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Evaluating the Social Perception of Public Art[1]

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Abstract
This article examines the evolving social perception of public art in the twenty-first century, arguing for a methodological shift from object-centered to community-centered approaches in its study and evaluation. While contemporary debates on public art often emphasize its participatory and relational dimensions, academic research still tends to privilege aesthetic innovation over social impact. Drawing on theoretical frameworks by Bourriaud, Bishop, Zebracki, and others, the study identifies the need to evaluate how artworks influence emotional well-being, urban experience, and collective identity. It discusses key motivations for such evaluation, including the use of public funds, mental health and urban well-being, democratization of public space, and heritage management. Furthermore, it highlights the challenges of assessing perception—ranging from methodological complexity and institutional resistance to the subjectivity of individual experience—and proposes a transdisciplinary methodology combining quantitative and qualitative tools. These include surveys, interviews, group activities, visual documentation, and digital analytics (such as social media and Google Trends). By integrating these methods, the research aims to capture both the measurable and affective dimensions of public engagement with art. Ultimately, the paper argues that evaluating the social perception of public art not only informs cultural policy and urban design but also reinforces art's potential to foster critical reflection, inclusion, and well-being in increasingly hybrid (physical and digital) public spaces.

Keywords
Public Art; Social Perception; Urban Space; Participatory Art; Evaluation Methodology; Community

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1. Introduction

1.1. Preliminary considerations

In the first quarter of this century, we have witnessed significant shifts in the social consideration of public art. The debate seems to revolve not so much around formal innovation or experimentation, but rather, the relationship between art and communities. The symptoms of this shift are varied: iconoclastic attacks or the removal of controversial sculptures, the proliferation of mural and street art interventions often tied to urban regeneration processes, participatory art projects, and the creation of new monuments dedicated to the

victims of war or repression. Yet, academic studies still appear to focus predominantly on the processes of artistic creation and the symbolism of works, rather than on their social perception. Should we reconsider the way we study public art, moving closer to communities and their responses?

There is a long history of iconoclastic attacks, explored for years by authors such as David Freedberg (2021), which have surged in recent times, speaking to the "power of the image"— a capacity for transformation and social activation that places art at the centre of public debates. In contrast, there is also a history of new monuments dedicated to victims, promoted by collectives and associations, where aesthetics are not the primary concern. This connects closely with the aims of artists working with communities, seeking their active involvement in projects. Nicolas Bourriaud, writing in 2001, reflected on the micro-utopias generated through art, which we must consider when addressing its social dimension. Drawing on the reflections of Félix Guattari (*La révolution moléculaire*), Bourriaud refers to "microscopic attempts of a communal kind" (neighbourhood-based, academic, etc.), where the artwork can function as a relational device—a mechanism to trigger individual or collective encounters (Bourriaud, 2001). According to the French theorist, this form of art "creates micro-territories".

Claire Bishop (2006) would later define the "social turn" in art over recent decades: a paradigm shift noticeable since the 1990s, when artists moved beyond plastic or conceptual experimentation to focus on activating relationships within communities. However, how far does this shift actually go? Do we genuinely care about what people think?

The work presented here is grounded in a set of questions that frame a complex field of inquiry: Why evaluate, and for what purpose? Why is this type of analysis not discussed more widely? How should evaluations be oriented? Should priority be given to quantitative data or to qualitative insights? Where should the focus lie—on the artwork itself or on its social impact? Finally, when we speak of "the public," are we referring solely to the external physical space?

1.2 State of the Art

The existing literature on the evaluation of public art refers to a set of qualities inherent to such manifestations, as well as to our sensory perception of them. However, there is still no sufficient consensus on which attributes are most relevant for analysing public perception (Zebracki, 2011, p. 307).

