

## UNDERSTANDING GRAFFITI IN THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT: THE CASE IN ANKARA, TÜRKİYE

### INTRODUCTION

Graffiti is of interest to socialists, anthropologists, psychologists, criminologists, artists, and urban planning. The link between the built environment and graffiti has long been of interest to the field of urban planning, particularly to the subfields of urban design. The theoretical, empirical, and practical work in these fields has generally aimed at the goals of enhancements to quality of life, improvements in system efficiency, or reductions in environmental impacts—in other words, the physical health of the community rather than the personal health of its residents. Direct assessments of the links between the built environment and physical activity as it influences personal health are still rare in urban planning. Yet the concepts, theories, and methods used by urban planners provide a foundation for an emerging body of research on the relationship between the built environment and physical activity.

In this context, the aim of this study is to find out complexity and the relationships between the design of the built environment and graffiti. Firstly, the literature review about graffiti will be conducted for New York City. In the literature, New York is always known as the "capital and cultural centre of graffiti". This article has two main objectives. The first is to understand the variables of graffiti, and then the cross analysis between New York and Ankara was handled according to the local dynamics which are embedded in space and graffiti characteristics as style and type of expression by graphic analysis of the artifacts. The second is to argue local characteristics of Ankara. Graffiti in New York and Ankara are analyzed and compared in terms of location characteristics, amount and types of Graffiti. The types, styles and structure of graffiti in New York City and Ankara are discussed later in the contemporary city context fulfill the gap in complexity and the relationships between the design of the built environment and graffiti in Ankara.

### WHAT IS GRAFFITI?

Graffiti is both art and crime. It is a spatial phenomena sustaining an explicit identity and defending a place for itself in the urban landscapes of the world (Bandaranaike, 2003). The "graffiti culture", like any other culture, presents itself in different forms, dependent on the social and cultural component of the local community, the distribution of cultural knowledge, the age of the culture and particularly, the presence or lack of an established graffiti hierarchy possessing experienced writers [graffitists]" (Collins, 1998 cited in Bandaranaike, 2003)

The origins of graffiti go back to the beginnings of human, societal living. Graffiti has been found on uncovered, ancient, Egyptian monuments, and graffiti even was preserved on walls in Pompeii. (Stowers, 1997) The word graffiti means little scratching and it comes from the Italian *graffiare*, which means to scratch. According to The American Heritage Dictionary, graffiti is defined as "a drawing or inscription made on a wall or other surface, usually so as to be seen by the public," (American Heritage 2005). For as long as people have been able to write, they have been writing on walls.

Today quite a few different classifications separate graffiti. To gain a better understanding of graffiti it is necessary to create a framework that categorizes the distinct types of graffiti observed in generally. According to meaning, complexities, placements, and size, there are different types of graffiti. The major types include:

- Gang graffiti, often used by gangs to mark turf or convey threats of violence, and sometimes copycat graffiti, which mimics gang graffiti
- Tagger graffiti (tagging), ranging from high-volume simple hits to complex street art
- Conventional graffiti, often isolated or spontaneous acts of "youthful exuberance," but sometimes malicious or vindictive
- Existential graffiti, is individual personal commentaries, and it's referred to as expressive graffiti. It that can be subdivided into several subcategories depending on the thematic context such as sexual, radical ,love, religious , self, nonsexual, philosophical, humorous (Alonso,1998).
- Political graffiti is the most open system of graffiti, meaning that all who are confronted with these texts can understand the messages being conveyed. The writers of political graffiti geographically place their writings on busy thoroughfares, which guarantee an extensive viewing. This type of graffiti uses the public as an audience to communicate ideas against the establishment.
- Ideological graffiti, such as political or hate graffiti, which conveys political messages or racial, religious or ethnic slurs (Weisel, 2006 ).
- Piecing (or bombing as it commonly referred to) is a decorative expression of the name that demands an artistic skill and understanding of aerosol paint control (Alonso,1998). Very few graffiti writers progress beyond tagging to produce the elaborate pieces. Taggers gain immediate notoriety by mass-producing their signatures, but acquiring fame as a piecer. is an accomplished ability requiring a technique and style more sophisticated than that of a tagger. Seconds are required to tag a name on a bus or a wall, but an average graffiti piece can take as much as an hour to complete, using up to twenty aerosol cans.

