



Humanising the Territory: Proposals for the Management of Urban Art and Muralism that Integrates the Community from a Transdisciplinary Perspective

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Abstract

The management of art in public space has often led to processes of gentrification and rejection by the community in which the piece is inserted. However, other participatory urban practices have served to revitalise different types of territories, especially more rural areas or peripheral neighbourhoods. However, when the management is not done from the neighbourhood itself, it is often the institution that in some way imposes these artistic practices on the territory, and when actions are carried out to integrate the local population, the results are not measured with objective instruments. In this sense, this paper presents a possible guide with participatory dynamics prior to the realisation of murals and/or urban art festivals, in order to achieve good practices in urban art management, from a transdisciplinary point of view by including not only art history, but also psychology and anthropology. These dynamics have already been put into practice and real results will be presented, with comparative analyses leading to conclusions about what has worked and can be extrapolated to other territories and what could still be improved.

Keywords

History of art; psychology; anthropology; city; community; urban art.

1. Introduction

In order to understand the need to humanise the processes of creation in public space, we must begin by defining the concepts of artistic manifestations produced in public space: urban art and urban muralism, urban installations, etc., which, although they have a wide dispersion and disparity of studies and publications. However, the proliferation of festivals, routes and other forms of institutionalisation of urban art has led to a certain tendency towards the academic study of these manifestations. The current reality is that contemporary

muralism has prevailed over free and spontaneous urban art, especially in Europe, although this does not mean that it has disappeared. The notable differences between both manifestations have not prevented the term urban art, and even graffiti, from being used to refer to urban muralism, although it is true that there is an incipient awareness in the academic and artistic world of the correct use of these terms.

This differentiation is very necessary, since when we propose good management, we cannot in any case

refer to urban art, since, being a type of work, as has already been said, free and spontaneous, there is no room for cultural management in this respect, with one exception: a request for its conservation/restoration. And this applies even to graffiti. As indicated in the GEIC Code of Ethics (VVAA, 2016) with regard to urban art, a piece of urban art or even graffiti, which by definition are ephemeral, could only be the object of a restorative intervention with the aim of extending its life in the case of a popular request, with formulas such as the BIComún, and always with the artist's approval, whenever possible.

However, with respect to urban muralism, which has become so popular on a social and institutional level, it has been written to date that this type of artistic production improves the lives of the people who make up the community in which the works are executed, but it has never been analysed with scientific instruments and at the same time much has also been written about the damage that this type of project can cause to certain areas, such as producing processes of gentrification (Luque, Fernández, Moral, 2024).

The reality is that these kinds of creations have been produced without planning, something that must continue to be the case in part due to the nature of the artistic manifestation itself, which is ephemeral and part of urban art that is spontaneous. However, as muralism has become professionalised and institutionalised, where public money is invested and communities are involved, there has been some criticism of it, for example, due to the abandonment of certain works that generate a degraded image of the area, or muralism has even been blamed for processes of gentrification. In other cases it has been understood as a means of revitalising degraded areas, but in reality these positive affirmations regarding the effects of muralism on certain areas and their population are based on observation, and there are no studies that analyse the economic effects with real data, much less on a psychosocial.

There are many projects that involve the community, the well-known cases of Chicago Public Art Group

(Chicago Public Art Group, s.f.) or Groundswell in New York (Groundswell, s.f.), although this type of project has also been carried out by researchers such as Adris Díaz in Monterrey (Mexico), or in Spain cases such as Boa Mistura in different parts of the world or Basurama. However, involvement is usually carried out through the option of the community also painting the walls, with interviews or focus groups in which part of what is to be represented is decided at most. There are even initiatives where it is the community itself that manages the creative process with artists, for example in Spain there are examples of Barrios such as El Almendral in Jaén or Zoes in Salamanca, but doesn't that association do anything but act as a patron? (Luque Rodrigo, 2023).