Gestalt psychology has demonstrated that the human brain constructs coherent three-dimensional images from the characteristics and meanings of a work of art (Kruk, 2019). However, the formation of such mental images also depends on factors related to the history and context of those perceiving them. Martin Zebracki points out that the perception of public art varies according to age, education, and familiarity with art, and that analyses should focus on three key attributes: the integration of the work within its spatial context, its meaning and social dimension, and the extent to which it invites participation (Zebracki, 2013). With regard to the conception of social networks as part of public space, it is important to highlight the way in which the digital screen transforms our experience of sociability with the environment, as Jenni Lauwrens argues in her study on touch—another aspect of public art that should also be taken into account in evaluation processes (Lauwrens, 2021, p. 399).

Zebracki, Van der Vaart, and Van Aalst (2010) emphasise the complex and problematic nature of art in public spaces, as it must always consider the diversity of existing actors, perspectives (and interests), as well as the factor of time. The authors argue that the "public artscape" constitutes a site of intersection and exchange of meanings, shaped by the coexistence of actors with divergent perspectives and by ongoing shifts in social debates. In public art, meanings and social differences are continually negotiated. It is important to note that when studying public art, approaches can vary considerably, depending on whether the focus is placed on aesthetic claims, economic claims, social claims, or cultural-symbolic claims.

There is limited specific research on this subject. Katherine Gressel (2012) has studied methodologies for evaluating public art and highlighted the existence of models related to muralism and community art, particularly in the Anglo-American context. She points to initiatives such as the one developed in the early years of the twenty-first century by the UK think tank IXIA, which produced a comprehensive evaluation model (*Public Art: A Guide to Evaluation*) based on two tools: the evaluation matrix and personal project analysis. The first refers to the values to be considered in the different phases of a project (planning, development, and completion), while the second focuses on project delivery. A significant number of aspects are considered, encompassing artistic, social, environmental, and economic values. At the same time, the model raises fundamental questions concerning the ultimate purpose of projects—questions that, unfortunately, are often overlooked by public art commissioners. Gressel notes that in many cases commissioners fail to clearly articulate the objectives of such works. Is the aim to strengthen community identity, to nurture neighbourhood pride, or to preserve the memory of loved ones who are no longer present? Moreover, problematic issues arise when considering the effects or changes produced: Is it realistic to expect a public art project to influence the outcomes being measured? Is it possible to distinguish the impact of the public art project from other influences, such as additional local investments?

It also seems that the limited methodological advances—particularly those developed from an interdisciplinary perspective—have been primarily directed at evaluating the merits of public art produced in the present moment, especially in connection with urban muralism festivals, rather than analysing the presence of monuments that have coexisted with citizens for decades or even centuries.

2. Reasons for Evaluating the Social Perception of Public Art

Why evaluate public art? This is undoubtedly a fundamental question to consider before addressing methodological issues. At the "Workshop on Public Art Evaluation" held in Barcelona in April 2025, as part of the PERMORIA research project, a debate emerged about whether such evaluation efforts are truly necessary. Why evaluate public art, and for what purpose? (Fig. 1).

First, it is important to highlight an issue that should not be overlooked: public funds are being used. But does this alone justify evaluation? Public art, since antiquity, has been commissioned by public authorities, whether secular or religious, with society having neither voice nor vote. Why, then, involve communities today? Analysing how artworks are perceived and the effects they produce can contribute to more effective heritage management. It could be argued that this represents a step toward the real democratisation of cities. UN-Habitat (United Nations Human Settlements Programme) recommends, in the New Urban Agenda, enhancing citizen participation in decision-making processes concerning urban interventions in public space. This recommendation is reflected at the European level in the Leipzig Charter and in Spain in the White Paper on the Sustainability of Spanish Urban Planning. Therefore, citizen participation in decisions about the spaces they inhabit is almost an obligation for municipalities—yet it is often neglected. Some monuments shape the urban space around them, influencing traffic patterns, construction, and more, by creating zones of respect. In these cases, multiple actors and needs converge, which are not always easy to reconcile: is the monument situated correctly? Does it obstruct passage? Does it diminish the visibility of another monument that generates stronger local identity? Has it been relocated to facilitate vehicle traffic, causing social harm? The study of the social perception of public art should, therefore, be seen as a step toward the democratisation in the management and decision-making processes concerning public spaces[1].

