

## Where's the "Public" in Public Art. Three narratives from documenta 14

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### Abstract

This paper analyses five public art projects exhibited in documenta 14 in Athens in 2017 that redefine and interact with the public space and therefore, form three different narratives on public space. These narratives are outlined according to the different interpretations of 'public space', 'public sphere' and democracy by the various artists. Our argument is structured as follows; firstly, we present an analysis of public art and its basic features drawing from contemporary literature. Secondly, we provide a number of key facts regarding documenta and documenta 14, outlining the main reasons we selected it as a reference point. Thirdly, we describe the three narratives about public space that we came up with after our field research and interviews with the respective artists: Sanja Iveković, Joar Nango, Rasheed Araeen, Mattin and Rick Lowe. We then discuss the relations between them and develop a model that unravels the way artists explore the public domain, look for locations, and redefine public space and the lived experience in the city. To do so, we engage with theoretical approaches as well as elaborations on specific artworks that engage the shifts and changes of the lived urban experience through art.

**Keywords:** public space, neighbourhood, agency, adaptation, COVID-19 pandemic

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## Introduction

Documenta 14 constituted an experiment between two cities, Athens and Kassel. According to documenta 14's artistic director Adam Szymczyk, the primary aim of that experiment was "learning to unlearn". Although it faced harsh and often fair criticism by the Athenian audience and a multitude of political collectives, documenta 14 admittedly initiated a form of public dialogue related to the role of modern art and the artist and their intertwining relationship with socio-political life on a local and global scale. Above all, as a 'glocal' event, documenta 14 brought up the necessity to reconceptualize (or at least attempt to do so) public art, public space and publics in general. As Erich Fromm stated in 1963, no society can be built upon the absence of shared artistic experiences (cited in Krensky & Steffen, 2009, p. 7). Art in its collective form is an integral part of everyday life. But if so, how should this collective art be made?

In the process of answering this question, new ones arise. Is the study of art in the public sphere able to lead us to a new understanding of public space and (counter)publics? What is the role of public art in the formation of 'the public' and everyday life of modern cities? How does art redefine the urban experience? More specifically, in what ways do international leading artistic events such as documenta (re)construct the notions of public art and public space? All the aforementioned questions inevitably lead us to a fundamental triad of questions; what public space means, what public means and, ultimately, what democracy means, as experienced and generated through art praxis, collective or not. It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide vague answers to the aforementioned questions. We rather proceed to analyse specific documenta 14 artists and artworks that redefine and interact with the public space. By focusing on the latter, we explore the intense relationship between public art and the concept of public. The in-depth analysis of five public art projects exhibited in documenta 14 in Athens in 2017 leads to the formation of three different narratives on public space. These narratives are outlined according to the different interpretations of 'public space', 'public sphere' and democracy by the various artists.

Our argument is structured as follows; firstly, we present an analysis of public art and its basic features drawing from contemporary literature. Secondly, we provide a number of key facts regarding documenta and documenta 14, outlining the main reasons we selected it as a reference point. Thirdly, we describe the three narratives about public space that we came up with after our field research and interviews with the respective artists: The first narrative involves public space as a scene, the second as a spatial expression of the public sphere and the third as a spatial expression of alternative commons (counterpublics). We then discuss the relations between them and develop a model that unravels the way artists explore the public domain, look for locations, and redefine public space and the lived experience in the city. To do so, we engage with theoretical approaches –mainly with Cartiere's definition of public art (2008), Kwon's approach on the route from site-specific to community art (2002), McCormick's ideas on how art practice is re-territorialising public space (2018) and Bravo's outlook on how contemporary artists and artworks remake the image of the city (2018)-, as well as elaborations on specific artworks that engage the shifts and changes of the lived urban experience through art (e.g. Hillary, 2018; Briggs, 2018; Ammendola, 2019).

As far as methodology is concerned, after deciding on the research field which revolves around the artworks presented in documenta 14 in Athens, we went on to select artworks that could be considered as public art pieces. Additionally, not being particularly

interested in installations or sculptures exhibited in public spaces, we focused on artworks involving performative elements. The physical proximity between the audience and the artwork allowed us to observe and analyse the evolving relationships (and their variations) among the people in the audience, between the artist and the audience and between the participants and the space in which they act and perform.

