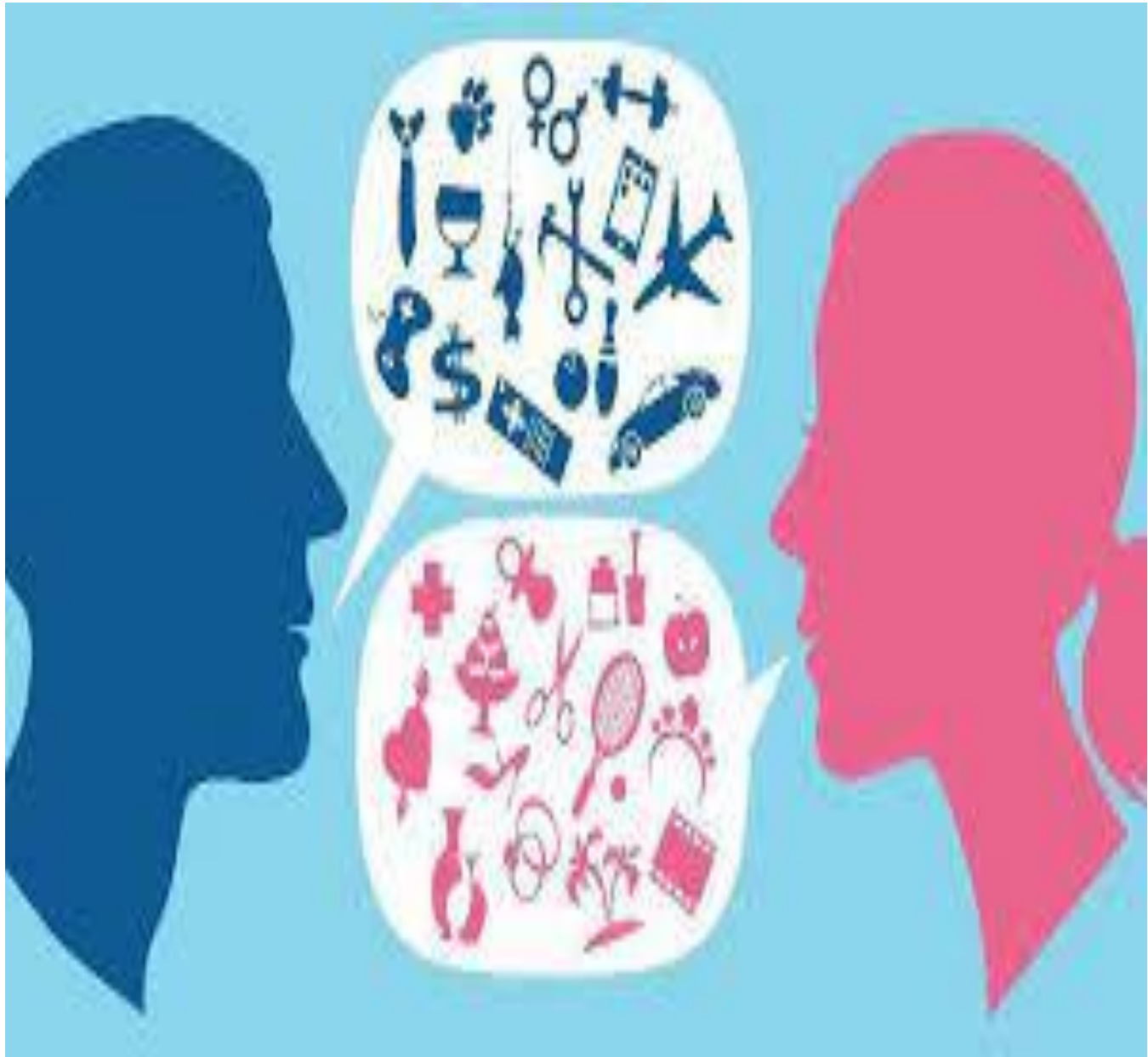


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Community-Based Public Art and Urban Sustainability: An Ethnographic Study of Participatory Artistic Practices

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Community-based public art has increasingly been recognised as a critical mechanism for advancing urban sustainability through participatory and culturally embedded practices. This study examines the intersection of participatory artistic engagement and sustainable urban development using a qualitative ethnographic approach grounded in secondary data. Drawing on interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks-social capital theory, cultural sustainability, and participatory urbanism-the research explores how community-driven art initiatives contribute to social cohesion, environmental awareness, and placemaking. The findings indicate that participatory art fosters collective identity, strengthens civic engagement, and promotes environmentally responsible behaviours through experiential and emotionally resonant communication. Furthermore, community-based art practices enable marginalised voices to participate in shaping urban spaces, thereby enhancing inclusivity and democratic governance. However, challenges such as limited funding, institutional constraints, and issues of equitable participation persist, potentially undermining long-term sustainability. The study concludes that integrating community-based public art into urban planning and policy frameworks can significantly enhance sustainable development outcomes, provided that inclusive participation and sustained institutional support are ensured.

