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Art, Urban Commons and Social Change

Tijen Tunali

The discussions of urban commons involve us in breaking up the totalizing notion of those dominated by power as passive consumers and reconsidering how urban life is made as creative production, constantly appropriating and reappropriating the products, messages, and spaces for expression. The common acts of engagement and reorganization are based on re-appropriations and redeployments of the dominant image economy and hierarchical distribution of space experienced in the city. Hence, they are also a part of the struggle for the reclamation of public space wherein wrongly privatized space is returned to its rightful owners. The special issue “Art, Urban Commons and Social Change” discusses how art in the urban space creates unmediated spaces and instances of emancipated subjects.

The authors analyze various forms of art within economic, cultural, and social urban contexts to shed light on the complexity of modern urban life and struggles for urban commons. They delve into the issue of urban commons and social change both in the role of urban social struggles and creating urban communities. Some questions that the contributors seek answers are: Under what conditions could art become effective in reclaiming democratic citizenship? What kind of public should artistic creativity in the urban space try to constitute and what kind of public spaces are needed to that effect? What can we learn from urban art about visual resistance in the interplay with political power structures?

Mehreen Mustafa analyzes the creative endeavor titled “The indifferent A (4)rt” is curated in the low-income housing colony in Lahore. The project aims to challenge the notion of power and agency associated with patronized art by fetching art exhibition, creation, and appreciation out of the confined gallery space into a democratic domain of public space. Mustafa demonstrates how public spaces and public art can create bridges between people and thereby foster convivial culture. Using mapping, photographs, and empirical observations Mustafa discusses that the collaboration of art and public forums could have a political potential. Miloš Moskovljević analyzes the function of street art (such as graffiti and murals) in constructing cultural memory and collective remembrance in the context of the post-Yugoslav space. Moskovljević bases his discussion on the notion of cultural memory and utilizes the media archaeology approach, not just to examine communicative functions of street art in collective memory but also to note patterns of urban commons behind the conveyance of socio-political landscape of the public spaces in Belgrade, as the former capital of Yugoslavia.

With examples from the aftermath of Turkey’s Gezi movement Tijen Tunali investigates the argument that the recent urban social movements arguably developed new notions of citizenship that extend the limits of politics and expand the decision making control of citizens. She argues that the legacy of these movements has been to give the aesthetic power to ordinary citizens over the public spaces of their city. She first analyzes the case of Turkey, where the ruling party has been reinforcing its power in the public both in the form of reinforcing a new socio-spatial order but also a particular aesthetic order to establish “a new cultural era” that is different from what the previous secular and nationalist ruling elite had established. Tunali then discusses how the Gezi movement might have given the citizens the power to reinforce their aesthetic rights to the city. The research group at Polytechnic University in Milan highlights how tactical urbanism methods can have a big impact even in highly-developed realities. They focus on the initiatives put in place by citizens and associations, like the projects Piazze Aperte, or TréntaMi in Verde that revive busy public spaces, take space away from the dominance of cars, create new open street meeting places for youths and inincreaseecurity for pedestrians and cyclists. They argue that those case studies show how creative activism is effective in transforming areas traditionally considered problematic.

Although they are short-term, community-based projects they have the power to drive lasting improvements in the city commons.

Moham Wang's article provides an overview of SF Chinatown's visual history from the mid-1800s to today through the colonial and postcolonial periods. It proposes a conceptual framework for reimagining the Chinese diaspora within the Bay Area's architecture – a reimagination of the physical and metaphysical movement of the pagoda across various spaces and times – to develop a community while writing an alternative art history. By adopting art-historical and theoretical analyses, Wang reveals the critical role of the pagoda for Chinese Americans in performing identities and navigating cultural and economic issues to form a highly robust and fluid autonomy as a response to the various forces from this transnational saga. In her work-in progress essay Yimeng Yang analyzes The "Everyone's East Lake" (EEL) art project is an urban protest initiated by two architects in Wuhan, China since 2010, with the aim of advocating for the publicization of the lakeshore and resisting land enclosures led by the government and developers. Yang examines how the digital creative commons contributes to the real-world struggle towards urban commons in China's political economic context, and how the offline resistance in turn inspires the collaboration and co-creation in the digital space which promotes the sustainable practice of making urban commons.

Acknowledgements
Editor of this special issue Tijen Tunali thanks Carlsberg Foundation for their generous funding for the *Art and the City: Urban Space Art and Social Change Conference* in 2022, which this issue is one of the outcomes.

Mapping the impact of public art in the creation of convivial culture: A case study of a public art exhibition at Sher Shah Colony, Lahore, Pakistan

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1. Introduction

“The indifferent A (4)rt” was a participatory public art exhibition that was held for 02 days in 2018. The exhibition was held in two different parks of a low-income housing society i.e., Sher Shah Colony, in Lahore. Sher Shah Colony is a designed housing facility located the in the southwest of Lahore. It is compressed between the highly commercialized locality of Raiwind and a chunk of agrarian land. (Figure 1) Although the investigation of the development pattern of Sher Shah Colony is not the focus of this research however it is important to note that the colony has recently examined a dramatic shift in terms of population growth and has observed an astonishing pace of urbanization in its vicinities. The recent introduction of educational institutions, industrial faculty, and housing societies for the urban elite and middle class, connected through a network of fine roads, has contributed to shaping and altering the socio-built environment of the colony. Planned on a perfect iron grid pattern, with an approximate area of 4600000 sqft, the colony is divided into 4 blocks namely A, B, C, and D. A park has been designed at the center of each block and two big parks have been allocated at the center of the colony.

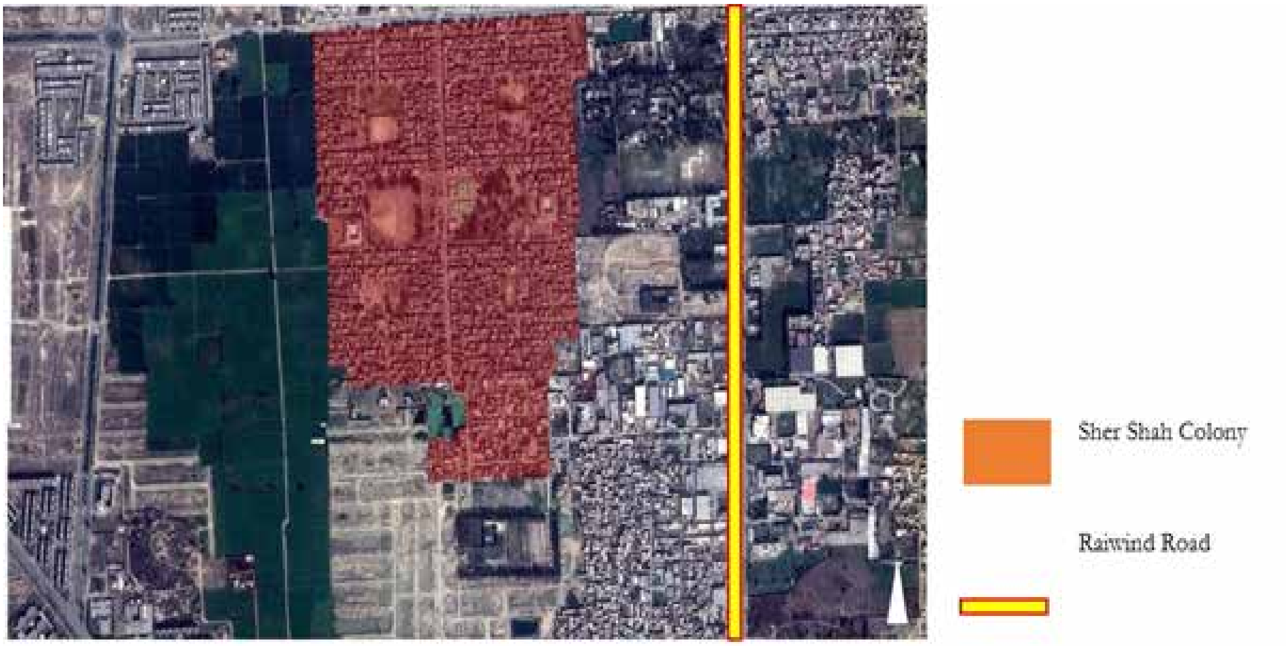

Figure 1. Context of Sher Shah Colony located on near Raiwind Road , Lahore. Source: Indifferent A(4)rt 2018

Interestingly the exhibition itself was a product of informal discussions carried out among a group of friends over meals in Sher Shah Colony, Lahore. The growing contextual and psychological strain affecting their cities, neighborhoods, families, and personal lives was often deliberated during their discussions. Being indifferent to the situation stopped working for their personal satisfaction since the current environment was not about people and places around them but about people and places where they anchor their existence. Therefore the endeavor holds not only objective but also subjective significance in its occurrence. Also, the brutal hegemony embedded in the structure of art and architecture practice and inaccessibility of urban public spaces was personally experienced by initiators rather than speculatively perceived in this case. Therefore efforts to create a public platform where discourse on these subjective and objective, personal and communal, concerns can be generated and encouraged seems to be the only possible solution for the group. The exhibition was conceived to be an experimental and collaborative endeavor challenging the spatial and artistic paradigm of creative culture. It was also aimed at fetching the art exhibition, creation, and appreciation out of the confined gallery spaces and privileged social groups and engaging it to evoke convivial culture in public space. The group believed that the collaboration of art and public forums can create democratic spaces where underprivileged voices can also be expressed, heard, and valued. The name of the project “The indifferent Art” doesn’t also define the objective of the project but highlights the existing dominant artistic and spatial attitude towards public spirit. And in an attempt to do so, it does also voice that art and public space should be indifferent to serve segregation, censorship, and anti-convivial and anti-democratic conditions.

The design of the exhibition space was perceived as a collection of memories. Memories of culture in distress, of culture in celebration. Each piece of art displayed was projected as a story and every story highlighted multiple social behaviors observed by the artist in Sher Shah Colony. This was further emphasized by weaving the design around an existing element which can retain the memory of social life i.e. one exhibition was designed around a big mango tree (Figure 2) and in another park around an abounded football net (Figure 3). It is interesting to note here that the deliverables of the proj-

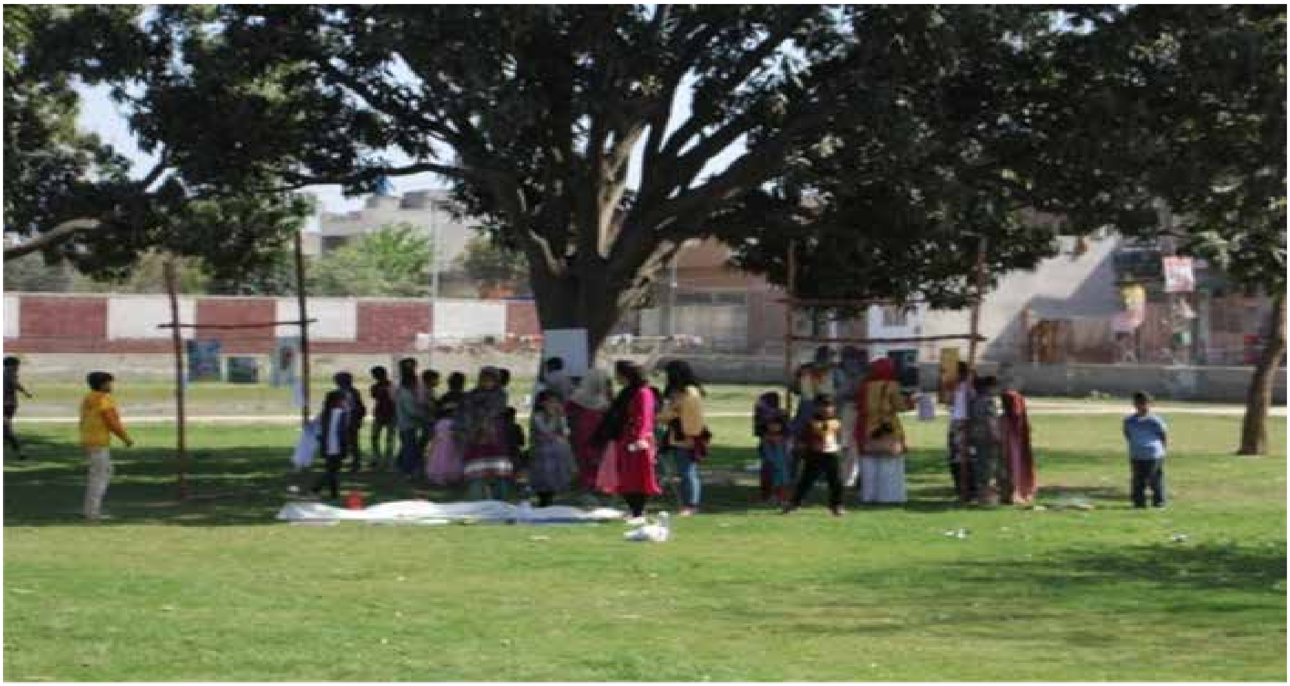

Figure 2. The exhibition is arranged around the mango tree located in the park. Source: Indifferent A(4)rt, 2018.

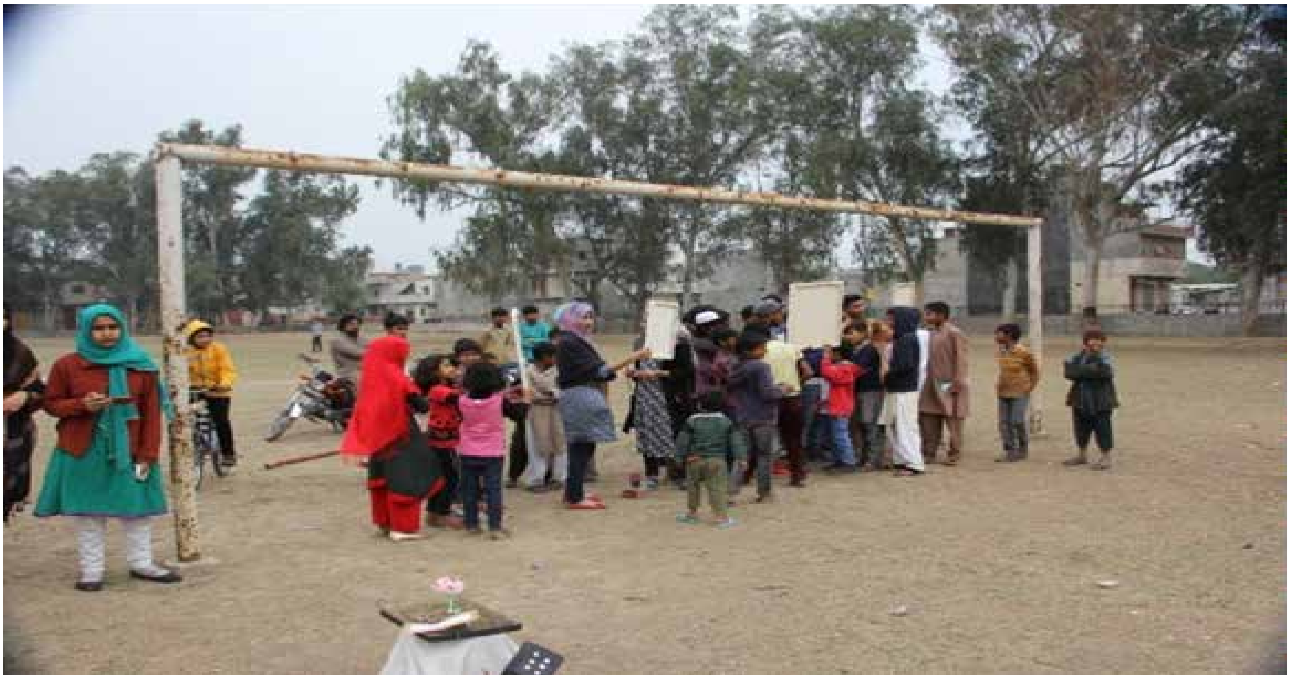

Figure 3. The exhibition was designed around the empty football net located in the park. Source: Indifferent A(4)rt, 2018

ect were also not preconceived but they evolved organically during the course of the research. However, what was decided from the start was to invest in public art as a catalyst to revive convivial culture in public space and to establish the autonomy of this unconventional practice of art exhibition by its mere occurrence. Several design proposals were presented in community meetings, informally discussed with the people of the colony, and rejected. These include the public follies, landscape design elements, and provision of kiosks or other facilities as a tool to create or revive the social convivial culture in the public park/s of Sher Shah Colony.

With the help of a multi-disciplinary and collaborative approach, the question on the nature and spatial typology of exhibition space appropriate to advocate the objective of the project was initiated and finalized. The extended public partnership and understanding achieved through research also informed the materialization of the exhibition. The research also provides decisive guidelines for the implementation of the exhibition where the design and implementation process focus on an inclusive approach fostering participation, engagement, and collaboration of people.

2. Method and research questions:

Urban exploration and a community-based participatory approach were employed as the on-ground research methodology to experience, record, and analyze the public culture, public spaces, and aesthetics of the Sher Shah Colony in order to organize a participatory public art event. The above-mentioned research methods were also used as ingress to interact with, engage and extend collaborations with the community of Sher Shah Colony.

Each research methodology was chosen to serve a specific objective and yield a pre-determined outcome. For example, Urban exploration was employed as one of the research methodologies to explore and map the public culture and spatial complexities of Sher Shah Colony and to identify potential public spaces in Colony for social experiments and interventions. Photographs, videos, sketches, personal notes, maps, and architectural drawings exploring zoning, building typologies, spatial hierarchy, activities, and infrastructure details were developed in this regard.

Also, in order to develop an inclusive design proposal assisted by research data, a community-based participatory approach was adopted. The process of research and exploration was further strengthened by regular workshops, seminars, and meetings in which the curators of the exhibitions present, analyze, and deliberate on the research conducted under the supervision of community members. Design proposals for social experiments and interventions, strategies for the accusation of required material, and funding for the exhibition were extensively discussed during community meetings with peers and with the people of the Sher Shah Colony. The community-based participatory approach has contributed a lot in honing community participation, interaction, engagement, and a sense of community ownership with the public art exhibition.

Public spaces are the manifestations of civic urban complexities. These spaces are projections of communal expressions and are shared, accessed, and preserved distinctly and differently in the personal and collective memory of the people. The *translucentality** of the public spaces allows the exposition of such personal and collective experiences, associations, and interactions to dwell under a single shade fostering conviviality. Public spaces are also capable of absorbing and generating manifold abstractions of a single reality. The nature of extensions and the reactions communicated by and to the public user imparts fluidity to a public space making it a cocktail of various and varied human expressions of individual and communal concern. Public spaces being the culmination points in the public arena also reflects on people's thoughts, activities, traditions, beliefs, and culture. These spaces have been feeding multiple human needs i.e., from physical, emotional, and cultural to psychological. UNESCO defines a public space as one which is "open and accessible" to all. One of the primary forms of public space is a public park which has the innate quality to bring the people of the city together through its spatial accessibility and viability in terms of design supporting communal activities, interactions, and initiatives. The formal and informal interactions generated in and around public parks allow people to discuss what is already acquainted and to hear stories and ideas that are unknown. The curiosity to listen and the urge to respond, in almost a symphonic manner, can form the basis of convivial culture in the public domain. The unfamiliar faces and ideas introduced during these interactions facilitated by a public space either result in awe or generate a heated or soft debate. In either case, the interactions are facilitated by public space encouraging everyone to voice and shape their opinions. Clearly many communal public actions typically happen in existing public spaces thus reasserting the role and sustenance of the public realm (Tridib Banerjee, 2001).

But what if the phenomenon of debate and dialogue attributes intrinsic to tolerant and democratic values are not allowed to unfold in the public sphere? What if the basic human right i.e. right to freedom of expression, is crumbled through sophisticated propaganda? What if the innate spatial quality of public parks i.e., the convivial culture is reduced to mere visual pleasure that is too reserved for a few? What if the dynamics of socializing and interactions are altered in

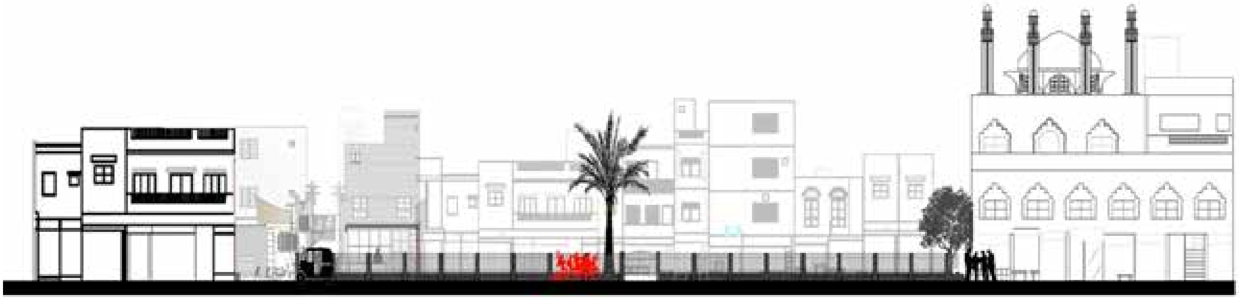

Figure 4. An architect's impression of the socio-built environment of Sher Shah Colony. Source: Indifferent A(4)rt , 2018.

a way that produced nothing but discomfort, mistrust, and hesitation in the public arena? What if public spaces staging human drama (Syed Faisal, 2014) the story of our society being performed is of apathy and desolation?

The questions posed in the above-mentioned paragraph are not mere hypothetical assumptions but an everyday reality of our time and context. Pakistan and especially Lahore is witnessing the corrosion of public spaces as a direct outcome of capitalism and terrorism. Systematic dysfunctional conditions are improvised to socially impair public parks as vibrant convivial arenas. Recent development in Lahore city observes the social function of public parks consciously debilitated and their utilitarian purpose being reduced to mere visual gardens. The new ones being developed in gated vicinities are reserved for the exclusive urban class. And low-income neighborhoods are gifted with an underdeveloped piece of land under the name of public parks which are either illegally occupied or abandoned due to their poor physical environment and lack of ownership. The research, therefore, aims to investigate if public art can regenerate an inactive public space in underprivileged communities like Sher Shah. Evolving urban morphology of Lahore is treating land as a commodity. Too valuable to be wasted on public parks dedicated to the public well-being and democratic spirit. A new form of public space recorded as "Privatized public spaces or publicized private spaces" (Tridib Banerjee, 2001)is merging to satisfy commercial and capital hunger. This new face of public space dedicated to feeding capitalism is strictly controlled and monitored allowing little or no room for democratic convivial culture to develop. Thus Decline of the public realm is paralleled by a corresponding decline in public spirit (Tridib Banerjee, 2001).

Interestingly paradoxical conditions in reference to the "publicness" of art exist in our context where public art has been displayed for the public in private space i.e. *Surkh gulaban dey mausam wich phulaan dey rang kaaley* (Black Spring) by Awami art collective, or where public art has been exhibited for privilege class in a public space i.e. galleries. The term art has always been a contested terrain (Robert S. Nelson, Richard Shiff, 2003). And the question of what qualifies a piece of art as public art furthers the complexities of the subject. A lot has been discussed, written, argued over, and criticized by academic and nonacademic circles on the subject of Public Art. But the issue, fortunately, or unfortunately has been further convoluted. Public art can be described as an interrelationship between content and audience (Cher Krause Knight, 2008) having an ability to generate emotional or consequential effects (Robert S. Nelson, Richard Shiff, 2003). The three key elements i.e. art, public, and space, have been formulating the base or structure of all concepts designed to address the notion of public art. The convivial conditions created and encouraged in public space due to the ownership, engagement, and participation of people with art, labeled as public art, can also serve as a tool to measure the *"publicness"* of an art piece and public space. Also, the level of public engagement and participation should be questioned rather than answered while defining the *publicness* of public art.

Conviviality is more than a "feasting, drinking good company" (Merriam Webster) or "sociable and good time" (Word web Dictionary. It is the autonomous and creative intercourse among people and their intercourse of persons and their environment (I Illinch, 1973). Peattie (, 1988) describes these interactive interactions of social pleasure as purposeful activities which are not limited to singing, dancing, and socializing but also may include small or big community/group initiatives aimed at addressing the grave community concerns or demanding reclamation of their rights. Convivial environments demand liberty and freedom of expression and public spaces by definition act as breathing spaces of a city, both environmentally and socially. Therefore the research also aims to investigate if experiments like Indifferent A(4) rt i.e. a public art exhibition being held in a public space can act as a bridge between people and revive convivial culture in a society that is in the process of strangling its communal spirit. Subjectivity, being an intrinsic attribute of public art, demands acknowledging the fact that multiple opinions (irrespective of being ultimately wrong or right but debatable) are expected to be generated by a single expression of art. And the expression and its reactions, in the shape of acknowledgment, adaptation, and confrontation, is, in fact, an astonishing display of human creative diversity. And recognizing this environment of pluralistic values is the soul of a convivial culture.

During the course of field research, 6 public parks located in Sher Shah Colony were critically observed and considered potential sites (Figure 5). Where urban exploration allowed the navigation of inaccessible parks, the community-based participatory approach laid down the paradigm using which the parks were selected. Two out of the 6 parks were attached to the government school and were already being used exclusively by the school authorities. Another 3rd park, interestingly decided for women, was slowly being engulfed by a mosque located at its periphery to an extent that the site boundary located between the mosque and the park was indistinguishable. 4th park, interestingly another park dedicated to women, was organically evolving its convivial spirit due to its neighborhood. This park relatively the smallest among all parks was surrounded by a residential area and therefore was used by children, women, and men alike in the evening. Feedback received from the people also indicated that an intervention might destabilize and reorient the evolving convivial culture of that park. On the one hand, religious partiality, the hegemony of government institutes, and surveillance exploitation can be reflected and on the other hand spark of a convivial environment was observed in the parks of Sher Shah Colony.

The community-based participatory approach adopted during the course of research in which community members were engaged as team members and advisors indicated that artistic intervention in 2 parks located at the center of Sher shah colony, relativity big in size and surrounded by commercial area will be suitable for the public art exhibition. The parks were selected because despite being large and located in approachable vicinity, they were inactive in their use and accessibility. Also, the parks were situated between the commercial and residential areas, enabling them to share a much more diverse neighborhood than other parks located in the Colony. The location, size, and diverse neighborhood of the parks can also ensure the participation of males as well as females since one was dedicated to males and the other was dedicated to females shared by kids and elders.

3. Regeneration of An Inactive Public Space with the Help of Public Art

It is interesting to note that despite the well-defined space designated for the public parks, only one park out of all the present in Sher Shah Colony, was recorded as active in terms

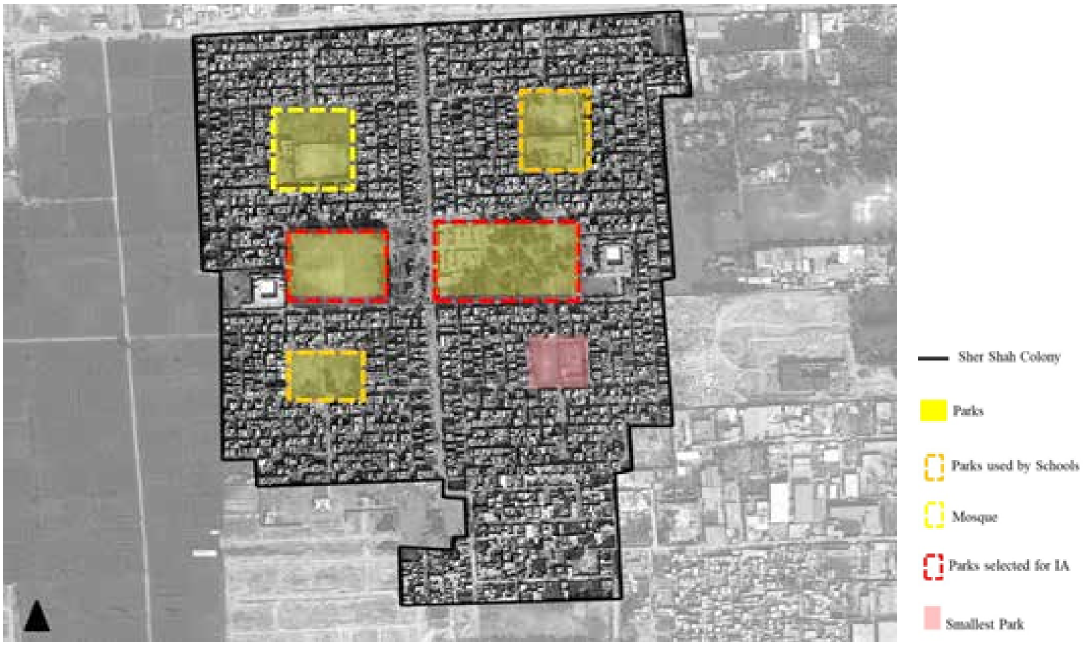

Figure 5. Usage of Parks located in Sher Shah Colony. Source: Indifferent A(4)rt.

of activity, accessibility, and quality of space. Lack of public ownership, maintenance, infrastructure, and activity was mostly absent from all the parks located in the colony. Cricket was the main activity predominately observed in the parks during reserve hours but for only male members. The participation of females, the elderly, and kids were rarely observed. These block parks were rarely either used by elder members of Sher Shah Colony for evening sittings or rare political or religious processions.

A glimpse of periodic activity was however observed in the two selected parks of the colony in terms of their usage since the Sunday market was attached to one park and the second park was used as a cricket ground. The culture of conviviality, public spirit, and communal participation was absent from all six parks of the colony.

The Comparative activity map (Figure 6 & 7) demonstrate how the introduction of a participatory public art exhibition not only increased the participation of all genders and age group in the park but also added a significant number of activities created within and around the exhibition. The activities contributed to the creation of convivial culture and allowed the people of the colony to talk around and about the exhibition as well as about their daily lives. Children who were rarely observed in the parks were the main agents of change. The children contributed to making the space and exhibition active by participating in the event as well as promoting the event in the vicinity.

The comparative activity map (Figure 6) shows that limited space within the park was used for playing cricket by the male members of the colony i.e. students of the school located in the vicinity of the park. The Cricket matches were also played at fixed hours. However, the participatory exhibition attracted not only young male members but kids as well as elderly members. The exhibition also ran from morning till evening. One of the major activities added to the park was the exhibition itself, however, due to the exhibition, the elderly members started engaging with the exhibition as well as with each other under the shade of a nearby tree. Together with crickets, the male members were busy painting and discussing the art piece exhibited in the exhibition with artists as well as with their fellow peers.

The comparative activity map (Figure 7) shows that the park was generally active in the area where a play area was dedicated for the children. The park was not actively used by the females despite it being named “Ladies Park”. Although the park was well maintained but underused due to the lack of

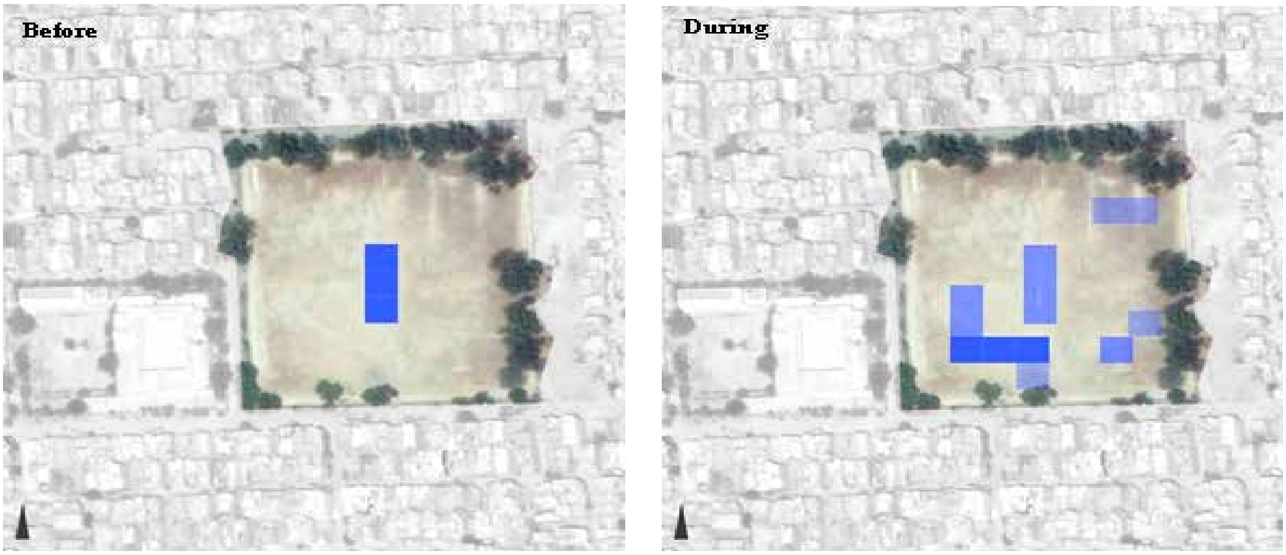

Figure 6. Activity Map of Park reserved for young boys, Before and During the exhibition. Source: Mustafa, Mehreen (2019).

activity. The participatory art exhibition first attracted the kids who were playing in the designed section of the park. The kids not only participated fully in the exhibition but also invited their family members, especially the female ones. Soon the park was raided with mothers holding their children. The art exhibition soon witnessed kids filling the canvas with colors. Mothers and young females engage with an artist concerning their aspirations and how the exhibition has provided them an opportunity to use the park and paint their hearts out.

The comparative analysis of the activity map (6 and 7) clearly outlines the increase in the number of activities conducted in the park. The park was transformed from only a cricket and playing area to a space where painting, discussion, casual chatter, and debates are being held. The maps also highlight that the participatory art exhibition has encouraged females and children to access the parks and participate in the participatory art exhibition, resulting in the creation of gender-inclusive public space i.e., from a male-only space to a space where children and females can sit, relax, paint, play, and discuss their daily business. The maps highlight that the participatory art exhibition has regenerated an inactive public space and contributed to the creation of convivial public life and space in the parks where people. of all ages from young members to kids and the elderly can participate freely.

4. Reviving Convivial Culture with the Help of Public Art and Public Space

The design Layout and concept of the exhibition were focused on “Inclusiveness, participation, and democratization” as the key features. The layout of the exhibition provided multiple options, perceived as “perspective”, to the public through its subtle opening. Providing multiple options to access an exhibition also provided multiple routes and order of seeing things displayed. This flexibility of accessibility and navigation was intentionally designed to open the door of “multiple perspectives” of a single reality i.e. exhibition. The “memories i.e. art pieces” informing the “perspectives” were conceived to be either suspended in time i.e. air or deposited in the subconscious i.e. earth. The use of the minimalistic style of display composed of only fish wire, bamboo, stone/bricks collected from the site, and a piece of cloth was employed to propagate the message of “memories suspended in air or deposited in the subconscious”. The materials were also chosen due to their everyday use in the living culture of the Sher Shah Colony. The nature, behavior, and texture of these materials were not new, unknown, or uncomfortable for the people who have been using them creatively in their everyday life (Figure 08).

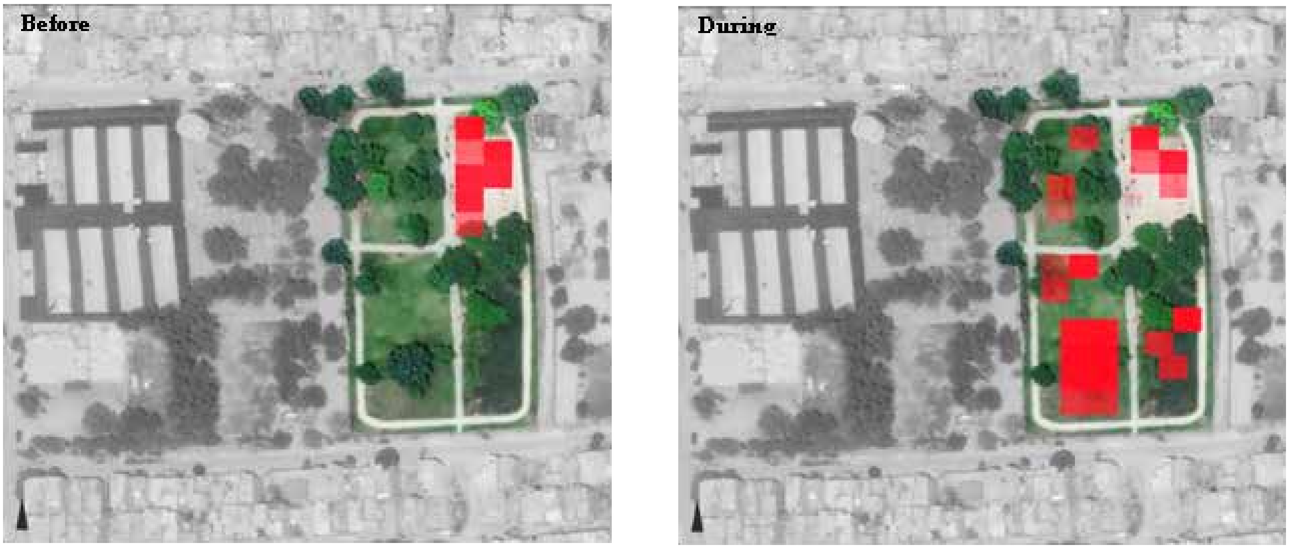

Figure 7. Activity Map of Park reserved for Ladies , Before and During the exhibition. Source: Mustafa, Mehreen (2019).

