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VANDALISM. A piece of theory
and a meal of preventive
strategies
Bram van Dijk, Paul van Soomeren
and Martin Walop

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NOTE:

This paper is a first draft of some sections taken from a forthcoming publication (entitled: Vandalism: a Dutch perspective) on all our vandalism research in Amsterdam.

In this paper for the Zutphen Workshop we describe some anti-vandalism experiments implemented in two neighbourhoods in Amsterdam. The development, implementation and evaluation of the experiments is supervised by the Municipality of Amsterdam.

Although the Amsterdam anti-vandalism experiments are not yet finished and evaluated the Municipality of Amsterdam gave us permission to present this paper at the International Workshop on Police Strategies against Vandalism under the conditions that this paper or portions thereof are not reproduced in any form whatsoever without written permission of the authors.

Probably in Juli 1983 all the Amsterdam anti-vandalism experiments will be evaluated and the official (5th) report of the action-research on youth vandalism will be issued by the Municipality of Amsterdam. By then we will send all the participants of the Zutphen Workshop a copy of "Vandalism: a Dutch perspective".

Bram van Dijk
Paul van Soomeren

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APPENDIX

1. INTRODUCTION

After a brief exploration of the extent and increase of vandalism in the Netherlands we started our research on vandalism in 1979:

- We studied the spatial distribution of vandalism in Amsterdam.
 - Tried to get more insight into the relationships between the "build-up environment" and the amount and nature of vandalism.
 - Held extensive interviews in two neighbourhoods in Amsterdam with about 250 youth, headmasters and youthworkers.
 - Conducted several anti-vandalism experiments.
 - Helped local and regional Police crime prevention co-ordinators everywhere in the Netherlands to develop, implement and evaluate anti-vandalism projects.
 - And....we are still not finished yet.
- We guess it will cost us three lifetimes to understand vandalism.
But then.....how to prevent vandalism?

Of course we can not give you in this paper a ready recipe for preventing vandalism. Probably nobody can.

In section 3 some broad anti-vandalism strategies will be presented.

But strategies against vandalism must be based on a sound theoretical framework and good research findings. In section 2 therefore a brief outline of some underlying ideas (or theory) will be given.

Research findings are not to be presented in this paper. The reader is referred to the appendix or to our forthcoming publication "Vandalism: a Dutch perspective".

External thresholds: Vandalism is not allowed. If you do it, you can be caught by others and punished. A beating from your parents, a punch in the eye from an angry neighbour, legal proceedings by the police, or a criminal record from a court of justice. All things one can be afraid of and which one will take into consideration.

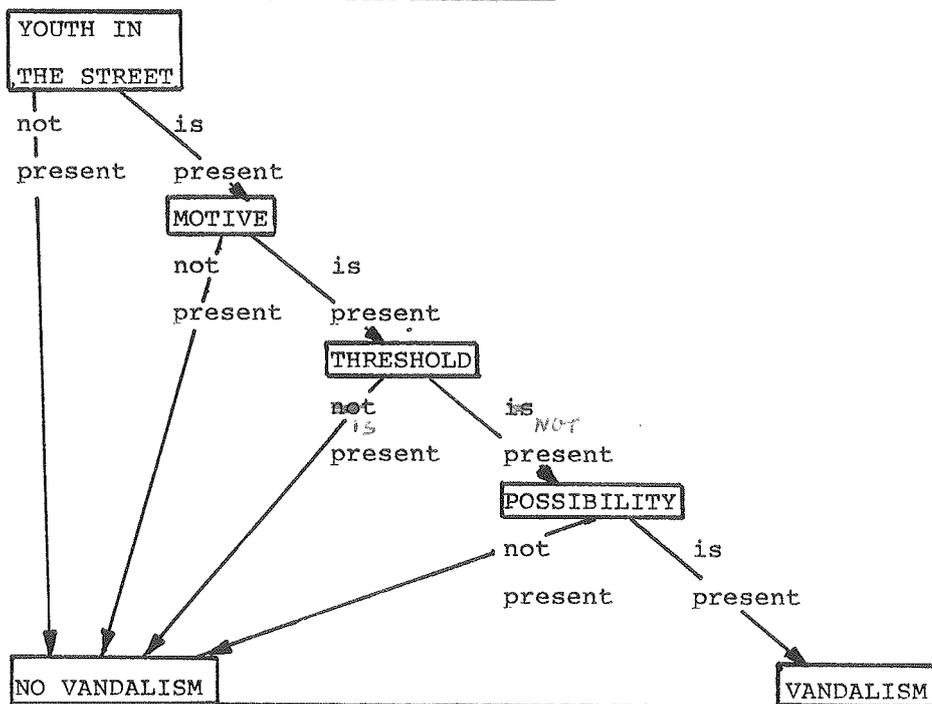
Internal thresholds: Of course a youth can himself feel that vandalism is not done. He could feel that it is a waste to vandalise something. This internal threshold is related to the extent to which a particular youth has taken over the norm "vandalism is not done".

