paintings (MoMA, n.d.; Tate, n.d.). As cameras have developed over time, how and the amount of photographs that are taken have increased. With the development of cell phones having high-quality cameras, it has increased even further.

Much of what is known about the past comes from writing and images, whether that is digital or through fine arts (MoMA, n.d.). Photography is a way of capturing a moment, both staged and candid, revealing some insights into how things were at that time (MoMA, n.d.). Not only does the subject reveal some of this information, but so does the photographer in what they have chosen to capture.

Secondary research consists of "using information that has already been compiled and formatted" (Oxford Reference, n.d.). There is a large amount of existing information about street art and graffiti from over the years, so, for this thesis, I wanted to see how that information could be used to explore my main research questions from different angles. The secondary research explores past and current policies, programs, and other related examples, to see how graffiti and the mindsets or rules relating to those have changed over time. Most of this secondary research looks at past and current examples from the United States and Finland, to see the impacts of graffiti’s history on current-day communities and policies.

While the secondary research covers cases from around the world, particularly in the United States and Finland, the visual research and participation aspects are only focusing on Finland. More specifically, the majority of visual research and the entire participation part are focused on Helsinki’s Ruoholahti and Jätkäsaari areas. Visual research can be defined as “a collection of methods used to understand and interpret images,” and can include autophotography and photo elicitation (Glaw et al., 2017). The visual research in this thesis consists of my own photographs and participant photographs. I have been taking my own photographs of public spaces, graffiti, and nature, over the past few years. The photographs were an important form of documentation, as I was able to easily make note of my surroundings and compare how locations and surfaces have changed over time. I took the photographs whenever I was interested in something, whether it was a small detail, such as a drop of paint, or something larger, such as a landscape photograph of the entire Ruoholahti canal. The photographs helped me remember different details and how I was feeling at the moment of capturing the specific photographs (Ash, 2022; Germano, n.d.).

For the participation aspect, five participants walked along the Ruoholahti Canal and took photographs of anything that they liked, disliked, or were curious about during that walk. A combination of autophotography, walking, and photo elicitation was used in order to gather results (Glaw et al., 2017). Participant photographs were taken by individuals on a single day, documenting how they view and experience the Ruoholahti Canal area while walking along it. Participants first took their own photographs as they were walking. After the walk, they placed those photographs, that they took, into folders of “like,” “dislike,” and “curious about.” The participants were allowed to decide in their own ways how to categorize their photographs into those three folders. During the walks and after the walks, participants would make comments about the environment, what they were gravitating towards, and their reasonings. If clarification was needed for certain photographs, participants were asked about those specific photographs through photo elicitation. The photographs and photo elicitation allowed for insights into what the participants were paying attention to and why they were noticing those aspects.

Methods Overview

This thesis consists of a combination of secondary research, visual research, and participation, to better understand social sustainability as it relates to nature, graffiti, public spaces, and creativity.

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Photography can help viewers connect with the subjects in the photographs, and possibly pick up on details that may not have even been included in the larger presentation of places and objects was an important part of my style (Tate, n.d.). Intentionally, I did not include people in the foreground in my photographs since I was focusing on places and objects, not on people and events. In some photographs, there were people in the far background, however, I wanted my focus to be on other aspects of public spaces, and how those elements then impact humans as they interact with those spaces. Additionally, I did not want any individuals to feel uncomfortable as I was taking photographs, so I sometimes waited for people to not be in frame.

Photography, similar to street art and graffiti is another creative outlet (Ash, 2022). Within photography, there are also varying degrees of permanence and impermanence. Printed photographs fade over time in the sun, and digital photographs last as long as the file does. Digital photographs are generally more permanent than printed ones. However, there is a sense of fluidity within digital photographs, as photographs can be unexpectedly destroyed if the file gets corrupted or accidentally deleted, can be edited, can be copied, and can be shared around the world more easily. Digital photographs overlap with those from disposable cameras when the photographs get printed, or vice versa, when the disposables are uploaded to a computer or a hard drive. It is interesting how with disposable cameras, the photograph is taken in an instant, yet the documentation of that photograph being taken is not revealed until later, once the photographs are developed. During the process of taking my photographs, on some days, I would look through each one that I had taken right when I got home, yet on other days, I would either intentionally or unintentionally not look at the photographs and wait to analyze them later. For the intentional moments, I wanted to give myself some time to process my walking experience on my own and focus on the feelings that arose instead of just focusing on the visual aspects. Waiting to analyze the photographs also allowed me to take a step back and see patterns more easily.

Walking as a Methodology

When considering how the participation aspect of my thesis should take place, I thought about the impact of movement, photography, location, and control. One of my goals for the participation part was to make it simple, natural, and engaging for participants. I had initially planned to do several semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. The questionnaires would have been to reach a wider group of people and would have been quick and easy for participants to respond to. The semi-structured interviews would have taken longer but would have been with fewer participants. The combination of these two methods would have helped me gain a well-rounded understanding of how people in Helsinki view street art and the connotations that they make with certain wording. As I started to step away from focusing on how people’s definitions impact everyday actions and mindsets, and instead shifted towards opening up the types of questions I was interested in, I began to rethink which methods I would use. Many of my questions stem from personal observations while taking photographs and going on walks. This type
of curiosity pushed me in the direction of asking my participants to go on a walk as well. The participation walks felt like natural continuations of what I had been working on and still allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of how others were experiencing the same spaces. Both during the walks themselves and afterward, I would hear some of the reasoning behind what the participants were interested in or disliked. This was a way of gaining some insight, in a relaxed manner, which would not have been as easy with the semi-structured interviews (Spicksley, 2018). Having the participants go on the walks themselves, rather than looking at photographs that I have put together, opened up the possibilities of what they would notice and how they would experience the spaces.

Walking methodologies have been used in many different projects and papers (Spicksley, 2018). How the walking is structured, including how many people are walking, if it is a set route, and what occurs on that walk, can all be customized. My participation walks included a key element from my own walks, which was photography. This way, I was able to connect that autophotography and easily compare results. Not only the final photographs themselves, but also the experience of going on the walk, were an important part of seeing the same space in a new way.

One example of when walking has been used as a methodology is the Loiterers Resistance Movement, which was started in 2006 and is still active (The LRM, n.d.-b). The LRM (Loiterers Resistance Movement) is a “collective of artists, activists and urban wanderers interested in the psychogeography, public space and the hidden stories of the city” in Manchester, England (The LRM, n.d.-b). They wander around, being led by curiosity and finding different ways of connecting with their surroundings (The LRM, n.d.-b). The LRM is an inclusive group and aims to “discover the extraordinary in the mundane” (The LRM, n.d.-b). They ask similar questions that I have been asking in this thesis, but theirs are more directed towards the streets while mine focus on street art (The LRM, n.d.-b). We both want to make spaces better for everyone and reimagine what spaces in cities could look like (The LRM, n.d.-b). Loitering and graffiti both act as a way of resisting rules in place that limit how people can move through and interact with the cities that they live in (The LRM, n.d.-b). The LRM asks the question “Do you know who owns the pavement and whether you are at risk of trouble if you stop to chat?” which is related to the vagueness of Helsinki’s rules regarding graffiti and how the city chooses to spend its resources in removing it (The LRM, n.d.-a). Reclaiming public spaces can look and feel different depending on location, intent, perspective, background, and more.

Analysis of the photographs taken on my own and by others is included in Section 2.
SECTION 1: THESAURUS

1. THESAURUS (DEFINITIONS, POLICIES & BACKGROUND)

1.1 Thesaurus Intro

For this thesaurus section, each sub-section begins with a dictionary definition. That definition then relates to the text that is directly after, which provides further explanations or synonyms. This is not a literal thesaurus, but rather a way of organizing and presenting the information, which is why the sub-headings are not in alphabetical order.

A thesaurus is defined as “a dictionary of synonyms and antonyms” (“Thesaurus,” n.d.). While a word can have many synonyms, those synonyms often have varying connotations (Nordquist, 2020). These variations can result in “different connotations, attitudes, or implications” which impact how words and phrases are interpreted (Nordquist, 2020). This issue with synonyms can also occur when talking about the same exact word as well (Colier, 2013). This happens with the same words when people “believe that [they] are meaning the same thing” but actually are not (Colier, 2013). The miscommunication occurs as people express themselves through words that “represent [their] thoughts, feelings and ideas,” yet “the meanings that [they] attach to [those] words are always different for each person using them” (Colier, 2013). For this reason, I included this thesaurus section to not only clarify the definitions and their synonyms, but also the connotations and attitudes associated with those words for the context of this particular thesis. This is an attempt to have readers be on the same page, or find and acknowledge that page. Naturally, the text itself will be interpreted by all readers in various ways depending on personal experiences, associations, feelings, and more, but I think that it is important to have a common understanding in terms of the definitions and their starting points.

1.2 Graffiti

In the online Cambridge Dictionary, graffiti is defined as:

1. “words or drawings, especially humorous, rude, or political, on walls, doors, etc. in public places” (“Graffiti,” n.d.)
2. “to write or draw graffiti on walls, doors, etc. in public places” (“Graffiti,” n.d.)
3. “writings or drawings made on surfaces in public places” (“Graffiti,” n.d.)

Even in the same dictionary, the definitions of the word graffiti slightly differ. Each definition has a different emphasis, showing how the same words or ideas can be interpreted in various ways, impacting the mindsets, attitudes, or connotations associated with those words or ideas. In this thesis, graffiti is defined as the third definition, as the emphasis is on the surfaces in public spaces. Street art is also known as “independent art’, ‘post graffiti’, ‘neo-graffiti’, and ‘guerrilla art’” and can include both two-dimensional and three-dimensional art (Eden Gallery, 2021a). There are ways in which the definitions of graffiti and street art relate to each other, yet each individual may have a different way of categorizing where a piece of art would fall into (Eden Gallery, 2021a). Since “street art is more popular and widely accepted than graffiti art,” this thesis uses the terms graffiti and street art interchangeably in most sections (Eden Gallery,
This is an attempt to try and show the similarities between the two, and, hopefully, change some of the stigmas surrounding graffiti, which were a result of a, now debunked, theory.

Graffiti, especially tagging, is sometimes viewed as “vandalism, a criminal act associated with gangs, petty crime, broken windows and a less attractive environment to live in,” yet graffiti has not been proven to actually increase nor indicate crime rates (Marcello, 2023). The debunked broken windows theory, which is discussed in the Social Sustainability section, continues to have an impact on some of the public’s perception of safety, in areas with graffiti, worldwide (Malone, 2020). The resulting anti-graffiti campaigns and policies can lead to more graffiti in those areas (Malone, 2020). Besides safety concerns, the perceptions relating to graffiti are also impacted by age and political beliefs, according to a poll by CBS News, seeing what percentage of Americans support graffiti (CBS News, 2014). The poll was first taken in 2011 and a second time in 2014 (CBS News, 2014). The second time, there was slightly more support for graffiti when asked if graffiti was a “legitimate form of art like painting or sculpture,” with 44% saying yes and 51% saying no (CBS News, 2014). Those saying yes were primarily between the ages 18-34, followed by ages 35-44, and similarly, with primarily liberals, followed by moderates (CBS News, 2014). Shifting policies to be more nuanced and inclusive, could help “reduce fear by increasing awareness and public exposure to graffiti” (Malone, 2020).

While the broken windows theory impacts policing and punishments, there are also restrictions already in terms of the mediums being used. For graffiti writers, spray paint is a common medium to use (Ross, 2016). With spray paint, there are restrictions on who can buy it. In Finland and most places around the world, customers must be 18 years or older to purchase spray paint (Paintzone, 2023). The age restriction is due to the fumes from the spray paint and to prevent vandalism (Paintzone, 2023). Merriam-Webster dictionary defines vandalism as “willful or malicious destruction or defacement of public or private property” (“Vandalism,” n.d.). Other dictionaries and websites also include the term “malicious” in their definitions. Malicious is defined as “having or showing a desire to cause harm to someone” (“Malicious,” n.d.) and malice is further defined as a “desire to cause pain, injury, or distress to another” or “intent to commit an unlawful act or cause harm without legal justification or excuse” (“Malice,” n.d.). It is interesting to note that all of these definitions have negative connotations and assume that the one leaving the marks has ill intent.

There is an ongoing conversation about whether graffiti is art or vandalism, but to say that all graffiti is one or the other ultimately lacks nuance (Zhou, 2022). Each person and city official may have different boundaries that they have set in their minds about where graffiti becomes art and where it becomes vandalism. However, current policies in many countries, including Finland, overwhelmingly point to most graffiti as vandalism, recognizing commissioned murals and marks on legal graffiti walls as legal and acceptable art (Helin, 2013). Even so, there is a wide range of styles, messages, mediums, and scales that are still considered illegal graffiti (Zhou, 2022). The definitions for vandalism are quite vague and place much of their emphasis on intention, yet the punishments seem to be given out solely based on if the marks were left on public or private property without permission, both during and after Helsinki’s zero tolerance policies regarding graffiti (Fransberg, 2021a).
By giving fines to graffiti artists and removing their work, that places strict restrictions on whose marks are allowed in the city. This also prevents positive aspects of graffiti, such as creative expression and the utilization of public spaces as a platform to spread messages (He & Gyergyak, 2021). Quite often, permission includes a monetary value. Advertisers are permitted to place posters, screens, and billboards to promote products or services (Iveson, 2011). Similarly, companies or wealthier individuals can have a larger influence on their surroundings, due to the power of their name and money (Prokop, 2015). Money oftentimes brings some protection from the law and gets those opinions or requests pushed to the front (Prokop, 2015). Public spaces then reflect only certain groups of people, and when others try and modify those spaces to be more welcoming for a wider group, they could get punished for those actions. One aim of this thesis is to see how more voices could be taken into account in public spaces, both in the planning and use phases, and how street art and nature relate to shifting mindsets in those processes. People’s varying experiences with and feelings towards these topics are valid, and this thesis is just one way of showing alternative approaches to street art in public spaces and asking questions to start conversations.

