Contemporary Art in Cultural Landscape: Experience and Opinions

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Abstract. In this paper, research results are presented to understand the experience and opinions of experts from both landscape and art fields about art in public space in Latvia, exploring options to develop the cultural landscape with the help of art in public space. The research is based on in-depth interviews with Latvian and international experts using the "snowball" sampling method. The paper identifies references and thesis of respondents emerging from the analysis of interview transcripts and outlines them in three broad themes. Thus, the subjects and directions dominating in the cultural landscape of contemporary art have been clarified, correlating similarities and differences on the theoretical level, as well as on the local and international level.

Key words: contemporary art, public space, in-depth interviews.

Introduction

The general mission of urban design is to improve the quality of human life [4]. Art in public space can be an instrument to create dynamics at the site and to ensure community interaction. The impact of art emerging in public space can be characterised by urban regeneration, public space revival, enchanting or attracting people, creation of the sense of a place and contributing to the preservation of cultural heritage values, added value to the place, to mention just a few [9, 20]. In research literature, several claims have been proposed, in regards to the role of art in public space [10; 12; 15; 16; 17; 20; 21]:

- Physically aesthetic requirements, which include the improvement of aesthetic quality [11, 18, 20];
- Economic requirements, which include the improvement of economic activities [6, 7, 14];
- Social requirements, which include the facilitation of the community and social interactions [3, 5];
- Cultural and symbolic requirements, which include the creation of a symbolic value [13, 15, 19].

Thus, art in public space gives rise to a diverse range of effects in socio-political, economic, and cultural fields.

The topicality of this research is conditioned by the relatively broad and intensive engagement of contemporary art in the urban environment that has become especially relevant in the cultural area both on

a global scale and in Latvia. Whereas the situation in Latvia indicates that the potential and resources of contemporary art are not fully exploited. In Latvia, at the local planning level, when accepting and integrating art projects for the improvement of urban environment. frequently a lack of general understanding of the role, utilisation and different manifestations of art in public space is evident. Wherewith, proposed a series of research questions: What ideas and directions of interaction between the cultural landscape and contemporary art are used in the Latvian cultural landscape? Are opinions similar of experts from both landscape and art fields about art in public space in Latvia?

The paper aims to clarify the opportunities for contemporary visual art used in the creation of the cultural landscape, as well as to identify how the various agents (persons who are endowed with the authority and influence) understand the trends of the interaction between the cultural landscape and contemporary art in Latvia and their usage in landscape creation from a theoretical and practical perspective.

This research is a part of PhD thesis "Contemporary Art in Latvian Cultural Landscape" carried out in Latvia University of Agriculture in 2013 [1].

Research Methods

This research was carried out between 2011 and 2012 with an aim to find out the most characteristic features for contextualising visual works of art in public space in Latvia. The research method included the use of qualitative data using the indepth interviews. The present enquiry was targeted to obtaining the opinions of specialists; therefore, it does not include the opinions of the general public.

Respondents

For the analysis of expert opinions, semi-structured interviews were conducted with

respondents who are related to practical and theoretical landscape science and/or visual art field. The in-depth interviews have been grounded on two levels of respondents:

The group of informants (providers of reference) – those respondents, who have noticed something and as "creators", developers and concept providers, convey it for the assessment and perception of the general public (1st level). The respondents of the 1st level are divided in two groups – reference agents

(curators and artists) and decision makers (representatives

- of municipalities and planners, namely, landscape creators);
- The group of experts (reference recipients and evaluators) those, who perceive, assess and distinguish outcomes, trends and opportunities (2nd level). The respondents of the 2nd level can be divided into experts, whose professional area of operation is related to the landscape science or art fields. Some respondents in various stages of their lives can be included in both categories.

