



CREATING PUBLIC ART PROGRAMS LEARNING BY CREATING

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Soros Foundation Kyrgyzstan and the American University of Central Asia founded SILK in 2019 with the purpose of developing innovative approaches to social change and social justice in Central Asia. Hosted by the American University of Central Asia (AUCA), the Lab brings together research and development organizations to conduct research, publish reports, organize events, make recommendations for public policies, and make use of advanced technologies such as data science to create marketable solutions.

Guiding Principles

- Develop innovative approaches to understanding problems and developing solutions
- Data-driven research; evidence-based recommendations
- Collaborative projects that bring together institutions and sectors
- Results of research will be shared at public events and released to the public domain
- Collaborations with social enterprises interested in sustainable business models for delivering solutions



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About the author

Meder Akhmetov - Architect at architectural studio MUSEUM since 2008. Practicing art mediator providing collective art workshops as attempts to counter predominant predatory commodity culture. Fan of philosophy, in particular Graham Harman's object-oriented ontology, Deleuze, Speculative realism, Tristan Garcia, and so on. Master degree in Architecture - 2007 DIA Dessau Institute of Architecture (Dessau, Germany)

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Abstract

Objectives. Public art is seen from two perspectives. On one hand we take it as a social object (produced by the community and for the community), on the other hand we take it as a conceptual tool to look into social objects - such as community. Public art is part of urban space and plays a vital role in making the public domain more sustainable insofar as it is community based. How it works and why we need it are the essential questions of this study. The methodology proposed in this study is of a non-classical style, which is not the direct way of research but "learning from tropinkas" (non-linear narratives, indirect discourse) - intervening and constructing living hypotheses (workshops) on the basis of heuristic methodology. The methodology is an error-tolerant, fallible trial-and-error method of rendering the object intelligible. This methodology is very widely used in programming and game development and other current new technologies (Reza Negar-estani, 2014).

Setting. The current stage of the research is theoretical and not empirically applied yet; it methodologically presupposes the practical stages in its second part. There are a number of locations that can be used as sites for the practical part of the research. Among them are the sides of the Alamedin river in Kok Jar as a model site for further replication in urban development programs.

Participants. There is a preliminary conceptual framework as part of the methodology. The conceptual personages that will be involved are of specific kind, for example the usually taken as marginals, such as vandals and other toxic members of public spaces, here they will play a structurally positive role, giving feedback. This is deliberately to be developed as concepts to learn from local agency, local context, without excluding the negative part of it. Agency here is any intervention happening with public art in public space, including vandalism. So basically learning from all members of public space using the object-oriented approach (which means without excluding any forms of self-expression, including marginal elements such as homeless people, vandals, drunks, and so on).

Results. Conceptual innovation based on the learning process, is radically related to the local context but also seen from a universal perspective, referring to global examples. As a result, conceptual innovation brings new ways of looking at public art in public spaces and vice versa, looking at public space as embedded in public art. In other words, being non-academic the research result is the implementation of object oriented methodology (which is the art oriented methodology) on the level of practice of interventions, such as workshops and creation of community-based art objects (Graham Harman, 2014).

Conclusion. Public art as a tool to indirectly measure social capital, is potentially a good perspective to work with - putting living hypotheses (workshops) into public spaces as methodological interventions. Living hypotheses or art workshops performed with local people is the tactical form of intervention into public space which indirectly generates knowledge about the place and its inhabitants. In other words, participatory collective art practice is another perspective on the local community. It is the nonverbal, indirect survey, metaphorical access to the society, to the community.

Keywords: Public art, public space, indirect discourse, OOO (object oriented ontology)

Background

The public art that has been left after many years of totalitarian regimes during the soviet times has controversial values. This is where people tend to divide into two main camps, those who are for soviet legacy in the form of murals and other variations of what we might call today public art, and those who feel depressed and alienated. Soviet era public art, is spread in the microrayons on the walls of panel housing with propaganda content. However, there are a number of art objects of great beauty and value in the form of fountains and murals that are not propagandistic or less heavily associated with the social realism agenda. What we are first of all interested in is art, not the ideological part of public art, though the two come together. But methodologically we develop more democratic perspectives on public art and public space co-constituting each other.

With the traditional art forms in public spaces there is the key relational contradiction with common people and community. Mostly it has State representational function and represents mythical narratives of less real and more symbolic value. There is no typology of public space, and no practice of issuing public art for neighborhood context. Monuments of cultural and political figures abound and dominate the public sphere and public art genre of Kyrgyzstan as a whole and Bishkek in particular.

There is a deficit for models of public space and all its constitutive ingredients such as public art. There is also a typological scarcity of community-based spatial objects such as art. And there is no vision for the overall paradigm of working with different urban phenomena, such as art objects in public spaces, street art included. We need to relate these things to spatial aspects of different urban situations. In other words, public art should not only be produced randomly, but should have urban policy, urban fabric relatedness, and spatial site-specific strategies.

Conceptualization

What is public art?

Public art is first of all art, in spite of its social connotations and significance. This means that its main core, the art element, should be approached with the help of indirect discourse tools – such as metaphor, allure, allegory, interpretations and so on. Public art is a phenomenon of urbanization – it is the hybrid form of public space and public art. American minimalist art of the 1960's is a big part of the development of public art as a distinct genre. The main theoreticians of American minimalist art are Michael Fried and Clement Greenberg.