Keywords: community-based public art, urban sustainability, participatory art, cultural sustainability, social capital, participatory urbanism, place-making

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1. Introduction

The twenty-first century has been characterised by rapid urbanisation, with more than half of the global population now residing in cities, a figure projected to increase significantly in the coming decades (United Nations, 2019). While urbanisation has driven economic growth and innovation, it has simultaneously intensified environmental degradation, social inequality, and cultural homogenization. These challenges necessitate multidimensional approaches to urban sustainability that go beyond conventional infrastructure and policy frameworks. Increasingly, scholars and practitioners are recognising the role of culture-and specifically community-based public art-as a transformative medium for fostering sustainable urban environments (Hawkes, 2001; Duxbury et al., 2017).

Community-based public art refers to artistic practices that actively involve community members in the conceptualisation, creation, and dissemination of artworks situated in public spaces (Goldbard, 2006). Unlike traditional public art, which is often commissioned by authorities and executed by professional artists with minimal public input, participatory art emphasises collaboration, inclusivity, and shared ownership. This shift reflects broader changes in cultural production, where art is no longer viewed solely as an aesthetic object but as a process of social engagement and dialogue (Bishop, 2012).

Urban sustainability, as conceptualised in contemporary discourse, encompasses

environmental protection, economic viability, and social equity. However, an emerging body of literature highlights the importance of a fourth dimension-cultural sustainability-which underscores the role of cultural practices in shaping sustainable urban futures (Hawkes, 2001). Community-based public art operates at the intersection of these dimensions by fostering environmental awareness, strengthening social networks, and preserving local identities. Through participatory practices, communities can articulate their experiences, address local challenges, and envision alternative futures that align with sustainability principles (Miles, 1997).

From an environmental perspective, community-based art initiatives often engage with themes such as climate change, waste management, and biodiversity. These projects utilise creative methods to communicate complex ecological issues in accessible and emotionally resonant ways. For example, eco-art installations that incorporate recycled materials not only raise awareness about sustainability but also demonstrate practical solutions for reducing waste (Curtis et al., 2012). Such experiential learning processes are particularly effective in promoting behavioural change, as they engage participants on both cognitive and affective levels.

Socially, participatory art contributes to the development of social capital by fostering trust, cooperation, and collective action among community members (Putnam, 2000). In diverse urban settings, where social fragmentation and inequality are prevalent, community-based art projects create spaces

for dialogue and interaction. These initiatives can bridge cultural divides, empower marginalised groups, and enhance community resilience. Moreover, by involving residents in decision-making processes, participatory art aligns with democratic principles and promotes active citizenship (Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

Culturally, community-based public art plays a crucial role in place-making and identity formation. Urban environments are often shaped by globalised forces that can erode local distinctiveness. Participatory art counters this trend by enabling communities to express their unique histories, values, and aspirations. Murals, performances, and installations become vehicles for storytelling, preserving cultural heritage while fostering innovation (Duxbury et al., 2017). This dynamic interplay between tradition and creativity is central to cultural sustainability.

Despite its potential, the integration of community-based public art into urban sustainability frameworks is not without challenges. Issues such as unequal participation, institutional constraints, and limited funding can hinder the effectiveness of these initiatives. Furthermore, questions remain regarding the scalability and long-term impact of participatory art projects. While many initiatives achieve short-term success, sustaining community engagement and maintaining artworks over time requires continuous support and resources (Sharp et al., 2005).

This study seeks to address these complexities by examining the role of community-based public art in promoting urban sustainability through an ethnographic

analysis of participatory artistic practices. By drawing on secondary qualitative data, the research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these initiatives operate across different contexts. The study is guided by the following research questions:

- How do community-based public art initiatives contribute to urban sustainability?
- What social, cultural, and environmental impacts do participatory artistic practices generate?
- What challenges and limitations affect their implementation and sustainability?

By addressing these questions, the research contributes to the growing body of literature on cultural approaches to sustainability. It also provides practical insights for policymakers, urban planners, and artists seeking to integrate participatory art into sustainable development strategies.

