Exploring Design, Site and Subject Matter vis-à-vis Public Art Engagement: Case Study of Āb-o-Ātash Park in Tehran

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Abstract

This article is the result of an exploratory research on public art in Āb-o-Ātash[1] park in Tehran. It investigates the way the three elements of design, site, and subject matter affect audience engagement with public artworks.

The research has been conducted through qualitative methods, namely unobtrusive observations and surveys. Artworks have been identified based on specifications extracted from discourse analysis of the concepts of publicness and authorship in public arts.

Thereafter, characteristics of the visual samples have been processed through cluster analysis with respect to design, site, and subject matter in order to be compared, and related to the results of observations of audience engagement.

1.- This article has used ALA-LC 2012 transliteration system available at https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/roman.html

The results propose a correlation between subject matters of the artworks and audience engagement in Āb-o-Ātash park.

Keywords: Tehran; Āb-o-Ātash; Design; Site; Subject matter; public engagement

Resumen

Este artículo es el resultado de una investigación exploratoria sobre arte público en el parque Āb-o-Ātash en Teherán. Investiga la forma en que los tres elementos de diseño, sitio y tema afectan la participación de la audiencia con las obras de arte público.

La investigación se ha llevado a cabo a través de métodos cualitativos, a saber, observaciones y encuestas discretas. Las obras de arte se han identificado en base a especificaciones extraídas del análisis del discurso de los conceptos de publicidad y autoría en las artes públicas.

A partir de entonces, las características de las muestras visuales se han procesado a través del análisis de conglomerados con respecto al diseño, el sitio y el tema para ser comparados y relacionados con los resultados de las observaciones del compromiso de la audiencia.

Los resultados proponen una correlación entre los temas de las obras de arte y la participación del público en el parque Āb-o-Ātash.

Palabras clave: Teheran; Āb-o-Ātash; diseño; sitio; tema; compromiso público

Resum

Aquest article és el resultat d'una investigació exploratòria sobre art públic al parc ashb-o-Ātash de Teheran. Estudia la forma en què els tres elements del disseny, el lloc i la matèria afecten la participació del públic amb les obres d'art públic.

La investigació s'ha realitzat mitjançant mètodes qualitatius, és a dir, observacions i enquestes discretes. Les obres d'art s'han identificat a partir d'especificacions extretes de l'anàlisi del discurs dels conceptes de publicitat i d'autoria en art públic.

A partir d'aleshores, les característiques de les mostres visuals s'han processat mitjançant anàlisi de clústers pel que fa al disseny, el lloc i la matèria per comparar-los i relacionats amb els resultats de les observacions de la participació de l'audiència.

Els resultats proposen una correlació entre els temes de les obres d'art i la participació del públic al parc de Āb-o-Ā.

Paraules clau: Āb-o-Ātash, Disseny, Lloc, Matèria, compromís públic

Introduction

This article attempts to extend the scholarship on functionality of public art regarding engaging the public. Public art roots in a pluralistic approach towards art (Knight, 2011: 111) and public engagement is, appropriately, a principle purpose of public art. The importance of public engagement has been frequently highlighted in previous research on public art. Scholars have discussed the necessity of public engagement with works of public art and have respectively, explored different ways of engaging the audience including audience interaction and participation through focusing on public art's potencies. However, respective research that relies on empirical audience-driven data is not coordinately developed. This type of research on public art can be specifically useful in anticipating those qualities of public art that are likely to be noticed (Carr Et al., 1992: 116).

Hence, the present article has tried to contribute to the research on audience engagement by empirical exploration of the audience response to public art in order to find out the role of formal, spatial, and contextual factors in functionality of public art. In choosing the three noted variables, this article shares an affinity with Bogart's (2016) literature on patronage of public art.

Based on Bogart's perspective, popularity of a work of public art is a matter of *"the experiential impact of its form and subject matter, and its relation to the built environment."*(Bogart, 2016: 387) In a quasi-similar statement, art historian Rosalyn Deutsche also highlights the importance of site and subject matter in her description of new public art as *"anti-individualist, contexualist, and site-specific."*(Deutsche, 1995: 116) Building on these notions, in this article design, site, and subject matter of public artworks are investigated with regard to the audience engagement with public art in Āb-o-Ātash park in Tehran.

During the 2010s, there has been a turn in urban policy making in Tehran, capital of Iran according to which the municipality has taken initiatives to further sponsor public art. One of the main sites of focus on public art has been Abāsābād complex which is constructed with the prospect of serving as the cultural and recreational landmark of the city (Website of Abāsābād Complex, 2020).

Tehran is a multicultural metropolitan city that has long hosted migrants of different ethnical backgrounds from around the country ("Mayor of Tehran", 2020). Being located in central Tehran, Abāsābād is a multipurpose complex that attracts both locals and tourists and provides amenities for visitors of different age groups. With the extensive diversity of its visitors, this complex provides for a suitable public site for exploration of audience engagement with public art.

Accordingly, this article attends to the relation of design, site, and subject matter to audience engagement with public art in Āb-o-Ātash park as a main recreational part of Abāsābād complex.