1.3 Mediums

In the context of art, Merriam-Webster dictionary defines medium as:

1. “a means of effecting or conveying something: such as: material or technical means of artistic expression (such as paint and canvas, sculptural stone, or literary or musical form)” (“Medium,” n.d.)

Street art and graffiti come in a variety of mediums and can be customized by the artist to show their own personality/style or message. One of those mediums, sidewalk chalk, is an accessible way of creating art, due to its price, ease of use, versatility, and ability to be used by children and adults (Positive Chalk DC | Who We Are, n.d.).

Even if one does not have experience using other mediums, chalk seems to be a fairly common medium in childhood in places such as the United States and Finland, so it is an interesting starting point for conversations about street art. Organizations, such as Positive Chalk, based in Washington D.C. in the United States, have been working to give families a space to “imagine their communities in new ways, inspire positive change, and develop the language necessary to advocate for themselves and their communities” (Positive Chalk DC | Who We Are, n.d.). Positive Chalk collaborated with Chalk Riot, an all-women street art crew that is also based in D.C., to organize an event called Chalk Walk, where people of all ages could make their own chalk drawings (Adams, 2022). The owner of Chalk Riot, Chelsea Ritter-Soronen, spoke about the importance of chalk in how it can “bring generations together” and create “a level of freedom in expression, knowing that it’s not going to be there forever” (Adams, 2022). Art in public spaces, and the freedom to be contributing to that art if one wants to, can help in building a sense of community (Adams, 2022).

Chalk tends to be introduced to children at a young age but after finger paint. Chalk broadens the possibilities of what and where marks can be created. Instead of being limited
to a piece of paper or a canvas, suddenly the entire sidewalk or asphalt becomes the boundary. By utilizing the ground for drawings or games, chalk can transform a blank space. This otherwise unused space turns into a new yet temporary opportunity for creatively interacting with others. The chalk creates pop-up spaces that last as long as the weather allows them to. When the lines are washed away by the rain, it allows others to leave their mark and add their own spin on what type of space they would like to see.

Stickers are also introduced at a young age, making their way into sticker books and onto nearby items, and following people into adulthood, landing on laptops and water bottles. These stickers also extend to outside environments, being stuck onto trash cans, poles, and benches. More permanent than finger paint and chalk, the stickers remain as long as the adhesive allows them to and depends largely on the surface to which they have been stuck. During harsher winter conditions and other rainy months, the top surfaces of the stickers start to wear away, sometimes faster than the adhesive itself. As the weather interacts with the stickers, it leaves layers behind that look similar to posters left outside for weeks or months at a time. The posters and stickers contain messages that are meant to be seen by the public, oftentimes bringing attention to local events or issues. This is a way of engaging with the public within public spaces, yet still allowing the viewer the choice of whether or not to interact with that poster’s or sticker’s content.

Pens and pencils allow for people of all ages to leave a mark easily since all that is needed is that medium. People can write and draw on a variety of surface types and sizes, from a crumpled-up receipt in their pocket to a sketchbook to a picnic table. In my schools in California, from elementary school to college, the lunch tables often had doodles left behind either on the surface or carved into them. No matter the age, there was still this need by students to leave a mark on the surfaces while eating lunch or spending time with friends. The doodles that did not have time to be completed next to math notes in class found a new home in more outdoor spaces. Pencil, which could otherwise be more easily erased, created more permanence when it carved its path into wooden benches or tabletops.

The same urge to write on, draw on, or carve into benches and trash cans can be found in Helsinki. Trash cans, which are otherwise identical to each other, become a playground for customization through decorations of stickers, and pen and paint marks. Public spaces become like mood boards that are added to and edited over time by the people who pass through them and who live within them.

As children grow up and become teenagers, they tend to be given access to materials that leave behind more permanent marks. With a better understanding of the responsibilities tied to those materials, they are opened up to new ways of expressing themselves. These materials can last longer and to be applied to different surfaces. Permanent markers, such as Sharpies, are easy to access and use. While they are considered permanent, they actually only last a few years on outside walls (Loard, 2021). That weathering process can be sped up depending on the conditions of the location (Loard, 2021). Meanwhile, rock paintings have lasted thousands of years even when they have been open to the elements. Rock paintings, one of the oldest forms of graffiti, which will be discussed in later parts of this thesis in more depth, can be found around Finland (Luukkanen, n.d.). Seeing how weathering processes impact current and past materials on various surfaces leads to wondering about what is considered to be permanent and how much that definition can vary in different situations.
1.4 Social Sustainability

Social sustainability can be defined, by MOOC.fi, Brundtland Commission, Oxford Institute for Sustainable Development (OISD), and Social Life, respectively, as:

1. Being “achieved when different processes, systems, structures, and relationships of society actively support current and future generations in creating healthy and viable communities” (MOOC, n.d.)

2. “Satisf[y]ing essential human needs” (MOOC, n.d.)
   a. With “the most important themes of social sustainability includ[ing] well-being, justice, a democratic system of governance, and a democratic civil society” (MOOC, n.d.)

3. “Concerning how individuals, communities and societies live with each other and set out to achieve the objectives of development models which they have chosen for themselves, also taking into account the physical boundaries of their places and planet earth as a whole” (Ricee, 2022)
   a. And “blends traditional social policy areas and principles, such as equity and health, with emerging issues concerning participation, needs, social capital, the economy, the environment, and more recently, with the notions of happiness, wellbeing and quality of life” (Ricee, 2022)

4. “a process for creating sustainable, successful places that promote wellbeing, by understanding what people need from the places they live and work” (Ricee, 2022)
   a. And “combines design of the physical realm with design of the social world – infrastructure to support social and cultural life, social amenities, systems for citizen engagement and space for people and places to evolve” (Ricee, 2022)

While the definitions for social sustainability may differ slightly in their wording, they all share similarities in working towards bettering and supporting communities. In this thesis, social sustainability is a combination of all of these definitions, looking at how citizen engagement and participation can be increased in Helsinki in order to strengthen communities, reimagine public spaces, and have more voices be represented. This idea of reimagining public spaces refers to co-design and how that framework has, in the past, and could, in the future, work to have public spaces be more playful and engaging and how that could show up in public spaces will be revisited later on in this thesis.

Street art can positively impact its surrounding areas, especially through engagement and amplifying voices or messages that are often not heard, such as how artists like Keith Haring did, whose work is discussed in Section 2 (Zeit Contemporary Art, n.d.). However, there is still a stigma surrounding graffiti, which is then reflected through policies and mindsets. The broken windows theory, which although has been debunked, still is impacting how some people, especially those in policing, view graffiti (Ansfie19, 2019; Shattering Broken Windows, n.d.). In 1982, two social scientists used a study from 1969 and twisted it in a way that would fit their claims (Ansfie19, 2019). They argued that all windows in a building will be broken if “a window in a building is broken and is left unrepaired” (Ansfie19, 2019). Although the broken windows theory was not true, it was then amplified through policies. This included increased discrimination, profiling, policing, and incarceration (Shattering Broken Windows, n.d.). Over 40 years later, that misrepresentation of that original study is continuing to influence how people feel like they can impact their surroundings and how policing then limits that (Shattering Broken Windows, n.d.). This idea of broken windows does not only apply to buildings but also to graffiti and “other signs of disorder” as they all were, falsely, made to appear to increase crime rates (St. Martin, 2019). Researchers at Northeastern University conducted studies where they ultimately found “no consistent evidence that disorder induces higher levels of aggression or makes residents feel more negative toward the neighborhood” (St. Martin, 2019). This is important to note since it shows the disconnect between those who are living within communities and those who are then policing and creating these restrictions.

The impact of broken windows theory resulted in increased discrimination and the New York Police Department’s enforcement of their unconstitutional stop-and-frisk practice, which ultimately has had a “disproportionate impact on African-American and Hispanic communities” (Shattering Broken Windows, n.d.). The impact is still being felt and is shaping how communities are policed, treated, and funded. Positive Chalk D.C. (PCDC), which was mentioned in the previous section, focused on chalk, an accessible medium, since PCDC generally works with “communities that are under resourced and overwhelmed with trauma caused by police brutality, gun violence, mass incarceration, drugs, and other systemic issues” (Positive Chalk DC | Who We Are, n.d.). Positive Chalk was started by Val Suarez during the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, to give children a “space to express their thoughts about the movement” if they were unable to go to the marches (Adams, 2022). This helped turn the ground into a platform and allow for more voices to be heard (Adams, 2022). There is power in showing children, starting from a young age, that their thoughts and emotions are valuable, and chalk is one medium through which that can be done.

For social sustainability to improve, it is vital that there is open communication and that those who are within the community are listened to since the policies shaped by the broken windows theory have strong short-term and long-term impacts.

1.5 Mark

Mark, both a noun and verb, is defined by Britannica Dictionary in around 50 ways, with some being larger differences between definitions and others being slight variations. The definitions of mark which are most relevant to the context of this thesis include:

1. “a small area on the surface of something that is dirty, damaged, etc.” (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.)
2. “a written or printed shape or symbol; a symbol or shape on something that identifies it, shows its quality, etc.” (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.)
3. “a specified point or level” (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.)
4. “leave/make a/your mark: to do something that causes you to be remembered: to create a lasting or strong impression” (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.)
5. “to make or leave a visible mark on (something)” (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.)
6. “to write or make (a mark); to write a note about (something); to write or make a mark on (something); to write or put a mark around or near (something) so that it will be easily seen or noticed” (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.)
7. “mark (something) off or mark off (something): to make (an area) separate with a line, fence, etc.” (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.)
8. “mark (something) up or mark up (something): to make marks and write comments in or on (something)” (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.)

When discussing the idea of leaving a mark, it can mean many things (The Britannica Dictionary, n.d.). Marks can be literal, figurative, or both. For some people, leaving a mark means wanting to have an impact on the world and wanting to make a difference. This can be related to the idea of having a purpose on Earth and wanting to do as much as one can while they are here. These marks can be as little or as big as each person wants or feels the need. In the literal sense, leaving a mark can also be as small or big as the person leaving the mark sees fit or compelled. A mark can encompass many variations as it can include initials carved into a tree or park bench, a doodle on a bathroom wall, a sticker on a trash can, a tag under a bridge, or a mural on the side of a restaurant. A mark can be a singular occurrence, repetitive, or somewhere in between. Someone’s mark may be carefully planned while another’s could be impulsive or out of habit.

Marks can have no meaning, be full of meaning, tell a story, tell part of a story, create questions, leave answers, blend in, make a statement, be temporary, or be permanent. The same mark could be described in different ways based on who is viewing it since what holds or does not hold meaning varies from person to person. Graffiti was defined as “the result of someone’s urge to say something - to comment, inform, entertain, persuade, offend or simply to confirm his or her own existence here on earth” in 1985 by Rennie Ellis, a photographer (Marcello, 2023). Tagging continues to be a large part of graffiti culture. Tagging means “writing the artist’s signature (or their pseudonym name or logo) on a public surface” (Eden Gallery, 2021b). While tagging tends to have less public approval than images being graffitied, it is important to note the similarities and differences between tagging and autographs. In California, the Los Angeles Public Library has an autograph collection which is also available as a book (Mosley & Raphelson, 2019). City librarian Charles Lummis began the collection in 1906 and stated that he collected autographs “from ‘people who count’” and that when he was asking for those autographs, he just wanted them to “improve upon” a blank page (Mosley & Raphelson, 2019). This resulted in some people writing their signatures, while others created art or wrote excerpts from speeches (Mosley & Raphelson, 2019). The exhibit curator, Josh Kun, was inspired by a signature that he saw in the collection since someone has written their name large and written “I’ll never make it, so I’ll make it big” (Mosley & Raphelson, 2019). Kun discussed how this made them think about “this desire that if we could just write our names big enough, that we’ll be remembered” (Mosley & Raphelson, 2019). With tagging, many people try to tag in more difficult locations so that the tags can be visible yet less likely to be removed (Marcello, 2023). The idea...
Figure 92. Graffiti by the water

Figure 93. Graffiti textures

Figure 94. Outlines
of being remembered and wanting to make a statement through scale is a similarity to both the autograph and the tag. The autographs, which were collected from “people who count,” tend to hold more widely accepted value, while tagging is viewed more of as a nuisance since they are done by the public (Mosley & Raphelson, 2019). This also raises the question of whose marks count and why? What makes the people who signed the autographs count more than if they were signed by the general public? Tagging, although viewed from the outside can be seen as “negative” or “vandalism,” can bring “pride, pleasure, enjoyment and community” for the taggers (Marcello, 2023). “It is human nature to want to leave a mark (Schiller, 2014). This “urge to connect through mark making” can be seen in various mediums, including rock carvings and paintings around the world (Kraft, 2018). These intentionally placed marks, which date back around 45,500 years in Indonesia, can be found throughout history all the way to the present day, located around the world (France-Presse, 2021). While everyone will not be leaving that mark in the same way, why is it frowned upon to be leaving a mark through graffiti? Legal graffiti walls have been added in some places around Helsinki but they are oftentimes near construction sites or are taken down rather quickly. While Jätkäsaari had planned for and voted on a legal graffiti wall to be implemented in 2022 (as of May 2023, progress is at 60%), there seems to be this disconnect between what the people living in the area want and support, and how that is being reacted to (OmaStadi, n.d.).

