

Exploring perception of public art in urban spaces among North Cyprus residents

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Abstract

Urban open spaces are significant features of sustainability oriented urban environments. These spaces have potential to contribute both in four pillars of sustainability, environmental, social, economic and cultural. Public art can increase the existence, impact and benefits of urban open spaces with the help of increasing quality of urban life and can enhance townscapes within disparate city scales. Public art can also be catalyst for urban communities. Urban open spaces have qualitative and quantitative insufficiencies in N. Cyprus. Additionally these spaces have several inadequacies regarding the existence of public art products such as sculptures, installations, monuments and wall paintings etc. Within this framework, a user survey was conducted among 90 participants in three cities of N. Cyprus (Nicosia, Famagusta and Kyrenia) in order to understand and evaluate the dynamics of their perception in relation to public art in urban communal spaces. The findings reveal that respondents are mostly dissatisfied regarding both the urban open and green spaces and public art in these spaces.

Keywords: Perception, Public, Art, Urban, Space, Questionnaire, N. Cyprus.

Kuzey Kıbrıs'ta kentsel mekanlardaki kamusal sanat algısının kullanıcı anketi aracılığıyla araştırılması

Özet

Kentsel açık ve yeşil alanlar sürdürülebilir kentsel çevrelerin önemli bir özelliğidir. Bu alanlar sürdürülebilirliğin, çevresel, sosyal, ekonomik ve kültürel olmak üzere tüm dört boyutu kapsamında kente katkı sağlayacak potansiyele sahiptir. Kamusal sanat ise kent yaşamını destekleyerek kentsel açık ve yeşil alanların etki ve faydalarını artırabilir ve farklı kent ölçeklerinde kentsel peyzajı güçlendirebilir. Kuzey Kıbrıs'ta kentsel açık ve yeşil alanlar kalitatif ve kantitatif yetersizliklere sahiptir. Ayrıca bu alanlar heykel, sanat gösterisi ve duvar resimleri gibi kamusal sanat eserlerinin varlığı açısından da yetersizlikler

içermektedir. Bu çerçevede bu çalışmada, katılımcıların kamusal alanlardaki kamusal sanata dair algısını araştırmak ve değerlendirmek amacıyla, Kuzey Kıbrıs'ın üç kentinde (Lefkoşa, Gazimağusa ve Girne) toplam 90 katılımcıyla bir kullanıcı anketi gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırma bulguları katılımcıların önemli oranda, kentsel açık ve yeşil alanlar ile bu alanlardaki kamusal sanata dair memnuniyetsiz olduğunu göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Algı, Kamusal Sanat, Kentsel Mekan, Anket, Kuzey Kıbrıs.

Introduction

Enhancing urban environments with sustainability dimensions has become a key issue worldwide for the current agenda of urban development policies. Urban open and green spaces are the features benefiting both four pillars of sustainability, *environmental, social, economic and cultural*. Public art in urban spaces can increase the existence, impact and benefits of urban open spaces with the help of increasing quality of urban life and can enhance townscapes within disparate city scales. However existence of art in public spaces is another issue that may be overlooked.

In North Cyprus, not only the public art features but also urban open and green spaces have significant qualitative and quantitative deficiencies. Regarding the public open spaces, it can be suggested that these spaces are not planned and well defined in order to create walkable, pedestrian friendly and liveable urban environments. Therefore as cities that are located in northern part of the Mediterranean island with a moderate population, Famagusta, Kyrenia and Nicosia have emerging urban development and planning challenges. Additionally regarding the public green spaces, it can be suggested that the cities in Northern Cyprus have scattered green spaces almost like green spots without achieving an integral green system welcoming urban ecology with fauna and flora.

Public art in public urban spaces is another challenging issue that needs further scientific focus both in general and within Northern Cyprus in particular. Hence urban open and green spaces have inadequacies regarding the existence of public art products such as sculptures, installations, monuments and wall paintings etc.

Within this framework, this study focuses on user perception in relation to public spaces and public art in urban open and green spaces. The paper first provides a review of the relevant literature. Secondly, the methodology including sample and measures are presented, and questionnaire results are displayed. Finally, the findings are interpreted and recommendations are made for further research.