Several modes were chosen for the selection of respondents: Firstly, getting acquainted with the Latvian Centre for Contemporary Art in Riga, which can be characterised as one of the key developers of contemporary art in Latvia. Further respondents were sought out. using the "snowball" sampling method [2; 8]. Accordingly, the current respondents informed not only about the research topic, but also the use of this sampling approach determined the range of other potential research participants. In this way, each respondent provided the name of the next individual, who might be familiar with the subject of the research. However, in the interest of diversity, and when one cannot follow the proposed direction advanced by one contact person, cross-references from several research resources were used. Therefore, theoreticians, architects and a community worker were also included in the pool of respondents. Respondents were chosen depending on their area of operation with a goal to obtain as broad perspective on the current use of the connections between the contemporary art and the cultural landscape in Latvia as possible. Thus, the number of respondents initially was not strictly fixed, and it was changed and supplemented during the research process.

In total, 14 in-depth interviews were conducted with both Latvian and international respondents, out of which, five were reference agents, four were decision makers and planners and five were experts and observers. Among the respondents, there were representatives of various occupations, professors, and representatives of municipalities, a geographer, architects and artists, who had worked or were working at the local municipalities at the time of the interviews. Serial interviews facilitated deeper rapports with the selected respondents during the research.

In general, the number of respondents related and unrelated to the art field is equal. Most of the selected respondents live in Riga, Latvia or in the vicinity of Riga. The majority of the respondents live and/or work in Latvia, however two respondents have lived and worked abroad longer than five years. Two respondents are foreign experts, who do not

live and work continuously in Latvia, as well as one foreign expert, who lives and works in Latvia. The majority of the respondents are in the age range from 30 to 60 years.

Each empirical study raises the question of credibility, whether the selected number and range of respondents have identified the observed processes in relation to the cultural landscapes. In the framework of this research in a small number of interviews, it was observed that certain aspects in the answers become similar with an opportunity to identify the differences of opinion, thus reaching the point of saturation [8].

Methods applied in interviews

Interviews were based on ethnographic approach. Thus, approaching the opinion of respondents was performed, where the researcher was involved in a longer conversation on the subject, encouraging the respondent to explain and expand his or her opinion in his or her own words [2]. To ensure its success, the interviews in the research were semi-structured. Questions have been arranged in a manner to establish a conversational format, attempting to obtain the respondent's story and leaving space for the description of the respondent and provision valuable examples.

The interviews have been carried out on the basis of previously provided groups of questions, which were correspondingly divided according to the levels of respondents. For the interviews with the representatives of the reference agents (curators and artists), individual questions were developed. The goal of interviewing this group was to clarify how the representatives of the group perceive the landscape, what their relationship to the landscape is, whether they use the narratives of the place and what the most essential component in their work settings is. The questions have been grouped into three groups:

- (1) the meaning of landscape and usability in the working process;
- (2) understanding of Latvian landscape and formation of the landscape in the context of political power, touching upon changes after the restoration of Latvian independence, namely since 1991. The goal of the questions is to find out how respondents see the State of Latvia as the creator of the "story" of a contemporary landscape through its values and human relations, as well as to study the usability of landscape as an archive in contemporary art practice; and
- (3) inclusion of public in the creation of works of art and observations of human activities and actions beside contemporary works of art.

The second part of interviews with decision makers and planners, as well as the group of experts and observers or evaluators, formed the greatest part of respondents. Interviews have been structured in such a manner to find out the theoretical understanding of respondents, attitude towards the contemporary landscape and art strategy and preferences and motivation, understanding of Latvian landscape and development in the context of contemporary art and public actions. The structure of interviews ensured that the respondents spoke about the projects or individual cases from their own or other practice, which they regard successful, representable or unsuccessful. The questions have been grouped in four groups:

- (1) indications on how the experts understand the latest conceptions, trends and practical usability of the interaction between the landscape and contemporary art nowadays. Factors affecting the understanding of the usability of contemporary art in the creation of the cultural landscape are studied, as well as the synchronisation of the approaches is sought;
- (2) introduction of contemporary art in the landscape and contextuality, clarifying the actions and opinion of respondents regarding the relations between the cultural landscape and the work of art:
- (3) understanding and formation of Latvian landscape in the context of political power, touching upon changes after the restoration of Latvian independence;
- (4) observations of human activities and actions beside contemporary works of art.

In order to assess the scope of interview questions, several pilot interviews were initially carried out, during which inaccuracies in questions were identified. After these pilot interviews and after the clarification of the questions was conducted, certain questions were modified, depending on the professional expertise and specific circumstances of each respondent.