The respective research has been conducted using qualitative methods and empirical data on audience engagement. Audience engagement has been examined through field observations in an unobtrusive fashion. Meanwhile, each of the variables of design, site and subject matter has been separately studied. Further, the result of the observations has been studied in relation to the

noted variables to find out their correlation.

The results presented hereby, are discussed in light of content analysis and propose the need for strategies that focus on content in order to increase public engagement.

Identifying the Landscape

Situated in Abāsābād neighborhood in north central Tehran, Āb-o-Ātash Park is one of the interconnected parks that form part of a larger recreational network called Abāsābād complex. Prior to the 1970s, the site was nearly an empty tract of land of roughly 554 hectares in extent (Costello, 2013: 170).

However, in the early 1970s, first decisions were made to develop Abāsābād into a central area of the city with three key objectives: "a national center befitting Iran's capital city, a model community built to meet growing North Tehran's need for a coherent center, and a transportation center" to deflect the city's traditional northward growth toward east and west (Robertson, 1978: 47).

Nevertheless, by the mid-1970s, the project was curtailed due to concerns over centralization of urban growth (Costello, 2013: 181). Development of the site later continued in a different form and at a much reduced scale under the new government which came to power in 1979 (Ibid: 157). During the past decade, however, the development trend paced up with the aim of turning the area into a built environment serving as the cultural, recreational, and tourism center for the city.

Today, Abāsābād complex consists of museums, a skating rink, a planetarium, a bike route, a pedestrian overpass, and interconnected parks namely, Nowruz Park, Eco Park, Port Gardens, and Āb-o-Ātash Park. In addition to the recreational complex, the neighborhood is home to the National Library, a mega bookstore, and the Academy of Persian Language and Literature which lends the area its cultural atmosphere.

Āb-o-Ātash park is the main entrance to the Abāsābād cultural-tourism area (Website of Abāsābād Complex, 2020). This 24000 square meter park, which was opened in 2009, gets its name from the water fountains and large fire burners installed within its main area.

Owing to its locational situation which faces the highway on one side, and other parts of Abāsābād complex on the other, the park can be reached through different pathways. Moreover, proximity to the public transportation system and parking provisions, has made it accessible through different modes of transportation. As a consequence, the park enjoys a decent level of physical accessibility both in terms of connection to the surrounding environment and ways of entering it. (Zojaji, 2019: 77)

Facilities implemented in the park, including the fire burning towers, electric fountains, and an open venue, are complemented by a number of restaurants and cafes that are scattered in the area (Website of Abāsābād Complex, 2020).
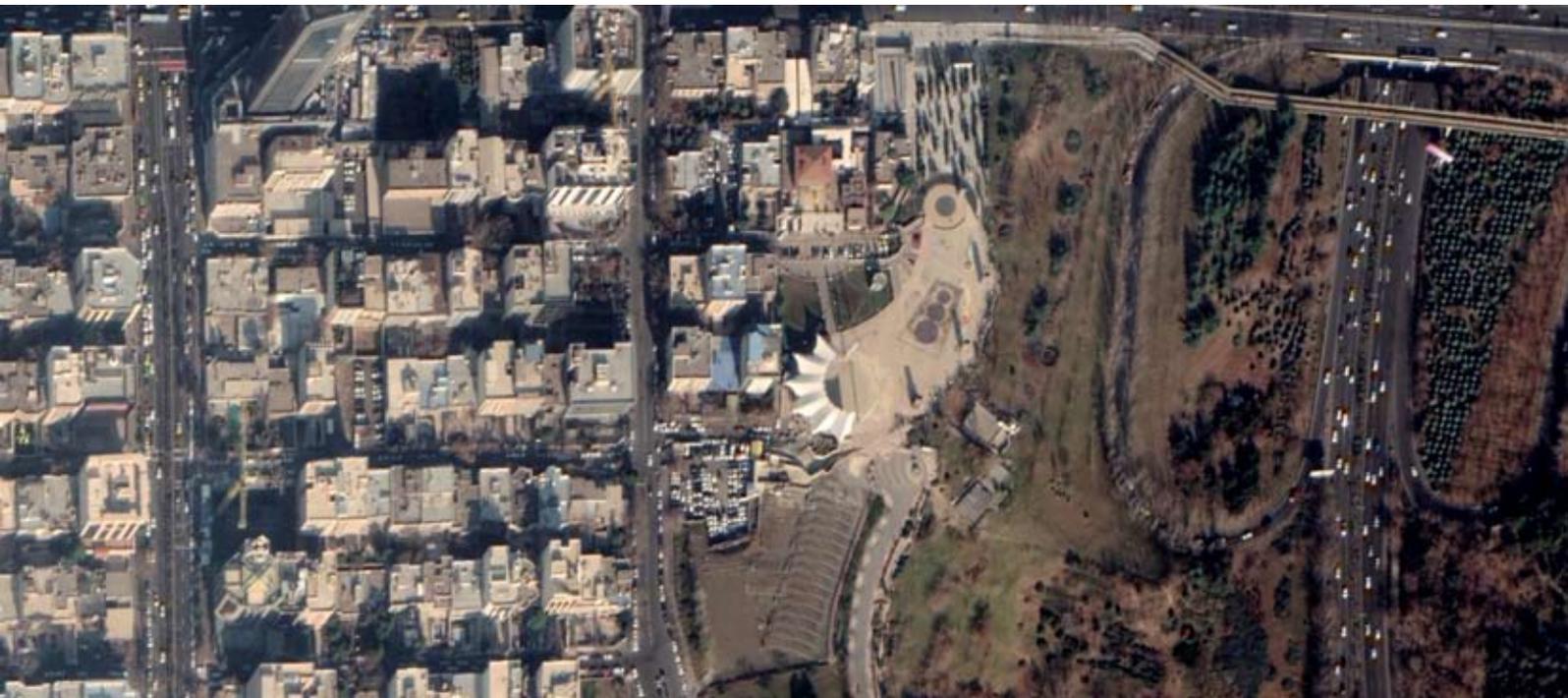
Aerial view of Tehran. In orange the location of the park.
Below, View of the Āb-o-Ātash park. (c) Google Earth. In-
fographic: POLIS Research Centre

