

Spraycity.at—Graffiti Archive and Online Map

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Abstract

Spraycity is a documentation archive dedicated to the graffiti writing movement in Austria. The archive was founded in 2001 by art historian Stefan Wogrin to react to the transience that goes hand in hand with writing. The works of the graffiti writing movement are usually ephemeral and not destined to last forever. The 'Spraycity' archive aims to record, archive and catalogue the resulting works as photographs and makes them accessible to the public for a longer period. While some works have already disappeared from the public, photographs are often the only possibility to let them remain. The archive currently includes about 300,000 image documents from all over Europe (mainly in Austria), Asia and the USA. The 'Spraycity' website (<https://www.spraycity.at>) forms an interface through which a selection of around 100,000 photos can be accessed online. Each photo contains metadata and is also searchable through its categorisation and keywords.

Keywords

archive; Austria; documentation; graffiti; Vienna; writing

1. Introduction

Already at the beginning of the graffiti writing movement in North America at the end of the 1960s, it was clear that the resulting works were not intended for eternity and would be removed from their image carriers or painted over after a very short time. Fortunately, we now have photographs by the creators themselves or by amateur and professional photographers which were taken shortly after a work's creation and before its removal. Based on the photographs, the works of that time can still be viewed, classified and analysed today. As early as the 1980s, it was the media that was responsible for the worldwide distribution of the movement using photographs and films, which was also accompanied by a stylistic takeover in Europe (Hinz, 2018). However, canvases made by the writers in response to the demands of the art market have also been preserved from that period. Those canvases were also responsible for the worldwide reception of the movement, as they were displayed in galleries, museums and at art fairs in Europe (Stahl, 1992). However, those canvases show the original content from the subway exteriors in a more romanticised way. On the canvas, graffiti became the subject of the paint-

ing, while photographs and video recordings are predominantly of a documentary nature. In particular, cinema films such as 'Wild Style' (1982) and 'Beat Street' (1984) or the documentary 'Style Wars' (1983), along with books like 'Subway Art' (1984) and 'Spraycan Art' (1987), are often cited by first-generation European writers as the most influential publications and sources of inspiration—also with regard to the reception and adoption of the North American form language. During the 1980s, graffiti was still primarily conveyed via mass media. In the 1990s graffiti magazines, such as the German 'On the Run' or the Swiss '14k' magazine followed. Those magazines were often produced by the writers themselves (Kraus, 2021). The magazine 'Servus Wien' was also published a little later in Austria, in the mid-1990s. Those magazines were mostly focused on the local area, i.e. a city, a region or a country. Usually, international photo submissions were also shown, which resulted in a lively exchange across national borders. A decade later, around the turn of the millennium, the internet was becoming increasingly important among writers for the distribution and display of their works, which resulted in countless websites being created in the short term (Mininno, 2021).

The website 'Art Crimes', for example, which is also known as 'graffiti.org' and which can still be accessed today, acted as a hub (<https://www.graffiti.org>). Many websites from that time were hardly and often badly structured or limited to the work of an artist or a crew. 'Art Crimes', on the other hand, has a clear structure. The content can be accessed both geographically (by continent, country and city) and by the artist's name. In addition to photo galleries, there are countless links to other websites, even if some are no longer accessible today. Some photos from Vienna can also be accessed here, although the selection of images is more of an exemplary nature. In addition, the photos contain hardly any metadata. The artist and recording location are sometimes completely missing. Austria itself also had its first websites around the turn of the millennium, such as that of the 'IFG, Institute for Graffiti Research' run by Norbert Siegl. Here one can find an extensive collection of information, some of which is scientific, as well as a graffiti encyclopaedia that illustrates parts of the archive and makes them accessible via the website (<http://www.graffitieuropa.org>). But there is no possibility to search for specific places or artists. Another website from Austria was 'graffiti.dasign.at' from 'Tesa', which was online until approximately 2006. The website provided a photo gallery, which was structured through the federal states. Each photo had a unique identification number, along with artist's and location information. However, the classification was limited to the Austrian federal states. A subdivision was not possible except for Vienna, which is both a city and a federal state. In addition, a so-called 'Hot Spots' list was made available via the website. The list contained both permitted spray areas as well as places in Austria that were not permitted to paint but were popular among the writers. From the list it was not clear whether the mentioned area is a legal wall or not. There was also no map with a general overview, but a map for each spot with the marked location. A short time later, other websites such as 'flasht.org', 'graffiti.stare.at' and 'innsbrock.at.tf' were created ('graffiti.stare.at' is no longer accessible today but since June 2022 the complete archive of 'innsbrock.at.tf' is available again through the 'Spraycity' website). In my opinion, there was a lot of Austrian material that was accessible online, but there was no comprehensive collection that provided the recipient with all the extensive information, like about the culture, the commu-