Public spaces as urban open and green spaces

Public spaces as urban open spaces (streets, squares etc.) and urban green spaces (neighbourhood parks, community parks etc.) are significant features of sustainable cities. They have a central role, both physically and functionally, in urban planning and development. Many urban theorists state their significant

role as one of the principal components of a healthy urban setting (Paşaoğulları and Doratlı, 2004:225). In other words, the availability of attractive, accessible open spaces is an important feature of a liveable urban environment for the inhabitants of cities and urban areas (Salama et al., 2013:47). These spaces have valuable benefits in relation to both four pillars of sustainability. With regards to environmental sustainability, it can be suggested that they sustain urban ecological systems as they have a role to be the homes for plant and animal species. In relation to social sustainability, they can give the chance to individuals having disparate social profiles to come together and interact. There is evidence that green spaces have significant role in residents' feelings of attachment towards the community, and their connections with other inhabitants (Kim and Kaplan, 2004). Regarding the economic sustainability, they may support the value and increase identity characteristics of the urban environments for city branding purposes. Additionally they have the potential to assist the cultural evolution of the cities including the urban communities with the help of hosting cultural entities and activities.

However urban open and green spaces have qualitative and quantitative insufficiencies in N. Cyprus. Because they have been ignored within the urban planning and design process since 1980s. Consequently, buildings are designed with little concern for their relationship to each other or for the overall effect of the city. Spaces left between them have become undefined, undesirable, useless and unliveable. To change this, we must develop a sensitivity to public spaces; not only in central civic and business districts, but also, and most importantly, in urban and peri-urban quarters, where the spaces between are becoming more important as densities increase (Oktaç, 2002:261). See Figure 1.



Figure 1: A community park example in Nicosia (B. Asilsoy).

Therefore it can be argued that besides focusing on the quantities of the public spaces in the cities of Northern Cyprus, qualitative characteristics of them are further needed to be addressed within urban planning agenda. At this point it can be argued that public art is one of the tools that has a high potential to enhance qualitative dimension of the public spaces.

Public art in public spaces

Public art can be defined as all type of art works displayed in streets, squares and other public spaces. It has potential to achieve several significant social, cultural and psychological benefits like public spaces and it can be suggested to be existing since ancient times. Statues, monuments and other religious, social or architectural sculpture were common as traditional public art features. For instance statues of the pharaohs of Ancient Egypt or Michelangelo's marble sculpture positioned in the Piazza della Signoria in Florence which was a symbol of Florentine Republic independence can be given as examples of public art features.

However today, the category of public art includes a huge range of works including forms of visual culture, sound art, painting, ceramic, stained glass, performance art, installation, graffiti, street art and plastic art etc. For instance, the seven-meter long 'Ali and Nino' moving sculpture in Batumi, made by Georgian sculptor Tamara Kvesitadze, as one of memorable sights in Black Sea, is a nice sample of contemporary public art work (Figure 2).



Figure 2: Statue of Love by Georgian sculptor Tamara Kvesitadze in Batumi as a public art feature (<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/446137906807813203>).

Public art items do not have exact characteristics regarding the size, shape, material used etc. A public art feature will be determined and created according to the artist(s) perception, view and aim(s). However the output of the public art

product is the same with any other art work. Eventually, it may be the reason to raise awareness, to ask new questions leading to new mind openings or to shake the individual's values etc. In other words public art can express community values, enhance our environment, transform a landscape, heighten our awareness, or question our assumptions. Placed in public sites, this art is there for everyone, a form of collective community expression. Public art is a reflection of how we see the world – the artist's response to our time and place combined with our own sense of who we are. (<http://www.associationforpublicart.org/what-is-public-art>). See Figure 3.



Figure 3: On the left: A graffiti as a public art feature in an urban space of Nicosia. On the right: A public art feature as an old ship located in an urban space of Kyrenia (R. Amrahova).

One another main benefit of public art in cities is its contribution to the city's touristic purposes that may further be used for city branding. Therefore an increasing number of communities are finding ways to make available the social and aesthetic qualities that are desired by people. One way communities are attracting people to a particular settings is to include public art as a part of the landscape. Hence public art features can be the symbol of the setting where it is located and can contribute to the local economy as attracting both local and external tourists. In other words public art can give identity to a community and become a symbol of that place. Such that according to a 2014 study by Americans for the Arts, tourists seeking cultural experiences typically spend more money than tourists who do not (<http://www.nrpa.org>).