1 - It is crucial to understand communities' perceptions of public artworks. At the very least, they should have the capacity to voice their opinions. But when it comes to decision-making, who should ultimately have the authority to decide on public art? Historically, these decisions have been predominantly political. Should they now rest exclusively with the public? What role should the artists' judgment play in this process? And what about the specialists? Perhaps the answer lies in fostering interdisciplinary collaborations, where art historians and other experts act as intermediaries between the community, artists, and institutions.

Figure 1. Meeting of the research project PERMORIA (Performatividad del monumento. Percepción social e intervenciones sobre el arte público). Barcelona, April 2025.

Another reason to evaluate public art relates to mental health and public well-being. It is widely acknowledged that art has a significant impact on the emotional dimension of human experience. For instance, Susan Magsamen and Ivi Ross, in their book *Your Brain on Art: How the Arts Transform Us* (2023), provide a comprehensive review of artists who have worked with emotions to improve mental health through the arts. It is no surprise that various nonprofit organisations, such as Creative Growth, use visual arts to assist individuals with intellectual disabilities, or Americans for the Arts, which funds initiatives to promote the arts in hospitals and healthcare facilities. Indeed, the benefits of art therapy have been recognised for decades. Semir Zeki and Hideaki Kawabata (2004) have studied how viewing visually pleasing artworks activates the medial orbitofrontal cortex (associated with pleasure and emotion), demonstrating how beauty stimulates the brain's emotional centres.

When art occupies public streets, and the viewer is not a casual visitor deliberately choosing to attend exhibition spaces but someone who encounters the works daily, it becomes essential to understand its psycho-emotional and psychosocial impact. Research has shown that urban living is linked to a higher risk of certain mental health disorders (ANAED Foundation, n.d.). Does public art contribute to exacerbating these issues, or does it help alleviate them?

For several decades, particularly through artivism and relational art, artistic practices in public spaces have explicitly aimed to improve community mental health. In this regard, J. Lerner has proposed the term 'urban acupuncture' for practices—not necessarily artistic works—that produce positive effects in cities (Lerner, 2003). This approach has been manifested in mural projects such as those by Boa Mistura. Public art, specifically community murals, can reduce urban decay and improve residents' mental well-being. Similarly, Jill Sonke (2019) has investigated how murals, public art installations, and participatory art enhance emotional well-being and reduce anxiety. Glen Coutts and Timo Jokela (2008) highlight that community art provides new educational perspectives by linking artistic creation with the environment and local participation. More recently, M. Dehove et al. (2024) conducted a field experiment demonstrating how urban art interventions influence visual attraction and well-being.

This brings us to a third motivation for evaluating the social perception of public art: the need to humanise cities. This approach gained prominence in the mid-20th century through politically driven proposals, such as Guy Debord's psychogeography and Henri Lefebvre's right to the city. In recent times, what is often referred to as the capitalist city has failed to prioritise human needs, and the problem has only intensified. This is evident in the ongoing loss of public spaces, the reduction of green areas (with the predominance of hardscaped plazas), and the prioritisation of vehicular traffic over pedestrians, among other issues. In this context, reclaiming public space is crucial not only to improve mental health but also to strengthen neighbourhood relations and, more broadly, the sense of community and belonging. Achieving this requires significant interventions in urban planning, and artistic practices can contribute by informing decision-making and, above all, by creating safe environments for living, not merely spaces for transit. In other words, they help transform the 'non-places' described by Marc Augé (1998) into liveable, vibrant spaces.