While some parts of Jätkäsaari and Ruoholahti allow for some graffiti to stay up, there are certain areas where it gets removed quickly. There is no place to find out where this is allowed and where it is not, which are insights made from my personal observations and research over the past several years. Graffiti is considered a “vahingontekokorokos” in Finnish, which roughly translates to a crime involving damage or vandalism (Alanne, 2022). Finland’s official police website, poliisi.fi, states that vandalism is considered a property crime, however, the site does not specify what is included within vandalism, such as scale, medium, location, and more (Poliisi, n.d.). Underneath the Property Crimes headline are six categories that have further information and they include: embezzlement, bicycle theft, car burglaries and unauthorized use, domestic and holiday home burglaries, robberies, and theft and petty theft (Poliisi, n.d.). None of these six categories include further explanations for vandalism and the expected punishments if caught doing so (Poliisi, n.d.). While the policies in Finland used to be strictly zero tolerance, over the years they have eased slightly (Hakala, 2013). Even though the policies and punishments have eased, graffiti is still punishable. The following section discusses how this uncertainty presents itself in real-life situations.

1.6 Zero Tolerance Policies & Present Policies

Zero tolerance is defined by Merriam-Webster as:

1. “a policy of giving the most severe punishment possible to every person who commits a crime or breaks a rule” (“Zero Tolerance,” n.d.)

Even though zero tolerance policies are no longer in effect, the mindsets and some of the actions still line up with those ideologies (Hakala, 2013). The original zero tolerance policies, called Stop Töhyille, were an expensive campaign that cost the city of Helsinki millions of euros (Laitinen et al., 2014). The zero tolerance policy was in effect from 1998 to 2008 and caused people who were caught creating graffiti to be given harsh punishments, whether those were fines or sentences (Hakala, 2013). Even with so much money being poured into the campaign, people in Helsinki were still creating graffiti (Fransberg, 2021). More recently, the introduction of legal graffiti walls has not stopped other graffiti, resulting in the city of Helsinki spending around 200,000 euros annually to remove graffiti (Laitinen et al., 2014). Some other current cost estimates for graffiti removal in Helsinki are even around 500,000 euros annually (Oltermann, 2023). While it is still illegal in Helsinki to create street art in places that are not legal graffiti walls, the information for what the punishments, fines, or certain rules and regulations regarding those are very unclear (Helin, 2013). According to one source, legal graffiti is defined as being “in a public space open to all and in constant use without risk of legal consequences” and “is done on fences, walls, transport containers, cellophane or other wall-like surfaces, whose purpose has been agreed in advance” (Helin, 2013). Even though that description may make sense at first glance, it leaves a lot to interpretation since illegal graffiti is still “considered malicious damage under criminal law, if the person destroys or damages the property of another” yet it can also apply to public spaces, depending on the interpretation (Helin, 2013). For example, there are literal walls, not just wall-like surfaces, in the Ruoholahti and Jätkäsaari areas, where graffiti has been removed, and other spots where graffiti has been allowed to stay.

Currently, there is no way to find out what specifically is or is not legal for or even considered as street art, such as if stickers are viewed in the same way as spray paint in Helsinki’s

Figure 95 & 96. Graffiti under the bridge
Figure 97 & 98. Graffiti layering & removal
street art policies. Along with that, there is a lack of information surrounding why and how often the graffiti is being removed, since graffiti under one bridge may stay longer than under another one that is close by, and similarly for some walls, poles, and so on. In regards to those rules, the punishments and enforcement seem to be very difficult to find, making it seem like it is intentional, to try and deter people from leaving a mark on their surroundings if they do not know what the actual protocol for that is. This lack of information and clarity could be intentional since Finnish people tend to be rule followers and therefore would be less likely to act on something that they are unsure of.

In June of 2023, the deputy mayor of Helsinki, Paaavo Arhinmäki, was detained by police for spray-painting graffiti with his friend (YLE, 2023). They were spray painting on a rail tunnel wall located in eastern Helsinki, near the Vuosaari harbor (YLE, 2023). The Finnish Transport Infrastructure Agency spent 3,500 euros cleaning up the graffiti, so they are responsible for paying that amount, but it is unclear if there will be legal charges as well (Woodyatt, 2023). A police hearing after the summer will reveal if they will be fined on top of the cleaning costs (Oltermann, 2023). Arhinmäki grew up painting graffiti in the late 80s and early 90s in Pasila (Oltermann, 2023). The graffiti that Arhinmäki and his friend had spray painted, already had graffiti that had been there for years, so the two of them “thought people just didn’t care” if new graffiti was added there (Oltermann, 2023). This is another example of the inconsistency relating to what marks are allowed to stay and which are not, since even in the same location some have been allowed to stay for years, while others are removed immediately (Oltermann, 2023).

The uncertainty relating to legal actions is an issue since residents are unaware of the typical protocol for punishments relating to graffiti. Therefore, this could result in some artists having to deal with unexpected consequences of varying degrees. While it makes sense that consequences would vary depending on the specific situations, it would be helpful to at least have a clear list of possible legal actions and fines for graffiti, and what factors tend to influence those differences.

1.7 Curating

Curate is defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as:

1. "to select (the best or most appropriate) especially for presentation, distribution, or publication; to select and organize (artistic works) for presentation in (something, such as an exhibit, show, or program); to select and organize (articles, images, etc.) for distribution or publication" ("Curate," n.d.)

2. “to select and bring together (people or groups) for a purpose that is dependent on the specific skills or talents of the members” ("Curate," n.d.)

Who gets to decide which marks stay and which marks go? More specifically, who is curating the surfaces in Helsinki? Why is it only certain people who get to decide how a community looks like, even though there are so many different people in that community? This leads to curiosity about why allowing even more marks to be left is not being embraced. While sometimes marks are left with permanent markers, the permanent markers do not actually stay forever. Even permanent markers have impermanence to them.

I find it interesting to see what people around me are thinking and how they see the world. Since the Ruoholahti and Jätkäsaari areas are large neighborhoods, these are people who I otherwise would not be able to interact with, but through their art, stickers, or posters, I get a brief glimpse into their world and into how they view things. When that graffiti gets removed, it almost feels like trying to remove those connections. Trying to keep the environment looking like it did when it was built is unsustainable. It is unsustainable to think that an environment will look the same way each year or even each week. The environment naturally moves and changes as people and non-humans interacting with it do. Using resources to remove this graffiti is wasting time, money, and energy, and feels like trying to pause time when it is unnecessary to try and do so.

It is interesting to see how spaces change based on who is interacting with them. I believe that as long as the graffiti is not hate speech and that it is not on a historical or world heritage site, then there is no reason to remove it. However, even so, I think that there can be exceptions and nuance to the historical sites part of that statement, and do not think that it should always be removed. Throughout history, there are examples of graffiti and messages that have been added to monuments, sites, and buildings, which then add onto or reveal a new significance (Merrill, 2011). Some of these examples include ancient Egyptian graffiti on the "leg of the colossus of Memnon" which confirmed that Roman Emperor Hadrian had visited in AD 130, carvings of a board game on a statue from Khorsabad showed the "game’s popularity and its accessibility to people besides royalty," and various occupations of caves in Europe during and after the Ice Age (Merrill, 2011). These help provide insights into events that occurred, cultural aspects of various societies, and clarify timelines (Merrill, 2011). The information about the board game, Royal Game of Ur, revealed how something recreational influenced large parts of society and culture, and is one of the oldest board games (Getty, n.d.). Thinking about present-day, writings or carvings about something recreational may even seem unnecessary or uninfluential at the time, yet could provide interesting insights in the future. Political state-
ments can largely influence communities and how those in power react to current issues, and the timing, scale, medium, and location of those statements have an impact as well. Archaeologists are aware of the nuances relating to interpreting these findings and the implications that those have, as heritage can be political and statements can impact narratives (Merrill, 2011). One way in which this issue has been addressed has been by acknowledging that “heritage is a knowledge, a cultural product and a political resource” and just like archaeology it “is negotiated … within specific social and intellectual circumstances” (Merrill, 2011). Taking into account differing interpretations can help create more inclusivity and understanding (Merrill, 2011). This nuance in interpretations can also be applied to how graffiti on heritage sites could be viewed, as each situation is different and has varying implications.

Over time, and as nature interacts with graffiti, especially if it is painted instead of carved, it will slowly start to fade and it will show the beauty of impermanence. I do not think that that process needs to be sped up. In most cases, the graffiti on the wall, on the bench, or wherever it is located, is not causing harm to people passing by. Safety concerns were discussed in the earlier Graffiti section, highlighting how a debunked theory has led to mixed perceptions about graffiti and its links to crime (Malone, 2020). However, the graffiti itself and the actual impacts of the perceived disorder are not a hazard to the community (Malone, 2020). Over the past few years, I have noticed that some areas in Helsinki, including Ruoholahti and Jätkäsaari, often have tiles that have fallen or are completely gone, posing physical safety hazards. Due to these observations, it seems like a waste of resources to try and keep removing the graffiti that will be painted over by someone else during the next few weeks anyways.

Conversations about heritage sites, graffiti removal, and locations, bring up values and how aspects are valued. Reactions to graffiti can fluctuate depending on numerous factors, as the value is determined by the person viewing or interacting with that piece. Why is it that only once some artists, such as Banksy and Keith Haring, have a known name, then that art is celebrated or approved more widely? Often-times then that art is taken out of the original context and tried to be brought into gallery spaces, back into these controlled environments (Blanché, 2016). Those lines and those marks suddenly have value when they are taken from being in public spaces and on the street, to rooms with art critics and a monetary value attached to them (Blanché, 2016). Banksy, a British street artist whose identity remains concealed, has been creating art since at least the late 1990s (Ellsworth-Jones, 2013). Banksy’s work is often political, bringing attention to issues such as wars and power imbalances (Green, 2014). While most of Banksy’s art is located outside and around the world, there have been instances where their art was sold at high prices (Green, 2014). Banksy’s works, as they enter auction or gallery spaces, become more valuable monetarily (Green, 2014). The art is valued once it is being displayed against white walls, for people to come and look at, yet when that same art is accessible and available to everyone, and it is in the context that it is intended to be in, then it is not valued and, furthermore, it is removed (Blanché, 2016). The exclusivity of galleries and the monetary value of the art are prioritized and made to seem like only then can that art be valuable in society. At that point, then the inspiration from nature is valuable and appreci-
though there are many similarities between the various types of public art, street art tends to be admired “and valued up to millions of dollars,” while graffiti “can be criminalized,” which is often rooted in systemic racism (Soergel, 2021). This relates back to the discrimination related to the policies coming from the broken windows theory, mentioned in the Social Sustainability section. Ismael Illescas, a doctoral candidate in California and a former graffiti writer, shared how graffiti can look “like an insignificant tag or scribble to some people, but there’s a lot of meaning behind it” (Soergel, 2021). Many graffiti writers “have been pushing for years to de-criminalize their art,” highlighting the value that it brings, both artistically and socially (Soergel, 2021).

1.8 Reflection

Reflection is defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary as:

1. “an instance of reflecting; especially: the return of light or sound waves from a surface” (“Reflection,” n.d.)
2. “the production of an image by or as if by a mirror” (“Reflection,” n.d.)
3. “the action of bending or folding back” (“Reflection,” n.d.)
4. “something produced by reflecting: such as; a: an image given back by a reflecting surface; b: an effect produced by an influence” (“Reflection,” n.d.)
5. “a thought, idea, or opinion formed or a remark made as a result of meditation” (“Reflection,” n.d.)
6. “consideration of some subject matter, idea, or purpose” (“Reflection,” n.d.)

The idea of leaving a mark is not new, but how we, as a society, either accept or reject people’s marks is something that seems to be increasingly part of our built environment (Schiller, 2014). How might the ideas of impermanence and collaboration within nature impact changes in graffiti-related policies and perceptions? Cave paintings are seen as something valuable and protected, with marks that many people will go to look at and admire, yet similar marks from today are often removed. These current marks are seen as messy by the city of Helsinki, instead of as art or self-expression. While at first glance some may see posters, stickers, and paint that have slowly weathered away as something that should not be there in the first place, or as something that needs to be removed, it brings up some important questions.

Is the idea of an untouched surface being equated as clean and is that something that Helsinki is trying to maintain in our environment? Why is something unnatural, this untouched surface, something that, through the city’s actions, is trying to say is the only way that that surface can be? The previous question is implying that surfaces being untouched is the only way for them to seem clean and natural, and instead, these marks are the ones that are making it un-clean and unnatural (Saito, 2012). To clarify, the surfaces being mentioned are surfaces in outside public spaces.

If one looks closely at nature, one can see how water is a reflection of its environment or surroundings. If one slows down and starts to pay attention, one will notice all of these similarities, whether it is how the bench lines up with the cracks in the ice, how the icicles look like the drip marks of the paint, or how colors reflect on the surface of the water like the graffiti around it. If one slows down and looks at one’s surroundings through a different lens, maybe one will also see the beauty in nature, graffiti, and all the surfaces that are usually just walked past. A lot of art, design, literature, architecture, and so forth, are all influenced by nature (Coukts & Jokela, 2008), yet why is the acceptable line drawn there? A line is drawn there of what is allowed and what is not, of whose marks stay and whose marks are removed, and of where the influence is appreciated and where it is viewed as unnecessary. When people living within these communities are leaving their marks on these surfaces, with so many similarities between graffiti and nature, it seems like a natural continuation of the process and of the inspiration to be creating graffiti. This is them just being humans living together in this ecosystem.