Only by summarising the results of all interviews, it was possible to determine a complete scope and direction of the research topic. Among these, 12 interviews were organised in person, two respondents were interviewed with the help of the Internet (by means of a video conversation (Skype)), three respondents interviews were carried out in writing by means of e-mail correspondence. In order to broaden the subject of the research, six interviews were repeated. The reasons for these repeated interviews were determined by: (1) the role of the individual respondent in the study of the research object and (2) the revelation obtained in the initial interview required expansion and further explanation. The duration of each interview was from one to two hours in length. The interviews relied heavily on the cooperation of the respondents and the scope of the information range.

The data analysis

The aim of the research was to correlate similarities and differences so as to characterise the understanding and usage of contemporary works of art in the cultural landscape and in order to determine the main commonalities and features based on the transcripts of the respondents. Not surprisingly, there was no consistent perspective in the opinions of the experts. Categorisation and determination of the main themes have been applied for the data analysis. The empirical material has been analysed using the following principles:

- what common topics emerge;
- what interesting stories are offered by respondents;
- whether any of the selected examples and topics indicate any necessity to obtain additional data.

The analysis of the understanding and usability of the interaction between the existing contemporary works of art and the cultural landscape was an on-going process, during which new topics and conclusions have emerged, supplementing the initial interview questions. Some interviews branched into various directions of opinions and professional interests, resulting in uneven development of the topics expressed in the interviews and in their degree of depth.

Results and Discussion

In the framework of this section, the references and theses used by the respondents have been systematised by drawing parallels between similarities and differences in terms of opinions and understanding. The results of interviews provide evidence that several significant themes have crystallised, yet some of them have not reached the saturation point.

After listening to a series of interviews, re-reading the notes and transcripts of the respondents, conceptualisation of the applied references and theses was carried out. Close attention was paid to a number of the ideas mentioned, which were repeated or supplement each other. After the identification of references and main theses, the broad themes which reflect mutual correlations have been established. Similarities among several ideas have been identified and they have been grouped into sub-themes.

Furthermore, three broad themes have been identified:

- "Process" references and theses that reveal the active processes in the landscape, strategies and methods, as well as reflecting the ways the works of art are integrated in the landscape;
- "Result" references and theses that express and characterise the influence of the works of art on the landscape, the public opinion and the assessment of this influence;

"Continuation" – references and theses that reveal the purpose and intention; that is, future-orientated perspective, trends, development perspectives. On-going processes, modes of expression and the avoidable aspects have been proposed.

The broad theme "process" reveals the positive directions that respondents have mentioned in relation to the integration of contemporary work of art in the landscape, as well as entailing the distinction of approaches based on the object and methodology. In total 17 sub-themes have been identified, as illustrated in Table 1.

The broad theme "result" emphasises the impact to nature, mostly analysing the features of the object, as well as the context of the landscape, methodology and society. In total 14 sub-themes have been defined, as illustrated in Table 2.

The broad theme "continuation" reveals the desirable movement, development in future or the crucial aspects that must be taken into consideration when creating a qualitative cultural landscape to integrate contemporary works of art. In total 12 sub-themes have been distinguished, as illustrated in Table 3.

TABLE 1
The broad theme identified in interviews – "process" [Source: construction by author]