The fourth motivation concerns an issue affecting all artworks, regardless of their duration in public spaces: conservation. While some works may be ephemeral, the evolving perception of the community can justify preservation efforts that extend their lifespan. A notable example was the restoration of Muelle's signature on Calle Montera in Madrid, which was undertaken by the City Council in 2017 (García Gallo, 2017).

However—related to this motivation—the opposite can also occur: community perception may justify not preserving a piece, at least in its original setting. This is exemplified by the controversy surrounding the monument to Antonio López in Idrissa Diallo Square (Barcelona City Council, 2022) (Fig. 2), which was removed following a campaign highlighting the Catalan businessman and philanthropist's history of involvement in slavery. This is significant because cities are organic and constantly evolving. While some works may become permanent monuments, be they architectural or sculptural, others—though they remain witnesses to a particular era—may be relocated, for instance, to a museum. Public debates on socially relevant issues—often charged with strong political dimensions—ultimately influence decisions on the care and management of heritage.

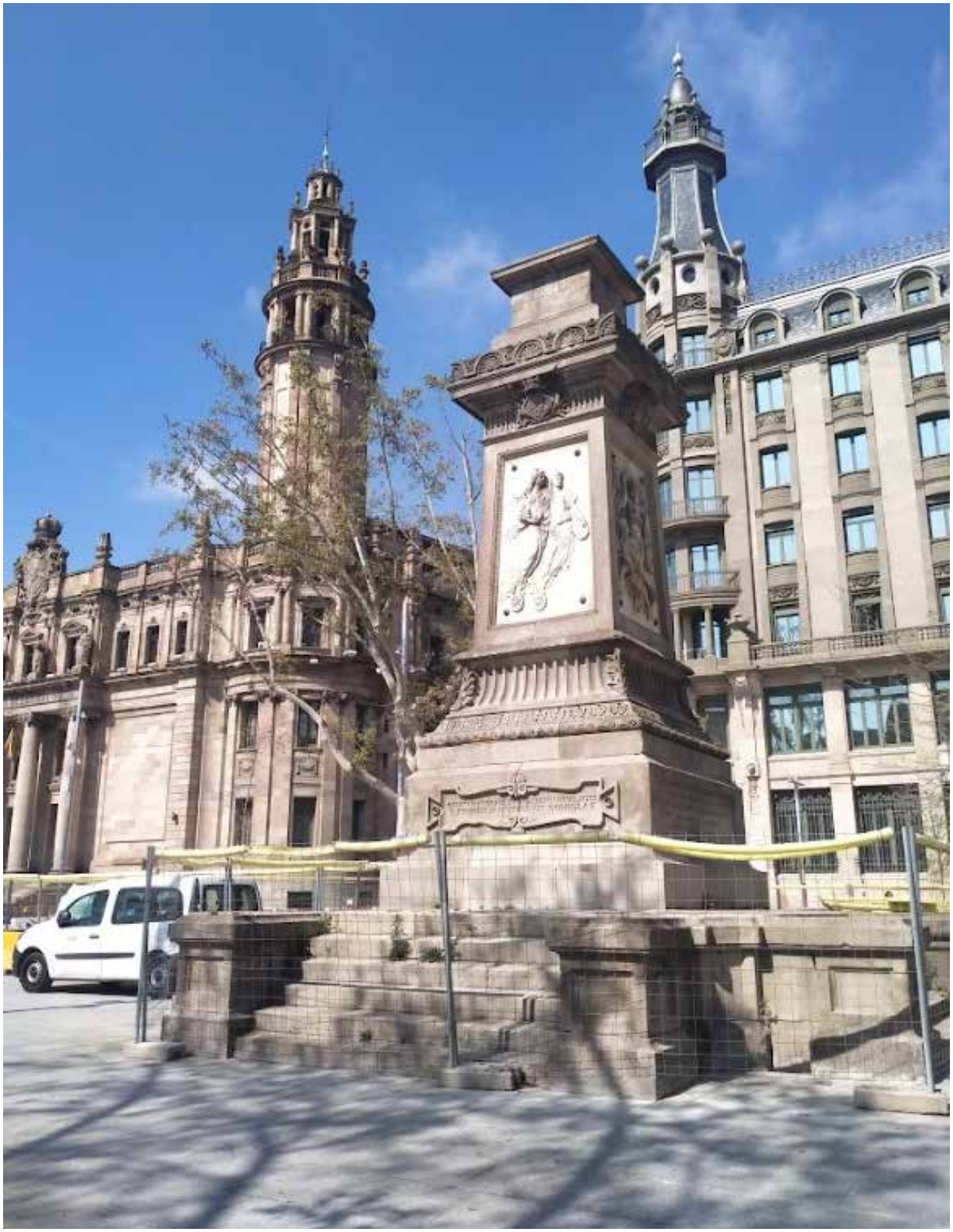

Figure 2. Pedestal of the Monument to Antonio López y López after the removal of the statue. Idrissa Diallo Square (Barcelona).

Finally, it is essential to consider the very body of scientific knowledge relevant to art history and history. Methodologies examining the impact of artworks on people date back at least to the 19th century: Einfühlung, the psychological approach, the sociological approach, semiotics, and so on. The central question is: what do we aim to understand, from the perspective of art history, about the social perception of public art? Public art can serve as a valuable resource for studying aesthetics of reception, thereby generating educational material.

But can such studies ultimately lead to the complete domestication of art? If so, what becomes of critical art that unsettles and provokes? Not all public art can accommodate the tastes of institutions, tourists, or even the community itself. Art—even public art—need not be merely decorative; it must also confront and challenge in order to engage with social issues. Should this responsibility be left solely to extralegal forms of art, which are increasingly rare in places such as Spain? Or should art history itself contribute to promoting initiatives that both engage and challenge the public?