1.9 Water

Water, both a noun and verb, is defined by Cambridge Dictionary as:

1. “a clear liquid, without colour or taste, that falls from the sky as rain and is necessary for animal and plant life” (“Water,” n.d.)
2. “an area of water, such as the sea, a lake, or a swimming pool” (“Water,” n.d.)
3. “to pour water on to plants or the soil that they are growing in” (“Water,” n.d.)

The biotic shapes the abiotic, and vice versa. Water, a powerful and influential force, carves pathways in the land. Through flowing streams, sitting lakes, and consistent waves, the impact of water is evident, even when it is no longer there. Dried-out canyons, rocky shores, and desert mountains highlight the movement of where water used to be more constant. Lay-
ering is left behind as the flows of water vary, marking where it has reached over the years on the shorelines. Water within the fog, rain, snow, and ice, impacts where and how people live, from generations to the day-to-day. Finland has more than 76,000 islands, 56,000 lakes, 647 rivers, and 314,000 km of shoreline (The Island Committee, n.d.). Finnish culture is shaped by this water, such as through sauna culture and even the colors in the flag. The blue cross on the Finnish flag represents the blue lakes and the white background represents the white snow, both relating to water throughout the seasons (The Finnish Flag, n.d.). Helsinki is surrounded by the sea, and that shoreline has even been extended through the Ruoholahti Canal, which separates Ruoholahti from Jätkäsaari. 

Across Finland, there are over 100 rock painting sites that include identifiable figures, most of which are located on “vertical cliffs rising from the lakes,” with an overhang protecting the paintings (Luukkonen, n.d.). Due to changing water levels over thousands of years, some of the remaining rock paintings are now positioned “several meters above the waterline” (Luukkonen, n.d.). These rock paintings were made with red ocher, and a similar shade of red, Falu red, was also later utilized for painting houses in Finland (Kelleher, 2017). Falu red was made from byproducts of the copper mining process, consisting of copper, iron ocher, silica, and zinc, all mixed in with linseed oil (Kelleher, 2017), while red ocher was made up of silica, clay, and iron oxide (How Red Ochre Is Made, n.d.). The red ocher, although natural, has lasted for thousands of years, both blending in with its surrounding environment and also standing out against the stone.

Astuvansalmi, located in Mikkeli, includes rock paintings of humans, animals, handprints,
and boats (Luukkonen, n.d.). The human figures are not alone in the environment but instead are interacting with the animals around them, such as moose (Luukkonen, n.d.). Handprints connect the current viewer to the original artist, seeing how something so simple can also be so impactful and human. The red ocher connects the artist to the rock on which they are painting. Growing up, children learn to leave a mark on paper, and accidentally or on purpose on the surfaces surrounding that paper as well, with finger paint. An easy way for children to express themselves is by adding color to a blank canvas, with the importance of the art being in the process, the emotions, and the freedom that the child can experience. In that moment, the child can let go of the lines in their coloring book and create their own art, by feeling the paint and paper, and feeling what it is like to leave a mark without getting in trouble. To allow such freedom, toddlers are often given washable paint so that the art that makes it onto the paper can stay, but what ends up on their clothes, in their hair, and on the table and chair can be washed. There is a sense of impermanence in the combination of washable paint and surfaces that, to an extent, exists in the rock paintings. While the red ocher itself has mainly stood the test of time, its impermanence and fragility remain in the surfaces on which it has been painted (Bonnor, 2022). Nature interacts with the rocks, by weathering the cliffs, which can then break off over time, by creating spaces for plants to grow, and by exposing the surface to elements that the overhangs cannot always protect (Bonnor, 2022). However, efforts are being made to not only preserve the rock paintings at Astuvansalmi but also to increase awareness about them (Bonnor, 2022). The value of the art and its history is being recognized, and resources are being allocated to make it easier and safer for individuals of all ages to visit the paintings, making the art and its connections to heritage more accessible to the public.
With the rock paintings, nature is directly interacting with the art, as environmental sustainability interacts with social sustainability. The S-E-E Model of Sustainability addresses how the social, economic, and environmental needs overlap (Algonquin College, n.d.). Adding onto that, the Environmental and Social Framework (ESF) focuses on the connections between environmental and social sustainability (Sivaraman, 2020). The ESF helps protect both people and the environment, along with increasing public participation and working against discrimination (Sivaraman, 2020). This framework aims to improve transparency throughout projects and changes, and at the same time, take into account cultural heritage and biodiversity conservation (The World Bank, n.d.). Focusing on nature shows that “environmental resources and constraints shape the structure and physiology of organisms” (Malmström, 2010). Organisms adapt to their environments, finding unique ways to navigate their surroundings and be part of the ecosystem (Malmström, 2010). Each ecosystem’s flora, fauna, and landscapes are impacted by water availability (Malmström, 2010). Water availability and seasons strongly relate to each other as they affect the activity levels and behaviors of the flora and fauna (Malmström, 2010). On the other hand, organisms can also shape their environment, “by altering stocks and flows of water, energy, and elements at both small and large scales” (Malmström, 2010). The interconnectedness and fluidity of nature illustrate how elements continue to build upon and influence each other.

Circling back to Helsinki, the walls along the Ruoholahti Canal’s underpasses act as cliffs and small overhangs, protecting the graffiti that finds its way there. Situated by the water, the relationship to the sea and to the lakes connects with the art and its surroundings. These locations are the city’s version of the rock paintings, however, city resources are often used to remove the new marks, while nature has allowed the rock paintings to remain for thousands of years. As more graffiti is added and taken away, it influences how people interact with those spaces, as it shifts the tone. Changes in those environments affect the people passing through, and those people then shape the environments.

As the seasons change, the atmosphere that the water creates changes along with them. The summer water reflects a different message and feeling than the ice in the winter. On still days, the water creates a mirrored image of the bridges, buildings, and people around it. The calmness of the water brings the street art directly onto its surface, giving the people passing by two chances to view the art. On windy days, the roughness and movement of the water create new shapes with the color palette of its environment. Constantly changing and blending together, the water represents the fluidity of spaces and how they are influenced, directly and indirectly, by the biotic and abiotic.
Figure 117. Three shades of water

Figure 118. Buildings by the bridge

Figure 119. Sunny canal

Figure 120. Snowy bridge
Figure 121. Wall closeup
Figure 122. Hietaranta
Figure 123. Graffiti by the bridge
Figure 124. Trash can
1.10 Fluidity

Fluidity is defined by Vocabulary.com as:

1. “the property of flowing easily” (“Fluidity,” n.d.)
2. “the quality of moving smoothly and gracefully” (“Fluidity,” n.d.)
3. “a changeable quality; the quality of being changeable; having a marked tendency to change” (“Fluidity,” n.d.)

There is fluidity within definitions, mediums, intentions, impacts, messages, and styles. How things are defined, categorized, and interpreted include many possibilities. Even within mediums, chalk can be viewed as something harmless, fun, and interactive in one location, yet could be banned in another (Harlow, 2021). Even though spray paint is viewed as something permanent, there is some blurriness when spray paint and chalk meet, creating chalk spray. This fluidity in terms of permanence, medium, and acceptance can be seen in the past as well.

As graffiti has left a mark throughout history, why is there still a rush to remove it? In everyday life, there are reminders of the past and how new interpretations make slight adjustments or additions to those. For important documents, writing was etched into stone or metal throughout history, such as in Ancient Egypt or Mesoamerica (McDonald, 2013, pp. 31–32). Permanence in these marks was viewed as valuable, rather than something to be discouraged. When thinking about the past, whether it is thousands of years ago or even just 100 years ago, it is easy to slip into the assumption that everything was very different. Humor is something that oftentimes gets forgotten when looking at the past, looking at stoic portraits, painted or in black and white photographs. However, humor is nothing new and, just like bloopers from 1930s films and the marks around cities and towns, it links people together, while revealing a bit of what is below the surface. Comment sections from those bloopers reels show viewers making those connections, glad to see the actors’ personalities and humor that are often otherwise portrayed as overly proper (FilmsNow Movie Bloopers, 2020). This same lens is generally seen in classical paintings, where people are sitting with serious expressions, as portraits would take hours to paint (Wolkoff, 2019). Albert Edelfelt was a Finnish-Swedish painter (1854-1905), whose works included serious portraits, yet also gave a glimpse into everyday life and a variety of emotions (Ateneum, n.d.). When Edelfelt painted children, he showed them actually being children, with their sleeves and pants rolled up, playing in the water or dirt, exploring their surroundings, and being more interested in what they are thinking about, rather than looking straight at the viewer (Ateneum, n.d.). In paintings of adults, nature, and work, there tends to be this similar sense of motion, which shows moments of the every day in interesting ways and humanizes the people in the paintings (Ateneum, n.d.). Art does not have to be about grand moments, but instead can be about going for a swim, doing laundry, or smiling. The more that viewers can understand about the personalities of those who have lived before them, through photography, videography, paintings, graffiti, writings, and so on, the more that the viewers can understand the similarities between themselves and people in the past. With that, is the possibility for those same viewers to better appreciate the art that is currently being created around them, not just in gallery spaces.

In ancient Greece, people created graffiti that included “toilet humor, sexual messages, and even insults,” along with carvings on rock statues, adding messages or their names and date (McDonald, 2013, pp. 33). Even though some humor changes over time, it is interesting to see how graffiti throughout history has included a mixture of political messages, humor, tagging, and more. In Pompeii, graffiti was common “and it was not necessarily seen as a form of vandalism” but there were some exceptions to this (McDonald, 2013, pp. 34). Covering a variety of topics, the graffiti was generally about politics, current events, gladiators, poetry, love, or sexual references, and was allowed to stay unless “it was offensive enough” and possibly if it was “in the wrong place” (McDonald, 2013, pp. 34). What was originally meant to be impermanent, suddenly became permanent due to Mount Vesuvius’ eruption, as 15,000 pieces of graffiti were found around Pompeii (McDonald, 2013, pp. 37). That graffiti was a mixture of etchings and paintings, which was common throughout history and still is to this day (McDonald, 2013, pp. 37).

Currently, park benches, tables, poles, and wooden railings usually have etchings. Between Ruoholahit and Jätkäsaari, Jaalasila creates space for semi-permanent etchings. Locks, which have either been drawn on or etched on, have been attached to the railings of the bridge. Exposed to the elements and staying above the water, the locks, in their shape, placement, color, and strength, resemble the buoys in the harbor. There is an interesting balance between durability and fragility that exists, not only on the surface of the locks, but also on walls, stickers, paint, tiles, tree bark, rocks, and other parts of one’s surrounding environment. Time and weather etch their way, little by little, leaving their own graffiti marks.

Within these marks, human-made, and nature-made, in the past, and currently, there is a shared sense of storytelling (Merrill, 2011). Although the intentions may not always be clear, there is a similarity in what is left behind. Pieces come together to create ever-changing surroundings, impacted by those who pass through those spaces.
2. YEARBOOK (METHODS REVISITED & MAIN ANALYSIS)

2.1 Yearbook Intro

A yearbook is a book that is published annually by an organization, with photographs and text from that year ("Yearbook," n.d.). For this thesis, the yearbook section consists of my own photographs and participant photographs. Compiling the photographs and categorizing them allow for easier pattern recognition and comparison. Although actual yearbooks are only annual, this yearbook covers photographs from several years. Yearbooks also tend to focus on humans, while the yearbook idea for this thesis is focused on locations on both a large and small scale. Photography is a key part of the methods section, which is why this section highlights the visuals and their related findings.

2.2 Process

At one point during my thesis, in August of 2022, I was considering including the Aalto University campus in my photographs as well. While searching through Google Maps, I noticed that in the summer of 2014, while the Länsimetro was being built on Aalto’s campus, the temporary construction walls were covered with street art-style graphics. The art was printed onto the walls, with its branding in the art style and typography trying to appeal to the younger demographic in the area. Ironically, street art was not allowed there once it was fully built, nor were people allowed to put their own art on the temporary walls during construction. My interest in the Aalto campus was in this juxtaposition between a very academic space and street art. The academic space is kept to fit more traditionally clean and organized aesthetics, with select people passing through there. Even when trying to push the boundaries, it is common for universities to still have criteria or requirements as to what extent that can be done. Meanwhile, street art tends to be viewed as organized chaos and is available to everyone passing through those spaces. I was curious about seeing how those two spaces could meet and about who at Aalto (students, staff, etc.) would be in support of adding a temporary graffiti wall to the campus. I was interested not only in what type of art would be added to the wall, but also in the reactions and seeing if being in an academic space would give that art more recognition. Would the location give the art being created more external value and appreciation, or would that still not be enough since it would not be in a gallery space?

Ultimately, I decided to focus my photographs and attention on a specific part of Helsinki which has a larger variety of people passing through it. I also wanted to spend more of my time exploring the connections between graffiti and nature, which I felt would have ended up being pushed to the side had I focused on the campus. Even though I had chosen to not work on campus, I was still curious about how that thesis would have worked out. Then, surprisingly, in February of 2023, TOKYO Arts, a student association at Aalto University, stated that students were allowed to paint on the walls of the Kipsari bathrooms. However, one main rule was that the paint had to be water-soluble. It was also made clear that students were not allowed to paint the floor, ceiling, towel/soap/toilet paper dispensers, sinks, toilet seats, outlets, door handles, sprinklers, exit lights, and fire extinguishers. While the restrictions due to
safety and hygiene concerns within the bathrooms make sense, limiting the paint to only two bathrooms is an example of pushing boundaries within academic spaces.

