

## **‘KATARA CULTURAL VILLAGE’ IN QATAR: PUBLIC ART AND URBAN SPACE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This research study discusses the role of public art in influencing urban environments in Qatar, namely within Katara Cultural Village. It will explore how this approach can increase local communities’ environmental awareness as an indirect input to enhance the environment to which it attracts both local and international visitors. In addition, it will explore the types of catalysts that enhance the built environment, such as art and culture.

This research is primarily a qualitative evaluation that employs multiple methods to support it, such as interviews and observations, while investigating the communication of connectivity, desirability and expansion in relation to different aspects of development. This approach will assist us in reaching the finding, which will include the advantages and disadvantages of public art and culture in an urban space.

**Keywords:** Cultural Planning, Culture, Cultural Districts, Katara Cultural Village, Gentrification, Tourism.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Doha, the capital of Qatar and one of the oldest cities in the GCC, grew quickly during the 20th century, when it witnessed its first modern urbanization effort after the sudden increase in oil production. (Furlan, 2015, 2016a; Furlan & Almohannadi, 2016; Furlan & Faggion, 2015a, 2017; Furlan & Petruccioli, 2016; Furlan & Sipe, 2017; Furlan, Zaina, & Zaina, 2016). However, it faced many obstacles along the way. One such obstacle to Qatar’s modern development is balancing urbanization and preserving the nation’s cultural identity (Furlan & Faggion, 2015b; Furlan, Rajan, & AlNuaimi, 2016). Globalization has generated competition among cities to establish a relationship between public art and urban development to increase their individuality, uniqueness, and attractiveness, thus providing opportunities for economic development and preservation of the city’s cultural aspects (Furlan, 2016b; Furlan & Shurbaji, 2017; Furlan & Wadi, 2017; Furlan, Zaina, et al., 2016).

Through Public art, the character of a community city, town or even a small neighborhood is represented as a continuous story. The research, which focuses on the Katara cultural village in Qatar, seeks to reveal the importance of public art in influencing the designs and the general outlay of urban environment. The research also seeks to show how the art and cultural approach to urban environment impact on the awareness within societies and how it upgrades the desires of the community with regards to tourist attraction. The article reviews the effect of different society based catalysts that enhance regeneration of art as well as the preservation of cultural practices for the next generation through built environment and economic growth.

Qualitative research is applied in this research that makes use of various research tools such as interviews and observations to get substantial data that can be used to derive a conclusion about the impact of art and culture in a society. The findings derived from this research show the merits and demerits of the introduction of public art into public space in term of influence to social behavior, acceptance and development of cultural identity. In addition, the research enhances discovering of new strategies in which public art can be used to enhance public interactions and participation in developing urban areas.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Public art is defined as site-specific art located in a public area. Public art requires the artist's participation in the urban development and regeneration process (Hall & Smith, 2005; McCarthy, 2006). It may come in various forms representing different values and may express important aspects of a region or nation, for example historical and social values. According Thomas, public art is a tool used by planners to develop more productive urban environments (Thomas, 2007). This point raises a further question: What is the value of public art in an urban space?

### ***The Vision of Public Art in the Context of Urban Environments***

Sustainable development plays a significant role in defining a city's future in terms of urban settlement and buildings originating through social interactions (Day, 2003; Farr, 2008; Kaspirin, 2011; Montgomery, 2013; Partnerships & PARTNERSHIPS, 2000; Saleh, 1995; Shahreen, 2012). Public art as a tool of development strategy has an evolving role in urban planning and design. It is also considered a marketing strategy to attract mobile international capital reinforcement. This strategy is living proof that public art was used in ancient times (Canter, 1977). The presence of urban sculptures and murals helps develop a given community and leads the city to embrace traditional buildings and to construct buildings that capture the community's cultural and artistic aspects (Brown, D.Dixon, & O.Gillham, 2014;

Carmona, 2010; Carmona & Tiesdell, 2007; Carmona, Tiesdell, Heath, & Oc, 2010; Cuthbert, 2003; Xiaofeng, 2008).

### ***Economic Advantage***

Doha's many art events have attracted tourists from all around the world. Normally, these tourists spend funds on local goods and services, providing an external benefit to the local economy (Guetzkow, 2002). Therefore, public art can act as a wider promotional mechanism in cities' global competition for investment (Ashworth & Voogd, 1990; McCarthy, 2006).