These diverse facilities have broadened the park's functionality to serve visitors with different interests. Likewise, as the fountains provide children with a unique playground and leveled pathways and seating provide a convenient space for senior citizens, the park attracts people of different age groups. The variety of offered possibilities, along with the site's accessibility, have contributed to the inclusiveness of the spatial design of the park. Such space provides an opportunity to engage the public with public artworks.

Accordingly, this article reports on the research conducted to explore how design, site, and subject matter of public artworks assess the functionality of public artworks in Āb-o-Ātash park as to engaging the audience.

Identifying Public Artworks

Although almost all recent public art is site-specific, not all site-specific sculptures are public art (Plagens, 1995: 61). Recognition of works of public art is tied to their artistic identity as well as their publicness.

> *"In public art discourse, 'public' refers to 'site' in its physical state, as it is represented and understood conceptually as a terrain for intervention. A public site might be defined in terms of morphology (outdoors) and/or in terms of activity (outside the art gallery)."*(Rendell, 2000: 23)

In institutional settings like those of museums or galleries, there is little else that one can do with the art besides looking at it. Museums imply that all objects in their care are interesting primarily because of their aesthetic (Rice, 1991: 130). Also, when presented in an institutional setting, such as that of an art gallery or a museum, an object will commonly be regarded as art. One would not go to a museum for grocery shopping or to get a haircut.

People go to art institutions to see art and consequently, they presume the exhibited objects as art objects. As probable as it can be to see a spontaneous visitor in a gallery or at a museum, not many of the visitors are there simply because it has been on their way. In fact, museum visitors tend to be there following a previous plan to see art.

Accordingly, the mere act of displaying an object in an art institution could identify it as art. A piece of Plumbing or a detergent package, for example, are not habitually thought of as objects of artistic value. However, more than a century after Marcel Duchamp raised controversies over the ontology of art by submitting an urinal to an art exhibition and more than half a century after Andy Warhol did the same by placing replications of Brillo soap boxes in a gallery, in the art history contexts, their presentations are still being discussed as art[2]. In a more recent instance, in 2016,

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2.- See, for example, Bradley Bailey (2018), Before, During, and Beyond the Brillo Box: The Impact of Pop on the 1964 Edition of Duchamp's Readymades, Visual Resources, 34:3-4, 347-363; Johnson, J. H. (2018), Medieval Pop: Warhol's Byzantine iconography, In L. Nelstrop, and H. Appleton (Eds.), Art and Mysticism: Interfaces in the Medieval and Modern Periods; Kilroy, R. (Ed) (2018), Marcel Duchamp's Fountain: One Hundred Years Later.

two teenagers who were visiting San Francisco Museum of Modern Art randomly placed a pair of glasses on the floor to see how it would be perceived by other visitors. In just a few minutes, the glasses had the visitors who had perceived them as art, gather around and take photographs of them (Hunt, 2016). These examples testify the effect of the institutional framework on audiences in their perception of an object as art.

Conversely, in terms of urban public art there are no institutional implications as to suggest the artistic identity of an object. That being the case, how would one know, in the first place, that an object placed outdoors is art before they call it public art? Duchamp's urinal, Warhol's Brillo boxes, and the pair of glasses would not have been discussed as art if they were each left in an outdoor public space as "something ordinary," as Warhol described his boxes.

Meanwhile, if public art is defined solely by virtue of being placed in public space, any private art object placed therein could be considered public art. A private artwork which is carried into or left behind in a public space, for example, would then be considered a public artwork. However, public art aims that 'citizens have control over the aesthetics of their own environment' while in case of an artwork which is carried into a public space, an aesthetic imposition is implied by the private owner; thus, the object would rather be art in public space (Remesar, 2016: 136).

