

## Analysing the Geography of Street Art

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### ABSTRACT:

Urban landscapes can be seen as works of art: as a sculptor shapes clay, culture shapes the physical environment over time to create unique places. Although we shape landscapes, the relationship is reciprocal: the places we inhabit influence the life we live, and urban landscapes provide opportunities for some while imposing constraints on others.

Street art provides insights into the cultural forces shaping urban spaces, as it is deeply embedded in the surrounding environment. It can spotlight overlooked voices and foster political dialogue. In some neighborhoods street art reimagines, promotes and markets gentrifying areas. In others, it is a powerful expression of marginalized voices.

While it is clear that street art has the power to shape urban landscapes, this research analyzes the impact of the urban landscape on the geography of street art. How does the street shape the art? Why is street art concentrated in some areas and absent in others? To accomplish this we analyze neighborhood-scale economic, demographic, political, cultural and environmental processes shaping the location and distribution of non-sanctioned street art in the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and Saint Paul, Minnesota).

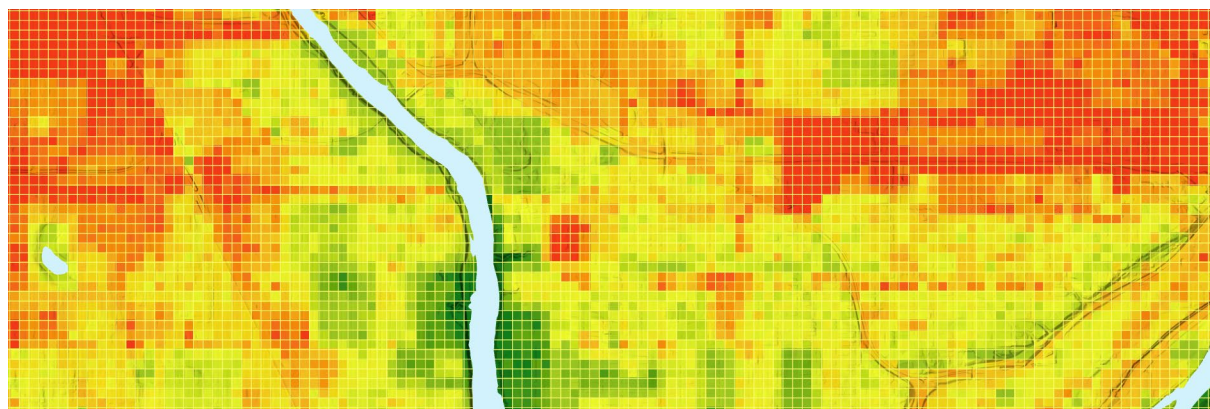
First, we discuss the results of field surveys of unsanctioned street art conducted in Saint Paul's Midway neighborhood. Observations from these surveys were used to generate a detailed map of street art which was then overlaid with maps depicting a wide range of landscape features. This process provided insights into the cultural and environmental processes shaping the geography of unsanctioned street art.

Second, a Geographic Information System (GIS) was used to construct map layers depicting these landscape features for the entire Twin Cities Metropolitan area. Then, insights about the geography of street art in the Midway neighborhood were used to parameterize GIS suitability modeling tools which were used to generate a hotspot map displaying the hypothesized locations of clusters of street art in the Twin Cities (Figure 1).

Third, we briefly discuss the [George Floyd and Anti-Racist Street Art Archive](#), a crowd sourced database seeking to document street art from around the world. It contains more than 1,000 submissions from the Twin Cities.

Fourth, we analyze the actual location and distribution of street art in the Twin cities by mapping clusters of street art from the George Floyd database. We then compare this pattern to the predicted hotspots generated by our suitability model.

Our results show that the location of street art in the Twin Cities is highly concentrated and that our model accurately predicts the locations of most clusters of street art. We also find street art in unique and unexpected places. Thus, the geography of street art is shaped by a combination of urban structure and unique, local factors. This matters because our interpretation of art is shaped by the setting it is viewed in. Meaning can shift with location and a fuller understanding of spatial context can deepen our connections with both art and the urban landscape.



**Figure 1.** The geography of street art in Saint Paul, Minnesota (detail). Relatively high concentrations of street art are hypothesized to appear in red areas.