New Interpretation of Public Visual Art in Urban Space

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Abstract. Public space is essential for the full-value existence of a human being in the city. We are aware of its quality and the various tasks it is supposed to provide. Besides the basic needs that we inevitably perform in, it also has additional added values which it offers. One of the main tasks is to provide the opportunities for movement and the space for meetings and social interaction. The presence of works of art and elements enriches the public space and so it offers to perceiver a new enjoyment. Especially these works of art and the place where they are located may be in the environment the place of meetings, rest, and social interaction. The work deals with a new presentation of works of art in an urban environment. The subject of the research is the rehabilitation of works of art from the second half of the 20th century and the verification of possibilities of interpretation through the new technologies such as widespread and virtual reality. The research analyses the basic issues of works that have lost their natural function, their impact on public, and methods of their new use. The component part of the research is the design of a new interpretation of a chosen artwork.

1. Introduction

The works of art have entered in the past and are now entering the city’s surroundings to refer to a major historical event, personality, or to make the locality more attractive. The subject of our research are the artworks which originated over the years between 1965 and 1989. The selection of the period under review is related to the cultural policy and legislative measures adopted in the socialist Czechoslovakia. Resolution of the Government of ČSSR no. 355/65 on the budgetary rules relating to investment construction was to ensure the financing of the artwork in the field of architecture and the public space directly from the budget of the construction. In 1978, the rules and conditions for creating of an art in the architecture were clearly defined. The artworks are to be placed in the places with the greatest movement of the population, taking into account the character and function of the building. For the buildings having extraordinary social importance it was 1.5-2.0%, for social constructions it was 1.0-1.5% and for other public constructions it was 0.5-1.0% of the total budget construction costs.

2. The current state of an art in the public space

Over the time, with changes in lifestyle and social conditions, public spaces have to adapt to new demands of population who is demanding the change in the form of reconstructions and the introduction of new energy into the environment. Monumental artwork in the public space has always reflected social events and the removal of artworks has been the result of specific events and movements in society. At
present, fine arts are still disappearing in public spaces, particularly because of new constructions and their poor technical condition.

Investors, as well as representatives of local authorities do not have enough or have no information about the artwork in their territories. Requirements on the contemporary architecture and public spaces prefer sterile forms of typified “design”. Original artworks from the past are problematic and from the investor’s point of view, the argue or otherwise disrupt the new solution. [1]

We ask ourselves how to face the current issues and what solutions are possible. The options that can be used in such cases are categorized into three basic groups:

- Reconstruction and leaving the artwork in the original place
- Removal of the artwork
- Relocation of the artwork with creating of a new placement concept

2.1. Works of art that have lost their natural function

The main interest of research is the work of art in such public space which over time, has lost or changed its original function and role in the structure of public spaces of the city. They are now unused point in space, often found in poor technical condition. The aim of the research is the finding whether we can raise an interest in the work of art through new technologies. It is supposed that by creating an artwork-related experience with modern technologies. We support the relationship of remembrance art – an art that is linked to an emotional experience through memories

It is not enough to place the artwork in public spaces, but it is also important to keep them alive with the residents. Perception of the support of preserving artworks and preventing their removal should be formed from the early age of visitors and residents. Defining of the benefits and arguments needed to support the preservation of artworks can provide new cultural values, relaxation, entertainment, educational development and economic impacts. Therefore, we have witnessed the uncertain existence, unprofessional reconstruction and intervention in the artwork of the academic sculptor Anton Vranka was carried out in Bratislava – Petržalka, which resulted in a depreciation of the artwork and violation of the author’s copyright. In 2011, during the building construction of a chain store in Bratislava – Ružinov, the statue of Jozef Jankovič was demolished. It was one of the first abstract works of art in Bratislava originated over the years 1965-1989.

2.2. New context and roles of the artwork and its new interpretation

Works of art are often associated exclusively with the ideological aspect of the past regime. We do not differentiate artworks that were monuments or memorials of the regime and which are abstract compositions serving to make public spaces more attractive. These works of art are often the greatest values of some public spaces. However, we find the opinion that the removing the installed work and clearing up the space from it is the only way to deal with his heritage. The aim of this contribution is to point out the virtue of artwork placed in the public space, unlike those in the galleries and museums. The main difference is to enable the touch and direct contact with the viewer. By touching it, we have direct contact with the artwork, we perceive the information about its size, shape and material itself. The sight which is primarily used to view the artwork, mediates only the colour and light. Our optical perception brings together the subjectivity of the artistic vision with objectivity of today’s world and does not arise in hermetic isolation but as the form of communication.

