

The importance of public art cultural studies essay



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Cardiff is one of the well-known examples of the kind of regeneration, where public art was used broadly to improve the sea front in during the construction of the new Opera House which had to be built. (Landry, Greene, Matarasso and Bianchini 1996: 30). The Public Art plan in Cardiff Bay was created as a part of the regeneration initiative of Cardiff Bay Development Corporation (CBDC). This independent governmental organisation was established in 1987 by the then Conservative British Government under Margaret Thatcher, to help recovering the economic prosperities of Cardiff Bay (Sterk 2002: 171). During the 1990's Cardiff added numerous art pieces to its public art collection through the redevelopment of Cardiff Bay. As part of its strategy, the CBDC commissioned a ' Strategy for Public Art in Cardiff Bay' which was created by the Cardiff Bay Arts Trust (CBAT) and was meant to widen the range of artworks that formed an important part of the streets, buildings and public spaces throughout the bay (Arts Agency SAFLE 2011: 2). Although there are some publications giving overall descriptions about the public art project itself (Thomas, 1989), most of the articles available concentrate on some specific feature of the whole Cardiff regeneration project in general, such as issues related to the constructions, city marketing, or local economic improvement (Brookes, 1992; Jauhiainen, 1992, Imrie & Thomas, 1992). The Cardiff Bay Development Corporation was established in April 1987 with an aim regenerate the old run-down docklands of Cardiff and Penarth with an overall space of 1123 hectares. The objective for the regeneration program was to put Cardiff on the International map as an excellent maritime town which would compete with other cities of similar kind in the world, thus improving the image and economic well-being of Cardiff and also Wales in general. Whilst the then Secretary of State for

Wales Nicholas Edwards did not set exact deadlines for the project, he indicated that the main objectives should have been mostly completed in 10 years. According to the Cardiff Council (Cyngor Caerdydd) public art includes street furniture, sculpture, monuments, performance, digital media, text based work and other kind of artworks, which are described as original works of acknowledged or living artists, that are visually or physically reachable to the community and which may have been produced as an outcome of a joint project involving other groups, planners, engineers, architects or other members of the public. The works should be site specific and not a mass-produced piece or copy of an original or a previously unrealised design, and should be related to that particular place and time, and which should share the unique identity of Cardiff (Jarden 2010: 19). In order to achieve this, the CBDC hired a group of professionals to create The Strategy for Public Art in Cardiff Bay, which was finally published in 1990. This document confirmed the establishment of Cardiff Bay Art Trust and The Arts & Regeneration Agency, and also ensured the completion of some temporary and over a hundred permanent projects, several incomplete projects, as well as some reports and studies by artists (CBAT 2001). In order to convince the public that it was the time to change, CBDC published strongly negative images of the Cardiff's landscape. One of the most important pieces of the campaign was the ' Wasteland to Wonderland' poster, which compared the existing environment of the city with the blue-skied and beautiful images that were promised to deliver during the regeneration project (Giblett, 1996, p. 6). The reports and other campaign materials mainly suggested that Cardiff was " dying on its feet" and becoming a polluted and run-down city with empty deserts (Crickhowell 1992: 474). They concluded that it was already time for

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a physical and social transformation, which would contribute to a creation of a modern capital city (Thomas and Imrie, 1999) and " put Cardiff back onto the world stage". There are many important advantages that public art can bring to Cardiff, most notably well-managed public art can improve the environment, improve the cultural life of Cardiff by creating opportunities for civic expression and also boost private investments in the city. As Charles Quick stated, " It is essential that artists are supported and encouraged to have a creative input into the regeneration of our cities. If you look at other successful cities across the world you recognise the ones that are proactively encouraging artist activity. They are the cities that people want to visit and remember visiting" (Public Art South West, 2008). The Public Art Strategy was shaped to develop Cardiff's success, to extend opportunities for the delivery of public art and to encourage the establishment of high quality creative public art projects that would enrich the environment, contribute to the enhancement of its unique atmosphere, and celebrate the city's past and present characteristics. The strategy is also aimed to form the policies and values for the delivery of public art; illuminate the methods involved in the development; promote new enterprises and opportunities for public art; encourage businesses and also the community to engage in the regeneration process; inspire the ideas of groups and individuals which support the betterment of life in Cardiff; promote the early integration of public art in regeneration projects, develop the administration and preservation of Cardiff's existing and future public artworks, and finally, expand and encourage the access to public art material (CBAT 2005: 3). Cultural Tourism Strategy for Wales stated that: " A high quality built environment cannot only help support tourism but also provides a good place to live, work and play