Whatever the motivation, evaluating the true impact of public art would enable more informed decisions in urban design, grounded in real data aimed at enhancing collective well-being. Such well-being may also be understood through the discomfort generated by critical art that drives positive social change.

3. Challenges and Resistances

It is striking that, in a time when concern for strengthening the ties between modern art and society is on the rise, there remain so few in-depth studies on how communities perceive the art they live with daily. Much is said about social impact, and the benefits of art are often proclaimed, yet in the case of public art, we are unable to demonstrate whether it truly generates positive effects.

The perception that tools for evaluating public art are lacking is not new (Zebracki, Van der Vaart, Van Aalst, 2010). The issue becomes more problematic, however, when this perception is placed against the backdrop of abundant discourse on the benefits of community or participatory public art, particularly in relation to large-scale biennials. George Yúdice (2002) notes that, on occasion, works presented as socially engaged in fact reproduce the power structures of global corporations, with highly paid elites and 'participants' who are subjected and exploited, receiving little in return. Moreover, when the social benefits of such works are proclaimed, evidence supported by rigorous studies is rarely provided. As Yúdice observes, this would be unthinkable in the field of sociology.

Mexican artist Pablo Helguera, in his book *Education for Socially Engaged Art* (2011), emphasised the importance of drawing on experiences and knowledge from the field of education when working with participatory art. Such expertise, grounded in well-established research, can help secure group involvement and support the achievement of intended goals. This leads Helguera to raise a question that can, at times, feel unsettling: are the objectives clearly defined when participatory art is undertaken? This question extends to public art as more broadly, as its social dimension should remain central. For Helguera, it is not merely a matter of “participation”; it requires carefully considering the outcomes being sought, remaining conscious of the processes necessary for project development, “and to learn how to act in an effective way” (Helguera 2011, p. XV).

