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EL REFUGIO CULTURAL FESTIVAL, GRAFFITI AND URBAN ART IN THE HISTORIC CENTRE OF PUEBLA IN MEXICO

Abstract

The city of Puebla was put on the UNESCO list of Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 1987; its history dates back to the sixteenth century allowing for the preservation of various important buildings, such as churches with baroque and neoclassical facades, buildings from the period known as Novo Hispanics, when some of its historic neighbourhoods were founded, including the Barrio el Refugio, hereinafter referred to as BR, where indigenous people employed in the lime manufacture used to live. Since those times, however, the neighbourhood has become a place with bad reputation, “a den of thieves” (Leicht). The traditional, religious commemoration, the “Fiesta Patronal de la Virgen del Refugio,” is the most important celebration in the neighbourhood. In the Church of La Virgen del Refugio, built in the seventeenth century after an inhabitant painted a mural with the image of the virgin, the “mañanitas” are sung with the Mariachi. During the patronal feast, the “El Refugio Cultural Festival” is held with more than a hundred artists taking part and creating about a thousand murals according to the organiser’s estimation. This happens in the city where a project “Puebla Ciudad Mural” was started, as an initiative of the “Colectivo Tomate,” which sought to regenerate the neighbourhood through art, in alliance with the government and private companies. However, these policies are more tourist oriented rather than benefit the neighbourhood. For this reason, the graffiti movement “Festival Cultural el Refugio” is becoming a meeting point for urban artists from Mexico and Puebla, accustomed to taking up public or private space, as they demand space where they can live and express themselves. For ten years the festival has realised more than one thousand pieces of urban art, including Wild Style graffiti, bombs, stickers, stencil, and murals. All this is done under the patronage of the artists themselves, as three hundred of them come from all over the country to take part in every edition of the festival that does not receive any government support or other form of sponsorship.

Keywords:

public space, graffiti, cultural festival, historic centre, urban art



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INTRODUCTION

The city of Puebla is the fourth most important in Mexico. It was created for various reasons shortly after the conquest of Tenochtitlan and the founding of New Spain. One of the reasons was building a city for the Spanish that had not received anything from the conquest so that they could receive some lands and peons working in their service. Another reason was that they were looking for a strategic place between the capital of New Spain and the port of Veracruz, the main means of communication with the Spanish Empire.

The city was officially founded on 16th April 1531 and named Puebla de los Ángeles, which literally means “City of Angels” it emerged as a utopian city, conceived as a place to experiment with Renaissance ideas about society, a city of commerce and rest. It was thought to be run by Spaniards, industrialists, merchants and various religious orders that built a large number of churches. In 1538, Puebla received the appointment and royal certificate of the King of Spain, Carlos V, and was called “a very noble city.” The city was tax-free for thirty years to foster the development of new industries that were subsequently established. Civil buildings and convents were also built, making the centre of Historic Puebla the second most important city of New Spain (see e.g. Hirschenberg, 1978, pp. 185–223).

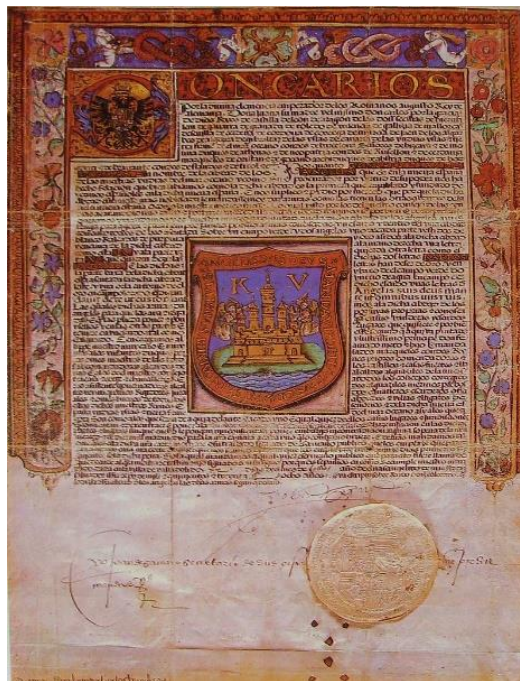


Photo 1. Royal Certificate for the City of Puebla de los Ángeles. Awarded by Carlos V, King of Spain. Source: Gustavo Velarde Tritschler (Gusvel), CC BY 4.0.

