

**PEOPLE'S INTERACTION WITH ATTRIBUTES OF PUBLIC ART IN  
URBAN SPACES**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the award of the degree of  
Master of Science (Urban and Regional Planning)

Faculty of Built Environment  
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia

14<sup>th</sup> October 2014

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I owe my endless thanks to many people who have provided me with their support, encouragement, comfort and love throughout the whole process of my research and writing of the thesis. I would express my deepest appreciation to Associate Prof. Ismail Said, not only for his guidance and help in my research as a supervisor, but also for his consistent motivation to the students. He had provided his kind help throughout the whole process of the research, from the very beginning of defining the research topic, to the very end of revising and editing the contents of the thesis. I thank my colleagues for sharing their knowledge and experience, and many other friends of mine for sharing the journey of studying. I specially thank to Chng, Saiful and Cheach for aiding in the survey questionnaires, Darmila for the constructive comments in Malay version abstract and Munirah for proofread. Without their help, it would have been impossible for me to complete my research on time. I thank them all for the precious friendship, accompany, encouragement and trust they gave me. Essentially, I thank to my dearest parents and sisters for their caring and assistance. My thanks to them are always at the end but they are always the first ones who give me their unconditional support and help whenever needed.

## ABSTRACT

The fitting of public art in towns and cities around the world has become favourable and has gradually been used in urban regeneration schemes. As today people begin to appreciate public artworks by interacting with it. This study explores public art in palpable forms namely sculpture, mural and street furniture. Many researchers have studied on the value of art in public realm and its artistry toward aesthetic, economic, social and cultural claims. Several studies have been conducted on attributes of the artworks such as attractiveness, size, material composition, placement and its social identity. However, there is still a lack of study namely on size, material composition and the placement of public art that can contribute to people's interaction, be it active or passive. This study began with an observation at Georgetown, Penang to garner a prerequisite understanding of the site and followed up with survey questionnaires (N=211) to generate the results of public art attributes, and eventually interviews (N=5) were adopted to strengthen the findings. The questionnaires were analysed using SPSS (Chi-square test) and AMOS (Confirmatory Factor Analysis) and observation and interview data were content analysed. The result suggests that people like to interact with a life-size public artwork, fabricated from natural and non-natural materials which located at streets, squares, plaza or parks. For those who took photos, touched or observed the artwork attentively, they are infused with positive vibes such as feeling pleasant, contented and excited. Whenever they felt positive, they are subsequently motivated to recommend their friends, family or relatives to visit the artworks. This research allows landscape architect, architect, urban planner, artwork producer, artist and local authority to understand the significance of adapting public art's attributes structurally and socially that can contribute to the renewal of urban space.

**Keywords:** Public art, interaction, attributes, emotion, urban regeneration

## ABSTRAK

Pemasangan seni awam di pekan dan di bandaraya seluruh dunia semakin diminati oleh orang awam dan lama-kelamaan seni awam ini digunakan dalam skim penjanaan semula kawasan bandar. Kini, cara orang awam menghargai seni awam adalah melalui interaksi dengannya. Kajian ini meneroka seni awam dari segi fizikal bentuk arca, lukisan dan perabot di tepi jalan. Ramai penyelidik telah mengkaji maksud awam dan seni dari segi faedah seni awam ke arah estetika, tuntutan ekonomi, sosial dan budaya. Segelintir penyelidik telah mengkaji tentang sifat-sifat karya seni seperti daya tarikan, skala, komposisi bahan, lokasi dan identiti sosial. Walaubagaimanapun, masih terdapat kekurangan atas kajian tersebut iaitu skala, komposisi bahan dan penempatan seni awam yang menyumbang kepada interaksi aktif dan pasif. Kajian ini dimulakan dengan tujuan tinjauan melalui pemerhatian di Georgetown, kemudian diikuti dengan pengedaran soal selidik (N =211) untuk mengeneralisasikan unsur-unsur kesenian awam dan akhirnya temu bual (N=5) digunakan untuk mengukuhkan pemahaman ini. Data dianalisis melalui SPSS (Chi-square test), AMOS (Comfirmatory Analisis Factor) dan analisis kandungan. Keputusan menunjukkan bahawa orang awam suka berinteraksi dengan karya seni bersaiz serdehana diperbuat dari bahan semula jadi dan bukan semula jadi yang terletak di tepi jalan atau taman. Bagi mereka yang mengambil gambar, sentuh atau melihat seni awam tersebut dengan penuh perhatian, mereka merasakan positif seperti menyenangkan, puas dan teruja. Apabila mereka merasa puas hati, mereka akan bermotivasi dan mengajak kawan-kawan, keluarga atau saudara-mara untuk melawat seni awam tersebut. Kajian ini membolehkan arkitek landskap, arkitek, artist, perancang bandar dan majlis perbandaran memahami kepentingan penyesuaian seni awam dari segi sosial dan struktur untuk penjanaan semula kawasan bandar.