nity or the history. The incipient interest in graffiti culture probably leads the inexperienced layman to the internet very quickly these days, which I can also confirm from my own experience. With the knowledge of the Austrian websites, I founded the website 'Spraycity' in 2001, with which I am still trying to create a central, comprehensive place for graffiti in Austria.

In particular, the following goals should be achieved first:

- Creation of an online accessible archive
- Structure by country, city and category (Allover, Hall of Fame, Line, Street, Trains)
- Creation of a map with all legal graffiti areas in Austria, including sources that confirm the legality of a wall
- Collection of press articles

2. Archive

The 'Spraycity' archive now includes around 300,000 photos, of which around 100,000 are accessible via the online platform (all other photos are exclusively in use for other projects, such as the 'Offline Graffiti Magazine', newspaper articles or books). The archive is also constantly expanded - with photos from 'Spraycity's own documentation tours, photos sent and photos from external archives. 'Spraycity' collects photos from graffiti created worldwide (currently, photos from Asia, the USA and Europa are accessible).

The archive is divided into:

- Online archive (publicly accessible)
- Collection and digitisation of photographs acquired before 'Spraycity' was founded in 2001, in particular for use in the ongoing book project on the history of graffiti in Vienna
- Collection of photos for exclusive use in the 'Offline Graffiti Magazine'
- Collection and archiving of publicly accessible archives, blogs and social media accounts
- Collection of books and magazines
- Press archive (thousands of articles from the 1980s to today)
- To make it easier to search, most of the archive material has already been provided with metadata.



Figure 1. Part of an installation by 'Spraycity' showing photos alphabetically ordered by the painted words. Exhibition 'Take-over', Wien Museum, 2019, Photo by Stefan Wogrin

3. Documentation

Since many works are only visible for a short time, there is a constant, systematic ongoing documentation by 'Spraycity'. The geographical centre of the documentation are the city of Vienna and its surroundings. The documentation in the federal states takes place at irregular intervals. Due to its size and population, Vienna can also be considered the centre of the Austrian writing movement, which is also reflected in the number of works. The documentation usually takes place as part of our documentation tours, which have the purpose of photographing as many new works as possible (mainly works not in the archive yet). A photo tour usually takes 2–6 hours and is done 2–4 times per week. A specific target is typically selected, and the environment is then examined for new works. When choosing the destination, previous photo tours are also taken into account, so that certain places are not visited directly one after the other. Specific locations with increased frequency, such as the Danube Canal or certain 'Wienerwand' (legal graffiti walls in Vienna) areas, are recorded every three days on average. Planning a photo tour is usually preceded by an investigation of online content (like social media platforms) for potential newly created works, as well as anonymous tips.

3.1. Photography

New works are taken almost exclusively in the form of an overview photo. Thereby, the work is positioned in the middle of the picture. Since the selection of the location is often essential, the surroundings are also partly recorded. In addition, graffiti in the public space is always connected to it and should, therefore, not be seen separately from it. The image carrier or background should also be visible in the photo. Detailed photos are only used very rarely, for example for small-scale works like stencils or stickers—although an overview photo is always created here as well. On average, 1 to 3 photos are recorded for each work. At specific locations, overview photos of entire walls or wall sections are also taken to ensure later comparison with older photos from the same place. In this way, the development but also the stratification of the individual works can be tracked and analysed over time. For the recordings, we use mostly full-frame single-lens-reflex (SLR) or system cameras. In case of spontaneous encounters, backup photos are also taken with the smartphone. On average, between 10,000 to 15,000 photos are taken each year.

