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## **Study of the effect of Public Art with Emphasis on environmental sculpture in increasing urban space quality. The Sampled Case: Tabriz**



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### **Abstract:**

At present, public art is considered a cultural necessity in contemporary urban planning. Use of public art in city, firstly to compensate for undesired features in contemporary cities and secondly to fulfill missions, like the educational and cultural role of the city, is increasing. Such increasing use of public art enhances the necessity to study this art, its nature and impact on the city. After studying the city-planning critics' viewpoints about public art's definition, nature and impact on city, this study evaluates the role of environmental sculptures - as a type of public art - in ameliorating public place quality in the sampled case of Tabriz.

As clearly shown by the topic, which is an evaluation of a qualitative phenomenon, this research possesses a phenomenal viewpoint and uses the case-correlative research methodology and library methods, worldwide information network and interviews.

What resulted from this study was that through having the least possible qualities and public art features, city sculptures in the city of Tabriz have the ability to improve the qualities like legibility, sense of belonging, and happiness besides developing citizen's social interaction and native cultural identity.

**Keywords:** public art, Tabriz, urban public space, environmental sculpture.

### **1. Introduction: statement of the problem and the theory**

Public art is a lot different from museum and classic art. Due to various reasons, like the wide variety of audience, the necessity to create harmony in the surrounding space and place, sociological influences, the need to apply maintenance measures and..., we are facing a different type of art. All these issues, along with various and changing dimensions of contemporary cities - as founders of the grounds to cultivate environmental art- like population, population variety, and social life, increase the need to study environmental art, its being and nature and exploring its capacity to influence the beauty of urban environment and improving people's life quality.

In recent years, the role of public art in improving the quality of public spaces has been taken into consideration. Some of the reasons for this attention are as follows: (Margareth Worth, 2005) 1. Rapidly expanding development and redevelopment of cities and suburbs characterized by 'placelessness'. 2. Boredom and disadvantage leading to vandalism and other crimes. 3. A

good proposition for governments – low cost and high profile. 4.Social inclusion through art / design leading to increased community empowerment.

The wrong use of this art not only doesn't take our cities toward visual and social order, but in some cases also turns to be an additional factor to increase visual turmoil while, based on definition, public art belongs to cities, is created for the cities, originates from the existence of cities, and its future is the future of the cities (Armajani 1384). The proper use of this kind of art can be very effective in improving urban public space quality.

## 2. Public space

The existing relationship between public art and public space, the first as one of the city making elements along with architecture and buildings, and the latter as the place of creation and placement of this art is undeniable.

Jane Jacobs, a journalist and an important critic of city issues, emphasizes the important role of urban public spaces in creating social interactions in her book "The Death and Life of Great American Cities". As she believes, what remains most vivid in mind of a city is its public spaces specially its streets and pavements (Pakzad, 1386)

Public space can be defined as a space which allows people to access it, where certain activities are performed and where is controlled by a public organization; it is a space which is provided and run for the benefit of all public. It seems that the definition of public space emphasizes the unlimited access to space or various activities, the most noticeable of which are the qualities that public space should have; for example, its ability to support, to be democratic and meaningful. (Moradi, 1386).

## 3. Public Art

Public art or art for the public was first coined in 1967 by the American National Art Foundation. La Grande Vitesse was the first environmental work which was delegated to Alexandar Calder to be built in the main square of the city, Grand Rapids, in Michigan State. Calder's work brought about increasing public respect regarding the city and its public places. (Gholnari)



Figure 1: La Grand Vitesse, Alexandar Calder

The city and its public spaces are the grounds to form Public art. Not only has this art firstly been created for the city but it is also the result of the do's and don'ts, city-related patterns and needs of its citizens. Unlike Classic art which is after expressing the artist's personal worries, and, in other words, is author-centered, environmental art seeks to respond to needs and requirements of its own field.