### ***City Value***

The city's history and culture are recorded in murals and public works of art. Their presence can enhance and define a city's position and rank (Jie, 2008). They add to the city's sense of meaning in terms of its reputation and heritage and contributes to creating a community and a sense of identity (Hall & Robertson, 2001). Conservation of urban heritage means being flexible in adapting the objectives of rehabilitation to the needs of modern living while respecting the local community's cultural values (Furlan, Muneerudeen, & Khani, 2016; Nafi', Alattar, & Furlan, 2015). An example of this approach is Doha Sheraton Hotel. A landmark piece of architecture with an intellectual, cultural, and artistic vision that captures the city's growth since the oil revolution in 1978. To its west, other examples are the Grand Mosque and the Clock Tower (Wiedmann, Salama, & Mirincheva, 2014).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This paper employs multiple research methods to understand how public art and culture can influence and regenerate an urban area. The research process includes three key stages—direct interviews, observation, and plan application—and was structured over a four-month period. The study was conducted within the administrative border of Katara. It focused on four aspects—people, activities, setting or space, and timing—to understand the dynamics of the people, their interactions with the urban environment, and the type of art used.

## **FINDINGS**

Katara Cultural Village is a tourism development project located in Doha, near Doha's West Bay. The village embodies the site's historic theme.

### ***Observation***

Various types of public art can be found in Katara, each affecting people's interactions; for example, public monuments are part of the official historical record and heritage of public places. In Katara, aviary towers can be found that have a role in developing a sense of identity in the area. Art installations such as Gandhi's *Three Monkeys* and *Force of Nature* are considered a beacon for tourists because they were created by prominent international artists and relate to the people and the environment. The built environment is itself a work of art. The very structure of the place defines it as art that has overcome the most difficult of challenges to add enduring value to its environment. Public art is done by citizen artists—local or international. Allowing the public to participate in creating these works of art generates a sense of belonging, creates a connection between the place and its people, and improves the city's economic viability (Lacy et al., 1995). Nonphysical public art such as events, activities, and other creative and meaningful activities are the main means through which to keep a place alive.

### ***Interviews and Surveys.***

Most of the monuments were not created by local artists; indeed, they were designed and built by companies to meet a specific need or accomplish a defined purpose. Unlike most current public artworks, which focus on activating an area by adding to it, Katara area came to life. Many artists and other interested parties began coming to Qatar just to visit the area, thus activating a neglected part of society. Albeh, Ibrahim Jaidah, the group chief executive officer and chief architect of the Arab Engineering Bureau, pointed out that public art is extremely important. He argued that the city is becoming too urbanized and is ignoring the locals' culture and behavior. So, the city is evolving to become more of a typical international/global city.

The survey's findings were sub-divided into two parts: effects on the urban environment and citizens' perceptions of public art. Most respondents agreed that the aesthetic impact seems obvious and stated that they are aware of the economic value of public art. However, approximately 70% of the surveys were filled out by artists and designers, which explains the high rate of agreement on the educational aspects of public art and how it inspires artists. Conversely, the international tourists confirmed that Katara Cultural Village is a must-see site because it provides a full understanding of the area's cultural aspects, thus making the area more active economically and socially. Different forms of artwork in Katara were created by the public and serve to give the place a sense of identity. The art serves as a focal point for many visitors, who stated that although perceptions of public art are not directly related to citizens' decision to participate in a public art project, they are very much related to citizens' acceptance of public art, which figures significantly in the decision to participate.

## **CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION**

This research study showed that public art and culture bring benefits to Katara, particularly urban development and regeneration, and that positive physical, social, and cultural impacts help determine the livability and thus sustainability of an area. Public art can increase attention and foot traffic to a location, thus attracting foreign and domestic visitors and increasing the amount of time and money they spend in the location or the country, contributing to the area's development. Likewise, public art and related streetscape facilities, such as artist-designed lighting and built areas, are a means to attract pedestrians. One of the challenges in this study was identifying the disadvantages of public art. Negative feelings about public art were mostly related to ethical considerations; that is, not all public art is accepted by society. In addition, the decision to participate in environment-related activities such as public art usually depends on how the citizens perceive the art itself and how they perceive its effect on their environment.

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