

Received 2015/11/10

Accepted 2016/10/02

“Urban art” as a Landscape Phenomenon in today’s Society*

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Abstract

Today in literature of “Urban Art” in our country, the definition of it, is either based on the mission of art work to improve the quality of urban landscape or on a variety of art works in the city; however the interesting point here is that the Urban Art is not clearly determined in the previous studies. How can it affect the quality of urban landscape? And whether all works of art in the city are caused such qualities? With the distribution of artworks all over the cities and failure to reach their maximum determined targets, it seems that Urban Art has been backed away from its original essence and subdued by some styles attenuating its values as much as decorations and ornaments of city. Therefore, it has not only lost its meaningful presence in the city, but also [the present application of it] has led to some sort of confusion. To achieve the desired goals, this paper suggests considering “urban art” as a landscape phenomenon, because it depends on two components, “citizen” (human) as the “target audience” that urban art works are created for him, and “social space” as an environment to form perceptions and social interactions, not just a simple context of the works. Finally it concludes, in modern times, the most appropriate platform for urban art is not every urban space and public space, but it is a social space establishing the social connections as the highest goal of civic life to be able to invite the target audiences to understand art works and achieve urban qualities in this calling.

Keywords

Urban art, Landscape phenomenon, Citizens, Social space.

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* . This article is taken from the Ph. D. thesis proposed by “Padideh Adelvand” entitled “ The aesthetic aspects of Tehran urban sculptures in the last two decades” it is ongoing under the supervision of Dr. “Ashrafosadat Mousavilar” and advising of Dr. “ Seyed Amir Mansouri” at the Alzahra University.

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Introduction

City as the most civic achievement of human being that accommodates more than half of population of the world, is considered as a phenomenon that not only is derived from the human's need for social life, but also is an existence that its survival is dependent on citizens interactions with each other in an urban environment that be able to shape their apprehension of the urban concept.

City is not only a collection of various components which have been gathered together, but instead is a whole entity with a unity of purpose and significant relationships between its elements. The more expanded this communication become, the stronger citizens' understanding of city and subsequently more belonging to the urban environment will be happen.

By arriving of the modern art into the urban space and passing through the public space afterward, it has been always looking for a suitable interaction with the audiences and citizens and improving the quality of civic life. Urban art by proposing a special image of the cityscape can affect relationships between the citizens and add a character, uniqueness and quality to city; moreover, it is able to improve the city vitality.

The interpreting and social identity of Iranian's urban art has yet to be achieved and replaced with its decorated and tools character which is related to the past time

It seems that the mistaken interpretation of urban art essence existing among artists, citizens (as audiences), critics and municipal management, will confront the creation, application, understanding and criticism of it with difficulty. Due to this misunderstanding, in most cases "urban art" has been reduced to a mere object with a decorative role for city that will sometimes led to visual disturbances as well. It can be said that many art works in the city have used only the art techniques and possibility of being present in urban space, that their purpose, function, and meaning do not have any correlation with their urban identity. Therefore understanding what "urban art" is seems to be the most critical step in this area.

The problem of this research is to answer the following question: will every work of art in the contemporary era be considered as an "urban art" simply because of its presence in the urban space?

The hypothesis based on the proposed definition

It seems that in today's society, the "urban art" should not be defined based on its mere presence in "urban space" and "public space", but instead, the concept of urban landscape, as a common phenomenon among body, events and residents' mentality should be the basis for definition.

Based on this theory, urban art is a kind of art that plays an active role in this interaction and is dependent on two components, "citizenship society" and "social space".

Literature Review

In recent decades, urban art has been noticed by researchers, artists and entrepreneurs, and some articles, books, and conferences been concentrated on this subject. According to the literature survey it has been found that each article considers some features for urban art that can be categorized as follows:

1. The presence in the urban space and public areas (Moradi, 2007, Beheshti, 2010 / Yazdanfar et al, 2013 / Moosavi & Khalesi, 2013, Molazem, 2013).
 2. Producing for public, citizens and the wide range of audiences (Moradi, 2007 / Shamsizadeh Maleki, 2012 / Molazem, 2013).
 3. Impact on improving the visual quality of urban space and guarantee the vitality and sense of citizenship; promote the identity and sense of place (Moradi, 2007 / Zandi, 2009 / Khosravi & Ebrahymianpour, 2012 / Yazdanfar et al, 1392 / Moosavi & Khalesi, 2013 / Hoseinia and et al, 2013 / Molazem, 2013) Creating a visual pleasure and a social space, a context for collective memories, improving the quality of urban space, helping to revive the economy by tourism, to help revive the city's culture and art and give identification to it (Sheibani & Ostovar Zijerdi, 2012) and the presence factor in space and enhancing the interactions (Hoseinia et al., 2013).
1. Public Art reliance on notions of community involvement (Moradi, 2007), and create the

recognizable symbols in public spaces and the formation and strengthening the special image of the city (Sheibani & Ostovar Zijerdi, 2012).