2. Humanising artistic creation in public space: the right to the city

In relation to the social part of the project, it is necessary to start from some notions in relation to how public space is experienced. Starting from Marc Augé's notion of Non-Place, some theorists are beginning to show how the streets have ended up becoming a non-place, a space for transit and not for socialisation. The contemporary city has become a hostile and dehumanised place, as has been announced at least since the end of the 1960s through Situationism, where authors such as Debord (1958) proposed other ways of experiencing the city through psychogeography. Moreover, the lack of interconnection and the disappearance of community in street life have weakened the sense of belonging and solidarity in contemporary society. It was Lefebvre (1972) who spoke specifically about the right to the city, an issue that is still in full swing today, as the problems of cities are not only ongoing, but have increased.

Today's city presents problems such as the lack of public spaces for socialisation, homogenisation, the prevalence of road traffic, pollution, biophilia, insecurity (especially for women), gentrification, information overload, uprootedness, etc. This is stated by the UN in its SDG 11 (SDG, 2015).

These problems also exist in medium-sized and small cities in the so-called depopulated Spain, to which

others are added, such as lack of resources, ageing of the population, loss of confidence in the territory, etc. According to some studies, living in a city increases the probability of suffering from an anxiety disorder by 21%, among other disorders, but good urban planning can help to combat them (ISGlobal, 2022).

Working in cities through art promotes the strengthening of social relationships between the people involved, which in turn leads to an improvement in quality of life. Social support has been shown to be an important protective factor against physical and mental illness, and this can be promoted through the design and management of public spaces that encourage interpersonal relationships, encounters and a “lively pavement life” (Jacobs, 1961).

This is why it is proposed to carry out interdisciplinary work where, through psychological studies of certain sectors of the population, specific problems can be detected that are having repercussions on mental health in terms of the relationship with the territory, and, from there, to carry out participatory dynamics that will lead to the creation of a new kind of public space, to carry out participatory dynamics that involve the design of strategies that propose different options from artistic and participatory creation in the public space, to try to reverse some of these negative effects, thus giving resources to certain collectives to, on their own, recover spaces for neighbourhood socialisation, generate links with the context and even activate resources for local development. These groups will be carefully selected from among neighbourhood associations.

In order to have an impact on other communities, resources will be generated that can be adapted to other similar contexts by the community itself.

3. Methodology

The proposed method involves working with a community in which no artistic creation has yet taken place in the urban space. In this sense, the work would have three phases:

- Preliminary work. This involves:
 - o Researching the area, focusing at least on urban analysis (possible deficiencies, public spaces, road traffic, etc.), presence of public services, type of population (in terms of gender, age, origin, academic level, etc.), history of the neighbourhood, situation in the general context of the population, type of shops, tourist analysis, presence of historical and artistic heritage, safety, presence of associations and their activities, relationship with institutions, etc.
 - o Contact with the community. Generally it is necessary to have Associations, but this presents the problem of leaving out those who are not associated or are associated but do not actively participate. If it is a small area, word of mouth through local businesses and even door to door, as well as involving educational centres, can be effective.
 - o Community dynamics. These will be detailed later. This is a fundamental part. Cross-reference this data with the previous analysis.
 - o Contact with artists who can respond to the needs presented by the community.

- Management work. This involves the creation of the artistic proposal, playing an intermediary role between institutions, community and artists. During this phase, the response of the community is also measured, as will be detailed later on.

- Subsequent work. This is the most complex part because it involves monitoring in the short, medium and long term to check how the action carried out has affected the community. This phase is yet to be implemented.

In addition, in order to obtain better results, we intend to carry out comparative studies between different areas, which would allow for a flexible model that can be adapted to different realities.

It should be taken into account that the study and analysis population is highly heterogeneous. The neighbourhood will be our main unit of study. In this case, however, specific analysis instruments have been developed for particularly vulnerable groups, such as the

elderly population, for whom we will seek to establish specific strategies. Likewise, work will also be carried out in environments with a young population. On the other hand, special attention will also be paid to women, in order to detect what specific problems they reveal, whether they have to do with security, etc.