A large number of workers was needed to build the new city and to serve the new settlers. Thus the neighbourhoods arose that were inhabited by indigenous population that did agricultural work, peonage. They also developed different trades to fulfil the needs of Spaniards, who also brought European construction styles and techniques which they taught the indigenous people. This model of society, known as *Novo Hispana*, continued for almost three centuries. For their part, the builders were organised in guilds from the beginning of the city's construction, as mentioned by Terán in his book on the history of the Historic Centre of Puebla.

Various trades related to construction functioned under the guild organisation. Guilds were concerned with regulating this activity as well as the learning of it, seeking and promoting good quality in building, which definitely had an impact on better architecture and the physiognomy of the city (Terán, 2010, p. 45).

In the neighbourhoods, life began to acquire particularities according to the trades that flourished there. For example, in "el Alto neighbourhood" pottery was developed, an activity that is still carried out today. The "Xanenetla neighbourhood" was another of those that had great importance since "xalene" was the stone that was used for the construction of the city. There are several versions of the story about the founding of the city but the official one is that of Fray Toribio de Benavente.

The most generalised version about the foundation of the city is the one provided by Fray Toribio de Benavente, also known as Motolinia, who in his chronicle claims that on Sunday, 16th April, 1531, on the infra-octave of Easter, a mass was celebrated for the first time in the place chosen for the new city, a ceremony that he attended. He mentions that "...they had already made and drawn the layout of the town, by a stonemason that was found there (the layout was made), and then without much delay the Indians cleared the site and once the cords were laid, they distributed up to forty floors to forty settlers." For this reason, Motolinia considered the aforementioned date as the founding of Puebla, a date on which, to this day, the event continues to be commemorated (Terán, 2010, p. 32).

In 1987, the city of Puebla was named a "world heritage city" by UNESCO, with two thousand six hundred and nineteen heritage buildings and a six point nine square kilometre polygon, with numerous churches and buildings of various architectural styles, especially its preserved churches representing a mixture of baroque and neoclassical styles. In other cases, the architectural and construction style has deteriorated or completely changed, and only the facades have been preserved.

Due to the importance of the Historic Centre of Puebla, in 1987, UNESCO declared it a World Heritage Site. This declaration led to an increase in land speculation, with the gradual change in land use from residential to commercial and service uses. There was also a euphoria to interfere with historic buildings, either by remodelling or restoring them (although often in an inadequate and incorrect manner). At the same time, there was an attempt to improve the urban image by changing the pavement, removing street vendors from the streets, eliminating advertisements, projects to rescue some of the city's neighbourhoods, etc. (Terán, 2010, p. 27).

Approximately in the middle of the 20th century, with the growth of the city, the population of the neighbourhoods also changed, while the old buildings deteriorated, others became what is known as “Neighbourhoods” where several families live in separate apartments. Many places have ever since totally changed their land use, often by evicting the residents, while other areas have become more touristy with hotels and shops. Gradually, the life of the neighbourhoods, their trades and original inhabitants have disappeared, and as the spaces have become privatised, the patrimonial value has been lost and the lifestyle has started changing rapidly.