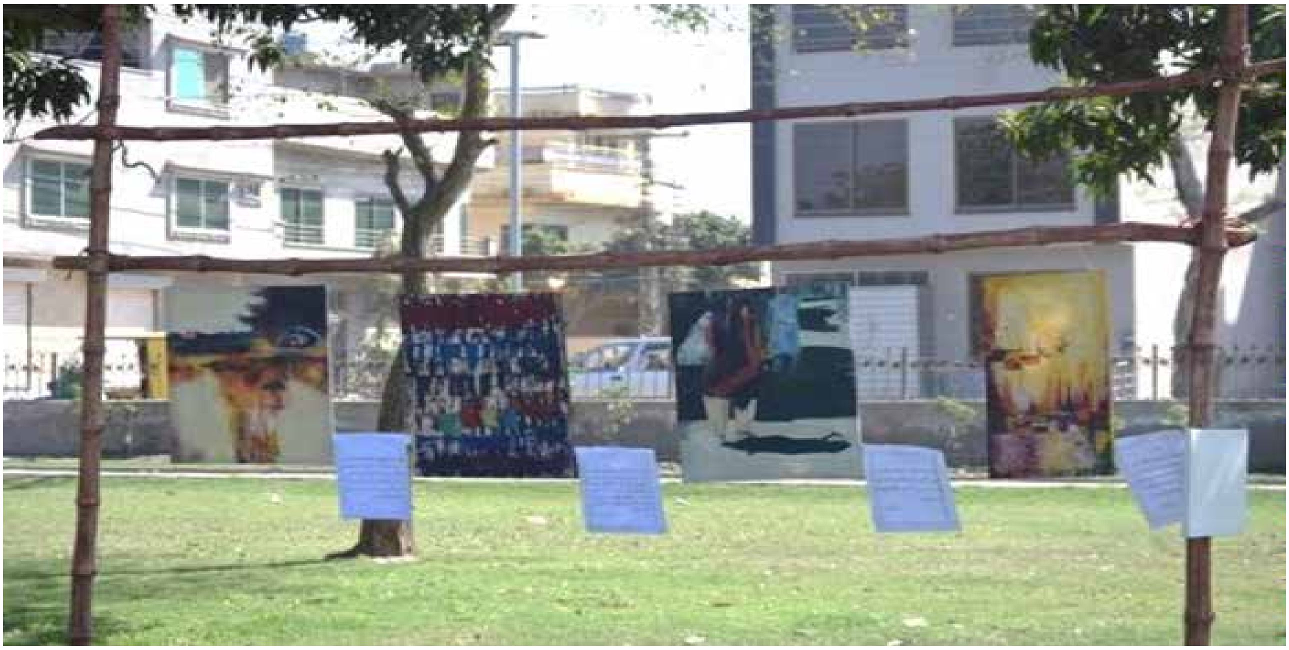

Figure 8. Daily use material such as fish wire and bamboos were used for the exhibition to generate sense of similarity and comfort. Source: Indifferent A(4)rt, 2018.

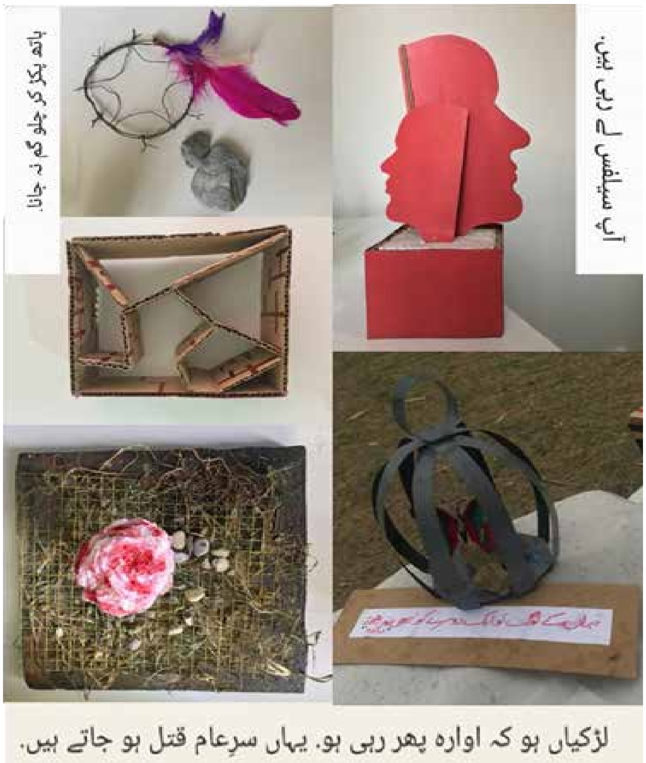
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Figure 9. A glimpse of series “Rah Chaltay Jumlay”. Source: Indifferent A(4)rt, 2018.

The sculpture series titled " *The Rah Chaltay jumlay* (Figure 09) " was subjected to heated discussion. Although the female participants appreciated the content, the men folk were receptive but uncomfortable with the message it was projecting. Rah Chaltay jumlay made its space in the exhibition with the help of the following statement:

"We, especially the women folk here, have always experienced our personal space violated in private and public spaces. The violation though is not always physical. It can be as subtle as a voice having no literal but symbolic meaning or a word which cans your mind can register and signify. The interplay of signifier and signified (Ferdinand de Saussure 1857 – 1913) provides critical insight into our collective behaviors. What we are being called? Why are we being called? What does the word being called signified" are the complex questions we are always forced to think about once the ferocity of the moment has passed. These also include those sentences which have stuck in the memory of artists due to their conditional significance and how they have been expressed. The following " Rah chaltay jumaly" is something we encounter and we think this does say a lot about cultural perception and interpretation."

The painting series titled *Collection of memories* (Figure 10) was subjected to introspection in both parks. Male, female, and elderly people discussed the content and perspective of the artist on Sher Shah Colony and gave their input. Since *Collection of memories* was the fusion of what culture at Sher Shah and what the artist has registered. The memories are reflecting the perspective of an artist and their nostalgic baggage expressed in the context of Sher Shah Colony. They evoke memories of homes, emotions, physical needs, behaviors, paradoxes, humanness, etc. And the people of Sher Shah Colony received, discussed, and welcome these impressions with warm hearts. Where adults and the elderly were attracted to the content and story behind the painting, the kids were more interested in the imagery used. But most importantly the collection of memories rather than being a nostalgic identity was crafting something unique – a culture in making. The exhibition by taking the help of existing culture, art, and public space was in process of reviving conviviality. The existing culture with all its undesirable and intolerant aspects was juxtaposed by a layer of convivial culture, both existing and making each other, a single plane of time.

A regular space was created using the display of art pieces at their periphery. Art pieces were facing the interior of the periphery and the space created was small in size. It was intentionally designed so to designed to increase the proximity of people navigating it. The comfortable congestion compelled people to notice and acknowledge each other and interact. Also, the inclusion of white blank canvas of various sizes assisted by colors and brushes in an environment where each canvas was full of colors and memories challenges the definition of "artist" (Figure 11). The blank white canvas was the main feature and attraction of the exhibition where young and elders, with or without hesitation but little encouragement, considered themselves artists and had painted their observations and aspirations on canvas. The creative use of colors, symbols, portraits, and abstraction painted by the people of Sher Shah Colony on the canvas were confidently projecting that an "untrained eye and mind" can critically observe and sensitively translate their impression on canvas. That such eyes and minds can not only create, appreciate and confidently exhibit their art but also initiate and welcome discussion around their ideas. That art doesn't require any privileged space or hands to unfold it or to be appreciated. The event had successfully established the autonomy of this unconventional practice of art exhibition by its mere occurrence. The symbols and lines drawn were demonstrating the desires and hopes of the people. Art as a medium of expression was at its work. It is especially interesting to note that where the male members drew portraits and names (Figure 12) The female members drew their opinions, aspirations, and challenges with the help of symbols and abstraction. (Figure 13) The female members discussed the work of the artist and their opinion on the art displayed at great length followed by drawing their reflections on the white canvas. The canvas imprinted the challenges of mothers, the aspirations of young girls, and the obstacles of a common female member of the colony. Apart from leaving their impression on canvas the female members started forming small groups and started reclaiming their space in the park. There were a group of females who were keen to show their creative skills on canvas and there were groups who were talking about education and its accessibility for the girls of the colony.

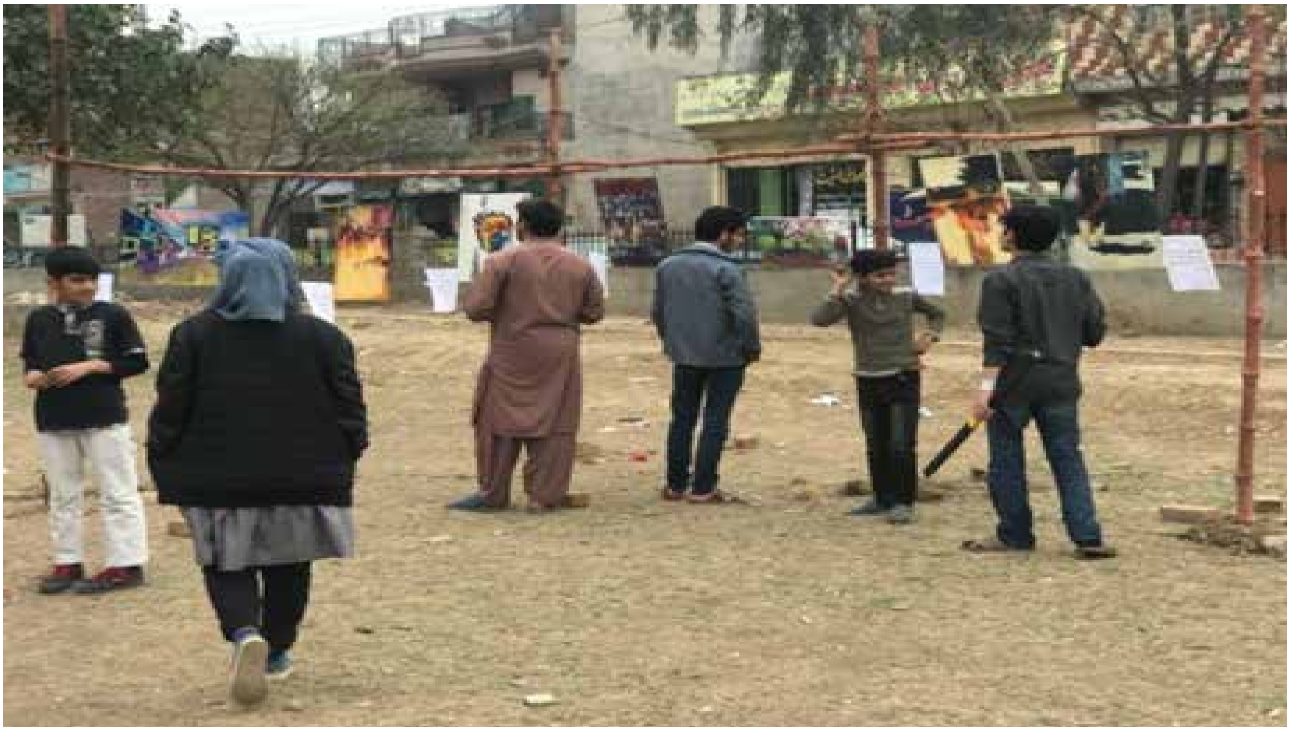

Figure 10. A glimpse of series “Rah Chaltay Jumlay”. Source: Indifferent A(4)rt, 2018.

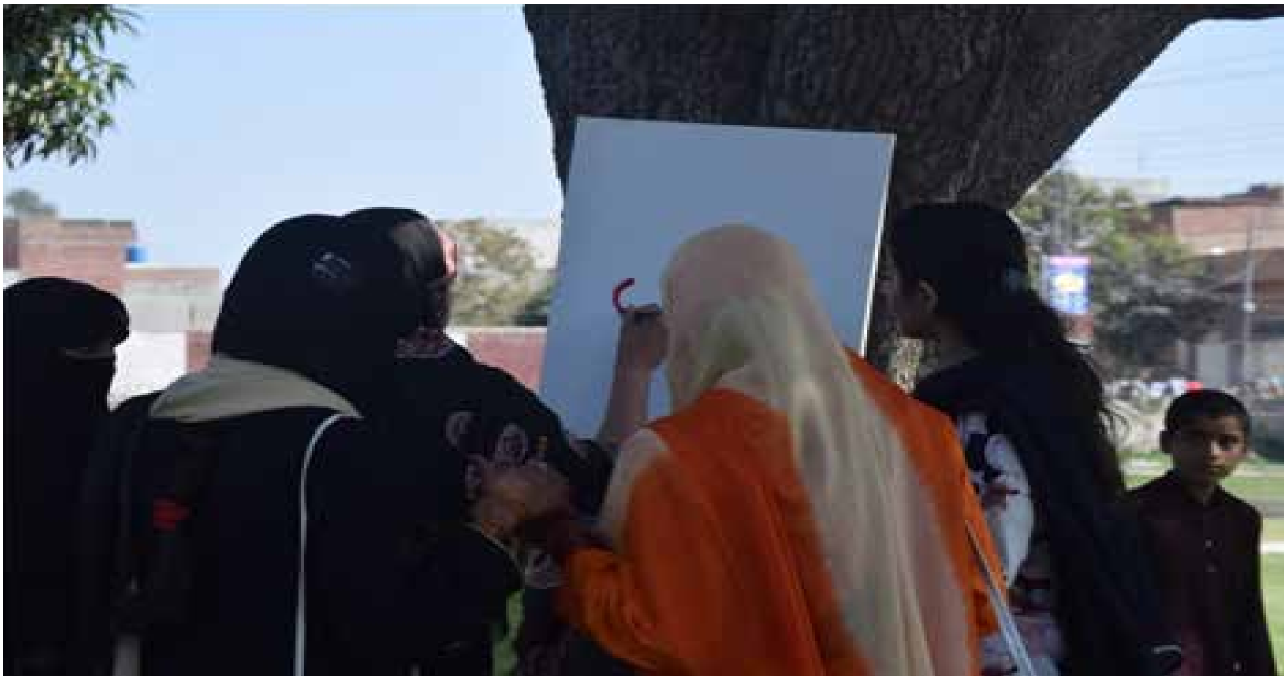

Figure 11. White canvas allowed the people to reflect, engage and participate in the exhibition. Source: Indifferent A(4)rt, 2018.

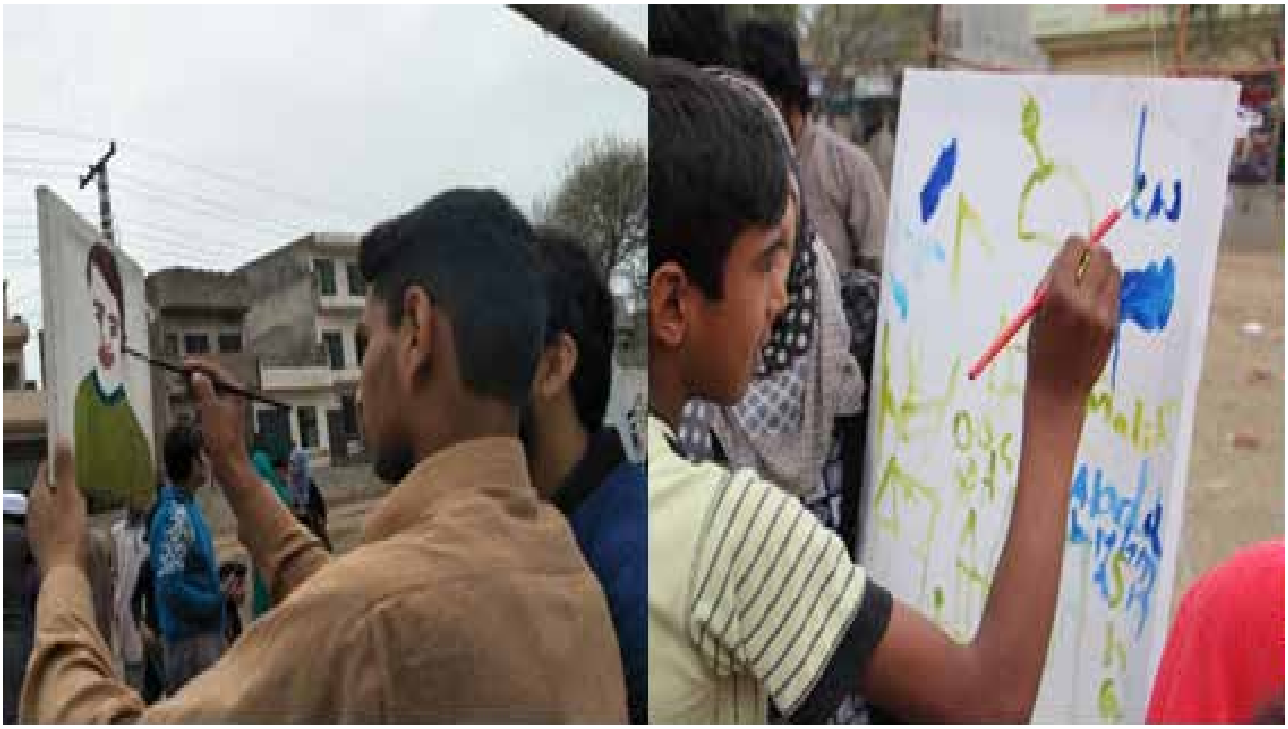

Figure 12. Male members has mostly drawn the portraits. Source: Indifferent A(4)rt, 2018.

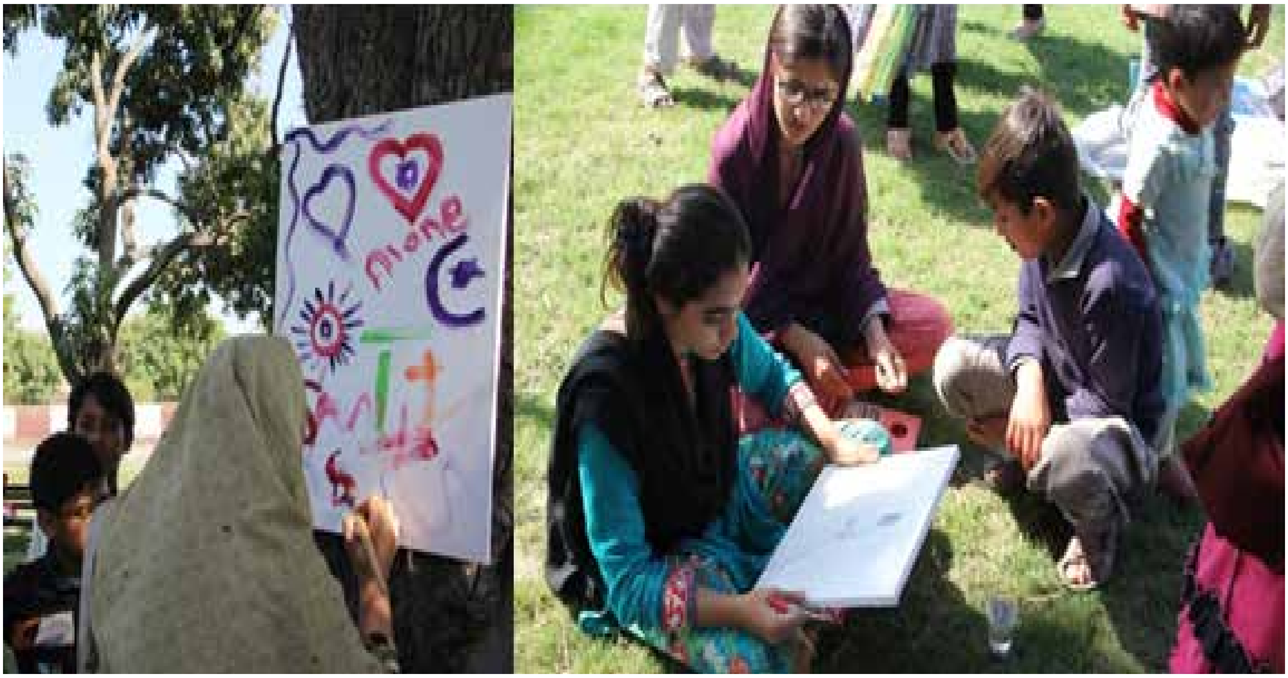

Figure 13. Female members have used abstract symbolism to express their aspirations. Source: Indifferent A(4)rt, 2018.

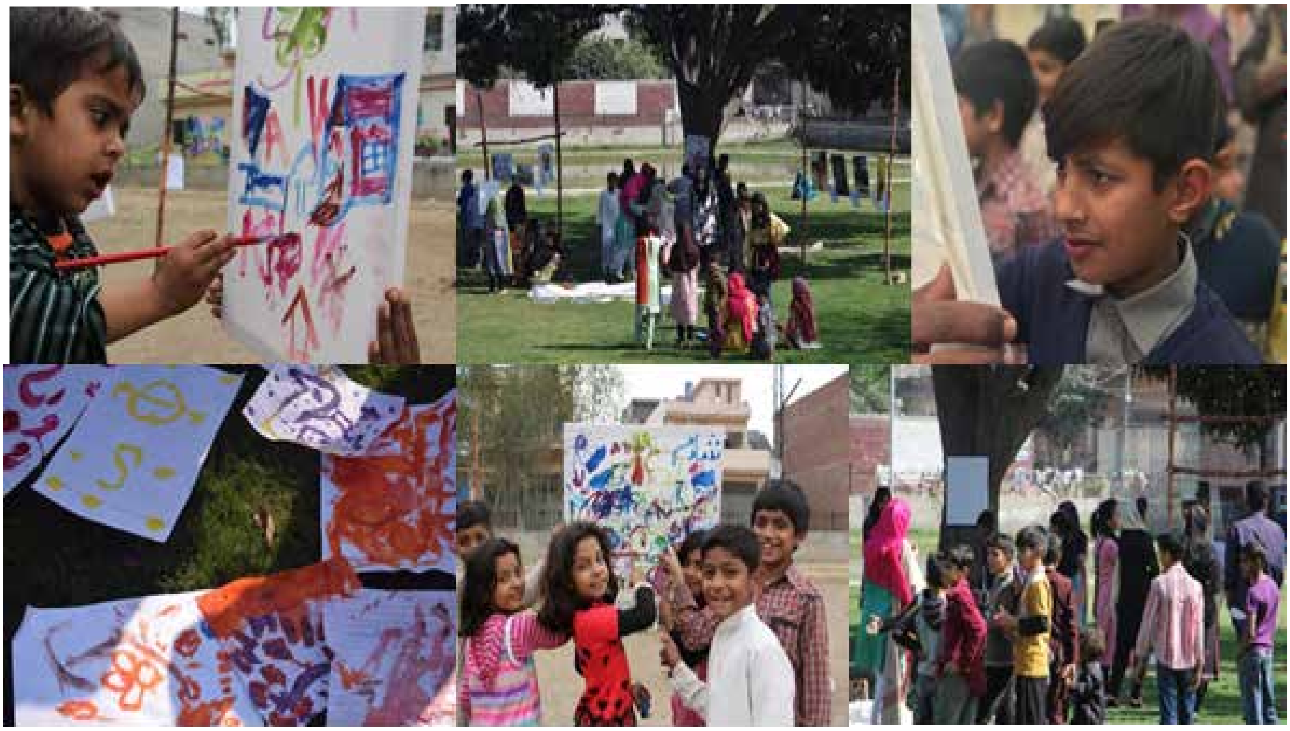

Figure 14. Engagement of children with event. Source: Indifferent A(4)rt, 2018.

The “kids-only park” space soon transformed into a feminist arena, where stories were shared and critical concerns regarding the accessibility of public space and navigating the streets were raised and discussed. Ladies shared that they were rarely welcome or allowed to use the park and how activities like this exhibition can provide them with an opportunity to access the park, meet each other, and discuss their collective and personal concerns.

The role of children remained vital in regenerating the convivial culture of the public space and the success of public art events. Their participation, curiosity, and confidence built an environment of trust in the exhibition space. The children facilitated the setup of the exhibition by identifying the potential human resources which were required to gain the confidence and approval of the neighborhood for the exhibition. Also, they played a vital role in convincing their mother and female members of the colony to visit the exhibition and participate in it (Figure 14).

4. Concluding Remarks

The question of power and agency affiliated with the creation and appreciation of art and its exhibition in the public domain, in an urban context especially, adheres to the core principles of democratic civic behaviors. Understanding the extension of these behaviors in public spaces is very crucial in our context and time, when lack of trust, security threats, and state-backed undemocratic attitudes have further segregated our already fragmented urban class. The segregation enforced, other than being intrinsically unjust, directly foster autocratic conditions in the public and private realms. The complex phenomena noted above through personal experiences are what has motivated the group comprised of artists and architects to investigate and breach the preconceived peripheries of approved institutionalized art, artist, and public space. But the breach was not attempted only by aesthetical purists or merely for the sake of it. It was attempted with a very clear objective i.e. to scrutinize whether conviviality can provoke progressive and tolerant dispositions in public space through art. The effort was also a creative critique of the conventional practice and exhibition of art and design in which the authority, legitimizing one's opinion as valuable and others as invalid, rests on the premises of one's formal education and privileged background. The phenomenon is supported by arguments like "one needs a trained eye and a cultural mind to enjoy and appreciate art (Syed Faisal Sajjad, 2017) Such narratives automatically exclude the so-called "untrained" eye and "uncultured" mind from participating and enjoying art and other creative cultures. Nevertheless, several artists believe that appreciation of art is not a social construct but an innate human trait (Denis Dutton, 2010)and have therefore dedicated their lives to challenging the idea of art as not merely a privileged asset but an integral part of public life. Regular efforts have been made to accelerate interfaith and intercultural tensions. Art and artists, therefore in our part of the world, have rarely felt comfortable being a part of general public discourse and public space.

Public art is still a not acceptable form of expression in our region although it has acquired the status of art in urban subcultures as an alternative medium for the new Avant-garde (Syed Faisal Sajjad, 2015). Nevertheless, creative endeavors in the domain of public space and public art should be encouraged since public spaces and artists with the power of art can foster convivial culture. Interactive and participatory art and public space can motivate people to come out of their biased prejudices and face each other's social polarities. It can create social spaces encouraging intellectual conflict and public discourse. Inclusiveness, participation, and democratization are the key features of convivial public culture. The indifferent Art demonstrated that art in public space can help foster this culture.

A convivial culture evoked by public art can provoke social capabilities of the public space in which a or multiple creative expressions perceived by people in their capacity can create a shared experience that reflects on the collective enterprise of a complex society. (Garrett Dash Nelson, 2015) As believed by Frederick Law Olmsted public spaces especially Parks could hasten the emergence of a broad-minded public spirit that could transcend factional politics (Garrett Dash Nelson, 2015.) Public space in Pakistan is a contested site on which state, extremists, and society are laying claims thus public art in Pakistan is geared towards empowering people (Sadia Pasha Kamran, 2017). Where art has widely been used as a propaganda tool by states and extremists through various mediums and platforms, public art in Pakistan has so far made its alliance with civil society. Different forms of public art in Lahore such as urban graffiti, street art, street theater, public installations, etc. are highlighting and representing serious communal concerns, resistance, and interest of underprivileged, underrepresented, and marginalized groups. Formal and informal censorship on the freedom of expression imposed by autocratic forces in the region is creatively challenged using art and public platform. And this is one of the prime reasons of as to why, in our region, public art is strongly discouraged and preferred to be acknowledged as a frivolous art form sabotaging public space.

The event was an attempt to connect the convivial culture with a by definition convivial space. Undoubtedly the participatory public art exhibition A was designed to commemorate a shift in our attitude towards how art should be created, where it should be displayed, and how it should be celebrated concerning its impact on communal wellbeing and convivial spirit.

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War on the Walls: (Re-)imagining Past And Collective Memories through Murals and Graffiti in post-Yugoslav Serbia

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1. Introduction

''He who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past'' – George Orwell, 1984

In the last few decades, political scientists, historians, psychologists, and sociologists' interest in "collective memory" increased significantly (Assman & Czaplicka, 1995; Olick & Robins, 1998; Mistzal, 2003; Hałas, 2008; Maier, 2009). There are ongoing discussions about the coverage and the exact meaning of terms such as "social memory," "social remembrance," "collective memory", ''public'' and 'national'' memory (Wood, 1999; Kansteiner, 2002). It seems that between all the bearers of these discussions, there is a consensus around one thing - a collective and often debatable representation of the past, which demarcates the boundaries between social groups, and at the same time, represents the fabrics from which social (thus, political) identity is woven, deserves to be the subject of a more detailed scientific inquiry.

More than thirty years ago, in April 1986, a historian from Erlangen warned his compatriots that "in a country without history, the future is won by the one who fills memories, creates concepts and interprets the past" (Strumer, 1987). That catchphrase became the motto of the stormy Historikerstreit, which took place a few months later, and its topicality and significance are confirmed not only by the profound revisions of history at the end of the twentieth century throughout Europe but also by the patterns of political culture that arose as a result of perverting and mystifying the past. Revision of the past has become the source from which new social and political forces draw legitimacy. The primary instruments facing the present problems have become the demonization or idealization of earlier states or personalities. It is enough to observe the Balkans, and it is possible to see several countries where such practices are present. After the collapse of the communist regimes in the region, there followed an extensive period of historical re-examinations in these countries. The underlying aim of these operations was to refute the communist interpretations of the past that represented a constant in the collective memory and dominant in the national historiographical discourses. This process has often led to the most extreme forms of historical revisionism. The rehabilitation of many historical figures best evidences this - Ante Pavelić and Cardinal Aloysius Stepinac in Croatia, Mikloš Horti in Hungary, and Jon Atoanescu in Romania, among others. (Volovici, 1994; Ramet, 1999; Shafir, 2002) Their status is changed, and they turn from criminals to victims and from criminals to heroes.

Therefore, it should not be surprising that there are patterns of political culture that are based upon the practice of politics of denial, silence, and constant (re-)imagination of the past in the areas of the former Yugoslavia. This region is a space which Croatian journalist Slavenka Drakulić once described as a, (...) space filled with too many memories and too little history." (Drakulić, 2015). In Serbia, this matter has recently become topical after, in Belgrade, the Serbian capital (and once the capital of Yugoslavia), two female activists tried to desecrate a mural dedicated to Ratko Mladić, a controversial figure in domestic historiography. General-colonel Mladić was one of the critical actors in the Yugoslav Wars, and he is a convicted war criminal, currently serving a life-long sentence in the Hague.

The mentioned incident occurred in Belgrade's downtown area at the beginning of November 2021. One of the activists threw eggs at the mural. Shortly after, she and her companion were detained by force and taken to the police station by non-uniformed persons. Event information was reported by all mass media - not only in Serbia but throughout Europe. The public has raised some severe inquiries - is Ratko Mladić a hero or a criminal? What are the attitudes of the Serbian authorities regarding dealing with the past and the wars for the Yugoslav heritage? Shortly after the mentioned event, a cultural war followed in the urban space (mainly on the walls) - through a series of graffiti and murals. In the following period, public walls were sprayed with graffiti and murals with competing messages representing radically opposing ideological viewpoints: communism versus nationalism. Given that, this paper aims to examine the function of public art (such as graffiti and murals) in constructing cultural memory and collective memory in the context of the post-Yugoslav space.

For this research paper, the author relies on the notion of cultural memory developed by Jann Assman (1995) and utilizes the media archaeology approach, not just to examine communicative functions of street art in collective memory but also to note patterns and underlying mechanisms behind the conveyance of messages displayed on public spaces in Belgrade, as the former capital of Yugoslavia. The materiality of street art does indeed provide something uniquely affective and visceral to work with, and that is why they are more than suitable for archaeological excavation, hence being the ideal object for media archaeology studies. In the first part of the article theoretical framework, approach and context are elaborated. Then, methodology and data analysis is provided with the consequent discussion.

1.2. A Conceptual Approach To Murals And Graffiti – Media Archaeology and Cultural Memory as Communal Link between Past and Future

In the last thirty years, there has been a noticeable increase in interest, not only by scientists and scholars in the academy microcosm but also by the general public, in the phenomena of collective memory. Namely, this trend is particularly noticeable in societies where there is a discrepancy between collective and private/individual memories. Among others, these are the societies of the former Yugoslav states. After all, we are talking about social collectives, which underwent a series of traumatic episodes during Yugoslavia's bloody dissolution. As Hirschberger (2018) noted, collective traumas are cataclysmic events that are pretty potent and can destroy primary social connective tissues and fabrics. As it will be discussed later, these traumas are ongoing processes constantly being (re-)negotiated between and within groups. This leaves a vacuum that can be filled with suitable (re-)interpretations of the memories that political elites seemingly tend to utilize in their pursuit of power.

In order to understand mechanisms that make up a culture, it would perhaps be more rewarding to opt for an interpretive approach or else for (new) institutionalism. This direction refers to the values inherent in certain political institutions, not the structures themselves when explaining how particular socio-political behavior occurs. At the same time, political institutions represent all those conventions, strategies, roles, procedures, routines, technologies, and organizational forms around which a certain political activity is constructed and takes place. It is essential to point out that they include, among other things, paradigms, beliefs, codes, and knowledge in cultures that surround, elaborate, support, or otherwise contradict those routines and rules. In addition, it should be added that the behavior is directed or limited by cultural and social norms, whereby a specific action, first of all, appears as a direct "consequence of the identification of normatively adequate behavior, rather than a calculation of the return benefit from alternative choices." (March & Olsen, 1989, p. 22). However, graffiti and murals are not institutions, although in our particular case, there is a suspicion that state actors are behind them - why would police guard murals on private buildings? Besides that, we would make a fundamental attribution error by simply ascribing the mural or graffiti to a particular political actor(s) without hard evidence of their creation. Since, unlike various branches of the new institutionalism, culture studies treat “mental products” as created in an institutional vacuum (Grendstad & Selle, 1995), I believe that we should stick to the cultural theory in our analysis – namely cultural memory theory.

Cultural memory, as a separate theory within cultural studies, deals with the study of the mechanisms by which memories and remembrance form a collective identity and its relationship to past times, along with their transmission, suppression, inventing, and forgetting. Accordingly, cultural memory refers the the “politics of memory.” As for the instrumentation of the cultural memory with which it is possible to reshape the collective identity, it should be pointed out that it contains numerous tools. Among other things, it is possible to use the creation of certain public narratives (through the financing of television series and projects, the establishment of museums, and galleries), the renaming of institutions, squares, and streets, the removal and installation of monuments, the organization of various types of festivities. Cultural memory is a form of collective memory, and as Wang (2008) has remarked, ‘’collective memory sustains a community’s very identity and makes possible the continuity of it’s social life and cultural cohesion’’ (p. 307).

As Jan Assmann (2005) writes, the culture of memory concerns one of the exogenous dimensions of human memory. In connection with that, it is crucial to point out that the culture of memory refers to a group, unlike memory, which is an individual skill. , Assmann writes that the ability to communicate, and therefore to remember, can only be developed in interaction with others. “Cultural memory focuses on fixed points in the past. The past as such cannot be maintained in it either. Moreover, the past here congeals into symbolic figures to which memory clings. The story of the fathers, the exodus, the migration through the desert, the conquest of the land, the exile, are some of the figures of memory that appear in the liturgical form of the holidays, illuminating the current situation of the present. Myths are also figures of memory: the difference between myth and history is abolished here. For cultural memory, factual history is not important but remembered history. It could also be said that in cultural memory, factual history is transformed into a remembered one and thus into a myth” (Assmann, 2005, p. 61). Therefore, in order for a certain “truth” to become established in the collective memory, it is necessary to present it in the concrete form of a place, person or event.