**Kata Kunci:** Seni Awam, interaksi, unsur-unsur, emosi, regenerasi perbandaran

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## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

This Chapter is to get an overview and insight of public art in urban setting. The purpose of this study is to explore how public art influences people's interaction; both active and passive particularly in urban area. This Chapter is divided into eight sections. This section is followed by Section 1.2 which discusses the problems that arise in public art development. The gap of public art study which still lack of consideration is explained in Section 1.3. Next, research aim and objectives in regard to the gap and problem are identified in Section 1.4. From the two research objectives, four research questions have been formulated in Section 1.5. In addition, the three parameters of public art– size, material composition, location, and two parameters of positive and negative weighted emotions are discussed in Section 1.6. Lastly, Section 1.7 explains the significance of the study which allows landscape architects, architects, urban planners, artwork producers, artists and the authorities to understand the implication of adapting appropriate public art's attributes structurally and socially which might promote people's interaction in the first place and then regenerate space in a more effective and pragmatic trajectory. Eventually, the overall structure of the thesis is also explicated in Section 1.8.

## 1.2 Problem Statement

Physical-aesthetic claims, economic claims, social claims, and cultural-symbolic claims are always the main concern when embedding public art in urban spaces. In some circumstances, public artworks aim to develop the identity of a certain place, thereby creating sense of place and improving the place distinctiveness for that particular area. According to Sharp et al. (2005), the articulation of artworks involving numerous identities can be problematic especially fitting artworks in a multi-racial urban area. Similarly, in reimagining of a city, imposition and the favour of certain interests are likely to cause opposition for others, therefore, raising the question of ‘culture for whom?’ (Bianchini, 1999; Boyle & Hughes, 1991). For example, the public arts embedded at Putrajaya did not implement one identity only (King, 2005); rather, it implements Chinese- Malaysian cosmopolitan style (Mustafa, 2013). Perhaps, if the artwork is located at a place where people share the same culture then, then it is better for the artworks to remain its cultural identity.

Whenever public art seeks to achieve enhancing community and social interaction, an additional problem encountered is that the public may feel that the artwork is elitist, therefore, unlikely to engage with it (Pollock & Paddison, 2010). In some manner, this also relates to their art education background (Fabian et al., 2012) on how they perceive art. Lack of understanding on public art and public discussions on art will only make them think that their money would be better spent on something else that will improve their daily lives (Pollock & Paddison, 2010). Hence, public comprehension and participation are vital in the development of public art as it allows the community to comprehend the utility and function of the artwork.

With regard to achieve physical aesthetic, public art always raises questions of style and taste. In the research by Kwon (2004), the failure of public artworks especially Richard Serra’s steel sculpture Tilted Arc was discussed. Richard Serra declared “he is interested in sculpture which is non–utilitarian, non-functional... any use is a misuse” (The Art Story Foundation, 2013). This means that the artwork is not socially relevant, at the same time fails to improve the attractiveness of a place



consequently, discouraging public to use the space. Worst comes to worst, some of the public art were dubiously selected by bureaucrats who do not acquaint much about art, hence end up choosing especially those tasteless, kitsch, public arts that reflect poor on visual imagery (Fabian et al., 2012). As John Dungey elaborated his position in 1990:

*“We believe that our relationship with places is as important as our relationship with people. And because places, like the arts feed our senses, our emotion and our spirits and fire our imagination, we, in turn, want to nurture places and do all we can to ensure that what we value is not destroyed.”*

This explains that the significance of public art is to improve social interaction and liveliness of the place, stimulate positive emotion subsequently, improving the relationship of people with the artwork and the urban space such as street, square, plaza and park. In other words, any public art development should not be chosen in isolation from the values of the society to avoid the consequences of being abandoned and neglected.

### **1.3 Research Gap**

A great number of researches had studied upon public art's publicness and artfulness (e.g. Deutsche 1996; Hein, 1996; Kwon, 2004; Chang, 2008). Publicness mean the matrix of physical space that it occupies and the origin of its existence (Hunting, 2005). Artfulness means what the artwork serves their purpose or just merely a meaningless piece (Norman and Norman, 2000). There are also many studies on the benefits of public arts toward people and places (e.g. Selwood, 1995; Hall, 2001; Sharp et al. 2005; Remesar, 2005; Zebracki et al. 2010; Fabian et al. 2012; Mustafa et al. 2013). Some researchers had studied on the attributes of artworks such as attractiveness, cognitive, social, size, material composition and location (e.g. Zebracki, 2011; Well, 2013; Rubio and Silva, 2013; Pollock and Paddison, 2014). However, more studies need to be done on how human interact emotionally and cognitively with the artworks, and how it initiates their respective

response. More specifically, how the attributes such as size, material composition and placement of public artwork influence active and passive interaction and the emotions regulated by this particular process of interaction. In fact, Batch (2001) and Miles (1997) posit that a productive public artwork is resonated with the site and linked to its context, creating opportunities and welcoming people to interact with it.