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and makes it an attractive place to invest. This requires...high quality public arts initiatives such as those pursued in Cardiff Bay". Additionally, according to the Community Strategy (2004 to 2014), the aspiration of the project is to make Cardiff a liveable city with good parks, clean streets, convenient access to the rural areas, excellent public art, extraordinary architecture and an outstanding waterfront. The Public Art Strategy was planned to be applied to the whole of the City and County of Cardiff. However, the paper identifies the following locations for the future public arts: Sites that highlight entry points into Cardiff and create a sense of arrival (roads, Rail Corridors and water, including Cardiff Bay and the Barrage) Entrances into the City Centre and Bay Core area Places that identify and differentiate key land uses and generate a sense of place (subways, railway bridges, street furniture, and public transport sites) Landmarks that identify and articulate routes and create focal points Linear Artworks that assist the public to orientate and articulate routes (primary road, pedestrian and cycle networks, river and rail corridors) Local communities that create character and provide an opportunity for community expression, through the enhancement of existing environments Sites that provide opportunities for events, festivals, and exhibiting temporary artworks Sites that provide opportunities for interior commissions and community artworks (schools, community facilities, medical centres, governmental, private and public buildings) Locations that deliver opportunities for joint public art projects within a defined site margins (landscape areas, land for waste management, health sites, retail parks and shopping centres, offices, regeneration sites, open spaces). (Strategy) The Strategy was inspired by the idea of An Urban Renaissance that the arts are important in attracting visitors to the city, improving the visual quality of the

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location and increasing the financial resources for the community (Miles 1997: 113). The estimated cost of the Strategy for Public Art in Cardiff Bay was £30 million, £16 million of which was funded through an art scheme prescribed by the Development Corporation (CBDC 1990: 15). Additionally, significant number of national and regional agencies has been listed for the possible funding opportunities, some of which are Lottery Funding, National Arts Funding Bodies, European Union Funding, Sponsorship Awards, Competitive Awards, Private Trusts and Foundations. The Public Art Strategy in Cardiff involved two main stages; initially a review had to be prepared about the existing artworks and their placement across the city. Although Cardiff holds a massive collection of public artworks, there has been little in the way of identifying and promoting them. Cardiff contains more than two hundred pieces of public artworks that have been created since the mid-19th century and are important parts of city's public spaces. Earlier pieces include commemorative works, sculptures and memorials, such as Aneurin Bevan and Jim Driscoll, which demonstrate important historical events and figures. These artworks are particularly situated around the Civic Centre in Cathays Park and in other parks such as Roath and Victoria Park. These works were not only restricted to external locations but were also exhibited within public buildings, including the Marble Hall at City Hall which holds several sculptures unveiled in 1916. Animal Wall at Cardiff Castle demonstrates an early example of non-commemorative sculptures giving addition value to the quality of public spaces (Arts Agency SAFLE 2011: 1-2). By now, Cardiff council's team has done a great job by listing all the existing works in Cardiff and plotting them on an interactive web map^[1](Peter D Cox 2011). The Public Art Consultancy Team defined the educational benefits that the public