Public art isn't about a person's being; it is concerned with the being of others. It's not about personal taste but about others' needs. It's not about the artists' worries but about other's satisfaction and happiness. It is not going to create distance between the elevated culture and the common people, but it is to make art public and the artist is a member of this public. Public art

is that which is experienced by the public. (Armajani, 1384) Of characteristics that Armajani mentions considering art in public places, we can refer to its being open to all, being useful and being for all. (Moradi, 1386)

If we want to define public art based on convention, this art is an ordered and specific art for the public which has participatory characteristics (Moradi, 1386). Public art includes artistic works that are created by artists and, in some cases, through people’s cooperation and are placed in city spaces and have proper visual permeability; all people can access them and they can be temporary or permanent projects (Kanaani 1388).

The term public art defines every type of artistic work which is usually installed or run in open spaces in public sphere and which is open to the public. Such artistic works are usually designed and performed for special places. Besides, it is attempted to connect them with other environmental social and cultural factors in the installation location. (Agheli.....)

It should of course be taken into consideration that each artistic work in open city space can’t be a reason for applying the term public art to it.“ Some try to place a work here or there, some wish to create a here or there. The first should be called art in public place and the latter the public art (Armajini 1384)

Characteristics of public arts:	Considering the artist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the abstract presentation of the artist’s subjective notion</li> <li>• the priority of meaning and issue over form</li> <li>• the opposite to elite-centered and artist-centered</li> </ul>
	Considering the work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• city as the ground to develop this art</li> <li>• located in city open space</li> <li>• reflecting its forming ground</li> <li>• Being opposite to worldwide view/thought</li> <li>• Physical/visual permeability of work</li> </ul>
	Considering the audience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inseparable connection between work and audience (audience are a part of the work of art)</li> <li>• Being at service of the public and having participatory qualities</li> </ul>

Table 1: characteristics of public arts, Reference: the author

#### 4. Types of public arts

Based on the nature of their creator, public arts can be classified in 3 groups: (Kanaani, 1388)

1. Self-initiated arts for all: artistic activities that some people- commonly amateurs- do in cities; like wandering instrumentalists such as Haji Firuz or wandering singers
2. Participatory public art:  
Public art is like a social process in which people, artists, city designers and architects cooperate to produce an art work, like the *culture in action* project in the city of Chicago.
3. Specialized public art (artist-centered):  
Artistic productions like music, painting, sculpture, and... which are produced, ratified and performed by the specialized artist or artists. The artist will perform with an aesthetic outlook and on the basis of aesthetics.

Public arts are also varied on the basis of their nature. In recent years, city spaces and their different aspects, from urban furniture to lighting and mural paintings, have turned to be a place to present and perform public art works. In addition, it should be noted that public art is not limited to material and physical works of art; poetry reciting, street theatrical performances, Installations and the like are also within the scope of this kind of art (Agheli). Despite natural difference among various forms of public art, all can be grouped in one of the following sub-divisions: (Moradi 1386)

1-Events 2-Noticeable works and Masterpieces 3-Activities 4-Every expression of performance art 5-Every expression of musical art 6-All creative meaningful activities

Of course when we talk about public art, we are mostly referring to issues that have been permanently placed in public spaces. Permanent public arts are as follows:

1. Historical Memorials: all things, buildings or issues that represent a society's remarkable history.
2. Special buildings: buildings which are noticeable in the city for any reason.
3. Memorials: Sculptures, fountains, and structures that remind pictures, symbols, important people and facts about the city.
4. Decorations: sculptures and fountains that are placed in the city to revise urban landscape.
5. Urban furniture elements: the most important duty of these elements is to improve urban elements' quality.

Types of public art	Based on the nature of its creator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-initiated public arts</li> <li>• participatory public arts</li> <li>• Specialized public arts (artist-centered)</li> </ul>	
	Based on the nature of the work of art	Physical (permanent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical memorials</li> <li>• Special buildings</li> <li>• Memorials</li> <li>• Decoration</li> <li>• Urban furniture elements</li> </ul>
		Non-physical (temporary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Events</li> <li>• Activities</li> <li>• Every representation of performance art</li> <li>• Every representation of musical art</li> <li>• All creative and meaningful activities</li> </ul>

Table 2: types of Public Art Origin: the author

### 5. Environmental sculpture:

Sculpture is considered not only as an urban decoration but also as an inevitable necessity in improving visual quality of the environment. The term, environmental sculpture of the city is applied to any kind of sculpture which is formed based on the volumetric needs and spatial structure of the environment while following its characteristics, and whose addition to city-environment is generally done with the purpose of completion, improving or adjusting urban space (Shance..).

