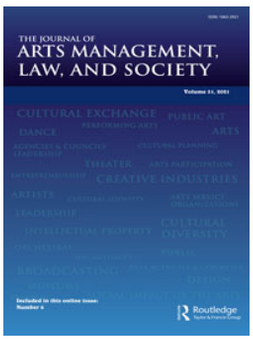

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The Impacts of Public Art on Cities, Places and People's Lives

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ABSTRACT

Public art's accessibility to a broad audience and its potential to bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds have granted it a unique power to make strong, enduring impacts on cities, places and people's lives. The impacts warrant a systematic review and categorization, the results of which will provide insights that contribute to justifying the integral place of public art in society. As no such systematic review has previously been carried out, this article seeks to provide a qualitative synthesis of original articles selected from four major databases of international journals using a combination of keyword searches and filtering procedures. The 839 articles retrieved from the initial searches were screened by title and abstract. The remaining 132 articles were read in full, with 50 studies eventually being selected for analysis and synthesis. The public art impacts identified were organized into eight categories, in terms of placemaking, society, culture, economy, sustainability, wellbeing, wisdom and innovation. Implications were then drawn with respect to future research on the impacts and evaluation of public art.

KEYWORDS

Public art; impact; city; place; life

Introduction

Public art is literally art for the public. In the existing literature, the term generally refers to artwork executed in the public realm in openly accessible locations outside of the conventional museum and gallery system (see, e.g., Miles 1997; Zebracki 2013). Such artistic creations exist in a wide range of indoor or outdoor public arenas; some are erected in city centers, others in what was once the middle of nowhere. Some of them are situated permanently at a site, such as a monumental statue or a bespoke sculpture, while others are for ephemeral engagement, as in the case of a public art festival, where the artworks only exist in a specific place and at a specific time. Some are site-specific, meaning that their interpretation requires an understanding of the site's historical contexts and sociocultural relationships, while others are less so. Some require more participation and input from the public, facilitated through, for example, the use of interactive and responsive media, while others are more static in nature.

Public art projects have often focused on the relationships between people, objects and places. For example, in 2017, Ai Weiwei saw his work *Arch*, a 40-foot tall cage-like structure, installed beneath New York's iconic Washington Square Arch. Built with mirror

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polished stainless steel, the sculptural structure creates a passageway in the form of two united human silhouettes. Combining the form of a passageway, which suggests movement, with that of a fence or cage, which suggests the inhibition of movement, the artwork creates a paradox that provokes discussion of issues relating to borders, immigration and access, and begs us to consider the inherent dualities of the world we live in. Another example is Bruce Munro's *Field of Lights*, which opened at the base of Uluru in Central Australia in 2016. Comprising more than 50,000 stems crowned with glass-frosted, solar-powered spheres, the installation lights up the desert as darkness falls. It invites visitors to immerse themselves in this garden of fantasy. The project has driven a significant increase in domestic and international visitors to Central Australia (Northern Territory Government 2017).

Public art can have a wide range of potential benefits, from fueling creativity and beautifying cities to improving quality of life and adding value to communities and assets. Its accessibility to a broad audience and its potential to bring together individuals from diverse backgrounds have granted it a unique power to make strong, enduring impacts on cities, places and people's lives. These impacts warrant a systematic review, the results of which will provide insights to artists and commissioners, enabling them to show that what they are advocating makes a difference. The results will also engage audiences, participants and communities in recognizing the value of their experiences, and assist city planners and policymakers to develop criteria for evaluating the effectiveness of public art planning, policies and programs. Such a systematic review is lacking in the existing literature.

Thus, the following research question arises: "What impacts do public art have on cities, places and people's lives?" To address this question, we conducted a systematic review by searching for, screening, assessing, selecting, analyzing and synthesizing information across multiple academic studies. In this review, we aim to identify and organize public art impacts into categories that can contribute to justifying its place as an integral part of society.

