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# Student Vandalism as Spontaneous Risk-Communication in the Context of Digitalization

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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this article is to study the nature of the relationship between the components of identity with the city with the motives of vandal behavior among students, as well as to consider the digitalization of society as a factor in modifying the processes of popularization of vandal practices. The relevance of studying the causes of vandal behavior and factors of motivational readiness for it is associated with the widespread vandalism and related visual pollution in urban spaces and spaces of educational organizations, the emergence of a wide range of Internet resources on which the results of vandal acts are positioned.

The role of attachment to a place and identification with it can be significant when choosing vandalism as a strategy for students' interaction with the material environment of "their" city or "their" educational organization. We conducted a study among students of Yekaterinburg universities aimed at assessing their motivational readiness for vandal behavior and assessing the role of identity components with the urban environment in the formation of motivation for this behavior (n=370). Psychodiagnostic methods were used for the study: "Scale of identification with the city" and the author's questionnaire "Motives of vandal behavior". Descriptive statistics and linear regression were used as part of mathematical and statistical processing. As a result, it was found that the components of identification with the city play both a facilitating role and an inhibiting one in motivational readiness for most types of vandalism (with the exception of aesthetic vandalism). At the same time, the perception of familiarity and goal setting are factors that facilitate vandal activity of students, in fact, emphasizing that vandalism for young people is the result of "appropriating" urban space, settling in it and achieving their own goals in it. Inhibiting factors are the external value of the city and the general attachment to it as indicators of the value attitude to the already existing environment of the city as a given.

*Keywords: vandalism, digitalization, students, urban environment, educational environment, identification with the city, risk-communication*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

High-profile acts of vandalism attract attention and receive wide coverage in the media. Their agents are people of different ages, but such destructive actions are based on an ideological position, which should be conveyed to the public consciousness by a vandal act. However, such cases are quite rare. Much more often we encounter more familiar and less condemnable vandal violations of the material environment, such as broken windows, damage to objects of the material environment of educational organizations, burned litter bins, littering of urban public spaces, unauthorized graphic objects on the surfaces of urban space [11]. In this case, the agents of vandalism are most often young people, for some representatives of whom the urban space or the space of the educational environment is an "arena" for the implementation of "non-traditional ways of civic practices" [2, p.997], a statement of their own view of events, a signal of unsatisfied needs [12].

It is worth mentioning that the phenomenon of vandalism in the public and scientific perception often has an exclusively negative connotation, suggesting the senseless destruction of property that does not belong to the agent of vandalism, the destruction of historical and cultural heritage. Often, the use of this term is selective, since not all defacements are called vandalism, and not all subjects who committed an act of vandalism are categorized as vandals [5]. In particular, acts of vandalism are not considered breaches of the urban or educational environment associated with its inconvenience, non-ergonomics, entailing atypical use of its objects or their use for other purposes - what V. M. Weinmayr called vandalism "otherwise-it was-impossible to do" [15]. In the present study, succeeding J. Wise's point of view, vandalism is defined as any change in the physical part of the urban or educational environment without the consent of its owner or manager [16]. Based on this definition, we can assume that vandalism is not always based on

destructive intentions, and may be associated with the specifics of the perception of the changing space as "one's own", in which the agent is active in its transformation and doesn't suppose (or ignore) social disapproval of the results of such activity. At the same time, it is necessary to understand that the background factor here will be the process of identifying oneself with the environment with which the agent feels connected and close. For students, such an environment is the main space of life, which in a broad sense can be attributed to the urban environment, in a narrow sense - the environment of an educational organization, and the assessment of changes as vandal will depend on their subjective interpretation, and not on the objective form and legality of the transformation of space [6].

Attachment to a place is a complex phenomenon that contains an emotional connection between a person or groups of people and places that they are familiar with, where they live or which they visit [1]. Such places, in particular for students, are both, the urban environment itself, where their daily activity is realized, and the space of the educational environment of the educational institution. The emotional connection with such iconic places can be positive, it can be negative, and in some cases it is ambivalent [10]. Its characteristics depend on the social and physical dimension of the environment to which attachment is established [8]. Changing or breaking a person's attachment to a place can occur for various reasons [6], where, among others, changes in the physical structure of the place due to anthropogenic factors [4] or change of its symbolic meaning [3], as a result of vandalism as well[7] are indicated.