Visual art is communicated through the visual sense more than through the touch. Artworks located in an urban setting where sculptures and reliefs are found are also related to the touch and contact – which is possible when using them. The situation of artwork and the urban space opens up new questions of presentation, achievement of the credibility of the work and direct connection with the viewer. New concepts such as experience and enjoy creating a new value for the artwork and the form of its communication. The most important condition is the acceptance of creation and its non-traditional shift with possible transitions to the other sectors and architectural creation. [2] Art and its creation is an instrument that currently serves to experience and open up new issues in the field of presentation. It is the current topic we are dealing with. In recent years, we have seen the cases where the willingness and
awareness of self-government or private investor and the contribution of local activists have rescued or restored works of art. The reconstruction of monumental painting or the new usage of the largest sundial – an artwork by the academic sculptor Štefan Prokop in Bratislava – Petzalka is an example of a conscious and purposeful activity of local volunteers. The activity we monitor is the rescue and restoration of the artwork of Stone Flowers by academic sculptor Karol Lacko. This activity has changed both the territorial and functional context of the work. [3]

3. Case study – Stone Flowers in Lučenec

The rescue and restoration of this sculptural work is still considered a precedent in dealing with the material heritage of socialism in the public space. The work of art was supposed to end up, like the most artworks of this period, by liquidation. The artwork has been saved thanks to long-term efforts. It was reinstalled in a context that gives it the role of dominance in the urban environment.

The academic sculptor Karol Lacko see figure 1a, created the work of art for the first time for the ceramic symposium “The statue of parks of Piešťany” in 1970. The author gave the permanent form to the artwork a few years later as the part of the fountain at the reconstructed Square of Republic in Lučenec. From this reconstruction to 2005, a larger amount of money was not invested not only in the care of the public space at the square, but also in the body of fountain and the sculpture itself. In 2005, a public tender for the divestiture and design of the entire square took place. The form of divestiture of squares and free uncultivated areas were common examples of the deprivation of lucrative properties in Slovakia in that period. [4] The tender was eventually cancelled. The reason why the square was not sold was the petition with 5000 signatures. The public clearly rejected the sale of the square and waited for the city leadership reaction. The decision of city leadership was surprising. The idea of selling a part of the square and reconstructing the other part from EU funds is now seen as the biggest problem in the process of rebuilding the square. The third of the square, including a fountain body with sculpture, was sold by public tender, and the rest was rebuilt without a public debate from EU funds.

![Figure 1. The original context (a) and the new context (b) of the artwork with the movement diagram of public space users (Source: authors)](image)

The interest of the activists in the square territory began in 2012. The new city leadership inherited the square in the process of ongoing reconstruction and looked for the solutions of the situation. Activists, in the cooperation with representatives of the city, organized a public debate not only about the shape of the square but also about the future of the artwork. It was unclear what the new owner of the part of square intended to do with the territory on which the fountain with sculpture stood. The discussion brought a united opinion that Stone Flowers – the sculpture in the fountain, should be preserved. Several members of the city parliament and a part of the public questioned the importance of the artwork rescuing. The rescue process changed in 2014. The new owner committed to respect the city’s demand to save the artwork. This demand of the city originated especially thanks to the long-term...
interest of activists and volunteers in this process. Considering their education and activities, the city has assigned them the task of finding the appropriate location, context and the role of this work see figure 1b. When selecting the location, the original concept of the sculpture, the context with the urban environment, the feasibility of the intention and the opinion of the public – professional and laic was taken into consideration. The considered territory in which the art work has entered is now understood as the public park at the largest settlement in the city. Intervention of the urban environment, in the form of reinstallation of the art work, did not have the ambition to devalue this environment. The intervention brought a valuable artistic work into the territory, it increases the social value of the area. It offers an artistic experience to a perceiver from the artwork itself, but with new technologies it is possible to bring it even closer to the contemporary perceiver and to encourage the interest in this type of creation in the public space.