Another difficulty we face concerns the question of where to place the analytical focus. When dealing with artworks that aim to be innovative while also engaging with meanings intended to challenge or resonate with communities—or even contributing to urban regeneration programmes— what should take precedence in the analysis? Tim Hall (2003) cautions that the type of analysis undertaken depends largely on the disciplinary field: from an art-historical perspective, the emphasis lies on processes and formal analysis; from sociology or human geography, the focus shifts toward urban processes, economic factors, social impact, or transformation of the urban landscape. Artists, in turn, tend to stress aesthetic issues, whereas geographers adopt a more “deconstructive” approach, examining urban effects. Yet, as Hall observes, academic texts

almost invariably focus on production and on the "text" itself; seldom engaging meaningfully with audiences. Who, then, is the real audience of public art? How do they interact with the artworks? What meanings do they assign to them?

On the other hand, evaluating public art is complicated by the inherent subjectivity of individual experience. Multidimensional indicators are needed, ranging from visual appeal to emotional well-being. Mixed methodologies—combining quantitative and qualitative data—provide more comprehensive means of capturing its effects. Rigorous evaluation of public art is essential not only to substantiate its social value but also to secure funding. Yet it may be this very methodological complexity that explains the relative scarcity of specialised literature on the subject.

Beyond the inherently subjective nature of individual experiences, it is also necessary to account for people's situatedness: their sociocultural context and the type of relationship they establish with the artworks can strongly influence their attitudes and opinions. Martin Zebracki (2010) underscores the importance of considering the various stakeholders involved in such evaluations—residents, artists, public administrations, business actors, and others.

Evaluation is both costly and time-consuming, as Katherine Gressel (2012) observes, citing statements from representatives of organisations involved in promoting community art, such as Americans for the Arts's Public Art Network. Certain proposals—such as those advanced by the IXIA working group—are difficult to implement, as public administrations often consider them overly complex, expensive, and resource-intensive. Resistance to evaluation thus frequently emerges from the very institutions tasked with promoting public art. Artists, for their part, are unlikely to undertake such studies, as they impose further demands to an already substantial workload. What is required are transdisciplinary teams and sustained longitudinal monitoring. The latter is especially significant, since the impact of art typically unfolds over the long term and remains dynamic, evolving in tandem with social transformations.

A rigorous evaluation of the social perception of public art could help mitigate harmful effects—particularly in the case of new works—associated with processes of gentrification or the touristification of neighbourhoods. For actors within the art field (historians, curators, conservators, and even artists), it is crucial to avoid generating such social harms when promoting artworks in public space, especially the displacement of residents caused by rising housing costs. Yet in many cases, decisions are made in advance, with the interests of public administrations or major corporate stakeholders outweighing the perceptions of local communities.

4. Approaches and Tools for Evaluation

In this section, we propose a set of tools for analysing perception, but it is important to begin by considering how evaluations should be oriented. It is crucial to establish from the outset which values or dimensions should be considered in such evaluations, as this directly influences the choice of tools and methodologies. Claire Bishop, in *Artificial Hells* (2012), cautions that one must first clarify where emphasis is placed when discussing collaborative art: what is most important when analysing art aimed at engaging communities—the social dimension or the artistic/aesthetic component? Many existing works in public spaces confront this very question. Depending on where the focus lies, both objectives and modes of evaluation differ. What should be prioritised in works whose themes are dictated by social or political "urgency"? Should priority be given to the artistic aspect or to the social dimension? This dilemma gives rise to two distinct types of analysis: one that highlights art's capacity for social transformation, and another that emphasises its "artistic quality."

It is important to define the purpose of the tools in advance and to establish clear objectives. Tim Hall (2003) recommends gathering information from a variety of sources: published texts (in the media or academic forums), conversations (interviews, surveys, group activities), and others based on observation. Hall notes that images can reveal aspects that written sources do not capture: how people move through public spaces, what tourists photograph when approaching a monument and from which perspective, how residents

behave and what they do around artworks, whether they interact with them, or even how they use them. The methodologies proposed by Hall prioritise in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, and visual methodologies.