Besides other cultural and artistic achievements, sculpture holds a special position in representing imaginative outlook, emotions and goals in the history. In fact, city sculptures constitute a major part of public art collection.

City sculptures not only help enrich visual quality of our city and our social life space, but also are reliable as symbols and signs of our collective identity and culture; hence, we should have a fresh and more serious outlook toward them. These public art works, as elements of urban environment, should - according to regulations and overall city needs and requirements and urban visual qualities, be chosen and installed so that in addition to not add to crowded urban environment and not reduce the effectiveness and impression of the sculpture, they can play their role in helping improve urban space qualities.

### 6. the effects of public art in improving urban space quality

The most important mission of urban designing is to improve Man's quality of life. But to achieve this, we need special tools. Kevin Lynch says: if urban design is meant to be useful, it should be able to – by elevating the quality of physical environment- help improve human life quality (Golkar 1378).

Use of public art is a step toward increasing the environmental quality in urban spaces. Public art in city makes recognizable and memorable signs in public spaces and forms and improves a special picture of the city. Work of art can represent itself in form of something in urban environment or, through its spatial quality, cause to increase visual emotional quality of urban environment and change city space to city place. (Moradi 1386)

Environmental sculpture can be effective as one of the basic foundations in environmental design to create novel urban space; a desirable space which has the ability to create intellectual belonging, innovative space, and finally, the contemporary Man's deserved space (Shance...).

To the extent that public art provides fundamental definition of the nature of public space, it injects it- with the same force- to awareness of the citizens who don't have a proper understanding of their surrounding environment and its quick changes and through public evocation of emotional reactions, places the city as a collective possession which needs guarding against all its enemies ( Naraghi 1385).

These projects and art works are in a way that can highlight their own identity grounds, improve the quality of physical environment and cause the increase of people's presence in space and create the sense of place in them and can cooperate, along side other designing policies in creating places (Kanani 1388). The effect of art in public space has been defined by Malcolm Miles as: (Moradi 1386):

- 1- Public art give the place the sense of emotion and happiness.
- 2- It creates the sense of responsibility in people who are using the place and involves them with the place.
- 3- It gives a model of thoughtful and imaginative works.
- 4- It helps revive the city

The educational and cultural advantages of public art has been defined by Hoda Kanani as follows: (Kanaani 1388)

1. Improving people's artistic taste
2. Awakening and improving people's innovative power
3. Birth giving and soul granting to citizen life
4. Helping educate citizens
5. Involvement of artists in building places along with city designers and architects
6. Continuation of native art
7. Teaching history to people
8. Teaching native culture and art
9. Helping improve urban knowledge
10. Teaching art

Hall and Robertson express responsibilities for urban art:

1. promote a sense of community and an awareness of local cultural identity
2. promote the development of social networks and tackle social exclusion
3. promote senses of place and the connections between communities and places
4. develop and promote civic identity
5. have an educative function
6. act as a provocation for social change

In addition we can recognise three intermediate outcomes through which, it is argued, these impacts are achieved. It has been claimed that public art:

- aesthetically enhances environments
- acts as a medium for the communication of symbolic meanings
- acts as a vehicle for participatory and co-operative activity

It has long been argued that the aesthetic improvements associated with public art projects have a number of social impacts, for example, promoting senses of community amongst residents of disadvantaged neighbourhoods. Advocates argue that public art can improve the spaces of public culture and social interaction, increase senses of security and reduce fear of public space. Thus, it is often claimed that public art can ‘humanise’ prosaic urban forms.

Impact of public art in the city	Experimentable- aesthetics qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Increasing visual/emotional qualities</li> <li>• Creation of emotion and sentiment in place</li> <li>• Increasing sense of place</li> <li>• Increasing place beauty</li> <li>• Awareness of native cultural chance</li> <li>• Creation of more humane environments</li> </ul>
	Functional qualities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving ground qualities</li> <li>• Increasing people’s presence</li> <li>• Improving social network development</li> <li>• Improving society/place relationship</li> <li>• Social change stimuli</li> <li>• Creating happiness</li> </ul>