Why is learning from a local context so important for developing tools for creating and working with public art projects in local conditions? First of all, we have a number of typical problems, one of which is the problem of maintenance. The day after having finished with the project, the realization of the objects of art or design objects, it gets actively used and it involves elements of vandalism. Instead of just fighting vandalism we can use inclusive logic and take vandals as feedback agents and try to learn not from vandals but from situations created by vandals. These are the elements of an indirect approach to accessing the art object. And again we should keep in mind the fact that public art is art in the first place. Art in public space needs learning from conceptual personages. Vandals are among such conceptual personages. From vandals we proceed to community-based art. But before community-based art we want to mention art that is of partizanning character. And among other such conceptual personages we have children. Children are very sensitive and they are like our fingers. We assess the place-making tasks through children. Usually people are not active in the places where they live, mostly they stay home, but not children. Children tend to stay outdoors, on the playground or in the courtyard and so on. Children introduce the element of playing (games) into art objects. And we have to be sensitive to that and learn from them. They are our agents, our artistic tools. Going from children to artists that practice not very legal art, so-called intervention art, we learn from this perspective a lot in terms of sensitivity and the possibility to look at things from non-typical angles. From partisan art to community art, it is easy to transform the language of art – and adapt it to certain local problems

and connect it to problems of place-making and community developing processes. What are the strong points about art is that it is an error-tolerant discipline in principle. It is radically inclusive. It works with identity problems. Art helps develop the agency of local communities. It prompts tourism and internal tourism in particular.

Why is Public Art important?

Public art is the indicator of public spaces. And it is the element of beauty, and beauty is a basic, necessary element of normal life. How do you choose meat or vegetables when you go to a bazaar – you look at it from an aesthetic point of view. Because aesthetics is the fundamental element of our life and our ability to comprehend the world.

- Public art increases tolerance, toward differences in age, gender, race and so on.
- Community-based public art strengthens community agency - the capacity to act and solve problems.
- Agency development is a placemaking driver.
- Public art creates conditions for better emotional wellbeing, and positive effects.

Public art is an urban phenomenon, but it is not only needed by the urban context. It can very well be part of rural or suburban communities. Public art can play its social role not only as an attractive object, but also by creating social capital for the community that needs to have its agency identified with material objects of the community, architecture (cultural), landscape (natural), design (utilitarian), and art included (symbolic).

Developing methodology

Learning from tropinkas(emergent pathways)

Going one direction, from object to object, is what object-oriented and actor network theory suggests (Grant Kein, 2016)³. As philosophical discipline has recently made an aesthetic turn, the artistic discourse is attracted by new emerging philosophies and metaphysical trends. Public art is made by artists, but it is inspired by the local, vibrant, context - which might not only consist of people but other agents of the site - such as animals, trees, stones or walls. So animate as well as inanimate elements of the site affect the artist's work and the form of the future public art object.

Theoretical background.

American philosopher Graham Harman is the main figure in the Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) movement in a bigger Speculative Realism emerging philosophical school. Performatively it energizes thought on public art as objects in public space where all the elements are of equal importance and therefore have a chance for new things to emerge. That is the main feature of the new OOO method of thinking which makes philosophy more engaged with artistic activity and develops conceptual tools for artistic discipline. The interdisciplinary character of public art involves not only art elements, but also public space with all its constitutive elements.

Two parts - first is the theoretical conceptualization. Almost done. But it is open architecture so it would get updated and corrected as the second part gets started which is more of empirical practical kind, where the number of workshops are planned to test and take the process itself as the element of learning paradigm.

Next steps

The first diagnosis of any urban space is the search for a typology (character). And starting with differences, not identities, is the better way to avoid reductionism according to the indirect OOO methodology. Distinction is in the proximity to unique types of spaces. Neighborhood with a unique typology suggests that any fragment in

3.

Actor-Network Theory —
Grant Kein, 2016,

[https://www.youtube.com/
watch?v=5Uh2UIPvlhs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Uh2UIPvlhs)

the city is always part of something bigger, Like part of a Chinese wall, which was built with the method of “from the particular to the general,” from the small parts to the big whole.

SPACE IS ALWAYS PART OF SOMETHING BIGGER.

“Kök Bishkek” is a large, infrastructural, spatial, project vision strategy for the city’s development of sustainable development in terms of its green and aquatorial blue public space. It is a big project working with the city as a whole united hyperobject.

Things to be done:

- List of categories of spaces of the city - types of spaces - spatial grammar for potential intervention
- Global vision of public art as objects of paradigmatic spatial structure of the whole city.
- Workshops
- Reflections on the results of the workshops
- Publication.

Recommendations

- Create and promote new models for public art - public space conjuncture
- Search and conceptualisation of spatial typology.
- Typical spatial urban situations that can be developed into a grammar of spatial matrix for public art representation. There is a variety of spatial forms. For example, strange spaces of nontypical shape and proportions. Very long spaces or very tall, well-like, spaces.
- Be sensitive to the context - work and include everything - use a flat ontology model of thinking - which means include even negative or insignificant personages into your feedback group.
- Learn from tropinkas, and not only from animate objects but also all kinds of objects that can play a role in networks or relationships between objects.

- Think creatively instead of trying to make renovation, and don't limit the program to utilitarian problems.
- When drawing a mural on a wall don't ignore the architectural style of the building.
- Public art should be Community-based and community-driven, but state supported.
- Public art should have educational effects.
- Public art can and should involve a touristic element into its agenda.
- Public art should develop policies of urban spaces such as working with developers.

Reviewing existing global public art programs

1. Public art walking tours.
2. <https://www.denver.org/things-to-do/itineraries/downtown-public-art/>
3. Enhanced hoarding around the construction site.
4. <https://www.calgary.ca/transportation/roads/traffic/permits/hoarding-permits.html>
5. Percent for art
6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Percent_for_art
7. Arts council
8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arts_council
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