Claire Bishop (2012) expresses certain reservations about methodologies that rely too heavily on image-based documentation when analysing the "success" of collaborative or community-participatory artworks. The analysis of such works cannot rest solely on images of people gathered together and performing activities; the experiences, impressions, and narratives of participants must also be taken into account. The social sciences can provide valuable support here, having developed a substantial theoretical and research corpus around key concepts such as "empowerment," "inclusion," and "community." However, Bishop warns that it is problematic to allow evaluations to rest exclusively on quantitative analysis, as such data are often used to legitimise results already anticipated by the public administrations commissioning the works, primarily serving their own interests. In many cases, these evaluations fail to acknowledge the symbolic significance of the works for communities—a dimension that the humanities do take into consideration.

Another issue arises here, further complicating the debate: what do we actually mean by public space? Should attention be limited to artworks displayed and perceived in plazas and streets, in other words "outdoors"? Today, the impact of a work of art cannot be confined to its study at street level; it must also consider the internet and social media, understood as integral parts of public space. In *The 'Polyvalent' Public Space* (2017), Angelika Schnell proposes a conception of public space grounded in the ambivalence exemplified by the Centre Pompidou in Paris: in this context, the traditional distinction between interior and exterior loses relevance, as both the museum's interior layout and the exterior plaza constitute a single space. Schnell thus suggests that public space comprises a constellation of overlapping and interconnected spaces, extending even into the private sphere (Schnell, 2017, pp. 402–403).

One such overlapping space is the cloud—the way we conceive the ecosystem of networks and media, the online dimension—which is also part of this ensemble of public spaces. The convergence of physical and virtual realms has both positive and negative consequences: social networks, now transformed into a new public space, generate debates which, through anonymity and impersonality, contribute to the dehumanisation of the city. At the same time, they create a space that is not disconnected from art, as exemplified by Net Art in the 1990s or NFTs (Luque & Moral, 2021).

Taking these considerations into account, we propose a series of analytical and evaluative tools, with particular emphasis on surveys, interviews, group activities, visual research, and digital resources, which make it possible to capture both quantitative and qualitative dimensions.

- **Surveys** will provide general overview, enabling the collection of data and the identification of patterns. They can reveal how frequently a work is visited, whether it is perceived as part of the everyday landscape, or whether it evokes particular emotions. Likert-type scales are especially useful, as they allow for measurement and facilitate subsequent statistical analysis. Moreover, such instruments have proven effective in evaluating citizen perceptions within urban and cultural studies (Evans, 2005).

- However, quantitative data alone cannot capture the emotional or symbolic bonds between humans and public art. For this reason, **in-depth interviews** will be employed, building an analysis grounded in listening to participants: their memories of the artwork, the history associated with the space, and the ways in which the work has altered their perception of the place. During the Barcelona seminar, we considered conducting interviews directly at the monument, as this setting can encourage more sincere and spontaneous responses. Research has shown that spatial context influences emotional response: location shapes both memory and the narratives that emerge (Tuan, 1977; Hernández, 2006). Through these narratives, we seek to understand how public art is experienced in everyday life, how people appropriate space, and why.

• **Group activities** will be used to observe the construction of social perceptions, generating a dialogue in which participants interact, listen to one another, and experience conflicts. Through such interaction, more comprehensive responses are elicited and new ideas are fostered. It has been demonstrated that groups activate processes of cognitive openness, which stimulate creativity and critical reflection (Paulus & Nijstad, 2019). Within the context of artistic evaluation, these dynamics promote emotional expression and enable the identification of collective ways of appropriating public space. To analyse the data, different approaches will be combined. For surveys, descriptive statistics (means, frequencies, cross-tabulations) will be applied to identify patterns by age, gender, or place of residence. For qualitative analysis—of both interviews and group activities— thematic coding will be employed. This technique makes it possible to organise large volumes of information by grouping it into categories such as "memory," "emotions," "identity," or "conflict."