Additionally there are scientist suggesting that public art has positive effects on a community's sense of place. Public art products can add value and meaning to the public space where located (Turpeinen, 2014:242). With the help of value-making, the users' sense of belonging can be supported. In other words, public art can serve to highlight collective values, beauty, history and the surrounding nature (Turpeinen, 2010:30). For instance in Mexico, Pachuca it was used as a very powerful tool to motivate residents of low-income neighbourhood to reduce crime and increase sense of belongingness. It was a great community project, developed by group of artists named Germen Crew. Project lasted 14 month, 209 houses was painted and turned the neighbourhood into Mexico's largest mural.

Furthermore, the relation between public art and public pedagogy is another significant topic of concern. Such that art and other cultural practices are considered to initiate learning processes which differ fundamentally from those generated in the context of formal schooling (Sandlin, O'Malley and Burdick, 2011). The processes under scrutiny range from the creation of opportunities to enact the public quality of human togetherness (Biesta 2012a, 2012b) over the emotionally charged challenges posed by artists to securities and established convictions (Ellsworth, 2005) to the way art opens up new ways of seeing, feeling, experiencing, and describing the world (Rancie `re, 2010 cited in Schuermans, 2012:677).

Another purpose, which public art has been used for, is political propaganda. The most extreme example of public art being used for political aims is Socialist Realism during Soviet Russia period. Hence all these benefits mentioned above may be the reason that many researchers and policy makers etc. have a more deepened focus on socio-psychological and cultural dimensions of public art.

Methodology

The Study Region

Cyprus is the third largest and third most populous island in the Mediterranean, after the Italian islands of Sicily and Sardinia. It is located south of Turkey, west of Syria and Lebanon, northwest of Israel, north of Egypt, and southeast of Greece. The island has two different republics due to the political conflicts between Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots ongoing since 1960s. The northern part of the island there has six main provinces, Nicosia, Famagusta, Kyrenia, Güzelyurt, İskele and Lefke respectively.

These provinces' de-facto population according to the 2011 Census is displayed below. As Lefke has officially become the sixth province after the 2011 Census, it is not listed in Table 1.

	DE-FACTO POPULATION (%)
NICOSIA	85,579
FAMAGUSTA	64,269
KYRENIA	62,158
GÜZELYURT	31,116
İSKELE	21,978

Table 1: De-facto population of N. Cyprus provinces according to the 2011 Census(%).

The Interview Schedule

A user survey was prepared for the research. The user survey was conducted among 90 participants. 30 participants from each of the three cities (Nicosia, Famagusta ad Kyrenia) of Northern Cyprus were chosen randomly in order to fill out the questionnaire. The user survey was carried out by the authors of the study individually as face to face interviews in April 2017 within three weeks.

Research Sampling

Gender of Participants: In the city of Nicosia, 46.7 percent of the respondents were female and 53.3 percent were male. In Famagusta, 60 percent of the

respondents were female and 40 percent were male. In Kyrenia, 70 percent of the participants were female and the rest 30 percent were male. See Table 2.

	FEMALE (%)	MALE (%)
NICOSIA	46.7	53.3
FAMAGUSTA	60	40
KYRENIA	70	30

Table 2: Participants' gender profile (%).

Age of Participants: 46.7 percent of the participants had an age of 16-25, 16.7 percent had an age of 26-40, 33.3 percent were between 41-55 and the rest 3.3 percent of the respondents were between 56-65 in Nicosia. In Famagusta, 23.33 percent of the respondents were between 16-25 years old, 30 percent were between 26-40 years old, 36.67 percent were between 41-55 and the rest 10 percent had an age between 56-65 years old. In Kyrenia, 40 percent of the participants were between 16-25 years old, 36.67 percent were between 26-40 years old, 13.33 percent of the respondents had an age of 41-55 and the rest 10 percent were between 56-65 years old. See Table 3.

	16-25 (%)	26-40 (%)	41-55 (%)	56-65 (%)
NICOSIA	46.7	16.7	33.3	3.3
FAMAGUSTA	23.33	30	36.67	10
KYRENIA	40	36.67	13.33	10

Table 3: Participants' age profile (%).