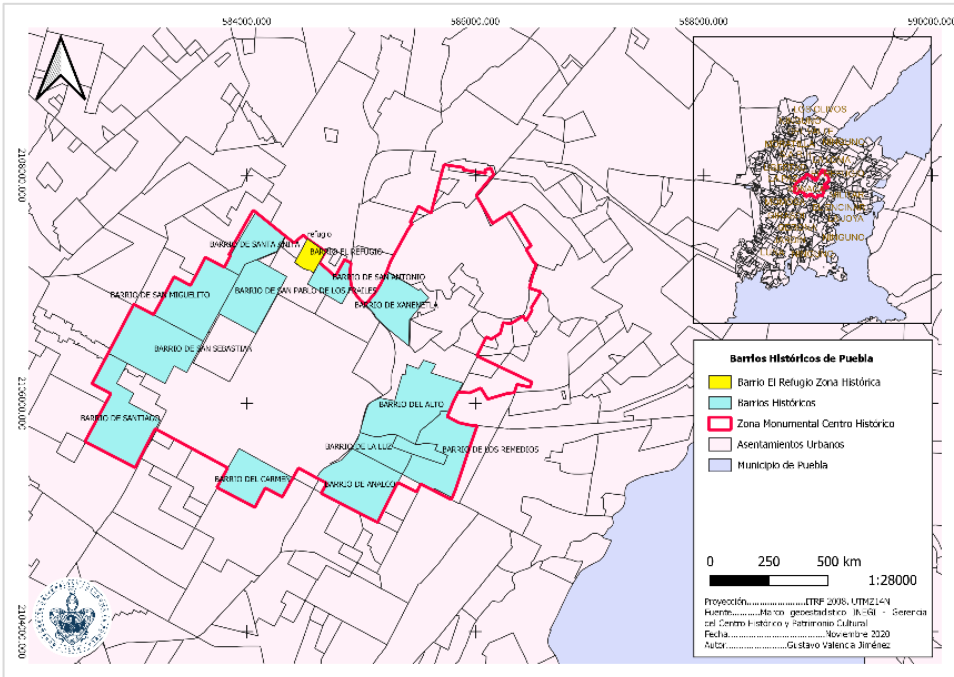


Photo 2. Polygon of the Historic Centre and neighbourhoods (authors' elaboration, 2020).

Given the importance of the city of Puebla and its Historic Centre, conservation and maintenance efforts are a priority for the government, in addition to concentrating a large part of the cultural, economic and tourist life of the city there. The drastic change in land use can be seen—though the facades are preserved in their entirety or partially, the deterioration in the buildings of the historic neighbourhoods is quite evident, as the abandonment, the lack of maintenance and the location of some of the buildings prevent government programmes from encompassing them.

NEIGHBOURHOODS OF PUEBLA, URBAN ART AND THE GOVERNMENT

The first decades of the 20th century, under the mandate of José Vasconcelos, who was the Secretary of Education in Mexico from 1920 to 1924, brought about the commissioning of elaborate murals that represented the past, the present and the future of the Mexicans. The three great exponents of Mexican Muralism were: José Clemente Orozco, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Diego Rivera. These artists achieved great recognition and nowadays provide a reference to understand modern and contemporary Mexican art when some critics and curators speak of neo-muralism.

In 2010, a project called Colectivo Tomate was created in the city of Puebla on the initiative of young students. The objective was to create murals in the Historic Neighbourhoods of Puebla aimed at getting closer to the inhabitants of the neighbourhoods, creating murals based on the life experiences of those inhabitants, and summoning local artists. In subsequent editions, they had the support of the government that incorporated the project into the public policies of the municipality.

Indeed, the evolution of public space, its constitution as a territory of urban expression and social articulation, is sustained, in large part, by the presence of symbolic artefacts that transcend the utility of utilitarian artefacts that populate public space. In this sense, public Art, its presence in public space, can be understood as an indicator of the health of public space, as well as its quality (Remesar, 2013, p. 18).

The organisation Colectivo Tomate, with its “General Objective: Facilitate through art and culture the recognition of identities that strengthen community ties” (Colectivo Tomate, 2019, p. 8), continues to apply its model of participation and art in different parts of Mexico. With more than 15 major cities in the country, they also have another series of mega mural projects and workshops focused on community participation and art. It has become one of the largest

agents in the management and elaboration of murals in Mexico. In 2020, they had simultaneous events in the city of Puebla, in the La Margarita housing unit, with support from the municipal government for more than two million Mexican pesos (almost one hundred thousand dollars), in addition to the sponsorship of Comex, the most important painting company in Mexico, and other types of sponsorships.

The intervention related to this housing unit was an initiative of the City of Puebla implemented through the Municipal Institute of Art and Culture (IMACP) in conjunction with the Colectivo Tomate organisation. In an interview with RAYAS, Alan, who is a member of this group, said that 30 murals would be done in this place, but at the same time they were also working in the auxiliary boards of Resurrección and San Andrés Azumiatla (SEGURIDAD, 2020).

However, in the year 2021, their activities were paralysed not only by the Covid-19 pandemic but also due to the fact that the project “Ciudad Mural San Luis Potosí” was suspended as a result of the actions of a group of national artists. A letter addressed to the city council was prepared to denounce irregularities of the Colectivo Tomate group and appeals were made for the murals to be made by other authors.



Photo 3. Xanenetla neighbourhood, intervention by Colectivo Tomate in 2012.
Source: NTR Zacatecas, 2021.

GRAFFITI – A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE PHENOMENON IN THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURY

The culture or subculture of contemporary graffiti has been subject of a series of debates, and the official history places its origins in the United States in the 1970s, where the bases for the aesthetic forms of current culture came from. These styles have expanded in quantity and quality, with the aerosol as the main tool, and the artists have managed to represent practically all the artistic styles of the visual arts, as each graffiti artist seeks to develop his or her own style that identifies him or her, either with a single image repeated many times or with an artistic production ranging from graffiti to other techniques. However, other art critics do not consider it art at all.