Consequently, the site alone, cannot identify an object as public art. Therefore, the sampling of public art works in this project has been carried out based on the criterion that the object has been created by an artist as public art to be placed in public space so that their publicness could thereafter be determined with regard to audience engagement. That is to say, in this project in addition to site, artist's authorship has been considered as a sampling criterion to identify the artistic identity of the research population. Based on these criteria, among five sculptural installations in Āb-o-Ātash park, three commissioned artworks namely Horse and the Rider (hereafter The Rider) by Mohammad Salarian, statue of Siyāvash in Fire (hereafter Siyāvash) by Abbas Eftekhari, and Narrative Relief of Prophet Ibrāhīm (hereafter The Prophet) created by a group of artists were chosen as public art samples. (Figs. 1-5). The three of the artworks have been commissioned by divisions of Municipality of Tehran; the first one by the Beautification Organiation in 2013, and the two latter by the Organization for Renovation of Abāsābād, respectively, in 2014 and 2009.

Horse and the Rider

Siyāvash in Fire

Narrative Relief of Prophet Ibrāhīm

Design

In analyzing and comparing the visual design of the artworks, this article takes a comparative approach to formal analysis of art. Formal analysis is a specific type of visual description which is meant to explain visual structure, of the ways in which certain visual elements have been arranged and function within a composition (Munsterberg, 2008).

The formal analysis framework used here draws upon principles of sculptural design as proposed by sculptor, Leonard Robert Rogers (2019). Accordingly, it focuses on orientation, proportion, scale, articulation, and balance of the three sculptural masses.

Orientation is the way in which the masses are positioned in relation to each other, to a spectator, and to their surroundings. It is described through a spatial scheme consisting of a system of axes and planes (Rogers, 2019).

According to Cheryl Akner-Koler, axis expresses three general conditions for axes: a straight axis which involves a one-dimensional movement without any forces acting upon it; a bent axis in which a sharp bent angle is formed following an abrupt change in the movement of axis; and a curved axis in which the course of axis gradually changes (Akner-Koler, 1994: 117). Planes, on the other hand, are the divisions of surfaces that define the volume[3] (Ibid: 6).

By comparison, the three public artworks are similar in that they all have straight axes. However, in terms of planes, The Prophet is a two-planed mass while the two others have 6 planes.

Proportion refers to relations that exist among linear dimensions, areas, and volumes and masses as they coexist and interact in sculpture (Rogers, 2019). It can be expressed through two concepts of inherent and general proportions. Inherent proportion describes the correlation of the elemental parts to one another while general proportion summarizes the essential proportional features of an element. General proportional features can be extensional (expressing length), superficial (expressing flatness) or massive (expressing volume) (Akner-Koler: 9 & 10).

Considering the figurative nature of the three artworks as in representing animal and human figures, The Prophet relief uses unnatural inherent proportions compared to realistic proportions of The Rider and Siyāvash. With regard to general proportions, The Prophet is an extensional art object extending along the area whereas the two other artworks are massive.

When a sculpture is one element in a larger complex, it must be considered in relation to the scale of its surrounding (Rogers, 2019). Considering height, width, and length of the three sculptures i.e. The Prophet, The Rider, and Siyāvash which are respectively 4 x 100 meters, 3 x 6 x 1 meters, and 4 x 3 x 1 meters, they are all natural scale both in relation to the audience and their surroundings.

Articulation expresses the way in which one form in the sculptural volume is joined to another. The methods used for this purpose are carving, modeling, constructing and assembling and direct

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3.- Volume is a dimensional measure of a three-dimensional object that represents the size of a solid (The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020).

principle		Siyāvash in Fire	Narrative Relief of Prophet Ibrāhīm	Horse and the Rider
		artworks		
Orientation	Axis	straight	Straight	straight
	Planes	6	2	6
Proportion	Inherent	realistic	unnatural	realistic
	General	massive	extensional	massive
Scale		natural	natural	natural
Articulation		direct method	assembly	direct method
Balance	Physical	natural	natural	natural
	Compositional	static	dynamic	static
	Figurative	asymmetric	asymmetric	asymmetric

Table 1. Comparative Formal Analysis of the Works of Public Art in Āb-o-Ātash Park

metal sculpturing (Rogers, 2019). All three public artworks in Āb-o-Ātash park are made of metal. However, they differ in articulation. The method used for making The Prophet relief is assembly, but the method incorporated in making the other artworks is direct metal technique.

Balance of a sculpture can be expressed in three aspects: physical, compositional, and figurative balance (Rogers). *The Prophet relief*, *The rider*, and *Siyāvash* all have natural balance, meaning that they are stable enough to stand firmly. In term of composition, *The Rider* and *Siyāvash*, as equestrian sculptures, are relatively static compared to *The Prophet* which is extended throughout the area and requires movement to be visually perceived. All the three artworks here have asymmetrical figurative balance.

As the formal analysis of the artworks suggests, the visual design of Sculpture of *Siyāvash* in *Fire and Horse* and *The Rider* share common attributes while the Narrative Relief of Prophet Ibrāhīm distinguishes itself from the two by orientational, proportional, articulation and balance properties. Table 1 compares the formal attributes of the three artworks.