On the other hand, can attachment to a place and identity with it be considered as contributing factors to vandalism? The validity of this question is indicated by the fact that illegal graffiti as a particular type of vandalism is increasingly seen as a way of dialogue in the urban space about hidden problems of society, as a form of interaction through symbols, as a way to demonstrate citizenship [2; 12] and the struggle of young people for their values and beliefs [13] by means of environment, as a risk factor in the formation of readiness for vandal behavior of students. At the same time, the space of the city environment is an "easel" for reflecting social problems that concern students, the field where "unvoiced questions" are represented. However, modern trends in digitalization expand this field, making it available to the widest possible audience through Internet content tools. In general, all this modifies "vulgar" vandalism and various illegitimate graffiti practices into a certain type of risk-communication, which serves as a signaling function of destructive changes in the environment, both in the urban space and in the space of the digital environment.

As a result, the study focused on three research questions devoted to determining the main risks of changes in urban space and the educational environment as a result of vandal activity of students in the context of facilitating, inhibiting and ambivalent effects of their identification with the city.

## 2. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1) What are the leading motives for vandal behavior of students? What are the reasons for the main risks of unauthorized changes to the city's space and educational environment, as well as their transfer to the digital environment?
2) How strongly do students identify themselves with the city they live in and the objects that make up its space?
3) Does their identification with the urban environment matter for students' motivational readiness for vandal behavior? Do all components of identification with the urban environment work as inhibitors or facilitators of motivational readiness for vandal behavior of students, or is there an effect of ambivalent impact?

## 3. PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

The purpose of our research was to identify the role of identification factors with the urban environment in motivational readiness for vandal behavior of students as a risk-communication in the conditions of digitalization.

## 4. METHODS OF RESEARCH

The study involved 370 respondents, including 39.2% of men and 60.8% of women. The age of the respondents ranged from 17 to 24, and all the study participants are studying at higher educational institutions in Yekaterinburg.

The following groups of methods were used in the study:
1) methods of research organization - cross-section method, stating the experiment;
2) methods of collecting empirical data - psychodiagnostic method: the author's questionnaire "Motives of vandal behavior" (Kruzhkova O. V., Vorobyova I. V., Ostrikova S. A.) [14], the scale of identification with the city (M. Lalli) [9];
3) data-processing methods - mathematical and statistical analysis: descriptive statistics, regression analysis (IBM SPSS Statistics 23.0); interpretation methods.

## 5. RESEARCH RESULT

To answer the first research question, the collected data were subjected to descriptive analysis. The results are shown in figure 01.
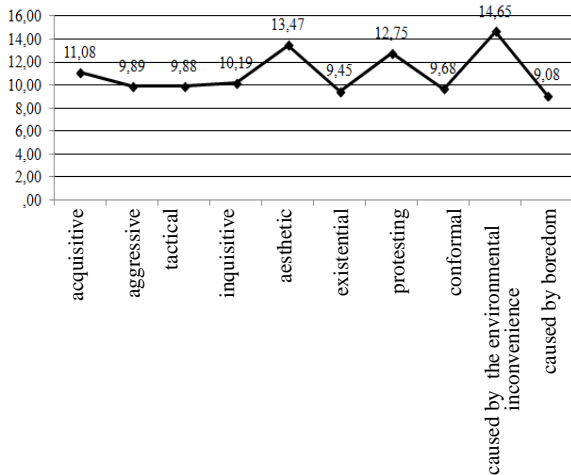
**Figure 1** Average values of indicators of motives of vandal behavior of students

The attitude to the surrounding urban space was assessed by means of a scale of identification with the city. The results of descriptive statistics are shown in figure 02.
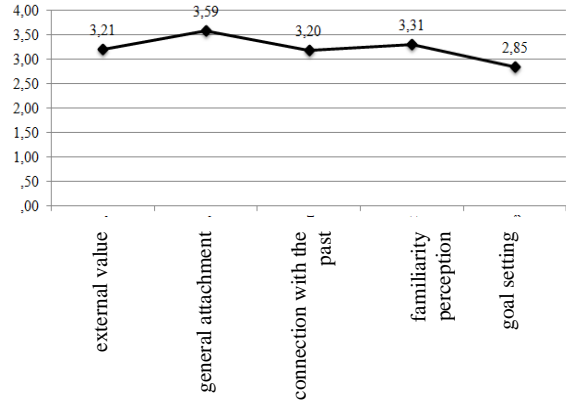


**Figure 2** Average values of indicators of the scale of identification with the city for students

Determining the possible relationship of specific motives for vandal behavior with the attitude of students to the urban environment was carried out by means of regression analysis, the results of which are presented in table 01.