4. Online Plattform

Historically Spraycity was founded in 2001 as an online

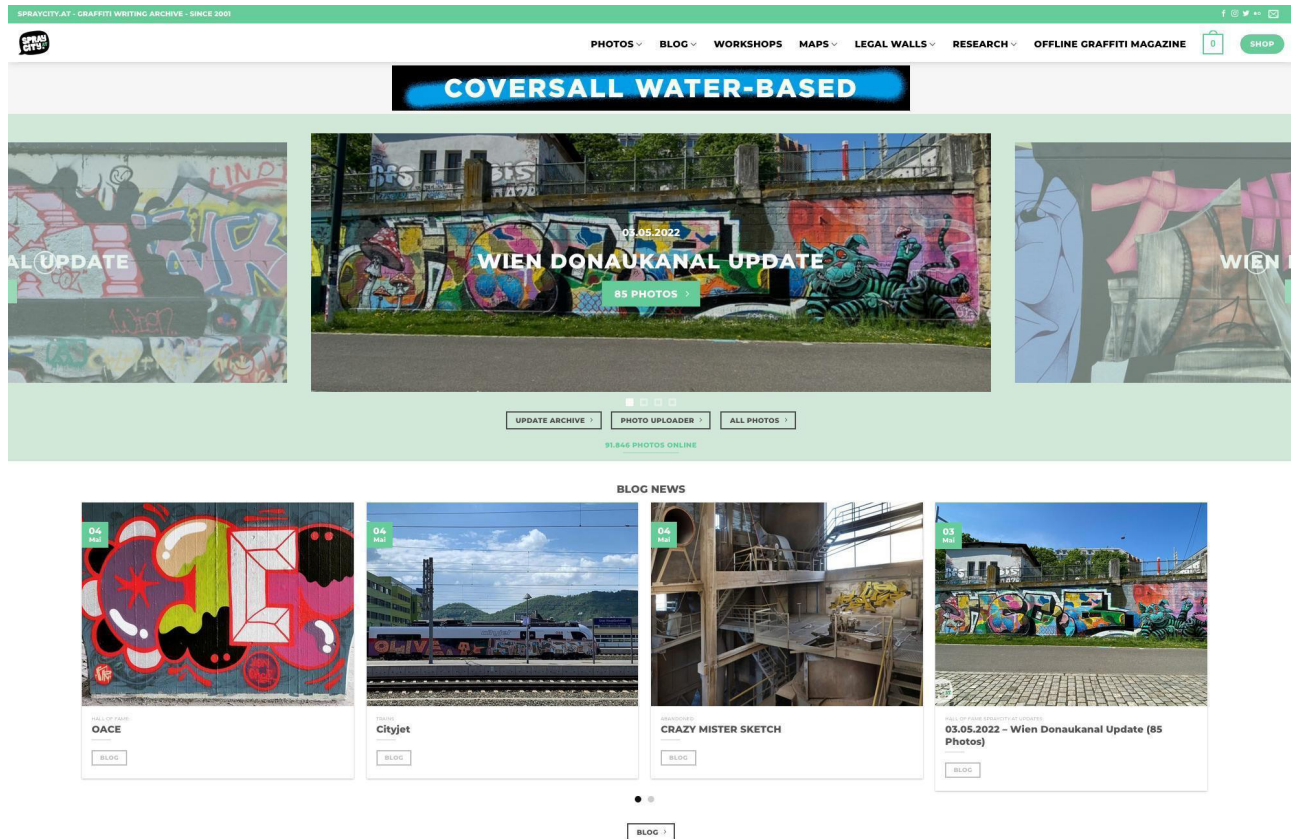


Figure 2. Screenshot of the homepage, available at www.spraycity.at (2022-05-04)

platform, which exists to this day and has been constantly renewed and expanded. The main components are the online photo archive, the blog and the maps, as well as an online shop.

4.1. Online Photo Archive

In the beginning, the photo archive was implemented with HTML (HyperText Markup Language) and the scripting language PHP (Hypertext Preprocessor, but initially "Personal Home Page Tools"). As the archive grew over the years, this was no longer sufficient, and the gallery was converted to open-source content management systems (WordPress and Piwigo). The photo archive can be accessed via the home page. On top, there is the 'Spraycities' map, which gives an overview of the cities that are available in the archive. Below one can choose between the main categories. On the one hand, geographically (Austria or International) and also