Methodology

The systematic review of journal articles was conducted in 2020. The search was performed on academic journals indexed in the online databases of Web of Science's Arts and Humanities Citation Index, Social Sciences Citation Index, Science Citation Index Expanded and Emerging Sources Citation Index. These databases represent a clear standard for peer-reviewed international articles. The search was limited to original articles published between 1961 and 2020, a 60-year span, with full text available in the English language. The *Topic Search* function was used, which returned results from the *Title*, *Abstract* and *Keywords* fields of journal articles. Three search rounds were conducted, each using a varying combination of search terms facilitated by the phrase searching and wildcard options. To retrieve articles that contain the exact phrase "public art", the two words were placed in double quotation marks. This served to exclude articles that contain the words but in which they do not appear close together.

The first round of queries focused on retrieving articles related to the impacts of public art. It employed the search terms "public art" AND (value OR impact OR benefit OR experience) and retrieved 108 articles. Given that the impacts could also be revealed in studies related to the evaluation of public art, we employed the search terms "public art" AND (evaluat* OR measur* OR assess*) in the second round of queries. The wildcard option, also known as truncation, helped to retrieve articles that contained the word plus zero or more characters. For example, a query for evaluat* returned words such as evaluate,

evaluating and evaluation. This query retrieved 58 articles. However, we also considered the possibility that there might be articles that would be relevant to this study but that did not contain any of the search terms outlined above. To enhance the comprehensiveness of the search, we conducted a third round of queries using only the search term "public art", which returned 673 articles.

A total of 839 articles were identified through the search process. Duplicates were removed, and the remaining articles were screened by title and abstract for an initial assessment of their suitability for inclusion in this review. This screening aimed to identify studies that had public art as a core subject in the research, rather than as a peripheral or minor subject. No constraints were placed on the methodology of the studies or on their subject in terms of the location of the public art project discussed. The exclusion criteria were articles that focused on museum or gallery arts, performing arts, cinema projects, literary studies, philosophy and other types of articles such as editorials and reviews. Articles not directly related to public art were also excluded, as well as those that merely approached public art from a technical point of view.

After this screening process, 132 full-text articles were identified as candidates for an eligibility assessment. Each of these articles was read in full. A few articles with titles and abstracts in English but main content in other languages were excluded in this process. Based on a purposive sampling strategy, eligibility was assessed based on the following criterion: to what extent would a review of the study contribute to a better understanding of the impacts of public art on cities, places and people's lives? This purposive sampling strategy required researchers to rely on their knowledge, experience and judgment about the field of study when selecting articles to be included in the systematic review. This strategy resulted in 50 articles being identified as relevant to the purpose of this review. To increase confidence in the selection of the articles and to minimize the impact of any researcher bias, all stages of searching, screening and assessment were conducted independently by two researchers who, after reading all of the potential articles, reached a consensus on which articles to include.

The selected articles were then carefully analyzed and thematically coded by the two researchers, again independently, adopting the thematic and genre analysis approaches from Cheung (2011a, 2011b). Through this in-depth interpretative process, the impacts of public art were identified and clustered into descriptive categories. The categorization affirmed the model initiated by Cheung (2019). Each article was then reread to identify the study's aims, context, methodology, results and implications to develop a detailed picture of how the researchers had tried to communicate the impacts to readers. Discrepancies in interpretation and categorization were resolved by discussion between the two researchers. There was no unresolved discrepancy that required the decision of a third researcher.

Impacts of public art

It has been widely acknowledged in previous studies that public art has significant impacts. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative synthesis is not to reexamine this aspect, but rather to identify and categorize the impacts of public art on cities, places and people's lives as revealed in the studies included in this review. Following the interpretative analysis described above, we classified the impacts into eight categories: impacts on placemaking, society, culture, economy, sustainability, wellbeing, wisdom and innovation (see Figure 1). Within each category, our deliberation is supported by referring to relevant studies included in this review.