**Table 1** The results of the regression analysis

| Dependent variable | Model characteris-tics | Model elements | Coeffi-cient ($\beta$), signifi-cance level (p) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Acquisitive vandalism | F=6,85 p=0,002 $R^2$=16% | External value of the city | $\beta$=-0,363 p=0,002 |
| | | Goal setting | $\beta$=0,343 p=0,004 |
| Aggressive vandalism | F=7,25 p=0,000 $R^2$=23,5% | External value of the city | $\beta$=-0,241 p=0,026 |
| | | General attachment | $\beta$=-0,456 p=0,001 |
| | | Familiarity perception | $\beta$=0,469 p=0,001 |
| Tactical vandalism | F=5,29 p=0,007 $R^2$=12,8% | General attachment | $\beta$=-0,419 p=0,004 |
| | | Familiarity perception | $\beta$=0,395 p=0,006 |
| Inquisitive vandalism | F=5,29 p=0,007 $R^2$=12,8% | General attachment | $\beta$=-0,340 p=0,017 |
| | | Familiarity perception | $\beta$=0,446 p=0,002 |
| Existential vandalism | F=6,03 p=0,004 $R^2$=14,3% | General attachment | $\beta$=-0,461 p=0,001 |
| | | Familiarity perception | $\beta$=0,389 p=0,006 |
| Protesting vandalism | F=8,74 p=0,000 $R^2$=19,5% | External value of the city | $\beta$=-0,373 p=0,002 |
| | | Goal setting | $\beta$=0,406 p=0,001 |
| Conformal vandalism | F=6,04 p=0,004 $R^2$=14,4% | General attachment | $\beta$=-0,470 p=0,001 |
| | | Familiarity perception | $\beta$=0,367 p=0,010 |
| Vandalism caused by the environmental inconvenience | F=3,40 p=0,039 $R^2$=8,6% | General attachment | $\beta$=-0,351 p=0,016 |
| | | Familiarity perception | $\beta$=0,313 p=0,032 |
| Vandalism caused by boredom | F=7,77 p=0,000 $R^2$=24,7% | External value of the city | $\beta$=-0,324 p=0,005 |
| | | General attachment | $\beta$=-0,267 p=0,013 |
| | | Goal setting | $\beta$=0,389 p=0,001 |

## 6. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

According to the obtained average values profile, the most probable motives for destructive behavior of students are vandalism caused by environmental inconvenience, aesthetic and protesting vandalism. It can be assumed that unauthorized changes by students of material and spatial objects of the urban environment are initiated by the specifics of their location and construction, in other words, the environment that, in the opinion of young people, is inconvenient, uncomfortable or does not meet

their expectations is transformed. The aesthetic motive of vandal activity is also mainly caused by dissonance in the ideas of beauty among young people and older generations, and changes in the environment by students are activated by the desire to decorate the surrounding space. Protesting vandalism usually manifests itself in a situation of urgent need for young people to express their disagreement with existing rules, norms, decisions, etc. This method is often the most affordable one for students

which is to protest due to the fact that there is individual anonymity of the agent of vandal activity, the possibility of the widest publicity, and clear manifestation of their position that is diametrically opposed to the existing one. Each of the dominant motives of vandalism is congruent with the current conditions of functioning of society, where in parallel with the real environment, young people realize themselves in a virtual space. By posting the results of their own activity in the global network, students not only demonstrate their own capabilities, but also receive a kind of response, feedback on their actions, involving an increasing number of partners and observers.