Second taxonomy of graffiti can be defined to technique that is used as aerosol, home made stencil or sticker.

Third taxonomy of graffiti includes the surface that it is applied on:

- Light-colored surfaces. Dark surfaces do not generally attract as much graffiti, but can be marred with light-colored paint.
- Large and plain surfaces. Surfaces without windows or doors may be appealing for large-scale projects. Smooth surfaces especially attract offenders who use felt-tip markers.

In addition, there is new form; artistic graffiti. Artistic graffiti is a modern day offspring of traditional graffiti that has elevated itself from just scrawling words or phrases on a wall, to a complex artistic form of personal expression (Tobin,1995).

## **GRAFFITI BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND URBAN DESIGN**

Graffiti is typically placed on public property or private property adjacent to public space. It is commonly found in transportation systems—on inner and outer sides of trains, subways and buses, and in transit stations and shelters as well as on other public and private properties.

The emergence of postmodern thinking has provided an important stimulus for reconsidering the role of space in the construction of everyday life. Space becomes a rare commodity to those who cannot afford it. Typically in a built environment space is the privilege of those who can afford to pay for it, and who in turn sets rules to control it. Under these conditions, the graffitiists who have no ownership on space pounce on opportunities to encroach on such space causing conflict. Leferbvre believed that "where there is space, there is being". Graffitiists view space in an absolute sense where it is essentially natural and free until colonized. They utilized it as social space where they can leave their mark, in anonymity only to be recognized by their peers (Bandaranaike, 2001). Graffiti is asserting identity, visibility, and power in a social and ecological context in which these youth were previously ignored (Bandaranaike, 2001). Graffiti is the manifestation of postmodernist youth culture in

landscape. It is part of social modernization and global exposure to an evolving contemporary society where youth participation is often marginalized (Bandaranaike, 2003). Giddens (1984) says everyday life of offenders is shaped in part by understandings of the nature of particular areas and specific locations that are important in shaping the geographical distribution of offending behavior. Graffitiists operate within familiar territory usually within a radius of 3-4 kilometers. Graffiti is a spatial phenomena sustaining an explicit identity and defending a place for itself in the urban landscapes of the world. By virtue of its positioning, it has become a prominent icon in our urban landscape. In addition, it is the harm caused by graffiti to the community, in terms of property damage and fear of crime that is the focus for state and local government.

Urban design is concerned with the quality of the built urban environment that has an interest in graffiti (an urban phenomenon). Its interest is in the effect of graffiti on the visual quality of the urban environment as well as in perceptions of the space and the experience of the urban environment, as they are affected by the presence of graffiti. Urban design has also an interest in public art, a question that intersects with the issue of graffiti.

### **THE URBAN ORIGINS OF GRAFFITI: NEW YORK**

New York is a preferential place to study graffiti as a phenomenon. Modern graffiti art originated in New York City, and it was known first as "New York Style" graffiti. This *art* form exploded in late 1960's with the public housing projects. Because of these projects, loss of identity and name occurred and desire for social mobility increased in the residential areas. In order to try to understand possibly, why graffiti expanded so much, the New York urban landscape in the 70's needs to be addressed. New York's social cultural and political ground in the 1970's was undergoing a great transformation. The systematic poverty, homelessness, ongoing racism, violence, neglected neighborhoods, and post Vietnam fall out all led to the fragmentation of the social space creating 'no go' ghetto areas, where the only ones allowed in were also not allowed out. The youths of the ghettos, while trying to assert their identities, would try to tell their views of the social world in which they dwelled. Their resources for self-expression were often limited. Therefore, graffiti (and the hip-hop whole) can be seen to echo inner-city inventiveness, while carrying out their own "strategies of resistance" from the alienation they felt.

There are three forms of graffiti in New York experience. One of the simplest form of graffiti is tagging has a very important role in the early period. Gang's connection is used the way of marking territories. In generally tag signifies one's name or nickname and territory. By the time, tagging changed its original form and deformed to the form of alter ego. One's well known name deformed to the definition of alter ego based unknown face. TAKI 183 – of the best-known tagger- pioneered phenomenon as community problem like Patric 301 the Warrior. TAKI 183 was the tag of a Greek American boy named Demetrius. Taki 183 first appeared as a competition element. Tagging soon became a way to get one's name known throughout the city. In the early periods, this competition was raised on fame and quantity.