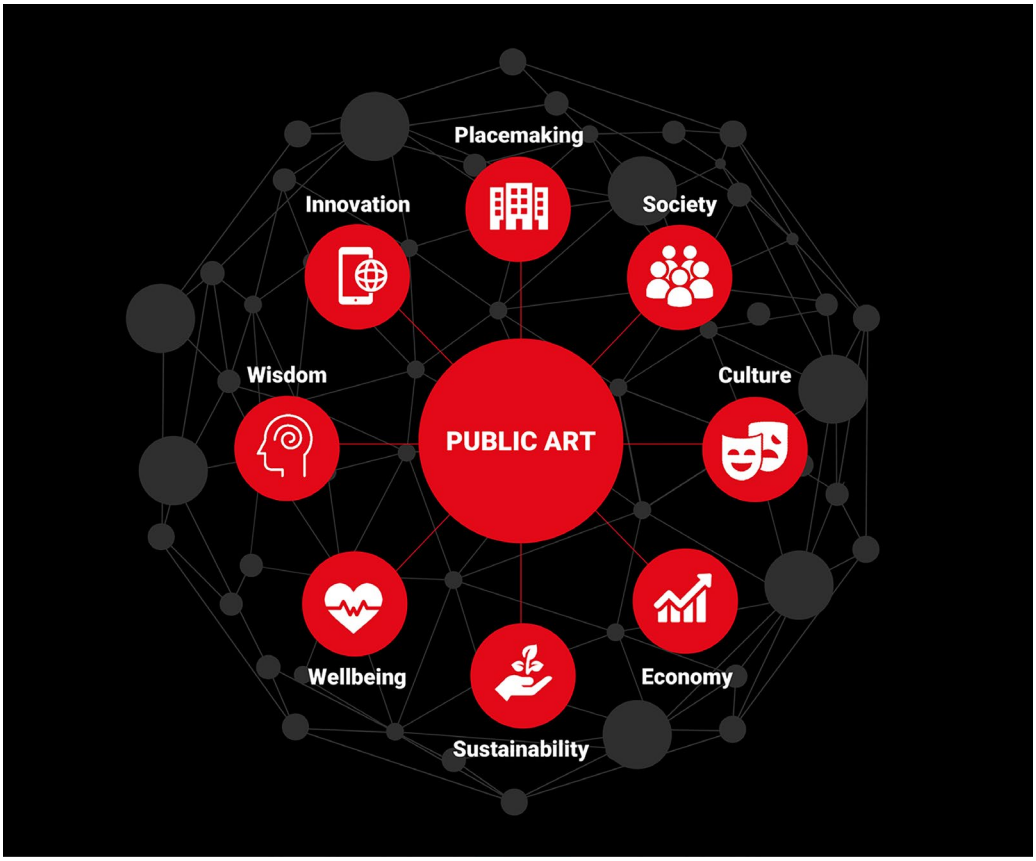

Figure 1. Impact categories of public art (© Ming Cheung 2019).

Placemaking

Placemaking is defined as the "designing or redesigning" of public spaces so they can be "more useful, communal, safe", particularly with "input from the communities using them" (Collins 2020). Public art has a clear placemaking role; it can help to make cities vital places in which to live, work and play. The nature of its placemaking often depends on the planning, design and management of public spaces. On the one hand, public art can develop site awareness and an iconic identity for a place, and, on the other, it can prompt conversation – and sometimes contention and controversy – among stakeholders. See, for example, Blair, Pijawka, and Steiner (1998)'s examination of the role of public art in a city's mitigation planning through a review of the experience of the Squaw Peak Parkway in Phoenix.