according to specific categories such as events (jams and exhibitions), sketches, street art & murals or atmosphere photos. On the other hand, external archives can also be accessed directly from here. Such are digital or analogue photos from external photographers as well as collections or inventories from former websites. A separate folder is also created for each photo update. Updates are usually grouped geographically, showing an average of 30 to 150 photos from a city, state, or country. Photos of events are also uploaded to the online archive. If there are photos from different cities in one update, the content in the folder can also be displayed separately according to the associated subfolders. The sorting in the respective folders shows the newest photos. The user can add his photos to the archive via an uploader. However, the photos are not immediately visible, but will be reviewed and added to the archive with one of the following updates. The upload is anonymous or,

if desired, an archive with photo credits can be created. The administration is currently carried out by 'Spraycity'; user registration is not (yet) possible. The online photo archive currently shows around 100,000 photos from 31 countries and 300 cities.

4.1.1. Metadata

All photos in the online archive are provided with metadata. The archive material can already be sorted according to specific metadata via a menu bar on the start page of the online archive. The selection can be made by 'Category', 'Type', 'Colour' or 'Year'.

- 'Category' contains the main categories. Here all photos on trains or on the street can be displayed, for ex-

ample. It is also possible to show different content, like old-school works, political slogans or football graffiti. The latter have gathered enormous popularity in Vienna and Austria in recent years, which is why a specific gallery is dedicated to football graffiti. For example, it is possible to search for works related to a specific football club.

- 'Type' describes the image content and its superordinate classification. For example, any abstract or photorealistic works can be retrieved. In addition, displaying photos according to classic writing terms such as 'Throw Up' or 'Wildstyle' or 'Wholecar' and 'Wholetrain' is also possible.
- 'Colour' enables the display of 13 different basic colours of one work. In the annotation, the most fre-