Location of public artworks in Āb-o-Ātash Park

Site

"When planners or architects talk about public space, public art and urban design are essentially peripheral to their argument." (Remesar, 2003: 4) According to Cynthia Nikitin and Fred Kent, for instance, success of a work of public art relies heavily on the spatial design of its site (Kent & Nikitin, 2012).

The three public artworks in Āb-o-Ātash park, are situated in 3 different spots of the park. *Siyāvash* is located the southern entrance of the park where the park interconnects with another park. It is opposite one of the entrances of the park, and overlooks Tabiyat bridge, an architectural tourist attraction of Tehran. There is little seating in this site.

The Prophet is located in the central part of the park running along electric fountains where a lot of families take their children to play. It is also opposite to an open venue which provides plenty of seating. Conversely, *The Rider* is situated in the northern marginal part of the park. It is placed in the green space with no seating around. Figure 6 offers a view of the locational situations of the artworks.

To evaluate the effect of spatial design on success of public artworks with regard to audience engagement, in this project, audiences were asked to assess the sites. Through rating scale surveys, informants were asked to rate the design of the sites where the artworks are installed in terms of four criteria. The rating criteria has drawn upon indicators of good public space as proposed by Project for Public Space (PPS) in form of a place-making diagram (Diagram 1).

Indicators of spatial design allow for a systematized evaluation of public spaces. Various public space evaluation systems have been modeled to target different aspects of spatial design and, hence, each offers a different set of assessment indicators based on their adopted approach. For example, In her 2000 article, Measuring the public realm: A preliminary assessment of the link between public space and sense of community, urbanist Emily Talen has proposed a methodology that allows for practical measurement of public realm based on physical features of public space (Talen, 2000: 345).

Her model provides a basis upon which public space differentials in neighborhoods can be assessed. Pinto and Remesar (2015), have developed a model which targets urban cohesion based on the premise that considers public spaces the agents of urban cohesion (Pinto & Remesar, 2015: 10). Their method aims to analyze a network of public spaces while considering how that network relates to its surrounding (Pinto & Remesar, 2015: 11). Wojnarowska (2016) has designed a model that incorporates the evaluations of both users and experts. While her model relies strongly on delimitation of the research area, it is designed mainly to assess spatial qualities of town centers (Wojnarowska, 2016: 81). A different perspective to spatial design assessment can be seen in a method proposed by Daly, Mahmoudi Farahani, Hollingsbee, and Ocampo (2016). As part of a project aiming to develop a methodology for measuring the psychological and physiological comfort in public spaces, Daly Et al. have introduced a method that incorporates walking interviews, sensory mapping, and GIS devices in order to investigate user experience as per comfort level of a public space (Daly Et al., 2016: 8).

Meanwhile, PPS evaluation system bases its component on place-making qualities. Place-making as an urban strategy, focuses on people's use of and participation in spaces. Hence, participation is an intrinsic element of place-making (Conner, 2013: 198). PPS diagram as an assessment tool would, thus, suit the target of evaluating audience-public space relationship.

Diagram 1. PPS place diagram, Reftrieved from https://www.pps.org/

In order to conduct the research, PPS diagram as the evaluation system, has herein been integrated into a subjective approach based on user experience. Principle indicators offered in PPS diagram are sociability, uses and activities, access and linkage and comfort and image. Drawing upon walking interview as a technique that allows for the engagement of informants with space and place (King & Woodroffe, 2017: 3), participants were first offered brief descriptions of each of the rating criteria, elicited from their specifications as proposed by PPS, while walking through the respective sites along with the researcher.