2. Literature Review

Public art has undergone a significant transformation over the past century, evolving from monumental and state-sponsored works to more inclusive and participatory forms. Traditionally, public art was associated with statues, memorials, and architectural embellishments that reflected dominant political and cultural narratives (Miles, 1997). These works were often created by professional artists with little or no input from the communities they were intended to serve.

In contrast, contemporary public art practices emphasise engagement, process, and collaboration. This shift is closely linked to broader changes in the art world, including the rise of socially engaged art and relational aesthetics (Bishop, 2012). Participatory art challenges the traditional boundaries between artist and audience, positioning community members as co-creators rather than passive observers.

Goldbard (2006) argues that community cultural development is a critical component of this transformation, as it prioritises local knowledge and collective creativity. By involving residents in the artistic process, community-based public art democratises cultural production and fosters a sense of ownership. This participatory approach aligns with the principles of social justice, as it seeks to amplify marginalised voices and address issues of inequality.

2.1 Community Engagement and Social Cohesion

A substantial body of literature highlights the role of community-based public art in enhancing social cohesion. Social cohesion refers to the strength of relationships and the sense of solidarity among members of a community (Putnam, 2000). In urban contexts characterised by diversity and inequality, fostering social cohesion is essential for sustainable development.

Participatory art projects create opportunities for interaction and collaboration, bringing together individuals from different backgrounds. Sharp et al. (2005) found that public art initiatives in urban neighbourhoods facilitated dialogue and reduced social

tensions. By engaging residents in collective activities, these projects build trust and strengthen social networks.

Moreover, community-based art can empower marginalised groups by providing platforms for self-expression. This is particularly important in contexts where certain voices are underrepresented in mainstream discourse. Through participatory practices, individuals can articulate their experiences and contribute to shaping their communities (Bishop, 2012).

However, some scholars caution that the impact of public art on social cohesion may be limited by structural inequalities. For example, projects that fail to address underlying power dynamics may inadvertently reinforce existing hierarchies (Miles, 1997). Therefore, ensuring inclusivity and equitable participation is crucial for maximising the social benefits of community-based art.

2.2 Public Art and Urban Sustainability

Urban sustainability is a multidimensional concept that encompasses environmental, social, and economic considerations. In recent years, scholars have increasingly recognised the importance of cultural dimensions in achieving sustainable urban development (Hawkes, 2001). Public art plays a vital role in this context by shaping the cultural landscape of cities.

Duxbury et al. (2017) argue that cultural sustainability involves both the preservation of cultural heritage and the promotion of creative expression. Community-based public art contributes to this by enabling

communities to maintain their cultural identities while adapting to changing circumstances. This dynamic process supports resilience and adaptability, which are key components of sustainability.

From an environmental perspective, public art can serve as a tool for raising awareness and promoting sustainable practices. Eco-art, for example, integrates environmental themes into artistic expression, encouraging audiences to reflect on their relationship with nature (Gablik, 1991). These projects often involve the use of sustainable materials and practices, demonstrating the feasibility of environmentally responsible art.

Curtis et al. (2012) highlight the effectiveness of art-based approaches in communicating ecological concepts. Unlike traditional educational methods, which may rely on abstract information, art engages emotions and fosters experiential learning. This can lead to deeper understanding and long-term behavioural change.

2.3 Participatory Urbanism and Place-Making

Participatory urbanism is an approach to urban planning that emphasises community involvement in decision-making processes (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). This approach challenges top-down models of development, advocating for more inclusive and democratic practices.

Community-based public art aligns closely with participatory urbanism by involving residents in the design and transformation of public spaces. Through collaborative processes, communities can shape their environments in ways that reflect their needs

and aspirations. This contributes to placemaking, which refers to the creation of meaningful and vibrant public spaces.

Place-making is closely linked to identity and belonging. Public art can enhance the aesthetic and symbolic value of urban spaces, making them more attractive and accessible. At the same time, participatory practices ensure that these spaces are inclusive and representative of diverse communities (Duxbury et al., 2017).

2.4 Challenges and Critiques of Community-Based Public Art

Despite its many benefits, community-based public art is not without its challenges. One of the primary concerns is the issue of sustainability. While many projects achieve short-term success, maintaining engagement and preserving artworks over time can be difficult (Sharp et al., 2005).

Funding is another significant challenge. Community-based projects often rely on limited resources, which can restrict their scope and impact. Additionally, bureaucratic processes and institutional constraints may hinder community participation and limit creative freedom.