	1	lentified in interviews – "process" [Source: construction by author]
No	Sub-theme	References and theses of respondents
		Policy holding outside the processes
1.	Decision-making	Democracy depreciates the value
		Decision-making among experts
		"Everything [] is determined by politicians"
	Respect for landscape and impact of individual	""Game" and theatre
2.		Need for the spectator
		■ The individual –artist impact
		Respect for history and culture
	New place creation	Community participation in guidance development
3.		Creation of new stories, "to sell a legend like a contemporary story"
		 Required creation of events, naming places and interventions
		Building strong landmarks
	Highlighting of place	"When someone works, it becomes useful"
4.		"Bringing forth"
		■ "Digging under the surface"
		Local character
	Manner and time of	 Landscape affects our subconsciousness and way of being
5.	viewing	 Sometimes there is no responsibility for this period of time in contemporary
		works of art
6.	Use of narrative	■ The main aspect is "how" rather than "what" is represented in sculpture
	Ensuring harmonious	Search for the appropriate site
7.	relationships with the site	 Implementation of work of art for the particular location and situation
	relationships with the site	■ Discrepancy with the site gives rise to pollution
		Nature, its elements; urban structure elements; characteristics of perception
		and lifestyle
8.	Latvian landscape	 Urban dimension, scale, proportion, material; landmarks; natural factors;
	elements as a value	parks; wooden buildings in the historical centres of city; heritage of the Soviet
		Union
		"National Romanticism"
9.	Inhabitation of the	• The museum as a workshop, where "something is going on continuously"
	cultural heritage	Thinking about the past is an obstacle for creativeness
10.	Arts and cultural	Distinction between municipalities and private initiatives
1.1	processes	• The driving force of individual initiative
11.	Role of new media art	Advancement of new media art
12.	Self-reflection	Use of language that "does not tell in an intrusive way"
		Sending a clear message through particular instruments Use of multiple levels of the message.
13.	The "language" of an	Use of multiple levels of the message
	individual genre of art	Use of informative posters ""People should be closely related to the cite"
14.	Connection of community	"People should be closely related to the site"
1.5	with the place	Awareness that "this connection may be established" Creation of a work of out as a manual of modification.
15.	Process of creation	Creation of a work of art as a means of meditation Article relationship with the place and landscape.
	Artist's sense of the	Artist's relationship with the place and landscape
16.	landscape and the	"Landscape fascinates" "I feel being in the landscape"
	landscape as a source of	"I feel being in the landscape"
	inspiration	A work of art does not emerge by chance Therefore the appropriate and involved at all.
	Limitations of the	 Threats – the community is not involved at all "Living environment"
17.	community engagement	Formation of common sites
		■ "Strategy of seduction"

TABLE 2 The broad theme identified in interviews – "result" [Source: construction by author]

No	Sub-theme	References and theses of respondents
		 Inability to abstraction and creation of symbols
1.	Statics and stagnation of	 Nature (mentality) should be national
	today	 Lack of ambition of contemporary art
	-	 Few samples of modern trends
	Duration of realisation	Actions express city creativity
2.		Activation of issue and "going further"
2.		 Maintenance of people thinking process
		Temporary artworks refresh urban environment
3.	"Other view" and creation of appropriate language for generations	A different perspective on things
		 Permanent art is so lifeless and solid
٥.		Use of generation "adequate language"
		Attracting of attention
		Distancing factor
4.	Acceptance or rejection of	Prejudice towards contemporary works
٦.	unknown	 Capacity and the ability of art elements to change
		Education and information
	Interconnection between a	• "Coordination with the environment"
5.	landscape and a work of	• "Walking is like a work of art in the landscape"
	art	• "If the initiative comes from the inhabitants of the place, they accept the idea."
	Confrontation and reconciliation with the setting	 The need for explicit motivation and ideas
6.		Challenge and provocation
		Effect of the unexpected and plump
		Adaptation of the implemented work of art into the landscape
7.	Role of the theme	■ Theme parks
		Presentation of "the creator's" target
	High-quality art in public	• Great opportunity for viewing art outside the museum space
8.	space – outside the	• We "should to take into consideration that nothing emerges in an empty space"
	museum environment	(A) 1 1 N
9.	Art as part of a	• "An important part of the city"
	community	• "Power" of interventions at the moment
10.	A work of art as a	Intermediate stage between the real and the unreal world
	mediator	Ability of description
11.	Change of the artist's	A different perspective after a distance in time
	vision	
	Stories – part of the urban landscape	Urbanism as a holistic work of art
12.		■ Problem of communication
12.		Public space "that advances the story about the city"
		Conservation of the "signs of time"
13.	Code of conduct and security	Deliberate demolition
		Prevention of threats to users, promotion of maintenance
-	-	• "It is pleasant that people take pictures of the work of art"
14.	Response and inhabitation	Retrospective perspective at something that so far has not been there
	of a place	■ The successive stage – inhabitation

TABLE 3 The broad theme identified in interviews – "continuation" [Source: construction by author]