Around the world, there is a long history of graffiti in bathrooms (Beck, 2014). Bathrooms and snow share this similar lower threshold of creating a mark. However, the reasoning for the lower threshold is a bit different. In the winter, the snow displays impermanence as the marks on the surface last only as long as the snow allows. Those marks change depending on the weather, such as if there is more snowfall or if the snow starts to melt. The impermanence of the mark is due to the weather and also to the type of surface. While the snow is creating a lower threshold in many public spaces, the bathrooms create the opportunity for some privacy within a public space (Beck, 2014). This small sense of privacy then allows for the lower threshold since it creates a sense of anonymity for the marks (Beck, 2014). The bathrooms offer something that the winter snow does not which is a year-round possibility for a lower threshold. The bathroom stalls remain the same while the seasons outside require people to change what medium they are using, as chalk becomes more of an option once the snow has melted. Even though some bathrooms are kept as clean as possible, which includes the removal of graffiti, some other places support or do not mind the graffiti history (Beck, 2014). Some bars, clubs, restaurants, and public restrooms, embrace writing and drawing in their bathrooms (Beck, 2014). Writing in bathrooms, which is quite common now, started in the first century AD when Roman poet Martial told another writer that “if he wanted to get published, he should go find a bathroom wall” (Beck, 2014). What started off as a diss for a location for art, has turned into surprising mini galleries, but instead of buying a ticket, needing to buy something from the menu. Art is art, regardless of where it is displayed, and bathroom walls or city streets allow for more people to not only see that but also add to that.

2.3 Own Photographs & Participation Walk Intro

In addition to the literary research, much of my findings come from autophotography, which are my own photographs and from photographs taken by a group of five participants. The participants were asked to walk along a path which most of my own photographs are from. That participation walk aimed to be able to compare likes, dislikes, and curiosity within the area. The comparison was between participant photographs and also between my own, but participants were not shown any of my photographs beforehand. All photographs, including my own, were taken on our own personal phones.

2.4 Own Photographs

Visual research for this thesis consists of my own photographs and participant photographs while going on walks in Helsinki. Some of my observations started in the fall of 2021, shortly after moving to Helsinki. However, the majority of my photographs and intentional connections are from January 2022 to April 2023. These observations began as noticing similarities between nature and the built environment, along with how nature left its mark on different types of surfaces. Examples of these were how the ice felt like a continuation of the rocks by
the sea, how drip marks appeared on walls, and how puddles reflected light posts and tree trunks. Single chairs would pop up, one by a construction zone, and later, possibly that same chair, by the sea. At a common fishing spot, a single chair had a new home for a while, as the benches were separated by a bridge. People within this community were making adjustments to the spaces in order to meet their wants and needs. Around June of 2022, my photographs began focusing more on graffiti around Helsinki. In the fall of 2022, the amount of street art started increasing in the Jätkäsaari and Ruoholahti areas. Bridges, underpasses, poles, and trash cans were more frequently becoming spaces for the addition and removal of graffiti. In the summer of 2023, different types of heart graffiti have noticeably appeared more often throughout Helsinki. Spreading positivity, personally, the hearts are a nice addition to see on any walk.

My photographs center around the Jätkäsaari and Ruoholahti areas for several reasons. Some of my main reasons for choosing the Ruoholahti Canal specifically, were due to Jätkäsaari being an area that is currently still being developed, many Jätkäsaari residents have been in favor of adding more street art walls, and its location with the bridges and water. It is a common walking path for residents of both Jätkäsaari and Ruoholahti, with a wide range of ages. There are various types of settings along the walking route, such as under and overpasses, parks, and seating areas. There is a mixture of natural and human-made elements, which can be seen to varying degrees throughout the pathway, and their emphasis changes throughout the seasons. Dogs, cats, birds, and other animals are also often moving through those spaces.

One key reason to confine my focus to a smaller area within the city, rather than looking at all of Helsinki, was to be able to keep track of changes more easily. Another aspect was familiarity, since throughout this thesis, it would become a route that I would frequently be walking on. At the same time, parts of the route would be more unfamiliar to others, who I would later ask to be part of my participation walk. I wanted a fresh perspective on the area, to which I could compare my photographs and see new angles.

My own photographs are mainly limited to that specific walking path, which I had initially been focusing on and had participants go on as well. That pathway started at the underpass below Porkkalankatu, on the side closest to Lapinlahti, continued down Itämerenkuja/Ruoholahdentori, went along the Ruoholahti Canal on one side, turned at the dog park, and con-
Figure 143. Bench

Figure 144. Water

Figure 145. Ice
Figure 146. Plant in container

Figure 147. Posters

Figure 148. Cone next to bird

Figure 149. Water creating gradient

Figure 150. Flowers growing through
Figure 151. Crusellinsilta

Figure 152. Crusellinsilta closeup (January)

Figure 153. Crusellinsilta closeup (May)

Figure 154. September in white

Figure 155. May in pink

Figure 156. Connected September

Figure 157. Connected May
tinued along the canal on the other side, and followed the water until Crusellinsilta. However, due to the fact that I have taken photographs over several years, some of my photographs extend to both sides of the route, meaning to Lapinlahti and Saukonpaasi Park, and occasionally, to other parts of Helsinki.

Throughout the past few years, I have taken over 8,000 photographs that fit into the categories that my thesis focuses on: street art/graffiti, patterns in nature, and public spaces. For the purposes of this thesis, I have sorted through all of those photographs and grouped photographs that relate to each other. Those photographs have been carefully chosen to help visualize topics being discussed within the text.

While using the terms street art and graffiti interchangeably, most of what is included in those categories in this thesis is two-dimensional art on surfaces. Street art can include other types of art as well, such as sculptures. There have been some interesting and unexpected additions though, which bring new connections, such as a bicycle that had been pulled out of the Ruoholasht Canal in the winter of 2023. The bicycle remained there for a short amount of time, and a few weeks later another bicycle and a skateboard had been pulled out of the same canal. They were placed under the canal bridges, leaning against the concrete walls. The first bicycle, covered in barnacles, was an especially good reflection of its surroundings. Whether intentionally or unintentionally, the bicycle mimicked some of the graffiti lines behind it. The icicles above the bicycle quickly took over the handlebars and frame, making sure that it was part of the environment. In the spring of 2023, another bicycle appeared in the same location. However, this time it was slightly different. Since the snow had melted, this barnacle-covered bicycle stood out in new ways. The tires looked similar to the stone on the ground and pieces of barnacles that had chipped off resembled chalk. Even if the bicycle were to be removed, there would be remnants of the barnacles, marking that something was once there. Similarly to chalk, the marks are fragile in their impermanence yet still have an impact. Every time, the front wheel has been broken while the back wheel has been intact. This spring 2023 bicycle’s front wheel was attached, but the wheel was also broken in the middle and laying on its side. On the surface of the bike, rust, shades of grey, and barnacles blended together. In parallel with some past observations, this bicycle related to shapes in the graffiti behind it. An arrow on the letter “y” was similar to the seat, another letter reflected the handlebars in front of it, and some leading lines connected everything together.

In the summer of 2023, there was a new bicycle that had been taken out of the water and this time was placed on the other side of the Crusellinsilta bridge, near the jetty. The bicycle camouflaged into its surroundings, in texture, color, and shape. The frame had a softness to it as the barnacles became a backdrop and plants from the sea had created an overlay. The new plant additions, which were not as noticeable on the other bicycles, revealed the strong influence that the bicycle’s specific location in the sea had on its appearance. This time, the bicycle’s wheels were both attached and intact. The bicycle became a new surface for organisms in the sea to attach to and cover, and after it was placed back on land, became a decoration in an environment in which it used to be functional. The bicycle’s functional value shifted to curiosity in its new aesthetic value. The biotic and abiotic continue to change over time, both changing and being changed by Helsinki’s urban environment.

Out of curiosity, this leads to several questions. Who is fishing these bicycles out of the canal? Is it the city or is it individuals? It appears to be individuals since the bicycles, for the most part, are placed in the same areas and stay there for a while. Why are they being displayed by the canal and where do they go after that? They could be pulled out of the canal for a variety of reasons, including for fun, out of curiosity, to bring attention to the issue, to help clean the canal and improve the ecosystem, or for something else. I am unsure where they go afterward and who is responsible for moving them. In many places around the world there tends to be this same issue of bicycles ending up in canals. However, in other countries, those are usually shared bicycles, while the ones in the Ruoholahti Canal, from what I have seen, have been personal bicycles and skateboards (Burnett & Chang, 2022).

Street art is, for the most part, deliberately-made two-dimensional marks on surfaces. Even so, street art can also include three-dimensional art and accidental marks, with some of my own photographs fitting into the accidental street art category as well (Joachim, 2023). These bicycles can be viewed as street art, as interesting objects, as something outside of art, as a reminder to keep our waterways healthy, as an eye-sore, or as multiple other options. It does not necessarily matter how exactly people passing by the bicycles define them, but it is beneficial to get an overall feeling, such as if they are curious about the bicycle and all of the barnacles growing on them. Objects appear along the canal and may be something that others might not notice at all or then be something eye-catching.
Figure 160. Bicycle (no snow)

Figure 161. Bicycle (snow)

Figure 162 & 163. Bicycle (chalky)

Figure 164. Bicycle (sunset)

Figure 165. Bicycle (icicle)

Figure 166. Bicycle (seat)

Figure 167. Bicycle (wheel 1)

Figure 168. Bicycle (wheel 2)

Figure 169. Bicycle (frame)
The bicycles and the ways in which they are viewed, relate to other forms of public art which may be more unconventional. Yarn bombing is also called graffiti knitting, yarn storming, guerilla knitting, or urban knitting (McDonald, 2013, pp. 197-198). This type of graffiti started in 2004 in the Netherlands and has since occurred in other locations around the world (McDonald, 2013, pp. 197-198). Yarn bombing is a way of adding color and interest to public spaces, so that people of all ages can interact with their surroundings in new and fun ways (McDonald, 2013, pp. 197-198). By adding a piece of one’s own craft and creativity to a public space, there is a hope to add beauty to the mundane. Although I myself have not seen yarn bombing in Helsinki while walking around the city yet, it has occurred in the past. In 2011, people came together and placed thousands of granny square blankets, that they had crocheted, on the steps in front of the Helsinki Cathedral (Jones, 2020). This was an attempt to break a world record for creating the largest patchwork quilt, and those blankets were then donated to charity afterward (Dr. M.F. Khan, 2022; #WOMENSART, 2022).

This idea of patchwork and coming together as individuals to form a larger collective piece, for whatever intentions, such as if it is just for fun, to raise awareness, or to make a statement, is a powerful way for communities to come together. In the United States, in 1987, an activist, named Cleve Jones, started the AIDS Memorial quilt (National AIDS Memorial, n.d.). The idea started in 1985 when he asked people, during a march, to write the names of their friends and loved ones, who had passed away from AIDS, onto placards (National AIDS Memorial, n.d.).

All of those names coming together reminded Cleve Jones of a quilt, which then inspired the 1987 quilt (National AIDS Memorial, n.d.). This was a way of honoring everyone who had been lost and a way of trying to gain awareness of something that the government had intentionally been ignoring (National AIDS Memorial, n.d.). While queer voices were being silenced by the government otherwise, this quilt created space to amplify what needed to be heard (National AIDS Memorial, n.d.). There is power in communities coming together and this quilt allowed for those who had passed away to not just be statistics, but rather honor each individual, the type of person that they were, and the impact that they had on the people around them (National AIDS Memorial, n.d.). Together, the quilt is a collection of connections and a fight for a better future for the next generations because we all deserve to be heard. Around that same time, Keith Haring was an artist and activist who made a mark in a variety of mediums (Zeit Contemporary Art, n.d.). Haring started off creating chalk drawings on blank advertising panels in the New York subways, which he was arrested for several times, and later worked on larger pieces and in different mediums (Haring et al., 2010).

The later works included murals, paintings, posters, clothing, and toys (Zeit Contemporary Art, n.d.). Haring’s works covered many different topics and themes, and included awareness about AIDS (Zeit Contemporary Art, n.d.). In 1990, Haring passed away from AIDS, but his work continues to influence street art, queer culture, and art in general (Zeit Contemporary Art, n.d.). His work was sometimes criticized for not being good enough by art critics, yet he is still one of the best-known artists to this day (Sawyer, 2019). Works that were appreciated by the public but not deemed good enough for galleries are now sold for millions (Sawyer, 2019).

What happened with Haring’s art is similar to what happens to many other artists who work outside of traditional gallery spaces, where their art is not valued as highly by critics until it has been accepted into those curated white walls. Street artists, such as Keith Haring, and techniques, such as yarn bombing, chalk, and spray paint, all have the ability to transform spaces. Understanding some of the history and influence that street art has had in the past, especially by creating a platform for voices to be heard, can spark a greater appreciation for current-day street art in one’s own community.

Thinking back to the yarn bombing, it is interesting to view it in relation to nature in the city. Oftentimes, yarn that has either been knit or crocheted, is wrapped around tree trunks or branches (McDonald, 2013, pp. 197-198). This addition of a new texture and color then emphasizes the shape of what is naturally growing there. Barnacles covering the bicycles that were pulled out of the canal in Ruoholahti are like yarn covering tree trunks. Creating this interesting new element to the otherwise familiar bicycle, the barnacles work together creating this patchwork that is hard to go unnoticed.