Critics also point to the potential for tokenism in participatory art. In some cases, community involvement may be superficial, serving more as a symbolic gesture than a genuine collaborative process (Bishop, 2012). This raises questions about the authenticity and effectiveness of such initiatives.

Furthermore, issues of inclusivity remain a concern. Marginalised groups may still face

barriers to participation, and projects may inadvertently reflect the perspectives of more dominant groups. Addressing these challenges requires careful planning, ongoing engagement, and a commitment to equity.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored in an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that integrates social capital theory, cultural sustainability, and participatory urbanism to examine the role of community-based public art in advancing urban sustainability. These frameworks collectively provide a comprehensive lens through which participatory artistic practices can be understood as socio-cultural processes that influence environmental awareness, civic engagement, and spatial transformation.

3.1 Social Capital Theory and Collective Agency

Social capital theory, as articulated by Putnam (2000), refers to the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. In the context of urban environments, social capital is a critical determinant of community resilience and sustainability. High levels of social capital enable communities to mobilise resources, address collective challenges, and engage in participatory governance.

Community-based public art functions as a catalyst for the development of social capital by creating opportunities for interaction and collaboration among diverse groups. Participatory art projects often involve collective decision-making, shared labour, and continuous dialogue, all of which contribute to the strengthening of

interpersonal relationships and trust (Sharp et al., 2005). These processes foster what Putnam (2000) distinguishes as both bonding social capital (within-group cohesion) and bridging social capital (connections across diverse groups).

Furthermore, the collaborative nature of participatory art enhances collective agency—the capacity of communities to act together toward shared goals. This is particularly important in urban contexts marked by social fragmentation and inequality. By engaging residents in creative processes, community-based art empowers individuals to contribute to the shaping of their environments, thereby reinforcing democratic participation and social inclusion (Goldbard, 2006).

However, it is important to acknowledge critiques of social capital theory, particularly its tendency to overlook power dynamics and structural inequalities. Not all forms of social capital are equally accessible, and participatory processes may inadvertently reproduce existing hierarchies if not carefully designed (Bourdieu, 1986). Therefore, the application of social capital theory in this study is complemented by additional frameworks that address cultural and spatial dimensions.

3.2 Cultural Sustainability and Identity Formation

Cultural sustainability has emerged as a critical dimension of sustainable development, emphasising the preservation, transmission, and evolution of cultural practices (Hawkes, 2001). Unlike environmental and economic sustainability, which focus on resource management and

growth, cultural sustainability addresses the symbolic and expressive aspects of human life.

Soini and Birkeland (2014) conceptualise cultural sustainability as encompassing both heritage preservation and creative innovation. Community-based public art embodies this duality by enabling communities to maintain their cultural identities while simultaneously adapting to changing social and environmental conditions. Through participatory artistic practices, local narratives, traditions, and values are articulated and reinterpreted, contributing to a dynamic and evolving cultural landscape.

In urban settings, where globalisation and modernisation often lead to cultural homogenisation, community-based art serves as a counterforce by reinforcing local distinctiveness. Public artworks such as murals, performances, and installations become sites of cultural expression and dialogue, reflecting the lived experiences of community members (Duxbury et al., 2017). This process of place-based storytelling is essential for fostering a sense of belonging and identity, which are key components of sustainable communities.

Moreover, cultural sustainability is closely linked to social justice. Ensuring that diverse cultural voices are represented in public spaces requires inclusive and participatory approaches. Community-based public art provides a platform for marginalised groups to express their perspectives, thereby challenging dominant narratives and promoting cultural diversity (Bishop, 2012).

However, the integration of cultural sustainability into urban planning remains uneven. Institutional frameworks often prioritise economic and environmental considerations, with limited attention to cultural dimensions. This highlights the need for more holistic approaches that recognise the interdependence of cultural, social, and environmental factors in achieving sustainability.

3.3 Participatory Urbanism and Spatial Transformation

Participatory urbanism is a theoretical and practical approach that emphasises the involvement of citizens in the planning, design, and management of urban spaces (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). This framework challenges traditional top-down models of urban development, advocating for more inclusive and democratic processes.

Community-based public art aligns closely with participatory urbanism by enabling residents to actively engage in the transformation of their environments. Through collaborative artistic practices, communities can reimagine public spaces, address local issues, and create environments that reflect their needs and aspirations. This process contributes to placemaking, which involves the creation of meaningful and vibrant public spaces that enhance quality of life (Miles, 1997).