For the part of the analysis of mental health pathologies, a participatory action research methodology (Lewin & Salazar, 2006) is proposed, through which the community itself and its actors actively participate in the construction of knowledge and the solution of the problems identified. In addition, taking into account the target population, prevention and mental health promotion actions will be carried out at the 3 basic levels: primary prevention (with participants in general), secondary prevention (with risk groups or the most vulnerable people), and tertiary prevention (with people who present mental health problems and / or affectations in the quality of life).

4. Proposed dynamics

Firstly, an assessment instrument was developed through an individual survey based on:

- Socio-demographic data interview.
- Structured Clinical Interview for Axis I Disorders of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (SCID, First et al. 1999) to diagnose possible mental disorders.
- Short-Form Health Survey (SF-36) (Ware and Sherbourne, 1992; English version by Alonso et al. 1995).
- Positive and Negative Affect Scale (PANAS) (Watson, 1988; Spanish version by Sandín, 1999).
- Perceived Stress Scale (PSS): Original version by Cohen et al. (1983) and Spanish validation by Remor E. and Carrobbles, (2001).

The test was as follows:

Basic Data						
Age						
Gender	woman man other I prefer not to say					
Marital status	married single widowed other					
sons and daughters						
Educational level	primary/secondary secondary school university degree doctorate other					
Current employment status	Unemployed Employed by others Self-employed Civil servant					
Nationality						
How many years have you been living in that neighbourhood?						
Mark 1 for strongly disagree, 3 for neutral, 5 for strongly agree.						
		1	2	3	4	5
1	In most respects, my life is the way I want it to be.					
2	My circumstances are very good.					
3	I am satisfied with my life.					
4	So far, I have achieved the things in life that I consider important.					
5	If I could live my life again, I wouldn't change a thing.					
I generally feel (mark the appropriate number), where 1 is not at all or hardly at all, 2 is a little, 3 is quite a bit, 4 is a lot, and 5 is a great deal.						
		1	2	3	4	5

Interested (showing interest)					
Tense or stressed					
Excited, thrilled					
Disgusted or annoyed					
Energetic, lively					
Guilty					
Scared					
Angry, annoyed					
Enthusiastic					
Proud (of something), satisfied					
Irritable or moody					
Willing, clear-headed					
Ashmed					
Inspired					
Nervious					
Determined or daring					
Attentive or daring					
Restless or worried					
Active					
Fearful, afraid					
About my environment (mark the corresponding number), where 1 is nothing or almost nothing, 2 is a little, 3 is quite a lot, 4 is a lot, and 5 is a great deal.					
	1	2	3	4	5
I feel safe walking around the neighbourhood at any time of day.					
I can find everything I need for my daily life in terms of shops in the neighbourhood.					
The neighbourhood is easy to get around on foot.					
I have easy access to transport to get around the town.					
Driving into the neighbourhood and parking is a problem.					
I generally spend my time in the neighbourhood.					
I can find leisure facilities in the neighbourhood (bars, etc.).					
There are recreational spaces in the neighbourhood (squares, green areas).					
I make use of these spaces.					
I enjoy walking around the neighbourhood.					
I look for other areas to walk around.					
Write whatever you want: what would you change about the neighbourhood?					
I feel at home in the neighbourhood.					
I have a relationship with my neighbours.					
I would like to spend more time with my neighbours.					
I can distinguish between urban art, graffiti and muralism.					
I think these types of practices make the neighbourhood ugly					
I would like murals to be painted in the neighbourhood.					
Graffiti gives the neighbourhood a criminal and marginalised appearance.					
Murals make a neighbourhood more pleasant.					
I would like tourists to visit the neighbourhood to see the murals we could paint.					

Table 1. Pre-questionnaire.