Second period is mostly built on *style wars*. First style is appeared with font style and peripheral decorated tag. Bubble-like lettering, 3D and wild styles, single or two colors, less dot and star like decorative shapes are main characters of this period. With the settled styles, it became easier to read graffiti artist's name (Figure 1). The phenomenon reached its peak point in 1980's. Graffiti started to be seen not only on the walls of buildings and streets but also on the public transportation vehicles like subways. Even though, graffiti is not a direct technical risk for public transportation, however, it creates image of that state loses the authority on it and opposition. In addition, graffiti puts state in a financially bad position because millions of dollars are spent on cleaning the trains and subways.



**Figure 1. Style factor in Graffiti; NY. Source: <http://www.graffiti.org>**

Furthermore, the 1980's are described as market economy faced to the subcultures. In this period, graffiti is started to be accepted as an art and sold as art pieces in the galleries. Commercializing of hip-hop culture, graffiti became more and more popular in the advertisement industry. Because of commercialization, art usage of graffiti started as the third period of graffiti experience. In this way graffiti became an art form that makes not only fame and respect but also money. Television viewers see graffiti in primetime shows and music videos; shoppers see graffiti-inspired clothing in popular mall stores such as Hot Topic (Graham, 2004). Hip-hop is a life style about music, dance and press and is described as a nonconformist approach to the esthetic and value system of western culture. In 1970, it appeared with Bronx and in Queens, New York. It termed with block party. Even it brings the different echoes together as well as Mcing Rap Djing B Boys Break-dance Beat Boxing and Graffiti. In this manner, graffiti became repercussion of this culture not only repercussion of this culture not only in public place but also marketing of this commercialized culture. Graffiti and hip hope is not limited only by New York but spread worldwide as lifestyles and the effects vary to the original places. However, when we analyze it as historical and stylish, graffiti is a worldwide case that became popular in New York.

To understand the concept of graffiti in the context of Metropolitan areas in Turkey, it is; first, better to identify the social, political and economical conjecture in past 50 years. In 1940s, Turkey first experienced the multiparty system. After this period, social government model was dominated during 1960s. Turkey is affected by the transformation of the global political and economical structure in 1970s and coalition governments carried the political system during this decade under the influence of global economic crises. It was the time of politic and ideological graffiti of the party fractions. At the end of 1970s, the coalition dominated the political system, which was incapable to find solutions and use the tools of democracy to eliminate the inequity of income distribution, migration and economic crises. Since then, Turkish political parties have multiplied, but democracy has been fractured by periods of instability and intermittent military coups in 1980; which eventually resulted in a return of political power to civilians with the great change in foreign affairs and economical structure toward globalization. After 1980s, the changes in the general economic and social structure of Turkey produced a new system of factors that had important effects on the distribution of urban population, land uses and intra urban transport. This case has triggered the quantity of graffiti that observed in urban. Over the past decade, it has undertaken many reforms to strengthen its democracy and economy, enabling it to begin accession membership talks with the European Union.

Weakness of organizing under a civil society or an association at the same time late start of democracy process and pause of democracy process with the interventions in Turkey

increased the use of graffiti as an ideological tool in the public area. Today because of great number of unstable (floating) elector influenced from the continuous changes on the bases of parties daily political changes and commitments graffiti became more applied method.