2. Rich tools of media culture (Zandi, 2009 / Fadavi, 2013 / Hoseinia et al., 2013)

3. Exploiting the potential of creating urban space (Safian & Sabet, 2013).

After classifying the available definitions of urban art, it has been specified that the requisite for definition is to consider the presence of art work in urban space, however, since the prerequisites are not codified in definition, the terms of public art, urban art and street art are used instead by mistake, while definite distinction for them are not considered. Moreover, in assessing the proposed definitions it has been cleared that the major emphasis in defining the urban art is not on the nature of it but rather on the impacts that leaves the urban space: Improving the quality of life, intensifying the sense of location and identifying the urban landscape. Here a question arises: What is the real essence of urban art that is causing these effects? Is any art work in urban space should be perceived as urban art and does it lead to these affectivities? What should be the characteristics of these art works and what will their aesthetic approach follow? Has it always had a unique concept over the time, or has changed according to time and place? On the other hand, if the urban art causes such a quality in urban areas, why today despite the presence of numerous art works around the city and the effort of managers such effects are not seen in practice? Reflecting on these points reinforces this assumption that the urban art in the scientific community has not been studied fundamentally and there is a crucial gap between the academic scopes and executive authorities. Therefore, the first and most immediate step to define and manage urban art is to represent an accepted definition of its nature. Different approaches to this question can be posed. This article intends to review the "concept of urban art as a landscape phenomenon".

Urban art, a Landscape Phenomenon

«Landscape»¹ in definition is a phenomenon that

is created as the result of human interaction with the environment. That is why it is considered as an objective-subjective issue; the body of environment, consists its objective aspect and the observer's perception forms the subjective aspect of it, which are two inseparable component. "Pierre Donadieu" considers landscape as a new concept for describing the relationship between physical space and the people who perceive it (Donadieu, 2013). It seems that based on this definition, landscape is a two-fold issue; on one hand is a "phenomenon" that is created as the result of interaction between human and environment and on the other hand is an "approach" that interprets the human relationship with the environment.

According to this definition, city is a landscape phenomenon in a same way; flowing between the concepts, physics and the human perception of their living environment. City is a hypertext with a plastic form and a texture of the visual signs bearing meaning. Since the city is the personification of communal spirit of city and citizens, the body of the city cannot be separated from the spiritual (meaning) aspects of it. In other words, the city is a body composed of physical form and meaning aspects (Noroozitalab, 2010). The city as a visual text follows a linguistic structure similar to other texts (written and spoken); as "Levi-Strauss" uses the term of "Language City". So the linguistic elements and signs of this text must be connected together and linked to the whole text so it can be interpreted as a coherent urban text; for this reason, this article emphasizes on this point that art works in the city like a linguistic signs of an urban text should be subjected to a whole.

According to the literature review of this article over the nature of urban art and emphasizing on this claim in all research works that urban art is concerned the art works that are located in urban space and cause vitality, dynamism, improved quality of life, strengthening the sense of place and a lot of other impacts, it recommends in the first place to consider Urban art as a landscape phenomenon; because on one hand, is dependent on the environment factor

here called city [and in particular social space] and on the other hand on person (citizen) as the subjected audience. Therefore, it seems since city is an objective-subjective phenomenon and according to Alan Rouge, aesthetics, it is considered as an objective-subjective process resulting in formation of a view to the city among the people (Nussaume, 2011:18), therefore, the urban art as part of a series of urban landscape based on a holistic approach must be considered as both objective-subjective and landscape [phenomenon]. In this interpretation, "urban art", is not equal to urban landscape, but it will be a subset of it that its perception and survival depends on compliance of the whole entity of urban landscape.

• **The first component: The society of citizens, the audience of "urban art"**

Yves Luginbuhl (۲۰۱۳) in an intellectual definition of landscape considers the citizen participation as a necessary component of landscape issue. There is no concept for landscape without an audience, and if there is no audience to [create] and perceive it, the landscape will not be appeared. Accordingly, "Urban landscape", is a phenomenon existing in the city which will be produced by citizens and based on their experience of place that is identifying both places and people. The urban landscape is not simply the appearance of city, but instead is a dynamic phenomenon that is formed in line with the knowledge of residents up taken over the city and its symbols (the statement of National Conference on Urban Landscape, 2010).