As Assmann points out, the institutionalization of the culture of memory begins with the transition of accumulated memories into cultural memory, where cultural memory does not have to represent only a storehouse of memories but could also represent the embodiment of a specific function. At the same time, we must not forget that the past is not a static category and that it is necessary to observe the broader socio-political context and historical framework for its interpretation. Thus, the past has two levels: ontological and explicative. In other words, what once took place will remain a fact. However, the interpretation of it will change according to the social context, and the context can be recognized thanks to the political institutions within that society.

Therefore, it could be said that collective memory constitutes a whole series of contents, patterns, and rituals that people form, learn, interpret and change in order to incorporate into their own identity. Although, as Assman writes, memory is an individual act, it is socially organized and mediated. Several individuals will see the same event differently and accordingly interpret it differently. Following this, we cannot say that collective memory is only the sum of the individual needs of a group. However, we must remember that it also expresses the same group’s needs. It is constituted and shaped by the constant tension between private memories and official politics of memory (Assmann, 2005, pp. 31-32). Therefore, Assmann concludes that it is possible to distinguish two basic types of collective memory:
a) communicative - that is, that memory that is transmitted through oral tradition;
b) institutionalized cultural memory - that is, that memory that appears in the form of monuments, festivals, and museums.

The question arises – to which type of collective memory do murals and graffiti belong? As Michael Hebbert (2004) noted in his deliberations on community struggles over postwar urban clearances and "critical reconstruction" of modern Berlin – "the shaping of the street is an instrument for the shaping of memory. A shared space – such as a street – can be a locus of collective memory in a double sense. It can express group identity from above through architectural order, monuments and symbols, commemorative sites, street names, civic spaces and historic conversation; and it can express the accumulation of memories from below, through the physical and associative traces left by interweaving patterns of everyday life" (p. 592). In order words, human memory, thus collective memory, is spatial.

Besides that, (collective) memory should be observed in terms of temporality. All events and persons must be placed in the temporal web of relations to be remembered and (publicly) communicated (see Barash, 2012; French, 2012) –otherwise, they have no symbolical value. For such an act – imagination represents a necessary precondition. As famous historian Benedict Anderson has pointed out in his seminal work "Imagined Communities" (1983) – both group cohesion and collective identity are deeply rooted in the shared reminiscences over the collective past. Nevertheless, the past cannot be preserved as it is not a static category, but it is the process of constantly reconstructing it in relation to the future (Halbwach, 1992, p. 40).In other words, collective memory represents the continuous (re-)imagination and reinterpretation of past experiences.

Collective memories are, hence, expressed and disseminated by publicly circulating signs. Nora has conceptualized these signs as sites of collective memory (fr. lieux de memoire) (1989). These signals are synchronously "simple and ambiguous, natural and artificial, immediately available in concrete sensual experience and susceptible to the most abstract elaboration. Indeed, there are lieux in three senses of the world – material, symbolic and functional" (pp. 18-19). In that sense, graffiti and murals could be assessed as ideal sites of media archaeology research. Human identity and memories are entrenched in bodily experiences and movements in material space (Fried, 1963). Umberto Eco, a renowned Italian philosopher and novelist, compared the process of remembrance to traveling through space and time – "memories are built as a city is built" (Eco, 1986, p. 89). Consequently, in our specific case, graffiti and murals should be seen as agents of collective memory, and this paper tries to answer the question:

Graffiti and murals, as visual media and specific genres of street art, tend to provide more or less unsanctioned transcriptions and representations on public locations (Whitridge & Williamson, 2021). That being said, street art should not be dismissed lightly as an alternative source of political information. Mitja Velikonja (2019), one of the few academics who approach street art and graffiti in post-communist countries holistically, notes that these are phenomena that have not been adequately approached from the scientific side and by social scientists. However, it is a massive, simple, global, and effective form through which neglected groups could enter the public sphere. He notes that graffiti as a genre of street art goes through the same process as some other forms of "profane culture", which were considered too banal and everyday to be the subject of serious scientific research. However, as Hamilton (2016) observes, everyday artefacts such as internet memes and graphic comics are one of the main drivers of political participation in the modern world. Furthermore, everyday life in the socio-political sense is a space through which resistance and dissent are realized (Migdal, 2013; Popovic & Miller, 2015).

In line with that, it should be emphasized that murals and graffiti should not be approached only from a mere archaeological point of view. It is necessary to deal with this topic from the aspect of media archaeology. Ultimately, both fields (archaeology and media archaeology) are deeply interested in examining the material culture that exists before a particular cultural creation but also after that particular creation. In this sense, we are interested and intrigued by the connective tissue, the glue between the past and the future - contemporaneity and contemporary forms of cultural and artistic expression. As Parrika writes: "The contemporary becomes articulated as the tension between past, present, and future, where that tension becomes a topic in itself; the contemporary is the political category that is able to address the multiplicity of times that stretch across the normalized time categories of “past “and “present. “”(2015, p.9-10). Following that, the author believes that street art, thus murals and graffiti, should be observed as communal links between past and present.

2. Collective Memories in Context of Former Yugoslavia – Two Competing Identities (Yugoslavian versus Serbian)

Before going into the explanations of the research methodology and how the data was collected, it is necessary to familiarize the readers better with the regional context and to point out a few more strands of the theory of cultural memory along the way. The critical issue facing the societies of the former Yugoslav community is the issue of identity – or, to rephrase it: what makes one a Yugoslavian? How one stops being Yugoslavian?

In order to provide an adequate answer to this question, it is necessary to look back at the term’s historical development. The creation of the state of Yugoslavia represents the realization of long-term efforts of the South Slavic peoples (primarily Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) to live within the framework of a common state. The idea of Yugoslav identity (and consequently, Yugoslavism) was fermented during the 18th and 19th centuries in the wake of the awakening of nationalist states across the European continent (Hudson, 2003; Troch, 2006). Decades of struggle for self-determination and mass sacrifices bore fruit after the Paris Peace Conference, which buried the three great empires (Austro-Hungarian, German and Ottoman), which were the main antagonists to the embodiment of the “Yugoslav dream.” Without delving into the various ideological outlines and conceptions of the initial Yugoslavism, it should be pointed out that the primary elements on which it was based are the shared past and culture (primarily language). Etymologically, Yugoslavia stands for the land of the Southern Slavs; the Romantic idea about Yugoslavism could be summed up as the unification of South Slavic tribes that speak different dialects of the same language. The very beginnings of the idea that the South Slavs should be united in one state could be traced back to the Illyrian movement. “ Illyrian movement’s main thesis was that Southern Slavs, with different dialects, used the same language that they belonged to the same or similar people, giving them the right to unification.” (Trgovr⍰ević, 2016, p.2). Ljudevit Gaj, one of the originators of this movement, believed that language represents a nation’s distinguishing features.

From a geopolitical point of view, Yugoslavia, as a newly composed state, was supposed to back up the process of dismemberment of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The Habsburg Empire was also known as the “dungeon of the people,” in whose territory, among other things, the South Slavic peoples who lived on the territory of today’s Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina, as well as Vojvodina (the northern autonomous province in Serbia were “imprisoned.” The primary governmental form of organization of this new state was the kingdom. Accordingly, in the period between the two world wars, the primary formative force behind the attempts to shape Yugoslav nationalism was the crown (see Zec, 2015).

During the Second World War, Yugoslavia went through its first death - the Germans dismembered it by handing Vojvodina to the Hungarians, Macedonia to Bulgaria, and Bosnia and Herzegovina to the newly created “Independent State of Croatia” led by the bloodthirsty Ustasha regime. The Germans and Italians occupied the significantly reduced territory of Serbia. In this period, the Ustasha authorities who led the Nazi puppet state committed genocide against the Serbian population, as well as against the Roma, simultaneously with the Holocaust, intending to create an ethnically pure Greater Croatia (see Steinberg, 2002). At the same time, relations between these nations are further complicated by the co-existence of two national liberation guerilla movements that were ideologically opposed - the Chetniks (monarchists) and the Partisans (communists).

Of these two movements, the communists took the upper hand - a new Yugoslavia was born in the form of the Socialist Federal Republic with a system that would prevent the dominance of any national group. The new connective tissue between these peoples became class equality - the new Yugoslavia was supposed to represent a pan-Slavic working community. Instead of a royal figure, the new symbol of the gathering was the dictator Josip Broz Tito, who insisted on political and economic unification and tried to erase religious and ethnic differences (see Ognjenovic and Jozelic, 2016). One of the problems is that most of the crimes that took place during the Second World War remained unprosecuted. In a certain sense, they were covered up to maintain the idea of Yugoslavia.

The final disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s revived the ghosts of the past - all these societies went through the process of mutual (re-)traumatization (see Mirkovic, 2000). While one part of the collective remains trapped in nostalgia for the period of prosperity and peace that preceded the bloody dissolution (Vol⍰ić, 2007) - other parts of society, primarily guided by the mantra of nationalism, remain trapped in the framework of the politics of denial and forgetting (Dimitrijević, 2011; Mijić, 2021). It can easily be argued that a shared history of suffering inextricably links the peoples of the former Yugoslavia and that their members were perpetrators, heralds, observers, and victims of collective crimes at the same time. In this specific context, a collective crime could be characterized as any "act committed by a significant number of members of one group, on behalf of all members of that group, against individuals who have been identified as the object of attack based on belonging to another group." (Dimitrijević, 2010, p. 189). Although there is a complex network of relationships in the region, which would be almost impossible to untangle by placing the blame on one single group, the people of this region are prone to self-victimization, and when it comes to issues related to the Wars of Yugoslav Succession and the World Wars, disagreements regarding these issues they articulate, not through dialogue or debate, but one-sided accusations and blame-shifting.

Furthermore, it should be pointed out that when we talk about the culture of memory, memory is generally perceived as the highest virtue, while forgetting is generally perceived as an omission (Legg, 2007). However, some researchers would not agree with that. One of them is Christian Meier, who, in one of his studies (1996), pointed out that forgetting represents a cultural legacy, while memories are quintessential for cultural survival only in extreme situations (such as Auschwitz). In this study, which deals exhaustively with the genesis and consequences of civil wars, Meyer examined the thesis that memory represents collective mental construction that serves as a defense mechanism against trauma. However, it is a means of preventing the repetition of the violence that actually contributes to fueling negative energy within society. In other words, if the memory contains revenge and hatred, forgetting could serve as a means of arbitration, reconciliation, and reintegration between the conflicting parties. It is understood that the state and its representatives cannot influence the personal memories of its citizens, but that does not mean that they cannot contribute to their ignoring and even erasing from the public discourse. In his study, Meier cited the so-called as one of the examples of good practice. The truce in the Athenian polis that followed the Peloponnesian War is, according to M, an example of good practice. For this form of forgetting, there was a word in the ancient Greek language - mnesikakein - meaning remembering the bad (persons/events). In contrast, in those ancient times, it represented an act of public censorship for the sake of the public good.

However, has forgetting proved to be a good strategy in the post-conflict societies of the former Yugoslavia, which at one time was not only a multicultural but also an intercultural creation? Famous essayist, Dubravka Ugrešić, performs a kind of cultural anamnesis of (post-)Yugoslav collective(s) in her famous collection ''Culture of lies: Antipolitical Essays''. Through a series of obscure episodes, Ugrešić describes Croatian selective amnesia in the last decade of the last century and how that entire collectivity managed to replace the Yugoslav intercultural brotherhood with a toxic nationalist culture of a misunderstood (national) individual. In contrast, intercultural consciousness was submissively suppressed by a hegemonic cultural monopoly. Of course, Croatian society was not an isolated case, but these processes took place in almost all former Yugoslav states with, as Ugrešić carefully observes, certain features of a schizophrenic disorder: "In a completely disturbed, fractured, disintegrated world, fragments of past and present regimes are cacophonously mixed " (1996, p. 63).

Therefore, national memories and experiences within the collective of the former Yugoslav republics are fragmented. Political elites turned to politicization and revision of historical events - which was initially reflected through historiographic publications, commemorative activities, and monuments. This sort of personality split is also reflected in street art. Accordingly, this paper intends to provide an answer to the question:

RQ2: *What functions does street art have in the processes of public remembrance in Belgrade, the former capital of Yugoslavia, and the current capital of Serbia?*

Before elaborating on the methodology and methods of data collection, it is necessary to refer to one more fact - that in almost all former Yugoslav republics, including Serbia, we can see the widespread logic of populism in the party system, but also in political life in general. In that case, we could define populism as “’interactive process in which both elites and masses participate, but in which the rules of the game are written by elites” (Archer, 2020, p. 479). As Luca Manucci (2020) has noted in his ruminations on the relationship between populism, collective memories, and political power – the legitimacy of populist parties and politicians is strictly determined by collective memories and collective remembrance. This is extremely relevant for our case since populist forces tend to divide society along the lines of those who are members of the society (“people”) and those who, due to their largely different cultural, moral, religious, or economic behavior, are marked as invading alien corps (“enemies of the people “). Shortly put, populists drive their power from divisions among the community and between communities. Therefore, it is in their interest to make the public constantly relieve past traumas and conflicts through any possible means – street art included. This implies that the conflict between right-wing ideas of Serbianhood and the communistic idea of Yugoslavism has to remain reflected in murals and graffiti.

3. Methodology and Data Collection

Belgrade is a vibrant city – filled with many fascinating public art pieces (Arandelovic, 2020). Graffiti started showing up on its public walls back in the 1980s and gained popularity during the 1990s as resistance forms against the Slobodan Milošević regime (Dragi⍰ević-Šešić, 2001). As Dragi⍰ević-Šešić has noted, the massive students protest against war, the rigged results of local elections in November 1996, and the authoritarian regime has taken the form of Carnivalesque. “The street and the square became a kind of fair, in which symbolic artifacts of protest were sold. “ (Dragi⍰ević-Šešić, 2001, p. 81). Graffiti alongside flyers and banners were one of the best-selling artefacts. Therefore, public art is a not-so-new phenomenon in the Serbian capital.

As it can be read from previous passages, initially, graffiti was used as a form of contentious political participation (Waldner & Dobratz, 2013; Tolonen, 2021) among Belgraders. The same cannot be said for murals – this form of public art started gaining popularity during the 2010s (Levitt, 2009). City authorities became interested in them alongside the revitalization of its industrial zone – as they present the ideal solution for embellishing former “grey belt “areas which are being turned into nightlife and urban-art hotspots (Krsmanovic, 2020). Interestingly, many of those contain environmental protection motifs, yet there is much potential left to be utilized to turn street art into eco-art in the complete sense of that term (Tunić, 2020). This is not so surprising, as sustainability has been a more frequent theme in street art worldwide (Xyntarianos-Tsiropinas, 2020). At last, murals seemed to the city officials as a relatively convenient way to pay homage to well-respected members of society.

Along with the popularization of murals in Belgrade, it seems that a proliferation of graffiti, which could be characterized as hate speech, took place simultaneously - without enough attention being paid to these processes. At one point, they became a tool with which hooligans and football fan groups, mainly ultra-nationalist members, settle accounts with each other. Over time, messages of bigotry towards minority groups became more frequent in the public space (Canakis, 2018), and city and state authorities acted rather sluggishly towards such phenomena, with a noticeable absence of sanctions against the perpetrators. Although – the question of the illegality conditions in street art is a rather complex one, as it is a matter of free speech (Chackal, 2016).

For this research, the initial time point of data collection was November 9, 2021, when an activist threw eggs at a mural dedicated to Ratko Mladić. The activist was detained by non-uniformed persons, who, at that moment, were securing the mural, which had been there for a few months. After the arrest, a” war on the walls” followed in the public space - through murals and graffiti. The author tried to follow the situation ethnographically from November 2021 to June 2022 - following the changes on the walls. Several murals were identified, around which there were frequent “fights,” and the analysis was mainly focused on them. These are murals dedicated to the following personalities: Dr. Zoran Đinđić, Patriarch Pavle, and Ratko Mladić. With the exception of occasional field checks of the mentioned places of graffitology research (Velikonja, 2019), the author also followed media reports, as well as posts on various social networks, in order to gain as comprehensive a picture as possible of the patterns that are present in these “graffiti wars” in the public space. For better contextual understanding – it is crucial to mention that local, general and Presidential elections took place in April. Most votes were taken by the Serbian Progressive Party (sr. Srpska Napredna Stranka), which is considered to be a populist party.

In the next section, findings will be presented alongside the discussion. At first, multimodal analysis of chosen mural will be provided with consequent elaboration on symbolic “disruptive confrontations “happening on the particular site. For multimodal discourse analysis, several modes were taken into consideration. It is important to note that all chosen archaeological sites represent places depicting places of polysemiotic multimodal street artwork (see Stampouldis, Bitouni & Xyntarianos-Tsiropinas, 2018; Stampouldis, 2019). They (murals) are polysemiotic since they consist of both pictorial and verbal elements.

For this research, it is the author’s decision to operationalize both murals and graffiti as works of art generated on a wall surface. Since they are fabricated in the public sphere – exteriors of private buildings are also part of the public sphere as they are visible to the whole community (see Molnár, 2017) – the author would argue that any form of street art becomes congenial with public political discourse.
Furthermore, it is necessary to remember that street art as a form of public transgressive semiotic communication combined with street signs (street names and landmarks) contributes to the formation of the urban Linguistic Landscape. Linguistic Landscape refers to the” language in the environment, words, and images displayed and exposed in public spaces” (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). This is particularly relevant for Belgrade street art and investigated cases because the Serbian language is digraphic. There are two scripts in use: Cyrillic and Latin. As Mladenov Jovanović (2018) has noted in the study on assertive discourse on the Cyrillic script in Serbia, “linguistic nationalism has proven to have been among the more relevant instances in discursive construction national identity and new languages, dubbed as ‘administrative successors’ of Serbo-Croatian. “(p. 611). In a recent ethnographical study, Canakis noted that one’s ideological affiliation can be read based on one’s choice of the script (Cyrillic or Latin) when it comes to the public street as a linguistic Landscape (Canakis, 2018). The choice of the Cyrillic alphabet is thus linked to Orthodoxy and nationalism, while the Latin alphabet is attributed chiefly to advocates of Yugoslav identity and Yugo-nostalgics. In certain instances, Latin script is presented as an “invasion “of the Others (Croats/Yugoslavs) which is in line with Mladenov Jovanović’s findings. Additionally, besides the script’s choice and the linguistic meaning of specific messages, the spatial-temporal context of murals and graffiti was considered in our study since they” provide clues about thoughts and ideologies behind desires that cannot be translated into the words” (Lowe & Ortman, 2020).

4. Findings and discussion

As previously emphasized in the text, several murals in the period of observation (November 2021-June 2022) became the battlefields on which opposing conceptions of Serbian identity were being weighed through constant graphitological modifications. The author focused on three figures whose public murals were fought over. Those figures are Ratko Mladić, Dr. Zoran Đinđić, and Patriarch Pavle.

4.1. Ratko Mladić

One of the “busiest” positions in the frequent propagation of graffiti (re-)modifications is the mural dedicated Ratko Mladić with accompanying message written on Cyrilic letter ”General, thanks to your mother’’. This mural is located in the very heart of Belgrade, in the municipality of Vračar, on Njegoševa Street. The street is named after Petar II Petrović Njegoš, a renowned philosopher and poet. His literary works are considered to be some of the essential pieces in Serbian and Montenegrin literature. Njegoš (1813-1851) penned epic verse work titled" The Mountain Wreath," describing the extermination of the Muslim converts in Montenegro at the beginning of the 18th century. Specific scholars observe this piece as a glorification of violence towards Muslims, arguing that it was one of the central literary pieces whose (re-)interpretations were helpful in the politicization of" collective memory" in Serbia during the 1980s, at the dawn of the war that befell Yugoslavia one decade after (see Adams & Halilovich, 2021; Posavljak, 2022). Furthermore, it is claimed to be among the main literary inspirations behind the ethnical cleansing of Muslims during wartime years in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Cigar, 1994).

So, as mentioned earlier, after the ‘’eggs accident’’, the media throughout the region and Europe reported on these events. A few days later, protests under the slogan "Mural must fall" (sr. Mural mora pasti) were held. The initial idea was to gather activists from various non-governmental organizations with citizens to remove the mural, but the police and the Ministry of Internal Affairs banned that gathering. Admittedly, the rally was held on Cvetni Trg, the small square in the immediate vicinity of the mural. A small group of citizens gathered nearby and chanted in support of the general Mladić. The entire event passed without any significant incidents, thanks to the police cordon between the opposing groups. Although, shortly after this ocassion ended, a series of banners appeared placed next to the mural, evoking the traumatic events for the Serbian population from the late 1990s (see figure 1), such as the NATO bombing or massacres over Serbian population in villages Bratunac and Kravice which preceded the Srebrenica massacre carried out by Bosnian government soldiers who were under the command of Naser Orić at the time. Admittedly, it would be essential to refer to the choice of a script for banners. Two banners have messages written in Cyrillic script ("Serbia without Kosovo and Metohija is the same as a man without a heart," "Goodbye Kindapovani Serbs, goodbye justice for Serbian and Kosmet victims") and they primarily relate to the events in Kosovo and Metohija during 1999 War. Based on the sentence construction and the choice of words and script (a eulogy for justice and Serbian victims), it can be concluded that these two messages are directly intended for the "domestic audience." Other banners are intended for the international community and the other nations that made up the Yugoslav collective. They accuse the international community of the selective distribution of justice and an unfair approach toward Serbian victims. Namely, they evoke the events around Kravica and Bratunac, but also the missing Serbs in Kosovo and Metohija, who most likely ended up as victims of organ trafficking (see Bowden, 2013; Troude, 2018). Also, it seems that banners indirectly tell the regional communities that the Serbian community will not recognize the crimes committed against others until the recognition and confrontation with the past are reciprocated.

Two new murals appeared near the Mladić mural a few days after this episode. Initially, a mural dedicated to the First World War leader of the Serbian army, Živojin Mišić, appeared on the building across the street. Then, right next to the mural of Mladić, a mural dedicated to Draža Mihailović (see figure 2) appeared - the Chetnik commander Draža Mihailović with the lyrics of a Chetnik song, written in Cyrillic. As mentioned earlier, the Chetniks were guerilla fighters for the liberation of Yugoslavia and acted simultaneously as a partisan movement. However, we are talking about two groups of opposing ideological movements that, in parallel with the anti-fascist liberation struggle, also waged a civil war between themselves. The Chetniks were monarchists, and after the establishment of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, they were undesirable and characterized as traitors and collaborators with the German authorities. Draža Mihailović was rehabilitated in 2015. Apart from that, it is essential to point out that certain mass crimes committed by the Chetniks against Muslim lives during the Second World War are historically documented (see Sindbæk, 2009; Jareb, 2011), and his placement alongside General Mladić, therefore cannot be accidental. In the following months, both murals were repeatedly destroyed and restored - by different means (see figure 3).

Furthermore, regarding Ratko Mladić, it should be pointed out that during the observation period, dozens of graffiti inspired by Ratko Mladić appeared all over the city walls. Some depicted him as a criminal, while others praised him as a hero.

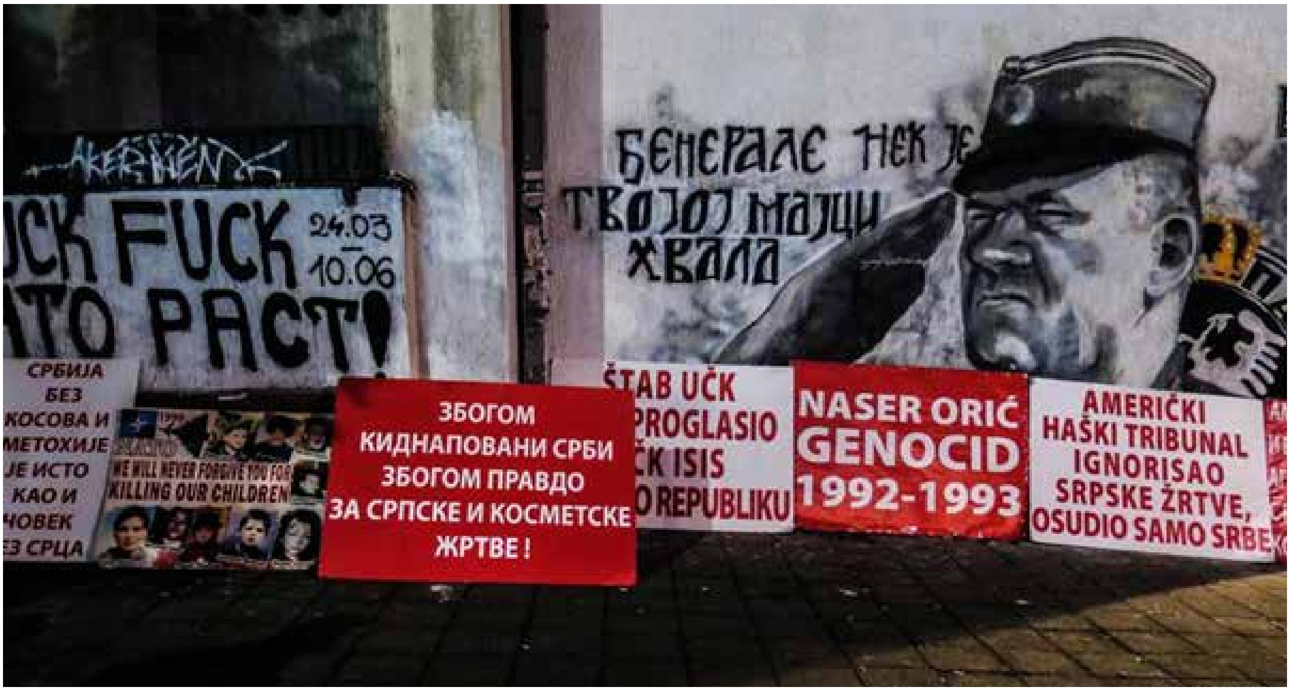
CK FUCK
ATO РАСТ!
24.03
10.06
ЂЕНЕРАЛЕ ТЕК ЈЕ
ТВОЈОЈ МАЈЦИ
ХВАЛА
СРБИЈА
БЕЗ
КОСОВА И
МЕТОХИЈЕ
ЈЕ ИСТО
КАО И
ЧОВЕК
ЕЗ СРЦА
WE WILL NEVER FORGIVE YOU FOR
KILLING OUR CHILDREN
ЗБОГОМ
КИДНАПОВАНИ СРБИ
ЗБОГОМ ПРАВДО
ЗА СРПСКЕ И КОСМЕТСКЕ
ЖРТВЕ!
ŠTAB UČK
PROGLASIO
ČK ISIS
O REPUBLIKU
NASER ORIĆ
GENOCID
1992-1993
AMERIČKI
HAŠKI TRIBUNAL
IGNORISAO
SRPSKE ŽRTVE,
OSUDIO SAMO SRBE

Figure 1. Mural dedicated to Ratko Mladić and accompanying banners. Source: https://www.dw.com/bs/veli%C4%8Danje-mladi%C4%87a-bi-se-moglo-ka%C5%BEnjavati-kad-bi-dr%C5%BEava-htjela/a-59813739

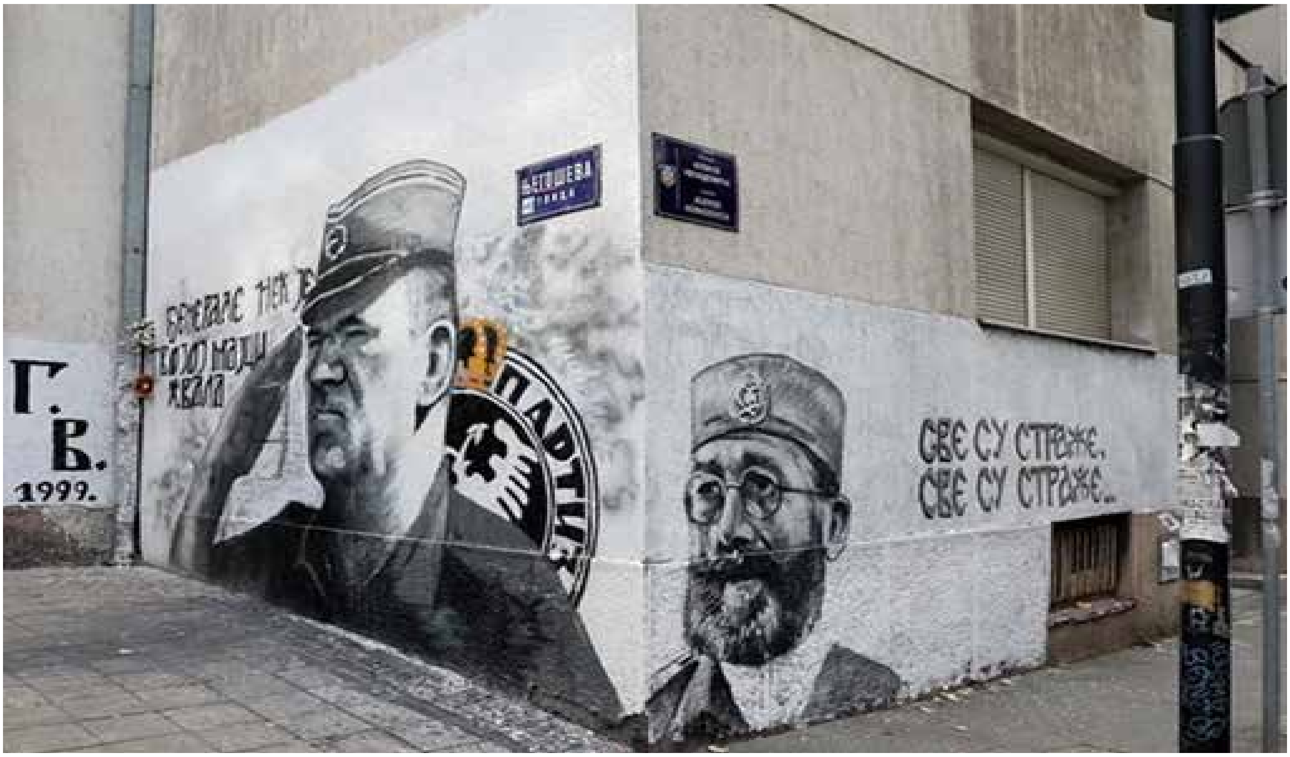
Г.
В.
1999.
ЂЕНЕРАЛЕ ТЕК ЈЕ
ТВОЈОЈ МАЈЦИ
ХВАЛА
ЊЕГОШЕВА
ПАРТИЗ
СВЕ СУ СТРАЖЕ.
СВЕ СУ СТРАЖЕ..

Figure 2. Murals dedicated to Ratko Mladić and Draža Mihailović. Private archive.

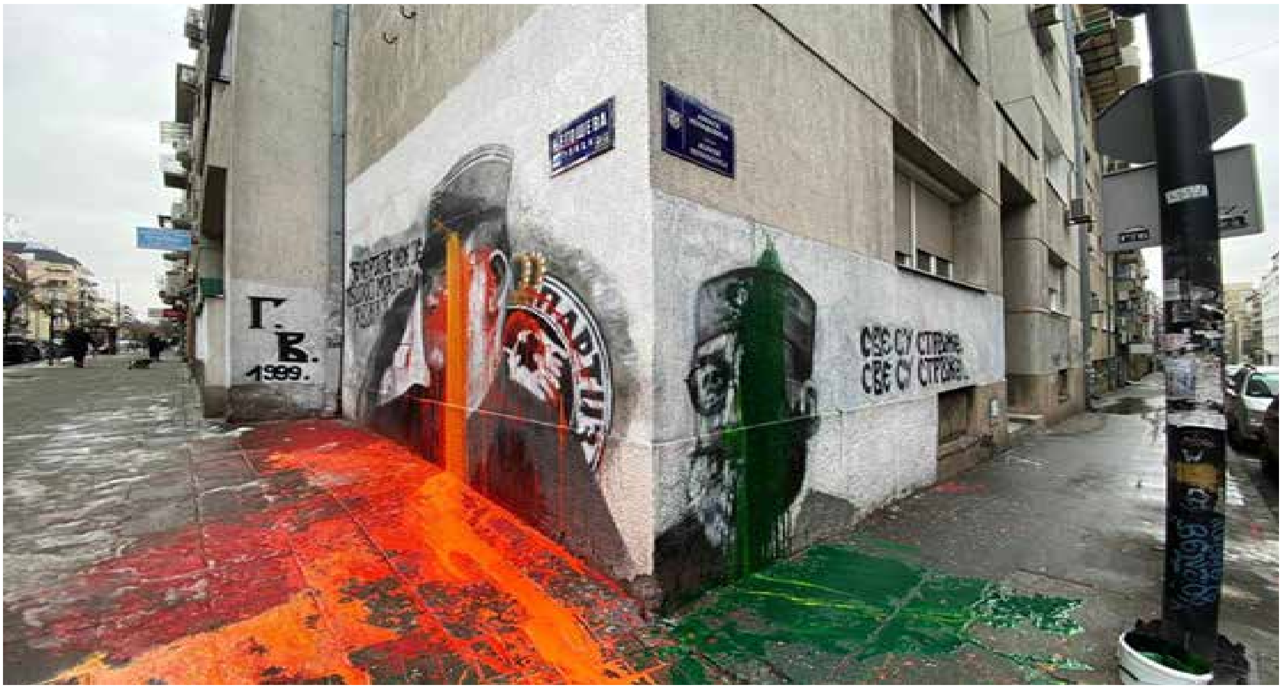

Figure 3. ''Coloured'' murals dedicated to Ratko Mladić and Draža Mihailović. Source: https://mondo.rs/Info/Beograd/a1588776/Unisteni-murali-Ratku-Mladicu-i-Drazi-Mihailovicu.html

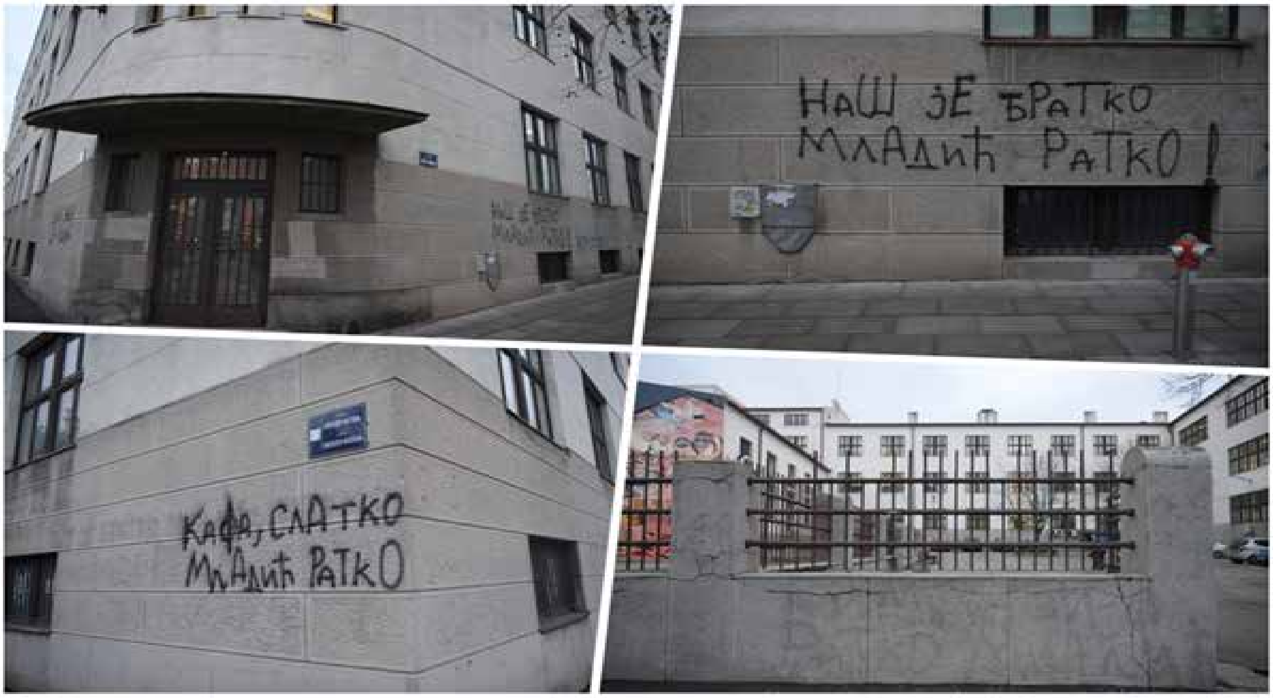
НАШ ЈЕ БРАТКО
МЛАДИЋ РАТКО!
КАФА, СЛАТКО
МЛАДИЋ РАТКО

Figure 4. Ratko Mladić graffiti sprayed on the walls of First Belgrade Grammar School. Source: https://nova.rs/vesti/drustvo/foto-u-beogradu-prekrecen-skandalozan-grafit-posvecen-osudjenom-zlocincu-mladicu/

For this paper, we will refer to those written on the walls of the First Belgrade Gymnasium and the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in February 2022. On one of the oldest Serbian high schools, messages like: “Coffee, sweet, Mladić Ratko” (sr. Kafa, slatko, Mladić Ratko) and “Mladić Ratko Grammar School” (sr. Gimnazija Ratko Mladić) were written (see figure 4) - in Cyrillic script. At first, it seems like they are messages of support - but considering the ironic tone and choice of locations, it seems that the intention is actually to put pressure on educational institutions and Serbian community. However, the disputed question remains: who wrote these messages? Video footage was never released, despite both buildings having installed video surveillance systems.