In general, it should be noted that the students' identity with the city is expressed in an average degree. Thus, the indicator of general attachment to the urban environment is slightly higher, and the goal setting is lower. Thus, we can assume that young people have a positive attitude to the surrounding space, identify themselves with it, position their belonging to the city in the external environment, but do not always link their own life strategy with a specific environmental object. It is worth mentioning that the urban environment for young people, as for any other person, is not the whole city. This is a set of objects that a person systematically includes in their own active routes - streets, courtyards, transport, places of activity. In this regard, the educational environment of professional education organizations is one of the basic environments that make up the overall urban space. At the same time, it should be noted that the city and educational organization for the modern generation are already a kind of synthetic image, in which, in addition to real and objective characteristics, there are components of virtual content related to these objects in a fairly large extent. In other words, the city is perceived by students not just as a set of material and spatial objects, but as its active representation in social networks, navigation programs, news aggregators, etc.

According to the results of the regression analysis, out of ten possible models, nine were statistically reliable. Aesthetic vandalism has not found its determination with the value of the urban environment. The five motives of vandalism (tactical; inquisitive; existential; conformal; vandalism caused by the environmental) are actualized when a person has a low attachment to the environment on the one hand, and on the other - regarding it as their own property. In other words, a person identifies the environment as his own, but at the same time does not give it any personal meaning, the space is not

personalized, it acts solely as a background for the deployment and implementation of the life strategy of the individual. This fact can also be partially interpreted as a consequence of the penetration of the Internet into individual representations of the city, when almost all urban objects are accessible to a person through their reflection in the digital environment on the one hand, and are not, as a rule, personally significant for them - on the other. The other four models (acquisitive, aggressive, protesting vandalism, and that caused by boredom) include an indicator of the city's external value with a negative sign. Students who commit vandal acts with such motives do not consider the environment from a position of not only personal, but also social significance. The city does not act for them as an object that needs careful treatment, it does not require the preservation of its environment, and the transformed, the damaged sooner or later will be restored by the services responsible for that. It is alarming that the goal-setting indicator is added to the mentioned above for the acquisitive, protesting vandalism and vandalism caused by boredom. Probably, this motivational basis of student vandalism transforms this activity into the most conscious, planned and purposeful format. One of the options for the goal can be popularized trends, including "hype", broadcast on the Internet and allowing the implementation of reputational pumping of the individual in the digital space, which can be additionally monetized and generally considered by representatives of student youth as a form of employment.

It should be noted that the percentage of explained variance in statistically reliable models ranges from 8.6% to 24.7%, which, according to the existing norms, indicates the formal acceptability of the factor's influence. However, the interpretative potential of the detected models is quite large due to the fact that in the general system of motivation for vandal behavior, the attitude of the agent of destructive activity to the changing environment does not assume key positions. The main predictors are usually individual psychological characteristics of the individual and socio-environmental factors that indicate that the vandal belongs to sub-cultural communities or has a vivid conformal position. At the same time, identification with the environment and a sense of belonging to it can act as a significant resource that compensates and converts vandal activity into a pro-social form.

## 7. CONCLUSION

Thus, the study of the leading motives of vandal behavior of students allowed us to identify aesthetic, protesting vandalism and vandalism caused by environmental inconvenience as the most common types of vandal behavior of young people. The inconvenience of the urban and educational environment, its non-ergonomics, and its non-conformity to the aesthetic representations of the agent of vandalism are environmental predictors and risks

of vandal damage to urban spaces and spaces of educational organizations. In fact, vandalism here becomes a form of implementation of risk-communication, reflecting the signaling function of vandal actions that indicate some kind of social or material disadvantage from the point of view of a particular social category of the population (in our case, students). At the same time, it should be taken into

account that in addition to the actual practice of vandal damage, the effect of risk-communication is enhanced through the representation and dissemination of the results of acts of vandalism in the digital content of the global network.

It is important that when identifying themselves with the city for most young people, the most important thing is the general attachment to the city as a place of residence and the realization of their subjectivity. At the same time, this factor, together with the external value of the city, are inhibitors for the development of vandal behavior of students. At the same time, goal setting and the perception of familiarity, that is, the sense of urban space and the space of an educational organization as "one's own" can serve as significant facilitators of vandal changes of the environment. Here you need to understand that modern youth is characterized by a shift in emphasis, where the city and educational space are no longer just a medium for deployment of activity, but are becoming instrumental like a modern multi-purpose device.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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