No	Sub-theme	References and theses of respondents
1.	Landscape transformation and rehabilitating of the environment	 Art as an instrument to enhance the quality of the landscape The creative process – the landscape is constantly modified Established limits The "variable" character of landscape
2.	Long-term settings and impact on the private space	 People are affected by what appears in the public space Experience transmission and adaptation Marketing emphasis Complexity of continuity
3.	(Political) power to set the action	 Need for cooperation between architect, artist and landscape architect Non-sequential action Lack of view on the future Reliance on cultural politics
4.	Borders of the understanding	 "Gap" between the contemporary thinking and discourse of the Soviet era Conversations with the people and explanation Running through the culture, but not going at depth "Ouality Projects"

END OF TABLE 3

No	Sub-theme	References and theses of respondents
5.	Potential of the peripheral	 Increased ability of the city periphery
	territory of the city	■ Creation of an alternative lifestyle
6.	Pluralism	 Multiple identities and features of society
7.		■ Creation of environment is collective work
	"United orchestra"	■ By connecting multiple layers "the arrangement obtains a pretty good audio
		effect"
8.	Political process of	 National commitment and elaboration of the "bottom-up" initiative
	forming the landscape	
9.	Risk of urban	 Contemporary art at risk of becoming a phenomenon of urban life
9.	environment	
		 Lack of planning of temporary activities and decorative sculptures
10.	Planning perspective	 Advantage of thoroughly considered decisions
		 Lack of sustainable projects
		 Repetition of the intervention for several times
11.	Use of space and	■ Place-making
11.	interaction with objects	 Interaction between inhabitants and installations
		Mutual trust in communication
12.	Creative landscape,	"Creativity" as one of the major powers
	economic context	■ Creativity is freedom and liberation

Curators tend to discuss art and landscape theories more, but artists are more inclined to interpret the landscape as a source of inspiration, focusing on the artistic idea and conception. Thus, two approaches can be distinguished. There are those specialists, who use their artistic ideas and later directly or adaptively apply them in the landscape, and those, who create their own work on the basis of the "sense" of deeper cognitive layers of the landscape. On the other hand, representatives of municipalities focus their opinion on the overall image of the cityscape and building a single open space, as well as to certain restrictions of political decision-making and the processes. The majority of the respondents recognise the need for active promotion of public engagement; however, a little practical action can be observed. The tendency to refer to urban interventions and site-specific art in the light of local conditions is recognised in the expert group.

Respondents' understanding of the interaction between the cultural landscape and contemporary art can be summarised as follows:

landscape – at the beginning of the interview, each respondent had to agree and clarify individually what is understood by the term "cultural landscape" because of its extensive and multi-dimensional meaning. Two types of the "landscape" concept in relation to the reception of the work of art can be distinguished. First, it is as a background. Second, it is as a field of activity or a material, studio, canvas that is used and manipulated with constantly on-going events. The second type consists of those respondents who work and are in direct process to affect the landscape. All respondents are most keen to understand the landscape in a broad sense, including both rural and urban setting.

The landscape is assessed in a wide range, while the sculptures in Latvian "landscape" are understood more stereotypically by sculpture symposia related to the placement of sculptures in the landscape. In the majority of interviews, respondents recognised the uniqueness of Latvian landscape, the importance of preserving "clean" rural landscape and its inherent rhythm, while more attention was paid (geographical natural context) anthropologically established values such as rivers, parks, architecture, and landmarks in urban landscapes;

- contemporary art respondents in this category focused more on various expressions of visual works of art, used materials, ideas, creative process. Both temporary and permanent work of art has its own expression, aim, efficiency, duration in the landscape and other characteristic parameters. A work of art is viewed also as a mediator. Therefore, the need for the use of "adequate, normal language" to be understood by a new generation is necessary, as it would strengthen the connection between generations. A group of artists, who relate their works to the context of landscape, emphasise the sense of landscape and need for creativity;
- contemporary art in the cultural landscape one-third of the respondents is able to evaluate the cultural landscape and contemporary art in mutual interaction, irrespective of the analogy of field represented by the respondents. It indicates that the connection between the cultural landscape and contemporary art. It is expected that it is related to respondents' experiences in contact with the landscape and/or the work of art. The respondents of the 2nd level are more focused on the interaction

between the landscape and the work of art, rather than as separate units. A small part of respondents mentioned the careful attitude towards the landscape in order not to "harm" the landscape by placing works of art. The saturation level of space and environmental "pollution" conditions resulting from the exhibited works of art have to be evaluated according to the individual character of the landscape.