Possibility

Next to the three preceding conditions, there is still one condition that has to be satisfied before a vandalistic act will actually take place: a "destructable" object must be present. The word "presence" hereby refers to the number of objects that are present within a certain area. The word "destructable" refers to the strength or to the attainability of a particular object.

The four concepts can be placed in the following scheme:

Scheme 1: Conditions for vandalism



3. STRATEGIES AGAINST VANDALISM: THE AMSTERDAM ANTI-VANDALISM EXPERIMENTS

As a part of our research in Amsterdam we conducted several anti-vandalism experiments in one neighbourhood in Amsterdam^{*)}. Herein one can roughly distinguish between 4 main groups of experiment-implementors: schools, youthwork, various municipal services (transport, telephone, police etc.) and finally the neighbourhood (inhabitants/neighbourhood authorities, groups and societies).

We will describe most of the experiments suggested and implemented in Amsterdam on the basis of the theoretical model sketched in section 2. Therefore we give relatively a lot of attention to the broader anti-vandalism strategies in which the various experiments fit. One should be aware, however, that a number of aspects are to be distinguished in some experiments, whereby the classification of an experiment in a particular strategy is sometimes arbitrary.

We like to stress that the anti-vandalism strategies presented in this section are not entirely based on the research and experiments in Amsterdam. We also learned a lot from helping local and regional Police crime prevention co-ordinators in the Netherlands to develop, implement and evaluate anti-vandalism projects. However we limit ourselves in this section to the Amsterdam experiments only.

3.1. Youth in the street

The variable "spending leisure-time out of doors" appears to be an important predictor for the committing of vandalism. If one wants to prevent vandalism, the strategy in this respect is therefore obvious: see to it that the youth are not - or less - in the street, or make sure that if the youth are in the street they can amuse themselves with activities other than the committing of vandalism.

Next to relatively simple solutions^{**)}, the much heard plea for more leisure-time facilities for the youth also fits in this strategy. We can

*) We will call this "The experiment neighbourhood".

***) The well-known example of the disco-bus: there is a discothèque that closes at 24.00 hours, but unfortunately the last bus, that has to transport the disco-youth, does not leave till half an hour later. Shortening this boring waiting time can avoid a lot of damage and hindrance for the people of the area.

(wishes boys: 1. bicycle-cross course, 2. "rough and tough" building-playground, 3. playing field; wishes girls: 1. ice-rink, 2. "rough and tough" building-playground, 3. roller-skating rink) (Wito, 1982, p. 16-26).

Of course it is impossible to fulfill*) every wish. Nevertheless the condition that leisure-time facilities must correspond with the needs of the youth is essential. With the discussion of the anti-vandalism strategies that fall under the concept "motive" we shall go further into the question of what needs the youth have.

As far as leisure-time facilities for the youth are concerned (existing as well as newly to be set up) we have one more important relativizing statement to make. One must not see leisure-time facilities that can keep the youth off the street as the panacea against vandalism, because the filling of a piece of leisure-time changes little or nothing in the motives for vandalism. We can therefore also take Gladstone's warning to heart, when he states that: "Vandalism is not particularly time-consuming and can easily be undertaken while travelling between home and leisure facilities given that almost any urban route will pass by street lamps, 'phone boxes and other convenient targets". (Gladstone in: Clarke '73, p. 37).

3.2. Motives

In section 2. we described the concept "motive" as "a reason to vandalise something". There are a number of reasons one could point to as to why the youth vandalises something: anger/vindictiveness, acting tough (showing off), testing out the physical and social environment and discord.