Urban landscape of Malaysia comprises cities and small towns. Each town or city consists of unique characteristics, cultures and backgrounds. The implementation of public art in Malaysian cities and towns are considered relatively new and has never been seemed crucial (Mustafa et al., 2013). While there is a concern to achieve Malaysia's national identity and has aspiration of becoming a Garden Nation, little apparent attention has been given to public art. Subsequently, to enhance the identity of Malaysia, an initiative has been launched by the Minister of Tourism Malaysia, Ng Yen Yen. She had announced One Malaysia Contemporary Art Tourism 2010 aiming to attract tourists to Malaysia. It is also a distinct and innovative initiative, which attempt to establish Malaysia as a hub for contemporary art in the region (Corporate Communications Unit, 2010).

Even though public art in Malaysia always seeks to enhance the identity of Malaysia, but solely on improving the identity is not enough. There is still lack of study on people relationship towards public art in Malaysia, and because of that some of the public arts installed are abandoned and neglected and subsequently discourage people using the space. A productive public artwork should create opportunities for people to approach and engage with. This means that public engagement with artworks is most crucial in public art development. Therefore, this study is intended to fill in the gap of how public art influences people's interaction and how this interaction regulates people's emotions and behaviour.

## **1.4 Research Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to explore how public art influenced people's interaction, particularly people who interact with the artwork actively or passively in urban spaces.

To achieve the aim, the following research objectives (RO) are formulated:

- i) RO1- To identify the attributes of public art that contribute to people interaction, and
- ii) RO2- To examine public's reactions after they engage with public artworks, whether they behave positively or negatively.

## **1.5 Research Questions**

The research questions (RQ) are formulated according to each respective objective. The following RQ1 and RQ2 in reference to RO1, while RQ3 and RQ4 in reference to RO2.

- i) RQ1- What kinds of active and passive interactions are exhibited by the people?
- ii) RQ2- To what extent does the size, materials and placement of public art influence people interaction?
- iii) RQ3- Do people feel positively whenever they interact with the public artwork or they feel negatively?
- iv) RQ4- Would individual recommend or motivate others to interact with the artworks?

## **1.6 Scope of Study**

This study explores how public art influences people's interaction, particularly public's interaction with the artwork and people around it in urban space

such as street, roundabout, square, plaza, and park. Public art plays an important role in urban regeneration schemes (e.g. Hall & Robertson, 2001; Hall 2003; Sharp et al., 2005; Remesar, 2005). Zenbraki (2010) posit four fundamental benefits of public art for social claims, physical aesthetic claims, economic claims or cultural symbolic claims. However, this study focuses on social claims and related it to physical aesthetic, economic and cultural symbolic claims. This study focusses on the attributes of public art in three aspects – size, material composition, and location, investigated by examining people’s reaction in Georgetown, Penang, Malaysia. Three aspects of the attributes of public art - size, material composition and location are selected because it has potential influences toward people and place relationship, especially on the public’s preferences (Zebracki, 2012; Well, 2013; Rubio and Silva, 2013). Similarly, people’s reactions also reflect their opinion of artwork and the relevance of the artwork to them (Zebracki, 2011).

### **1.7 Significance of Study**

This study is significant in response to the problem statement and research gap that have been stated earlier. This research allows landscape architect, architects, urban planners, artwork producers, artists and the authorities to understand the significance of adapting appropriate public art’s attributes structurally and socially which might promote people’s initial interaction and regenerate space in a more effective and pragmatic trajectory. In fact, this study provides a platform for different professions and disciplines to comprehend adapting appropriate attributes which are accepted by the public.

### **1.8 Structure of Thesis**

This thesis composes of six chapters in the study of public art’s attributes and interaction. This section explains the structure of each chapter respectively.