As described by PPS, accessibility can be visual or physical. Visual accessibility describes visibility both from a distance and up close. Physical accessibility refers to the convenience of getting to and getting through a place. Comfort includes perceptions about safety, cleanliness and seating. Activities are critical to the design of a public space. They are the reason why people visit and revisit places. Therefore, the more opportunities a public space provides for participation of both
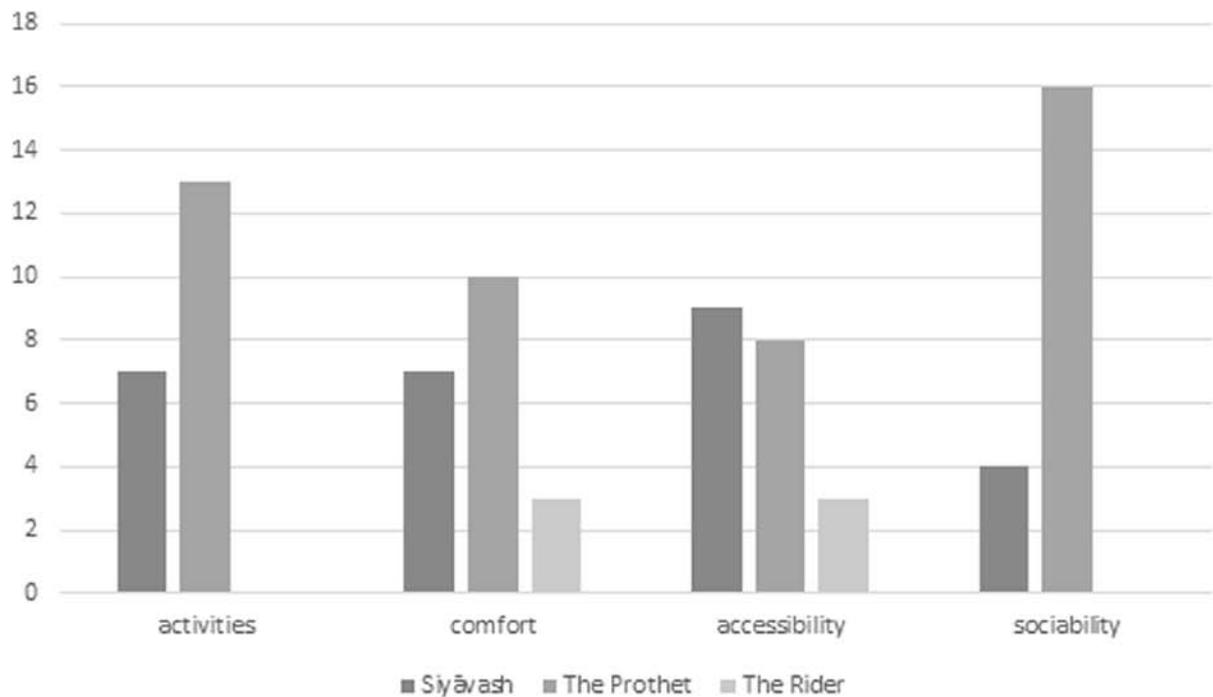
Chart 1. Spatial design of the public art sites as evaluated by the audience

genders, both individuals and groups and people of different ages, the more useful it will be. Sociability describes the functionality of a place to make people socialize. Behavioral actions like arranging to meet friends, talking, or visiting in groups are suggestive of sociability of a place. (Project for Public Spaces, 2005)

In sampling of the survey informants, people with particular expertise on spatial design were excluded to avoid evaluations based on structured knowledge and obtain a public sense of place, in return. In addition, considering that the sense of a place can be affected by the familiarity of the attendees (Craig Et al., 2012: 3), half of the informant were chosen from first-timers. In total, 20 informants were selected to take the survey.

After receiving an introduction of the four mentioned criteria, participants rated the sites of the artworks to choose the site with desirable level of accessibility, activities, comfort, and sociability. Among 20 informants, 9 found the location where *Siyāvash* is located the most accessible, 8 found the location of *The Prophet* the most accessible, and only 3 thought the area where *The Rider* is located was the most accessible part of the park. In terms of comfort and image the location of *The Prophet* and the location of *Siyāvash* were respectively considered to have the highest level of comfort by 10 and 7 informants.

However only 3 evaluated the site of *The Rider* as the location with highest level of comfort. When asked to rate sociability, that is the potential to let different people socialize, 16 of the respondents found the site where *The Prophet* is located as the most sociable and 4 chose the location of Siyāvash as the most sociable site. The location of *The Rider*, however, was not chosen as the sociable location by any of the respondents. The same location was neither considered to have a

good design regarding uses and activities by any of the informants while the location of prophet, in this regard, was evaluated as the most desirable by 13 informants followed by the location of *Siyāvash* which had the best provisions of activities according to 7 informants.

To conclude, based on participants' assessment, spatial design of the site of *The Prophet* relief surpasses that of the sites of the two other artworks in terms of activity, comfort and sociability while the level of accessibility in *Siyāvash* sculpture roughly outweighs that of *The Prophet* relief and *The Rider*. *The Rider* has scored the least in all four indicators. In total, subjective assessment of PPS place-making criteria in the three sampled locations suggests that the site where *The Prophet* sculpture is located has the most successful design followed by the site of *Siyāvash* sculpture and that of *The Rider* respectively. (Chart 1)

Subject Matter

As similar as the three artworks are in being figurative in terms of representation, they are different in terms of the subject matter they represent. The nature of subject matter in *Siyāvash* sculpture is historical as it represents a hero in the historical epic poem Shāhnāmeh.

The Shāhnāmeh, meaning the book of the kings, narrates the history of the kings, queens, and heroes (Dabashi, 2019: 3). The character of Siyāvash in Shāhnāmeh is mixed with stories of love and jealousy (Fathi, 2016: 7). His story, as a prince who voluntarily rode with his horse through a blazing fire to prove his innocence after he was reported to the court for false accusations by his stepmother whose love he had refused (Dabashi, 2019: 64), connotes the concept of innocence.

The Prophet relief, is a visual narration of some stories that characterize the life story of prophet Ibrāhīm, a religious figure. In Islam, the official religion of the country, Prophet Ibrāhīm is considered the father of all prophets. Characteristic stories of his prophecy include the breaking of idols, the flowering of the Nimrodians, the fall of the angels of revelation, the sacrifice of his son, and the building of the Kaaba (Website of Abāsābād Complex, 2020).