Style, form and methodology, which are the three major concerns of most graffiti writers, are of secondary importance compared to the primary directive of graffiti: to **get seen** getting up, that is, to have your name appear continuously or very frequently. This has been the term used by writers since the mid-1970s (Craig, 1982, p. 49).

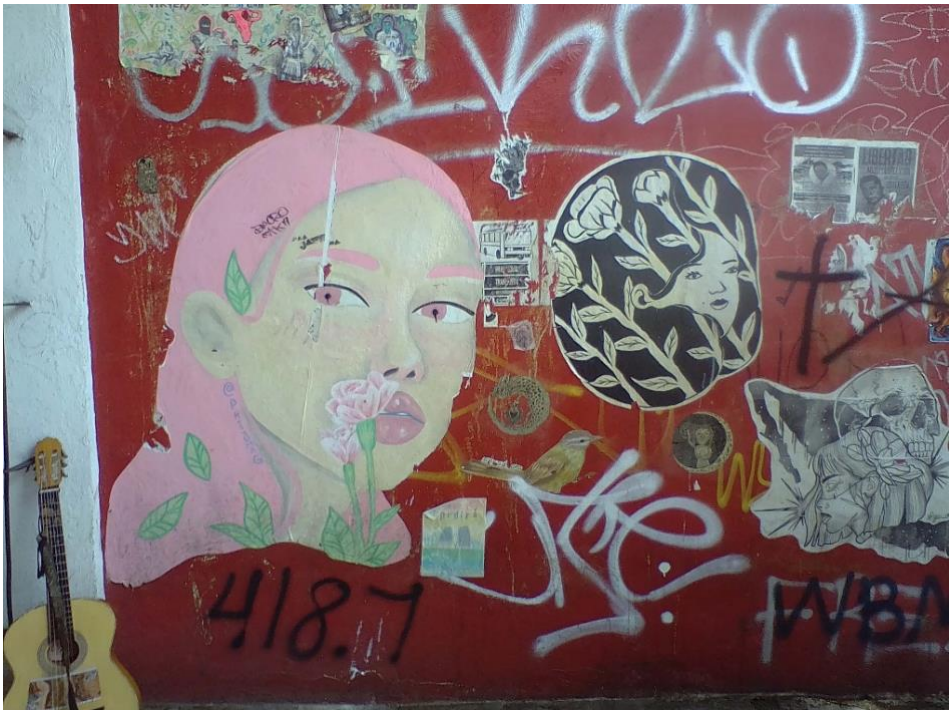


Photo 4. Graffiti and art in the Historic Centre of Puebla 2021. Photo by G. Valencia Jiménez.

However, the manifestations of graffiti currently vary, sometimes ranging between what is legal and what is illegal, and terms such as urban art or street art are also used interchangeably, although the differences are great. Graffiti has become widespread since the 1980s as part of popular culture in all cities of the world, in addition to being present in art galleries, movies, fashion, etc. However, the graffiti subculture has its own codes, since in order to understand it, you have to know how it is done, but above all to do it in some of its forms.

In appearance, the History of Graffiti/Urban Art that has been constructed has been heterogeneous, has evolved towards the **crossmedia** interdisciplinarity¹ that marks our days, and has been mostly independent in terms of its means of financing, objectives of documentation and representation of these phenomena (Figuerola, 2017, p. 2).

The principles of graffiti can be understood as the manifestation of identity, the expression of the graffiti artist's self (Writer, Tagger) through a name or nickname that is his or her tag. This chosen name is generally short, it is expressed by the scratch on the wall (tagging) with a distorted handwriting which has a tangled calligraphy that is often not easy to read for those who do not know it. There are different official styles, but everyone can develop their own style. In some cases, the more complex your signature or the more intrepid the places where you place it, the greater the respect you have from other graffiti artists.

The first and most obvious feature of graffiti is its artistic style, such as that used in early tags. Second, graffiti is public. Anyone, regardless of gender, colour, nationality, or age, can view graffiti as long as that person can walk down the street. The third attribute of graffiti is its interactivity, ranging from wild style tagging to large scale outdoor painting. Art is not necessarily understandable or reasonable (Gengli, 2018, p. 67).