### **1.8.1 Chapter 1- Introduction**

The overview and insight of public art in urban setting is studied in this chapter. The purpose of this study is to explore how public art influences people's interaction; both active and passive in urban space. This Chapter is divided into eight sections. This section is followed by Section 1.2 which discusses the problems that arise in public art development. The gap of public art study which still lack consideration is explained in Section 1.3. Next, research aim and objectives in regard to the gap and problem is identified in Section 1.4. From the two research objectives, four research questions are posted in Section 1.5. In addition, the three parameters of public art— size, material composition, location, and two parameters of positive and negative weighted emotions are discussed in Section 1.6. The significance of the study in which allows landscape architects, architects, urban planners, artwork producers, artists and the authority to understand the importance of adapting appropriate public art's attributes structurally and socially is explained in Section 1.7. This is vital as it might promote people's initial interaction and then regenerate space in a more effective and pragmatic trajectory.. Eventually, the overall structure of the thesis is also explicated in Section 1.8.

### **1.8.2 Chapter 2 - Literature Review**

This chapter discusses on different fields of literature. It is categorized into six Sections. The background studies including land art, earth art, environmental art, ecological art, public art and site specific are discussed in Section 2.2, then the popular trends of studies is identified in Section 2.3. Section 2.4 explains the role of public art in urban space towards aesthetic, economic, social and cultural claims. Next, the attributes of public art that are overlooked in previous researches is established in Section 2.5. Perceived emotion attributes in two different dimensions is set in Section 2.6. Finally, Section 2.7 defines research underpinnings that aid in establishing a conceptual framework to assess public art that influence people to interact. This framework is designed in addressing how public art influence people's interaction structurally and socially. The research underpinnings are namely symbolic interaction, social cognitive theory and emotional attachment.

### **1.8.3 Chapter 3 – Research Methodology**

This chapter discusses the methods used in accordance with the research framework discussed in Chapter 2. This Chapter is divided into five sections. The mode of research and philosophical assumption (constructivist, post-positivist, pragmatism) are explicated in Section 3.2. Then, the selected study area and its background are explained in Section 3.3. Next, Section 3.4 discusses about public art structural configuration (size, materials and location) and social activities that take place. In addition, the positive and negative emotional behaviour that is displayed after they engage with public artwork is also analysed in Section 3.4. After that, types of questionnaires, observation and interview methods are distinguished. For example, sampling size is determined on one factor per ten numbers for structural equation models (SEM). The reliability and validity of these survey techniques are evaluated in Section 3.5. The model for data analysis is conceptualised in Section 3.6.

### **1.8.4 Chapter 4 - Data Analysis and Result**

This chapter discusses about how the data were analysed and the results were drawn via observation, survey questionnaires and interview in three sections. This Chapter is divided into three sections. Section 4.2 explicates the content analysis in picture coding and the result from observation data. Section 4.3 illustrates the result of survey questionnaires using Chi-square goodness of fit test and Confirmatory Factor Analysis. Finally, Section 4.4 discusses about the data yield from the interview method using inductive content analysis. Both observation data and interview data are used to support survey questionnaire data.

### **1.8.5 Chapter 5 – Interpretation of Results**

This chapter discusses the interpretation of the results in Chapter 4. The results were drawn from observation, survey questionnaires and interview. This Chapter is divided into six sections. Section 5.2 explicates attributes of public art that contributes to people interaction. Section 5.3 discusses about the size of public art. Section 5.4 discusses about the material composition of public art. Section 5.5

discusses placement of public art. Section 5.6 looks at public's reactions after they engage with the artworks, whether they behave positively or negatively. Finally, Section 5.7 discusses about how public art motivates people.

### **1.8.6 Chapter 6 – Conclusion**

This chapter encompasses a conclusion of the thesis on author interpretation on how public art influenced people's interaction, particularly people interact with the artwork and their family, friends, relatives or strangers and its significant roles. The first section explains the definition of public art. Second section explains the methodological flow of the study. Third section explains the significance of public art in Malaysia urban landscape as well as its theoretical and planning implications. The last section of the study explains about the limitation of the research includes site limitation and study limitation.

## **1.9 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the operative definition of art practices has been adapted from indoor environment (painting in the museum) to outdoor environment (monument or sculpture) which are literally known as 'Public Art'. Public art development in urban landscape for physical-aesthetic, economic, social, and cultural-symbolic claims is remains unresolved. Despite the benefits that public art offers, it is also a double-edge sword. An inappropriate development and planning of public art can degrade the existing condition of a space instead of beautifying the space. Besides, public art development also encountered problems such as socially irrelevant, autonomous and elitist; fail to improve the beauty of a place. Furthermore, imposition and the favour of certain interests or characters are likely to cause opposition for others. These problems will directly and indirectly affect the quality of space and have an inference on people's interaction. Thus, this study provides a paradigm to examine the attributes of public art to the public. It is widely discussed in Chapter 2. This can contribute to the existing body of knowledge in a more pragmatic way which will

eventually motivate people to protect, appraise and promote public art, developing and planning towards urban regeneration.



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