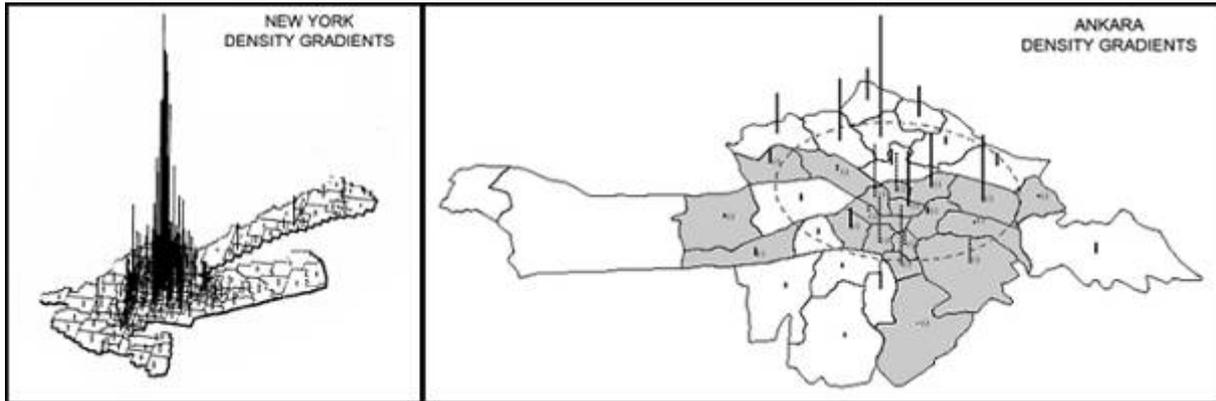
In Turkey, graffiti is used as a communication tool to describe an opinion among different groups and psychological states. The main motive is not the style or quality but the quantity. Tagging is commonly used to bomb the quantity. In tagging its common to tag the real name of the tagger as "Tolga" (Figure 2–a). In the expression, some adjectives are added to emphasis the messages. This adjective is somehow originated by the impact of the migration or location as "Hasan" "Erzincan Hasan". It is not surprising to detect this case in to societies where the concept of citizenry (in Turkish: hemşehrilik) is still traditionally continues. The expression of belonging to a group is mainly observed in football team supportship. In this case the taggers identity is hidden and the main expression focused on the name on the team that is supported (Galatasaray, Fenerbahçe, Ankaragücü) (Figure 2–b). In some cases supporter groups tags their identity by their nick that they have chosen (Ankaragücü Pegasus, Ultraaslanlar, Çarşı, etc.) (Figure 2–c). It is hard to classify the graffiti samples in Turkey however, they can be undertaken some thematic classifications: ideological (as NARO) (Figure 2–d), political (as MHP, CHP) (Figure 2–e), existential graffiti (as E loves M) and free types that are full of arabesque motives to express suffering and lack of money (Figure 2–f).



Figure 2. Types of Graffiti in Ankara (photographed by walking).

## GRAFFITI IN ANKARA CITY

The one of the most noteworthy location to observed urban graffiti in Turkey is the capital city Ankara with it s a fascinating case study in terms of urbanization process. From the constitution of the Republic in 1923 up to 1950's, Ankara experienced a rapid planned urban development process as a capital. These processes were instrumental in starting major characteristics of the graffiti of the city as politically. In this early period, urban development in Ankara took place in the north south axis along the recently opened Atatürk Boulevard connecting Yenışehir to the old Ankara (Altaban, 1998). The period 1940-1950, witnessed the proliferation of irregular housing units (Baraka houses) and latter they played major roles in shaping the urban development of Ankara. The origins of graffiti started. Parallel to rapid urbanization the intensity of graffiti varied with the size of the population, particularly the prevalence of youth (Figure 3).