4.2. Dr. Zoran Đinđić

One of the locations where graffiti wars were apparent is the mural of Zoran Đinđić (see figure 5), which is located on the plateau in front of the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Belgrade, near the Student Square. This place has a special symbolic significance because it is the position from which the route of student protests against the regime of Slobodan Milošević began in the 1990s (see Dragićević-Šešić, 2001), among whose leaders was the late Dr. Zoran Đinđić. On the mural, a part of the famous quote “Look to the future... (you and I will meet there)” (sr. Gledajte u budućnost… tamo ćemo se sresti Vi i ja!) is written in Latin script (see Milic, 2010).

Zoran Đinđić is presented in the domestic historiographical discourse as a figure of the democratic and European future of Serbia - and is, therefore, a kind of antipode of the nationalist conception of Serbia Serbian identity. He, as Prime Minister, has strongly advocated pro-democratic reforms along with the integration of Serbia within the European Union. He is the one who has sent Milošević to stand trial in front of the United Nations War Crimes Tribunal in the Hague, and alongside that, he has been marked as a transitional justice champion (Gordy, 2014). Nevertheless, for some, that meant that he was a traitor to national interests (Christensen, 2004). Months before his assassination, that label was attached to him in the domestic press. It could be argued that his death left a void in the domestic political culture (Samardžić, 2008),

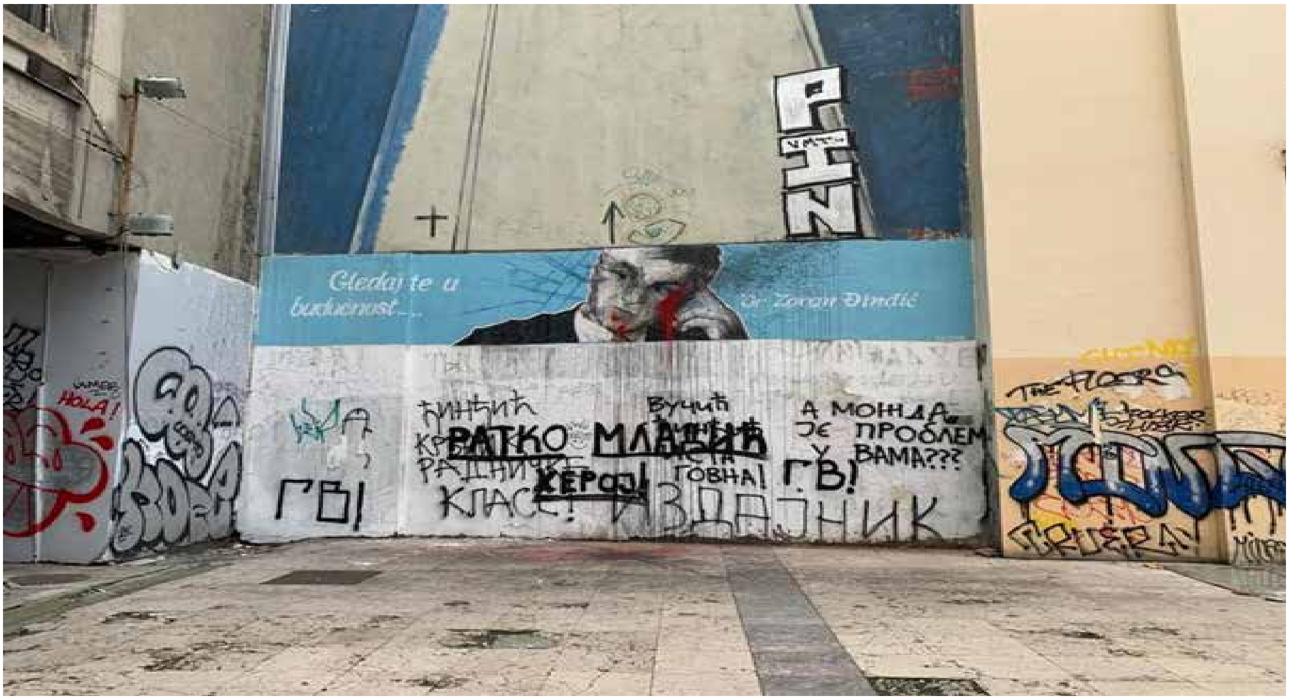

Figure 5. Mural dedicated to Dr Zoran Đinđić. Private archive.

which is reflected, among other things, in the partial presentation of the quote on the future (sr.” Gledajte u budućnost..”). Building the European future for Serbian citizens and democratic consolidation remained unfinished processes for Serbia. The void which was left after Đinđić’s death was filled by populist forces, embodied in the current president, Aleksandar Vučić, who at one time declared himself Djinđić’s successor. However, years ahead the establishment of the currently ruling Serbian Progressive Party, as a radical, he renamed himself Zoran Đinđić Boulevard to Ratko Mladić Boulevard. (see video clip: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G6q-4MEei7wI).

Admittedly, among the graffiti that were found under the mural of Zoran Đinđić, there was also one graffiti targeting both of them (Zoran Đinđić and Aleksandar Vučić) as traitors (sr. “Vučić and Đinđić – ista govna,” eng. “Vučić and Đinđić are the same type of shit). Other graffiti marks the late Đinđić as an enemy of the working class, and one graffiti glorifies Ratko Mladić as a hero. One graffiti also asks a counter-question: “Maybe the problem is in you?” (sr. ‘’Možda je u vama problem?) Interestingly, this entire discussion is written in Cyrillic script, so this ‘’wall tête-à-tête parley’’ is intended exclusively for domestic readers. It could also summarize the dialectic of transition processes and relations towards history and modernity in the Serbian society of the 21st century.

4.3. Patriarch Pavle

The third mural covered by this research is a mural dedicated to Patriarch Pavle (see figure 6), the head of the Serbian Orthodox Church in the period from 1990 to 2009. The mural itself was created on November 17, 2021, and the political movements/parties of the Democratic Party of Serbia and the Movement for the Restoration of the Kingdom of Serbia, a right-wing party, were signed as authors. Serbian flag colors were painted below the image of the late patriarch and the date of his birth and death, with a message written in Cyrillic script, “Let us be people/humans.” (sr. Budimo ljudi), were included.

Together with Dr. Zoran Đinđić, the late patriarch played

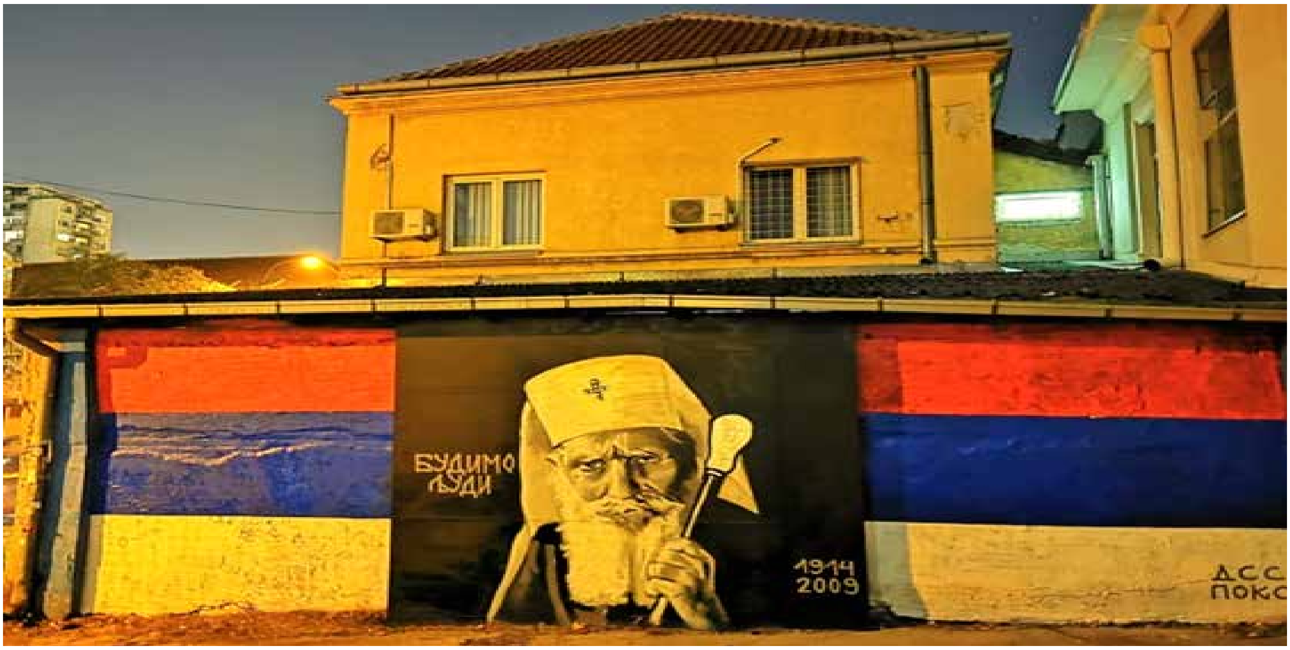

Figure 6. Mural dedicated to Patriarch Pavle. Source: https://nova.rs/magazin/lifestyle/novi-mural-patrijarhu-pavlu-na-dorcolu-s-porukom-koja-treba-da-odjekne-foto/

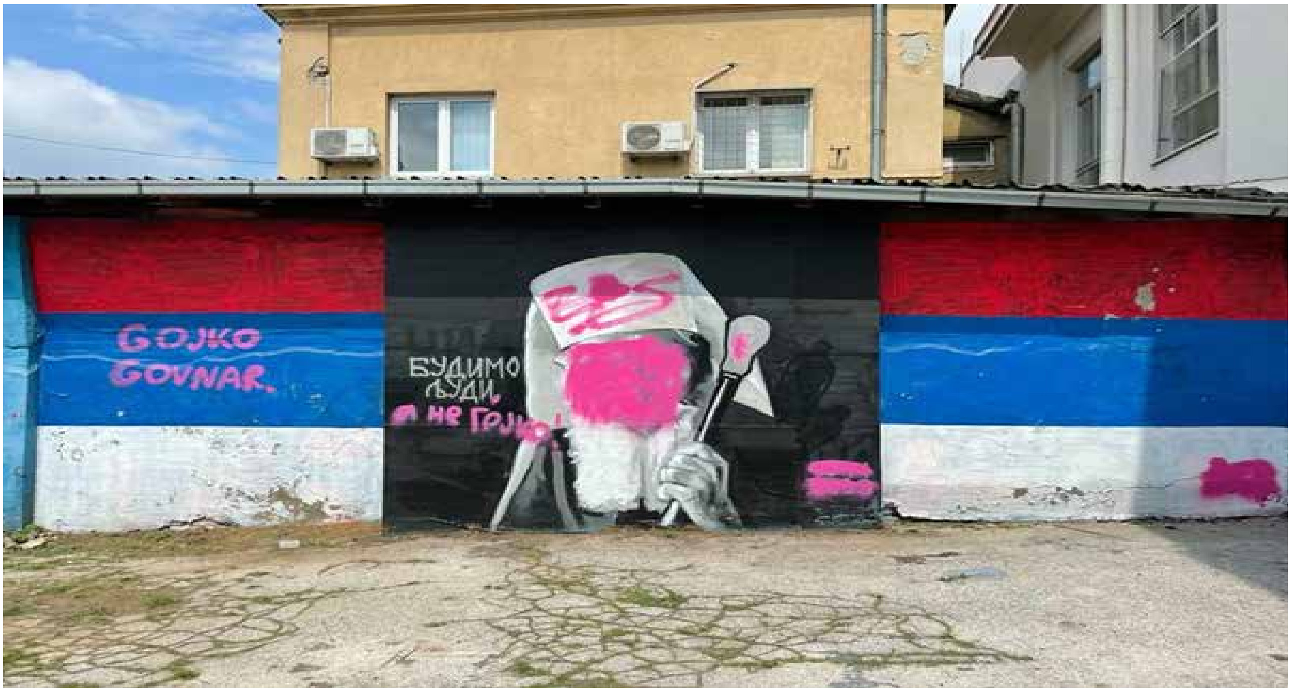

Figure 7. Sprayed mural of Patriarch Pavle. Source: https://www.kurir.rs/vesti/beograd/3951257/ostecen-mural-patrijarhu-pavlu-na-dorcolu-huligani-ostavili-skandaloznu-poruku-foto-video

an essential role in attempts to democratize Serbia. Namely, as an institution, the Serbian Orthodox Church is one of the most important political actors in the socio-political life of Serbia, even though it is a formally secular state (see Mylonas, 2003; Vukomanović, 2008). For centuries, when the Serbian people lived under the rule of the Ottoman Empire, it served as a kind of pivot and guardian of national identity and language (see Aleksov, 2010; Sotirović, 2011) and is, therefore, the emissary of enormous social capital. Furthermore, Patriarch Pavle himself played one of the critical roles in the overthrow of Milošević's authoritarian regime - among other things, student protests in the 1990s became mass thanks to his involvement and efforts. Additionally, as Veković Marko (2020) has noted in a comparative analysis of democratization processes in Christian Orthodox Europe, the Serbian Orthodox Church was not a supporter of Milošević's regime, despite the widespread belief. He reported ''that the Church often criticized the regime, asked for its resignation, participated in the demonstrations, and thus it labels the political role of the Church, a leading actor." (p. 63).

Many print and online media reported the mural's creation, conveying its original message on importance of being/acting human. However, the mural again became one of the main topics in the media when the image of Patriarch Paul was desecrated with pink spray (see picture 7) in June 2022. A few more words were added to the original message, and it changed its meaning to: "Let us be people and not Gojko". Besides that, on the side is written in Latin, "Gojko shithead" (sr. Gojko govnar). Gojko was the birth name of Patriarch Pavle, which he bore until he became a monk. The choice of spray color was not accidental - it was supposed to evoke citizens to the activities carried out by feminists in 2019 before the traditional feminist March protests. On that occasion, they left purple aprons with different feminist slogans on monuments of prominent male figures in Serbian history. Although they formally did not damage the monuments, among which was the monument to Patriarch Pavle, part of the public and the media characterized the mentioned action as vandalism. One of the few things objectionable to Patriarch Pavle is his public advocacy of leading a traditional way of life in which women should stick to their traditional patriarchal roles. In this way, one gets the impression that the Patriarch and the Christian way of life are under attack from leftist forces. It seems that audience should remain thinking that you can't be both religious and feminist (see Devic, 1997) . In this way, the public discourse on the conflict between Yugoslav and Serbian identity is further strengthened.

5. Concluding Remarks

This study is part of an ongoing inquiry into the function of street art in the context of collective memory, remembrance and identity construction. Bearing in mind the thesis about the constitutive role of memory in self-image processes, the author tried to examine the expediency of murals and graffiti in the public political discourse of Belgrade, the capital of the Republic of Serbia and the former capital of Yugoslavia. Approaching the street walls as a vernacular space - one gets the impression that street art is, to some extent, expedient for populist forces for the needs of (re-)constitution and (re-) imagination of the collective past. Murals are used to maintain the Yugoslavia-Serbia dichotomy because, in this way, the citizens are kept imprisoned in the traumatic experiences and grievances they lived through during the 20th century. It is necessary to conduct more extensive research in other major cities of the former Yugoslavia and to conduct interviews with citizens as consumers and creators of urban art.

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Political Struggle for the Aesthetics of the Urban Commons in Turkey

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1. Introduction

The common features of the protests sweeping the world since 1994 are their anti-austerity stance, the denunciation of corruption, the critique of mainstream institutions and the media, and increasing social inequality in deeply segregated urban landscapes. Across the world, people of different nations, operating in highly diverse cultural, social and historical contexts, have discovered who they are as citizens and what constituent power they have in relation to their governments. Many accounts have argued that in these recent urban social movements, the protestors have had diverse identities, interests and critical capacities, and yet they have collectively engaged in an aesthetic and sensory experience and discovered it to be a valid political instrument to undermine dominant political styles, challenge authoritarian rigidity and subvert the aesthetico-political language of officialdom (Bruff 2012, Della Porta and Mattoni 2014). The creation of political spaces of experience where imagination, creativity and pleasure are embraced and celebrated as integral to political engagement in order to "permit actors to live according to their own principles, to knit different social relations and to express their subjectivity (Pleyers 2010, p. 39)." The question this paper asks is, how this relates to empowering civil society?

A piece of graffiti created during the Chilean uprising in October 2019 proclaims 'We are proletarians! not citizens!' and emphasizes that the protests are about class struggle. It is also a rejection of the fallacies of neoliberalism in determining what citizenship and citizen participation should be. The slogan in Santiago de Chile is poignant in putting the issue of class struggle back into the "virtues" of citizenship. Yet, it is also alarming in that it points out how "citizenship" is becoming an empty signifier imbued with meaning by the ruling elite in the process of designing its ideal citizens (Temelkuran, 2019, p.169–212). The graffiti makes us think about how our agency as political subjects is already framed according to an ambiguous definition of *citizenship* by the nation-state, one that has the potential to empty out the political content of civil society. For Purcell, a common agenda of the protests that occupy the urban public space for the last three decades has been to reinsert politics into urban citizenship that has been diminished by neoliberalism's reduction of the power of ordinary citizens and enhancement of the power of corporations (Purcell, 2004, p.564).

The article argues that the recent urban social movements paved the way for a renewed understanding of democratic political participation and redefining the meaning of being a citizen and a *citadin* (urban dweller). The aesthetic participation, creation and experience in those struggles have built and demonstrated a shift from the illustration of nationhood with respect to the retrospective homogeneous nationhood to creating a conglomeration of emancipated subjects that thrive on a diverse and egalitarian collectivity. Such understanding of citizen participation proliferated among the protestors who struggled for democratic and polytonal political participation. This arguably also empowered ordinary urban citizens to navigate and negotiate their positions in power systems that markup the urban public space. The article will demonstrate the efforts of the municipalities in Turkey to command the aesthetic reconfiguration of the public space in an attempt to create a "desired citizen". It will then analyze

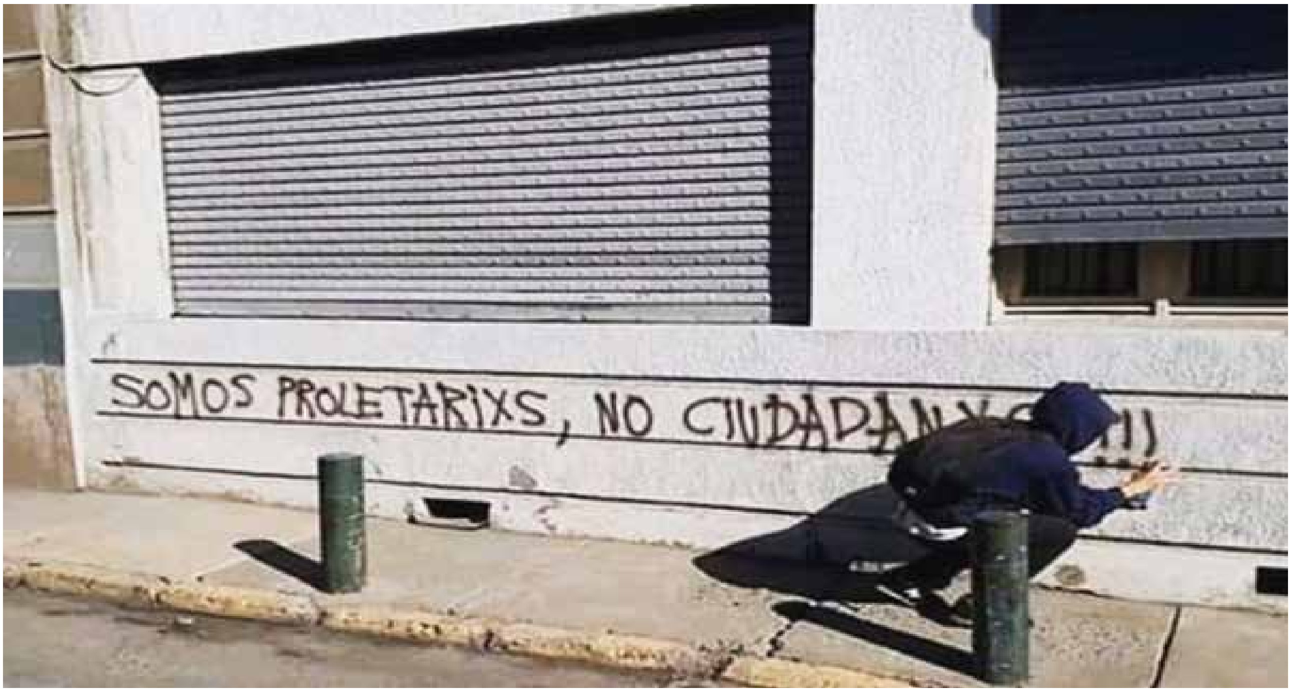

Figure 1. Image of graffiti in Santiago de Chile. The text reads: "Somos Proletarixs, no ciudadanxs."

a burst of urban creativity shortly after the Gezi movement where citizens take the initiative to occuppy the public spaces spontaneously and reclaim not only their "right to the city" but also their right to "democratic citizenship."

2. The Right to Democratic Citizenship

While our cities are designed by neoliberal actors in order to maximize profit, our aesthetic perception of our urban environment and thus our everyday life is also designed, monitored and controlled by political and economic mechanisms. Henri Lefebvre identified this as mastering over the representational space, imagined, lived, and experienced by urban dwellers (Lefebvre, 2003). Such strategic principles of urban organization, structures, and symbolic economies are made of a fragmented sprawl of communicative signs and symbols reproducing the dominant socio-political premises and preferable images of the city. As with the proliferation of urban social movements in their quest for a society based on non-violent relations, political freedom and equal rights for all, Lefebvre's concept of "right to the city" has spread all over the world and become a key phrase in the urban agenda of different actors and urban social movements. For Lefebvre, "the right to the city, complemented by the right to difference and the right to information, should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (*cidatin*) and user of multiple services" (Lefebvre, 1996, p.34). In another sense "the right to the city" is like a cry and a demand to surpass current inequalities and fulfill basic needs cultivated as an aspiration for change (Lefebvre 1996, 158). This is the right to full and equal enjoyment of the resources and services concentrated in cities, something that would only be fully possible in another, non-capitalist society (Souza, 2012). According to Venturini "Today state policies are intervening in the building of a city shaped on citizenship (Venturini, 2019, p 87)." Against the hegemonic construction of citizenship, both the right to social justice and the right to the city movements embraced the struggle to empower themselves as "being citizens who bear the rights to rights (Holston, 2009, p.241)."

David Harvey's take on "the right to the city" precisely points to "the freedom to make and remake our cities and ourselves (Harvey 2008, 23)." The possibility for people to shape their own city is fundamentally a social, political, historical, and an aesthetic one. In Harvey's discussion neoliberal policies commodify and enclose "commons", e.g. common property, common knowledge and common resources (Harvey 2008). The recent urban social movements suggest that the reversal of this process can be achieved to a degree through occupation and re-appropriation of streets, squares or state buildings. In his much-celebrated book by activists, *Rebel Cities: From Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* Harvey states that in the heart of the multitude of diverse urban struggles, there is one collective aim: "…their right to change the world, to change life and to reinvent the city more after their heart's desire (Harvey, 2012, p.25)." As much a romantic political idea as it seems, what Harvey means is claiming the power of self-determination over life and the social relations in the city. In another publication, Harvey and Potter write that "the right to the city" is a continuous process shaped by our desire to create a different sociality:

> The inalienable right to the city rests upon the capacity to force open spaces of the city to protest and contention, to create unmediated public spaces so that the cauldron of urban life can become a catalytic site from which new conceptions and configurations of urban living can be devised and out of which new and less damaging conceptions of rights can be constructed (Harvey and Potter 2009: 49)

This argument calls for the emphasis on the aesthetic experience in the struggle for creating our sensible environment while creating ourselves as free and powerful and active political subjects, which is what democratic citizenship entails. Theorists of urban modernity Walter Benjamin, Jane Jacobs, Lewis Mumford, Steven Jacobs, and Henri Lefebvre and contemporary scholars such as Richard Sennett, Leonie Sandercock, David Harvey and Sharon Zukin, and others establish a strong link between the urban commons and plural and democratic city. One of the fundamental propositions of Ernesto Laclau's and Chantal Mouffe's theory of radical and plural democracy that art historian Rosalyn Deutsche also joins later of that democratic public space is not where consensus is found, but rather where consensus breaks down and new alliances are rearticulated again and again (Deutsche, 1996, Laclau, 1996, Mouffe, 1993, Spivak, 1988). Those philosophers seek to incorporate pluralism within a radical understanding of democratic citizenship in practice, in which the many different struggles could find a space of inscription under a common political identity. This identity is citizenship, but it is not apolitical nor undifferentiated. In 1988, when Gayatri Spivak asked if the subaltern voices can speak and be heard, she exposed the power relationships involved in political participation, locked in the irons of legitimate and illegitimate subjects. Similarly, Jacques Rancière questions the partition of the sensible—that is the ways in which bodies form a community—and calls for a participatory practice built through aesthetics that he refers to as the very essence of democracy (Rancière, 2004). The struggle for the "right to the city" is then an aesthetic struggle, in the expansive understanding of aesthetics that Jacques Rancière offers us.

According to Rancière, aesthetics involves making visible and audible what we have in common, and politics is the way in which the organization of this sensory configuration of the common takes place (Rancière, 2006, 2009).. Aesthetics and politics simultaneously define the subjectivities that articulate a sense of the common world. It is with this meaning of aesthetics that we understand political struggle not as a struggle for power but as a struggle for true political agency, which is connected to aesthetic struggle. For Rancière, aesthetics is a way of collectivity that forges the entire sensorium of a community by the way of producing a world of audible, visible, exchangeable, communicable, transformable objects, things and experiences. In the configuration of that common social world, "the police (order)" organizes and commands the distribution of spaces and times, occupations and capacities as a way to create consensus and social hierarchies that make up our perceived social realities (Rancière, 2010). Rancière calls this "distribution of the sensible."

Rancière's theory of "distribution of the sensible" helps us to understand the ordering of the sensuous productions as the "aesthetic regime" that creates the conditions to perceive, think and act in a given socio-historical situation (Rancière, 2004, 2009a, 2009b). Subversive aesthetic experience can affect the rational perception of social practices and norms and makes us aware of the obscured conditions and modalities of the social order (Rancière, 2006, 2009; Armstrong, 2000). Therefore, aesthetics has also the capacity to be an irresolvable force of disruption to the existing politico-aesthetic order. In the urban social movements what comes forth is their aesthetical struggle not only for visibility and audibility but also against the normalization of the "distribution of the sensible" as Rancière articulates. and thus, the normalization of our collective sense-making mechanism about our surroundings and our place in society.

Such dissagreement or "dissensus" with what is normalised by the "police order" is a struggle about what is included, who is included and how they are included in our common world. Rancière explains that class war should also be understood in terms of dissensus: "…And this is also what class war means: not the conflict between groups which have opposite economic interests, but the conflict about what an 'interest' is, the struggle between those who set themselves as able to manage social interests and those who are supposed to be only able to reproduce their life (Rancière 2011, 2)." In the following pages, being indebted to Rancière's concept of the "distribution of the sensible", I will examine how aesthetics and politics met on the rebel streets of Turkey as interconnected forms of dissensus against the aestheticization of the urban space by the efforts of the ruling elite. For, Rancière politics is the configuration of the common world in which everybody is in his/her place performing his/her role in society. And this is how "the police order" passes itself off as "the real." True politics starts then with dissensus. When this sense-making mechanism is broken, the distribution of the sensible can be reconfigured. As he writes: 'It [dissensus] is a conflict about who speaks and who does not speak, about what has to be heard as the voice of pain and what has to be heard as the argument on justice (Rancière, 2011, p. 2).

3. Top-down Aestheticization of the Public Space

The urban aesthetics is locus of antagonism between the politics of urbanity that utilizes art as a property in the service of power capital and politics of subaltern culture that instrumentalizes it to make visible and audible those who are excluded by this power. While the aesthetic reconstruction on the urban space has an essential role in producing and reinforcing socio-political divides, the governmental control of urban apearance could be for economic benefits related to gentrification, tourism and real estate development. It could also be used to reconstruct a certain aesthetic sensibility and thus certain ideological attitudes. Who has the aesthetic authority in the urban space is as important as who is re-developing that city.

Authoritarian governments have been using urban interventionism not only for economic but also for ideological gains. The power to dictate the aesthetic order does not fall away from the power to dictate the political order. Slavoj Žižek claims that "the notion of 'totalitarianism,' far from being an effective theoretical concept, is a kind of *stopgap:* instead of enabling us to think, forcing us to acquire new insight into the historical reality it describes, it relieves us of the duty to think, or even actively *prevents* us from thinking. While the ruling elite continues their efforts to manipulate and transform society, in line with their desire to use art and the artist as an effective tool in this way, they can mobilize all kinds of possibilities in their relations with them to influence and evolve artists in the desired direction, or at least, to pacify their creativity. While many artists offer their creativity and abilities to the service of those in power, some of the artists do not set an attitude in any way, taking shelter behind the natural consequences of the dialectical flow. They continue their existence with the thought that they fulfill their artistic activities. This kind of sectarianism serves to alienate society from itself, by obscuring, mystifying, and transforming reality into a false reality. It causes humans to move away from the nature of being human, to transform the self-alienated individual of the capitalist system into selfish beings who are insensitive and self-isolating from everything environmental. These attitudes, which are constantly reproduced and reinforced, are naturally the most important obstacles to human plurality, democracy and living together as a society.

In Turkey, after the conservative Islamist Welfare Party (Refah Partisi) took the most important metropolitan municipalities such as Ankara and Istanbul in the 1994 elections, the people in major cities witnessed a new aesthetic transformation in the public spaces in the forms of replacing public sculptures. In this period, there was an important ideological split in which the secular-anti-secular polarization started to escalate. Thanks to the September 12 Coup in 1980, the Turkish-Islamic ideology was already embedded in the backbone of education and social life.

The changes were more prominent in Ankara under Major Melih Gökçek. The landmark of Ankara, the capital of Turkey since 1923, was known for its massive modernist, gray buildings. As Welfare Party was reenacting itself as the antidote of the previously long-time ruling class—the Kemalist and social-democratic Republican People's Party (CHP) Gökçek wished to aestheticize the city with kitsch sculptures. He and his colleagues chose to enact plastic rapidly produced and colorfully painted objects, looking like children's toys, at the city entrances and squares. This proposed a radical process of transformation of the capital as the city of the new order with a new understanding of social life radiating from the public sculptures the Mayor was enacting on all corners of the city. Meanwhile, when the mayors of the Welfare Party displayed reactionary approaches such as not laying wreaths in front of Atatürk statues or not participating in official ceremonies in front of Atatürk statues, Gökçek started to remove the statues that he found obscene.

The first one of that was Mehmet Aksoy's modernist piece called *In the Land of the Fairies* in Altinpark (figure 2). For Gökçek the sculpture looked like an orgy and he infamously declared: "I spit to that kind of thing called art." The removal of this statute in 1994 was his first move before he replaced many public sculptures. This reflected the anti-intellectualism of the new wave of rightwing politics in Turkey that regarded public arts of the "previous era of CHP as degenerate Western aesthetics and create polarization in society by their encouragement to condemn modern and contemporary art in the public space. In fact, some internalized such condemnation so much so that they would find it acceptable to see banal and kitsch objects as "public art" in public spaces and approved them to show that they are different from the secular educated voters of the opposition party-CHP.

Another early example before he stared to fill Ankara with sculptures looking like children's toys, was the removal of the sculptural fountain called Water Elves in Tandoğan Square (figure 3). One morning, instead of the bronze square fountain belonging to the first years of the Republic, which can be found in many cities of Europe, the citizens around Tandoğan Square came across an ugly cup and tea jug, far from the

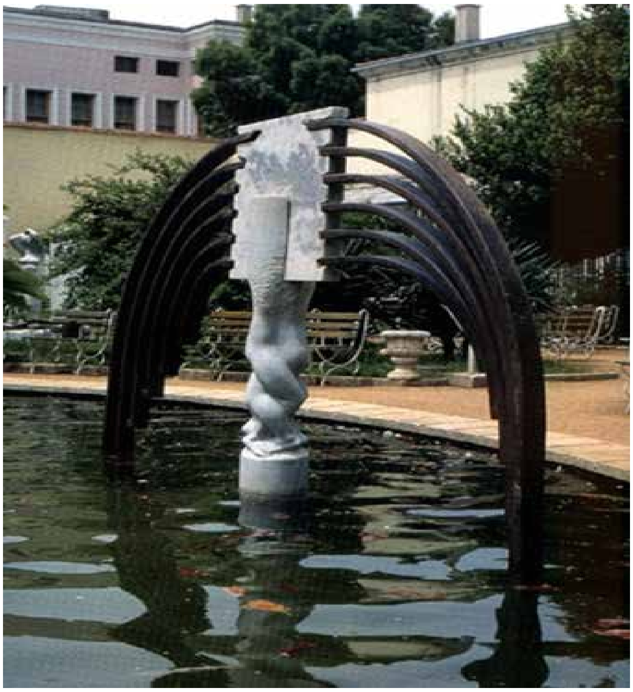

Figure 2. Mehmet Aksoy, sculpture, *In the Land of the Fairies*, public domain.

competence of Turkey’s tile aesthetic, with the inscription “Kütahya Porcelain” on it. About this unfortunate faith of the “Water Elves” Uğur Duyan writes:

> All the creative destruction processes that Ankara has undergone since the early years of the Republic preach a new and modern urban identity. Although the Water Fairy Sculptures were brought to Ankara in order to create a Western city image and to carry the daily life practices of the West, they could not fully realize their mission. Since the 1920s, Ankara has been equipped with structures built according to a neo-classical Turkish-Islamic architecture, which is reminiscent of 19th century Istanbul (Duyan, 2011, p.142).

Such transition from an aesthetic pool composed of classical sculptures to a rough tile-covered jug with water flowing from its pitcher was the start of Gökçek’s aesthetic education of Ankara’s dwellers. Especially with the AKP’s coming to power, Gökçek lived his “golden age” and during his tenure he inspired his colleagues in other municipalities to renew the public space with inspirational sculptures (figure 4). Duyan remarks “Almost all of the statues disappeared from people’s memories shortly after they are displaced (Duyan, 2011, p. 141).” At that time, many criticisms of this transformation came to the fore but unfortunately, all the criticisms could not prevent the grotesque aesthetics that Gökçek had imposed on the city and society for a quarter of a century until he lost elections in 2018. AKP has equipped public space with tasteless readymade-like sculptures in almost every city. This reproduced a shallow mentality about urban commons and dictated a very different aesthetic order than what previous political make-up in Turkey did.