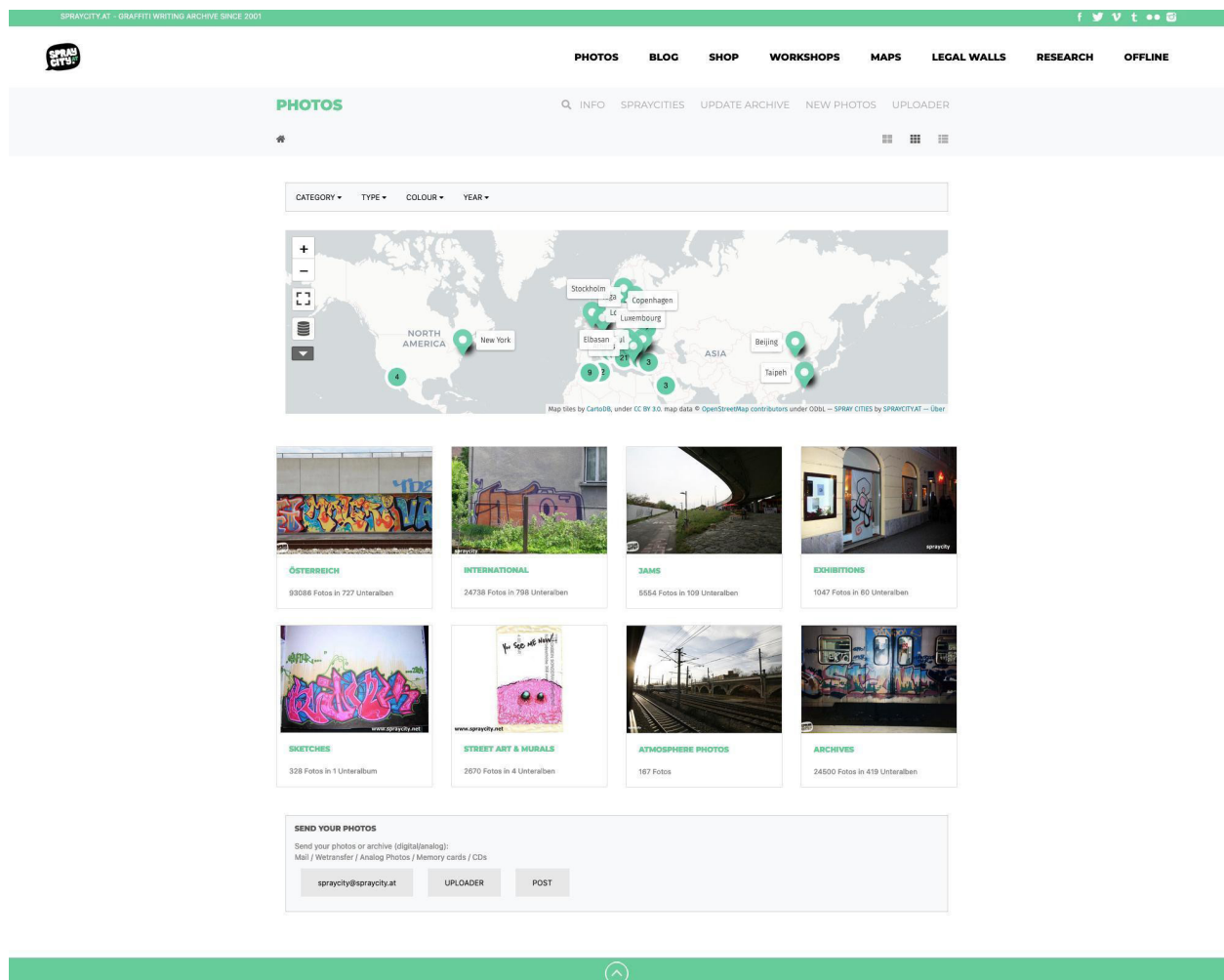


Figure 3. Screenshot of Spraycity's online photo archive, www.spraycity.at/gallery (2022-05-04)

quently used primary colours of a work are recorded. In addition, colour combinations of two or more colours can be retrieved using the search function.

- 'Year' means the year in which a work was created. The display is currently possible without gaps from 1991 to 2022. The oldest classic writing works in the archive were created between 1984 and 1989. A category with historical graffiti is currently under construction.

At the photo detail view level, each image contains a selection of metadata. In addition to photo credits and the classification in the different folders, the publication date and the number of page views can also be displayed. In individual cases, the recording date can also be called up. Additionally, each photo is tagged with country, city, and location information. The keywords are also used for the search function, which means that many keywords can also be combined. In particular, the location is given in detail for many photos. For example, specific addresses with street and house numbers can be found. But a classification according to different image carriers is also possible.

The keyword 'content' can be used to describe both the stylistic and the content level of a work. These can, for example, be attributes from the formal language of writing, such as arrows, crowns, highlights or drips. However, certain designs like clouds or bubbles, can also be displayed in isolation. In addition, specific content such as different animals, body parts or objects can be called up. Political content or people can also be found in this way. With so-called 'messages', the actual written text content is transcribed. It is also possible to sort the archive by artist, which is only used for legal walls and projects. In the case of walls that are not allowed, the term 'text' is used instead in some cases, with which an attempt is made to decode what is written. However, this is usually a subjective interpretation that does not always have to refer to the artist's name.

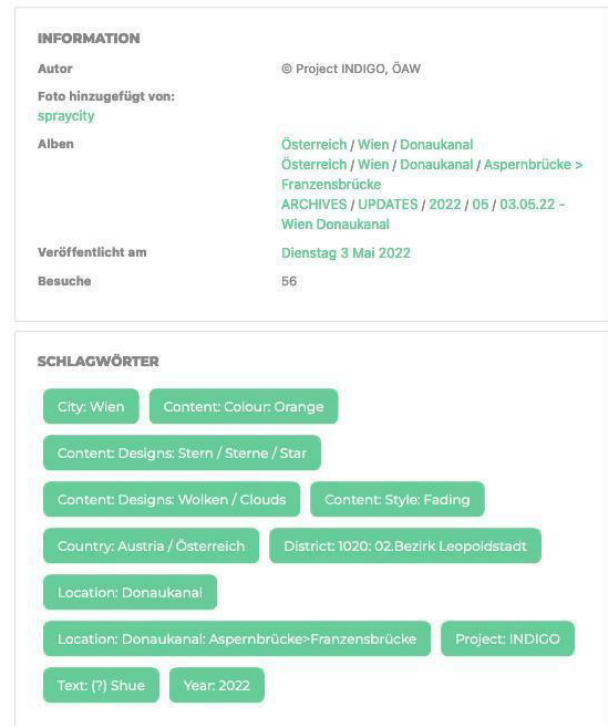


Figure 4. Screenshot of the metadata like keywords (Ger. Schlagwörter) stored in Spraycity's online photo archive, www.spraycity.at/gallery (2022-05-04)

4.2. Blog

The blog acts like a news portal and is updated daily. Current photos from social media sites or videos are published several times a day. Currently, around 18,000 photos are accessible through the blog. In addition, there are references to current press articles. The blog also contains useful information for the community about events such as jams or exhibitions. The published content on the blog has a major focus on Austria.

