

The Social Inclusion: the Heuristic Potential of Public Art Practices

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Identifying public art and analyzing its social and cultural properties are the undertakes that I look forward to, as well as a responsibility that I accept with serious intent. Let me begin with focusing on subject of the report.

The subject of this report concerns very important, if not urgent, questions of the relationship of art and public life that became of immense importance in the framework of the economical crises. What does it mean? What are the questions that can deepen an economical, following cultural, perspective of public art? The sole preoccupation of these questions **is how public art can improve the economical conditions of the city communities**. However, at first, I must determine and explain what public art is In order to answer this difficult question.

To begin with a definition of public art I should say that I am going to talk about contemporary public art, which aroused in the 1980^s. New initiatives entirely re-modified art imported into a city and communities in the post-Kennedy era in the US. Contemporary public art adapts responsively to physical, palpable conditions of a city and symbolical meanings of communities. Guided by a solution-oriented design, artists began to integrate their work (to the city life) trough investigation of architectural programme and utilizing the appropriate scale and materials.

Public art isn't something new in art, but rather admixing of existed artistic models, forms and styles. But what public art brings new that is interventions into the city space not only to decorate, but also to construct and upgrade it and provoke the creative and critical thinking.

How does public art do it?

It has implicitly an ability to construct the public sphere through actualization identity of community, which in turn based on social memory, in the city space.

I have argued four important notions in that assertion. There are social memory¹, identity², space or place³ and public sphere⁴, so public art directly connected with them.

¹ **Social memory** is the reusable and available texts, images and rites of any society, with the preservation of which it stabilizes and spreads its identity.

Now I want to present you how these connections are executed in concrete examples. After that I shall propose several statements about how we can use the abilities of public art to actualize social memory; to construct the identities; to produce the places and, finally, to excite creativity, for successful economical “renaissance” of European cities and their communities.

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To describe public art practices is to consider, in one sense, art within the city space, in another sense, the transformation of art presence, its role and meaning within the contemporary urban landscape.

Reflecting the city space and its visual filling with various kinds of art, I do not apply for originality. Art always carried out aesthetic, memorial and substantially ideological functions in the policy of city planning (from rock drawings, through a medieval cathedral up to posters of socialist realism art). From the end of the XIX century the change in art directions, styles, traditions, which took place during hundred years in the past, happened of kaleidoscopic speed. Essentially new phenomenon became the appearance of a popular/masscult and including in its sphere the interests of the broadest layers of the population. Art becomes one of the spheres of economy, object of investments and the source of enormous profits. The army of art workers is one of the sufficiently numerous groups of hired employees in the developed countries. Process of the formation of public policy concerning culture and art is intensified.

To the second half of the XX century these processes intensified in ways that artist creative activity crossed a threshold, actually, of “an art field”. In 1960th there was original “inclusion” of art in the process of structuring of the city environment, the calibration of patterns set of visual in a city, which intended "to switch" a mode of “watching” of a city by new formula of art in the city space, named - Public Art. It is the original art practice, which, to be sure, not opening something new in art but mainly trying to become closer, literally and figuratively, to its public: *“The work of artist, in this case - considers Polish art critic Mateush Shkop - is a form of dialogue, in which both sides (artist and audience) have equal rights”* [1].

On the one hand, public art aroused as the consequence and medium of the civil activity in public sphere of the West-European and American cities, in “mythical” 1960th.

² **Identity** is a discourse, product or field of relations between dominant ideas of understanding and explaining, preferably (but not necessary) of the past and “private” memory.

³ **Place** is constantly produced and modified space not just by the configuration of the material things, but by our social relations to them and to each other.

⁴ **Public sphere** is the sphere of openness, heterogeneity, plurality, a sphere where people witness and appreciate diverse cultural expressions that they do not necessary share and do not fully understand.

On the other hand, considerable influence on public art genesis and development had caused the ideas of such architect approach as “environmentalism”. Its basic postulates demand from the architect to pay more attention to visual filling the city environment with objects (art, design, and commercials) - some kind of the accents, that should harmoniously connect an architectural environment (buildings) and (quasi)public spaces (streets, parks, squares etc.) in the uniform city space.

This specific “ambiguity” of public art nature predetermined the further process of “art-activity”, which in the subject and target programme is balancing between «*decoration*» of the city space and social emancipation of city communities.

According to the first intention, it is worth speaking more about “*art in public space*” [2], obviously anticipating only design, decorative role of art in a city landscape. Then the city art-activity is considered within the framework of the action towards to upgrading a city and can be described by a brisk definition from the electronic encyclopedia: “*public-art is an art in the city environment, which focused on the unprepared viewer and the communication with the city space*”⁵.