4. After the Gezi Uprising in Turkey

On May 31, 2013, the people of Turkey, cowed by a history of coup d’état and civil authoritarianism, woke up to a nationwide revolt without knowing that it would be the biggest civil mass revolt in its history. The resistance started on May 27 with a few dozen protestors occupying the Gezi Park in the center of Istanbul to protect the last piece of green space

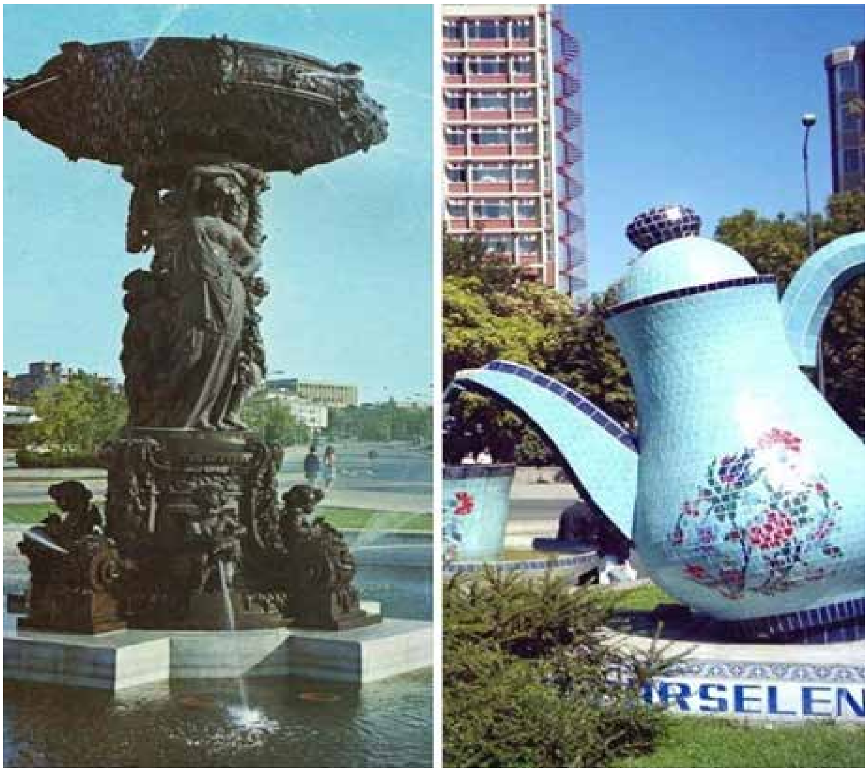

Figure 3. The photo of *Water Elves* on the left and *Kütahya Porselen* on the right. Public domain.

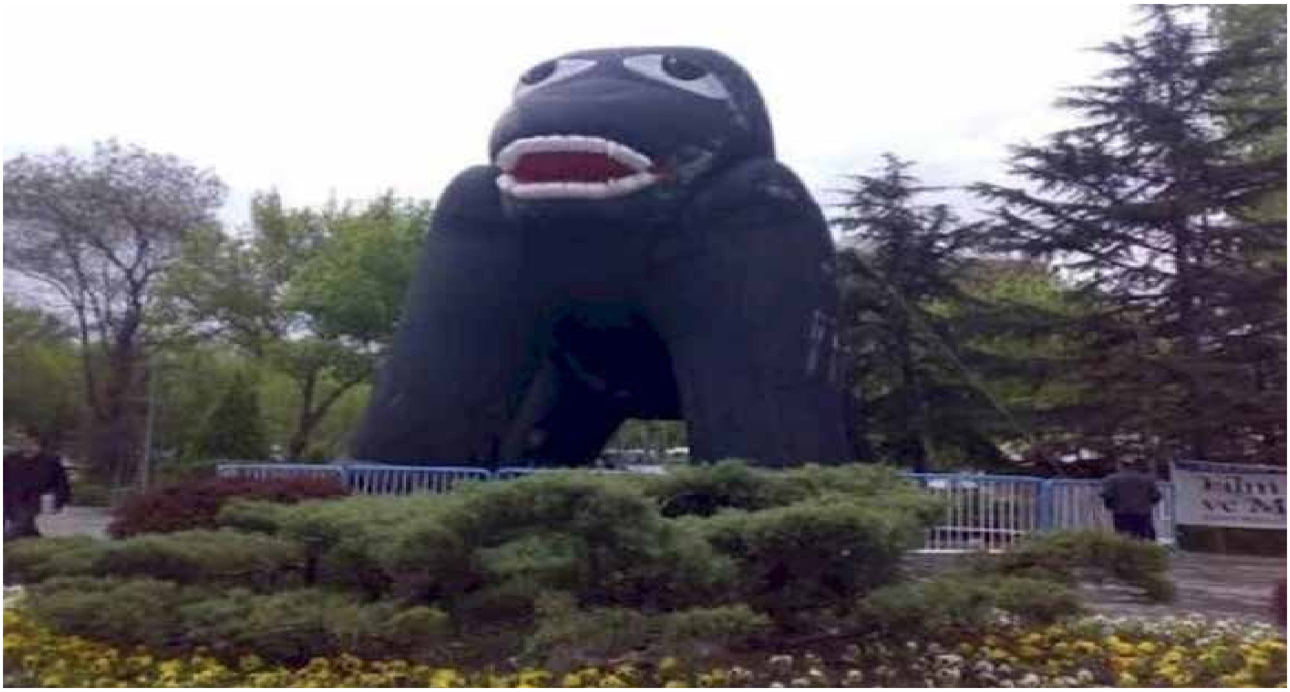

Figure 4. The inflatable sculpture known as “Dinocan.” Public domain.

from turning into another superfluous shopping complex in the city, this time in the form of an Ottoman barracks, replicating the original building built two centuries ago. The following day at dawn the police set protesters’ tents on fire while people were sleeping in them and started to evict the park using excessive tear gas and water cannons. Nobody predicted then that an unprecedented chain reaction would trigger a massive civil uprising.

Gezi uprising in Tukey was not only a contested territory but also an aesthetic practice of the dissensus–the reclamation of the urban space as the visual and discursive space—that devised the imaginary for politicians and intellectuals alike who have embraced an idealized notion of a nation and citizenry befitting their political objectives. The aesthetic language of the Gezi was one that mimicked the collective aesthetics and its dialogical premises visible since the 1968 uprisings and carried over to anti-globalization movement and Occupy and anti-austerity movements thereafter (Çolak, 2014, Tunali 2018). The deployment of similar forms of aesthetics—from the costumes to civil disobedient acts, from street art to social media memes, from spontaneous performances to hand signals during the assemblies–expressed both a global circulation of techniques of protest and at the same time an awareness of comparable political mobilization.

Do we have the right to change ourselves by changing the city or do we have the right to change the city by changing ourselves? What happened after the violent eviction of the Gezi Park and the demolition of the tent village, seemed like the *citadins* were searching for an answer to this question. A month later, a completely different dynamic took over the streets. An image of a man standing still in the middle of Taksim Square, once again made eyes turn to the center of Istanbul. Erdem Gündüz, stood for eleven hours until AKP and Erdoğan alarmed the mayor, Hüseyin Avni Mutlu who until then had said the police would not intervene in such a peaceful protest (figure 5). His body, fragile and vulnerable, stood in front of the Ataturk Cultural Centre–the most significant architectural symbol of the modernization of Turkey by the Kemalist elites. A performance of standing motionless disturbed the normal ways of behaving in a square —walking, crossing, moving.

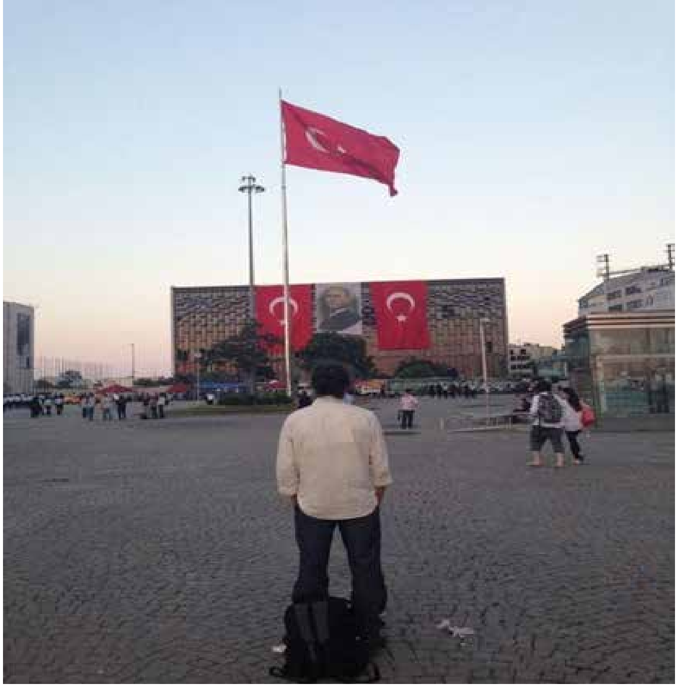

Figure 5. The standing protest by (then) art student Erdem *Gündüz* in Taksim Square.

This unplanned silence and inactivity become unusual disturbances to the established flow of urban life and traffic in one of the busiest squares in Europe. After the arrest of Gündüz for standing still, his action was picked up all over Turkey. People would suddenly stop and stand still while crossing a busy road, in a square, at a park, on a pavement. Sometimes people spontaneously organized a collective "standing" act in their neighborhood at a spot culturally or politically significant to them. They made up a landscape of dispersed but connected bodies, intensified and accumulated, being where they are not supposed to be, doing what they are not supposed to be doing. This collective act became a tactical disturbance challenging the routine of the neoliberal urban landscape. It complemented the Gezi Uprising that took its political shape by the occupation of Gezi Park, disrupted the normal use of the park, the Taksim square and the traffic and turned the space into a political agora for reclaiming urban commons. Dissensus, in Rancière's theory is about blocking the normal relationship between sense perception and sense-making (Rancière 2016). In other words, dissensus is the discordance between what is given to the perception and the established meaning of it. This motionless performance disrupted that relationship and created a kind of perceptive trouble that got repeated in other times and places, creating dissensus.

A few days later another spontaneous civil disobedience began when a 64-year-old retired engineer, Hüseyin Çetinel, living in the Taksim-Beyoğlu district, started the most colorful protest in the city. One night, Çetinel decided to paint a large staircase in front of his house to give the citizens something colorful to look at instead of gray, crumbling concrete (figure 6). After images of the rainbow-colored stairs circulated on social media, the historic staircase immediately became the site of contestations between the government and the Istanbulites. When municipal officials sent workers after nightfall to repaint the stairs gray, quiet aesthetic warfare broke loose. When everyone is sleeping at night, the stairs were transforming into vibrant rainbow colors again. Their goal was to take back their walls which have been filled with a lot of commercial images that do not reflect their values, voices and tastes.

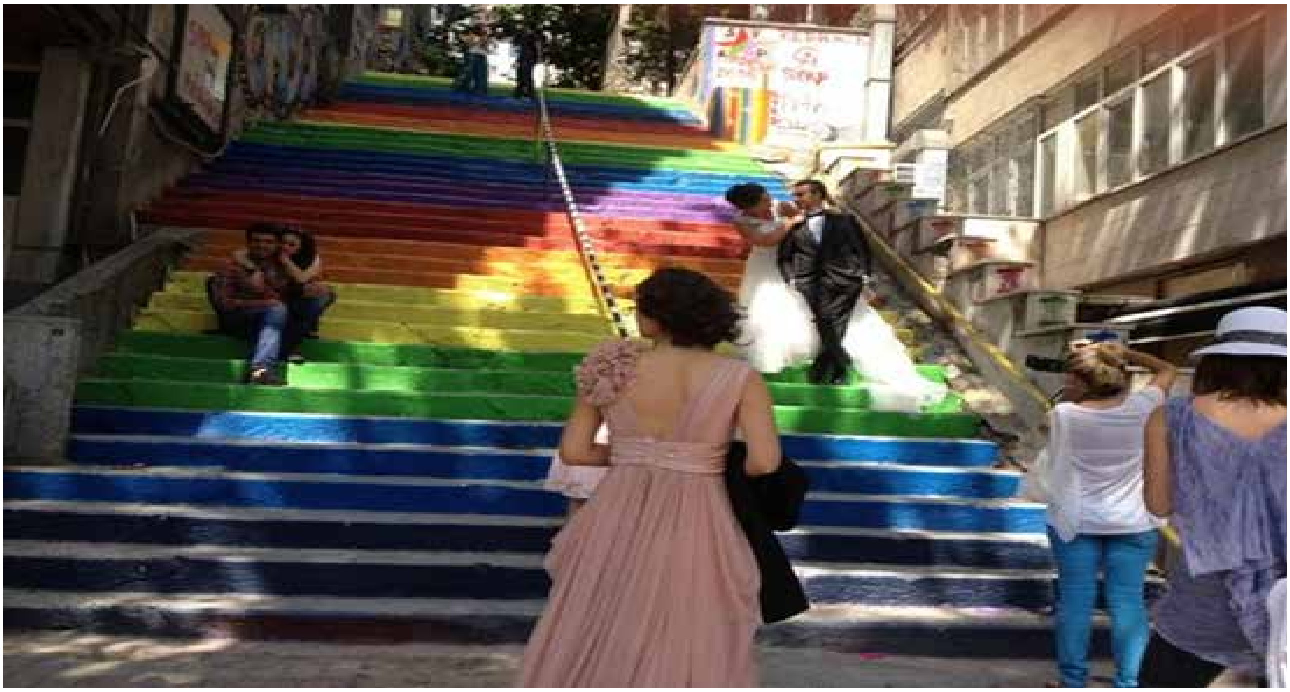

Figure 6. A view of the public enjoying the first rainbow stairs painted by Hüseyin Çetinel in Istanbul. Public domain.

After thousands of calls on Twitter to repaint the stairs again, Istanbulites of all colors united against the gray state not only in Istanbul but also in many cities all over the country. The repainting of the rainbow stairs seemed to be yet another sign of a lack of respect for their right to claim public space. Within three days, proud people posted hundreds of photographs on social networks of the colorful stairs, walls, pavements, and cobblestone pathways in their neighborhoods all over Turkey. This common space was produced as an ephemeral and contingent space. The *citadin* as a subject appeared in and through this space and was constituting the aesthetic acting. With this surprising and unexpected act, the routinized ordering of things in the city is disrupted and a colorful dissent is staged. Urban inhabitants seized to be passive and re-imagined and re-invented their role in the urban space and in their everyday living. In the battle between painting and repainting the staircase, for *citadins* citizenship was conceived as an expressive exercise of their rights to the city in their daily life.

This battle made visible the continuous struggle for recognizing and exercising the rights of everyone in the city. By the end of the week, some people took their children to see the newfound colors of the city's streets; some took bridal pictures in front of the staircase and some just hung out there with friends. With that, not only big squares and parks but also narrow streets and alleys became a space for public gatherings and a colorful unification of those who are tired of authoritarian consensus building of the state authorities, especially that of the President. At this time, the rainbow was still not recognized as the symbol of LGBT activism in Turkey and it worked as an attempt for the unification of people of all backgrounds who expressed their right to the city by means happy coloring the common urban space.

Another civic protest initiated by a random citizen came from an 85-year-old woman living alone in the city of Elazı⍰, in Eastern Turkey. Nadire Kaya protested the police barricades in front of her house in both humorous and practical way: she hung her vegetables to dry on the iron bars of the police barricade. Her brilliant answer to the alternative media

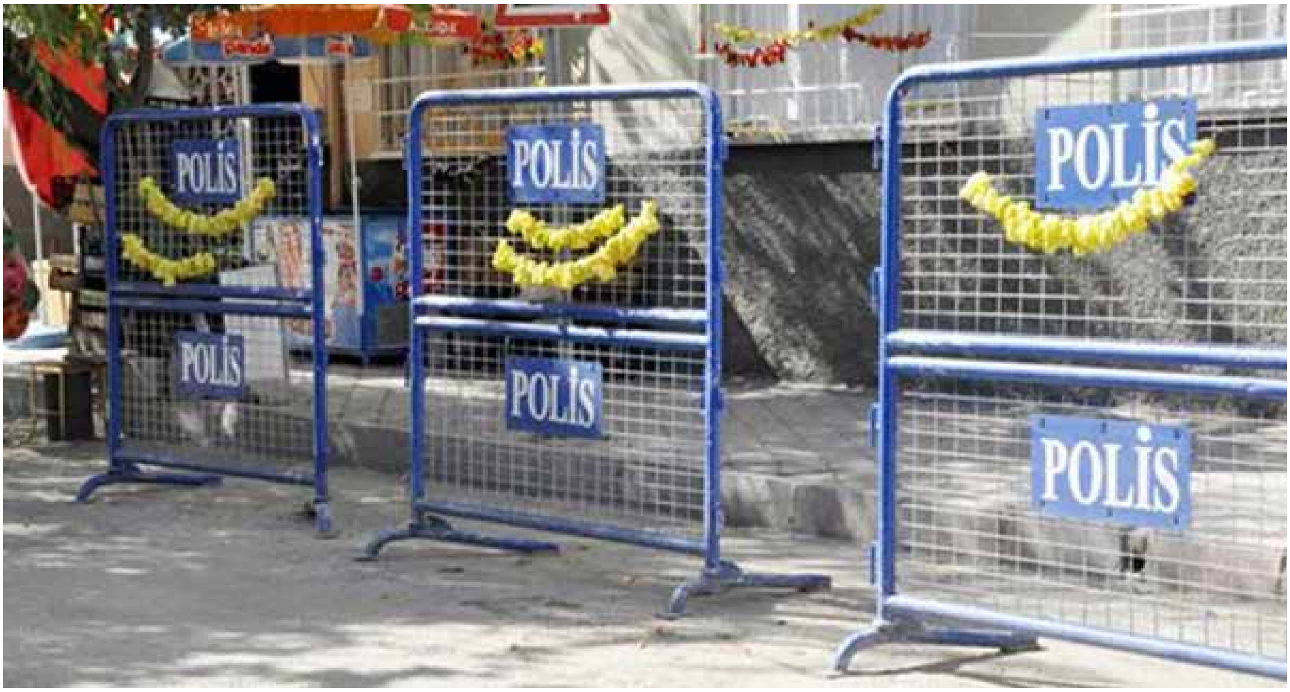

Figure 7. An image of Nadire Kaya's display of discontent with the excessive police force in front of her house in Elazig, Turkey, 2013. Public domain.

personnel who came to interview her was this: "I am poor. I live in a small house without a balcony. Where would I dry my peppers?" Kaya then added, "But, I made the police barricade beautiful, didn't I?" (figure 7). Drying vegetables at the end of the summer to be used later in the winter is a well-known cultural practice in Turkey. An 85-year-old woman made her poverty visible by aestheticizing what she thought was hideous in front of her house. Through this simple act of occupying the police barricades in front of her house, Kaya turned upside down the symbolic and practical existence of these ugly iron barriers that aggressively occupy public spaces all over Turkey. Her disagreement with the forceful existence of the barricades made her recognize her rights to that space as a citizen, and she exercised this right in a simple aesthetic act.

Breaking up the totalizing notion of those dominated by power as passive sensors of the urban space, such creative action is an engagement with the city as a *citadin.* Michel De Certeau articulates this in his book *The Practice of Everyday life* (2002) as the tactical way ordinary urban citizens navigate and negotiate their positions in power systems that markup the city space. De Certeau explains that the everyday man uses tactics such as urban nomadism, poaching or bricolage to subvert the state power imposed upon him: "It must vigilantly make use of the cracks that particular conjunctions open in the surveillance of the proprietary powers... It creates surprises in them... In short, a tactic is an art of the weak (De Certeau, 1988, p. 35)." If the state tries to control the people whenever and wherever, people have the capacity to create their own micro possibilities of resistance (Klanten, R. and Huebner, M. 2010).

Kaya's act was a good example of how ordinary people could intentionally "misuse" the streets against the regime's construction of the urban space in the form of the distribution of the sensible. Kaya, like Çetinel, wanted to determine what she would see in front of her house and created personal urban interventions. the demonstration of power, they aesthetically reclaimed their immediate surroundings. Kaya's act showed that the commonly established meanings and significance of things in public spaces could be questioned and undermined through a small act of subversion, which is a new poetics of urban dwelling that is usually left to artists of street art. This kind of re-aestheticization of public spaces as seen in the example of bell peppers on police barricades could act as an antidote to the ruggedness of our collective thinking about being political subjects. It brings forth a liberating potential and public opportunities for humor and playfulness. This gives citizens the opportunity to express themselves while opening up the political space towards self-realization as a citizen. Gezi left its mark as the collective creative demand of citizens who were realizing themselves as active actors in the city's public spaces and redefying the concept of citizenship as direct action in the service of democracy against the surge of authoritarianism.

5. Concluding Remarks

Gezi uprising in Turkey was a challenge to the new regime of social domination exerted as authoritative incentives and consolidated reasoning of the ruling power. It was an important example, which showed that in the re-appropriated urban space, the sensibilities of the common life could be reconfigured through unusual ways of aesthetic refiguration of the public space. What remained in the aftermath of the Gezi is not only a new political discourse but an aesthetic practice that defied the politico-aesthetic consensus hitherto enacted by the ruling elites. The spontaneous aesthetic occupation of public spaces by the citizens enacted a political demand about to how we constitute and share our encounters with the urban environment.

The paper also argued about the aesthetic strategies of contestation to the configuration of "a social order" that defines citizenship as an empty signifier to be filled by those in power. Thus, citizenship needs to be affirmed as a praxis of citizens' aesthetic and political expression toward self-realization. The constitution of the community and the expression of the community is crucial for such self-realization. According to Murray Bookchin, "an authentic community is not merely a structural constellation of human beings but rather the practice of communizing (Bookchin 2005, p. 349)." The aesthetics of the urban resistances invites us to think about active citizenship as the expression of freedom. This imagined form of citizenship can be conceived as a direct action towards urban commons thus creating the possibility to make decisions for one's own community. The aesthetic practices of political action in the recent urban movements have not only been more and more visible but also significant in empowering ordinary citizens by enabling them to claim their rights to change thenvironmentment.

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Creative Activism and Tactical Urbanism: Social Change in Milan through Colourful Squares

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1. Introduction

In the Western societies of the late 19th and early 20th Centuries, European cities were largely designed and planned by civil engineers, architects, and public health experts –fields dominated by wealthy men. Consequently, cities were, and still are, delineated along the lines of gender, as well as race and class (European Union, 2007). For several years, the *neutral user* of the city was based on an ideal type of inhabitant: adult, male, healthy, rich, educated and self-provided. This led male planners and designers - whether intentionally or unintentionally - to create urban spaces catered to their needs while reflecting and perpetuating the patriarchal norms of their society (The World Bank Group, 2020). This archetype, however, is as dominant as poorly representative: urban environments around the world became both products and drivers of inequities, not only towards women, but excluding many of the real communities living in the cities as well (Hanson, 2004).

Even nowadays, although some cities have made progress in addressing gender and biases in the built environment, the topography of the wider urban environment creates spaces of social exclusion and physical inaccessibility, and much work remains to be done. These urban planning traditions left the average citizen with a feeling of non-belonging to the public realm, that the space is not theirs. Therefore, it is important to recognize the dysfunctionalities of the conventional urban planning rules and procedures, and the urgent need to rethink the role of urban design, which has to become a tool for citizens' self-determination - rather than their exclusion (Boano, 2016).

Addressing the link between urban planning and structural inequalities is the starting point of movements that reclaim the streets. The protagonism of every inhabitant has to rise, especially the ones that are usually harder to involve in the discussion: women, the elderly, children, people with disabilities and marginalised communities. In fact, accessibility should be granted to anyone, and people with different abilities, sizes, and ages should be able to fully participate with the built environment (Institute for Transportation & Development Policy, 2020). Learning from the experience of the most disadvantaged will lead to the inspiration and empowerment of a new generation of engaged citizens, and new key actors in the transformation of their communities. This process demands re-making the city by micro-transforming and taking care of the spaces and services located below people's homes, on a neighbourhood scale. Subsequently, we aim to describe the state of the art of the current urban design of public spaces, underlining the importance of Public Art - and its most recent developments such as Tactical Urbanism - and how these bottom-up approaches of creative activism can help in creating waves of positive social change.

2. Art as a Tool for Integration and Regeneration Introduction

2.1. The Urbanism Practices: *Creative Activism* in Public Art

Cultural analyses of gentrification have identified in the individual artist an important agent in the initiation of reclamation processes: since the 1980s Public Art has been increasingly advocated on the basis of a series of supposed contributions to urban regeneration. It has been claimed by many that Public Art can help develop a sense of identity, of belonging to a place and it contributes to civic identity. It can address community needs, tackle social exclusion, possess educational value, promote social change, and encourage economic development (Miwon 1997).

Contemporary urban regeneration has changed objectives, actors, methods, and tools, becoming a consequence of planning failures and following the progressive affirmation of environmental, economic, and social phenomena. The shift of meaning in the modern urban planning field went from the expansion of the consolidated city to the re-qualification of it, led by the desire of recovery, redevelopment and eventually regeneration, with attention to the reuse, reversibility, and temporariness of the interventions. In this cultural context, *Public Art* - and more generally the multiple forms of creative activism with temporary and permanent reuses of the existing city - is not a response to random circumstances, rather it is a method to address citizens' specific needs and the evolutions of the standard cities (Cariello, Ferorelli & Rotondo, 2021).

Public Art and *temporary urban experiments* are widely used in urban contexts under the banner of regeneration to achieve some degree of social impact. This is why it should not only be considered an aesthetic topic but a social and economic one too, thanks to the engagement of citizens in placemaking processes. These experiments are becoming more and more a diffused technique to face urban problems, concerning at the same time public spaces and streets, understood as mobility infrastructures, given the urge to bring health-safe and sustainable adaptations in the daily urban transportation (Roberts & Sykes 2000).
It is important to underline that there are various interpretations as to what can be considered *Public Art* and that the discussion is still alive. Kwon Miwon, in her essay *"For Hamburg: Public Art and Urban Identities" (1997)* distinguished three different paradigms of Public Art that could be schematically described in this way:

1. Art **in** *public places:* typically a modernist abstract sculpture placed outdoors to "decorate" or "enrich" urban spaces, especially plaza areas fronting federal buildings or corporate office towers;
2. Art **as** *public spaces:* it is a less object-oriented and more site-conscious art. It seeks greater integration between art, architecture and the landscape through the collaboration of artists with members of the urban managerial class (architects, landscape architects, city planners, urban designers, and city administrators) in the designing of permanent urban (re)development projects such as parks, plazas, buildings, promenades, neighbourhoods, etc;
3. Art **in** *the public* **interest***:* it is often temporary, with city-based programs focusing on social issues, rather than the built environment. It involves collaborations with marginalised social groups, such as the elderly, children, people with disabilities and marginalised communities (rather than design professionals), and it strives for the development of politically-conscious community events or programs.

Given these distinctions, Tactical Urbanism falls within that category of Public Art that is not only art **in** *public spaces*, but also, and especially, art *in the public sphere:* a kind of art that raises social, political and economic issues and that is able to activate the public debate. In choosing art and culture as an engine for the regeneration and gentrification of urban spaces, it is fundamental to not consider the public space as an empty space to be filled with whatever work of art, and to consider citizenship as an active part of the aesthetic processes (Lydon, Garcia, 2015). As said, cultural projects have played an important role in urban regeneration since the mid-1980s, and nowadays the increasing interest in participatory arts programmes can be explained by their low-cost nature, that is flexible and responsive to local needs. This use of Art and Culture coincides with a shift in cultural policies and regeneration strategies, which consider local people as the principal asset through which renewal has to be achieved.

2.2. Community involvement in Public Art

What is special about art? If we look at the dozens of examples in which arts programmes have brought a positive contribution to local vitality and urban regeneration, renewal and gentrification, it is easy to find special characteristics and messages that the arts can convey (Harrebye, 2016). Art programmes engage people's creativity and so lead the problem to a solution, they enable dialogue between people and community, they encourage questioning and by doing so they offer the possibility to find solutions for a better future. A direct consequence of this is that arts programmes offer ways for self-expression, which is an essential part of active citizenship. Working with art and artists is intellectually stimulating and, at the same time, entertaining (Youkhana, 2014).

Nevertheless, it should be noted that arts programmes are not the only solution or an alternative to regeneration initiatives like environmental improvements, training schemes or youth development projects and initiatives, but they can be an important component of regeneration and gentrification policies and can have a significant effect. Finally, regeneration is not an end in itself; it is about people and the quality of their lives (Inti, 2019). For all these reasons, involving people in renewal and regeneration projects is not only essential for the long-term viability of the project but also to inspire further ideas and participation.

3. Tactical Urbanism: the Era of Asphalt Art

In the realm of Public Art, we can consider Tactical Urbanism as a citizen's acquired right to design site-specific interventions and reinvent the city according to collective needs. This independent, bottom-up movement, promotes the public and collective use of the city, with limited resources and low investments (Bazzu & Talu 2017). The concept *Tactical Urbanism* formally emerged following a meeting of the Next Generation of New Urbanism (NextGen) group in November 2010 in New Orleans. The purpose was to group together a set of interventions observed in North American cities in recent years. Its driving force is to put *individuals at the centre*, to take personal responsibility in creating sustainable buildings, streets, neighbourhoods, and cities. Therefore, it combines a development process with social interaction, and the goal is the enhancement of the quality of urban life by rethinking public space, which will then become a place of encounter and aggregation. Sometimes, it can carry strong critical political positions to the institutional action on the urban dimension, and support local communities to develop immediate solutions to the increasingly difficult economic and social conditions.

"Tactical Urbanism demonstrates the huge power of thinking small about our cities. It shows how, with little imagination and the resources at hand, cities can unlock the full potential of their streets" – Janette Sadik-Khan, 2015, Commissioner of the New York City Department of Transportation (2007-2013)

The virtuous cycle that inspired Tactical Urbanism to flourish comes from a series of first temporary and then permanent urban experiments. New York City was the first metropolis to experiment with tactical urbanism projects, even before the expression was coined by Lydon and Garcia (2015). The pedestrianisation of Times Square (Fig. 1) and the introduction of walkable plazas, by Janette Sadik-Khan, are two examples. These interventions not only made the area more beautiful and airy, but also resulted in more than a 60% drop in traffic accidents and pedestrian injuries at the interchange (Lydon, Garcia 2015).

3.1. Turning a Temporary Act into a Permanent Social Statement

Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia, members of the NextGen group, are among the first prominent writers to define Tactical Urbanism and to promote various interventions to improve urban design and promote positive change in neighbourhoods and communities. In their book *"Tactical Urbanism: Short-term Action for Long-term Change"* (Lydon, Garcia, 2015) it is described as consisting of five pillars:

1. a deliberate phased approach to instigating change;
2. local solutions to local planning challenges;
3. a short-term commitment to a longer-term change;
4. potentially high rewards with low risks;
5. the development of social capital and organisational capacity between citizens, public and private institutions, and nonprofits.

When included in a public design process, tactical urbanism can quickly build trust among different groups and community stakeholders. In many instances, the initiators of the proj-

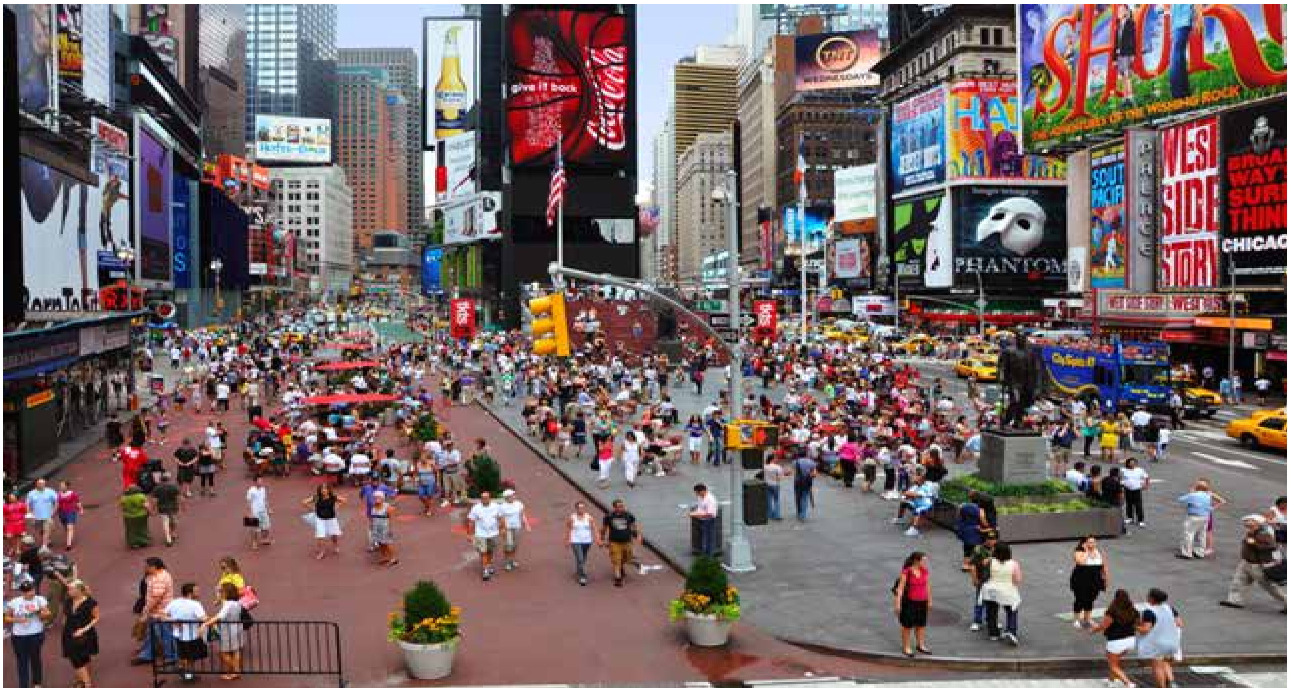

Figure 1. Times Square pedestrian intervention in New York City (United States of America), 2009. Photo credits: New York City Department of Transportation.

ects are associations or local governments that jointly show that *temporary* and *low-cost solutions* can facilitate change and bring benefits to the different actors involved. It considers citizenship as an active part of the aesthetic processes. For the citizens, it is a way to reorganise or transform public spaces, claiming the use in their everyday life, by allowing people to experience what's possible, rather than just looking at photos or renderings of what it could become. In this way, the spectator becomes 'spect-actor', and the artist becomes *'spect-author'* (Palermo 2014).

Collaboration between project coordinators, local residents, and the government is key to balance priorities and develop consensus around goals and the final design. Stakeholders representatives of the residents, instead, provide specific knowledge and insights that project facilitators may not possess. Capturing a variety of stakeholder voices is important to ensure that the project is not only designed for the local community, but *with the community.* Furthermore, engaging all potential stakeholders - especially those who are normally marginalised by the planning process - and securing their input on the project, can be a challenging experience and a chance of professional growth.

Tactical Urbanism is not the ending point in the design journey, it is what opens new possibilities of change: its efforts may be temporary, but the impacts may last for decades. This is why it's important to acknowledge it as part of a long-term strategy or vision, which includes making transitory interventions permanent, and scaling up successful projects to other neighbourhoods (Haydn, Temel, 2006). It is a tool cities can use to help achieve a larger vision of reallocating street space away from private vehicles and investing in safer, more comfortable environments for people.

The best way to get a sense of how a street or square changes, is for citizens to experience the new shared spaces firsthand. The success of the interventions can be measured, and thanks to the data collected and the lessons learned, the community can choose which of the temporary acts were effective and make them long lasting solutions (Lehtovuori, Ruoppila, 2012).

Through the critical analysis of some case studies, we want to underline how *participatory art* and *creative activism* have the ability to transform the living environment according to the *'build - measure - learn'* sequence (Bazzu, Talu, 2017). Regardless of whether it is a small town in the suburbs of underdeveloped countries or a neighbourhood in a large metropolis like the city of Milan, the case studies were chosen both for their differences and analogies. They allow the construction of a more general conclusion, that might be worthwhile for different contexts at a global scale. The common ground is how they implement *tactical urbanism* approaches to face the urban regeneration processes, and the cities' intention to learn from unturned approaches, and take their benefits into the institutional toolbox.

4. The Different Facets of Tactical Urbanism

Before focusing on how the city of Milan implemented the methods typical of Tactical Urbanism, some examples from different urban contexts will be shown. The projects that can be mentioned are abounding, but the attention will be focused on two case studies that illustrate Public Art as engines of urban regeneration to achieve some degree of social impact, which are developed in urban contexts that differ completely for social and economical development.

4.1. Breaking the Walls of Inequality through Colourful Murals

"Favela Painting" is the program by the Dutch artists Jeroen Koolhaas and Dre Urhahn, in collaboration with locals, aimed to affect the aesthetic of how favelas are perceived from within and outside.