Public Art effects in the city Reference: the author

### 7. Case sample: Tabriz City

Tabriz is one of the oldest cities of Iran which nowadays has lost its role-making function in forming the social interactions of the citizens despite having a historical background in active public places. This is while the need for strengthening the communal life is felt more than ever due to the specific time circumstances. Today, Tabriz is inundated with agitated and colorful elements presenting a look entirely different from its old past full of disturbed spaces. This agitation obsesses its residents’ minds and disturbs their comfort. In the meantime the disturbing issues in the constituting elements of the city such as buildings, sculptures and statues besides the inappropriate designing of the city spaces via disturbing images collectively have made it hard to realize and communicate with the urban areas. Currently the citizens’ sensitivity toward the city and its elements has gone and the citizens’ peace of mind, satisfaction and their sense of belonging to the city have been sacrificed owing to this negligence.

application of this municipal element usually is limited to the city’s small and big squares, and a majority of them not having been designed according to the aesthetic values seem so coarse and soulless. These sculptures and statues not only have done nothing in decorating the city but turned into eyesores and have spoiled the city looks (Mazinany, 2003).



Figure 2: The outdoors statue located in Ilgoli area of Tabriz,  
Source: the author



Figure 3: The statue of car in danesqah circle in Tabriz,  
Source: the author



Figure 4: The statue of Khaghani in Khaghani Park in Tabriz, Source: the author

The making of the frames of the works has been carried out disregarding the other important elements such as the statue's conformity with surrounding area, material durability, the relationship of material and the shape, performance quality, respecting audience's understanding and perception, attention to the novel perspectives in urban sculpture etc. That's why the essence of our municipal sculpture in its finest cases consists of some busts of Khaghani and Aboureihan Birooni etc dissimilar to their characters, having no clue of their geniuses, and perhaps their only difference lies in the turbans which in some cases are worn in different fashions.

In Tabriz, there are a little number of the public artistic works which are made based on the associated designing standards and conditions. "Ghungha" statue in Ghungha Square of Tabriz, which is one of them, in addition to vivaciously narrating the history of Tabriz, observation suggest has caused weird behaviors in the surrounding area because of being reminiscent of the past happenings and occurrences. Ghungha is a kind of transportation device similar to tram, which is pulled by two horses and move through the rails. it is utilized for the first time in Iran Tabriz, by the Russian government.



Figure 5: statue of Ghungha in Ghungha Square in Tabriz,  
Source: the author



Figure 6: The statue of Ghungha in Ghungha Square in Tabriz,  
Source: the author



Figure 7: : The "venis" statue located in Roshdiyeh district,  
Source: the author

The "venis" modern Statue is one of the other outdoors statues, located in newly-built Roshdiyeh district, has been built in recent years. Its performance success has been studied and evaluated because it has been designed differently and uniquely in harmony with the modern structure of the district.

## 8. Interview

Following some open interviews made with a group of Tabriz citizens, approximately all the citizens unanimously admitted that Ghungha statue is one of the long-lasting and perhaps the only important public sculpture of Tabriz. It is worth citing that most of the afore-mentioned people interviewed dwelled in some areas other than the Ghungha region of Tabriz and this

shows that the public work has reached beyond its neighborhood and plays its role in the area and city despite being located in a neighborhood devoid of attractive activities. But only 15% of the interviewees mentioned the statue in the Roshdiyeh district as a durable work.

Nearly 93% of the interviewees expressed their interest and sense of attachment to the Ghungha statue and most of them stated the reason for that through words such as “being reminiscent of the happenings and social life and cultural background of the past in their minds”, “getting people to know about the history of Tabriz”, “dynamism and liveliness of the work (its uniqueness in terms of its shape)”, “presenting people from different walks of life with different Social characters”, “the harmony of the work with the work position (Ghungha Square)”. But regarding Roshdiyeh statue, 75% of the interviewees whether weren’t interested in the work or were indifferent about it due to the lack of the sense of attachment to the work. They stated that they don’t have a liking for the work because it didn’t rekindle any concept in their minds and reminded them of nothing and 25% of the interviewees believed that the statue was beautiful and praiseworthy on account of its distinction and originality.