Meanwhile, *The Rider* is a decorative abstract figurative sculpture and does not communicate any historical or religious statements. As stated by its artist, Salarian, the sculpture is made with the objective of pacifying the bustling urban space (Website of Beautification Organization). Salarian has further stated that he highlights contemporaneity in his sculptures ("The Meaning of", 2014).

In a Panofskian sense, the meanings these artworks carry can be unraveled in different levels. Erwin Panofsky, considers the first stage of the meaning of an artwork to be the factual and expressional subject matter than constitutes the world of artistic motifs and does not have to be learned. He calls this stage of meaning the natural level. The second level involves conventional subject matter which is intelligible content conveyed by the natural subject matter. The final level of meaning is intrinsic meaning which constitutes values by which the first and the second levels of meaning are shaped. (Shin, 1990: 17)

The three public artworks in Āb-o-Ātash park, share the same intrinsic subject matters inasmuch as they lie in the same cultural ground and are all the same age. However, Siyāvash and The Prophet communicate the meaning to the audience in two natural and conventional levels while in case of The Rider, communication of meaning takes place in the natural level.

Public Engagement

Public engagement is core to public art. It is what makes art become public (Massey and Rose, 2003, as cited in Hall, 2007: 1377). To examine the patterns and extent of audience responsiveness to public artworks, this project has used on-site unobtrusive observation method.

Unobtrusive observation helps reduce the incidence of reactivity or the changes that may happen in the behavior of the participants when they are aware of being observed (Kawulich, 2005). Observations were made in an unstructured setting to allow documentation of different primary behaviors to be later categorized based on responsiveness. In total, the qualitative data consist of 270 minutes of observations (90 minutes for each artwork) performed in six 5-minute periods at different times of a day during 9 days.

The extent of audience responsiveness to the three artworks has been evaluated based on their response type through clustering the primary responses into two categories of active and passive responses. As elaborated by Stephen Carr and Mark Francis (1992), passive engagements in a public space include encounters with the setting without becoming actively involved. Active engagement, however, represents a more direct experience with the setting. Physical engagements that are encouraged by public art are instances of active engagement (Carr Et al., 2007: 233-236).

The preliminary patterns of audience behavior detected during the observations were: inattentiveness, mere observation, unconscious misapplication, discussion, taking photos or videos, reading the labels, haptic engagement, and setting up meeting points.

The first three patterns summed up to form passive engagements. Inattentiveness represents passersby or bystanders who passed by the artworks without noticing them. Although bystanders linger more than the passersby in the site of the artwork, they still are not converted into a public by the formal act of gathering alone (Jordan, 2011; as cited in Hewitt and Jordan, 2016: 31).

Viewing public art, like other acts of observing in public spaces, is another form of passive engagements (Carr and Francis, 2007: 234). Unconscious misapplication represents using the public artworks for a practical purpose and as minor accessories to the site. It is analogous to attributes of plop art as proposed by James Wines (1970). Wines coined the pejorative term 'plop art' to describe sculptures that were installed in the public domain regardless of any environmental considerations. Using the artwork as an object that pedestrians, for example, leaned against while waiting for a taxi would be the outcome of such sculptures (Womersley, 2005: 21).

During the observations, the number of audience passing through or settled in the site of each artwork in 90 minutes amounted to 175, 244, and 81 people respectively for *Siyāvash*, *The Prophet*, and *The Rider*. These differences in the number of attendees, were in line with the scale of accessibility of spatial design of these sites as rated by audiences.

The sum of active engagements with *Siyāvash* sculpture, *The Prophet* relief, and *The Rider* sculpture, respectively, added up to 17% (29 attendees), 19% (47 attendees), and 26% (21 attendees) which suggests functional proximity of the two first artworks and better functionality of the third with respect to engaging the audience.

Results

According to empirical investigation of the three public artworks in Āb-o-Ātash park through field observations, *The Rider* fosters more active audience engagement than the two others. The artworks of empirical investigation have been analyzed with regard to their formal design, spatial situation, and subject matter to find out how each of these variables relates to the functionality of the artworks towards engaging the audience.

Based on the results of the analysis, the Sculptures of *The Rider* and *Siyāvash in Fire* share common formal features, while the relief of *The Prophet* is different in planes, proportion, articulation, and compositional balance. Narrative relief of Ibrāhīm and Siyāvash in Fire are more user-friendly in terms of spatial situation while than *The Horse* and the rider.

Furthermore, the type of subject matter of *The Rider* is different from those of Narrative relief of *The Prophet* and *Siyāvash* in Fire. Consequently, the functionality of The Rider in fostering audience engagement has a negative correlation with its formal design and its locational situation, and a positive correlation with its subject matter.

Conclusion

This study has adopted an exploratory approach to contribute to the existing body of knowledge on public art in relation to the public by empirical investigation of the influence of three variables of form, site, and content on audience engagement.

First, public art was delineated. Relying on the delineated definition of public art, then, the works of public art were identified. Audience engagement with the noted artworks were then observed and studied in relation to formal, locational, and content features.