• **Visual research** provides highly valuable qualitative information, as artworks occupy space and interact with communities. Residents and tourists move through the environment and engage with the works using their bodies, demonstrating diverse modes of interaction with urban heritage. These interactions can range from a "reverential" respect for monumental works to playful engagements and the normalisation of physical contact. Artworks may function as urban furniture, forums for conversations, debates, and games, or even focal points for social mobilisation and activism. Photographs published in the press, online, as well as systematic observation and documentation conducted over time within a well-organised study, can yield evidence that goes beyond the more or less conscious statements collected in interviews.

• Furthermore, in **the context of the internet**, a wide range of tools can be used to evaluate the impact of public art. One such tool is Google Trends, which displays the search volume for a specific topic since 2004, as well as the number of visits to different websites over time and even the geographical origin of users (Corominas, 2011). In this sense, Google Trends can be can be employed to gain an indication of the societal impact of monuments, as an increase in searches during a specific period often corresponds to interventions, controversies, or debates surrounding a particular work. A clear example is the Valley of the Fallen (Comunidad de Madrid), which reached its peak search volume on Google in October 2019, coinciding precisely with the relocation of Franco's remains: the political controversies generated by the implementation of the newly approved Spanish Democratic Memory Law reached a high intensity in the public sphere. Similarly, social media can play a fundamental role in the analysis of public art, from monitoring the state of preservation of a piece to cataloguing initiatives, as these platforms function as collective repositories constantly updated with user-generated images. By analysing hashtags referring to a specific work within a set timeframe, changes related to the monument's preservation as well as potential interventions can be tracked. Additionally, many news outlets maintain social media profiles through which information about the monuments under study is disseminated. It is noteworthy that the analysis of social media applied to public art can also influence the quality of interventions and activities undertaken around a work, as well as the creation of new artworks (Azam & de Federico, 16).

The combination of these tools highlights the importance of transdisciplinary teams in evaluating the social perception of public art. If the aesthetic dimension of artistic proposals is to be taken into account, art historians should be involved; if psychological benefits are considered, psychologists are required; and when controversies or disputes arise regarding historical figures or commemorated events, the support and collaboration of historians and sociologists should be sought.

5. Conclusions

Artists often note that undertaking public art projects requires greater effort and more complex processes than producing art for museums or galleries. This complexity is also acknowledged by public administrations, yet it should not prevent administrations and researchers from approaching the evaluation of the social perception

of such art with due seriousness. Here, the reasons for conducting these evaluations have been outlined: art can contribute to people's emotional well-being; it can provide a deeper understanding of reactions to controversial themes, often conveyed through works with considerable symbolic power; and it can enhance comprehension of the need for restoration and conservation. Current debates surrounding the removal of monuments demand that administrations engage more thoroughly in analysing how works are perceived. Unfortunately, little action is being taken in this regard, and institutional inertia continues to shape both administrative practices and specialised discourse.
If the two components of the term—"art" and "public"—are considered separately, it must be recognised that evaluations need to address both the formal and conceptual qualities of the works. They must also consider their effects and public dimension: how aesthetics influence viewers, how the work interacts with its environment, how artworks engage with the identity and memory of communities, and how they may provoke discomfort due to the themes being explored or the narrative devices being employed. Analyses can effectively combine quantitative and qualitative approaches, but they must always retain a multidimensional and multidisciplinary perspective in research. It should be recognised that once art is presented in public space, it begins a new life and develops its performative power; it ceases to be protected and confined within the conceptual walls of the art world.

This also affects the notion of public space, which escapes traditional spatial coordinates: virtual space, with its uncontrolled circulation of images, opinions, and controversies, now constitutes an extension of public space and challenges the traditional separation between public and private spheres. Artworks are projected online and confronted by a virtual community. Evaluating the perception of these works involves observing and studying them in situ, engaging with neighbourhood or city communities through inquiry and dialogue, and also exploring the web to capture additional perspectives.

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