The art of the museums is different from the art of the streets, it could be done by the same artists, even using the same images, but the museum gives importance to the work, since the work is seen as an artistic object in addition to its commercial value. The museum gives it a value, a merit, beyond its materiality or visual representation, and also other aspects influence the work, such as curators or sponsors; graffiti is already common in museums and galleries of all kinds.

¹ We understand Cross Media as an integral marketing strategy which uses different types of channels and media that support each other in order to launch the same message (González, 2020).

The chromatic dimension characterises Mexican popular graphics, also, defines and nourishes it. This dimension seems to be a cry for freedom in the face of so much historical and social oppression, the carefree use of it can only have one meaning: The cry of here we are, this is what we are (Galindo, 2021, p. 100).

THE VIRGIN OF THE REFUGE AND THE CREATION OF THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

Art in the city of Puebla can be appreciated, in addition to its heritage buildings in the Historic Centre, in the form encountered in public museums, private galleries and even bars that have a cultural profile with an agenda of cultural events. However, in the neighbourhood of The Refuge there are no museums or galleries, nor is it part of the tourist tours or other actions that involve the residents in the life of the Historic Centre, despite the presence of a temple of great importance and two parks of considerable dimensions, the Refugio Park and the Angela Peralta Park.

The Refuge is located to the northeast of the Historic Centre. As a result of the veneration of the Virgin of the Refuge, the neighbourhood acquired an identity. Today, the adoration is still maintained in the form of patronal feast on 4th July. More importantly, Hugo Leicht tells in his book *The Streets of Puebla* that a missionary brought with him from Italy an image of the Virgin of the Refuge, but in 1776 an accident happened and the image was lost, so instead a mural was commissioned to be painted, and a temple was later built. One of the neighbourhood activities was working lime kilns, there were two of them at the time. There is also talk of a particular street, which is called the “devil’s bag,” to which numerous legends are attributed due to its irregular layout.

The Refuge neighbourhood is located in an area of urban, social and architectural degradation according to the Management of the Historic Centre, a body that regulates the actions in the Historic Centre polygon, according to the scale encompassing three parameters: an area in good condition, an area in the process of degradation and a degraded area. Taking into consideration the social, urban and architectural aspects, the Refuge is located in a degraded area. In the case of the Refuge, many buildings were deliberately abandoned and flooded so that they could be destroyed to avoid spending money on restoration, conservation and maintenance of the buildings, as they were so deteriorated, and the use of land was changed, while others simply remain abandoned.

Formerly the street was nothing more than a path between the orchards of the mill of San Antonio, crossed by the subway aqueduct, which is marked by the unevenness of the level... An image of the Virgin carried by a Jesuit missionary on his travels in Italy was publicly crowned in that country in 1717... (Leicht, 1967, p. 375).

Part of this abandonment seen in the Refuge is due to the fact that economic activities are low, tourist activities are practically nil, as well as recreational activities, since the neighbourhood is not close to the first square of the Historic Centre and the street known as the Market in the 18 West, which delineates the Historic Centre. The most significant activity in the neighbourhood is the patronal feast of 4th July, where the residents organise themselves to carry out the festival that includes several activities, from singing the mañanitas to the Virgin with the Mariachi, wrestling shows, and refreshments, among other kinds of entertainment. Those days are holidays, the residents mix and mingle, and there is a celebratory atmosphere different from the rest of the year.

Don Pedro, in 1746, placed it in a niche at the corner of Guevara and Santísima Streets, in front of his house... A resident of the neighbourhood of La Calera (of Antonio), who lived at 5 Norte Street, had an effigy painted and venerated it in his little house which became a small chapel for a few weeks. As the adoration of the image grew, the same year, the Jesuit father Miguel José de Ortega erected a larger chapel on the east side of the same Norte Street... (Leicht, 1967, p. 378).



Photo 5. Temple of the Virgin of the Refuge. Photo by G. Valencia Jiménez, 2021.

In this party context, a project was initiated by Joel Reyes, known as “WaRior,” (hereafter as WaRior) a native of the neighbourhood, who for the last ten years has organised what is now known as “El Refugio Cultural Festival.” A graffiti event that has been inserted into the neighbourhood celebrations and has gradually spread. Some residents approve and have changed their perception of these demonstrations, some have joined the project by donating their wall or asking for a mural. However, for others, the works are not understandable or they do not like them and prefer something “normal,” which has also been respected.