The theoretical notion used in the paper – *public art* - is an attempt to characterize/designate *social turn in contemporary art* [3] as a special way of creativity; it was high-grade issued in 1990th whose basic purpose is the criticism of social order and the reflexion of public discourse. In this case, public art can approach the creative efforts to change the perceptive models of visual recognition of a city, under-served communities; actualization of social memory or stimulation of counter-memory; to carry out the anticapitalist and antiheroic criticism etc.

Therefore, I want to argue here that public art is less art but still a specific (artistic) cultural practice including ontology of visual anthropology and ethnography, semiology, the theory of media and others views not connected with art criticism. For these reasons the products of public art increasingly remind social experiments, which modeling the sensations and emotions of “displacement”, disorder, insinuation; challenging the standard codes and norms, familiar attitudes and social stereotypes.

These experiments are carried out outside of “institutional walls” of art temples (galleries, museums) - in public space of city, thereby artists confirm new format of public communication in the city space.

Public art does not demand a payment for an entrance in its space; it searches the potential of the spectator in the accessible, open city space. Changing the habitual recognition of art as elite

⁵ Wikipedia: <http://ru.wikipedia.org:80/wiki/Паблик-арт>

(belonging only to a high class) to image understandable for ordinary people, artists “open” the city space for art and for communities this city represent.

Public art captured the art theoreticians’ as well as the sociologists’ attention. Among them J.Young [4], D.Abramson [5], P. Phillips [6], G. Dgyamski [7], M.Kraiewski [8] who analyze genesis, development and the role of public art in the public city space, its identity and values. Following these authors, we can underscore that public art can (re)construct public place/space, its historical character, palpable presence and imminent potential.

To consider all this extraordinary features of public art evokes the question of the direct correspondence of public art with a powerful phenomenon of art culture - avant-garde - will be absolutely reasonable. So the schemes of vision suggested by futurism⁶, cubism⁷ and other vanguard directions in the beginning of the XX century, also articulated an opportunity to see differently, establishing a principle of a *parallax*. But contemporary artists repeating algorithms and extravagance of surrealism, go further - they are seen to the viewer as the visitor, being symbolically equalized with him.

The avant-garde is the first of all reaction of aesthetic consciousness on the global changes in the sociocultural processes caused by scientific and technical progress of the last century. Unlike avant-garde, for public art it is not typical destructive pathos concerning traditional art and traditional values of culture (true, blessing, sanctity, fine) or the poignant protest against everything, that was represented to their founders and participants as a retrograde, conservative, narrow-minded, bourgeois, academic. For public art it is important to refuse to an authentic context in which art is socially possible. It is a question of functioning public art in a distance from friendly and safe “institutional walls” of museums, galleries, academies and others art institutions. (Also, clearing from habitual system of patrons - customers, intermediaries, curators and others agents of “an art field”).

Therefore, public art is not art in traditional sense, but also in vanguard understanding. Keeping the vanguard technique – better to say, logic of "*avant-gardism*" conceived as an aspiration to innovations and re-considering of an ordinary world - public art is characterized by its instrumentality and should be understood as a mechanism of the realization of non-artistic - social and cultural purposes. It is not so much work against the art dogmatic and the struggle against the academic “doxy”, but rather the art reflexion of the social order. Public art *really* displays problems of a time; it *exposes a nerve of an epoch* [7].

⁶ See more on: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Futurism>

⁷ See more on: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cubism>

What was the major in the modern tradition – product (artwork) – in case of public art has a minor character as if it were the extraordinary kind of conceptualism, but unlike complex and unclear experimental impulses and attacks of conceptualists that were clear only to other conceptualists, public art practices linked with problems and objectives of applied social philosophy. This activity assumes to develop the specific art language, which can be presented through installations, media-based projects, performances or multiple forms of collaboration – “community art”. In addition, Marek Kraewski following these possible forms suggested so-called “*site-specific art*” and “*art in the public interest*” [2, p.22]. I would also add “*street art*”, “*environmental art*”⁸, “*land art*”⁹ and “*plop art*”¹⁰.

Such language adapted for perception of the unprepared viewers. Tactically being guided by: an increment of social relations, active participation in redesigning of the social order of a consumer society; exposures of the techniques of common knowledge producing by means of art criticism, scientific and religious discourses.

Public art searches for ways to become the provoker of individual and group activity in realization of *the common* interest and preservation of *the common* space. It undertakes a search of the most adequate and effective forms of the communications in the city public sphere through trying to overcome estrangement of people in designed for them, but without their participation, the urban environment.