Participatory urbanism also emphasises the importance of temporary and experimental interventions, often referred to as tactical urbanism (Lydon & Garcia, 2015). Many community-based art projects adopt this approach, using temporary installations and

events to test ideas and engage communities. These interventions can serve as catalysts for longer-term changes in urban design and policy.

From a sustainability perspective, participatory urbanism supports the development of resilient and adaptable cities. Involving communities in decision-making processes ensures that urban interventions are contextually relevant and socially accepted. This reduces the likelihood of conflict and enhances the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives.

Nevertheless, participatory urbanism faces challenges related to scalability, inclusivity, and institutional support. While small-scale projects can be highly effective, integrating participatory approaches into large-scale urban planning processes requires significant resources and coordination. Additionally, ensuring that participation is genuinely inclusive remains a critical concern.

3.4 Integrative Framework

By combining social capital theory, cultural sustainability, and participatory urbanism, this study develops an integrative framework for analysing community-based public art. Social capital theory explains the relational dynamics and collective action fostered through participatory art. Cultural sustainability highlights the role of artistic practices in preserving and evolving cultural identities. Participatory urbanism provides a spatial and governance perspective, emphasising the transformation of urban environments through inclusive processes.

Together, these frameworks offer a holistic understanding of how community-based

public art contributes to urban sustainability. They also underscore the importance of addressing power dynamics, ensuring inclusivity, and fostering long-term engagement in participatory initiatives.

4. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in an ethnographic approach, utilising secondary data to explore the role of community-based public art in urban sustainability. Ethnography traditionally involves immersive fieldwork and participant observation; however, in recent years, scholars have increasingly employed secondary ethnographic analysis to examine existing qualitative data (Hammersley, 2010).

Secondary ethnography allows researchers to analyse previously collected data, including case studies, reports, and academic literature, to identify patterns and generate insights. This approach is particularly suitable for this study, as it enables the examination of diverse participatory art initiatives across different geographical and cultural contexts without the constraints of primary data collection.

The research is interpretive in nature, focusing on understanding meanings, experiences, and social processes rather than measuring quantitative outcomes. This aligns with the study's objective of exploring the socio-cultural and environmental impacts of participatory artistic practices.

4.1 Data Sources and Selection Criteria

The study relies on a wide range of secondary data sources, including:

- Peer-reviewed journal articles
- Academic books and monographs
- Case study reports on community-based public art projects
- Policy documents from international organisations (e.g., United Nations, UNESCO)
- Reports from non-governmental organisations and cultural institutions

The selection of sources was guided by the following criteria:

- **Relevance:** Sources must address community-based public art, participatory practices, or urban sustainability.
- **Credibility:** Preference was given to peer-reviewed publications and reputable institutional reports.
- **Diversity:** Sources were selected to represent different geographical regions and socio-cultural contexts.
- **Recency:** Emphasis was placed on recent studies to capture contemporary trends, while also including seminal works for theoretical grounding.

This comprehensive selection ensures a robust and multidimensional dataset for analysis.

4.2 Data Analysis: Thematic Approach

The study employs thematic analysis as the primary method for analysing qualitative data. Thematic analysis is a widely used method for identifying, analysing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The analysis followed a systematic process:

- **Familiarisation:** Reading and re-reading selected sources to gain an overall understanding of the data.
- **Initial Coding:** Identifying key concepts and assigning codes related to themes such as social cohesion, environmental awareness, cultural identity, and civic engagement.
- **Theme Development:** Grouping codes into broader themes that reflect recurring patterns across the data.
- **Review and Refinement:** Ensuring that themes are coherent, distinct, and supported by evidence.
- **Interpretation:** Linking themes to the theoretical framework and research questions.

This iterative process enhances the depth and rigour of the analysis, allowing for nuanced interpretations of complex social phenomena.

4.3 Validity and Reliability

Ensuring validity and reliability in qualitative research requires careful consideration of methodological rigour. In this study, several strategies were employed:

- **Triangulation:** Using multiple data sources to cross-verify findings and reduce bias.
- **Theoretical grounding:** Anchoring the analysis in established theoretical frameworks to enhance interpretive validity.
- **Transparency:** Clearly documenting the research process, including data selection and analysis procedures.

While qualitative research does not aim for generalizability in the same way as quantitative studies, these measures enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

4.4 Ethical Considerations

As this study is based on secondary data, it does not involve direct interaction with human participants. However, ethical considerations remain important. All sources were properly cited to acknowledge intellectual contributions and avoid plagiarism.