Urban art as a landscape phenomenon is dependent on humankind; therefore it is known as an audience-oriented phenomenon that knowing the audience is important to explain it. Considering audience in art approaches which are author-oriented is not a matter of concern, however this is not applicable to urban art, because the urban art is essentially an audience-oriented phenomenon that is required to be attached to its principles. On the other hand, like as landscape and city that do not include a single audience and encompasses a group of people,

the urban art audience as the same way is not an individual but instead composes the society of citizen. According to this definition, an artist is not supposed to claim his artwork as an urban art if no audience is considered to it.

From this statement that the audience of urban art is the society of citizens follows that individuality is not really of important, but the comprehension of society is a matter of concern. Emphasis on citizens and residents of city as the audiences in the urban landscape literature is for that this community over the course of time and along with the renewal common senses is able to comprehend the city. The urban art as a subset of urban landscape is not excluded of this rule in the same way.

The result is that urban art is not kind of art that upon achieving certain physical characteristics meet the desired identity and quality; but it is a concept of art that is created by people and based on their interactions with the art work. Thus, urban art is not an artistic object to be defined only based on its physical appearance and it could be installed anywhere [in a city], but it is an urban phenomenon that finding out the residents' experiences of the city spaces and symbols plays an important role in creating and interpreting it (adopted from the definition of urban landscape, Mansouri, 2009).

Therefore an urban art work more than of being an object is required to be dependent on citizen and his perceptions to be able to exploit the environmental qualities. In available research studies the double role of human- that on one hand can contribute in the creation of urban art and on the other hand in understanding and interpreting it- has not been considered. It should be noted that definition of urban art as a means of emplacing the art work in urban space without considering the role of citizenship in interacting with it, is a mere literal approach which not only reduces the art work as low as a decoration but beyond this the mentioned qualities will not be acquired of it. Moreover, the differences between the urban art work and the other art works might be arisen from this point that the art works must be part of the whole city

and subjected to its municipal order. Therefore, each art work that is created by an artist does not bear the ability of transforming into an urban art and must first recognize the totality and structure of urban language and its audiences known as citizens then create an art work. So, the audience of urban art unlike to the other art works that might be created only for the audience residing in the artist mind is not undefined and requires the artist to be notified of his art work audiences who constitutes the citizenship society. Therefore, the quality of urban art is emerged when the citizen as the audiences interact with urban art works. Therefore, an [art] work in addition to an objective aspect, which is the appearance of it and is created by an artist based on his artistic techniques, must benefit from semantic aspects arisen from the adaptation of art work with the minds of citizens.

• **The second component: social space, the most suitable context for presence and emergence of urban art**

According to archaeologists, cities have been formed based on the human desire for congregation. When these gatherings occur in a common space, they will be resulted in appearing of cities afterward. It is here that we are witnessing the emergence of disparity between private space and individual ownership and also public space shared by society. After the climatic characteristics of a territory what forms a city is a stream of public life in the city. Subsequent the modern movements which resulted in disconnection of city with its historical background, it is nearly two decades that urban research in Europe is following to re-emphasize the importance of communal spaces to qualify the social life. The social space, introduces the city framework as a space where life flows as a proved sign of personal and more importantly as communal identity (Revault, 2010). Social space is a leisure space. Therefore, due to the authorization of user to exploit the space, it could be also known as audience-oriented [phenomenon] (see. Mansouri, 2004).

By reviewing the successful examples of urban

art, such as Trafalgar Square of London and the pedestrian street of Strøget, in research studies, it is clear that all of these works present in public spaces. But it is noticeable that these public spaces, are defined as the territory of social spaces due to the supremacy of pedestrians as audiences and the optional interaction of them with each other. The social space is a place where “individuals and various social groups are involved in it, these spaces are a place for exchanging both the ideas and information and a location to form social networks. Such spaces more than being just a space are considered as an experience”. (Daneshpour, A & Charkhchyan, 2007: 20, According to Hajer et al, 2001). So it seems that the success of this work is indebted to the context of social spaces that are dependent on audience presence. Since the urban art is created for the targeted audience-the society of citizens- therefore the interaction of audience with art works and understanding them must be in a space that audience has a targeted and selective presence; this means [the audience] has come to be present. Today, these spaces are among of social spaces that take meaning of selective presence of audiences and their interactions. This is where the presence of an art work can be read by the audience, while helping to strengthen the qualities of space as well. Thus, based on the previous definitions of urban art that the mere presence of works in urban space and then in public spaces was enough for considering them as an urban art, it should be said that in contemporary time, regarding the characteristic of urban art, landscape and audience-oriented, the definitions can be modified into the presence of works in social spaces. Because, it seems in public spaces such as squares² that maximum dominance of riding is governed, the presence of a statue in the middle of square cannot be considered as an urban art; because the mentioned artwork due to absence of targeted citizen and the subsequent failure to secure two-way interaction in space reduces its value as much as a decoration that the desired effects from urban art will not be achieved.