As an example, I shall use an art project named “Streams” (“Течение”, 2008). The project was released in autumn in St.-Petersburg on the territory of Petropavlovskaya Fortress by a group of artists named “33+1”, whose creativity as a rule is connected with idea of revival of the Soviet school of monumental art (of course, with the minimized role of a propaganda function) in the new sociocultural context.

The given project represents the additional elements of the urban landscape displayed on glass which in the concrete physical appendix give a series, preferable (but not necessary in the perspective) St.-Petersburg’s panoramas. The consciousness of passers-by excites kaleidoscope of the offered variants: the images of skyscrapers analogues of the city called after Peter (which are much better than the American prototypes) are replaced to another ones - with sandy dunes instead of Neva. In addition, a following picture depicts the private cottages that spring up like mushrooms on shaky ground of bulk islands in a mouth of the river.

⁸ See more on: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Environmental_art

⁹ See more on: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plop_art

¹⁰ See more on: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Land_art

As we can see, such art intentions involved in public discussion the problems of the global character (ecology) and quite concrete questions being adequate to realities of daily life of a local context, as viewed from our instance: an architectural composition of the city, segregation of its territories, new kinds of discrimination, and ethics of responsibility.

Material for “art-challenging” can also serve a flexible body of social memory. In this case, public art is guided by a critical reminder and searching of local identities.

Therefore identity can be materialized in the form of a monument to the characteristic representative of local community, as it happened in artworks “An Old Marech” (2001) and “Shimon Genteg”(2004) installed in Polish cities Poznan and Gozhuv. These people were not outstanding Polish physicians or generals, great poets or composers, but they were personifications of the community, they embody this community. The small social solidarities have chosen the one who should stand on the place of today's monuments, the one who will represent the ordinary inhabitant and symbolically confirm the existence of a local group and its memory.

Another bright example is established in the Bosnian city of Mostar (2003), divided on the Bosnian and Croatian parts. This is the monument to the Chinese actor Bruce Lee. World media have presented this news not in a comic context because it displays deep problems of identity's search in regions of former Yugoslavia.

The city of Mostar has been chosen not by accident. It represents a vivid example of permanent situation of ethnic tension between the Christian and Muslim population of the Balkans. The situations in which each of the contradicting sides tries to impose own vision of the city history and ideological acknowledgement of its future development. These sides make it by means of filling the city space with symbols of the Christian or Islamic discourses. For this reason, there was a task for artist to bring in “the city text“ the sign which would not refer to one of clashing (conflicting) pictures of the world. Such sign, which would not separate, but stimulate something common for both parts of the population. So, there was Bruce Lee. The idol of popular culture is referred to mutual childhood, as an embodiment of struggle for justice and better world.

However public art not always offers an available image (above-named, Bruce Lee). According to Polish culture expert, G. Dzhyamski, the similar practice is ineffective unless change “the logic of sign coding” of the city space [8, p.48]. It is necessary for artist to choose another strategy, the strategy announced by Michel Foucault, “discourses creator”. Public art in this case does not offer ready clichés and social stereotypes. Then it is wrong to consider public art as a means of producing the consent and harmonious society in which everyone trust in shared system of values. From this point of view, public art is an art, which gives a rise of dispute and debate. It does not

allow an indifferent to remain, and provoke process of self-reflection, search or statement of the identity.

Leon Tarasevichem released the same project (2003) for Poznan. It represented a small renewal of the Poznan “Wielki” Theatre. This project is a temporary decoration of columns at the theatre entrance by yellow-green rings. Tarasevich has humanized, ”softened” the monument of Romance architecture of times of German reign in Poznan, having ornamented with a cheerful palette the columns. He has done it by the visual mixture of theatre with Green Square opposite. The project has caused a huge social resonance first to the ordinary people who were not conformable concerning to the project. “The colored theatre” has as well as possible reflected townspeople’s mentality when questions of economic feasibility, historical and cultural validity of the project were mentioned. Moreover, disputes did not even fade after liquidation of the project. Despite of it, artwork has executed its mission, having actualized local, territorial identity – “the inhabitant of Poznan”. For a minute, each man has realized own belonging to the city and probable, somehow, shown its anxiety or admiration about the city event. Even indifference, in that case, can be understood as a specific action in reference to the city; it is also the fact of self-identification.

However I have argued that the purpose of public art is not the whole destruction, ”washing out” of intrinsic bases of social life and the subsequent imposing of another, pleasing to the author or the customer, a social order. It is rather re-modification and improving of existed social order. For artists to use some superficial textual tenseness /fluidity of artistic images and social values is peculiar to upgrade the public life; to dynamicize the processes of an inclusion instead of exclusion as well; to actualize unique culture and memory of social communities, rather than to equal these distinctions under single-crop machine of a state. Public art is characterized by provoking an individual reflexion instead of confirmation of ordinary clichés and stereotypes; to cause dispute, dialogue; to cultivate the responsibility; to promote the process of self-identification instead of offering a ready “harmonious” set of identities and social roles.