The projects, placed in Rio de Janeiro Brazil, started in 2005 by training young community members in the process and epitomising an alternative and creative way to construct a sense of community in collaboration with local inhabitants. The representation of what favelas are, does not reflect the imaginary potential of what these spaces truly are and, above all, the way in which people who inhabit them represent them, and by doing so understand their own existence and environmental structures.

The colourful walls bring hope and deliver a different understanding of space and its people, inviting others to co-create and co-represent a much more constructive and positive life here (Fig. 2). In the designer's words, *"it breaks the poor stigmatisation image of favelados, so they can aspire to better education and other social and health necessities that can enrich their already complex reality and meaningful communities"* (Imas, Kosmala, 2010).

It brings a true potential for sustainability that proved to be significant in the fight against poverty, exclusion and deprivation of the faveladas. It allows to articulate a different discourse of social change, of engagement in contributing to improve life for favela dwellers. Both the local and global impact of this project inspired to continue creating large-scale community art movements across the world: over the years the initiative has developed into the *United Painting Foundation* (supporting their own and affiliate projects worldwide) that by now has become an institution with a fast growing international group of participants on many levels.

The second one is "Mural artivism: Breaking the walls of gender inequality" by the *UN Women* organisation (2021). As part of the Generation Equality campaign, UN Women has issued a global call for original artworks that visualise and celebrate activism for gender equality (Fig. 3). Seven distinguished local artists from all over the world (Turkey, Albania, Georgia, Kosovo, Moldova, North Macedonia, USA) promote new urban narratives and social change through art. A mural on the wall in a public space has the power to reach broad audiences and engage citizens in dialogue on social issues that are vital to the city or community. They seek to figuratively break down the walls of inequality, and to raise awareness about women rights. During online workshops held by Alice Mizrachi - a street artist from New York and an advocate of women rights - the artists exchanged experiences and efforts of equality that mould their art.

Collectively, these change-makers of all ages and genders can tackle the unfinished business of empowering women through a new multigenerational campaign. To foster a rich dialogue, each muralist selected young aspiring artists to

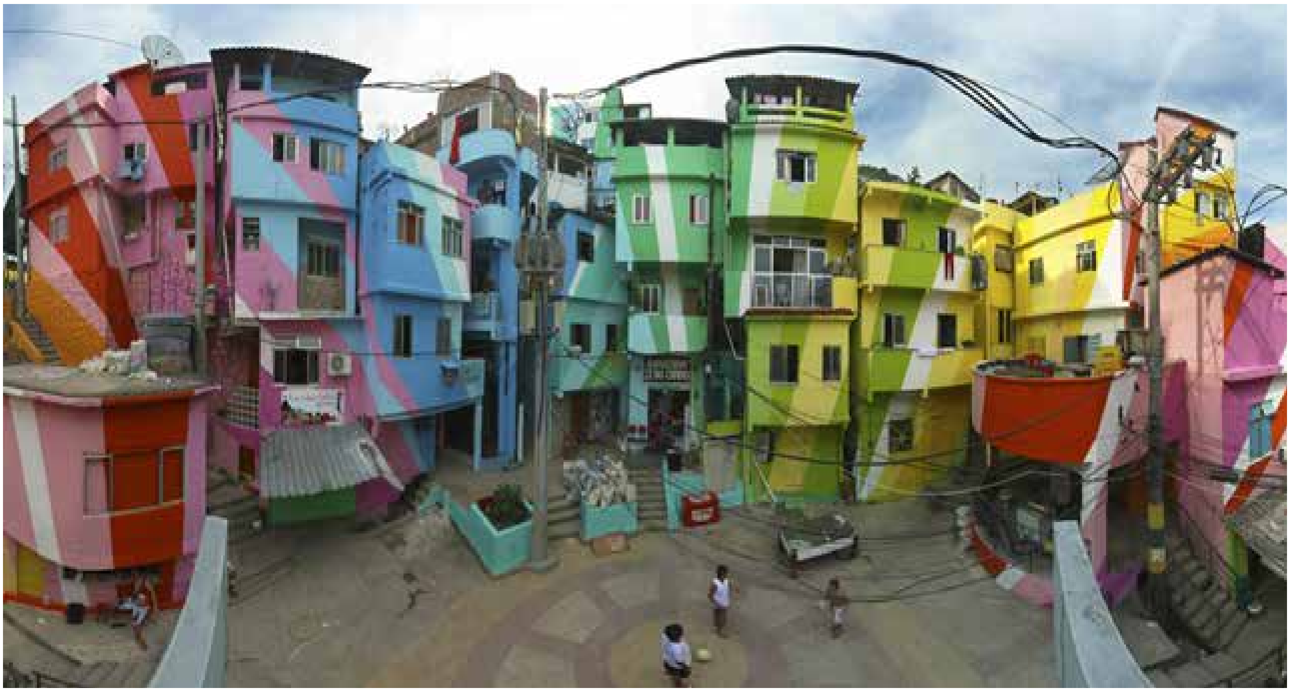

Figure 2. Favela Painting Project in Praça Cantão, Rio de Janeiro (Brasil), 2010. Photo credits: Favela Painting / Barcroft Media.

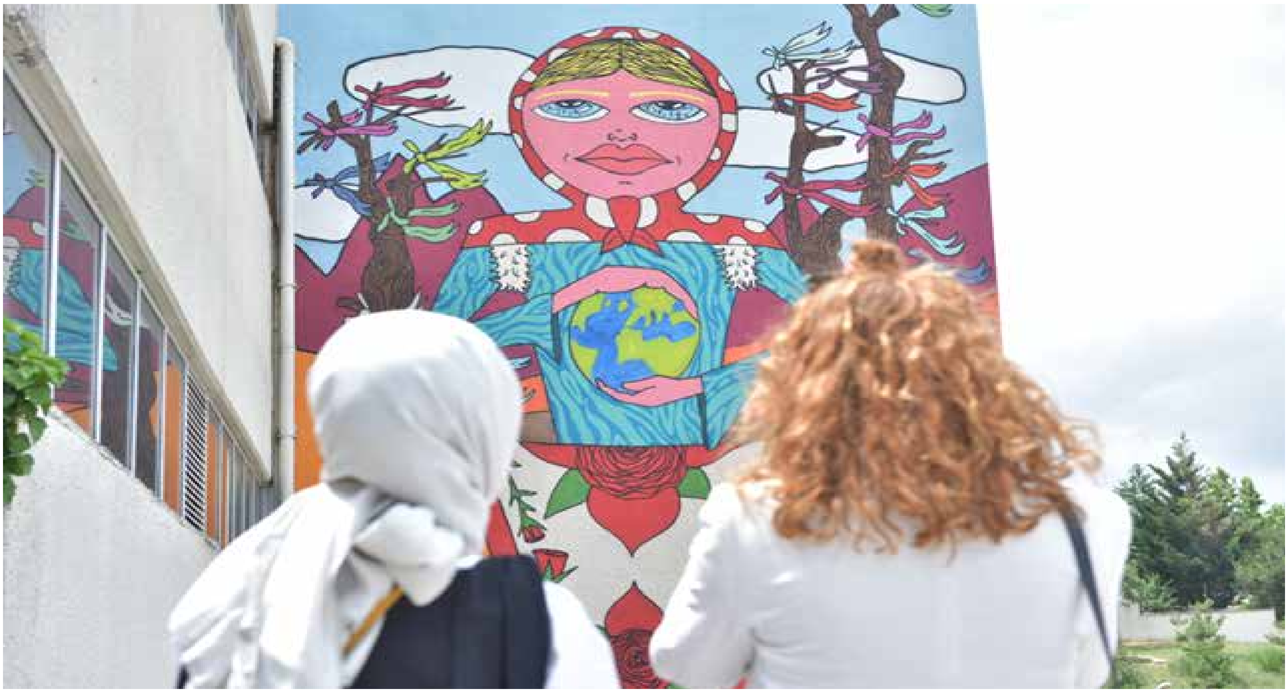

Figure 3. The inauguration of the mural “Half of the population = Half of the power” by Gökhan Tüfekçi in Ankara (Turkey), 2021. Photo credits: UN Women / Ender Baykuş.

help them with the mural. This intergenerational experience provided the artists with an opportunity to usher the next generation into a more sustainable and just future for all. The campaign demands equal pay, equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work, an end to sexual harassment and all forms of violence against women and girls, healthcare services that respond to their needs, and their equal participation in political life and decision-making.

4.2. The Milanese Experiments

The city of Milan, in Italy, freely offers the possibility to investigate Tactical Urbanism techniques: it is a city that wants to always question and renew itself, and to not stagnate in its history. Unlike other cities in Italy, Milan's urban structure developed together with its transport infrastructures, whose role grew extremely important since the dawn of the Industrial Age. And to this day, regardless of the city's important progress towards an evermore efficient public transport network, its configuration shows a strong redundancy of street spaces, almost exclusively absorbed by private vehicular mobility (Ferrari 2015).

The superabundant quantity of parking places, even in neighbourhoods dating back to well before the wide diffusion of private motorised mobility, implies that those parking places were progressively subtracted to green areas or free pedestrian spaces. Even in central neighbourhoods, the typical experience of public space is averagely quite poor: the vast majority of sidewalks finish with plain asphalt, and large portions of high-quality residential buildings have no public uses on the ground levels. Worrying levels of pollution in the air quality complete the framework of the city, which never found a true dimension of shared public space.

But it is in the city's imperfections that one can find the engine to start thinking about experimenting new solutions. In fact, in recent years short-term interventions of Tactical Urbanism inspired associations and planning institutions to implement local-based initiatives. Considering Milan's attitude toward innovation, it's a perfect ground for the transformation of the urban fabric, through a process of community reconstruction and redevelopment of public spaces, increasingly open to multiple and temporary uses.

4.2.1. "Piazze Aperte" Program in Milan

"Piazze Aperte" is a municipal program on which the city has been working since 2018, being a Milanese interpretation of the Tactical Urbanism movement. It is committed to converting former asphalted street spaces, dedicated to vehicular mobility, into pedestrian public spaces, using Tactical Urbanism techniques. The first projects were located on areas selected by the municipality, but since 2019 the program evolved into *"Piazze Aperte in Ogni Quartiere" (open squares in each neighbourhood)* and the active involvement of the citizens was extended to every step of the process, and it progressively consolidated the methodology.

Starting from a *selection phase*, the City issued a call open to citizens, informal groups, and associations, to propose urban transformations realisable within the tactical urbanism framework. Applicants were provided with a kit of admissible interventions (painting, urban furniture, and potted plants) and a list of 52 urban areas available to transform. In the *proposal phase*, citizens were asked to propose transformations concerning function, aesthetics, and furniture. Regardless of the technical quality or readiness, all proposals were accepted. Finally, the *co-design phase starts*, where citizens are involved in a common design process to refine their proposals and fulfil the urban safety and traffic management regulations. The city is progressively putting into practice all proposals.

The citizens' involvement process exceeded the expectations:

- it directly involved more than 200 actors in a short period of time;
- succeeded in collecting multiple proposals for the 52 available areas;
- it led the citizens themselves to request the addition of 11 new locations, all currently under advanced co-design phase, if not already completed.

It is remarkable how the city is embracing the opportunity to turn the temporal nature of these interventions into an ad-

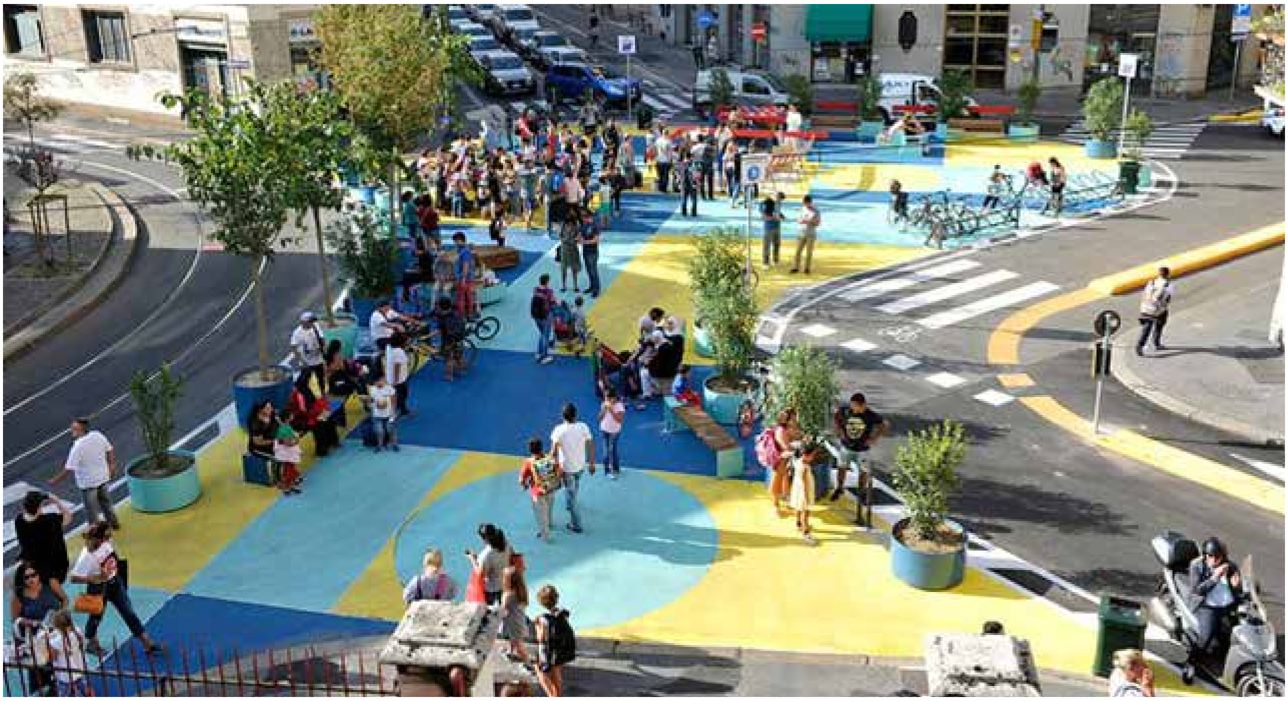

Figure 4. Piazza Spoleto, No.Lo, Milan (Italy) - *Piazze Aperte* Program (2019). Photo credits: Comune di Milano.

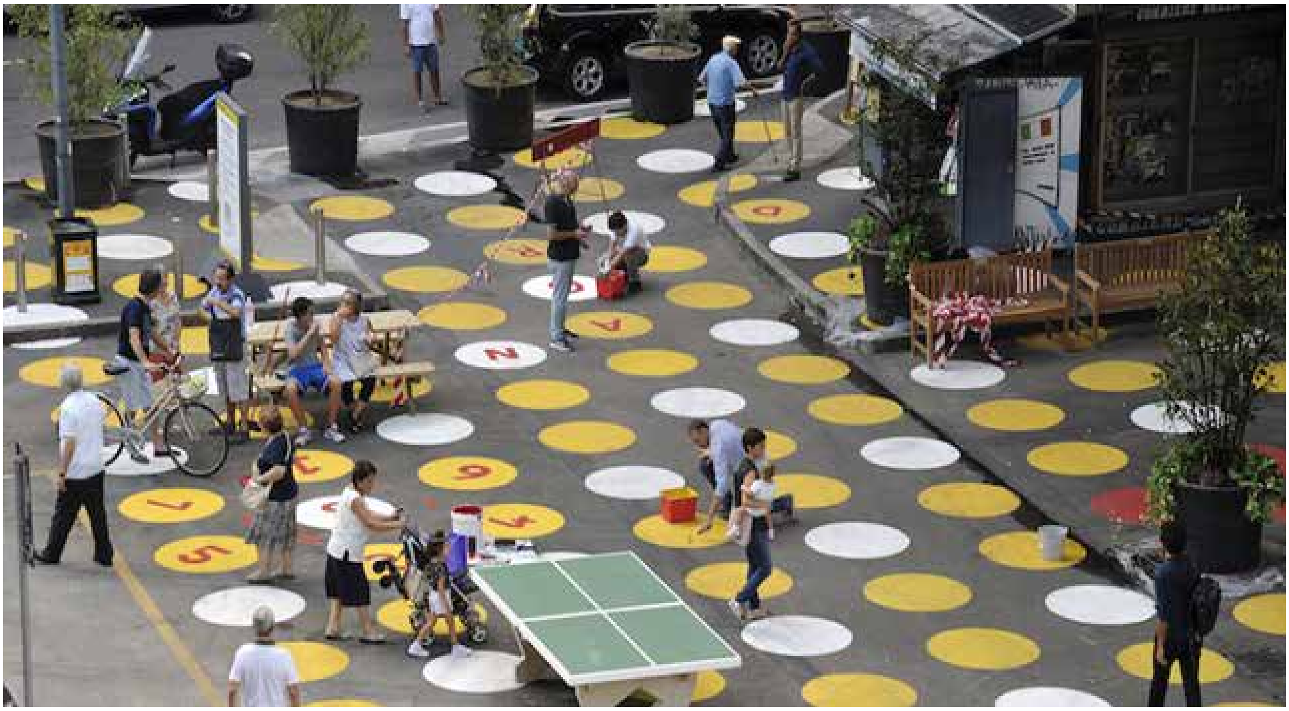

Figure 5. Piazza Dergano, Milan (Italy) - *Piazze Aperte* Program (2018). Photo credits: Comune di Milano.

vantage. Some of the earliest Piazze Aperte projects are now being turned into permanent pedestrian squares, and have therefore ultimately entered the urban topography of Milan.

Among the various examples of urban redevelopment, one of the most successful was certainly the intervention carried out in the No.Lo. neighbourhood in 2019, between Via Spoleto, Via Venini and Via Martiri Oscuri (Fig. 4). The project, requested by numerous parents, was designed to secure the small square, located right in front of the entrance of an elementary school. The pavement was repainted in blue and yellow, following a design that, when viewed from above, represents a large whale, symbol of the neighbourhood. The road system was also completely rethought and implemented, with the aim of slowing down and diluting the traffic, through one-way streets, bicycle lanes and pedestrian crossings, which created new spaces for families living in the neighbourhood to socialise.

In piazza Dergano, after a twelve-month trial period and a positive dialogue with the inhabitants, the final project to redesign the square started in November 2018 (Fig. 5). The initial interventions were integrated with permanent structural works, expanding the project to the neighbouring streets as well. During the test phase, a qualitative survey (Municipality of Milan, 2018) was carried out that showed a 50% increase in the flow of pedestrians along Via Tartini, the adjacent street. It also showed that 72% of the surveyed people spent more time in the square, at least one hour a day, and 84% were in favour of making the interventions permanent. In the final design, benches, ping pong tables and picnic tables remained, and the redesign of the pedestrian area has further widened the flowerbeds and allocated space for eating areas. New potted trees meet the need for more greenery and play areas.

The intervention in Piazza Tito Minniti was created in 2021 in collaboration with the Italian artist Camilla Falsini, called to redesign one of the symbolic areas, in the Isola neighbourhood (Fig. 6). The new square, a central point of the area and home to the historic local market, features an explosion of colours and geometric images on the pavement, which creates the word "Isola." Its letters enclose references to some of the area's distinctive features, such as: the i recalls a skyscraper, symbolising the modern soul recently adopted by the area; the a is the shape of a house, to emphasise the strong residential character of the neighbourhood.

4.2.2. *"TrentaMi in Verde"* Program in Milan (2019)

TréntaMi in Verde is a temporary experimentation of slowed-down traffic zones, where cars can only drive up to 30 km/h (Fig. 9). It is designed by the joint forces of local associations (Genitori Antismog, FIAB Milano Ciclobby, NoLo Social District, MoBì collective), together with the City Council.One of the main areas of intervention is the square preceding Parco Trotter, situated in the north-eastern part of Milan. Thanks to the colourful design on the ground, they got rid of wildly parked cars and dangerous intersections (Fig. 7). The idea was to give continuity to the greenery of the park with planters and trees, and the consequent transformation of the square into a place for the people. These interventions helped people to experience and touch with their hands the better liveability and safety of the public space - thanks to the reduction of speed and noise - and thereby created the necessary consensus for the success of the intervention.All the phases foreseen have been taken into account and implemented to let the initiatives work smoothly. Communication plays a key role in this process of change, that shifted from a municipality-centred model to a community one, in which urban spaces are given back to a plurality of users.

As an example, the volunteers who helped in the construction of Via Rovereto and Parco Trotter were mainly from the *NoLo Social District* association. But some volunteers came directly “from the street”, they spontaneously and independently joined the works, offering their willingness and help, stimulated by seeing other citizens - their 'neighbours' - engaged in building, painting, planting, cleaning. Moreover, many of the materials and tools that were used were donated or lent by local residents.

The new layouts have made it possible to obtain spaces for the insertion of new pedestrian furniture and plants of various sizes, to improve the quality of the street as a public

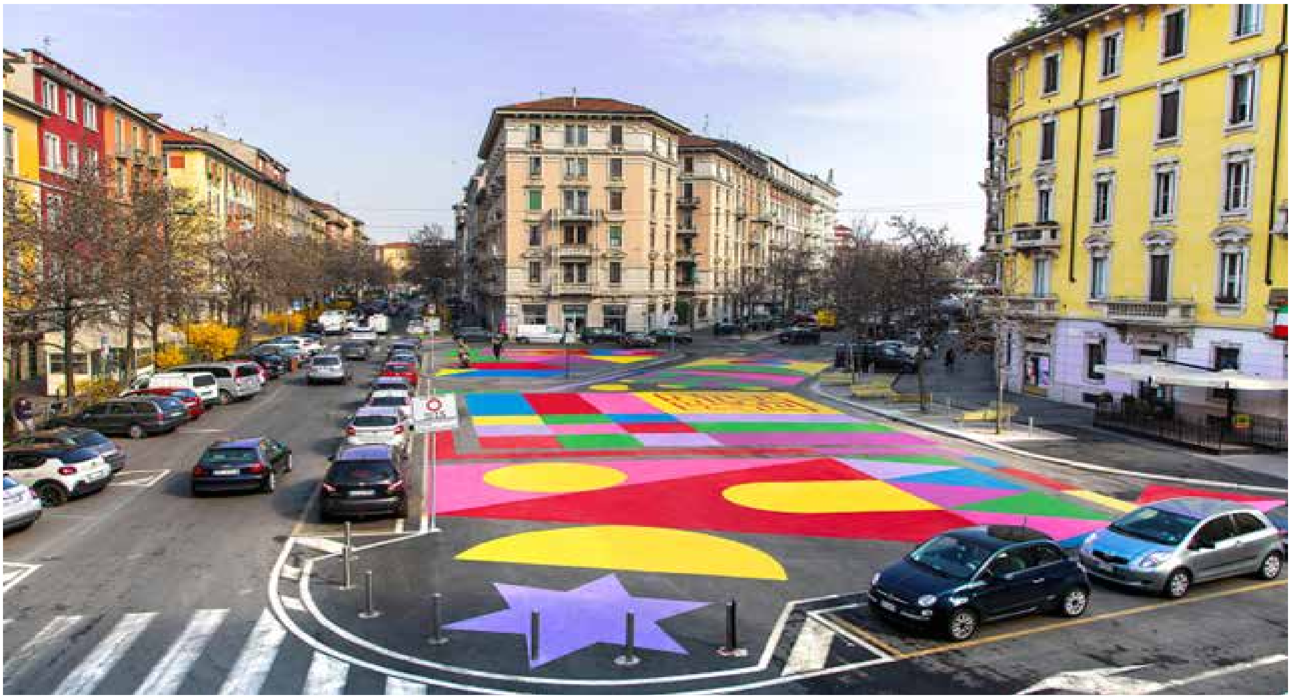

Figure 6. Piazza Tito Minniti, Milan (Italy) - *Piazze Aperte* Program (2021). Photo credits: Camilla Falsini / Jungle.

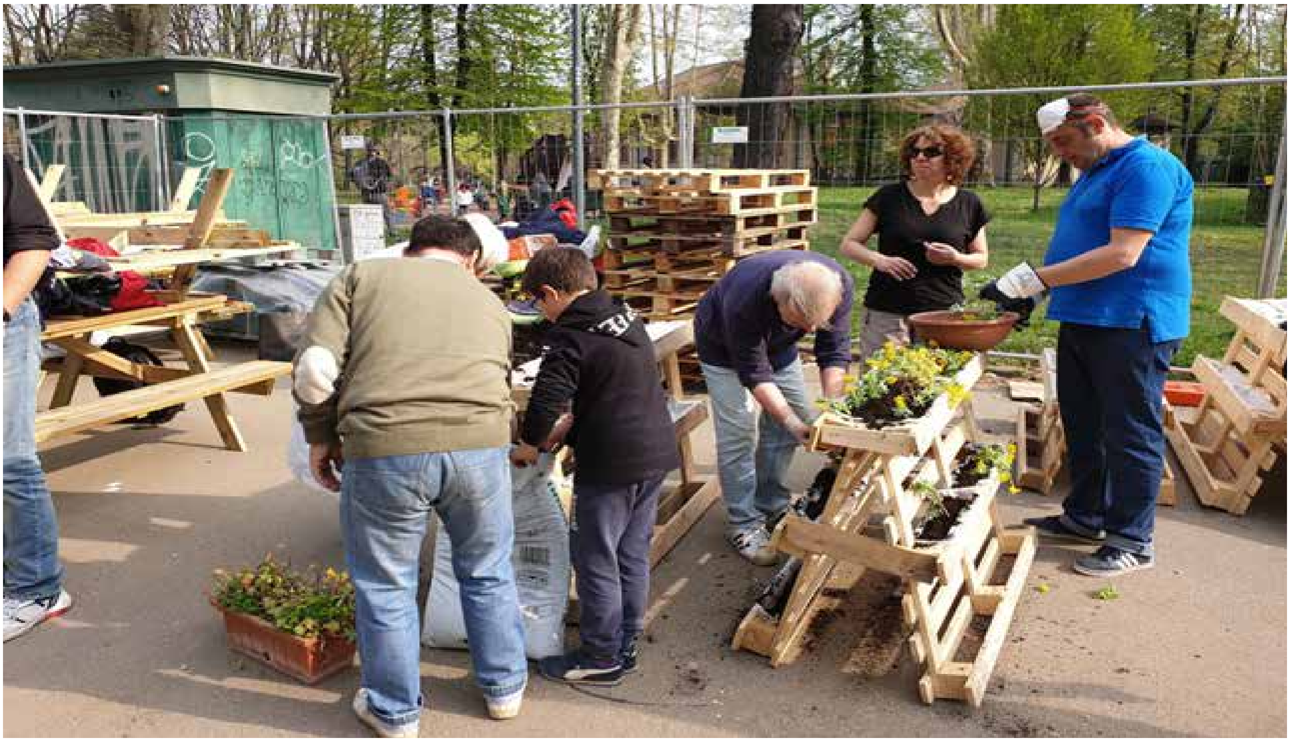

Figure 7. Parco Trotter, Milan (Italy) - *TrentaMi in Verde* Program (2019). Photo credits: Genitori AntiSmog Association / TréntaMI in Verde.

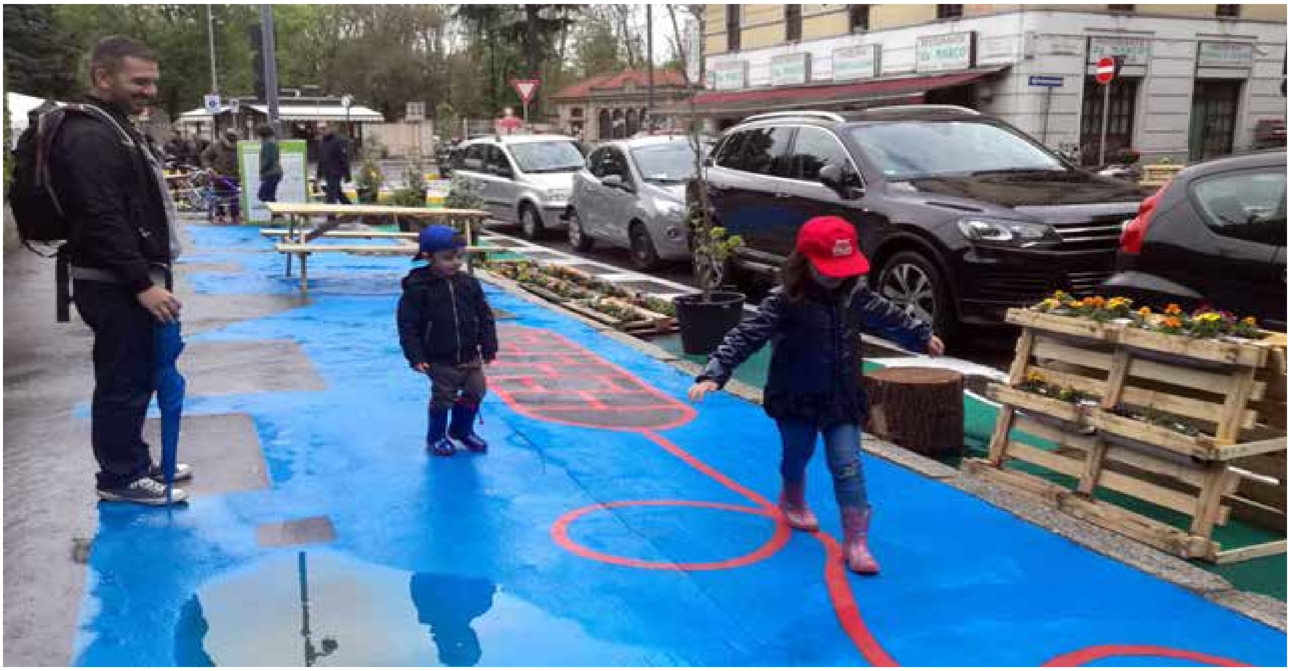

Figure 8. Via Rovereto, Milan (Italy) - *TrentaMi in Verde* Program (2019). Photo credits: Genitori AntiSmog Association / TréntaMI in VerdeTréntaMI in Verde.

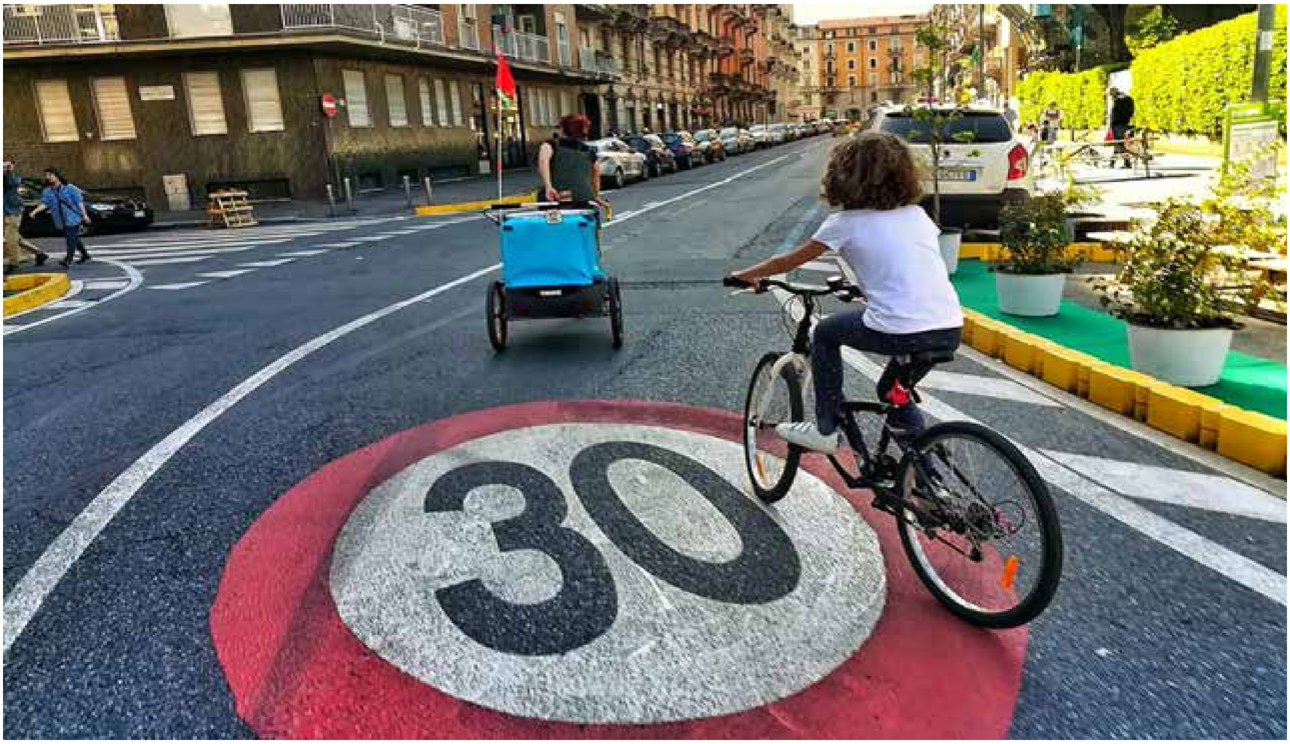

Figure 9. Via Rovereto, Milan (Italy) - *TrentaMi in Verde* Program (2019). Photo credits: Genitori AntiSmog Association / TréntaMI in Verde.

space, a shared space to live (Fig. 8). It transformed the area from an axis for vehicular traffic, to a space for inter-relations between a plurality of users (motorists, pedestrians, cyclists, residents...) and functions, and to transform the Parco Trotter exedra from an illegal car park to a real square, favouring liveability, coexistence and socialisation. The spaces were freed from cars and returned to the people, using colours as a tool for moderating speed and self-constructing the new street furniture, including new plants, games area and eating tables.

5. Learning from Tactical Urbanism Techniques for the Future Milan

The city of Milan embraced the interventions positively, as most of the earliest designs are now being turned into permanent pedestrian squares, and so have ultimately entered its urban topography. In this chapter, the authors want to present their own contribution to the experimentations in this socio-urban context: Bordin G. and Toso E. have been tutored by the professor Carvalho A. in the design of their master degree thesis, and by understanding the big impact of these case studies in the community's structure has inspired them to apply similar methodologies in their thesis design.

The picture in *Figure 10* depicts a mural art in Milan's neighbourhood Corvetto, that states *"Safe streets are made by the women who cross them"* (Andreoli & Muzzonigro 2021). It is relevant to include this statement because even though the thesis renovation project is located elsewhere in Milan, it shares with the Corvetto neighbourhood the same feeling of unsafety among users. Therefore, the re-design needs to address the issue of safety first.

The thesis project takes place in Via Emilio Gola in Milan, which has been defined as a case of '*suburbs*' in the centre: it is part of the central urban fabric, being located only two kilometres away from the Milan Cathedral, but it's totally unrelated to the context in which it's set in (Grecchi 2008). The visual and social contrast that characterised the neighbourhood is evident: the nearby Navigli area is enriched by elegant buildings, four-star hotels and renowned restaurants, while Via Emilio Gola emerges for a degraded, poorly maintained and untidy appearance. The press portrays it as a world parallel to the city, supporting the collective imagination of the Milanese population as being a place of degradation and danger, enhancing a shared sense of insecurity and distrust. This narrative seems to depict it only with negative connotations, while looking with more keen eyes, it is a place with a strong cultural identity, in which the lives of hundreds of people intertwine and confront each other (Fig. 11; Fig. 12). This creates a chaotic but fascinating effect, rich and full of experiences. (Agustoni 2003).