4.3. Interactive Maps

To simplify the presentation of the archive material and to locate legal areas, 'Spraycity' creates interactive maps that can be accessed using OpenStreetMap or Google Maps.

4.3.1. Legal Walls Map

This map shows all permitted, legal graffiti walls in Austria. It often seems to be difficult for graffiti writers to find legal walls in other cities or the legal status of specific walls can't be determined sufficiently, because sometimes information about these walls is not released by city administrations

SPRAYCITY.AT - GRAFFITI WRITING ARCHIVE - SINCE 2001

PHOTOS ▾ BLOG ▾ WORKSHOPS MAPS ▾ LEGAL WALLS ▾ RESEARCH ▾ OFFLINE GRAFFITI MAGAZINE SHOP

WIENERWAND DONAUKANAL RAMPE

LEGAL WALLS WIEN / WIENERWAND DONAUKANAL RAMPE

HALL OF FAME
Wienerwand, Donaukanal, Rampe
[Link](#)

WIEN / VIENNA
DONAUKANAL, RAMPE

LOCATION Rampe zwischen Rossauer Brücke und Augartenbrücke Obere Donaustraße, 1020 Wien	SIZE ca. 90m x 2.50m (Rampe unten) ca. 80m Länge (Rampe oben)	PERMISSION ohne schriftliche Genehmigung (Wienerwand-Reliefplatte)	PUBLIC TRANSPORT U2/U4 Schottenring 31 Obere Donaustraße
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PHOTOS >

Quelle: wienwand.at (09.01.2022)

Figure 5. Screenshot of the Legal Walls Map, www.spraycity.at/legal-walls-wien (2022-05-04)

or the organisation is completely done by free initiatives. Many walls are often not marked as a legal wall on site. The map is intended to support the writers in their search for those permitted areas. For better orientation, there is one map for each federal state, which is additionally accessible by city (the federal state of Burgenland is an exception; there are no legal walls at the moment). The colour of the marker also shows the status of the area. The green marker shows areas that can be painted freely and no registration or approval is required. However, there are also some areas that can only be painted after consultation with the owner or another contact person. Those areas are marked with a yellow marker and highlighted by an exclamation mark. In the detailed view, additional information such as an address, size and reachability can be found. There is also an external reference that also ensures the legality of the wall. In addition, each entry contains photos of the areas or a link to the photos in the archive. Today the map is well known to the community but also to city administrations or projects, which get in contact to inform about newly built legal walls.

‘Spraycity’ also supports interested city administrations in finding the optimal places for setting up new legal zones.

4.3.2. Graffiti Map Vienna

With the map ‘Graffiti map Vienna’ nearly all existing but also already disappeared graffiti spots in Vienna can be displayed online. The systematic documentation allows it to see how the entire development of a specific spot has changed over the years. The map is connected to the online photo archive and photos can be retrieved directly by clicking on the markers. For a better orientation, each marker category has a specific colour. In the menu bar, it is also possible to hide all layers that are not currently needed. If there is more than one photo in the archive, the marker shows a plus sign (+). There are also clustered locations with different spots or walls in one location, for example in parks. The markers show a star sign for these locations. Usually, there is also a polyline around the border.