Public engagement in the implementation processes of art in public space is controversially revealing both democratic non-democratic approaches, and a willingness to reduce bureaucracy, in order to provide more opportunities to the public. In several interviews, support for both democratic and non-democratic approaches to implement art in public space was expressed. This is based on the representative and unrepresentative division of public thereby establishing formal or elitist and informal public spaces. These preconditions have been the first to be allowed to determine the possible manner of interaction between the landscape and the work of art.

Conclusion

From the analysis of interviews, it can be concluded that the data saturation has been reached in most of the identified themes. However, there are topics that require further research. In the future, broader research can be carried out in several directions such as assessing the role of the landscape architect as a mediator and investigating strategies of public engagement through art in public space.

Diverse understanding of the cultural landscape and contemporary art has been revealed that influences the improvement of connections between the cultural landscape and contemporary art in the future. The themes that require more balanced cooperation among the specialists of the cultural landscape and contemporary visual art and elaboration of more explicit landscape planning and designing strategies have been identified in this research project.

Nevertheless, the level of theoretical understanding of art in public space is not sufficient among the specialists of the cultural landscape and contemporary art. In the process of establishing cultural landscape, cooperation among certain field specialists is not yet ensured. Thus, this is an area of cultural landscape that warrants further research and investigation.

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Kopsavilkums. Raksts atklāj skatījumu uz Latvijā notiekošiem mākslas publiskajā ārtelpā procesiem, kas palīdz izzināt kultūrainavas veidošanas iespējas ar mākslas publiskajā ārtelpā palīdzību. Pētījums balstīts uz intervijām ar Latvijas un starptautiskiem ekspertiem, izmantojot "sniega bumbas" principu. Respektīvi esošais respondents informē ne tikai par izpētes tematu, bet arī par citiem potenciālajiem pētījuma dalībniekiem.

Intervijās noskaidrotas kultūrainavas veidošanā izmantotās mūsdienu mākslas iespējas un kā dažādie sociālie aģenti (personas, kuras apveltītas ar autoritāti un ietekmi) saprot ainavas un mūsdienu mākslas mijiedarbības tendences Latvijas kultūrainavā un lietojumu ainavu veidošanā teorētiskā un praktiskā skatījumā. Pētījuma ietvaros meklēts kopīgais un atšķirīgais pieejās un izpratnē. Līdz ar to sistematizētas respondentu biežāk lietotās atsauces un tēzes, kas izriet no interviju transkriptu analīzes. Izpētes gaitā tika identificētas trīs plašākas virstēmas: "process", "rezultāts" un "turpinājums".

Izpētes rezultātā atklāta kultūrainavas un mūsdienu mākslas daudzveidīgā izpratne, kas ietekmē kultūrainavas un mākslas saskares vietu pilnveidošanu nākotnē. Konstatētas vairākas tēmas, kuras izkristalizējušās kā nozīmīgas, bet dažas no tām nav sasniegušas piesātinājuma punktu. Pētījumā atklātas tās tēmas, kas prasa sabalansētāku nozaru speciālistu sadarbību un pilnīgāku ainavas plānošanas un veidošanas stratēģiju izveidi. Turpmāk padziļināts pētījums veicams vairākos virzienos, ietverot ainavu arhitektūras kontekstu un izvērtējot ainavu arhitekta kā mediatora lomu un ainavu plānošanas procesu, kā arī sociālās iesaistes stratēģijas. Līdzšinējais teorētiskais izpratnes un savstarpējais kultūrainavas un mūsdienu mākslas mijiedarbes līmenis nav pietiekams speciālistu vidū. Kultūrainavas veidošanas procesā nav nodrošināta atsevišķu nepieciešamo nozaru speciālistu sadarbība.