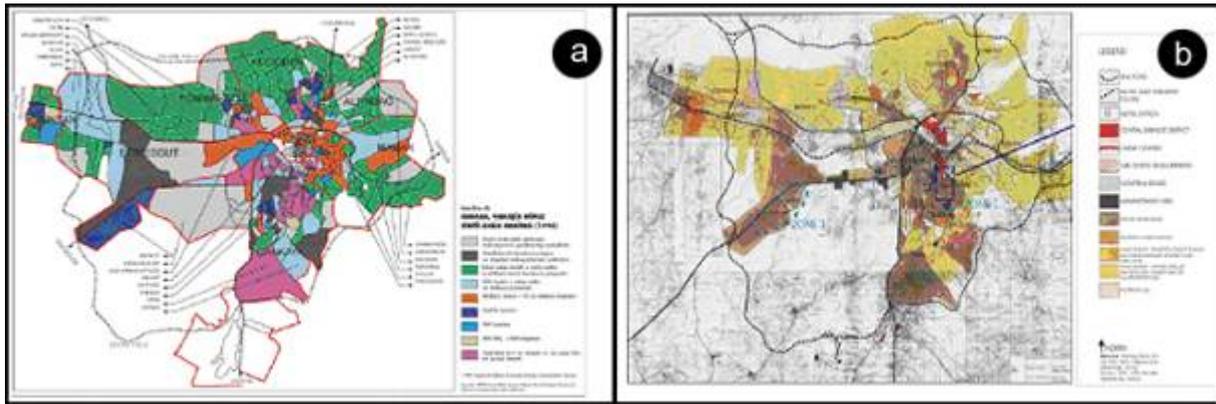


**Figure 3. Cross analysis of density gradients between NY and Ankara. Source: Esmer, Ö. (2005)**

The research on graffiti in Ankara is conducted in two folds. We are going to see that the geographical distribution of graffiti is closely related to changes in the urban functions and urban design form 1923-2000s. Today, the changes in urban macro form and land uses affect the urban graffiti. The establishment of light rail and subway systems (Metro and Ankaray) had important effects on intra urban accessibility, the structure of CBD, land market urban macro form but not affect the graffiti structure. There is not mature subway graffiti culture in Ankara due to Ankara subway is protected area with limited operational hours and strict protection rules. Large-scale mass housing projects realized by the union of cooperatives, municipalities and mass housing organizations on the fringes of Ankara (proposed by the 1990 Master Plan) brought significant changes to Ankara's macro-form and created different kind of graffiti according to social groups.

The social geography of Ankara reflects significant differentiations with respect to professions, employment status, income levels, and provinces of origin.

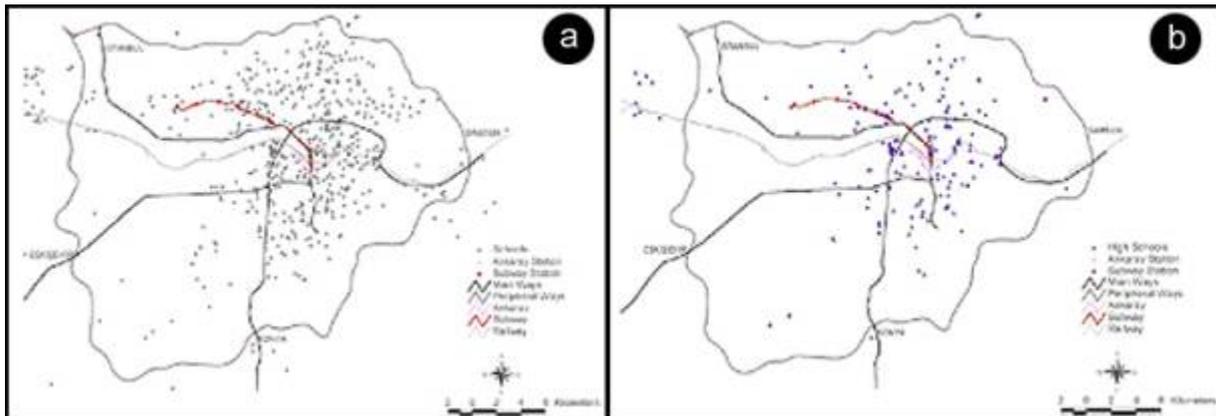
According to Güvenç (2001a-b), the people with high income and high standards of living reside mostly in the southern sector; hence, as far as the household incomes, the standards of living and social status are concerned there is a sharp contrast between the southern and the northern Ankara. In northern parts, the density of tagging is higher than the southern part (Figure 4). The messages that they enclose are more categorized in free form to express suffering a lack of money and team support ship.



**Figure 4. Income disturbance between southern and northern sector.**

It was categorized the distinct types of graffiti observed in Ankara. This taxonomy on Ankara graffiti applied not only to unused space but also to other urban environments. Graffiti is concentrated mainly in the inner city areas, squatter areas, schools, commercial business zones, the major arterial roads and in Ankara.

Deeper look to the distribution of graffiti in metropolitan area will show that the density of graffiti application increases areas that are nearby schools (Figure 5). This case is connected to the age segment of the taggers.



**Figure 5. a (Primary and High Schools in Ankara)- b (High Schools in Ankara): The Spatial Distribution of Education Buildings in Ankara (2002) Source: Ankara GIS Data Base /TEAŞ.**

Regular and irregular housing areas are endowed with different graffiti geographies, amount and types. In regular housing areas graffiti's are concentrated in evenly distributed, and whereas in irregular housing more often than not they are concentrated at the intersections of major transport axes. Interestingly, materials, which are used in graffiti, do not depict significantly different distribution patterns in the Ankara metropolitan area. An estimated half of the graffiti writers in Ankara come from middle class and lower class families. As a result, the composition of graffiti could not be more important than its quantity in Ankara. its is hard to observe a significant change in style during last decade yet the tagging is still popular and perceived easier way to express ideas.