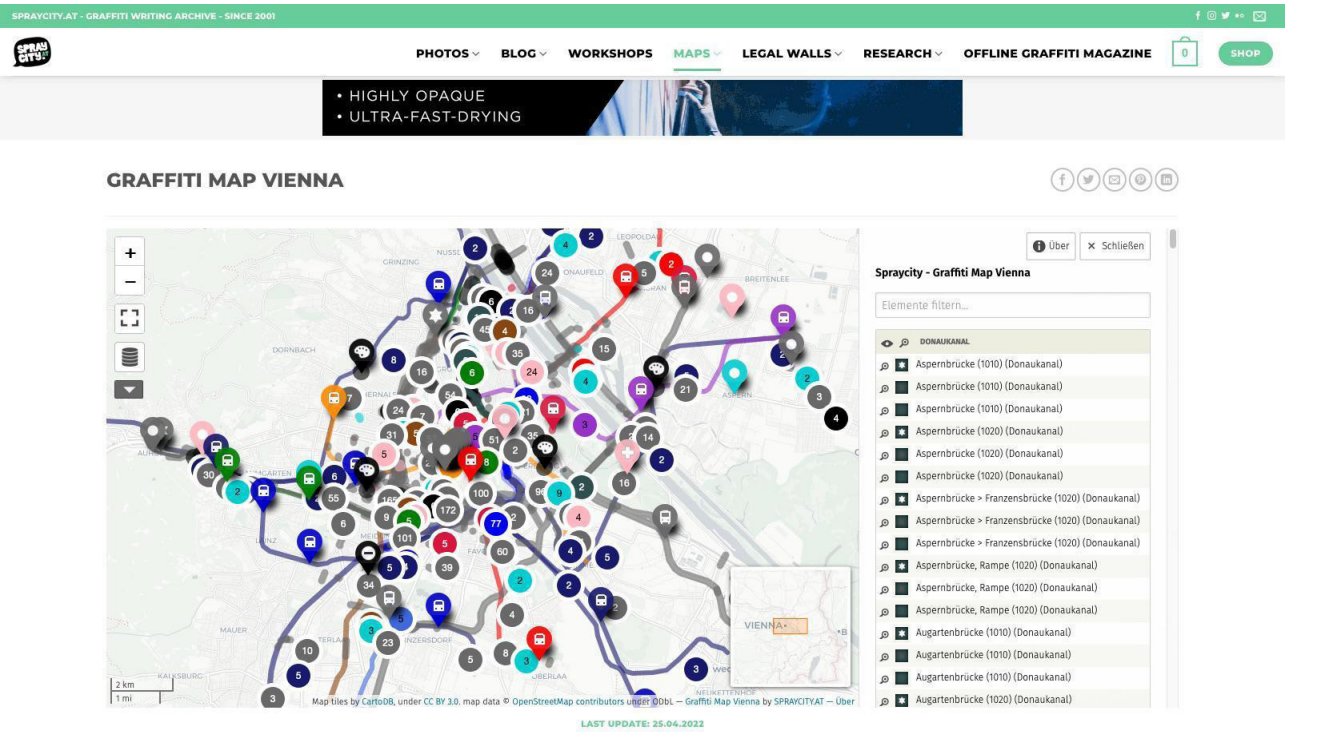


Figure 6. Screenshot of the Graffiti Map Vienna, www.spraycity.at/map (2022-05-04)

