Editorial

What Art and Design Do for Social Inclusion in the Public Sphere

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Abstract
Art and design can meaningfully contribute to social change. It can shift debates, change perspectives, raise awareness, and act upon visible and invisible mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion of different agents occupying the public sphere. In this thematic issue we invited authors to relate to this claim as they preferred: by bringing evidence to support it, refute it, or simply to discuss the potential benefits and harms of artistically inspired and design related interventions in citizens living environment. We challenged authors to rethink agency and engage theoretically or empirically with how art and design installations act upon us, citizens, and vice-versa. The result is a compilation of different storylines, coming from different geographical parts of the world and written from a variety of cultural perspectives. What binds these contributions is a true commitment to open up a space for those experiencing challenging life circumstances to access, occupy, or transform the public sphere. Our collective engagement with concepts such as power, prejudice, harassment or discrimination was not focused on erasing differences. Instead, we engaged with the idea that certain differences should matter less than they currently do in creating a safe and accessible public space for all.

Keywords
art; design; inclusion; public sphere

Issue
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What makes the public sphere so powerful is its capacity to tune into how people with differing gender, cognitive, physical, developmental, cultural, or religious experiences and expressions navigate and use space, how they tend to negotiate their place in the public sphere. Central to this thematic issue is the question of how public spaces can best be shaped to secure a positive impact on citizen's sense of belonging and their right to act upon the public sphere. In line with Cartiere and Zebracki's (2015) exploration of the everyday practice of public art, our aim was to create a platform for art and design practitioners interested in the link between aesthetically inspired material dimensions of the public sphere and the meaning of site-specificness in facilitating inclusion or exclusion mechanisms.

We present several scholarly contributions that offer theoretical reflections, operational strategies, or worked examples on how to (re)design and artistically appropriate public spaces for citizens, more particularly those whose voice tends to be overlooked by policy makers.

Art- and design-related interventions can facilitate or hinder access to a particular area on a physical, psychological, social-cultural, or economic level (Langdon et al., 2018). We collected several studies that illustrate how meaning is created through art and design, both from a supportive and a more critical point of view. Our reflection was not limited to the actual methodology of applying an artistically-inspired or design-related intervention in practice, nor was it explicitly focused on how design and art can influence human behavior. Most authors presented a critical perspective on how power inequalities are introduced by differences in gender, race, ability, geographical location, or challenging life circumstances.

Three research teams present worked examples that connect the aesthetic goals of design related and artistically inspired interventions in the public sphere to a social-cultural or public health policy agenda. Muñoz-Bellerín and Cordero-Ramos (2021) engaged with collective theatre creation to support homeless individuals in the city of Seville, Spain. They pay particular

attention to how these citizens' human rights can be asserted in relation to accessibility issues in the public sphere. Segers et al. (2021) involved an intergenerational group of local citizens into a collective-embodied interaction exercise to recreate a sense of belonging to their neighborhood Heist-Goor in Flanders, Belgium—the neighborhood lost most of its significant social-cultural spaces under a strong rationalization and centralization of public services. Using design anthropology, Campagnaro et al. (2021) transform the venues where caring services take place, hereby improving the quality of user's lives and the quality of the services themselves.

These authors created opportunities for local citizens to express themselves artistically in their own neighborhoods and strengthen their identity as fully fledged citizens with a voice capable of entering a public dialogue with significant others. It is this focus on different modes of collaboration with a variety of publics that forms a dominant trend in art/research practice in the public sphere. The outcome of an inclusive art and design participatory research process is therefore always related to the use of a particular participatory approach rather than the manufacture of a final product. The benefit of socially-engaged artistic practice lies in its uniqueness of the exchange between participants and the mutual benefits for all participants (Bourne, 2003). This is what we argued in a previously written editorial:

> Most social art is guided by a critical perspective on power inequalities and their effects within the spheres of for instance gender, ethnic majorities-minorities relationships, the economy, or the daily lifeworld as impacted by environmental changes. Together with raising awareness concerning social justice and equality, direct individual empowerment and collective emancipation are often explicit goals of social art. Artists involved in the corresponding practices tend to use art as a vehicle to engage with the texture of social life, eventually disrupting the seemingly natural flow of the social in order to stimulate reflection and invite action for change (Hannes & Laermans, 2020, p. 3)