Anger/vindictiveness

In our research among the youth it appeared that the motives anger and vindictiveness were usually totally unpredictable as to their origin. For

*) Although we do think that the changing wishes of the youth are often not reckoned with enough. An example: the experiment neighbourhood was built around 1965 and filled up with young families and newly married couples. Town-planning experts have probably therefore put a strong cement sandbox for the young playing children on nearly every street-corner. Unfortunately no account was taken of the fact that man (and therefore the child, as well) is liable to change. The large group of children from that time, is now between 15 and 20 years old and therefore has grown out of the sandbox. Leisure-time facilities for this age-group was however hardly taken into consideration at all at that time. This brings us to the recommendation that planners must take into account much more the logical future developments within a particular neighbourhood and therefore should on purpose not (yet) fill in possibilities.

essence, after all, it has to do with these motives that one could define words like curiosity, exploration-minded and boundary-scouting (and possibly -shifting) research on the part of the youth. In short, qualities that takes universities years to teach their students. They are therefore motives that, seen from a socialization point of view, can be positive. Nevertheless this does not yet mean that vandalism must go on unabated.

As far as we are concerned, there are two ways in which one must try and keep the negative effects that occur as a consequence of these motives as low as possible:

- Firstly, by the creating or the raising of a threshold to stop or hinder vandalism. We shall come back to this when treating the concept "threshold".
- Secondly, by simultaneously creating alternative whereby youths - without this causing unduly negative effects for others - can still show their toughness and whereby they can test their physical and social environment out.

With this we arrive again at the already treated subject of the leisure-time facilities for the youth. We are now, however, in a position to further define the condition formulated earlier that "leisure-time facilities have to correspond to the needs of the youth". Because "acting tough" and "the testing out of boundaries" appear to be important motives for vandalism, the leisure-time facilities must therefore be able to accommodate as much as possible the (often unconscious) wish of the youth to be able to show toughness and to test the physical and social environment out. It is therefore not accidental that the leisure-time facilities that were newly set-up as experiment did in fact accommodate these wishes.

For example: for children, an adventure-playground and (to a lesser extent) a bicycle-cross course; for adolescents, a workshop where mo-peds can be tinkered with; for young adults, an experiment that unfortunately failed at the last minute: A school that had been empty for quite a long time was to be fixed up by a group of youths themselves as an own youth-base. However, even before the transaction was completed, the building burnt down completely.

Discord

The research shows that for a lot of youth (from all age-groups) discord is an important motive for vandalism. For a lot of youths this discord appeared

academically motivated pupil towards studies for which he can muster more enthusiasm". (Gladstone '78, p. 37).

As a result of our reasearch we want to expand upon this recommendation by Gladstone.

Firstly we observe that, in the seventies especially, unemployment among the youth has risen drastically. Because of this it seems that the school cannot adequately fulfill one of its most important functions anymore - the provision of an education with which one's daily bread can be earned later. Many of the youths interviewed by us also pointed this out. Of course the school (teachers/headmasters) sees this fact as well. They even prepare the youths for it, for example in discussions. But youths at school still almost exclusively have to consume lesson-material that is aimed at functioning as well as possible (and making a career) in a job. However, hardly any attention is given to the question of how the youth could fill their freetime, now and later. In other words, the school trains for work and not for life. A lot of youths know the dates and facts of the French revolution by heart, but do not know how their own neighbourhood, city or village originated and what is to be found in it and what takes place there (especially behind the facades of the buildings). For that matter, teachers and headmasters themselves often do not know either.

An adaptation of the lesson-material to the real world of experience and the real perspectives of the future for the youth seems very desirable to us. Not only could this remove a lot of the discord among the youth, but would at the same time increase the involvement (belonging) with the environment (we will come back to this in our discussion about the concept "threshold").

Secondly - and this is in fact strongly interwoven with what preceded - we point out that our interviews among the youth showed very strongly that youths look for excitement (thrills/kicks; See also the motives "acting tough" and "the testing out of the physical and social environment"). It appears that due to the offered lesson-material, the school is hardly ever in a position to fulfill this need. "Sitting sleepily on a bench, writing and listening," is how many interviewed youths describe the time they spend at school. This is a source of discord^{*)} for them. According to us it would therefore deserve a recommendation to allow the youth, a lot more than is currently the case, to experience the (much more exciting!) reality.

*) Compare here to example: M. Csikszentmihalyi and R. Larson, '78.

With the anti-vandalism projects at schools one can make a distinction between projects with an approach specifically focused on vandalism and projects with a broader approach.