4. Technology as an object and a process
We understand the technology as the object as well as the processes that allow its final functioning in the public space. We consider the technology in some sense as economically and socially useful items that are commonly used and processes associated with them, used in different sectors. [5] Technology and its expansion possibilities can be understood as the basis for technical processes, which we also integrate into production with specific way of processes. Technology can be understood as a certain complex of applied conduction and material apparatuses which also include an ideological level. [6] In today’s everyday use of technological processes, we can say that modern technologies nowadays allow us what Walter Benjamin predicted in the 1930s – more accessible art. [7] We are currently trying to find the right answers to the question of how to integrate digital technologies into the environment without disturbing the emotion originated by the original exhibits. [8]

4.1. Perception of the art work
One of the alternatives is to leave the art work in the space with its reconstruction and the use of new technologies in the form of increased attractiveness and offered new possibilities of its use. The technology that interferes with the possibilities expansion of the artwork presentation and the visit effectiveness in connection with the popularity of the artwork enters in the public space. Digital art stories open up a wide range of possibilities. The extent and way of using the technology should make the artwork more attractive, but also it should not prevent its true perception which is based on the conceptual view of the artwork’s original author. The perception of the work is to be expanded, not distorted by the technology. If this true perception cannot be maintained, it is necessary to look for such a new context of surroundings that does not depreciate the artwork and enables it to have its full meaning. We incline to the contention that the fine art has come apart with the traditional ideals, abolished the classic rules, adopted “non-artistic” motifs, ways, techniques and materials. The myth-forming tendency of our time has made the anti-beauty a myth. [9]

Many of what was shocking in the past is nowadays common, even often desirable. It is desirable that if the art work was placed in the space in the past, it is its integral part and also a part of the building, it should be preserved. If such preservation is not possible, it is necessary to look for such a new context of the environment that does not devalue the art work and it will enable it to have its full meaning. In general, also the work of art that was created during the socialist era needs only the proper presentation to be able to re-attract the viewer based on its visual qualities.
4.2. Presentation of the artwork

New forms of artworks in public spaces are the settings for experiments. With their power and correct presentation, they create a new identity a place of education and entertainment. In this group, we include visual festivals in the form of short open-air happenings that try to attract the viewer with an entertaining evening with the use of modern technology in presentations. Such changes are related to the current state of sociological conditions, cultural sciences, and an increasing number of new visual media in the presentation. This current museum and gallery boom is increasin gly more popular in our lives. We can see here the tremendous potential of using decayed and problematic art works – how to revive them again and offer the perceiver the opportunity to understand this work correctly. By using technologies, we signalize the process of transforming an artwork and change of aesthetics which acquires new temporary possibilities without invasive interventions. Attractiveness in the form of “projection mapping” is one of the possibilities of their new presentation. Here the inhabitant becomes not only the viewer, but in most cases also the disseminator of an art. This can be done by using the internet and social networks. This emotional rendering enhances the perception of the artwork on the basis of the already seen and the viewer is spreading this perception through internet devices. In the case of such dissemination of artwork, it can easily convince us of the presentation success see figure 2.

5. Results and conclusions

The chosen technologies do not interfere with the artwork; they do not change its essence. Through expanded reality, they can complete the artwork and make it more attractive and more attractive to the target audience. We expect the highest number of users between the ages of 12 and 25 years to use these technologies. Nowadays this generation shows the signs of natural curiosity and is easily adaptable. At the same time, this target group is not burdened with distorted perception of the artworks from the era of socialism. The technology of “widespread reality” which is available to a wide range of smartphone users, was chosen for the solved artwork see figure 3.
Figure 3. Design of the widespread reality application for artwork Stone Flowers (Source: Authors)

In addition to the presenting the process of rescuing the artwork, the basis of research was the mapping of the population’s movement and stopping by in the monitored area. The monitored locality was the original and the new placement of the artwork. We also take into account the integration of the available art work localities in the space, and then we present them in the diagram where we present the available localities considering the movement. Part of the contribution is the presentation of graphical possibilities of rendering the extended reality application of the artwork. This application will then be subjected to further investigation to verify new contexts.

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