Studies have illustrated the idea that community engagement is at the heart of the placemaking process (see, e.g., Bruce 2019; Morris and Cant 2006; Pollock and Sharp 2007). Public art, in this sense, is tasked "to engage with its audiences and to create spaces – whether material, virtual or imagined – within which people can identify themselves, perhaps by creating a renewed reflection on community, on the uses of public spaces or on our behaviour within them" (Sharp, Pollock, and Paddison 2005, 1003–04). The meanings residing in public art are at the same time "shaped by community interaction" and "relentlessly negotiated by the numerous actors that inhabit the city" (Maria

Guazon 2013, 864). However, if a place is disrupted, there may be changes in the community reception of the public art located therein (Pollock and Sharp 2012).

Zebracki (2012) conducted research on the controversy around Paul McCarthy's public artwork, *Santa Claus*, located in Rotterdam, The Netherlands. The bronze sculpture, holding a sex toy rather than a miniature Christmas tree, was dubbed the "Butt Plug Gnome" by the media for its alleged sexual connotations. In 2008, following years of lobbying by a local entrepreneurs' association, *Santa Claus* was "set free" from the inner courtyard of the Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen and moved to a public space in Eendrachtsplein. The researcher examined the public's experiences of *Santa Claus* in relation to its place based on data collected from 100 media sources, two expert panels, three focus groups and 21 in-depth interviews. The results conveyed positive, neutral and negative voices about the site-specificity, site-connectedness or site-meaningfulness of this highly disputed artwork within the physical, aesthetic, social, cultural, economic and political dimensions of public space. In this sense, public art is geographically reconstituted by the public. Its identity for a place is constructed or reconstructed in the public's engagement with it. Zebracki (2012, 743) concluded, "The effects and affects of particularities of art in space are therefore a consequence of the engaging interrelationships between indweller, artwork and place, which thus requires situated knowledges of social relationality."

In the process of community engagement, placemaking implies encounters of consensus as well as agonistic and potentially antagonistic struggles. A study by Kortbek (2019) provides a good illustration of this. The researcher discussed the role of participatory public art in transforming socially and aesthetically problematic places into physically, socially and mentally stimulating urban spaces in eight municipalities around Copenhagen. However, not all of the projects succeeded. In one of them, the artist put up a canoe outside a dark tunnel and constructed a system with blue light and sounds of running water inside the tunnel as a response to the history of the place, which had had a brook located there before. However, the project did not garner appreciation from the participating citizens; instead, they questioned whether it was really art, and some even threatened to vandalize it. The researcher described this as a contradictory encounter engendered by the divide between the participating citizens and the artist, with the former wanting to have a voice in the project but having no power to influence its outcome and no inclination to interact with the artwork and the latter approaching the artwork in a spirit of artistic autonomy without fully realizing the potential for performative urbanism or transformative praxis the project was originally intended to encourage. The researcher concluded that this project "became a token of an antagonistic struggle in the housing estate and a symptom of a hegemonic order between those in power – the municipality and the artists – and some of the citizens, instead of a vibrant democratic process" (39).

Society

In the studies included in this review, public art has also been shown to have significant impacts on society which refers to, according to Collins (2020), "the people who live in a country or region, their organizations, and their way of life." Public art connects the past, present and future of a place (Mackenzie and Taylor 2006). First and foremost, it can contribute to a city's collective remembrance of its shared social legacy and, in some cases, civic pride. Examples include revealing structural and systemic violence rooted in societal exclusions based on gender, race, ethnicity and socioeconomic class (Falcón 2018), and evincing women's visibility in constructed histories and their representation in political protests (Kosmala and Beall 2019). Public art can also document national events for a city

– some statues and monuments still hold contemporary significance, although this is not unquestioned in a society of diverse publics and conflicting interests (Miles 2011), while others have become obsolete as their meanings have vanished from civic consciousness (Young 2016).