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art programme in Cardiff Bay Development Area could provide: "appropriation of the artworks, acquisition of new skills, creation of a greater sense of identity with a neighbourhood and community point of interest and discussion" (1990, p. 31). These, they argue, "are all direct benefits of a community and education programme". Public Artworks create an opportunity for communication between members of the society and give a great chance to encourage sensory awareness. An example includes the Relief Map situated at Roald Dahl Plass. Public art projects can also support various educational projects. For instance, 'Breath in, Time out' by Jeroen van Westen creates opportunity for sustained engagement of schools in discovering issues of engineering, geography and waste management. Another example of public art with educational purposes is a huge mosaic mural created by Kitchner School in Riverside pupils for the school building with the theme 'We all live together in Riverside' (CBAT 2005: 23). The most contentious recommendation of the whole project was that the 'entire barrage' had to be 'a work of art' shaped by joint efforts of artists, architects and engineers. The ecologists considered that this would have a negative effect on the wild life in Bay and would deny the claim that art had to 'improve and enhance all visual aspects of the environment of the Bay for the benefit of those who live, work and play there' (CBDC1990: 9-22). Other significant examples of public art generated during this program include the Oval Basin, Tower Colliery, "Tide of Black Diamonds" and Landfill Gas. An Art building is the most noticeable compound for regeneration, however sometimes it is not the most successful one. Nevertheless, theoretically it developed during the 18th and 19th centuries and played a big role in development of British towns in the first place. Such projects are costly but <https://assignbuster.com/the-importance-of-public-art-cultural-studies-essay/>

leading, and usually they provoke local and national disagreement. At their best, such projects become enormously popular and attractive, which impact on the economy of the surrounding area. On the other hand, somewhat because such important projects are planned to work for local or national populations, they may create mixed feelings among residents. In general, the contrast between the chosen area and those outside its boundaries can be very sharp, and may contribute to anger and pessimism (Landry et al 1996: 40). Both Darke (1995) and Miles (1997) criticize the participation of artists in the official public art programme of Cardiff Bay Development Area, where the construction of a barrage as part of the regeneration process was expected to cause severe damage to the local ecology. Miles (1997: 114) also states, "... (Public Art) projects such as Cardiff Bay, where contemporary art becomes the sign of ' success', whilst obliterating the political and ecological development". Others have made negative assessments of the likely economic and social influences of the Bay's regeneration (Imrie et al. 1995; Rowley 1994). A recent publications describes the reformed Bay as 'the bare marsh replaced by even more barren brick piazzas, the greedy gulls by developers, tidal slime by cars, nature by man' (Anon 1995: 10). In general, there were many flaws in this project, some plans were short-lived or ineffective, and many scholars criticised the economic and ecological impacts of the program. Although Cardiff Bay Development Corporation did not finished some projects, leaving it undone, and not everyone was happy with their activities, which caused a lot of controversy over some projects, it did, however, support the development of Cardiff Bay. The city has undergone an exciting waterfront improvement that sets the tone for many other developments to the public realm in Cardiff in general. It has also

encouraged considerable private investments, for which the whole regeneration project of Cardiff aimed for, improved the economy of the city, increased property prices, and helped the growth of employment opportunities for the locals. CBDC was also the only corporation of such kind that did not have planning control and, consequently, was obliged to gain permission from the local authorities for the regeneration plans. This guaranteed a high level of engagement from the local authorities, who had a strong element of control (Sterk 2002: 176). Cardiff Bay Development Corporation's strategies reflected more than just a wish for a flagship, but created a great chance to demonstrate the changes in the area in a particular light - one which characterised the area's present and future as an permanent mix of the ' natural' and the ' social', and which had a positive resonance with the main environmental imaginary (Thomas 2002: 1249). While the Bay cannot be considered an excellent example of a regeneration program, it has demonstrated to be a valuable development experiment for both Cardiff and Wales in general, and it continues to be responsible for examples of some of the worst and best characteristics of regeneration project. CBDC's particular improvements in the field of urban design involved the first public-art strategy and first public-art agency (which continues its work); an early use of a very skilled and experienced design panel; widespread use of design competitions and several acts of innovative design patronage on buildings, infrastructure and spaces; the publication of a complete design policies and guidelines, and an attempt to make actual use of design briefs (Hooper and Punter 2006: 167).