The artists interviewed as part of this research are Sanja Iveković, Joar Nango, Rasheed Araeen, Mattin and Rick Lowe. Aside from these interviews, we conducted participant observation both in Athens and Kassel as well as informal discussions with numerous artists and curators working for documenta 14.

### **Revisiting public art**

The most frequent and accepted definition of public art is used to describe works commissioned for sites of open public access (Miles, 1997). However, Cameron Cartiere (2008, p. 8) claims that over forty years since public art was coined as a term, it has yet to be clearly defined in any art history text. She goes on to attribute this struggle of establishing a definition to the multiple forms of public art and the multiple segments and subgroups associated with it. Public art can be related to fields such as urban planning, architecture, landscape architecture, cultural studies, political science, social sciences, public administration, environmental studies, history, feminist studies, geography, ethnography, anthropology.

Despite these obstacles, Cartiere attempts to construct a definition of public art as a form of art that takes place outside of museums and galleries and can fulfil the requirements of one of the following categories: a) it is located in a place accessible or visible to the public; in public; b) it is concerned with or affecting the community or individuals: public interest; c) it is maintained for or used by the community or individuals: public place; and d) paid for by the public: publicly funded (ibid, p. 15). In our understanding, this definition is the most comprehensive one and is employed for the construction of our model towards the end of the paper.

Over the last decades, public art has become more and more prominent in the contemporary art discourse. Thus, Claire Bishop considered this inclination as a social turn that would attach a more political orientation to art (2012, p.19). Going as back as the mid-90s, Lacy argues that public art has been popularised to the extent that it already constitutes a highly competitive alternative gallery system (1994, p. 172). Over the last few years, there has also been observed a turn in the public art discourse based on engagement that has been described as 'new genre public art' (Kwon, 2002, p. 105). Therefore, new questions on participation, artists' authorship, critique and ways of evaluation and aesthetics arise whilst engaging with input from geography, architecture, social studies and philosophy. Evidently, we are in need of a subtler and more challenging criticism on public art by bringing together the universes of both art and social discourse. As Lippard (2014) points out, when this kind of research on social belonging is incorporated into interactive or participatory art forms, collective views of place occur. The higher the degree of negotiation, the more public a space becomes. Through its multiplicity, public art can be a way to expose social conflict so that dialogue can emerge. In this sense, the political nature of public art is one of its most important aspects. According to Deutsche (1998, p. 1) discourse about public art is not only a site of deployment of the term public space but, more broadly, of the term democracy. If art has

the capacity to provoke interventions in the public domain powerful enough to interrupt the everyday social routines and initiate an instability solid enough to question perceptions embedded in the urban space, claiming it for the society of people who are the public space itself (McCormick, 2018), then (public) space is being mobilized and reshaped as a new materiality that is bound up with the social and cultural practices that surround it (Massey and Rose, 2003).

## Documenta and documenta 14

Over the last sixty years, documenta has played an important role in the promotion of contemporary art. Not only is it an art exhibition taking place every five years but it also is a story about the political, cultural and common spaces/places created by and beyond modern art throughout the previous century. For many artists, curators and art theorists, no other cultural event in the world is as historically emblematic as documenta. The myth around the event is based on a dialectic of destruction and reconstruction, rupture and continuity in view of dictatorship, world war and cold war (Siebenhaar, 2017, p. 11). Even the name of the exhibition refers to the Latin term 'documentation', indicating that it was probably its founder's intention to express the contemporary historical context in art forms.

Adam Szymczyk's proposal for the 14th documenta was to develop the exhibition in two partially coincidental versions, involving the same artists and contributors, in two different cities: Athens and Kassel. Thus, on April 10, 2017, the 14th documenta event was inaugurated in Athens with about 250 participating artists, extending to 47 locations throughout the city. According to Szymczyk, it was a project in two acts that was initially met with mixed reactions from the audiences in both cities: the Kassel public opinion feared the effects of the uprooting of documenta while Athenians feared that documenta would turn out to be another major event without a sustainable benefit, as were the 2004 Olympics, which were followed by the country's gradual economic decline (Szymczyk, 2017, p. 21). It was obvious from the very beginning that the selection of Athens was made due to a symbolic positioning of the city as the centre of the global economic but also refugee crisis. On the other hand, the implementation of documenta 14 in Athens was severely criticised. 'Colonial disposition', 'dispossession', 'exoticization' of the crisis and 'profitability' were some of the quotes one could encounter in several magazines and public announcements by Athenian political collectives in the summer of 2017.