On the other side of the spectrum, public art can provoke urban spaces to be "contested, negotiated and performed in the daily creation of city futures" (Gurney 2018, 33). It allows an artist to make a statement, and, in some cases, to advocate for social justice. It enables people to interact and debate social and political issues, which then shape places and communities and compose the relationships between them. As Smith (2015, 26) stated, "The potential of art to be a diagnostic of social issues and change rests on the degree to which it is public or engages with publicness." Studies have examined, through the lens of public art, interventions to challenge economic inequalities (Minty 2006) and to assert the right to the city in Cape Town (Becker 2018), to signal tensions with regard to class, gender and increasing political polarization in Egypt (Smith 2015), to foster social change and human rights for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans refugees in Vancouver (Fobear 2017), to broaden abortion rights in the Republic of Ireland (NicGhabhann 2018) and so on. Sitas and Pieterse (2013) reported how the practice of inclusionary public art had created new avenues for democratic dialog and renewal in South Africa by embracing an ethos committed to deep participation, collective decision-making and conflict resolution. In this regard, "[a]rt presents the possibility of an impromptu public forum for the exploration of thoughts and ideas concerning pertinent cultural and political issues" (Smith 2015, 26). It has, in many cases, contributed to the cultivation of community spirit and the promotion of social cohesion and social inclusion.

There are a few articles that examine the planning of urban sculpture and its impact on the socio-political landscape of a city (e.g., Liu, Uyttenhove, and Zheng 2018; Wasserman 2018). Zheng (2019) examined the urban sculpture planning and production system in Shanghai, the first Chinese city to have an administrative apparatus directed toward this purpose. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews with government officials, art consultants and leading artists in state-led projects. The findings indicated that the city's urban sculpture scene had been transformed by the government "from explicit political didacticism into veiled ideological education under the guise of caring for the people" (777). The state government continued to censor sculptures proposed by entrepreneurs and to support those that enabled it to control the cultivation of entrepreneurialism ideologically. While the urban sculpture scene continued to be dominated by didactic monuments, it underwent a transition from explicit to soft didacticism, as revealed by the growing number of democratized, people-friendly sculptures serving to trigger aesthetic and emotional responses from the community. Such symbolic capital, ideologically and entrepreneurially orchestrated, serves a dual purpose. On the one hand, it has contributed to generating economic returns through artistic placemaking and city marketing, and has attracted businesses and stimulated investments. On the other hand, it has worked toward maintaining political stability by making sure that the selection and display of artworks are aligned with state interests.

While public art can facilitate the urban regeneration of a region or city, it is, in some cases, used to circumvent local community opposition against private interests. It is not uncommon for public art to be used to re-aestheticize the damaged landscapes of former mining regions. Yet Chambers and Baines (2015) described how the land sculpture *Northumberlandia* served as a public relations framing tool of its commissioning body to justify a renaissance in surface coal mining and to obscure its negative impacts on communities. The sculpture was constructed from waste from an opencast mine between 2010

and 2012. The researchers conducted a media analysis and found that in the press releases and news articles, the sculpture was referred to as "a gift to the community" and an opportunity for increased employment and tourism benefits, which were framed within a discourse of cultural and economic regeneration. The civic role that this privately funded public art took on through this framing strategy enabled it to be used to manage local community resistance against the environmental and ecological damage inflicted by mining.

Culture

Another major impact category relates to the power of public art to foster an appreciation of cultural heritage, injecting a sense of ownership and belonging among people and communities while recognizing the past. According to Collins (2020), culture consists of "activities such as the arts and philosophy, which are considered to be important for the development of civilization and of people's minds." Community murals are examples of public art that promote artistic merit and cultural significance for cities and places. Studies have examined murals in different parts of the world (e.g., Grant-Smith and Matthews 2015; Kyi, Tse, and Khazam 2016; Molina, Molina, and Campos 2020; Tamaira 2017).