Additionally, the study critically engages with the data, recognising potential biases and limitations in the sources. Ethical research practice requires not only accurate representation of data but also reflexivity in interpretation (Mannan & Farhana, 2026).

4.5 Limitations of the Methodology

Despite its strengths, the methodology has several limitations:

- **Lack of Primary Data:** The absence of direct fieldwork limits the ability to capture lived experiences and nuanced social interactions.

- **Dependence on Existing Literature:** The analysis is constrained by the availability and quality of secondary sources.
- **Potential Bias:** Original studies may reflect specific perspectives or agendas, which can influence the findings.
- **Contextual Variability:** Differences in cultural and geographical contexts may limit the comparability of case studies.

These limitations are acknowledged, and the findings are interpreted with caution.

4.6 Justification of Methodological Approach

The use of secondary ethnographic analysis is justified by the exploratory nature of the study and the need to examine a wide range of cases. Community-based public art initiatives are highly context-specific, and primary research in multiple locations would require significant resources. By synthesising existing studies, this research provides a comprehensive overview of participatory artistic practices and their contributions to urban sustainability.

5. Findings and Analysis

The analysis of secondary qualitative data reveals that community-based public art plays a multifaceted role in advancing urban sustainability. The findings are organised into five major thematic areas: social cohesion and community resilience, environmental awareness and behavioural transformation, cultural identity and place-making, civic participation and governance, and structural

challenges and limitations. These themes are deeply interconnected and reflect the complex dynamics through which participatory artistic practices operate in urban environments.

5.1 Social Cohesion and Community Resilience

One of the most significant findings is the role of community-based public art in fostering social cohesion. Participatory art projects create shared spaces for interaction, dialogue, and collaboration, enabling individuals from diverse backgrounds to engage in collective activities. This process strengthens interpersonal relationships and builds trust, which are essential components of social capital (Putnam, 2000).

Empirical studies demonstrate that collaborative art initiatives-such as community murals, street performances, and participatory installations-facilitate communication across cultural and socioeconomic divides (Sharp et al., 2005). For instance, mural projects in marginalised urban neighbourhoods often bring together residents, artists, and local organisations, creating opportunities for dialogue and mutual understanding. These interactions help to reduce social tensions and foster a sense of belonging.

From a theoretical perspective, these outcomes can be interpreted through the lens of bonding and bridging social capital. Bonding social capital reinforces connections within homogeneous groups, while bridging social capital connects individuals across diverse social networks (Putnam, 2000). Community-based art initiatives often

achieve both, strengthening internal cohesion while promoting inclusivity.

Moreover, participatory art contributes to community resilience-the capacity of communities to adapt to and recover from social, economic, and environmental challenges. By fostering collective identity and shared purpose, these initiatives enhance communities' ability to respond to crises and pursue sustainable development goals (Duxbury et al., 2017). In this sense, art functions not only as a cultural expression but also as a social infrastructure that supports resilience.

5.2 Environmental Awareness and Behavioural Transformation

Another key finding is the role of community-based public art in promoting environmental awareness and encouraging sustainable behaviours. Many participatory art projects incorporate ecological themes, addressing issues such as climate change, waste management, and biodiversity conservation.

Eco-art initiatives, for example, often involve the use of recycled materials, community clean-up activities, and site-specific installations that highlight environmental degradation (Gablik, 1991). These projects serve as both educational tools and practical demonstrations of sustainable practices. By engaging participants in hands-on activities, they facilitate experiential learning, which is more effective than traditional forms of environmental education (Curtis et al., 2012).

The emotional and aesthetic dimensions of art play a crucial role in this process. Artistic representations of environmental issues can

evoke empathy and emotional engagement, making abstract concepts more tangible and relatable. This aligns with the notion that environmental communication is most effective when it combines cognitive and affective elements (Curtis et al., 2012).

Furthermore, participatory art projects often encourage community members to take ownership of environmental issues. By involving residents in the creation of eco-art, these initiatives foster a sense of responsibility and stewardship. This shift from passive awareness to active engagement is critical for achieving long-term behavioural change.

However, the effectiveness of these initiatives depends on sustained engagement and institutional support. Short-term projects may raise awareness but fail to produce lasting behavioural change if not integrated into broader environmental policies and practices.

5.3 Cultural Identity and Place-Making

The findings also highlight the significant role of community-based public art in shaping cultural identity and facilitating place-making. In urban contexts characterised by rapid change and globalisation, maintaining a sense of local identity is a key challenge. Participatory art provides a platform for communities to express their histories, values, and aspirations, thereby reinforcing cultural continuity (Duxbury et al., 2017).