Several authors in this thematic issue provide in-depth reflections on how an artistic presence or design-related material occupation of public space affects spatialized dimensions of discrimination and social injustice. In Begum et al. (2021) the public sphere is conceptualized as a principal site of contestation and negotiation for citizens. Their article focuses on the differentiated access of women to public space. From an analytical perspective, the authors apply an intersectionality lens to study the role of gender in design and appropriation of design in the specific location of Shahbag ("garden of the king") in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Alizadeh et al. (2021) illustrate how the disruptive and provocative character of an artistic intervention can create opportunities for public dialogue. Using street art as a medium for communication, the team aimed at transforming a patriarchal space into a place of gendered resistance against domestic violence, which resulted in strong negative response pattern over social media and vandalism against the art piece. This proves the influence of art to generate debate, as well as the need for more efforts from feminist activist to occupy space and change cultural mindsets in relation to the equal rights movement. These studies confirm the previous finding of Sharp et al. (2005): The processes through which artworks are installed in the public sphere are critical to a successful development of inclusive policies.

This said, art and design interventions do play an important role in the process of "socialization" of society itself (Chęć-Małyszek, 2018). They enable us to read other people's needs and desires to express themselves in the public sphere. Art provokes meaning and design often solves problems. However, both forms can promote a different order of democratic transition. This is one of the reasons why several scholars represented in this thematic issue reflected on a more theoretical level. Their aspiration was to tackle the complexity of shifting relationships between different of citizens or groups of citizens in relation to non-human agents through art and design. Sadikoglu's (2021) study investigates the potential of public art festivals to encourage dialogue and multicultural tolerance between Turkish and Greek Cypriots. Aerne (2021) analyzes how two different art works are included in the public sphere as non-human subjects. From there a typology is developed that categorizes art works based on their political potential and contribution to an inclusive public sphere. López-Yánez and Saavedra Calderón (2021) present a political reading of soundscapes to investigate how such interventions facilitate the co-construction of public spaces through the development of counter-narratives of power and resistance, mainly from the perspective of Afrodescendant people in Ecuador.

In most cases, the impact of art and design interventions was studied in relation to space-making practices as inspired by a strong sense of collectivity, relationality, and mutual interdependence of a multiplicity of different agents in the public sphere, including non-human species. While authors may differ in what they consider a measure of success on the level of achieving a more just and more inclusive society, they mostly represent the voice of those resisting oppressive political structures and narratives. Art and design interventions subjectivize through objects. They are powerful symbols of solidarity between, citizens, artists, and scholars willing to negotiate a different social, cultural, economical, practical, or political reality. Several authors took note of the discomfort of social, linguistic, or other forms of exclusion, paying specific attention to the articulation of narratives from citizens that feel out of place (Sidorenko & Marusinska, 2017). The contributions featured in this thematic issue demonstrate that going "public" with art and design embodies the notion of plurality and difference. It is through the use of art and design that

we are able to expose differential experiences that public places, spaces, or spheres may introduce.

They invite us into shifting our mindset from personal interests and how to best secure our own spot in the public sphere to a focus on the collective good of an inclusive society: That is, the right for all to access, occupy, or transform the public sphere without being subjected to people's prejudices, harassment, or acts of discrimination. A basic rule of thumb: Explore, temporarily occupy, and discover, but do not claim more space than necessary. More importantly, do not deny others the right to respectfully claim their own.

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Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interests.

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About the Author

Karin Hannes (PhD) specializes in the development of innovative research methods to respond to emerging social challenges, with a focus on multisensory, arts- and place-based research designs and evidence synthesis as a meta-review technique. Her transdisciplinary research team SoMeTHin'K is active in the area of urban development, citizen science, art/design and technology, social and behavioral sciences, public health, and the global sustainable development context. The group develops methodological and theoretical frameworks as a basis for understanding how complex phenomena should be approached from an inclusive perspective. Karin's analytical approach is multimodal, combining numerical and textual data with sensory data. She contributes extensively to theoretical discussions on quality assessment of disruptive types of scholarly output and the role of artistic research practices in an evidence-based discourse. Prof. Hannes chairs the European Network of Qualitative Inquiry, co-convenes the Arts-Based Research Global Initiative and is involved in the Qualitative Evidence Synthesis Methods group of the Campbell Collaboration.