The following participatory group dynamics were followed:

1. **The Tree:** The aim is to get to know the identity of the neighbourhood and at the same time to create links between the participants. To this end, a continuous piece of paper is put up vertically on the wall for each participant. Each person, with the help of another, draws the outline of his or her silhouette. In the area of the feet, as roots, they write words that define what the neighbourhood brings them. In the head area, they write what the neighbourhood brings to each person. This involves a deep but active reflection on one's own identity and that of the community. Then, looking for this connection between participants, in the torso area, in rotation, each person writes what they think they bring to others. This will serve to recognise the value of others and empower each person individually, but at the same time, at the end, the words are read and this usually provides common terms that end up identifying the neighbourhood. This is based on Carmen Moral's experience in El Almendral.

2. **The Map:** The objective is to find out how the neighbourhood functions, whether it is a dormitory neighbourhood or whether people live in it, as well as what needs the population detects, especially in terms of services. Each participant is given a map of the area.

Using coloured stickers and felt-tip pens, they are asked to point out where they live, where they work, where they do their regular shopping, where they walk and drive, and other important points such as their parents' house, their children's school, etc. They are then asked to point out what they would like to see in the neighbourhood that is not there (a park, a gym, a bus stop, whatever...). Based on the experience of Isidro López Aparicio.

3. **Lego Serious Play:** The aim is to deepen the relationship with the environment through play and psychological and anthropological analysis. Using Lego pieces, they are asked to make a figure that represents the neighbourhood, and once they have it, they have to explain it. This allows them to analyse verbal and gestural expression, but also to make an analysis through shape and colour. They are then asked to transform that piece into what they would like it to look like. The comparison gives valuable information about the negatives and positives they observe in it. Finally, they are asked to make a final piece that represents themselves and what they could do for the neighbourhood. This technique, but in a different way, was carried out for example by María Toro in her doctoral thesis (Toro Martínez, 2024).

4. **Urban collage:** The aim of the last activity is to familiarise the community with art in public space, which is not always well regarded. Photographs of walls or dilapidated areas in the neighbourhood are handed out, as well as photographs of different artists' works in different styles. With scissors and glue they can intervene these walls. By taking a photo with the phone, it can look like it is really done. Based on the experience



Fig. 1. Some images of the four activities being carried out (Source: own images).

of Nati Rodríguez in Almendral.

These dynamics do not require too much time, are suitable for all ages and allow working with small groups, but also with medium or large groups if there are several people to act as facilitators.

5. A real case

Between November and December 2024 a real experience was carried out, financed by the Vice-rectorate for Equality, Diversity and Social Responsibility of the University of Jaén, within a Service Learning project, so we worked with the students of the Heritage Management subject of the Art History Degree in the creation of the Alcaudete de Colores Festival, with the collaboration of the Alcaudete City Council (Jaén,

Spain), as well as various associations: Asociación de Vecinos Barrio del Matadero, Asociación Cultural Amigos de Alcaudete, Asociación multicultural Amigos de Alcaudete. As a result of the dynamics, the following activities were carried out:

- Creation of a mural by Héctor Lara. The mural reflects the identity of the neighbourhood and its aspirations, with an elderly woman sewing a fabric full of flowers (many elderly people live in the neighbourhood, one of the neighbourhood's aspirations is to recover the festival of the May crosses, which has been lost), while at the same time reflecting multiculturalism, so that the portrait is in black and white, but the flowers are very colourful,

reminiscent of diversity. The mural was collaborative, with the participation of the neighbourhood. Some of the students had to document the whole activity, and others were in charge of helping the artist at all times with whatever he or she might need.

- Creation of Eli, by Nacho Corredor. Eli is conceived as a new neighbour of the neighbourhood, a lady wearing the colours of the Venezuelan flag as a nod to the people of the Multicultural Association who participated most actively. This character was printed on small stickers and hidden around the neighbourhood, so that the children could play at finding him. In addition, a four-page comic book competition was proposed at the local school to tell the stories of Eli in the neighbourhood. Two books were given to the winning girls. The pupils contributed by sticking the stickers and leading the game with the children from the neighbourhood, as well as acting as judges for the school's prize and documentation.