If we look closer at how nature interacts with different surfaces, both natural and human-made, it is interesting to see the similarities between those interactions. This can be seen in the ways in which street art and graffiti show up in Helsinki, as the sticker residue mimics tree bark. Its surroundings and this layering tell a story, even when some parts have already been erased or stripped away, revealing yet another layer. When someone places a sticker or a poster on a surface, it stays there for a while, but the impermanence of it is a reaction to how nature and to how humans interact with those pieces. Time, weather, and nature create space for new paint, stickers, or posters to be placed on top of them. Those pieces were there for a certain amount of time and their importance oftentimes lies within the impermanence. However, that process should not be rushed or forced, since there is no need for this street art or graffiti to be removed unnaturally. The word unnaturally is intentional here since it is with the use of chemicals, power washers, and sandblasters to try and keep clean a surface that was not necessarily even designed to be that way. These graffiti pieces, just like nature in its own environment, are telling stories that are ignored or silenced if they are removed so quickly. They are stories that should be listened to and seen, some with a deeper meaning and some that are just there for a laugh, but they are a reflection of the communities surrounding them. They are a reflection of the people who are interacting with and moving through these spaces either every day, every week, or every year.

How people move through spaces then becomes part of the spaces. Public spaces are designed differently for pedestrians, animals, cyclists, drivers, and public transportation users. Cities have varying degrees of accessibility,
which then impacts what those spaces look like and how many people can move within them (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012. After the plans have been approved and the spaces have been created, the public then utilizes those locations in different ways. Spaces are used more or less depending on their location and if they have been designed in ways that are inviting and usable. The Ruoholahti Canal makes space for pedestrians, animals, and cyclists. There are many options for seating along the canal, both farther away from the water and right next to it. One section, which is midway up the canal, is a popular spot for people to sit and spend time with friends. Oftentimes, there will also be a bird in the same spot, enjoying the sun, looking for fish, or taking a nap. Children from the nearby schools walk along the bridges and take in their surroundings. Bicycles that have been fished out of the canal are placed under the bridges. It is interesting to see something that used to be used for moving from one place to another be completely stationary and take on a different life. The bicycle becomes an art piece that starts to blend in with its surroundings and is covered in barnacles that had formed while underwater.

When discussing graffiti, it is important to include green graffiti. Does that count as vandalism in Helsinki and to what extent? Is the bicycle that has been taken out of the canal and placed under the bridge considered vandalism if it starts interacting with its surroundings? Green graffiti is street art that is “created from living moss and grasses” and it is “attached to walls with biodegradable ingredients” (United Streets of Art, 2016). This moss then grows over time and spreads along the walls, bringing nature to more urban spaces (United Streets of Art, 2016). Green graffiti is a way for street artists to leave a mark in a more environmentally friendly way.
than traditional spray paint (United Streets of Art, 2016). Instead of breaking down and fading over time, this form of street art keeps growing and adding new layers. Green graffiti is similar to guerrilla gardening since they both include adding greenery to places without permission. However, green graffiti tends to focus on the art aspect and is generally done with moss, while guerrilla gardening focuses on the act of gardening and can include food, plants, and flowers (McDonald, 2013, pp. 199). Guerrilla gardening started in New York in 1973 with a group of people creating gardens out of unused lots (Sher, 2022). This form of gardening has been used in a variety of ways, including growing healthy foods in food deserts and adding wildflowers to otherwise empty areas (Sher, 2022). It is considered illegal since the people who are gardening do not have permission to do so and do not own the land (Sher, 2022). Oftentimes, guerrilla gardening takes place in public spaces and aims to benefit the residents and ecosystems nearby. In 2022, a guerrilla gardening team from Extinction Rebellion Finland turned a tram stop in Helsinki into a place for pollinators (Mediatyöryhmä, 2022). They did so by taking burlap fabric and creating the Extinction Rebellion logo on it with grass and seeds (Elokapina, 2022). They had several pieces of the fabric, which were placed on top of the tram stop and in front of it (Elokapina, 2022). Flowers were also placed on the corners of the fabric in front of the stop (Elokapina, 2022). The tram stop had been renamed “Pollinator Stop” which brought attention to the reasoning for adding the grass there (Elokapina, 2022). Guerrilla gardening and green graffiti help show the importance of making cities greener and thinking of multispecies perspectives while designing public spaces. These types of actions can show what possibilities there are for spaces and how they can be adjusted over time. Personally, I do not see much of a difference between a tram stop covered in grass and flowers, and a bicycle covered in barnacles. They are both taking a human-made surface that was designed for transportation and creating an ecosystem out of them. The only main difference is that one is human-led change and the other is nature-led change. There is a need for blending human-made and natural surfaces, whether that is steered by nature or human residents. Layering, fading, growing, patterns, and learning all happen on these surfaces to varying degrees.
2.5 Participant Photographs

Participants were asked to go on a walk that, if timed without stopping, is roughly 20 minutes long. Participants then took photographs during the walk. After the walk, those photographs were placed by the participants into three folders: like, dislike, and curious about.

The participation walk aimed to get a small insight into how several others experience the same settings. Even though I had walked the same route countless times, I still noticed something new even after the 30th time. I was curious to know what others would notice for the first time. These fresh perspectives could open my eyes to something new, shift my own perspective, or validate some of my previous findings.

A small group of five participants (ranging from ages 21 to 61), walked the route and took photographs. Participants verbally consented to uploading the photographs to the folders and to having the photographs analyzed for the thesis. Participants later signed a PDF where the same information was provided in writing. There were three walks in total, two with one participant, and the third with three participants. I walked alongside the participants so that they could focus on taking photographs instead of on where to go. Wanting to keep the range of possible photographs and interpretations as wide as possible, I stated briefly that my thesis looks at street art and public spaces in Helsinki. Adding on, I stated that participants should take photographs of anything that catches their eye, which will later be placed into folders of like, dislike, and curious about. The number of photographs and pacing of the walk were completely up to the participants. Finally, after the walk, I briefly explained what aspects I had focused on for my own photographs, such as the relationship between street art, nature, seasons, and policies.

The walks took place in February and March of 2023. There were some similarities between the photographs that were taken. As a disclaimer, the commentary in this participant photograph section is based on comments made by the participants themselves. Common themes for the dislike category were trash and advertising. Since all of the walks were during the winter, the trash was even more noticeable against the ground. Photographs were of litter on the ground, from small wrappers and cigarettes, to larger pieces of food packaging. Advertising and signage for stores and services felt noticeable to a few participants in a negative way, with light-up letters and floor-standing signs by pathways. Two pieces of graffiti were placed in the Dislike folder, but one of them was also in that participant’s Curious About folder. There were other common themes in the Curious About folders for participants, which were street art (paint, stickers, and posters), nature (trees, plants, water), textures (residues, cracks, moss, barnacles on the bicycle), and lines (railings, patterns in buildings, leading lines in the environment). Many of the photographs in the Like folders were similar to those in the Curious About folders, but there was more of an emphasis on nature and how that interacts with the environment in the Like section. The Like folders included reflections on the water, ice formations, animals (birds and dogs), a barnacle-covered bicycle and skateboard against concrete, and patterns on walls and other surfaces from water, moss, and plants interacting with them. Furthermore, the Like folders included colors that stood out against the sky, graffiti (permanent markers, posters, paint), bridge underpasses, pride flags, murals, lights, benches within the built environ-
CURIOUS ABOUT FOLDER
Participants 1 & 4

Figure 187, 188 & 189. Tree, Graffiti, & Skateboard next to bicycle Participant 4

Figure 190. Canal Participant 4

Figure 191, 192 & 193. Sculpture, Building, & Bicycle Participant 1

Figure 194 & 195. Branch & Window Participant 1
CURIOUS ABOUT (CONTINUED)
Participants 2, 3, & 5

Figure 200 & 201. Icicle & Building
Participant 3

Figure 202. Tunnel
Participant 3

Figure 196 & 197. Wall & Posters
Participant 2

Figure 198 & 199. Graffiti & Tunnel
Participant 2

Figure 203. Graffiti
Participant 5

Figure 204. Stickers 1
Participant 5

Figure 205. Stickers 2
Participant 5
LIKE FOLDER
Participants 1, 2, & 5

Figure 206, 207 & 208.
Underpass, Texture, & Sticker
Participant 2

Figure 209, 210, & 211.
Graffiti, Rocks, & Tree
Participant 2

Figure 212. House
Participant 1

Figure 213 & 214.
Branch & Steps
Participant 1

Figure 215 & 216.
Graffiti & Sea view
Participant 1

Figure 217, 218 & 219.
Bench, Building, & Wall
Participant 5

Figure 220 & 221.
Sea & Sign
Participant 5
LIKE (CONTINUED)
Participants 3 & 4

2.6 Seasons

My own photographs from the walks explore nature and how that interacts with public spaces and surfaces. While I have photographs from all seasons, I have primarily been focusing on the winter. Seasons in Finland have a big impact on what people focus on in their surroundings and how they interact with those settings as well. I have been interested in how snow makes it easier for people to interact with their surroundings, lowering the threshold to leave a mark on their environment. Snow creates space for snowmen, snow angels, and signatures or messages without the fear of being punished for doing so. Snow is versatile and contrasts the darkness of the winter days. In the winter, more snow falls to the ground, melts, piles up, changes color, and people can literally see all of the paths crossing. Looking at the snow-covered ground, one can see where a human, dog, and bird have walked, where a bicycle has passed through, and where a sled has been dragged. The snow reveals who is making their way through these public spaces, making visible the otherwise less visible.

There is an opportunity for playfulness and creativity in the everyday and the mundane. Playfulness in the seasons is like an Etch A Sketch ready to be used. The same urge to write one’s name or message in the sand, on a snow-covered surface, or carved into a bench, reveals varying levels of permanence but they are common experiences. Kids are often taught to embrace their creativity, making a rocket ship out of cardboard boxes, telling stories that are glimpses into the way that they think, or drawing on the pavement with a piece of chalk. A single piece of chalk can be used to make public spaces more interactive and more inviting, creating games where they used to just be pavement or adding a laugh to someone’s day with a quick sketch. Chalk leaves its mark in an interesting way, allowing people of all ages to help shape public spaces. The impermanence of chalk is clear, staying around longer on sunny days and quickly washed away with the rain. Yet somehow, chalk is also viewed as a disturbance to some public spaces, such as in two examples from the United States.
In San Diego, California, a 40-year-old was arrested for protesting by writing “anti-bank slogans on city sidewalks” in chalk in 2013 (Perry, 2013). The Mayor even stated that the case was a “waste of city money” while the courts made it clear that “graffiti remains illegal even if it can be easily washed off” (Perry, 2013). The now former, City Attorney, stated that they treat every case the same, “regardless of who the perpetrator or victim might be,” which resulted in the protestors being charged with 13 misdemeanor counts (Perry, 2013). In Anoka, Minnesota, chalk on sidewalks, even drawn by children, was banned in 2021 (Harlow, 2021). Those passing the ban tried to justify it by saying that it would help protect the community from “nonsense” (Harlow, 2021). Banning hopscotch and other children’s drawings limits how they can express themselves and interact with others in their own neighborhoods. Only one Council Member voted against the ordinance and stated that they did not want “to make it illegal for a kid to draw on the sidewalk with chalk” (Harlow, 2021). Multiple places creating clear punishments and strict guidelines for the use of an easily washable, accessible, and interactive medium, feels unnecessarily harsh. Chalk is not a danger to communities and should not be the focus of bans in the United States, especially when there are actual threats to safety, such as gun violence (Ingraham, 2022). It feels unsettling that people in Minnesota, where gun violence is rising, can open carry handguns in public if they have a permit, yet in the same state, children cannot draw with chalk on the sidewalk (Giffords Law Center, 2023; Ingraham, 2022). It should be alarming to think about the permanence of losing one’s life compared to the impermanence of the mark of chalk. Those in power, especially in politics, have direct and indirect control over shaping what cities look like. They are curating spaces for people, not by people, and in the examples above, are robbing children of the playfulness that could and should exist in their cities.

Thinking back to the impermanence in the snow and sand, the writing on the sand is there until the waves come up, washing away the text to the rhythm of the sea. The text, placed slightly out of the sea’s reach, waits patiently as its permanence turns to impermanence as the tides rise. While it creates this “clean slate,” the sea and waves still look and feel different every day. This is the same for the sand on the beach, as the grains of sand get moved around. That environment changes daily, and it welcomes the writing in the sand.

Seasons change what people focus on and how they spend time in those spaces. In the spring and summer months, Helsinki becomes very lively, as people are taking in the sun and spending much of their time outside. Stairs and hills that were used for walking and sledging transform into places to relax, gather, and enjoy the long days. While I love taking photographs in the winter of the ice on the sea, I am only able to be outside for a limited amount of time before my fingers start to freeze, even when wearing gloves. In the winter, some aspects of the city get covered in snow, while colors, on the buildings, in decorations, and in street art, tend to pop. Surprisingly, white paint in graffiti is also quite effective during the winter, since even though it may blend in with the snow at first glance, it is hard to unnoticed once spotted. Before the snow has arrived and after it has melted, there is a period of darkness. This darkness is literally due to the short hours of daylight and the rainy seasons making the asphalt, tree trunks, and sea appear darker. With most trees having no leaves left, the shape and power of the branches are highlighted against the fleeting colors of the sunset. During these darker months, it is especially refreshing to see pieces of street art, as they add something new, interesting, and engaging to an otherwise, generally, dull period since those months tend to drag on.