But how is public art framed in documenta? Every documenta since 1968 has marked the public space of the city of Kassel. Large sculptures, poetic, political and critical works, hidden installations with historical and political references. It is not uncommon one can still find them there, still at their original places. In general, the physical and imaginary space of the city merges with the history of documenta (Siebenhaar, 2017, p. 79) and so Kassel is also called the city of documenta. The exhibition and its perception of public art has been reformed according to the contemporary art discourse of the period. As the institution of documenta attempts to express the artistic avant-garde of each era, documenta 14 could only (attempt to) innovate in the field of public art. In addition to the many works of art that have been placed in the public spaces of Kassel over the years, there are many works that have renegotiated the artist-audience relationship, participatory works and works that attempt to involve a specific community within the city and beyond. In this framework, political art that refers to collective issues of our time

or specific claims of marginalised groups and communities in particular, is present in almost every event, more so in documenta 14.

One way or the other, documenta 14 reshaped the public space and public sphere of Athens, even for a short period, in the summer of 2017. In the making, documenta 14 gradually established a presence in Athens and it became visible through the multitude of events, and performances that sustained the continuum of the exhibition during its one hundred days. Spaces and places of documenta 14 in Athens included museums, cinemas, theatres, libraries, schools, university auditoriums, public squares, streets, shops, residential buildings, parks and paths - in short, all that comprises the great city in its density and richness. The documenta 14 Public Paper would come out fortnightly on Fridays in several spots around Athens, offering information on all documenta 14 events taking place at the time.

Above all, by joining a documenta 14 'Chorus', a walk in the city, visitors could create their own lines of inquiry, coming up with broader perspectives related to the sociopolitical and geographical contexts of the documenta 14 project. At the same time, the Parliament of Bodies, the Public Programs of documenta 14, emerged as an open space for discussion and reflection on contemporary social and political issues. As an institution-in-becoming and without constitution, the Parliament of Bodies inhabited sites of contested histories whose memories forced the public to question hegemonic and romanticized narratives of democratic Europe in order for the public to experiment with new forms of sovereignty beyond the norm.

### **Three narratives on the public within public art from documenta 14**

#### *Public space as a stage*

#### *Monument to revolution - Sanja Iveković*

Sanja Iveković fundamentally reconstructed the Monument to the November fighting Revolution (1926) which had originally been designed by Mies van der Rohe for the German Communist Party. The new monument was divided into layers of bricks. The first layer was placed in Avdi Square in the centre of Athens establishing an open platform that operated as a stage, hosting a number of actions, presentations and events. The aim of this project was to reconstruct the foundations of the monument and, thus, question the relationship between revolution and commemoration. This way, the artist would catalyse debate around the construction and deconstruction of public memory. According to the artist, the monument became a pretext for new forms of political action, based on fidelity to historical struggles, while offering a stage for future events. It was both a cautionary reminder of the past, an object to be contested, and a material invocation (Majaca, 2017). During documenta 14, the stage hosted performances with strong political connotations. After the end of the exhibition and until today it is still in Athens, and it has changed form due to the interventions of local street artists. The stage was not activated again as part of a performance or such public event.



Figure 1: Iveković's Monument to Revolution at Avdi Square, July 2017 (authors' personal archive)



Figure 2: Iveković's Monument to Revolution at Avdi Square, July 2020 (authors' personal archive)

*European Everything - Joar Nango*

Joar Nango, originally a member of the Saami<sup>1</sup> tribe, dealt with the notion of the 'nomad'. He travelled from Norway to Athens by car and collected the necessary materials to build a facility on a patio at the Athens Conservatory. The installation, made with Saami tents, reindeer furs, wood and other materials, was a setting for action. Artists, in planned or spontaneous interventions, mixed physically with the audience and passers-by co-creating the final piece.