Public artworks such as murals, sculptures, and performances often reflect local narratives and collective memories. These

artistic expressions contribute to the symbolic landscape of cities, transforming public spaces into sites of cultural meaning. This process of place-making enhances the emotional and psychological connection between individuals and their environments (Miles, 1997).

Moreover, participatory art enables communities to actively shape their surroundings, rather than being passive recipients of externally imposed designs. This empowerment fosters a sense of ownership and pride, which are essential for sustainable urban development. When residents feel connected to their environment, they are more likely to engage in its maintenance and improvement.

The role of cultural sustainability is particularly evident in these processes. By preserving and adapting cultural practices, community-based art contributes to the resilience of cultural systems (Soini & Birkeland, 2014). At the same time, it encourages innovation and creativity, ensuring that cultural expressions remain dynamic and relevant.

However, tensions may arise between local cultural expressions and broader urban development agendas. In some cases, public art projects are co-opted by commercial interests or used as tools for urban branding, potentially undermining their participatory and community-oriented nature.

5.4 Civic Participation and Democratic Engagement

Community-based public art also plays a crucial role in enhancing civic participation and democratic engagement. Participatory art

projects often involve collaborative decision-making processes, enabling residents to contribute to the design and implementation of public initiatives. This aligns with the principles of participatory urbanism, which emphasise inclusive and democratic approaches to urban planning (Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

Through these processes, community members develop a greater understanding of civic issues and become more engaged in local governance. Art projects can serve as entry points for broader discussions about urban development, social justice, and environmental sustainability. This increased civic awareness contributes to the development of active and informed citizens.

Moreover, participatory art can challenge existing power structures by amplifying marginalised voices. By providing platforms for self-expression, these initiatives enable underrepresented groups to articulate their perspectives and influence decision-making processes (Bishop, 2012). This contributes to more equitable and inclusive urban development.

However, the extent of civic engagement achieved through community-based art varies depending on the level of participation and the inclusivity of the process. Projects that are genuinely collaborative tend to have more significant impacts, while those that involve limited or symbolic participation may have minimal effects.

5.5 Structural Challenges and Limitations

Despite its potential, community-based public art faces several structural challenges

that limit its effectiveness. One of the most significant barriers is funding. Many projects rely on short-term grants or external funding sources, which can lead to discontinuity and instability (Sharp et al., 2005).

Institutional constraints also pose challenges. Bureaucratic processes and regulatory frameworks may restrict community participation and limit creative freedom. In some cases, public art projects are subject to strict guidelines that prioritise aesthetic considerations over social and environmental objectives.

Inclusivity remains another critical concern. While participatory art aims to engage diverse communities, certain groups may be excluded due to socioeconomic barriers, language differences, or lack of access to resources. Ensuring equitable participation requires deliberate efforts to address these barriers.

Additionally, the sustainability of public artworks is often overlooked. Maintenance and preservation require ongoing resources and commitment, which may not be available in all contexts. Without proper support, artworks may deteriorate over time, reducing their impact.

Finally, there is a risk of tokenism, where community participation is superficial and does not genuinely influence decision-making. This can undermine the credibility and effectiveness of participatory art initiatives (Bishop, 2012).

6. Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the transformative potential of community-based public art in advancing urban sustainability. By integrating social, cultural, and environmental dimensions, participatory artistic practices offer a holistic approach to addressing complex urban challenges. This discussion interprets the findings in relation to the theoretical framework and broader sustainability discourse.

6.1 Intersections of Social Capital and Sustainability

The analysis demonstrates that community-based public art significantly contributes to the development of social capital, which is a key driver of sustainable urban development. As Putnam (2000) argues, strong social networks and trust enable collective action and enhance community resilience.

Participatory art projects facilitate the formation of both bonding and bridging social capital, fostering connections within and across diverse groups. These networks are essential for addressing urban challenges, as they enable communities to mobilise resources and collaborate on solutions. In this sense, social capital functions as a form of social infrastructure that supports sustainability.

However, the relationship between social capital and sustainability is not inherently positive. As Bourdieu (1986) notes, social capital can also reinforce existing power structures and inequalities. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that participatory art initiatives are inclusive and equitable, promoting diverse forms of engagement.

6.2 Cultural Sustainability as a Central Pillar

The findings highlight the importance of cultural sustainability as a central component of urban sustainability. Community-based public art contributes to cultural sustainability by preserving local identities, fostering creativity, and promoting cultural diversity (Hawkes, 2001).