- Poster by Laura Calatrava. Design of an image that shows on one side the most recognisable identity of the

town of Alcaudete in the background and in the front the equipment that the inhabitants of Alcaudete miss. The posters were pasted around the neighbourhood. When 50 posters were printed, some were also given to the Town Hall and the Associations. The students pasted the posters and geo-referenced documentation.

- Search for graphic work. Out of twenty-five engravings by Ana Villén, one was given to the City Council and another one to the Associations, the rest were done as a challenge, they were hidden around the neighbourhood and whoever found it could keep it, uploading a photo to social networks with the hashtag #alcaudetede colores It is a view of Alcaudete. The students hid the works and documented the process.

- Flashmob by María "La Caramela". María created a choreography mixing flamenco (roots) with Latin music (diversity), it was pre-recorded and uploaded to networks and on the day of the festival it was performed in person with the participation of the community and pupils.

Basic Data						
Age						
Gender	woman man other I prefer not to say					
Marital status	married single widowed other					
Sons and daughter						
Educational level	primary/secondary secondary school university degree doctorate other					
Current employment status	Unemployed Employed by others Self-employed Civil servant					
Nacionality						
How many years have you been living in that neighbourhood?						
Did you participate in the activities on 8 November?	Yes No					
I have participated/attended	Alone With family With partner With friends Other					
Mark 1 for strongly disagree, 3 for neutral, 5 for strongly agree.						
		1	2	3	4	5
1	The arts festival met my expectations.					
2	I have a positive view of contemporary artistic creation.					
3	I think the mural is appropriate for the neighbourhood.					
4	I found the activities to be sufficient.					
5	I enjoyed the activities.					
6	The festival gave me the opportunity to talk to neighbours I didn't know.					
7	I would like to repeat the experience.					
8	I liked being able to participate actively.					
9	I found the level of participation allowed for neighbours to be sufficient.					

10	My attendance/participation in the activities brought me joy.									
11	I found the activities suitable for all ages.									
12	I found the schedule suitable.									
13	I found the day of the week suitable.									
14	I found the time of year suitable.									
15	I found the duration of the festival suitable.									
Rate the activities you have participated in										
	1	2	3	4	5					
Mural										
Putting up posters										
Searching for Eli										
Flashmob										
Searching for engravings										
Storytelling										

What activity that has not been carried out would you have liked to see carried out?

COMMENTS (write whatever you want):

Table 2. Final questionnaire

- Storytelling. By the pupils themselves.

A new questionnaire was carried out during the festival:

6. Results

The exploratory results from the questionnaires assessing negative and positive affect, as well as perceived

quality of life among participants, indicate a greater prevalence of positive or pleasant emotions compared to negative affect. However, due to the limited sample size, these results could only be analyzed qualitatively, underscoring the need for further investigation in future studies. Despite this limitation, the findings suggest a

promising line of research and indicate that this type of community-based intervention may be associated



Fig. 2. Some images from the festival. (Source: own images).

with an increase in positive emotional experiences among participants. Furthermore, respondents generally reported medium-to-high levels of perceived quality of life, which is consistent with the notion that positive emotions are linked to greater life satisfaction (Barragán y Morales, 2014; García Pérez, 2016).

7. Conclusions

The good results of this project invite us to continue research in this line in order to improve the instruments of analysis. The final objective would be to produce a good practice guide for managers, whether they are independent, institutions, etc. This guide should take into account the socio-economic part, but also the conservation part. Muralism, like urban art, is

understood as an ephemeral piece, but as it does not take into account the previous state of the wall, nor the subsequent monitoring, therefore, on many occasions, the poor state (sometimes very rapid) of the murals, generates social unrest for the community in which it is integrated, discomfort in the artists, etc. Not forgetting that public money has generally been used for this purpose. It is also necessary to emphasise the benefits that art in public space can have on the local population and to minimise the damage through this work with the community.

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