Nationality of Participants: In Nicosia, 40 percent of the participants were born in N. Cyprus, 46.7 percent of them were born in Turkey and the rest 13.3 percent were born in other countries. 80 percent of the participants in Famagusta were born in N. Cyprus, 10 percent were born in Turkey and the other 10 percent were born in other countries. In Kyrenia, 50 percent of the respondents were born in N. Cyprus, 36.67 percent were born in Turkey and the rest 13.33 percent of them were born in other countries. See Table 4.

	NORTHERN CYPRUS(%)	TURKEY(%)	OTHER (%)
NICOSIA	40	46.7	13.3
FAMAGUSTA	80	10	10
KYRENIA	50	36.67	13.33

Table 4: Participants' nationality profile (%).

Education of Participants: In Nicosia, 3.3 percent of the respondents did not have any education degree. 3.4 percent had a secondary education degree, 40 percent had a high school degree, 30 percent had an under graduate degree and 23.3 percent had a graduate degree or more. In Famagusta, 3.33 percent had a primary degree, 13.33 had a secondary school degree, 36.67 had a high school degree, 33.34 had an under graduate degree and 13.33 had a graduate degree or more. In Kyrenia, 10 percent had a secondary school degree, 26.67

had a high school degree, 60 percent had an under graduate degree and 3.33 percent had a graduate degree or more. See Table 5.

	NONE (%)	PRIMARY SCHOOL (%)	SECONDARY SCHOOL (%)	HIGH SCHOOL (%)	UNDER GRADUATE (%)	GRADUATE AND+ (%)
NICOSIA	3.3	-	3.4	40	30	23.3
FAMAGUSTA	-	3.33	13.33	36.67	33.34	13.33
KYRENIA	-	-	10	26.67	60	3.33

Table 5: Participants' education profile (%).

Occupation of Participants: In Nicosia, 43.3 percent of the respondents were students, 6.7 percent were officers, 10 percent of them were workers, another 10 percent were employers, 16.7 percent were employees and 13.3 percent were academicians. In Famagusta, participants' 13.34 percent were students, 33.33 percent were officers, 3.33 percent were workers, 6.67 percent were employees, 10 percent were academicians, 20 percent were tradesmen and 13.33 percent were retired. See Table 6.

	STUDENT	OFFICER	WORKER	EMPLOYER	EMPLOYEE	ACADEMICIAN	TRADESMAN	RETIRED
NICOSIA	43.3	6.7	10	10	16.7	13.3	-	-
FAMAGUSTA	13.34	33.33	3.33	-	6.67	10	20	13.33
KYRENIA	13.33	3.34	10	3.33	46.67	6.67	3.33	13.33

Table 6: Participants' occupation profile (%).

Measures and Analysis

Perception and user satisfaction of the respondents in relation to public spaces and public art in the urban spaces were measured in the first section of the questionnaire with the help of four Likert scale type items and two in-depth items. In the second section of the questionnaire, participants' socio-demographic data was collected via five items.

Results

Respondents' suggestions to the items seeking to find the perception and the level of user satisfaction of public spaces and public art in public spaces are evaluated within the study. The results are displayed below.

When we evaluated the results of the participants' responses about the item '*I believe that public spaces such as urban parks and urban open spaces are quantitatively and qualitatively sufficient in my city*', it can be argued that in total their disagreement were more than agreement to this item. 36.67 percent strongly disagreed, 32.22 percent disagreed, 12.22 percent were unsure and merely 18.89 percent agreed or strongly agreed. See Table 7.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)	UNSURE (%)	AGREE (%)	STRONGLY AGREE (%)
NICOSIA	36.67	33.3	13.33	6.67	10
FAMAGUSTA	26.66	36.67	16.67	6.67	13.33
KYRENIA	46.67	26.66	6.67	16.67	3.33
TOTAL	36.67	32.22	12.22	10	8.89

Table 7: Participants' suggestion to the item 'I believe that public spaces such as urban parks and urban open spaces are quantitatively and qualitatively sufficient in my city' (%).