This aligns with the argument that culture should be considered the “fourth pillar” of sustainability, alongside environmental, economic, and social dimensions. By integrating cultural practices into sustainability frameworks, cities can develop more holistic and context-sensitive approaches to development.

Moreover, the role of art in place-making underscores the importance of cultural expression in shaping urban environments. Participatory art enables communities to create spaces that reflect their values and experiences, enhancing the quality of urban life.

However, the integration of cultural sustainability into policy and planning remains limited. Greater recognition of the value of cultural practices is needed to fully realise the potential of community-based public art.

6.3 Participatory Urbanism and Democratic Governance

The study also highlights the role of participatory urbanism in promoting inclusive and democratic urban development. Community-based public art serves as a practical application of participatory

urbanism, enabling residents to engage in the design and transformation of public spaces (Lydon & Garcia, 2015).

These processes contribute to the democratisation of urban governance by involving citizens in decision-making. This not only enhances the legitimacy of urban interventions but also ensures that they are responsive to local needs and contexts.

However, achieving meaningful participation requires more than simply involving communities in artistic activities. It necessitates the redistribution of power and the creation of institutional frameworks that support inclusive engagement. Without such measures, participatory processes may remain superficial and fail to produce substantive change.

6.4 Environmental Communication and Behavioural Change

The findings demonstrate that community-based public art is an effective tool for environmental communication and behavioural change. By combining aesthetic and experiential elements, participatory art engages individuals on multiple levels, fostering deeper understanding and commitment to sustainability (Curtis et al., 2012).

This suggests that art-based approaches can complement traditional environmental education and policy interventions. By making sustainability issues more accessible and relatable, participatory art can play a crucial role in promoting sustainable behaviours.

However, the long-term impact of these initiatives depends on their integration into broader sustainability strategies. Without ongoing support and reinforcement, the effects of individual projects may be limited.

6.5 Addressing Challenges and Enhancing Impact

While the potential of community-based public art is evident, the challenges identified in the findings highlight the need for more supportive and inclusive approaches. Addressing issues such as funding, institutional constraints, and inclusivity is essential for maximising the impact of participatory art initiatives.

Policymakers and urban planners should recognise the value of community-based art and provide sustained support through funding, policy frameworks, and capacity-building initiatives. Collaboration between artists, communities, and institutions is also critical for ensuring the success and sustainability of these projects.

Furthermore, future research should focus on evaluating the long-term impacts of participatory art initiatives, particularly in relation to behavioural change and urban resilience. Primary ethnographic studies could provide valuable insights into the lived experiences of participants and the dynamics of community engagement.

7. Conclusion

This study has explored the role of community-based public art as a transformative approach to urban sustainability through an ethnographic

analysis of participatory artistic practices. By synthesising secondary qualitative data and situating the analysis within the frameworks of social capital theory, cultural sustainability, and participatory urbanism, the research demonstrates that participatory art is far more than an aesthetic intervention—it is a socially embedded process that contributes to sustainable urban development in multiple dimensions.

The findings reveal that community-based public art plays a significant role in fostering social cohesion and strengthening community resilience. Through collaborative artistic processes, individuals from diverse backgrounds are brought together, facilitating dialogue, trust-building, and collective identity formation. These processes contribute to the development of social capital, which is essential for addressing complex urban challenges. In addition, participatory art enhances environmental awareness by translating abstract ecological concerns into tangible, emotionally engaging experiences, thereby encouraging sustainable behaviours.

Culturally, community-based public art contributes to place-making and identity preservation, enabling communities to articulate their histories, values, and aspirations within urban spaces. This reinforces the importance of cultural sustainability as a central pillar of sustainable development. Moreover, participatory art practices promote civic engagement by involving community members in decision-making processes, thereby supporting more inclusive and democratic forms of urban governance.

Despite these contributions, the study also identifies significant challenges, including funding limitations, institutional barriers, and issues of inclusivity. These challenges highlight the need for more supportive policy frameworks and sustained investment in participatory cultural initiatives. Without such support, the long-term impact of community-based public art may be limited.

In conclusion, community-based public art represents a powerful and holistic approach to urban sustainability, integrating social, cultural, and environmental dimensions. For policymakers, urban planners, and practitioners, the findings underscore the importance of embedding participatory art within broader sustainability strategies. Future research should prioritise primary ethnographic studies and longitudinal analyses to further understand the enduring impacts of participatory artistic practices on urban communities.

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