- With the specific approach one is focused almost exclusively on the subject of vandalism. In a few schools involved with the experiments, teachers treated, often supported by experts like police-officers and repairman from municipal services, the negative consequences of vandalism. The material damage of vandalism, the intangible damage for, for example, citizens and repairman (hindrance and distress), the dangers of vandalism (for example in public transport) and the possible personal consequences for the perpetrator (police and the law).

- With the broad approach one was, in fact, working from the other side. It was attempted to get the pupils to recognize the "worth" of the environment they are in everyday. This broad approach connects with the ideas that we mentioned earlier under "the introduction of improvements in the existing school system". Following this approach the pupils were told, for example, how their neighbourhood originated historically^{*)}, what objects are to be found in their neighbourhood (from telephone-box to community centre), how and why these objects came to be there, how they work and who maintains and repairs them.

Within the framework of these broader projects some schools even organize puzzle trips, photo-competitions and interview-investigations among neighbourhood inhabitants.

All these activities are in fact aimed at increasing the involvement (belonging) of the youth with their environment in the hope that these youths thereby commit less vandalism.

Some experiments, however, went a step further and the youths were given more responsibility and decision-making power.

After all, one of the results of our research pointed in the direction of the fact that the youths who bear responsibility for something (for example: influence upon the goings on in the youth centre/neighbourhood activities etc.) often do not vandalise. Using this data as starting-point, a series of

*) To find this out we plunged into some dusty archives and, from the material found there, compiled a file with articles about the history of the origins of the experiment neighbourhood.

police and the law.

- neighbourhood inhabitants:

Before neighbourhood inhabitants will do anything about vandalism, two important conditions must be fulfilled.

They must be able to see what happens in the street and moreover they must feel, to a certain extent, involved with what happens. Especially Oscar Newman ('73) has paid a lot of attention to these aspects.

Unfortunately an experiment to increase the control possibilities for the neighbourhood inhabitants via a number of physical interventions in the built-up environment could not be realized, because it appeared that another neighbourhood in Amsterdam had a much greater need for these kind of interventions. Within the framework of the Amsterdam anti-vandalism experiments it was attempted to try, in various different ways, to increase the involvement (belonging) of the inhabitants with their neighbourhood. For example, a festival week was organized for all neighbourhood inhabitants. During this week presentations were made of all the societies and clubs in the neighbourhood, and various municipal services organized exhibitions and stands. The attention was thereby focused on vandalism (via a demonstratively set up burnt down site hut, for example) as well as on the service that the municipal services can provide. The shopkeepers organized a streetfair with numerous festivities. Bicycle-cross competitions and a school-game were organized with the youth.

- police:

If there is more police in the street and if in addition the police pay more attention to vandalism, then the number of vandals that are caught will obviously increase somewhat. However, one must not lose sight of the fact that it will be impossible to ever pick large numbers of vandals up from off the streets. A vandalistic act is accomplished in a split second, a sprint and there is not a policeman who can even blow a whistle for it. In the experiment neighbourhood the police did more patrolling for some time, whereby vandalism was especially watched for^{*)}. However, due to lack of manpower, this experiment could not be continued^{**)}.

*) Indeed, the data from the vandalism-registration that was kept up by the researchers was of a lot of use to these surveillances. Places where a lot of vandalism occurred could be established with this, as well as the times that a lot of vandalism occurs.

***) A comparable experiment in which the increasing of the change of getting caught (where appropriate - the fear of getting caught) was the principle point, was implemented in 1981 in Nijmegen. Evaluation of this experiment showed that at first the number of vandalistic acts dropped. But later the number of vandalistic acts increased again.

particular place - far too quickly. Therefore, for example, a cost-benefit analyses (beforehand and after some time) is hardly ever conducted.

A good analysis has even more importance because it is precisely with this strategy that the side-effect can occur of vandalism transferring itself, or not diminishing at all (for example, by the imagination stimulating effects of a particular reinforcement). To attain more insight into these processes, two experiments were executed in Amsterdam within the framework of the action-research. A number of reinforced lampposts were placed and a number of stronger paper-rubbish bins were put up in the experiment neighbourhood. Via the destruction-registration the effects could be precisely evaluated.

With this we have treated the anti-vandalism strategies that are, according to us, the most important, and the experiments in the Amsterdam action-research that are connected to these. We still have to make one very important concluding statement. We are convinced that not one means or experiment exists that can drastically reduce vandalism by itself. An anti-vandalism project will always have to consist of a number of measures that are complementary to each other and that are moreover based on an analysis of the local problems.

A P P E N D I X

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