The thesis work presents an urban and architectural regeneration project of the street Via Emilio Gola (Fig. 13), and the social housing complex adjacent to it. Without getting too deep in the details of the project, that goes beyond the scope of this paper, part of the design strategy has been the imple-

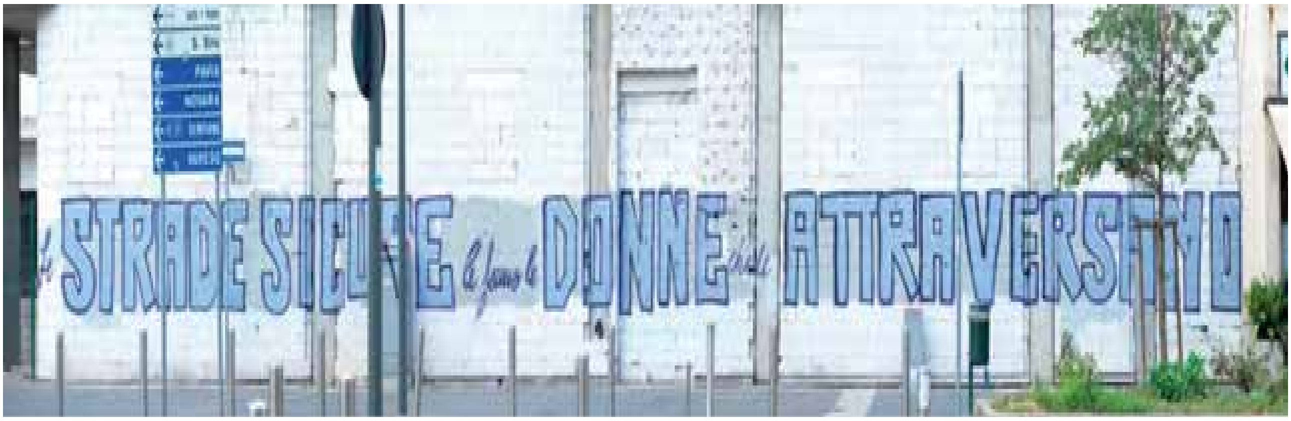

Figure 10. Street art in Corvetto, Milan (Italy), 2021. Photo credits: Azzurra Muzzonigro.

mentation of the tactical urbanism techniques to reconnect Via Gola with its urban surroundings, and to make it a safe and liveable place for everyone.

As stated, there is a strong connection between how much a place is lived and used by people and how safe it is, and the previously shown experiments in the city of Milan proves this. The picture in *Figure 13* shows the current appearance of Via Emilio Gola, while the subsequent image (Fig. 14) is a graphical representation intended to show the future scenario of a regenerated, lively and dynamic urban environment, according to the thesis project. The starting point of the regeneration is the design of an inclusive Shared Space (Hamilton-Baillie, 2014) in the street, where safety and comfort are provided by places to stay for a prolonged period of time - rather than being an emptied traffic artery - giving back to the community a sense of belonging and security. Therefore, cars are allowed in the street for most of the day, but more close-up interventions are implemented, such as the design of a discontinuous non-straight aisle, to slow down the car speed, with the addition of natural elements and urban furniture like planters with trees and vegetation and seating, creating a street that allows the fluid coexistence of cars and pedestrians. The addition of a continuous mirror in the lower part of the buildings' elevations frames the street, giving it a new appealing personality, while naturally discouraging criminal acts (Duval, Wicklund, 1971), in the attempt to eliminate the criticalities linked to crime and drug dealing.

Unlike the Tactical Urbanism interventions in Milan, the pavement in Via Gola is designed to be a long-lasting solution, built with a sustainably sourced recycled rubber surfacing, which is water permeable and provides a porous rubber pathway. The result is a safe and continuous walking path, with no differences in heights that go from facade to facade, accessible to all categories of users: from people with motion impairments to parents with strollers, to bikes (Fig. 15). The bright colours and playful shapes make the new pavement an inviting playground for kids as well (Global Designing Cities Initiative, 2019).

Ensuring and strengthening the active use of the public realm generates more pedestrian friendly and flexible public spaces, and makes buildings more attractive by night (Fig.16). This approach also encourages the process of the *'night time economy'*, which facilitates the development of activities during the night, like in a normal working day. In the project, Via Gola is conceptualised as a people-centred street, where there is no conceptual space for marginalisation, and every inhabitant can co-live, including parents, children and disabled people. So the area, traditionally considered problematic, would be transformed thanks to creative activism and tactical urbanism, to drive lasting social improvements in the city.

While recognizing the dysfunctionality of the current urban and social situation, it was clear the urgent need to rethink the neighbouring piazza (Fig.17). The main intervention con-

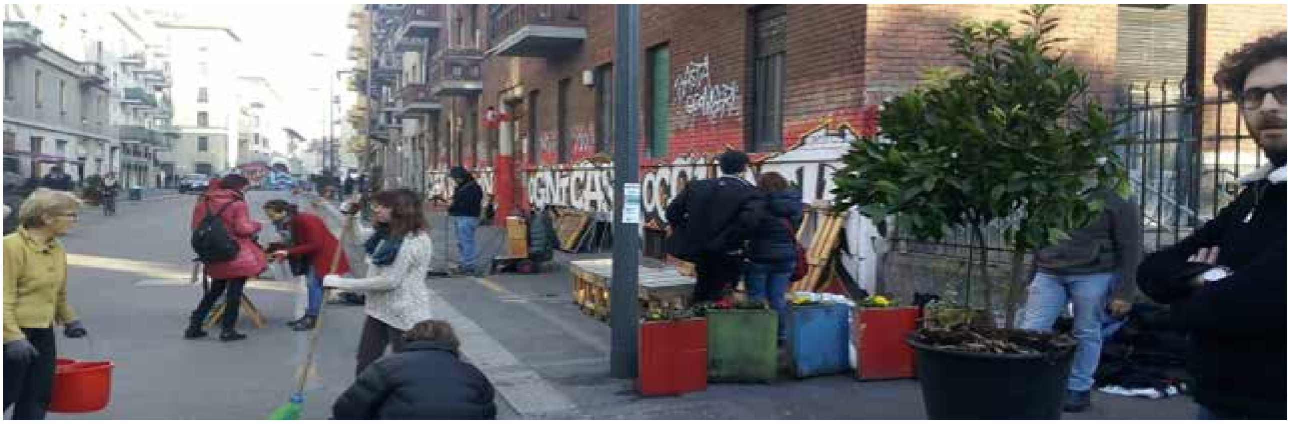

Figure 11. Inhabitants having a meeting in Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy), 2021. Photo credits: Luisa Marzani.

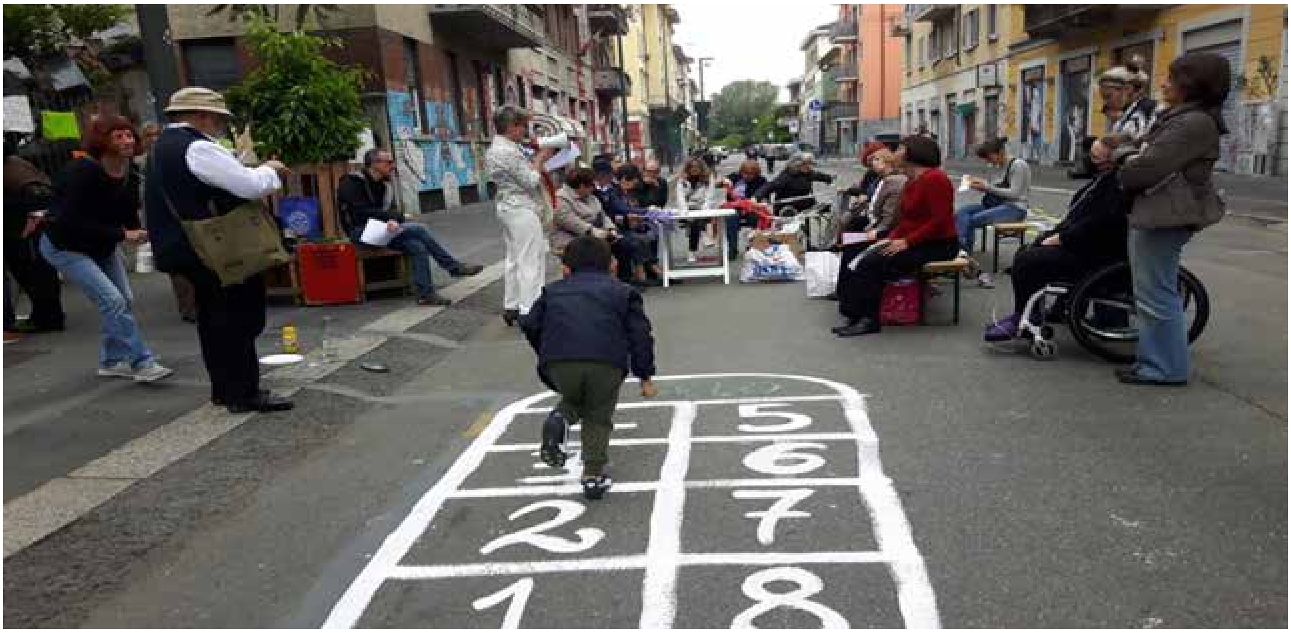

Figure 12. Local residents in Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy), 2021. It's clear the sense of community and the residents' attempt to conquer the street space for social interaction and community building. Photo credits: Luisa Marzani.

sists of the removal of the cars' domain, and giving the space back to the community (Hamilton-Baillie, 2014). Since people are more likely to linger in a high-quality environment, the overall appearance is thoughtfully enhanced with urban furniture such as lighting, seating, cycle racks and open-air activities tools. These choices would lead to the empowerment of a newly engaged population, that will be new key actors in the transformation of their neighbourhood.

6. Conclusion

It has been highlighted in multiple case studies that Tactical Urbanism methods can have a big social and urban impact, even in highly developed realities, like the city of Milan, in Italy. The experimental interventions of urban requalification put in place by citizens, associations and the municipality created new possibilities for the city: reviving busy public spaces, taking space away from the dominance of cars, creating new open-air meeting places for youths and increasing security for pedestrians and cyclists.

Additionally, case studies like the regeneration of the area outside Parco Trotter or the colourful Piazza Spoleto emphasise how Creative Activism is effective in transforming areas traditionally considered problematic, starting with short-term, community-based projects, that have the power to drive lasting improvements in the city. In fact, both these interventions have recently been made permanent, by paving the area or inserting durable street furniture, thus demonstrating their effectiveness and satisfaction among citizens.

The positive outcome of these projects can also inspire change in new areas of the city, as was the case with the design of the author's master thesis proposal, or in other cities as well. Thus, one is left with the question of which cities are in the near future going to join this stream of social and urban developments, and how municipalities, urban planners, architects and citizens will find a way to implement interventions that learn from the successful Tactical Urbanism methodologies and help each other respecting the intrinsic values of our cities and their communities, while operating on big-scale urban projects.

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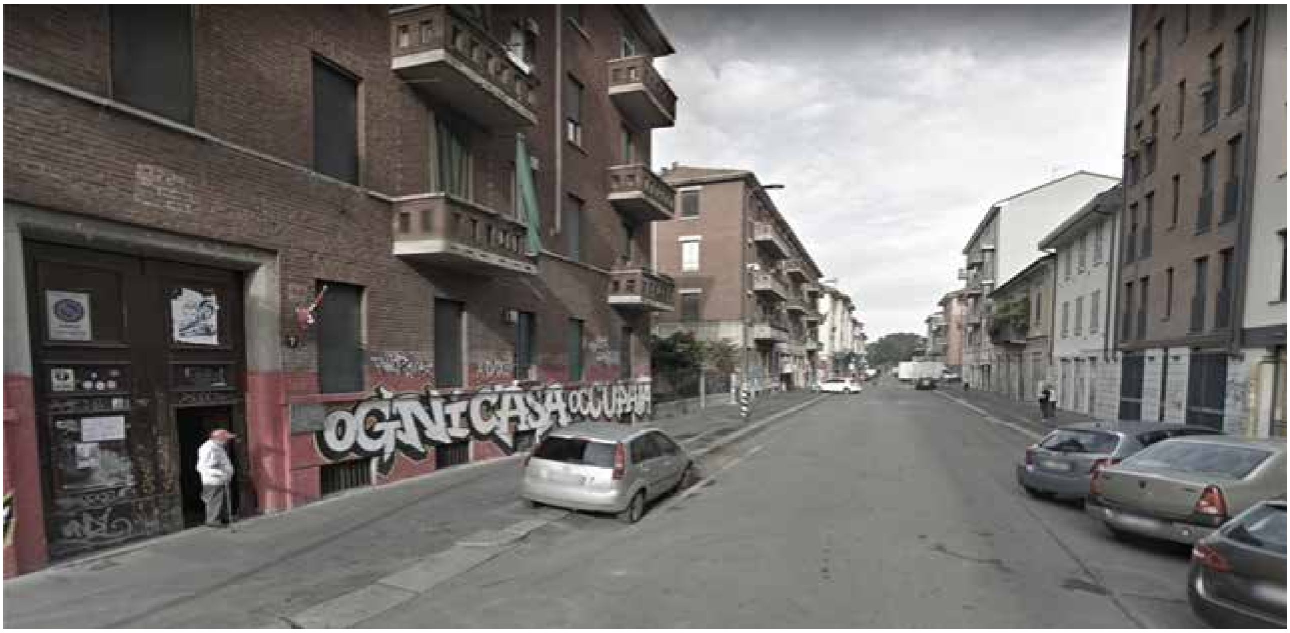

Figure 13. Current appearance of Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy): a desert, asphalted street, that causes feeling of uncomfort and unsafety while crossing it. Photo credits: Google Maps.

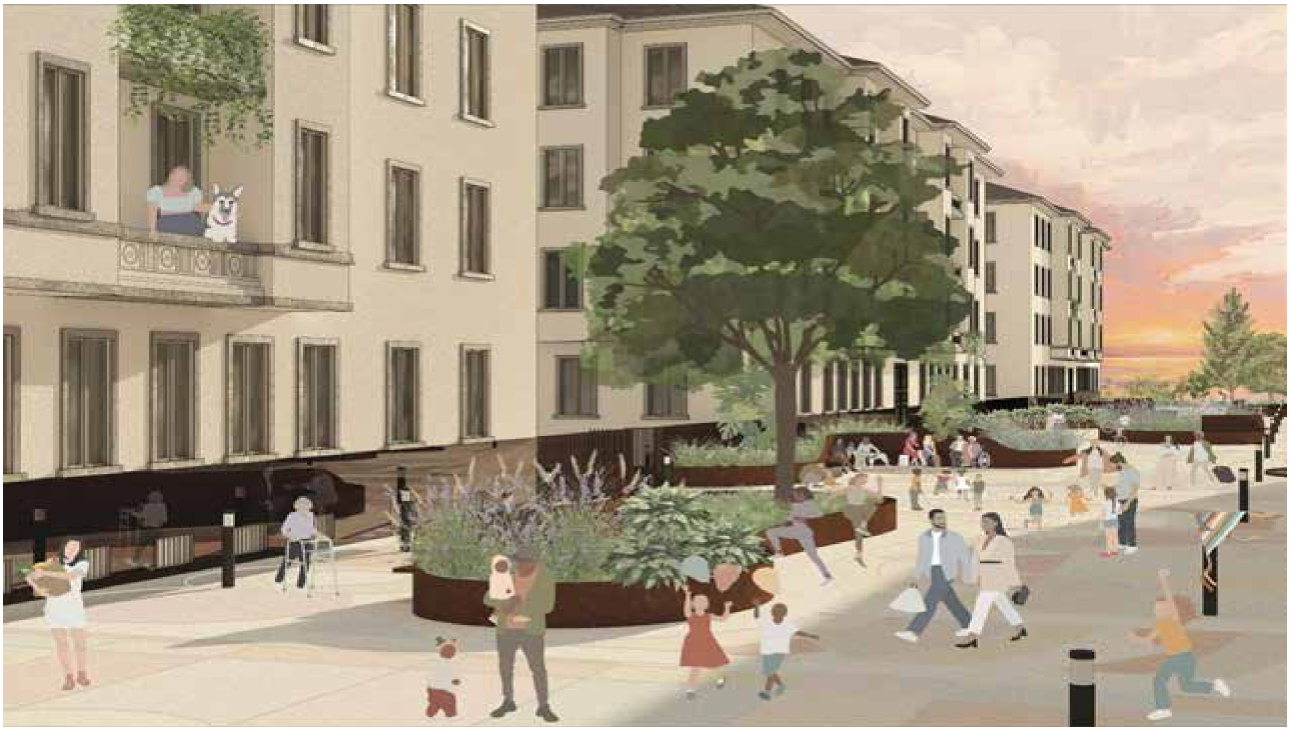

Figure 14. Graphical representation of the project proposal for Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy). Image credits: Giovanna Bordin, Elisabetta Toso, 2022.

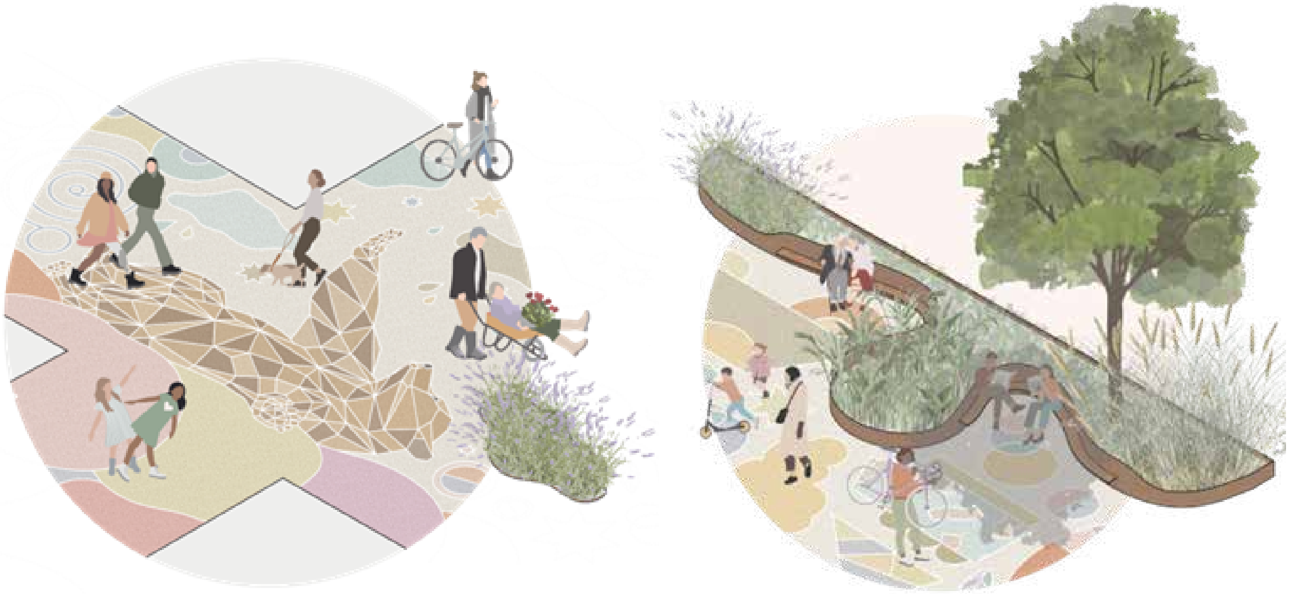

Figure 15. Axonometric views of the project proposal for Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy). Image credits: Giovanna Bordin, Elisabetta Toso, 2022.

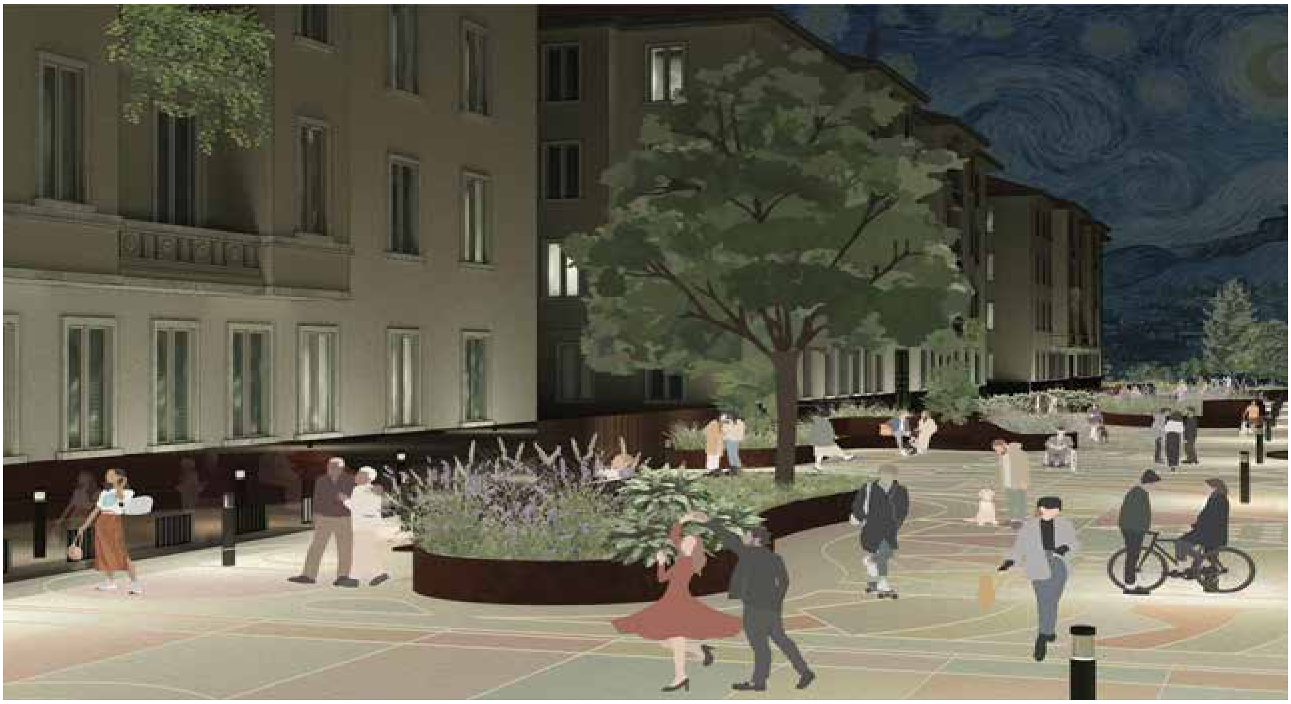

Figure 16. Graphical representation of the urban environment during the night in Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy). Image credits: Giovanna Bordin, Elisabetta Toso, 2022.

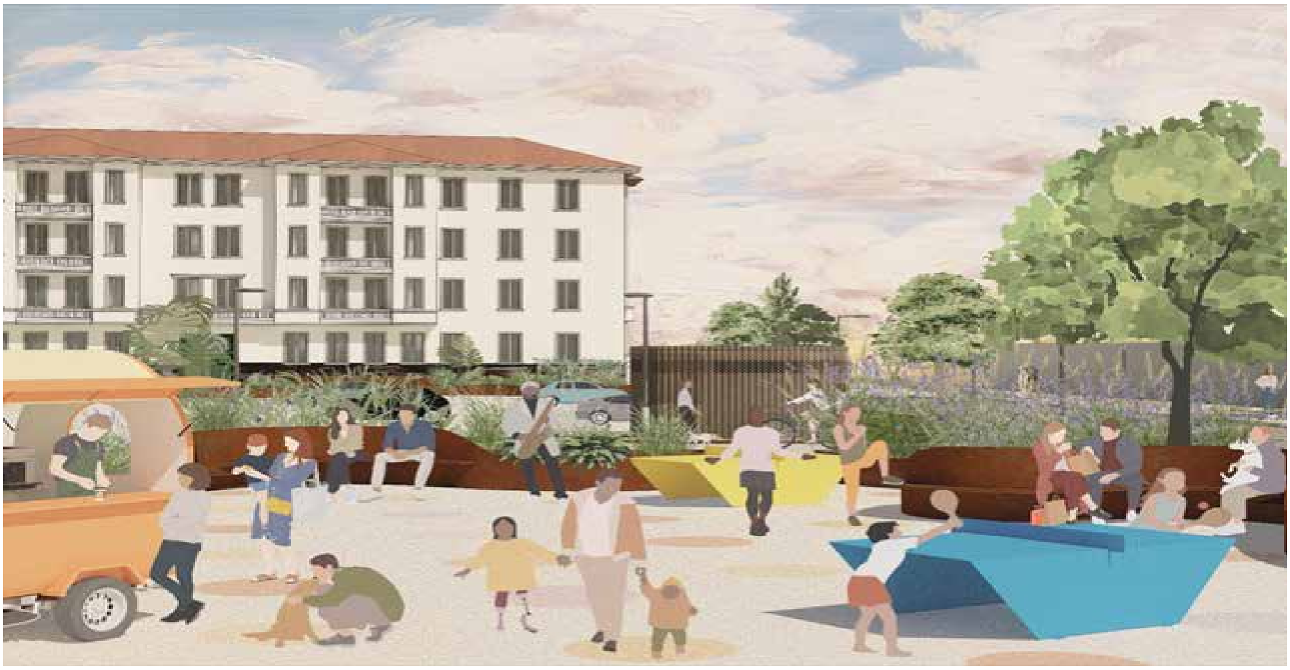

Figure 17. Graphical representation of the piazza adjacent to Via Emilio Gola, Milan (Italy). Image credits: Giovanna Bordin, Elisabetta Toso, 2022.

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The Pagoda in Flux: A Critical Visual History of San Francisco Chinatown

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1. Introduction

In *San Francisco – A Cultural and Literary History*, author Mick Sinclair (2004) claimed that San Francisco is “a rare part of the U.S. where eccentricity is more prized than conformity" (Sinclair, 2004, X). The pagodas, a late arrival to this culture of non-conformity, conform surprisingly well to the city as a dynamic whole. The American pagodas started in Chinatown, and the American Chinatown began in San Francisco. The flying eaves of a phone booth, the green restaurant tiles, the bell tower over an AT&T store, and the red overpaint of a new-year theme—all the disparate details extend beyond the pagoda as a format and point back to it as a form. Ubiquitous, volatile, and commercially available, the pagoda has acted as a constituent of an international city constantly shaped by Sino-Western contacts. The pagoda became the media of the city for community building for the Chinese diaspora.

The first section of this article places the pagoda back in the ocean of symbols and images—visual culture. This social observation accounts for the pagoda’s prevalence in popular culture and scrutinizes the pagoda as the product of different social processes and their theories. The second method is the art historical survey. Within the case study of the pagoda, and indeed many types of pagoda, the survey traces the origin and changes of the pagoda from India to China to America. Textual and visual analysis to discover meaning and context alternate in a rhythm to tell a coherent story of the pagoda across the two continents. Historical materials serve to support and challenge the ideas drawn from the first method and complement them in concrete ways.

This article demonstrates how migratory a form the pagoda has become throughout history. In retrospect, the pagoda originated in India as a Buddhist burial mound, then it was imported through missionaries to China proper and adapted formally and ideologically for the Sinicization of Buddhism in China, thus rendering it a powerful and volatile vehicle for channeling new ideas and affecting social changes. Under its layered skin, the immigrants from China have imbued the architecture with the shifting potentiality of negotiating economic interests, racial antagonisms, political freedom, and cultural autonomy by appropriating and, later, dis-appropriating a highly fluid identity of the pagoda and the community it overlooks in the gusty winds of San Francisco.

2. The Pagoda as the Ubiquitous Form in the Context of San Francisco

There is no official document about the exact number of pagodas in San Francisco for several reasons, but a Google search with “pagoda” would easily generate over 1,500 results showing pagoda-like structures in the Bay Area. Although the 1906 earthquake demolished most of the archives and material evidence of Old Chinatown, we could still feel its ubiquitous presence in the cityscape of San Francisco by taking a trolly tour from Market Street. However, it is imperative to point out that the great number of pagodas does not generate a monolithic presence of one form, one community, or one culture.

Two prominent examples of this heterogeneity are Sing Fat (Figure 1) and Sing Chong (Figure 2). Sing Chong was built in 1907 and Sing Fat in 1908 (the two brands were established and built in the 1850s and 1870s, but they were rebuilt as Orientalist architectures only after 1906). They served as “Oriental” art stores. In the design of the earliest pagodas,

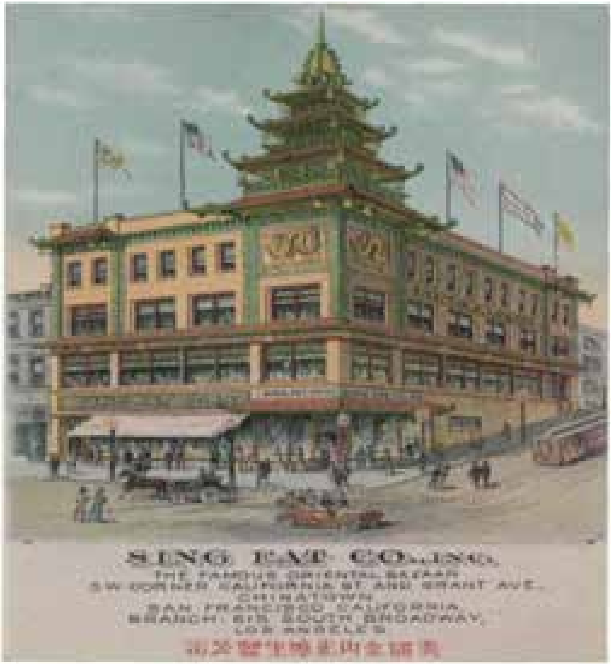
SING FAT CO., INC.
SAN FRANCISCO CALIFORNIA
LOS ANGELES

Figure 1. An early illustration of the Sing Fat Building/pagoda. American Antiquarian Society. Source: https://www.teachushistory.org/nineteenth-century-immigration/resources/sing-fat-company.

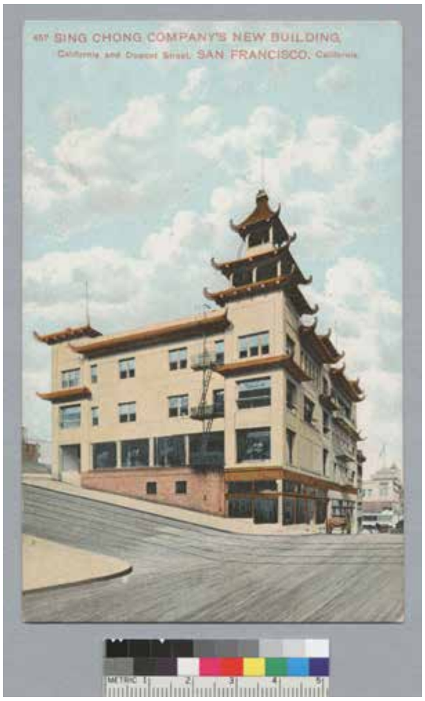
SING CHONG COMPANY'S NEW BUILDING
California and Dupont Street, SAN FRANCISCO, California

Figure 2. An early illustration of the Sing Chong Building/pagoda. American Antiquarian Society. Source: https://oac.cdlib.org/ark:/13030/hb900006cd/?brand=oac4.

the emphases on function and commerce were clear, while the other parts of the story remain ambiguous. Some would also speculate that the design of Sing Chong and Sing Fat was geomantic, judging from its peculiar location at the street junction. Nevertheless, more obvious and important is the influence of these pagodas. As more similar architectures sprouted, the style, “San Francisco Chinese,” also started to grow in influence and popularity in America, leading to its ubiquitous presence today.

In *The History of Forgetting*, author Norman Klein (1997) adopts the term *Social Imaginary*, and he explains this concept in one phrase: “A collective memory of an event or place that never occurred but is built anyway" (Klein, 1997, 33). If the early pagodas were built by Chinese merchants and white American architects, their forms must have been drawn from the collective memory of these two distinct groups of immigrants and settlers but is their memory reliable or imaginary? With more than 1000 pagodas standing in the Qing-dynasty Canton, it is highly possible that the merchants brought with them the *imago* of a pagoda, what scholars define as “an idealized image” from a particular event, and again, in *The History of Forgetting*, Klein (1997) explains that “the *imagos* are preserved inside a mental cameo frame as fiction itself” (Ibid.). This statement highlights the volatile nature of the *imago*, which moves as the context (frame) moves, thus making the pagoda project a social imaginary. This connection resonates strongly with the actual physical journeys the merchants undertook and commissioned a fiction based on their *imago*-s of Chinese pagodas.

However, the Chinatown pagoda is more than the fragmentary imagination of some Chinese expats because it was also imagined, even more effectively, by Ross & Burgren, the American architects. It is inevitably also shaped by their Orientalist imaginations. In *Orientalism*, Edward Said (1978) highlights identity, and according to his conception of Orientalist identity: “human identity is not only natural and stable, but constructed, and occasionally even invented outright” (Said, 1978, 331). Is the pagoda merely a social imaginary created from an invented identity? Furthermore, it would be a meaningless trope to assume that the Chinese merchants' imagination of their homeland pagoda will be more accurate and "authentic" than the architects' without exploring the grounds and ways for the Orient to make their own history that is "authentic" and "inalienable," which are questionable terms themselves.

3. Methodology and Literary Review

In studying the pagoda, some scholarship on Chinatown turns to the concept of Skeuomorphism, which derives from design language and describes “interface objects that mimic their real-world counterparts in how they appear and how the user interacts with them” (“Skeuomorphism,” n.d.). This framing brings the design concepts of prototype and material into our discussion. Specifically, we ponder: How is the Chinatown pagoda a Skeuomorph? What is the Skeuomorph’s relation to the previous question of authenticity? According to *Skeu the Evolution: Skeuomorphs, Style, and the Material of Tangible Interactions*, Gross et al. (2014) regard “Skeuomorph” as “an ornament of design on an object copied from a form of the object when made from another material or by other techniques" (Gross et al., 2014, 54). However, what if the ornament and the allusion to another material are crucial to the being of the new product? After all, this inquiry can still return to the relationship between functionality and style, but not empirical authenticity.

As a solution, the article also develops a comprehensive formulation of Skeuomorphs: “Skeuomorphs are evolutionary, but their use may not be entirely unselfconscious” (Ibid., 54). Based on this new formulation referred to as "the self-conscious evolution," the Chinatown pagoda involves both unconsciousness “driven by an attempt at exact replication” and self-consciousness driven by “a desire for renovation” (Ibid., 54). For example, the Ross & Burgren architects might have attempted to make a precise replica of Chinese “originals,” but this “failed” attempt inevitably became a renovation in the new context. This situation also implies the intertwined relationship between style and function (allusion to wood material and Chinese culture) and the premise that this relationship is socially formed and changeable.

This ironic nature of Skeuomorph inspires us to “relate function and form in a way that brackets off casual needs”: the concrete or steel materials of the early American pagodas did not require the use of this Indo-Chinese architectural form, but the merchants and architects still decided to make a pagoda that might require extra knowledge and efforts (Ibid., 55). Another unique quality of Skeuomorph is that it also reveals the temporal-spatial connection between different forms and materials to form a genealogy. However, a transition from one to another is not only formal but also a social question that conditions the development of this genealogy.

The Trademark Pagoda Tower (Sing Chong) on Grant Avenue emphatically shows how a trademark functions in modern culture. The pagoda shows, at the most visible place of its front wall, an intricate trademark, a symmetric symbol consisting of two opposite-standing dragons flanking a circle above an octagonal Tai-Chi diagram of the universe, making the entire pagoda a trademark, perching on the commodity. However, it may be one element away from a commodity: history. A commodity is not considered or valued for its history often deemed as an inalienable gift. Although we tend to understand history as a gift, it can also acquire commodity identity and value, and reversely, the history of the commodity is not meaninglessly about fetishizing only but about exchange and movement. To further understand how the pagoda sits in this spectrum, we can adopt the following two frameworks.
The first framework, "commodity history," encourages us to treat the pagoda as a commodity and flesh out its history. In *A Trail of Precious Goods: Colonial Latin American Commodity History*, Dr. Joan Bristol (2013) argues that tracking its history of production and consumption can be an effective strategy in studying the formation and deconstruction of socioeconomic systems "through the lens of goods" (Bristol, 2013, 949). One system is nationalism. Correspondingly, the cultural composition of the Chinatown pagoda exemplifies the Chinese American identity in the making.

However, history should also reflect on itself. In *Critical Anthropology*, Michael Taussig (2012) reflects on the phenomenon and danger of commodifying history in the previous scholarship, thus introducing another framework: history as commodity (Taussig, 2012, 227). Taussig's critique responds to the process of "commodification." He argues that commodification has developed to such a degree that even the inalienable aspect of history has taken on some qualities of a commodity: it can be exchanged for monetary value. This development also speaks to the Marxist idea of commodity fetishism: the idea that "inanimate things (commodities) have human powers able to govern the activity of human beings" ("Marxism and Alienation," n.d.; Marx, 1992 [1844]). This fetish enabled the pagoda, as a social imaginary, to be built into reality for American consumers. While the discussion here emphasizes the differences between commodity and history, it also reveals how the two converge in San Francisco Chinatown. In this way, the transnational history of the pagoda would come in as helpful in determining other factors not purely speculative but factual.

4. Findings and Discussion

As previously emphasized in the text, the pagoda is a multivalent vehicle for community representation, and its role in history and theory should be both examined. The author focuses on both the historical journey the pagoda undertook before its diaspora into America and the modern transformations it witnessed as a result of this diaspora based upon the qualities of the Chinese original. Its repercussions in Chinese American visual culture will also be investigated in relation to this background emerging from our textual and visual analysis.