When we evaluated the results of the participants' responses about the second item of the questionnaire '*There are attractive, effective public art features in my city*', it can be argued that disagreement were more than agreement to this item in total either. 41.11 percent argued 'strongly disagree', 27.78 percent argued 'disagree', 13.33 percent argued 'unsure', 10 percent argued 'agree' and 7.78 percent argued strongly 'agree'. See Table 8.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)	UNSURE (%)	AGREE (%)	STRONGLY AGREE (%)
NICOSIA	33.34	23.33	23.33	10	10
FAMAGUSTA	46.67	30	3.33	10	10
KYRENIA	43.34	30	13.33	10	3.33
TOTAL	41.11	27.78	13.33	10	7.78

Table 8: Participants' suggestion to the item 'There are attractive, effective public art features in my city'(%).

When we evaluated the results of the participants' responses about the third item of the questionnaire '*public art features in public spaces increase the attractiveness of such urban spaces*', in total merely 6.66 percent strongly disagreed or disagreed.3.33 percent were unsure, 32.22 percent agreed and 57.79 percent strongly agreed with regards to the item. See Table 9.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)	UNSURE (%)	AGREE (%)	STRONGLY AGREE (%)
NICOSIA	3.33	-	3.33	26.67	66.67
FAMAGUSTA	3.33	10	3.33	36.67	46.67
KYRENIA	3.34	-	3.33	33.33	60
TOTAL	3.33	3.33	3.33	32.22	57.79

Table 9: Participants' suggestion to the item 'Public art features in public spaces increase the attractiveness of such urban spaces' (%).

When we evaluated the results of the participants' responses about the fourth item of the questionnaire '*I wish that public art features would be increased in the public spaces of my city*', there were not any respondents suggesting strongly disagree. Merely 1.11 percent argued 'disagree', 7.78 percent of the participants were unsure. 25.56 percent argued agreed and 65.55 percent strongly agreed with the item. See Table 10.

	STRONGLY DISAGREE (%)	DISAGREE (%)	UNSURE (%)	AGREE (%)	STRONGLY AGREE (%)
NICOSIA	-	-	3.33	20	76.67
FAMAGUSTA	-	3.33	16.67	33.33	46.67
KYRENIA	-	-	3.34	23.33	73.33
TOTAL	-	1.11	7.78	25.56	65.55

Table 10: Participants' suggestion to the item "I wish that public art features would be increased in the public spaces of my city' (%).

Discussion and Conclusion

Public spaces have valuable benefits that should not be ignored and underestimated. They have a high potential to improve the environment and public health, encourage cultural diversity, attract tourism, enhance local economies etc. In other words it can be suggested that they have a key role for creating sustainable, liveable urban environments (Butterworth, 2000; Cho et al., 2015:147; Madanipour, 2006).

Additionally public art have the capacity to achieve significant contributions in urban environments (Hall and Robertson, 2001:5; Hegeman, 2016). They can create community attachment, support place making attempts and enhance aesthetic qualities etc. In other words, in many cities that are attractive for touristic purposes or in the cities that are at the top of the list regarding the quality of life measures, it is not difficult to experience public art facilities in their public spaces. Therefore it can be suggested that a public art feature has the opportunity to increase the attractiveness and qualitative value of both the urban spaces and the city itself, where it is located.

In Northern Cyprus, there are challenges regarding the issues of public spaces in urban environments. Public art is also a topic that needs a wider concern and focus. On that ground, a user survey was prepared in order to understand and evaluate the dynamics of their perception in relation to public art in urban communal spaces.

The findings reveal that most of the respondents (68.89 %) did not believe that public spaces such as urban parks and urban open spaces are quantitatively and qualitatively sufficient in the city where they live. Additionally a significant portion of the respondents (68.89 %) did not suggest that there are attractive, effective public art features in their city. Furthermore, most of the respondents (91,11 %) suggested that they wish public art features to be increased in the public spaces of their city.

Within this framework, as concluding remarks it can be argued that public spaces and public art in these spaces should not be ignored in the current and possible urban planning and design agenda of cities in Northern Cyprus. Oppositely public spaces and the integrity of these spaces within the urban environments need to be emphasized. Hence creating liveable, sustainable environments with green, pedestrian friendly urban environments will support us to combat both the possible threats of global warming, climate change and social, cultural degradation of urban communities.

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