In Australia, the City of Port Phillip has a post-settlement history that dates back to the mid-19th century. Kyi, Tse, and Khazam (2016) investigated the role of citizen science in conserving urban murals in the area. Working on a crowd-sourcing approach, community volunteers collected images and information about urban murals and shared the data on mobile and web-based digital platforms. This participatory engagement initiative had positive impacts on cultural heritage and knowledge transfer. The local and wider communities developed an enhanced awareness of the murals' cultural values and became advocates for their conservation. Informed by the conservation-relevant data, an evidence-based dialog was established between conservation specialists and non-specialists. A transfer of specialist knowledge about conservation processes and assessment methods took place. At the same time, the specialists benefited from the historical and cultural knowledge provided by the local communities, helping them to prioritize conservation decisions.

Economy

Public art certainly has an important role to play with respect to the fourth impact category, the economy. Collins (2020) defines the economy of a country or city as "the wealth that it gets from business and industry." Public art has become one of the new urban norms (Guinard and Margier 2018) that contribute to the branding and marketing of a city. It can boost creative industries and drive cultural tourism, which is "a type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination" (UNWTO 2017, 18, cited in Richards 2018, 13).

A few studies have reported on how public art has become a catalyst for economic revival (e.g., Kaino 2014; Whybrow 2016). Whybrow (2016) narrated his firsthand encounter and experience with public art in the town of Folkestone in the United Kingdom. Once renowned as a seaside resort and gateway to Europe, the town saw a decline in its economy from the 1960s onwards. However, with the introduction of the Folkestone Triennial in 2008, during which international artists were commissioned to produce site-specific artworks, the town started to revitalize and regenerate its momentum. In this case, public

art has attracted tourists whose visits and consumption support local businesses and help to drive the local economy.

Sustainability

Many cities around the world and their citizens are under threat from various environmental hazards such as air pollution, earthquakes, fires, floods and water contamination, to name but a few. Studies have revealed that public art can help to transform spaces in a city and develop a sustainable lifestyle among its people, ultimately enhancing livability and quality of life. Sustainability refers to the ability to have an environment "maintained at a steady level without exhausting natural resources or causing severe ecological damage" (Collins 2020).

Focusing on the city of Oslo in Norway, Myrvold and Wergeland (2018) studied how artists influence sustainability planning by actively exploring green values in nature-oriented, environmentally responsive public spaces. In their article, the researchers also addressed the shift in public art practices from positioning artworks as object-based representations toward taking on a participatory experience approach, with artists transforming themselves from being producers of artifacts to production planners and with the audience becoming co-actors or co-producers in the process. Similarly, De Shazo and Smith (2014, 22) stated that "The more a community participates in the art-making process, the more likely they will find the final product not only aesthetically pleasing but also meaningful and worthy of city funding."

With public art projects expanding their emphasis to civic activation, some artists have also attempted to drive changes in urban development and to influence the cultural and environmental policies of cities. Kuchinskaya (2018), in discussing a public art installation in Pittsburgh, attempted to raise community awareness of the importance of displaying environmental data publicly. The environmental visualizations stimulated dialog among the local and wider communities about how they were experiencing hazards in their society.

Then in Aragón, Buxton, and Infield (2019), the researchers examined how *High Tide*, a temporary landscape installation in Boston, engaged people to visualize the flooding due to the projected rise in sea level at a publicly accessible site. The researchers recorded 10 one-hour sessions of participants' interaction with the exhibit. They then interviewed four participants and collected 45 responses in an online survey. The results showed that the installation's site-specificity had helped the participants to understand the local implications of flooding in their neighborhood, the vulnerability of the city's shoreline to flooding and the gap in current municipal plans for accommodating climate change issues.