About 70% declared that they had a lot of tendency to approach the Ghungha statue and touch it personally but they hadn’t done so because of some reasons such as the unsuitable position of the work, the limited space around it and also inappropriateness of such behaviors in common culture, and common interest to sculpture is somewhat that 65% of the interviewees showed their enthusiasm for perceiving the work one more time while passing by the square despite the repeated observation of the work by them by the time.

Taking all the above-mentioned responses into account it can be said that out of citizens’ sense of attachment to the Ghungha statue and the statue’s informative role in notifying them of their local and cultural identity and also the existence of Ghungha as a familiar element in historical memory of people, the attachment of the citizens to the place has increased greatly and people’s sense of estrangement from the area has faded away leading to the increased intimacy of people with the area due to this bond. Therefore, the work has an educational role in addition to strengthening the sense of belonging to the area and creating the sense of vitality and identity in citizens besides making a sense of connection among them. Considering the Roshdiyeh statue, despite its partial harmony with the area, the connection between the citizens and the work has not been fully established due to some reasons such as incomplete understanding of the work thanks to its position circumstances and also unfamiliarity and lack of content and theme comprehension of the work by a lot of people.

Approximately 85% were dissatisfied with the current location of Ghungha statue (in the middle of traffic nod on the platform) and believed that the citizens have been deprived of fully understanding and observing and physically contacting with the work because of access difficulties to the work firstly due to its location in the vehicles’ course and secondly its high position. These people generally stated that if the work were positioned on the sidewalk or if there were more space for sitting or walking around the statue not only the work could communicate more effectively with the audience, it could also play a supportive role in forming the social interactions. 75% were more or less witness to the emerging strange behaviors such as photographing, the people’s inclination for approaching and touching the work, entering the Ghungha’s wagon etc despite its inconvenient conditions and access difficulty to the work.

Two conclusions can be drawn considering the questionnaires, first of the Tabriz citizen’s need for the public places and having social interactions, and secondly, identifying the characteristics of public art which are liked by people and attract them and the most important ones among them are the novelty of the work along with the familiar components of history, culture and

people's lifestyle. But about the Roshdiyeh statue not only no one observed forming activities in the area around it they themselves had no interest in approaching the work. The work seemed to have a mere symbolic role in its best case scenario.

Approximately 90% considered the Ghungha statue as an iconic element in building their mental image of Ghungha square of Tabriz and used it as a mark in orienting. Just about all the people interviewed took the Roshdiyeh statue as a weaker element as a mark for directing people compared to other constituting elements of the square such as the large roundabout and the mosque and the business complex in the area. 50% of the interviewees viewed the statue as an iconic element in creating their mental image and the other 50% believed that the role of the statue in forming their mental image was very weak probably because of the figures' concentration in the area (the mosque, the large roundabout, the business complex and a second public statue) and the location of the statue on the course of underpasses which makes it difficult to observe and understand the work. Owing to the fact that both statues have a leading role in creating citizens' mental images of the place, therefore they are helpful in legibility of the area. The Ghungha statue is also applied in directing people as an iconic and understandable symbol but the Roshdiyeh statue is of no practical use in directing people probably because of its vagueness and inexplicability (lack of name or title). Almost all the people interviewed exploit the other elements of the region such as business complex and Roshdiyeh Mosque and also the large Fahmideh Roundabout for giving directions.

## **9. conclusions**

Nowadays the public arts mostly are employed for decorating and in some cases for promoting values and getting people acquainted with city VIPs and sophisticated figures in Iran. Regarding the public arts performance like this along with designing and inadequate displaying of these works not only makes no associations with citizens but makes people indifferent about the work leading to the alienation of the statue and the city.

Despite all these shortages and numerous problems whether in conceptual areas and works' contents or in administrative dimensions or also supervisory measures against public art and sculpture in Tabriz, this art to some extent could present an acceptable role in challenging citizen's mind and associating cultural and identity-related concepts and contents with his minds, hence leading to his heightened sense of belonging to the city.

Due to the fact that the public art looks unique and distinct from a visual perspective, it takes a more symbolic role and manifests itself in city identifiability and legibility, When it is designed and created in consistency with its area and location specifications in addition to innovation, it can improve the city vitality, place attachment and security originated from understanding the familiar elements and can intensify social interactions through establishing a connection with citizens and associating the place with citizens' minds.

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