The thing that is more effective than physical

aspects for social interaction in public [social] spaces is predicting and creating community events³ that in addition to creating opportunities for participating in social activities be able to improve the sense of belonging to the place (Lennard, 1984, quoted by the Daneshpour & Charkhchyan, 2007: 20). The public [social] spaces are more considered as an experience than just to be a simple space (Hajer, et al, 2001 quoted by Ibid). The result of people interactions and experiences in these spaces is to perceive a common sense of identity and improve the social skills and participations.

The social places provide the opportunity for individuals to be connected with space and with each other; the happening that is not taking place in motorist public spaces. The desired human relationship with each other and sharing their experiences, make a sense of belonging to place that will eventually lead to the formation of collective memory. If the goal of rising cities be considered [as a phenomenon] followed by

man's desire for social life, it can be said that communal spaces are the most emergent aspect of social life. Therefore, the presence of art works in these spaces in addition to improving the visual quality of space, are exposed to contact and will be perceived within the interaction of audiences with each other⁵.

According to the issues mentioned in this paper, today just due to the mere presence of art works in urban spaces and public locations, urban art will not be created and what is important is the presence of it in social spaces where the interaction between citizens are at maximum level and is able to improve the aesthetics impressions of social spaces. So the important thing is the presence of urban art in places where people come to do leisure activities. In fact, since the definition of urban art is related to the perception of urban audiences or citizens, therefore this happening occurs only in social spaces, neither in urban space nor in public space.

Discussion and Conclusion

Before conclusion, it is necessary to review the following question based on the existing urban art works:

How an art work located at the entrance of an urban tunnel, allocated to roadway, or an art work installed alongside a highway, a freeway or an urban square [round about], observing passage of vehicles, could call citizen for interaction and social communication that be able to become familiar [object] over the course of time and bring on the sense of place? How it could be possible that an Urban Art Symposium on a variety of urban art work be held [for a while] and after the completion of event, the art works will be located all over the city? Indeed, what kind of urban and spatial audiences these artists have created their work for? And by considering which context? Would it be possible to install an art work at any place of city merely because it is created for an event such as an urban art symposium to improve the quality of the urban landscape? What type of audiences do the frescos installed on buildings lining the highway or in tunnels invite to interact? Is this stereotype-promotion the visual literacy- applies for a citizen who is moving on foot and cannot see the work closely, but instead a motorist passes by so fast? How is it possible for such works to enhance the sense of place and identity while even two citizens do not experience it similarly? How a temporary urban project involving an artistic activity could be considered as an urban art, while shortly after that there is no trace of it over the city ever? Although these events are created for citizens to become familiar with artistic techniques and is approved as an event that is created as the result of the audience and the artist participation, but an urban art is not created under this condition.

It seems that the definition of urban art need to be reconsidered and the presence of any art work in the city should not be considered as an urban art, in the same way the authorized organizations, should

not create an urban art with this approach. Although it is a very good happening that art works have found this opportunity to come out of the spaces where exclusively had been dedicated to museums and galleries and become visible to audiences, but it should be noted that art works have a long way for being considered as an urban art, so that an art work might be created by a mere artistic approach but not necessarily for improving the quality of urban life.

Therefore, it is suggested that for acquiring the mentioned qualities, in definition of urban art, the concept of landscape as a common phenomenon among body, events and residents' mentality be considered as a basis; and urban art should be regarded as kind of art that play a vital role in the mentioned interaction and is dependent on two essential components: "citizen society" as the audiences, and "social spaces" as a context" for shaping the perceptions and interactions.

Endnote

1. "Landscape as a discipline and beyond a simply interdisciplinary knowledge" is a collective agreement (consensus) among scientific authorities that has been proposed under a statement of the European Network of Universities for implementing the European Landscape Convention (UNISCAPE) in 2013. It seems considering the landscape [art] not only in areas of urban and architecture but is required to be considered in all areas of humanities specifically in art. For more information see the special edition of Landscape, discipline of future, The Future Discipline- the Journal of MANZAR, 5 (23): 24-59.

2. According to the application and maximum dominant of rider, it is better to call them round about, as they are far from the concept of square.

3. Set of activities are defined based on individual participation and interactions.

4. In addition to the presence of art works in public spaces, it should be noted that, today in different cities around the world, there are art works that result in creation of social spaces and will be placed in cycle definition of social spaces and its potential again. In other words, in today's world that art takes the responsibility of calling up and evoking the audiences, it is required to consider this prospective ability of art to be able to create social spaces per se in addition to being present in social spaces.

This subject requires to be discussed in a separate article that will be published soon by the authors.

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