Publicness of public art, in terms of public engagement, is a matter of communicative aesthetic experience. Form, is the means by which a work of art communicates its non-formal meaning,

apart from which form tends to become merely decorative (Gardner, 2003: 240).

Therefore, relying only on form to evaluate a work of art in a public space will reduce it to plop art that, according to Wines, serves as cosmetic décor with no environmental considerations. It will, by doing so, overlook the functionality of the public artwork to foster public engagement. It is also noteworthy that public art artists also tend to reject the notion of public art as decoration claiming that they create urban spaces rather than placing "objects" in them (Deutsche, 1995: 116).

Correspondingly, analyzing the documented public engagement in relation to formal design of the three artworks in this research, showed no significant relationship between the two.

As to distinguishing the effects of spatial design on success of works of public art, the results show that the design of the site of the artworks do not affect their performance in public engagement.

The spatial design of the site of an artwork can facilitate the possibility of audience encounter as in case of public art in Āb-o-Ātash park, as well, the two artworks which are located in sites with more satisfactory spatial design have been subject to more encounters than the artwork with less satisfactory spatial design in the same duration. However, the results also show that the artwork which is located in the site with less satisfactory spatial design, has been more successful in engaging the public.

Spatial design of the site of a public artwork, can prompt encounters with art through allowing for presence and gathering of public. Public facilities, for example, can encourage prospective audiences to linger in the site of the artworks (Marcus Et al., 1998: 72).

Conversely, people will not linger in places that lack public facilities like parks with no shades and benches (Wireman, 2008: 54). Nevertheless, lingering in the site does not necessarily lead to noticing or actively getting engaged with the artwork. Even if noticing the artwork is considered the result of presence and lingering that has occurred owing to the spatial design, this noticing like a mere act of spectatorship is not a form of active engagement; meaning that it positions the audience in the status of reacting rather than interacting.

Furthermore, public art is created by an artist to be placed in a public space. That is to say, urban public space is not designed to serve as a contributor to a certain artwork. Effective functionality of spatial design in hosting the public who may later choose to engage with the artwork installed therein, is the success of the spatial design in place-making and not the success of public art.

Considering the success of public art to rely on spatial design would disregard the active role of public art as a public phenomenon and, hence, blur the boundaries of public art and art in public spaces. It would further reduce the public artwork to an ornamental object that depends heavily on the site to have any kind of functionality other than expressive empiricism or spatial decoration. Such attitude towards public art, is analogous to the object-thinking towards art that James Wines attributes to plop art. As in Wine's contention, plop art is the result of an approach according to which architecture is seen as the big picture and art, in comparison, is treated as a peripheral

decor to the site (Womersley, 2005: 21).

In Āb-o-Ātash park, what distinguishes the artwork with the highest level of active public engagement from its counterparts, is the subject matter. Sculpture of Siyāvash in Fire and Narrative relief of prophet Ibrāhīm are monumental sculptures. The first one commemorates a historical figure and the latter, a religious one. Communication of the audience with the subject matters of these artworks, thus, depend on their public knowledge and collective memory. This necessitates an insight into the conventional meaning of the artworks. It needs not only familiarity with the practical world of objects, but with *"the more-than-practical world of customs and cultural traditions peculiar to a certain civilization."(*Panofsky, 1955: 27)

Āb-o-Ātash park is part of Abāsābād properties, the recreational, touristic, and cultural center of Tehran. Tehran, as the capital city of Iran is the destination of extensive internal migration. The country itself is home to different ethnicities of diverse cultural backgrounds.

Consequently, visitors of Āb-o-Ātash park comprise different socio-cultural strata beyond the ones whose collective past is tangled with the subject matters presented in Siyāvash Sculpture and The Prophet. Therefore, the conventional subject matters, as non-formal meaning being communicated through form, are tangible mainly for audiences with respective knowledge or memory and tend to overlook audiences with different intellectual background.

Conversely, the subject matter in artwork provoking the most public engagement i.e. The horse and the rider is not tied to collective memory nor public knowledge of a certain stratum. The audience can access the non-formal meaning at a natural level of understanding, meaning by identifying visible forms and regardless of enjoying the privilege of being familiar with the world of customs and traditions.

The artwork, in this case, speaks a public language. The audience does not need to refer to a description label to communicate with it. As maintained by Theodor Adorno about the aesthetic of content, the language of artworks, as the organization of their disparate elements, is the most eloquent when the artworks are syntactically articulated in themselves (Adorno, 2002: 140).

Broadly, this study has highlighted how independent analysis and empirical study of each of the intrinsic and extrinsic properties of public art can shed light on the functional mechanisms of public art. The implication of this study is that in terms of audience engagement, the functionality of public art relies mostly on its subject matter. In addition, it suggests that in order to further public engagement, especially in culturally diverse spheres, the subject matter of public art must be determined with regard to an inclusive consideration of socio-cultural strata.

Accordingly, to provision strategies to further engage the public with works of public art, future respective research should further take subject matter into scholarly consideration. Drawing upon the experience of incorporating content design strategies by other disciplines that involve audience engagement, public art can increase audience engagement by integrating strategies which are relevantly adapted.

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