Wellbeing

In addition to the above impacts, it is essential to mention that public art can also humanize cities and places. It can promote people's happiness and improve their mental and physical health through community building and social connectedness. Wellbeing, as one of our public art impact categories, refers to "the condition of being contented, healthy, or successful" (Collins 2020). Mohatt et al. (2013) situated their study in the United States, where suicide is a leading cause of death. The researchers reported seven first-person accounts of *Finding the Light Within*, a participatory public art initiative for reducing the stigma associated with suicide with a view to eradicating the social barriers to effective prevention and treatment. The initiative included the creation of a community-produced

public mural about suicide in Philadelphia, which engaged more than 1,200 community members in the creative process. It also supported the production of a public narrative about suicide and its aftermath, enabling suicide survivors and other community members to share their experiences of pain and suffering as well as collective healing, resilience and hope.

The first-person accounts in the study provided some support for the idea that the initiative became an agent for social change and community awareness, helping to alleviate loneliness and isolation as well as reducing stigma among people who would otherwise not have community support but be left to deal with suicide as an individual mental health problem. However, the researchers acknowledged that, because this initiative did not include a rigorous evaluation, it was not possible to identify specific impacts on individuals or communities.

This sentiment was picked up by Tanguy and Kumar (2019), who argued that there is little empirical evidence as to whether public art is crucial to the lives of citizens. To help fill this research gap, they surveyed 469 respondents at two public art projects in London's urban spaces during 2018, and found that 84 percent of the respondents believed that participating in public art projects on a regular basis benefited their wellbeing. The respondents also demonstrated a willingness to support the implementation of such projects in their locale financially, making them a core part of their city experience.

Wisdom

Our next impact category is wisdom, referring to the ability to use one's "experience and knowledge in order to make sensible decisions or judgments" (Collins 2020). Public art can encourage thought and enable educational opportunities for communities. Song (2014) explored how Patricia Johanson's ecological public art and landscape design helped to shape the future of local communities and inspire students to think about their projects. In another study, Robidoux and Kovacs (2018) examined public art for its environmentally focused educational capacity in Canada, trying to fill the gap in the research, which had primarily been conducted in Australia (e.g., De Lorenzo 2000), the United Kingdom (e.g., Pollock and Paddison 2010, 2014) and the United States (e.g., Song 2012, 2014). The researchers interviewed community stakeholders involved in ecological public art and urban planning in the Greater Toronto Area. Some major findings included: the need to cultivate critical thinking skills among children with respect to how they could effect change through addressing problems with creative means; the educational benefits offered by temporary installations through generating community engagement while allowing for financial practicality and flexibility in terms of location; the importance of empirically evaluating through public feedback whether the prescribed learning benefits have been achieved; and the usefulness of documenting evidence of such benefits to influence future policymaking in government and business.

While public art contributes to the cultivation of wisdom, it can also enliven a city and a place by bringing people together and promoting engagement and interaction through creative practices. In a case study of the Los Angeles Metro artist-led tour program, Yamamoto (2018) illustrated how contemporary artistic practices transformed commuter journeys into differentiated yet deeply integrated experiences in transportation environments. The study showed how the program's creative placemaking activities connected commuters with existing artworks for personalized and positive interactions in well-traveled public spaces. One of the activities, for example, engaged participants in an Earth Day tour to

explore and learn about nature-focused artworks. The experiences revitalized the commuters' expectations and reflections about where they live, work and play.

Innovation

Zebracki, Van der Vaart, and Van Aalst (2010) described public art as "a visual practice in that it integrates, represents, and communicates vision, image, and space" and noted that the dynamism in the arts sector has generated "a multiplication of styles and media of expression in cities' public spaces" (786). The kaleidoscopic ideas given physical form in public art projects can ignite creativity and inspire innovation among communities (see, e.g., Aragón, Buxton, and Infield 2019; Mohatt et al. 2013). As Cheung (2012, 321) pointed out, "If creativity is the act of generating new ideas, then innovation is the process of applying those ideas to a particular context." An innovation is "a new thing or a new method of doing something" (Collins 2020). The studies included in this review illustrate that public art can transcend disciplinary and methodological boundaries in the service of artistic, societal, scientific and technological imperatives and help to address real-world challenges of national and global significance, delivering innovative solutions that change lives for the better.