To better understand the festival as well as the artists’ motivations and the way they carry out their work, we have approached Joel Reyes, the artists and the residents of the neighbourhood at events, doing formal and informal interviews in addition to our own field work and the photographic record of the works.

(...) such is the case of the “Graffiteros,” whose youth identity is constituted from a way of living in the city, of relating to the urban space and of leaving a trace of their existence (Cruz, 2010, p. 108).



Photo 6. El Refugio 2020 Cultural Festival, Monkey Kings crew. Photo by G. Valencia Jiménez, 2021.

EL REFUGIO CULTURAL FESTIVAL – 10 CONTINUOUS YEARS

Urban art and graffiti festivals are common nowadays. In Mexico, some of the most famous include the Meeting of Styles, an international festival which began in Germany in 1993, and the Graffiti League, another of the best known festivals which arrived in Mexico in 2009, emphasising the expressions of the counterculture. There are numerous festivals of urban art, graffiti and other art expressions in the public space, and the agents, the purposes or intentions, as well as the way in which the events are developed are also diverse.

The graffiti community all over the world names the productions, the practice and the graffiti artist in the same way. The name of the productions are not only globally recognised but keep the same forms; among these are tags or signatures, throw-ups, bombers, wildstyle, deltas, comics, stencils or templates, stickers or labels, pisone, etc. (Cruz, 2010, p. 115).



Photo 7. Poster of the El Refugio Cultural Festival, Puebla, 3–4 April 2021.

Source: El Refugio Cultural Festival.

The El Refugio Cultural Festival was born as a pretext to celebrate the birthday of WaRior, graffiti artist and visual artist, a native of the Refuge neighbourhood, who got some space to paint with his friends to make some pieces of graffiti. Later on, he came up with the idea of making the murals during the celebration of the Virgin of the Refuge, in the month of July, summoning more artists and negotiating permits with the residents.

As it is a historical site, this type of intervention involving the use of aerosol on the wall would be prohibited, but the change in land use, the abandonment of the buildings and the location of the neighbourhood made it possible for them to avoid problems in carrying out the event. The festival has been integrated into the religious festival of the neighbourhood, and the residents and the artists are identifying with the same.

The festival has been registered by those responsible for the event, with a Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/festivalculturalelrefugio> that shows the work that has been done and also provides links for the artists who wish to join. There are some journalistic notes on the festival, photographic record, and videos, although the information is scarce. That is why we approached the project leader Joel Reyes to learn more about the festival: with the participation of about three hundred artists and more than one thousand works, the festival has been beneficial for the economy of the neighbourhood since it has generated an extra floating population. The festival has involuntarily turned the facades of the neighbourhood into canvases for the works and has generated economic activity.



Photo 8. El Refugio 2020 Cultural Festival, 36 crew. Photo by G. Valencia Jiménez, 2021.

The management of the festival is carried out by Joel Reyes and several collaborators, with some members always changing. The festival has been managed without support from the government or private initiative by the artists themselves out of their fondness and love of graffiti. Therefore, this festival is unique in its genre due to the type of intervention carried out within the Historic Centre, the relationship that has been created with the residents, the artists, the authorities and external agents who have seen the project and have approached it with the intention of learning about or supporting the movement. An example of such community actions can be found in the text of Grane where he mentions the following:

The collective nature of Chicano/a community muralism implied a transformative process for the artists and the communities, who experienced a radical process of conscientization, in Paulo Freire's terms, in which people became aware of their oppression but also of their power to transform. Thus, the murals had an educational role for a population that was culturally and politically excluded (Grane, 2017, p. 64).



Photo 9. Joel Reyes, artist and coordinator of El Refugio Cultural Festival. Photo by Photocar, 2020

In the interviews with Joel Reyes, the artist tells us that he was born in the neighbourhood and when he started working with graffiti he was not well by his neighbours in a positive light, since he did illegal graffiti at an early age. Since the beginning of the festival, the residents have started to change their perception of Joel, recognising him as “The Artist of the Neighbourhood.” They know that he directs the artists who have changed the appearance of the neighbourhood and have not caused problems, so the alliances between the residents and the festival keep growing. It is interesting to see that part of the foundation of the neighbourhood and the newly created images have developed a special relationship, reaching from its past to the present, with the mural of the Virgin at its roots, although illegal, authentic and primal graffiti also appears.

