



UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

**A STUDY OF COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO CREATIVE OBJECTS
WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO THE DESIGN OF PUBLIC
SEATING IN SELECTED UNIVERSITY ENVIRONMENTS**

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports on a theoretical and empirical investigation concerning the design, fabrication and use of creative objects as seating furniture for selected public spaces in two, cross-cultural university contexts. The main theoretical work, in terms of developing design concepts for three creative seating objects, has been undertaken at the University of Canberra (UC), Australia, while the construction of the respective object prototypes and the empirical investigations have been carried out on the UC campus as well as on the campus of the Universiti of Teknologi, MARA, Shah Alam, Malaysia (UiTM). This research has been undertaken in three main parts: Firstly, a critical review of the literature has identified the socially important features of public spaces and the notable design characteristics and role of seating furniture in such spaces. While a number of useful studies have been published about seating furniture in public spaces, no empirical investigations were detected in the literature with respect to how people may respond to the use of creative seating objects in these spaces, especially in different cultural contexts. Hence, further research has been found necessary. Secondly, as informed by the literature review, three creative objects were designed, constructed, peer reviewed and placed in the respective university campus spaces in order to serve as *vehicles* to test the responses of users, mindful of a *participatory design* approach in the respective contexts. A survey questionnaire and open-ended interviews were then conducted with participants on the UC and UiTM campuses, respectively, in keeping with a mixed-methods research plan and with due regard to temporal, geographic and environmental constraints. Thirdly, the associated participant responses found on both campuses were analyzed using SPSS quantitative analysis software—to better inform the future design and use of such creative objects as seating in such spaces. In a related partial triangulation study, a separate group of participants, based primarily on the UiTM campus, were also interviewed with a set of open-ended questions and their responses analysed by means of a thematic parsing technique.

It is found that studying the needs and reactions of these different University participants is important for gaining understanding and insights into how public spaces can be enhanced with particular respect to the use of creative seating objects. An underlying objective has been to provide furniture designers with new knowledge related to the potential use of creative seating objects. Interesting contextual data have been found and analysed which indicate that design awareness, creative knowledge and environmental/climatic aspects, as well as an appreciation of functionality and practicality, all play a part in how people respond to creative seating objects in selected cultural contexts. These findings are supported by recommendations for future research, a supporting bibliography and an extensive data base of original empirical information.

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