Bringing this rough period of the year, Slush, a startup and tech expo and convention held in Helsinki annually, created a welcome banner that was placed outside of the Helsinki airport (AWOL, 2016). The banner read “Nobody in their right mind would come to Helsinki in November. Except you, you badass. Welcome.” and it gained attention and support on the internet (AWOL, 2016). A simple yet humorous message can have a widespread positive impact, whether it is a banner like the one Slush created or a sticker on a trash can.

In Finland, the intensity of the changing seasons reminds me of the impermanence of my surroundings and makes me, personally, want to pay more attention to my environment and appreciate the short-term and long-term changes. In the winter and early spring, I tend to notice the changing textures on the ground more, yet in the late spring and summer, I tend to move my focus to the textures on walls and plants. Around spring and summer, shadows start to play a larger role in what public spaces look and feel like. With the sun out for significantly longer each day and the trees being covered in leaves and flowers, the shadows that are cast are more noticeable. The shadows spread onto the walls, interacting with graffiti and any items that have been left out, such as a chair, frame, bicycle, skateboard, and wooden shutters. The sun highlights certain stickers, paint marks, textures, and patterns, with the help of shadows, shifting the focus throughout the day.
Figure 233. Plants next to canal

Figure 234 & 235. Pride stickers

Figure 236. Leaves

Figure 237. Bench

Figure 238. Trash can

Figure 239. Ground

Figure 240. Building next to trees
3. COLORING BOOK
(LOOKING TO THE FUTURE)

3.1 Coloring Book Intro

Coloring books are often intended for children and consist of black outlines which can then be colored in. Those who are coloring in the coloring books can choose which colors and mediums they want to use. Coloring books support children with their motor skills, recognition, coordination, focus, handwriting, self-expression, patience, and social skills (Braam, n.d.). For children and adults, coloring in pages also helps lower stress and anxiety levels, and boost creativity (Kristenson, 2023). Leaving marks through coloring book pages can provide benefits to people of all ages. The books can be used at home or easily brought on the go.

For this thesis, a coloring book explores social sustainability and spaces through child-like creativity. This relates to the idea of having outlines, but using those more of as guidelines, and then seeing if one wants to color within the lines, outside the lines, or both. This is a way of encouraging people to be more hands-on in creating change in their surroundings and letting people leave their mark in their own ways.

3.2 Creating Temporary Playgrounds

There are a lot of opportunities to be explored within the creation of temporary spaces. Multistability, defined by philosopher Don Ihde in the context of technology, is “a technology’s capacity to be taken up for different uses and to be meaningful in different ways” (Rosenberger, 2017). Multistability in the context of public spaces and street art can refer to how spaces...
and objects are utilized (Rosenberger, 2017). Where street art and public spaces meet, there is an opportunity to create additional meanings and uses. Chalk especially holds the power to create temporary playgrounds. This means the ability to turn otherwise blank asphalt, which most people would not stop to pay attention to as they pass through those spaces, into interactive games and environments, which add a new purpose or element there.

In April of 2023, I noticed that chalk drawings of Moomins next to an actual playground in Jätkäsaari caught the attention of toddlers, being able to recognize the characters on the ground. What would have otherwise been just a path for them to walk on, quickly became an exciting find. Seeing the Moomins was an opportunity to practice naming the characters and create conversations about them, all while being a fun surprise. Making public spaces more fun and interactive can allow for children to be more connected to or excited by their surroundings. The areas for kids can be expanded from just the actual playgrounds to temporary playgrounds. Public spaces should be for people of all ages, so encouraging kids to use chalk in creative ways can be beneficial in several ways. Children can see the impact that their marks and decisions have, they can have more spaces that they feel included in, and they can interact with other kids in new ways.

Describing public spaces in ways that encourage interaction and playfulness can then stimulate learning and play. Through drawings, children can communicate and express themselves in additional ways, spark conversations, explore their surroundings, and work on their motor skills. When it comes to the topic of children drawing on walls, there seem to be two types of articles that always pop up: how to stop...
them or why they should be allowed to. Within these two is also a middle ground that finds a way to balance lessons from both. Drawing helps children with their motor skills and can motivate them to engage in different ways (Lin et al., 2015). Drawing is important in a child’s development, especially with their handwriting and coordination (Lin et al., 2015).

When I was a child, even though I had access to stacks of paper, I took a blue crayon and drew a line on the white wall in our house. I remember feeling upset after I was caught and was told that the property owner, who had become a family friend, would be unhappy that I had done that since it was a rental. Luckily, he was understanding and said that it was an easy fix with a coat of paint. While writing this thesis, I found several articles about other children drawing on white walls in their homes (Fateema, 2020; Guterman, 2022). Coincidentally, two of those articles mentioned that their drawings were in blue as well (Fateema, 2020). Jokingly, a wave of graffiti artist toddlers taking over white walls with blue drawings seems to be a pattern in creative expression over the years, and could have been a headline of one of those articles. More seriously, a lot can be learned from children and how they express themselves in various settings. Children can simultaneously learn about graffiti and respect because they are not mutually exclusive. Similarly to other topics, graffiti can be taught in age-appropriate ways. For younger kids, these discussions can include making marks in their own homes and understanding boundaries along with creative expression (Guterman, 2022). As children grow up and become preteens and teenagers, these discussions can grow to include public spaces in a different way. That shift from private to public spaces maintains the same sense of independence and ownership over marks, but adds in new layers of respect. If public spaces were designed with the help of people of all ages, including children, then it could be easier to allow that freedom and imagination for younger children to be supported in public spaces. While some countries and states are stricter in limiting the use of chalk in public spaces, that can lead to unnecessary restrictions. Even though Helsinki does not seem to limit the use of chalk, there are ways in which the city could be encouraging art.

In several places around the world, there are programs that help bring together street art and children or teenagers. In Salt Lake City, Utah, in the United States, there is a “graffiti-making programme in which kids aged between eight and 13 are asked to paint the walls of various public places” (Hock, 2022). This program is a way of supporting creativity and developing other skills. Some of the benefits of this program include the kids learning how to “work together, make decisions and share responsibilities” (Hock, 2022). On a larger scale, being a part of this particular program, or ones similar to that, can help children and teenagers feel empowered to create change, feel involved in their community, and be “proud to have left their mark on the city” (Hock, 2022). They can see firsthand not only what can be accomplished when people work together but also that they do not have to wait until adulthood for their voices to be heard. Citizen engagement is key to improving social sustainability, and it is important that people of all ages and backgrounds are included in that.

An insult to a lot of modern art tends to be that it looks like it was created by a child and that, therefore, the art is less valuable and less skilled (Freeman, 2012). A similar argument has been used for trying to define what street art is (Bacharach, 2016). Some believe that a child creating a chalk drawing or a drawing in any other medium is not considered street art since they are not intentionally rebelling (Bacharach, 2016). However, I believe that it does not matter who created the art because it does not make it any less valuable. Many people can argue over what is or is not art (Bacharach, 2016). That topic has been debated continuously, with people even adding trash to art exhibitions and seeing if visitors believe that that is intentionally there, or conversely, thinking that something being exhibited is actually a piece of trash (Reuters, 2015). There is no way that with 8 billion people on this planet, as of May 2023, that everyone will reach a consensus as to what is or is not art.

Looking back at the rock paintings from Astuvansalmi, it is unclear who specifically created those paintings, including their age. For viewers, the age of the artists and their intent in creating the art does not change the value of the paintings themselves. Even with those rock paintings, some visitors will be curious about them, some will like them, and some will dislike them. Even so, it is important that the paintings are there and that the viewers listen to what is being communicated. The paintings can help viewers gain a greater understanding of their surroundings and the people who have passed through them.

Paavo Arhinmäki, the deputy mayor of Helsinki and Finland’s former minister for culture, stated that “politicians shouldn’t determine what is good art and what is bad art” (Ottermann, 2023). This sentiment can be applied to art in both formal and informal settings, as art is subjective (Jones, 2019). Policies formed by politicians ultimately have an impact on and help shape the communities that they are enforced in. Supporting a wider range of the arts, especially within public art, can lead to improved accessibility and strengthened community (Lazerian, 2023). Public art, including graffiti, makes connections “between past, present, and future, between disciplines and between ideas,” which allows people to relate with their surroundings in different and more personal ways (Lazerian, 2023).
The Helsinki Art Museum (HAM) is one example of expanding interactivity within museum spaces and supporting childlike creativity (To Spring Pasture, n.d.). There is one exhibition, titled ‘To Spring Pasture,’ which was designed by Aalto+Aalto and curated by Sanna Tuulikangas (Aalto Admin, n.d.). The exhibition is open from 14.04.2023 - 14.01.2024 (To Spring Pasture, n.d.). The artwork in that exhibition is placed lower, so that it is easier for children to view, examine, and talk about (Aalto Admin, n.d.). There are guiding questions that guardians can ask children as they move through the space, resulting in making connections, practicing expressing thoughts and emotions, and identifying elements within the art (“To Spring Pasture PDF,” n.d.). The whole exhibition space has been designed for children and their guardians, as children are encouraged to explore freely in this no-shoe zone (“To Spring Pasture, n.d.). There is a recommended pathway for children to roam around the space, but as a guide instead of rules (“To Spring Pasture PDF,” n.d.). From personal observation, this pathway, from a bird’s-eye-view, looks similar to a river, meandering organically, instead of following a straight path (“To Spring Pasture PDF,” n.d.). The exhibition space ends with a room where everyone is allowed to “express their own creativity” by using crayons to draw anywhere in that room (“To Spring Pasture PDF,” n.d.). That room, which started off as a blank space, with panels and building blocks, is now, as of July 2023, already covered in drawings (Aalto Admin, n.d.). This is a place for children to not only be creative but also interact with others, feel free, and get out some energy (“To Spring Pasture PDF,” n.d.).

This exhibition at HAM is a way for organized chaos to be brought into an otherwise very controlled environment. This also allows visitors to become participants instead of just spectators, meaning that they can have a visible and tangible impact on their surroundings. By bridging spaces to include people of all ages, it helps promote interactivity and creativity (“To Spring Pasture PDF,” n.d.). The prompts for looking at the paintings and the freedom to draw anywhere within the one exhibition room also show the children who are visiting that their opinions, feelings, thoughts, and actions matter (“To Spring Pasture PDF,” n.d.). This idea of letting art exist outside of canvases and frames can be applied to outside public spaces as well. Co-designing spaces with children, along with letting people passing through those spaces leave their own marks, can help expand the lessons learned within the museum to wider public spaces in Helsinki.

The amount of children living in Helsinki has been increasing (Niska, 2018). In fact, in 2018 there were “more children in the city than at any time since the mid 1970s” (Niska, 2018). With this increase in families in the inner city, it is even more important to be designing and supporting inclusive public spaces. Since roughly 2013, Jätkäsaari has been experiencing a sharp increase in the number of people moving to the area, especially the number of children, since many families are moving there (Niska, 2018). There is currently still much construction happening in the area as it is developing. There are multiple schools in the Jätkäsaari and Ruoholahit areas, and several parks have been designed to include playgrounds. While some playgrounds can be seen in the buildings and playgrounds, especially through the use of color and how there are not many uniform designs, there is still more that could be done. Playgrounds and graffiti walls are considered designated areas for play when they could both be expanded to allow for more creative freedom. How might public spaces look and feel different if playfulness, curiosity, and interactivity were emphasized to foster community? Learning to let go through that childlike creativity can help expand those possibilities. Children can learn about boundaries while also having an impact on their surroundings. For this reason, some younger children are first given the opportunity to “draw on the walls at home” which still “gives them a sense of ownership over their space” (Hock, 2022). After they have been able to experiment with the walls in their home, they can take what they have learned, along with how they have felt, and apply that to public spaces as they grow up. This sense of independence encourages children to explore their surroundings, be curious, and leave marks in their own ways (Gill, 2022). In creating these types of spaces, various inputs can result in improved social sustainability. Co-designing public spaces with children can help them see the importance of their environment and of the environment in general (Gill, 2022). This can lead to a sense of agency when moving through the space and an increased understanding of how to care for their surroundings. Co-designing with children has proven successful in a research project in New Zealand for the Building Better Homes, Towns and Cities (BBHTC) National Science Challenge (Carroll & Witten, 2019). Two researchers and a landscape architect worked together with children to imagine what spaces could look like which would hopefully expand “children’s play and mobility” (Carroll & Witten, 2019). Current limitations are mainly due to safety concerns so the project aimed to help the entire community by making cities safer “to move around in and incorporate playful elements” (Carroll & Witten, 2019). The researchers noticed that the children who were involved in the co-design projects were taking into consideration their own wants and needs but also those of “older people and younger kids and how the space would work for them” (Carroll & Witten, 2019). The children were mindful of how these public spaces include everyone, understanding that they are one part of the ecosystem (Carroll & Witten, 2019). Those types of conversations could then lead to teaching about multispecies perspectives and supporting acceptance and diversity. Opening those topics could also help strengthen a sense of community which could then motivate more citizen participation from people of various backgrounds and ages.