The twentieth century was a lesson that social demonstration is not prohibitive where the federation must act but not in a radical way because the history of 68 should be learnt “2nd October is not forgotten” [“Tlatelolco massacre”: around 10,000 high school and college students protested against the Olympics in Plaza de las Tres Culturas and hundreds of people were killed]. Hence the claim of public space seen as a stage for social demonstration (Hernández, 2012, p. 14).

For artists, the festival is a benchmark in the local and national scene in the world of graffiti. One of the key points is the recognition of the work, either for its illegal nature and its production or for the scope of its crew. Hence, the festival has become a platform to “raise the level” of graffiti in Puebla, giving large-format canvases to artists and groups who see the Refuge as a meeting point for artists from the central-southern region of the country, which is also an opportunity for those who want to start working with graffiti, since the festival tries to give space to all those interested.



Photo 10. El Refugio Festival Cultural, 2021, Puerto Marques, Acapulco, Mexico.
Photo by G. Valencia Jiménez.

EI REFUGIO IN PUERTO MARQUÉS ACAPULCO

El Refugio in Acapulco is another place where the festival takes place. Acapulco is one of the most important tourist destinations in Mexico, the El Refugio Cultural Festival project has incorporated this new location and managed to appropriate the walls of Puerto Marques, a small port adjoining Acapulco. The port had its best years in the 1970s, but the murals have given it new life, as they

have brought new visitors, such as the artists visiting this location for five continuous years, and arose the interest of the locals. The residents know the results of their artistic activity as the artists stayed in the largest hotel in the port and painted a great wall two kilometres long.

Artists from the city of Puebla, Mexico City CDMX, Guerrero, etc. meet at this venue. The concept arose as a result of the invitation of an artist from Puerto Marqués who during his participation in the Refugio festival in Puebla suggested the idea of taking the festival to Acapulco. Each year since its inception, the quality of the works has improved, raising the level of the participants and making alliances so that the project develops in an orderly manner, all this coordinated by Joel Reyes and his team.



Photo 11. El Refugio Festival Cultural, 2021, Puerto Marques, Acapulco, Mexico.

Photo source: El Refugio Festival Cultural.

PLASMA URBANA

The study of graffiti in the El Refugio neighbourhood is part of a thesis that is being currently written by one of the authors of the article in order to obtain the degree of Master in Territorial Planning. As part of academic research and personal experience concerning some artistic topics, the proposal called “Plasma Urbana” arose: <https://www.facebook.com/plasma.urbana>. The initiative is an agent of promotion and artistic education, emphasising urban cultures, urban art and graffiti.

For this purpose, we started a series of graffiti workshops aimed at children from the city and the neighbourhood, as a pretext to get closer to the inhabitants of the area.

It is not the finished work that provides the urban artist with the enjoyment of art and his passion, but the very act of creating it. Street art is essentially an ephemeral art form, which means that the work of art itself has a limited life: it is not intended to last forever. In fact, the best street art is thought to erode over time and eventually disappear (Carlsson, 2010, p. 9).

It is a consolidated group of BUAP (Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de *Puebla*) that has gained international recognition for its work in different areas of urban planning and architecture. They have been involved with the inhabitants of the Refugio neighbourhood as well as other neighbourhoods and have sought to contribute to the improvement of spaces and the social fabric. One of the projects implemented by this organisation in 2013 was called Bolsa del Diablo-Bolsa de Color.

Bolsa de Color arises as a result of the integral project for the Refugio neighbourhood that has been worked on since 2013 in which various actions have been implemented ranging from citizen involvement projects, such as participatory design where workshops have been held with the population for urban and architectural projects, activities with the population for urban and architectural projects, to cultural activities that have fostered other creative proposals within the neighbourhood (Hernández, 2017, p. 296).

Plasma Urbana as a new agent becomes a kind of catalyst between the El Refugio Cultural Festival and Re Genera's intentions to understand graffiti activities in the neighbourhood, since both agents have worked in the neighbourhood for more than a decade. To make this alliance more evident, the idea arose of creating free workshops for children in the neighbourhood called "Graffiti in a minute." It was organised for children from ten years old, but during the activity children eight years old or less participated, with at least twenty children taking part in the first two sessions. Based on this alliance of Plasma Urbana, El Refugio and Re Genera Espacio, it has been possible to bring the population closer, experiment with education and graffiti aimed at children and young people. Above all, however, the intention is to leave something significant for the children of the neighbourhood, not just a toy, an object or an activity, based on something that they see all the time, something that catches their attention but is perhaps not so accessible. Now they can have some public space where they can learn and share through experience and identification with the graffiti culture. Bazant points out the importance of urban identity, the values shared by citizens, as in the case of El Refugio Festival Cultural, graffiti has created a community around the graffiti subculture and the neighbourhood.



