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## Editorial

Pedro Soares Neves

### Inscribed Territories: Informal Governance

This issue of *Graffiti and Street Art* develops from the 2025 edition of *Urban Creativity*, whose overarching theme—Territory—foregrounded questions of power, boundary-making, and the social production of space. Within that broader framework, *Inscribed Territories: Informal Governance* brings together contributions that examine writing, marking, and image-making as practices through which urban territories are regulated, contested, and reimagined outside formal institutional structures. Across diverse geopolitical contexts, the articles assembled here reveal how graffiti, muralism, and other forms of unofficial inscription operate as mechanisms of governance from below.

Territory, as Henri Lefebvre reminds us, is not merely occupied but produced through spatial practices, representations, and lived experience (Lefebvre, 1991). The inscriptions examined in this issue—on monumental walls, in contested neighborhoods, within post-conflict cities, or across informal social spaces—participate directly in that production. They articulate claims, enforce boundaries, memorialize violence, and negotiate belonging. In doing so, they function as forms of informal governance: systems of regulation that emerge through cultural practice rather than legal codification.

Several contributions foreground writing itself as a technology of power. From large-scale monumental inscriptions to small-scale graffiti interventions, acts of inscription materialize authority and resistance alike. Writing on walls is never neutral; it organizes visibility, frames historical narratives, and establishes hierarchies of voice. As explored in this issue, graffiti can both reproduce and disrupt dominant spatial orders—sometimes simultaneously—making it a particularly productive site for examining the tensions between control and autonomy in urban space (Mitchell, 2003).

Ethnographic and case-based approaches further demonstrate how territory is lived and negotiated in everyday contexts. Third places, neighborhoods marked by conflict, and cities shaped by informal economies become arenas where identity and spatial justice are actively constructed. Here, graffiti and street art do not merely decorate space; they mediate social relations, encode collective memory, and regulate access—often compensating for the absence or failure of formal governance structures (Soja, 2010). In post-war or post-industrial settings, inscriptions take on an especially charged role, functioning as durable records of trauma, survival, and political positioning.

A recurring theme across the issue is illegality—not simply as a legal condition, but as a productive spatial category. Illegal urban art exposes the limits of official planning and highlights how informal practices sustain urban life. In cities where regulation is uneven or exclusionary, graffiti becomes a means of asserting presence and negotiating rights to the city. These dynamics resonate strongly with debates raised at Urban Creativity 2025 concerning ideological and political territories, as well as the blurred boundaries between public and private space.

By placing historical, theoretical, and contemporary perspectives in dialogue, *Inscribed Territories: Informal Governance* advances graffiti and street art studies as a field capable of addressing fundamental questions about power, representation, and spatial organization. Rather than treating inscriptions as secondary or decorative, the issue positions them as active agents in the governance of urban space—agents that reveal how cities are shaped not only by policy and planning, but by everyday acts of writing, marking, and visual claim-making.

In line with the ethos of Urban Creativity, this issue does not seek to stabilize definitions or impose singular frameworks. Instead, it reflects the complexity and contingency of territory itself—inscribed, erased, rewritten, and constantly renegotiated through cultural practice. Together, the contributions affirm graffiti and street art as critical tools for understanding how urban life is governed, contested, and lived beyond official structures.

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