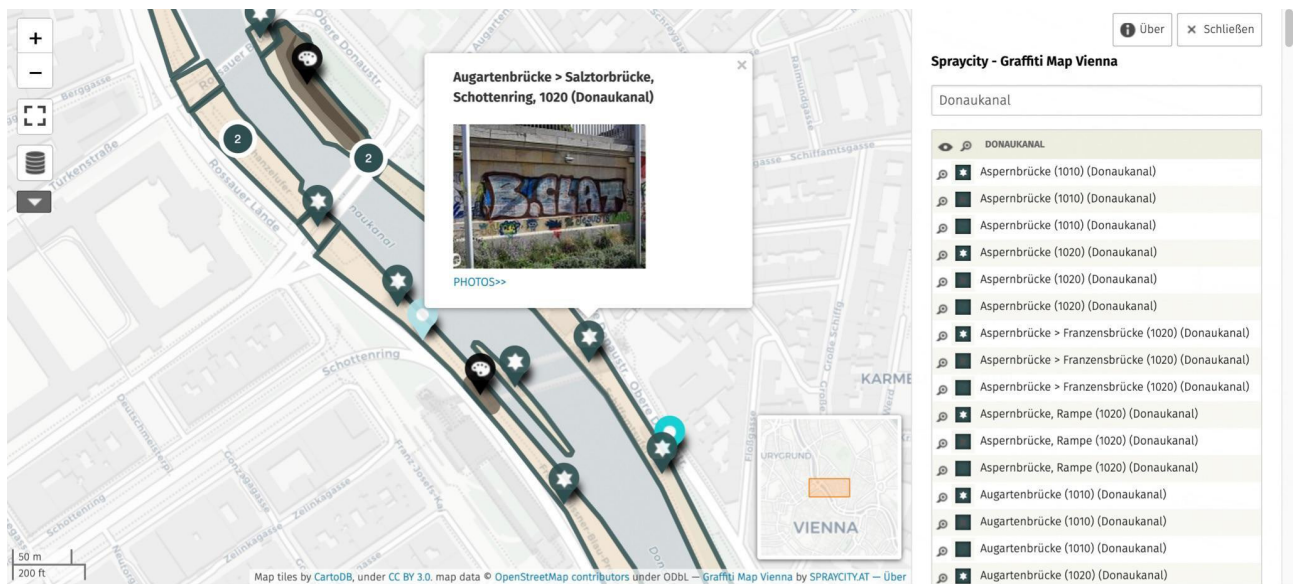


Figure 7. Screenshot of the Graffiti Map Vienna with a detailed view of the Danube Canal, www.spraycity.at/map (2022-05-04)

There are different categories:

- Hall of Fame: 'Wienerwand' spots
- Donaukanal: Since the Danube canal is a very popular graffiti location, there is also a separate section for this area (Ringhofer & Wogrin, 2018). More than 15,000 photos are available in the online archive from this location. The Danube canal on the map is divided into the areas between and under the bridges, which can be retrieved separately. In addition, some popular spots are also highlighted. For some walls it is also possible to see the entire development, from the first layer to today's condition.
- Line: Spots next to the train lines are also divided into specific lines, like the subway (U1, U2, U3, U4, U6) or the different S-Bahn lines. All lines are separated into areas within one or between two stations, so one can find specific works more easily on the map. A special case comprises all walls next to the main S-Bahn line ('Stammstrecke'). Here it is possible to separate the existing parts in-between the stations further into all existing walls next to the railway lines, also in both riding directions. This kind of display will be the role model in the future also for walls next to all other railway lines in

Vienna that are featured in the online archive.

- Street: All works painted in the streets can be displayed by the district. This allows one to see how many works are located in one street for example. The street spots are furthermore divided into specific subcategories which represent popular locations like the 'Gürtel', 'Donauinsel', 'Naschmarkt', 'Wienfluss' or 'Autobahn' (Highway).
- Murals: allowed street art murals
- Allover: all other locations which are not completely categorisable

5. Offline Graffiti Magazine

The 'Offline Graffiti Magazine' was founded on the occasion of 'Spraycity's tenth anniversary. The print magazine has published eight issues since 2011 and shows, in addition to some text contributions, primarily photos with a focus on Austrian train writing. The content on 96 pages is divided according to the specific train categories: 'S-Bahn', 'U-Bahn', 'Austria Trains' and 'International Trains'. The magazine mainly shows exclusive photos, i.e. photos that have not previously been published on the internet or in other print media. Due to the popularity of the internet and the increasing publication of photos, it is getting difficult to obtain exclusive photo material. Therefore, a further focus



Figure 8. Offline Graffiti Magazine, Issue #4, Photo by Stefan Wogrin

is also placed on the composition of the photos. For example, preference is given to photos that also include the surroundings or works that especially refer to the location instead of typical photos on the platform.

6. Graffiti History Vienna

'Spraycity' furthermore explores the history of the writing movement in Austria, which includes the collection (and first-time digitisation) of photos from the beginning of the writing movement in Austria until now from all kinds of archives. In the period from 2013 to the present day, around 10,000 analogue photos have been scanned. The research material comprises around 30,000 photos that have been sorted and categorised. For several years, 'Spraycity' has been working with its project partners on a representative compilation of image material from the period from 1983 to the present day. The result will be published as a printed publication.

7. Conclusions

With the 'Spraycity' archive, a comprehensive photo col-

lection with a geographical research focus on graffiti writing in Austria was founded. Large parts of the archive are publicly accessible online. Thanks to the archive's long history, countless works that had already been destroyed have been preserved in analogue or digital photographs for more than two decades. With a systematic categorisation and the use of an extensive metadata catalogue, the material can also be retrieved very easily for different research purposes. In addition, 'Spraycity' uses existing online map services to display the material in a new way. Due to the constant documentation, 'Spraycity' can continuously add current material to the archive, while users can also make their photos or archives centrally accessible through the online archive. With the additional collection of older photo material, a central archive for the graffiti culture in Austria was created.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.



Figure 9. Digitisation of analogue photos, Photo by Stefan Wogrin

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