Photo 12. The first session of the “Graffiti in minute” workshop with Sufre and WaRior, El Refugio Cultural Festival, Re Genera Espacio and Plasma Urbana, in progress, 2021. Photo by G. Valencia Jiménez.



Photo 13. The second session of the “Graffiti in a minute” workshop with Dayetos and WarRior, El Refugio Cultural Festival, Re Genera Espacio and Plasma Urbana, in progress, 2021. Photo by G. Valencia Jiménez.

If historic centres are deteriorated, it is because they no longer have social concurrence or economic attractiveness. They are difficult to revitalise in the short term because of the high investment required to remodel streets, squares, monuments and heritage buildings, although it is feasible to carry out this task little by little and in the long term. The historic buildings are catalogued by INAH and are untouchable. The question is: who remodels them and for what purpose (Bazant, 2014, p. 24)?

However, nothing more can be said at this time, as the project is just beginning since the last workshops began in May 2021 when this article was written. Therefore, the conclusions concerning the project could not yet be reached, but a large number of children from the neighbourhood and other parts of the city already participated in this last activity organised on 9th May 2021. Arrangements were made with the young people from the neighbourhood to work in the artistic instruction on topics of their interests.

**PLASMA URBANA . EL REFUGIO
Y RE GENERA ESPACIO**

Te invitamos al 1er "curso-taller"
GRAFFITI AL MINUTO
dirigido a niñas, niños y adolescentes
de 10 a 19 años

TOTALMENTE GRATIS
APRENDERÁS TÉCNICAS DE GRAFFITI
con artistas del Festival Cultural el Refugio

Imparte:
WaRior / SUFRE / DAYETOS / URZE

Coordina: Gustavo Roboteotl

Domingos
MAYO 2 TAG & BOWEN 11:00 a 13:00 hrs.
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Lugar: parque Ángela Peralta
Barrio el Refugio, 5 norte 24 pte. Puebla

Photo 14. The first course workshop of "Graffiti in a minute" with WaRior, Sufre, Dayetos and UrZe, Festival Cultural el Refugio, Re Genera Espacio and Plasma Urbana, in progress, 2021.
Photo by G. Valencia Jiménez.

CONCLUSIONS

Urban art and graffiti are present in the city of Puebla, manifested in great artistic activity but it is concentrated above all in the Historic Centre, where private groups and the government have seen opportunities and created alliances under the slogan of improving the space through urban art and community participation, among other types of support. Some civil associations and other groups have benefited from these programmes and sponsorships, but there are sometimes complaints from the artists, and the population's ignorance of the activities and their long-term results can also be seen.

The El Refugio Cultural Festival is a graffiti festival that has been gaining presence due to the quality of the artists who have participated in it. It is considered an important event for graffiti experts, although it is an event born out of private initiative. Being managed by the artists themselves to show what is new in their work. A community has been created that shares the taste for graffiti and sees in this project possibilities to create, learn and be a platform for new graffiti artists. In addition, other activities have been carried out such as exchanges of stickers and concerts of various alternative music genres, e.g.: ska, punk, metal, rock, hip hop.

On the other hand, the festival has also been gaining popularity among the residents who see painting the walls as a positive activity, giving a different image to the neighbourhood that in general is considered quiet. Today, more than ever, it is a huge gallery of urban art and graffiti, accessible to the entire population, with pieces by the best exponents of this art locally and nationally.

In conclusion, the El Refugio Cultural Festival has won the neighbourhood, the artists who have participated and visited the neighbourhood because of graffiti have found a point of reference for their art, and the residents have gradually changed their perception, even the pastors of the Christian temple have shown solidarity with the activities that promote artistic education.

The identity of the festival is already consolidated, as it has formed alliances with other national and international festivals, provides an opportunity to new artists, gets involved in the life of the neighbourhood, and has attracted the best national exponents of graffiti. However, since there is no more information in any medium on the festival, in-depth research on this phenomenon is just in its infancy and only continuing work in the neighbourhood with the artists and the population will broaden the understanding of these peculiar artistic works that have been created at the El Refugio Cultural Festival and are also present in other corners of the city.

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