4.1. The First Pagoda

The origin of the pagoda can be traced back to the stupa (3rd century BCE) in India. The stupa, "a dome-shaped monument," was used as a ritualistic monument to "house sacred relics and writings" ("Stupa," 2022). Although many scholars believe that the Chinese pagoda was not a form native to China proper, the popularization of this form, starting from 2-300 AC, was indebted to a series of local factors that were entrenched in pre-Buddhist ideologies and traditions. Many elements of the stupa are not strange to China. Based on Buddhism, Ching (2011) believes that "a stupa is a cosmological diagram linking the body of the Buddha to the universe" (Ching et al., 2011, 177). The balustrades are often carved with "reliefs and medallions depicting scenes and events of Buddhist significance," and the processes of reincarnation and nirvana, a Buddhist afterlife (Ibid.). The belief in an afterlife and cosmological concerns also existed in Chinese tombs, reflecting pre-Buddhist cosmology and values.

One prominent example is Lady Dai's Tomb. The archaeological finds of Han tomb no. 1 at Mawangdui in Changsha are highly relevant to our discussion. Like the stupa, Wu Hung (1992) believes that Lady Dai's Tomb defines a cosmological world consisting of different realms and layers that a deceased person would go to (Wu, 1992, 112). Not coincidentally, Mount Kunlun became an important and sometimes the anchoring symbolism among these realms. Before Buddhism, Kunlun was broadly regarded as a destination for the afterlife and where Taoist immortals reside. It also represents the "West End" of the pre-Buddhist cosmology in China, wherein the universe was understood as a round celestial canopy covering a square-shaped chess board.

In Buddhism, cosmology appears different, and its interpretations were translated into variegated forms of stupas in India. The vertical (or cakrav��a; Devanagari) cosmology arranges the worlds in a vertical pattern, with different planes at multiple heights. Although this structure deviated from the pre-Buddhist Chinese cosmology, the stupa reminded one of Mount Kunlun, and the early Buddhist art in China showed a localized interpretation of the stupa and its symbolism. Eventually, the pagoda became the twofold representation of Mount Kunlun and Mount Sumeru in Chinese Buddhism.

4.2. The Symbolization of a Foreign Form

Qiyun Pagoda, the first historically recorded pagoda in China built in 68AD, demonstrates the start of symbolization and how this symbolization developed. According to the *Supernatural Stories of Qinyun Pagoda in White Horse Temple*, a 12th-century document, Emperor Ming of the Eastern Han dynasty visited White Horse Temple in 69AD, and the Indian monks in residence inquired him about a protruding mound southeast of the temple. The Emperor recalled a supernatural story about this mound, and the monks instantly recognized the mound to be one of the nineteen sites where King Asoka placed the Buddha's relics. Xiao and Ren (2014) write that, pleased by this connection, the Emperor decreed the architects to build an Indian-style pagoda on the mound and named this nine-story (about 106 meters) building Qiyun Pagoda, meaning "cloud is the limit," describing its height (Xiao & Ren, 2014, 11).

Qiyun Pagoda reflects the early Chinese interest in Buddhism. According to Wu Hung (1986) in *Buddhist Elements in Early Chinese Art*, this fandom seemed to be primarily "inspired by the appeal of Buddha as a foreign deity" (Wu, 1986, 264). Although the pagoda would stand as the representation of the Buddha's body, it could also appear as the body of domestic and foreign deities alike. In this context, the pagoda readily became the object of symbolization and a freeway of welcoming Buddhism into native ideologies and practices. As an architectural novelty, the pagoda became an indispensable element in the growing edifice of Buddhist worship in China, and later it was incorporated into Taoism and other native practices. However, the pagoda was still heavily associated with the elite class and religious connotations during this time. Attracting emperors and aristocrats, the Chinese pagoda became the main object for a series of symbolizations, foreshadowing its de-symbolization after 1000AD, which built the foundation for its overseas journey to repeat this process.

4.3. The De-symbolization of the Chinese Pagoda

After the Tang dynasty, the pagoda witnessed a distinct process of de-symbolization, a process of shedding old symbolism and taking on the new. In the *Impact of Buddhism on Chinese Material Culture*, John Kieschnick (2003) explains the symbolism in Chinese Buddhism by pointing out that the development of symbolism is defined by "the tendency toward symbolic drift," a result of "the tenuous nature of the relationship between a given object and its symbolism" (Kieschnick, 2003, 154). Accordingly, it was hardly surprising to see the rapid de-symbolization of the pagoda as a "symbolic drift" (Ibid.). However, the de-symbolization of the pagoda is not the decay of the object's ability to act as a symbol but the obverse. After the Tang Dynasty, the pagoda had already broken away from Buddhist symbolism and acquired new meanings, a result of the devastating warfare among the military elites and the maturing Imperial Examination to have produced more officials and intellectuals from modest backgrounds.

Sinicization seems to define the pagoda's development as de-symbolized from a Buddhist stupa and acquiring the new status as a folk space. Alternatively, Dr. Mircea Eliade (1958) proposed that the de-symbolization might also be evaluated through a different model, that of "degeneration" (Eliade, 1958). Kieschnick (2003) applies this model to studying Buddhist symbolism and explains that "what begins as a sophisticated attempt to comprehend ineffable sacred truth through the mediation of symbols inevitably undergoes degradation as lesser minds reinterpret symbols in their day-to-day lives" (Kieschnick, 2003, 155). Accordingly, this drifting process can be further regarded as a decay in quality and originality.
Eliade's model enables us to see the "rationalization" in the possible early interpretation of the pagoda as an embodiment of Mount Kunlun and Buddha as a foreign deity. However, we would rather call this process "de-symbolization" instead of "degradation" or "infantilization" because the later architects and civilian sponsors gave the symbolism of the pagoda more depth and breadth in terms of how and why it should be built. Quality should not simplistically equate to originality. These later pagodas speak to a broader spectrum of interests and people.

The Old Chinatown and its early pagodas can be traced back to an artistic convention originating in Canton, China, the Lingnan Style. A detailed look into this connection might also help us understand the diasporic character of the pagoda even before its physical arrival in America. Within 19th-century China, then during the Qing dynasty, the Canton area epitomized the Sino-Western tension, which was further intensified after the Treaty of Nanking in 1842 and the consequent ceding of Hong Kong to Great Britain. Canton certainly became the first beneficiary and victim of this history. It is hardly coincidental that the early Chinatown architecture exhibited striking elements of the Lingnan Style, a dominant style to summarize Cantonese architecture before the 20th century.

In the book *Old Chinatown*, written by Arnold Genthe (1913), the Victorian shopfronts and restaurants, then predominantly wood and brick structures, started to be transformed by Cantonese elements (Genthe, 1913). Figure 3, a photograph from Genthe's book, shows a Cantonese-style balcony from the Street of Painted Balconies. Additionally, the other name of "Chinatown," "Ton Yan Gai," a name more often used by the immigrants themselves, meaning "the Street of Tang People," stems from the Cantonese history of Sinicization, which reminds one of what happened to the pagoda. It was a unique process through which the Austronesian indigenous peoples of Canton were absorbed into Chinese culture by south-bound immigration, cultural assimilation, and political expansion in the Tang Dynasty.

The Lingnan style is a result of this Sinicization. Tang Xiaoxiang (2011), an architecture scholar, also defines Cantonese architecture as a form born from the intimate contact between Western and Chinese forces through the three stages of historical processes: self-adaption, localized choice, and integration and renovation (Tang, 2011). In this process, Cantonese architecture evolved to have the following artistic aspects, summarized by Xianqiong Liao and Feifeng Zhong (2019): decorative art, decorative color, and technical craft, which were highly influenced by "the characteristics of Lingnan traditional cultural elements, including the emphasis on commerce, openness, compatibility, pluralism, innovation, pragmatism, hedonism and intuition (less abstract concepts and reason, more sensibility, interest, plot, image novelty, and ordinary citizen sentiment)" (Liao & Zhong, 2019, 72). The density and contrast of colors are also highlights of Cantonese architecture, which were brought into the design of Chinatown pagodas for climatic and auspicious reasons.

4.4. The Old Chinatown

Old Chinatown, often periodized between the 1850s to 1906, developed the early conditions for the later pagoda-like architectures to emerge. From 1852 to 1879, the Chinese population in California grew significantly from 22,000 to 71,000 (Sinclair, 2004, 150). With the incoming immigrants, Phillip Choy (2012) points out that "hundreds of imported prefabricated wooden houses were added to the City's housing inventory" to satisfy the increasing need of the burgeoning population (Choy, 2012, 30). A New York journalist, Bayard Taylor, wrote that "Chinese carpenters

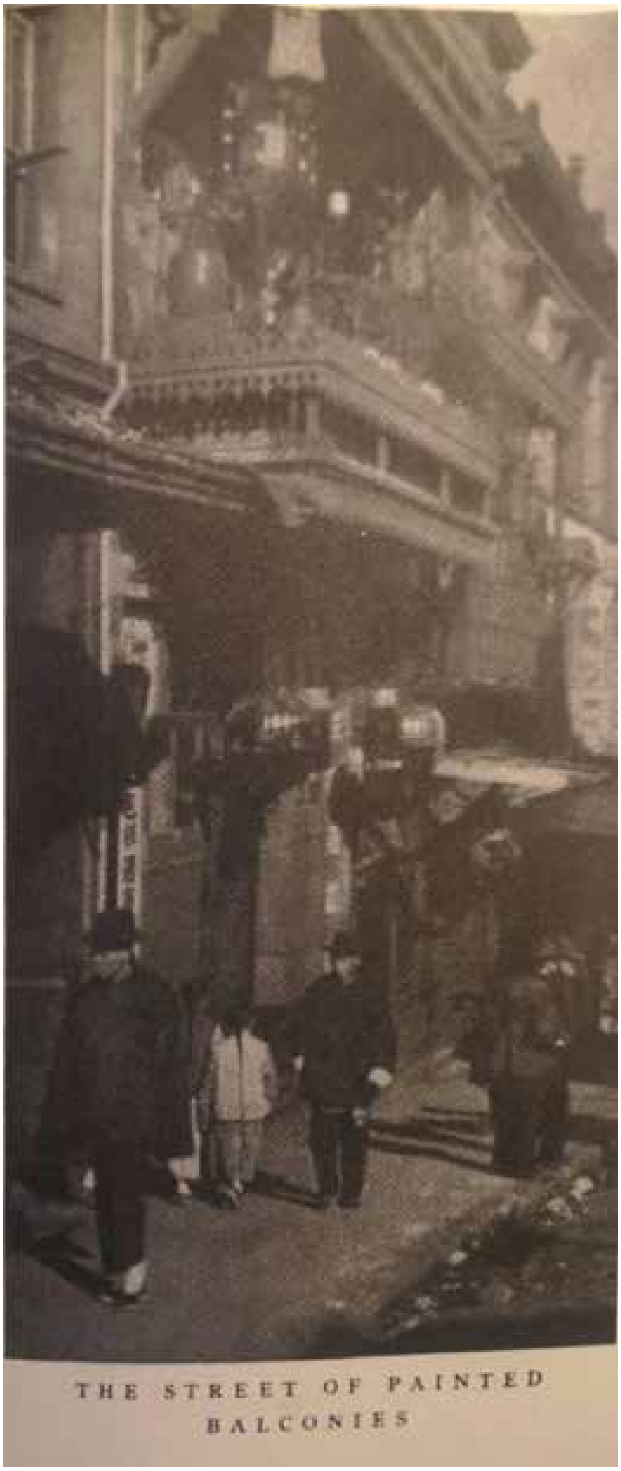

Figure 3. A Photo of A 19th-century Photo of the Street of Painted Balconies from Arnold Genthe's Book *Old Chinatown.* Genthe, A. (1913), *The Street of Painted Balconies* [Painting]. Private Collection. Source: Genthe, A. (1913). *Old Chinatown* (pp.47). Mitchell Kennerley.

put up at least seventy-five houses imported from Canton" (Ibid.). However, the expansion of the neighborhood was met with hostility, a result of racial politics. In such tension, the Tonk Tong Opera Company erected their own imported theater, the Mandarin Theater, and this pagoda-like "novelty" soon became a must-see for tourists to San Francisco in the 19th century (Ibid., 151). Unlike Sing Chong and Sing Fat, the theater is prefabricated and imported in its entirety.

As the Chinese started to congregate in the city center and near today's Financial District, they shifted from importing materials and lodgings to renovating and recycling the local resources. At this stage of development, the pagodas were still rarities incomparable to the dazzling presence of "painted balconies," which can be found in almost any Chinese household, presenting a festive spectacle. These visual elements can be regarded as a continuum of Lingnan architecture later incorporated into the pagodas. For example, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the combination of yellow and green is a dominant feature in Cantonese temples and courtyards. Another spotlight is the intricate rendering of the surface. The pictorial patterns for carvings and paint often follow the undulation of the building and form a unique dialogue with the structure itself, a Lingnan-influenced feature shared by the Chinatown pagodas.

4.5. From Duality to Abstraction

In Anthony W. Lee's seminal book about San Francisco Chinatown, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco*, Dr. Lee (2001) observes that many texts and images about the matter cannot escape from being "caught between two modes of apprehension" (Lee, 2001, 62). According to Lee, "Chinatown is both horrid and pleasing, appallingly dirty and strikingly colorful, ridden with social vice and packed with aesthetic virtue" (Ibid.). Many accounts can exemplify this duality. They include the so-called "Chinatown images," a product and instrument of larger sociopolitical agendas, and rendered Chinatown a "contested terrain," according to K. Scott Wong (1995), torn apart by two extreme feelings (Wong, 1995, 3) of pleasure and horror.

The new pagoda would serve as a creative and functional solution to resolve the duality of Old Chinatown by introducing abstraction. The most significant difference between the old ethnic slum and the new pagoda complex lies in the degree of abstraction. Compared to the overwhelming disunited details jutting out from Arnold's book, Sing Chong looks like a clean abstracted painting exorcised of any specters of duality. There is no duality here: the "horrid" and "pleasing," and even the picturesque was further flattened. This process of abstraction continued in the following decades. The changes in mapping San Francisco also mirrored this shift in the pagoda (and Chinatown residents) to become increasingly abstract and iconized, if not an intentional effort in cartography.

This process also teases out the questions around "abstraction." By abstracting both architectural and human forms, this "difference" is flattened and minimized, thus challenging the binary construction of "us" versus "them" and making impossible the colonialist narrative based on alterity. However, the pagodas can be read as decorative as well. At least Sing Chong and Sing Fat, with their schematic colors and Orientalist motifs, seem to fall into Greenburg's (2017) critique on decorative art (Greenburg, 2017, 24), but these architectures were never built initially to be appreciated in galleries or palaces. Afterall, the pagoda came to be the intersection of art and craft, thus here breaking down, according to Elissa Auther (2004), the artificial divisions of gender, race, and sexuality (Auther, 2004, 362), which divide them.

Indeed, the pagoda has adequately captured the curiosity of the readers and left some dramatic effect. However, it is still questionable that this form remains superficial without transcending the "decorative" by breaking out of a "hallucinated uniformity," like a Jackson Pollock painting by dramatizing the surface while expressing "pure" humanity (Ibid.), but the humanity of whom? To further investigate this, we would have to see through the abstract surface of the pagoda and examine its engagement with artists and the community.

5. Concluding Remarks

The pagoda in Chinatown is contemporary visual culture par excellence. If the pagoda is a ubiquitous form, its ubiquity is not to be counted but felt out. If it is a social imaginary, it

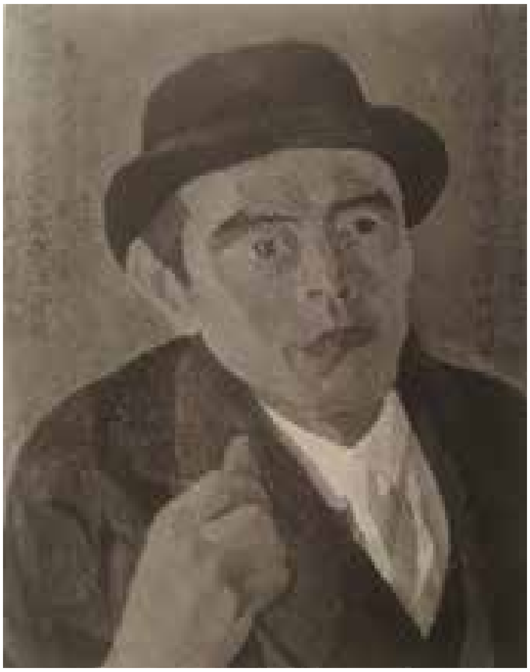

Figure 5. Yun, G. (1928). *Chinese Man in Hat* [painting]. Collection of Li-lan. Anthony W. Lee, Source: Lee, A. W. (2001). Picturesque Chinatown." In *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* (pp. 231, 5.14). University of California Press.

was built from an imaginary existence of something, but the Chinatown pagoda has existed for so long that it became the basis for new imaginations. It even stops straddling between commodity and history because the two are increasingly converging in our time. The pagoda is about ownership, the right to own access to Buddhism, to a foreign culture, to history, to economic success, or to appropriation and dis-appropriation. If we return to the question of "abstraction," we often neglect a critical aspect of how abstraction happens: the power of producing and mediating abstraction.

It was not only the Western gaze that got to decide what and how to abstract but also the “objects” of this gaze. Yun Gee was the first known Chinese American artist who was born in Chinatown, lived extensively in the place, and wherein set up his studio and painted his neighborhood as an insider. *Chinese Man in Hat* (Figure 4) is a portrait of a Gee's Club member. On both sides of the central figure are Chinese verses. The first line on the left reads: "I am thinking, thinking of me, I am thinking of me." The first line on the right reads: "Who creates, creates whom, who creates whom" (Lee, 2001, 231). The lines also remind one of the inscribed poems on the prison walls by the Chinese immigrants from Angel Island, an internment camp of Chinese immigrants during the Exclusion period. This abstract portrait suggests Gee's growing sense of himself in Chinatown and of his community in seclusion (Ibid., 235). In the Cubist-inspired brushwork of the picture, we see certain deviance in the abstraction of the figure—the abstraction starts to speak for itself. Gee’s paintings created a fissure in the Orientalist abstraction of Chinatown and set the subject-object relationship in tension for critical reflections. This process of abstraction was imbued with a strong sense of identity and subjectivity, unseen in the earlier abstractions. As the pagoda was increasingly encoded into the Chinese American identity through abstraction, or simply an abstract yet strong presence, this identity also started to grow out of the architecture, just as the man in the portrait speaks beyond the frame.

Chinatown is built out of necessity, but it revolves around performativity and ownership, just as in the history of the transnational pagoda. Today's Chinatown still acts as an effective media of the City, where the pagoda constantly produces and reproduces the old and new symbolism. However, the migratory journey of the pagoda is also strong evidence of the great possibilities within the entanglement of cultures and desires in every diasporic community. In the age of Metaverse and Non-fungible tokens, we cannot feel more anxious about our ownership of history and culture. Yet, I believe that by allowing ourselves to connect the disparate points of the past, we will begin to grasp the possibilities of the future. We shall never become strangers to ourselves, and instead, we should become the residents of the pagoda and look from there.

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Making Urban Commons: The Art Project of "Everyone's East Lake"

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1. Introduction

The urban commons is a public resource that citizens collectively manage and enjoy, but it is also a collective political experience beyond the state and the market (Huron, 2017). Thus, the urban commons is not just a thing, but a particular social relation and the struggle towards the urban commons is also an ongoing social practice that makes alternative relations (Harvey, 2012; Caffentzis and Federici, 2013; Tan, 2018). It is worth noting that the digital commons are emerging with the development of Internet technologies (Stalder, 2010). People in the digital world can access data, information, and knowledge at a lower cost and are more likely to produce based on the motivation of communication and sharing rather than on profit and exchange (Benkler, 2008).

Of course, the online and offline commons are often interconnected. The digital commons support collective practices in the real world, while offline actions in turn stimulate co-creation and collaboration in the digital space (Bollier and Pavlovich, 2008). This essay examines the relationship between cultural production in the digital creative commons and the real-world struggle toward the urban commons, using the example of the "Everyone's East Lake" (EEL) art project in Wuhan, China, which began in 2010.

2. Privatization of Common Space: OCT's Real Estate Development

Wuhan is known as the "City with Hundred Lakes" in China. As the Yangtze River crosses from the city center, the river has silted up inland and gradually formed more than a hundred lakes. The largest of these lakes, East Lake, covers an area of 33 square kilometers and is currently the largest lake in the city in China (Figure 1). After the rapid urban expansion in the second half of the 20th century, the location of East Lake has changed from a distant suburb of the city to a central area. Thus, by the beginning of the 21st, East Lake and the open lakeshore space have become increasingly popular leisure spot for the public. Especially in the hot summer of Wuhan, many people go swimming in the lake to cool off. In short, East Lake is an important urban public space in the daily life of Wuhan's people.

However, as a public space, East Lake was threatened with privatization. In March 2010, one of China's leading real estate companies, Overseas Chinese Town (OCT), decided to invest in a "Happy Valley" theme park, a high-end residential area and a resort hotel on the shores of the lake (Figure 1). Since urban land in China is state-owned, the government plays a dominant role in land development. The Wuhan government, believing that the project would become a calling card for Wuhan and promote tourism (The People's Government of Hubei Province, 2017), thus supported the developer's plans and provided land for its construction. The project would occupy a total of about 13 km2 of lakeside land and even fill in about 1.8 km2 of the lake (Zheng, 2014). Thus, many of the lakefront spaces would require tickets to access or become private landscapes in gated communities.

Immediately after the project was made public, it sparked an uproar in society. Many social groups sought to emphasize the importance of natural resource preservation and to argue for equal access to lakeshore space for the general public. In response to public opinion, OCT secretly constructed the project while falsely claiming that "the lake's shoreline will not be changed and the lake surface will not be occupied" (The Beijing News, 2010). At the same time, the government began to control public discussion. The media stopped speak-

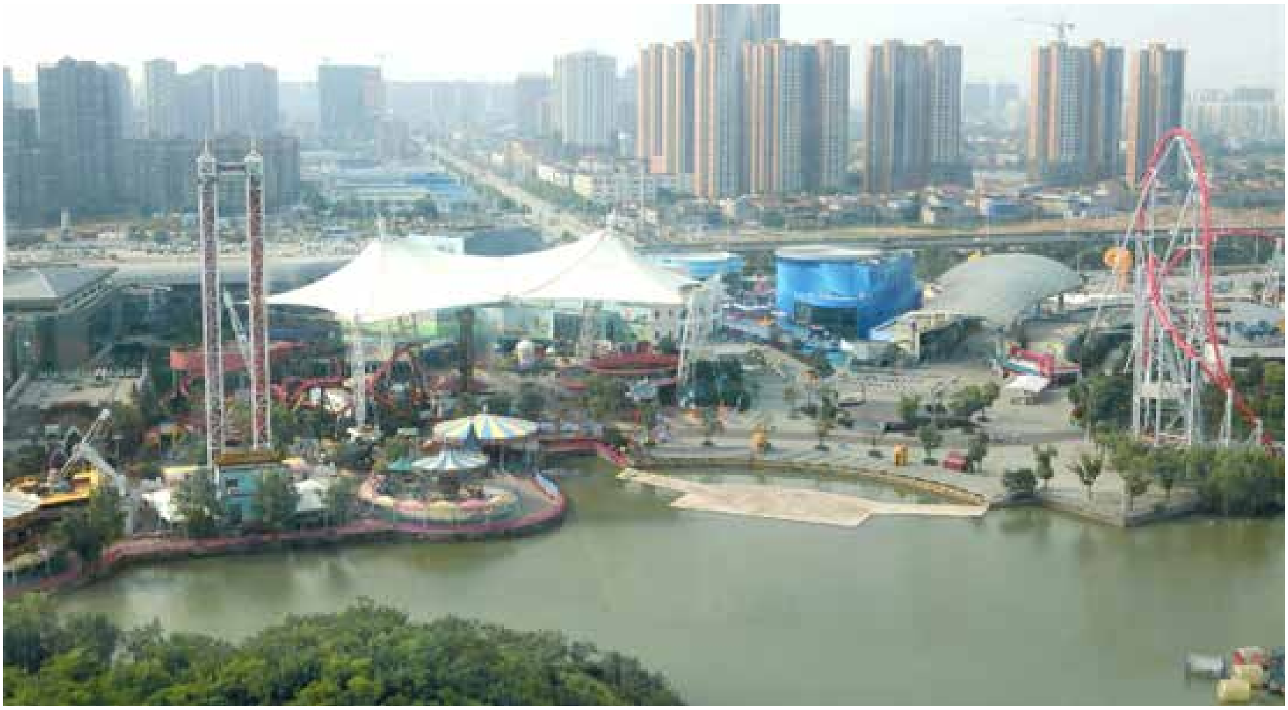

Figure 1. East Lake and OCT's theme park and residential area. Source: http://lldhwy.com/index.aspx.

ing out as a result, and what's worse, many offline activities were also terminated due to harassment by the relevant authorities (Li, 2012a: 21). In this context, Local resistance was obviously faced with a double task: deal with top-down oppression on the one hand, and promote sustainable public participation and collective action on the other.

3. Collective Resistance to Enclosure Based on Digital Creative Commons

In June 2010, Wuhan architect Li Juchuan and his partner Li Yu initiated the EEL art project as a way to continue to promote public discussion. In this project, they began by inviting the public to visit the shores of East Lake to create works on site. There was no restriction on the form and theme of the works. Li Juchuan argued that:

This is a project that everyone can participate in. […] Because this project aims not to create art, but to take common action in the form of art. In fact, it does not matter whether each person's specific action is a "work" or not. It can generate power as long as it is an action (Li, interview by Chen, 2010).

It is evident that from the beginning, Li positioned the goal of the project to stimulate public participation and collective action, rather than art creation itself. Meanwhile, Li and his team built a website for the art project. However, they were only responsible for the day-to-day maintenance of the website, while all participants collectively produced the data and information on the website.[1] The creators put the locations, forms, and concepts of their works on public display on that online platform (Figure 2). Different creations could thus refer to and exchange with each other in the digital space, further inspiring new ideas and works. Li emphasized that:

We all share the same website platform, and all are on a completely equal footing. […] This was partly due to the need for the project to run smoothly in China's particular context, and to avoid the suppression that would result from the formation of an "organization." On the other hand, it was also due to the belief that individual resistance was possible and more meaningful, and therefore did not want to create a power system that would lead to the suppression of individual autonomy by forming an organization (Li, interview by Po, 2012).

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[1] URL: http://donghu2010.org/

In other words, the EEL project can be interpreted as a commons-based peer artistic production (Benkler 2008). The architect Li Juchuan is not the leader endowed with authority, but plays the role of what Schneider and Till (2009) call an "agent of progressive politics." In this digital creative commons, people are not motivated by self-interest to contribute, but rather by the realization of collective values in the real world. Moreover, collective action based on non-hierarchical networks in the digital space helps to avoid forming "organizations" with unequal power relations, and the consequent official suppression of "organizations."

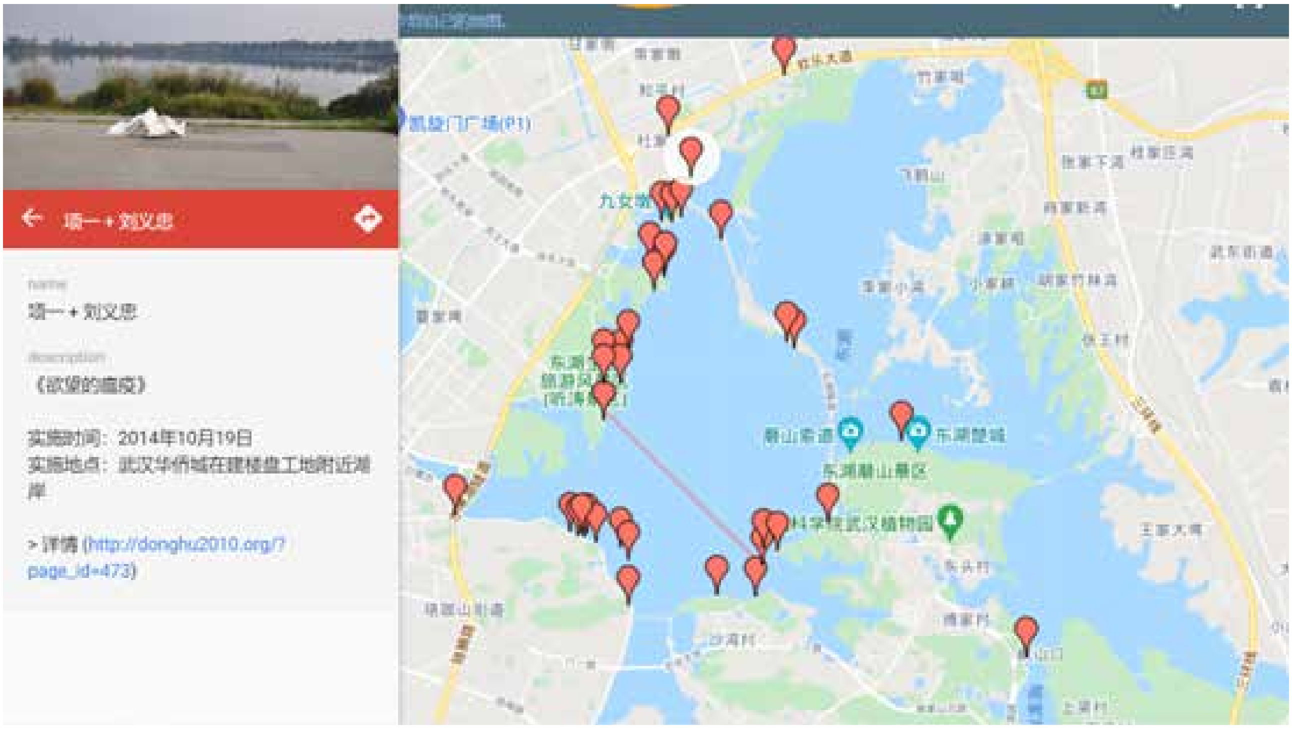
The project was quite successful. In the two months since June 25, 2010, a total of 59 pieces of "artwork" were created along East Lake (Li, 2012a: 21). The works were diverse, including punk performances, graffiti, poetry readings, installations, and more (Figure 3). These spontaneous "artistic" actions were assembled to form a collective intervention and occupation of East Lake as an urban commons before developers reclaimed the land.

4. A Social Practice of Communing: An Unending Struggle

Unfortunately, the EEL project failed to stop OCT's real estate development. With the end of a wave of artistic actions, in 2011, a series of projects such as the "Happy Valley", hotels and gated communities were also completed on schedule. However, many citizens and artists remained concerned about East Lake, and the EEL project continued. Li Juchuan believes that:

> What is needed is a long-term and widespread resistance. [...] Many people have forgotten about the filling of the lake and only know what an advanced theme park is being built in Wuhan [...] Our project is also proposed in response to this situation, and our aim is to remind everyone once again of the fact that the lake is being filled (Li, interview by Po, 2012).

As a result, the second and third rounds of the "Everyone's



name
靖一 + 刘文忠
description
《欲望的瘟疫》
实施时间：2014年10月19日
实施地点：武汉华侨城在建楼盘工地附近湖岸
> 详情 (http://donghu2010.org/?page_id=473)

Figure 2. The creators mark the positioning and description of their work on the website. Source: http://donghu2010.org/.

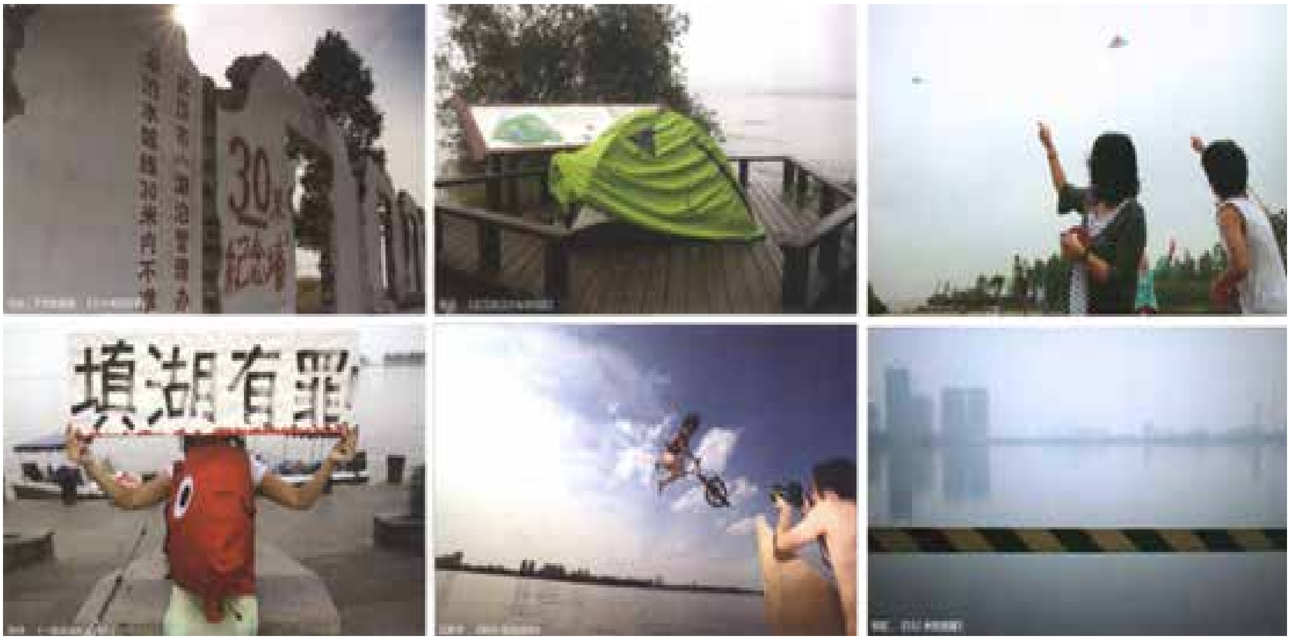


Figure 3. Some of the “artworks” in the “Everyone’s East Lake” project. Source: Li, 2012a; 2012b.

East Lake” project were launched in April 2012 and July 2014, respectively. At the same time, OCT, concerned about the brand image, once again attempted to suppress the new round of protests.

The second time it was launched, the tension and sensitivity actually remained. [...] So this time, after we launched the project, OCT reacted very quickly, finding someone to bring me a message, saying that they wanted to meet and talk and hoped that we would cancel or postpone the project, and also hinting that they would let the authorities intervene, and saying that working with them could make the art project bigger and better (Li, interview by Po, 2012).

Subsequently, OCT did contact the administrator of Douban.com[2], and removed the promotion page of the EEL project, which also caused inconvenience to the second round of the project. However, Li Juchuan and his team still did their best to get the word out through other alternative channels. In the second and third rounds of the art project that followed, 72 more works were created along the shores of East Lake (Li, 2012b: 32; Douban.com, 2014) (Figure 3).

In other words, the first wave of collective action and artistic resistance did not fundamentally shake the dominance of the political and business alliance, which is the main reason for the continuation and expansion of the EEL project. It is thus evident that the urban commons is a dynamic and unstable social relation, accompanied by continuous suppression and resistance. The struggle towards the commons is therefore not a one-off, but an ongoing social practice of commoning (Harvey, 2012).

In conclusion, The EEL art project illustrates three salient features of the practice of commons-making in urban China. First, in China's state-led urban development, the privatization of East Lake as an urban commons is not only attributed to developers but also is supported by the government. Thus, peer-to-peer cultural production based on the digital commons serves to circumvent the censorship and control of authorities while promoting collective action. Third, the struggle for urban commons is also an ongoing social practice. The realization of collective values in the real world stimulates the production and reproduction of culture in the digital commons, which in turn further facilitates the collective resistance offline. However, it is worth noting that the "Everyone's East Lake" art project has not fundamentally resolved the threat of enclosure and privatization of the urban commons. In the interview, Li Juchuan also admitted, "I think only direct social action can effectively intervene in specific social realities, and this project is clearly unable to undertake such a task." (Li, interview by Po, 2012) Therefore, there is still a need to continue exploring the practice patterns of commoning in China, especially how the commons movement can contribute to structural transformation.

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[2] A social platform in China, where information about the call for works for the EEL project will be posted.

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