Public art thus is the specific (artistic) practices and artifacts implemented in public sphere of a city with purpose to (re)design it, and are accomplished by the communications with the unprepared viewer through the initiation of the public dialogue.

And, at last, public art directs reflective aspirations on itself, being released /exempted from socially designed representations about the artist as about the sacred genius in whose hands is lying a definition of how we should live.

Public art is not a sacral, not a self-sufficient and not eternal as such anything on the Earth.

To discover an art is no longer the top-down study. Dziga Vertov – classic of Russian cinema - in the 20s of the XX century spoken about cinema has defined art like that: *it is a life seized unawares*. Practice of art-activity in a city is based on similar tactics - unexpectedness and surprise. Specializing in creation of surprise, masters amazed the spectator by the simple things: one line, one phrase, one episode from a life. They not only inspire the city dweller, community to decorate that place in which they live, but also excite the cognitive or mnemonic processes of consciousness.

I want to underscore that if these processes waked up owing to unexpected or unpredictable artworks, it still does not mean: first, that the given area – art – is shrouded by secret, visible only for the most talented and acute people. Secondly, creative process should not be essentially independent, uncontrollable and chaotic.

Creativity and innovation in the city context should turn to the complete integrated process covering all aspects of city life. Innovations in social, ecological, political, cultural sphere and “close to nowadays” - economic, become simultaneously necessary and have equal weight.

In essence, any contemporary city will have to realize, that its destiny, its social and economical stability are inevitably connected with how it uses or does not use, creative potential of the townspeople. Ability of a city to distinguish, discover, use, support and, eventually, assimilate this creative potential will define its destiny in conditions of economical crises, i.e. the cruel competition, at least between the national cities.

English writer Fill Wood [9], who challenged discourse of social sciences, in particular concept of “an information society” or “a postindustrial epoch”, developed the idea of “Creative era” and “Creative capital”. He insisted that: *cities today became storehouses of the new form of richness, which will be the main engine of economy of the future century. It is Creative – Art – Capital*. How this capital is used, or spent, determines whether the city should wait a rise or decline.

Today important question emerges for any city - how to provide an atmosphere, in which development of its latent creative potential will be possible. I insist that public art (the catalyst of democratization and modernization processes) possesses the means, strength and sources for the implementation of necessary conditions. I can suggest several stimuli, which are capable to provide the transition of “a city in crisis” to development of the creative opportunities. The substance of following offers is based on the combination of specific properties of phenomena of “the public sphere” and “public art”:

1. *Comprehension of crisis*. Many cities experienced crisis, but the few have realized the constructive potential incorporated in it. Glasgow and Huddersfield can serve as examples of the

British cities, which have successfully answered crisis in the 1980th of past century; with crisis have consulted many cities of Ireland and Flanders in the 1970th.

2. *Creation of space for creative experiment.* The initiation of the open city “art-space”¹¹ where the innovative thinking is encouraged.

3. *Partnership and gathering of ideas.* The creation of the appropriate atmosphere for debate and network cooperation; adventurism and competitiveness.

4. *Search of other senses.* Involving the diverse points of ethnical, cultural and others views of minority in the dialogue that will allow to involve an objective, consulting sight.

5. *Organizational opportunities and management.* This factor can be one of the most important stimulus because without effective organizational structure and technologies¹² a city can never transfer the creative ideas in actions.

The role of public art artists – “cultural creators” (O. Koval) – in activating and increasing of the creative capital of a city will be positive only in that case when their cultural practices provide a level of open and critical communications. Public discussion in local physical space of public artworks or debatable club in a city and digital space of media, promotes accumulation in “an art field” (Pierre Bourdieu) of means and skills of interpretation and argumentation. These proficiencies are necessary for the development of estimation criteria for already released and intended artworks.

In other words, the principles of public sphere included in the socio-cultural structuration of “a public art field” can become a push to updating and re-formatting of the European cities, their social, economical and political realms.

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¹¹ How it has been made with one of the quarters of Vilnius. “The independent republic Zareche” is similar to Vatican in the center of Rome but instead of religion here it reigns creative freedom. In detail see <http://www.inache.net/mif/209>

¹² The description of one of the possible technologies of creative process organization in a city, with an example of English Huddersfield, is accessible to the address of <http://www.huddersfieldpride.com/archive/cti/cycle.htm>.

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