

Young Subway

The project Young Subway was conducted in 2010 and involved approximately 120 children and youths from a socially disadvantaged neighbourhood (Granängen) in the municipality of Tyresö, in Greater Stockholm. The neighbourhood is characterised by high levels of unemployment and welfare support reciprocity, and many of the residents have an immigrant background. The goal of the project has been to reduce vandalism and graffiti. The young people have been given the opportunity to actively influence their local environment by designing the artistic decoration of the pedestrian subways leading to and from the residential neighbourhood. An architect, who led the project, held workshops with the young people, who learned to lay mosaic tiles and paint on concrete. The number of reported graffiti offences had increased dramatically between 2008 and 2010, and the subways are places where large numbers of graffiti offences are reported. It is notable that no graffiti or vandalism has occurred in the subway that the youths participated in designing and decorating either in 2010, when the project was conducted, or in 2011 (this ECPA entry was written in October 2011). One of the project's guiding ideas is that vandalism and other crimes can be prevented by actively involving young people in the artistic and architectural design of their local environment.

The number of reports of graffiti (excluding graffiti on public transport) have increased between 2006 and 2010 in Tyresö. In 2006 and 2007 less than 100 graffiti offences were reported each year. There was a large increase in reported graffiti between 2009 and 2010. A total of 317 graffiti offences were reported in 2009 and 916 in 2010. This represents an increase of 189 percent over the course of a single year. The substantial increase in the number of reported offences should be interpreted with caution. In Tyresö, as in large areas of the rest of Stockholm, the number of reported graffiti offences has increased between 2006 and 2010. Part of this increase is due to an increased reporting propensity on the part of large public transport companies, municipalities and housing companies, which have photographed and reported the graffiti to the police in connection with their graffiti cleaning activities. Part of the substantial increase probably does reflect a real increase in the level of graffiti. The pedestrian subway "should" have been exposed to more graffiti and vandalism by comparison with other subways in the area, which would have involved substantial annual cleaning costs for the Tyresö municipality. According to local police officers in Tyresö and representatives of the project, the likely reason for this crime preventive effect and for why the subway has not been subjected to graffiti is that the youths were involved in its design. People feel a sense of responsibility for what they have been involved in designing, and want to preserve it.

The municipality of Tyresö spends large sums of money each year removing graffiti. Part of the municipality's strategy for reducing vandalism and graffiti also involves costs for private security firms. In the schools and the area around the pedestrian subway, the municipality spent around 450,000 SEK in 2010 on measures to deal with graffiti and vandalism. This can be compared with the total cost of the Young Subway project, which was 204,920 SEK (for the year 2010). The project has worked well and the municipality is in the process of involving more young people, who will renovate additional subways in 2011–2012.