Today's increasingly digitalized era has also seen an expansion in the innovative use of hybrid, online-offline spaces, including social media, web-based platforms, mobile applications, digital technologies, extended realities, artificial intelligence and others, to enhance human interaction and experience in the processes of making and engaging with public art. However, among the studies included in this review, scholarship on public art has largely focused on examining the public's on-site encounter with the artworks, while little attention has been devoted to exploring the public's virtual engagement with them. Trying to bridge this gap, Zebracki (2017) examined the virtual relationality of public art engagement in a case study of the traveling *Rubber Duck* exhibition. Virtual relationality, according to the researcher, refers to "the mediation and appropriation/repurposing/challenging of public art's properties and roles in digitally mediated social relations and hence networked spaces" (4–5). The researcher conducted a textual and audio-visual discourse analysis of the appropriation and narration of the on-site installation of *Rubber Duck* on social media, online forums and news platforms. The results showed that the public's dynamic engagement through various online spaces had enhanced their affective experience of the artwork in parallel with its material locality.

Implications and conclusion

Public art is fundamentally about creating artistic and life-enriching experiences for people within the everyday, shared public realm. It is through these experiences, whether seen, smelled, heard, touched or felt, that public art can transform spaces and realize diverse impacts for its stakeholders, audiences and communities. This review contributes to the knowledge of public art by identifying and organizing public art impacts into eight categories in accordance with Cheung (2019), namely, placemaking, society, culture, economy, sustainability, wellbeing, wisdom and innovation. This categorization is significant, as it can foster a greater appreciation and understanding of public art, its value and definitive benefits for cities, places and people's lives. It is also useful when it comes to developing an evaluation methodology that aspires to provide systematic evidence to justify the need for and value of public art, as well as leveraging public and private investment in the arts

sector and supporting the inclusion of public art as a fundamental part of city planning, infrastructure and services.

For a public art project to be successful and to achieve its claimed objectives, effective community engagement is essential. This is supported by many of the studies included in this review. However, the review also reveals that there is a lack of primary, systematic studies on how communities perceive, experience and engage with public art. Without this knowledge, any claims about how impactful public art is may still be "criticized for being overblown and unrealistic" (Schuermans, Loopmans, and Vandenabeele 2012, 676). Two decades ago, Hall and Robertson (2001, 18) mentioned that "very little satisfactory evaluation of these claims has taken place." Twelve years later, Zebracki (2012) reinforced the suggestion that the interaction between art and the public still remains a black box, as "there is little knowledge of public-art perception and engagement from the perspective of the publics, those for whom public art is fundamentally intended" (736). From this review, it appears that there is still a lack of a rigorous methodology to evaluate community perception, experience and engagement with public art, and that this could be a valuable topic to address in future research.

By identifying and evaluating the key ingredients public art requires to meet the varied and evolving needs of its audiences, such research will provide insight into strategies for increasing and enhancing community engagement and ultimately increase the impacts and benefits of future public art projects for the public at large. Equally, it could spark a debate about artists' artistic integrity and freedom of expression on the one hand and the public's involvement in selecting, experiencing and transforming public art on the other. This could be another topic to explore in future research.

Some limitations of this review and of the studies included herein are worth mentioning. Reflecting time and financial constraints, this review has focused on articles that are included in four major databases of international journals. There may be other articles on the topic that appear in other databases but were not included in this review. However, from the outset, the aim of the review was not to give an exhaustive account of all articles in the field, but rather to affirm the major categories of the impacts of public art on cities, places and people's lives. In this regard, the selected dataset of 50 articles has enabled the research team to achieve its aim.

Among the studies included, most focused on discussing public art with regard to its impacts on placemaking, society, culture and sustainability. To enrich the literature, future research could focus on expanding the knowledge of public art's impacts on economy, wellbeing, wisdom and innovation – an exciting research journey ahead.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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