This idea of designing spaces in a way that benefits the whole community relates to Universal Design (National Disability Authority, n.d.). Universal Design is defined by the U.S. General Services Administration as “a concept in which products and environments are designed to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaptation or specialized design” (GSA, 2022). Universal Design, which started from the disability rights movement, aims to remove barriers and create designs that benefit as many people as possible, including age, disability, and more (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012). The curb cut was initially designed for wheelchair users but has since proven beneficial to many others, including for those using other mobility aids, strollers, bicycles, and skateboards (Steinfeld & Maisel, 2012). Accessibility within design also relates to graffiti. Graffiti allows everyone within the community to participate in whichever way they best see fit. Graffiti can amplify voices so that community members are heard and so that those wants and needs can then be reflected within those public spaces (Maddox, n.d.). “Social change, protest,
or expressions of community desire” can be brought to attention through graffiti, making spaces more inclusive (Maddox, n.d.).

As graffiti is a way of resisting, it creates space for change and growth. For some, graffiti is more of a deliberate form of resistance, while for others, although the intent itself may not be specifically resistance, the act still is. Creating a mark on an otherwise clean surface in a public space is rebelling against the idea that surfaces in public spaces must be maintained and restored to their original state. Graffiti is a way of bringing attention to different issues, creating more interactive spaces, or adding a piece of one’s own personality or humor to a space. Within social sustainability, it is important for people in communities to feel like they can share their thoughts and be listened to. Being able to have an impact on one’s surroundings can be empowering and encourage them to be more involved. Graffiti is a way of challenging norms at varying levels of permanence.

3.3 Icy Canals

The ice along the canal and docks, which changes day to day, mimics some of the same aspects that can be seen on the surfaces in the built environment. Some of these elements are layering and textures that can be tied to how the water interacts with the ice and snow. For example, there is an interesting pattern of dripping with water and within the built environment, which can be seen underneath the bridge Crusellinsilta. Drip marks, from paint that is used in street art, mirror how elements, such as water, interact with the surfaces of the built environment, leaving white drip marks. This leads to the idea of reflection and how water or shiny
surfaces, end up reflecting their surroundings. There are also common themes with the colors and seeing how even when the paint has faded, it leaves this residue that is similar to the ice as it melts. These both reflect how weather impacts the surfaces.

Additionally, there is this focus on layering and what stays and what goes. This can be seen through different stickers that have been removed and how the residue remains or how people paint over each other’s work once it has faded. There are certain unwritten rules that graffiti artists follow, with one main rule being that people can only paint over another’s work if it has started fading or if the new work will be of higher quality than the one underneath (Wayne Arthur Gallery, 2023). The different marks that are left as small pieces from each person’s message, translate to the ice and how there is this varying opacity that then lets certain shapes through more.

When looking at both the built environment and how the ice acts on the sea’s surface, it is interesting to see these shapes and patterns repeat even though they are seemingly unrelated. These small details that can be noticed in the built environment are magnified on the ice. The weather interacts with the sea and makes these small pieces turn into pieces of art in and of themselves. The main bridge, Crusellinsilta, is where the walk ends, also acts as a part of a community, adding paint to an otherwise blank canvas.

3.4 Collection of Connections

Who we are, as humans, is the result of a collection of stories, experiences, memories, people, places, things, and so on. Our styles change over time and we often express ourselves by how we decorate the spaces we spend the most time in, by how we dress, and by how we communicate our thoughts. Why would public spaces be excluded from these collections? A sticker on a trash can or graffiti under a bridge are just ways that people from the community are bringing pieces to create a collection. This is a collection to show who makes up the people who live there, pass by there, and interact with the spaces. They are making the public spaces part of a community, adding paint to an otherwise blank canvas.

Resources are being spent on removing these large pieces, even when they are in more hidden areas. While their goal is to have spotless surfaces, they still leave behind small marks that add to the layered environment. This ties into the conversation about what is allowed to stay and what goes because based on what remains, the rules seem to vary, even a few feet apart. Certain marks on top of the bridge have remained there for months, yet the ones under the bridge, in a more hidden and secluded area, are the ones that are often quickly taken away. While I have not been able to find information about how frequently this happens, I have been taking note of when graffiti has been removed while on walks in the area. From personal observations, it seems that the graffiti is being removed at a faster rate than when I had first started paying attention to that.

3.5 Coloring Book

Returning back to the examples of childlike creativity and expression is the idea of a coloring book. Coloring books provide the ability for people, of all ages, to physically represent their visions for the future, while drawing upon past and current experiences. This includes thinking about what spaces that one interacts with daily could look like. Creativity is emphasized by having people fill in the coloring books in their own way. Furthermore, it allows people to view their surroundings and interact with them in a different way. By having more control over one’s own surroundings and having a lower threshold to create changes, similar to the impact that snow has, people can feel more connected to public spaces. An advantage to the coloring book is that one can draw one’s own wants and needs on a page, from any location (own home, location that is being drawn, etc.). However, the emphasis is on the idea of a coloring book and what that represents, rather than the physical item itself. Within the idea is the hope to give control to the public, and have them be able to color it in any way that they want to. Supporting this childlike creativity in adults as well, which is seen oftentimes through chalk in childhood, is a process of reintroducing interacting with one’s surroundings.
3.6 Possible Future Steps to Improve Social Sustainability

Looking into the future can include thinking about what can be done to improve social sustainability. These suggestions are based on research, observations, and participation photography results. Due to the observations and participation photographs, some of these points may be more tailored towards the Ruoholahti and Jätkäsaari areas than the rest of Helsinki. The suggestions can be broken into three main categories, which are clarify, adjust, and be open. The first section, clarify, focuses on rules and respect.

CLARIFY:

- A key aspect is making clear the actual rules for graffiti, which means clarifying what is considered graffiti by the Finnish police, including in what locations. This would help answer questions related to why certain marks on surfaces get removed and why others don’t. Along with that, it would help clear up what the punishments are if people are caught and give some explanations as to why that graffiti is or is not allowed in public spaces.

- While creative expression and freedom are encouraged, it is extremely important for people to understand that hate speech, in any form, is never tolerated. If there is hate speech done with graffiti, that needs to be removed and steps must be taken for that hate speech to not be repeated. If that text is being written, then that means that someone passing through that space believes that, so it would be beneficial to see how those issues could be prevented within schools, workplaces, and more. Just removing the text will not get rid of the underlying issue, so there need to be multiple actions taken.

- For those creating graffiti, it is important to understand the unwritten rules. A few of these rules involve where to paint and how to be respectful. Religious buildings, war memorials, cars, people’s houses (unless given permission), tribute pieces, and dead graffiti artists’ works are off-limits for graffiti (September, 2022; Wayne Arthur Gallery, 2023). Respecting experienced graffiti artists and not snitching on other artists are key elements of maintaining a sense of community (Wayne Arthur Gallery, 2023). Understanding the history of street art and the order of creating new art are other important aspects to be aware of (Wayne Arthur Gallery, 2023). For the order, they grow in a sense of skill, size, and experience, with throw-ups going over tags, pieces going over throw-ups, and burners going over pieces (Wayne Arthur Gallery, 2023). For clarification, throw-ups are “quick and simple graffiti piece[s], often done in one color and featuring a graffiti artist’s tag,” pieces are more complex, and burners are “large and detailed graffiti piece[s]” (Wayne Arthur Gallery, 2023).

ADJUST:

- Allowing some leeway with the rules set in place by the Finnish police and the city of Helsinki, meaning allowing for more freedom to leave marks on Helsinki in public spaces, could help in supporting creativity and community.
- Allocating resources, that would have otherwise been spent on removing graffiti, to instead fix broken steps or other issues that could be safety hazards.
- Taking into account more age ranges, backgrounds, and so on, when planning public spaces, could help ensure that more needs and wants are being met.

**BE OPEN:**

- Allowing spaces to have more fluidity, means understanding and supporting that public spaces will change over time, especially depending on those in the community. This applies to the policies as well.
- Encouraging interaction and playfulness in public spaces, both in the planning and use phases.

**In terms of mindset:**

- Appreciating or at least being aware of the connections between current graffiti, nature, and rock paintings, and understanding how that relates to the idea of not aiming for completely blank surfaces.
- Embracing the culture of different neighborhoods and understanding that one solution will not work for every city or specific location. Adding onto the Adjust section, here it is also important that adjustments are made based on who is living there and what their wants and needs are. Something that may have worked for a city five years ago, may no longer serve their needs.

4. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSION

4.1 Discussion

The thesaurus, yearbook, and coloring book all work together to support the methods covered in this thesis, combining secondary research, visual research, and participation. The research questions, primarily led by curiosity, changed throughout the writing of this thesis. Playfulness within the urban context was a topic that pushed some of the connections between social sustainability and its relations to nature, graffiti, public spaces, and creativity. Examples of museums, such as HAM, shifting from being exclusive white wall spaces to inviting children to create their own art, reflect how spaces could be made more interactive and inclusive. This same idea can then be taken out of the museum spaces and into outdoor public spaces, where graffiti could be viewed as an extension of those passing through and leaving their mark in their own way, instead of as damaging surfaces.

Over the course of several years, I took photographs of street art/graffiti, patterns in nature, and public spaces, primarily in Helsinki, Finland. These photographs helped me see how spaces change over time and keep track of what marks are added and what is removed. This resulted in more of an awareness of my own surroundings as I navigated Helsinki, and, over time, especially in seeing how the actions and policies of others impact public spaces. Since there is little clarity within current policies and there have been delays in Jätkäsaari’s new legal graffiti wall, the photography was useful in the search for patterns along the canal. This allowed for specific locations to be compared days, weeks, and months apart. Some of the results of this tracking included how graffiti under the bridge Crusellinsilta and the underpass below Porkkalankatu was removed quickly, while stickers on trash cans along the canal remained until they were either covered by new stickers or worn away by the weather.

The participation aspect of this thesis helped in seeing the city from another person’s perspective. Walking and photography were used in this thesis as a way of documenting spaces but also understanding and finding patterns. Walking allowed for participants to feel more comfortable, and explore the canal area between Ruoholahti and Jätkäsaari at their own pace. The participant photographs revealed curiosity surrounding street art, nature, textures, and lines. Most of their dislikes were related to trash, advertising, and signage. Their likes shared similarities with their curiosity but focused on nature and its interactions with the environment. This resulted in their likes including, but not being limited to, ice formations, a barnacle-covered bicycle, murals, graffiti, bridge underpasses, and patterns on walls from biotic and abiotic components interacting with them.

The secondary research largely consisted of seeing how various aspects, including locations and backgrounds, affect the past, present, and future. Looking at graffiti in various contexts creates more room for nuance and a wider range of perspectives. Graffiti from tens of thousands of years ago, all the way to the present day, is connected by the urge to leave a mark. Marks, left for numerous reasons, can not only help strengthen communities, but also give insights into feelings, thoughts, and actions. This can lead to giving more value and respect to those leaving marks in their own ways. Exploring graffiti through a global and historical context, highlights the urge to leave a mark, graffiti’s widespread influence, and its balance between...
permanence and impermanence. Looking at graffiti from a larger scale also brings attention to patterns in policies and how a substantial portion of the negativity surrounding graffiti stems from a now-debunked theory. Past policies, especially the wording within those and definitions surrounding those concepts, impacts public perceptions. Helsinki’s past zero tolerance policies and similar ones in the United States influenced and continue to influence perceptions around graffiti and safety. However, organizations, such as Positive Chalk, are working to use graffiti to encourage communities to advocate for and express themselves. Graffiti, in its various forms, can positively impact communities and increase participation. The secondary research and visual research look at both more traditional and unconventional forms of graffiti and street art, and their connections to social sustainability.

Creating a greater understanding of graffiti and its impacts, by combining experiences, views, and situations from around the world with what is happening within the Finnish context, helped shape the recommendations for the future in the Coloring Book section. Within these recommendations, there is an acknowledgment that different cities and also locations within those cities have different wants and needs. Spaces and communities change over time, so adjustments should be made accordingly, as some areas, such as Jätkäsaari are more ready to embrace graffiti. Nature plays a large role in many aspects of Finnish culture already, so it could positively impact urban planning if graffiti was viewed through the lens of nature. This means bringing learnings from nature into urban spaces, such as how the seasons and elements of nature influence how spaces look and feel, along with the impermanence and collaboration that can be seen in nature. Embracing the impermanence of graffiti and its benefits in creating and strengthening communities, could save resources, including time, money, and energy, that are currently being spent on graffiti removal.

4.2 Conclusion

Graffiti is not a mess that needs to be cleaned up, but rather a start to a conversation and an insight into who is passing through those spaces. By listening to community voices, public spaces can be made more inclusive, accessible, and engaging. Childlike creativity, which can be beneficial for people of all ages, can spark interesting conversations, interactions, and feelings. Resources, which are currently still being allocated to removing graffiti in Helsinki, could be used to create more spaces like the exhibition in HAM or new graffiti walls. When navigating public spaces, there is value in slowing down and looking at one’s surroundings, to see the connections between the built environment, art, and nature. As the seasons change, the focus while navigating shifts with it, bringing attention to new aspects that reveal more about the surroundings and those who go through them. Public spaces, if designed inclusively, can foster creativity and learning, while creating a collection of connections.
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FIGURE REFERENCES

Author’s private collection: Figures 1-178, 229-277

Participant 1: Figures 179, 191-195, 212-216

Participant 2: Figures 184, 196-199, 206-211

Participant 3: Figures 182-183, 200-202, 225-228

Participant 4: Figures 180-181, 187-190, 222-224

Participant 5: Figures 185-186, 203-205, 217-221

Note: All photographs used in this thesis are either from the author’s private collection or from participants during the walk along the canal.
Are we on the same page?:
A thesaurus in leaving marks through street art

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