There are no strategies against graffiti in municipality. Graffiti is defined as crime according to Turkish Criminal Code 152/1. Rather, public internalizes it and the precaution towards it is limited. Precaution occurs when it is applied to private estate but not at public case.

Sampling was done on foot by walking through randomly choose every part of the urban area such as vacant land, parks in this suburb and collecting data on the locality, structure, surface, type of graffiti and tag content, medium used, lighting conditions, visibility and proximity to designated urban features. In the scope of the research offenders, amounts, types of graffiti are analyzed. Major results of this study can be summarized as follows:

There is no unique characteristic of the graffiti in Ankara. The graffiti is simple and generally small scale and single color. The Graffiti in Ankara is isolated. In Ankara, offenders use spray paint, and marking pans to make the graffiti. The usage of etching devices is low. In Ankara, offenders' characteristics are analyses in terms of age gender and student. It is seen that Graffiti offenders, while mostly boys, include girls; offenders are typically ages 13 to 17. In Ankara, all the taggers identified within a two districts; one was Bestekar Street (also as known as Mini Bar by daily visitors) in Çankaya (Northern) and other was Ahmet Yesevi Street in Altındağ (Southern).

Drug and /or alcohol use contribute to graffiti for example in "Mini Bar" takes place in Kavaklıdere districts "Mini Bar" there are young people there is a crowd over there with drinks at their hands. "Minibar" can be accepted as starting street culture, "Minibar" grow larger during the night became more perceivable and expands in the streets. Graffiti is easily seen in "Minibar" district. In addition, graffiti is associated with other violations such as truancy. Minibar lives in daytime due to truancy. Although there is a street groups such as "Mini bar" there is not mature street culture and signs of subcultures in Ankara. Offenders are generally lone operators or part of small and unorganized groups.

Altındağ is known as the symbol of squatter settlement in Ankara. It encloses low and middle-income groups and migrated groups. Relatively crime ratios is higher that the other part of the urban metropolitan areas. During the research on graffiti, several keynotes found out as follows:

Although the popularity was a key factor in several researches (Altay, 2005) the popularity of the Mini Bar is decreased because of the resistance of the residences and the increase of the commercial leisure spaces. The traces of the graffiti are still can be identified but the style is moved towards the stencil (Figure 6-a) and sticker type (Figure 6-b). The aim to expose marginal identity by street culture to promote alter-ego identity and art was not accepted by the local residents, and several precautions are taken towards the soul of action as to limit daily visitors to sit and drink freely. These precautions can be exemplified as the fences and more organized landmarks. As a result, limited numbers of graffiti items are identified and these were more stencil and sticker type.



Figure 6. Graffiti types in Mini Bar (photography by walking).

The quantity of the graffiti in Ahmet Yesevi Street ((Figure 2–e, f). in Altındağ was higher than the Mini Bar. For the graffiti count, the street is handled as the limit of the district by using a consistent methodology to count tags. However, it was not an originated action in Mini bar. Most of the graffiti items that observed were Tag type. The message that they covers were political existential graffiti and free types that are full of arabesque motives to express suffering and lack of money.

In sum, it is clear that, whether political, ideological or essential, the motive behind the graffiti action is a way of communication in both cases. The streets are perceived as a living space and the graffiti aims to mark the location to expose proprietorship.

## CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of graffiti in historical evolution is show that changes in social, economic, political structure of society, which is embedded in space in urban areas. To understand urban areas graffiti gives important traces. Congruent and different localities, specificities of sites in are identified with graffiti traces. In Ankara street culture is not effective and range of activities of residents are only limited to their covered space such as houses, commercial areas in spaces. The street culture is highly effected by bureaucratic rules in homogeneous way. Graffiti is became an urban object that reflect the desired and life style of the citizens.

It is difficult to emphasis that the graffiti in Ankara has no noteworthy style. Also it is not truly organized. The organized structure can be read on ideological and political style. Perhaps it is the heritage of 70s. The authority does not take any notice of the application of graffiti and the penal provision is weak.

The cross analysis of spatial distribution does not show great differences on style however quantity creates considerable diversity. As a result, the graffiti in Ankara is not planned and regular it is spontaneous and intermittent.

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