During the exhibition, the artist developed a performance on the installation. According to the artist, the play, performed atop the mobile stage of this traveling theater, reimagined the borderless state. The perpetual motion of the migrant and the Indigenous nomad was the basis for a proposed utopia. Not bound to any particular nation-state, this new world is formed precisely because of crossing national borders; culture is created from the ground up, and migration becomes the basis of belonging. Identity is birthed from lack, and coming to fill this absence are close connections made to land, language, and territory (Hopkins, 2017).



Figure 3: Nango's European Everything (I) at Athens Conservatory, July 2017 (authors' personal archive)

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<sup>1</sup> The Saami people (also spelled Sami or Sámi) are an indigenous Finno-Ugric people inhabiting Sápmi, which today encompasses large northern parts of Norway, Sweden, Finland and the Kola Peninsula within the Murmansk Oblast of Russia. The Sámi have historically been known in English as Lapps or Laplanders, but these terms are regarded as offensive by some Sámi people, who prefer the area's name in their own language, "Sápmi".



Figure 4: Nango's European Everything (II) at Athens Conservatory, July 2017 (authors' personal archive)

Iveković and Nango make art in places that are accessible or visible to the public; in public places. They create a place for their performance, not retained for the community. For them the public space becomes a stage, an area facilitating their performance; an act specific in time and space. Admittedly, they seemed to have acknowledged rigid elements in their spaces, such as the marbles that frame Noar's scene, as much as elements subject to transmutation, thereby creating space through the action on the stage, as in Iveković's installation. In both cases an invitation was present. Artists and audiences alike were invited to perceive and interact with public space as a stage. In Iveković and Nango's artworks, space was defined both as a field where we are allowed to place our bodies (a Cartesian space) and as a relation in which space existed only through interaction with time, history, experiences, physical objects, human bodies and events (a relational space). Upton (1997) argues that the way in which places host human activity is linked to their symbolic meaning and the invisible processes of their production. By exploring visceral engagements with the environment performers and designers create space. Evidently, for Iveković and Nango space is a stage. Iveković placed a stage in a public square and invited artists to perform on it, creating a modern monument to the Revolution. What happened on stage was accessible to the public. The stage itself, the events taking place on it and the red wall behind it, all became part of the public space and were intertwined with the motion of visitors and passers-by who could stand, watch or pass by. Similarly, Joar Nango created a setting in the public space. An installation comprised of elements and materials gathered from another place, that created a scene. He invited performance artists to perform, while the public could observe, skip or get involved with the installation, sitting or moving on stage, being part of the action.



Iveković and Nango chose a specific place for their art pieces, which could not be situated anywhere else – they create in a site-specific way.

“My work is a public endeavor and therefore the public space I chose for its realization is a key element of the work. The fact that it is built in a public square means that this work could not be built in a gallery or a museum” (Sanja Iveković, personal interview to the authors, August 2017).

Nango, also, supports this opinion adding:

“For my work I rely on what space is producing and giving to me. There is an openness and a simplicity in the materials and the design that makes me land on the site. I think of it somewhat as an organic choreography of materials, people, time and space, not as something with a beginning and an end but as something that begins when you come into space and ends when you leave” (Joar Nango, personal interview to the authors, August 2017).

As Cartiere (2016) mentions, artists involved in public art produce works that interact with *specific* locations. They not only respond to the topography of specific locations (both natural and artificial physical landscapes) but each grapples with the unique history, political context and/or social condition of the places selected. This ‘organic choreography’ could be the movement of everyday life, which is magnified when it becomes part of a piece of art. Public art encounters produce lived experiences thereof and, depending on their level of criticality, inhabit the inviting potential to intently sense everyday life. (Zebracki, 2016, p. 66). Perceiving public space as a stage and placing artists’ work on it provides us with a framework within which human and non-human bodies also produce, reproduce, shape and assemble space and place. This follows a body-oriented approach, which considers human bodies as moving spatial fields made up of space-time elements with emotions, thoughts, preferences and moods but also unconscious cultural beliefs and behaviours. This approach initiates a dialogue around a ‘culture of space’. It is a process in which according to Low (2017, p. 7) space is created through bodies and the mobility of these bodies that resulted in renewed places and landscapes.

But what is the artists’ relationship with the audience? In the case of Iveković, the distinction between artists and the public clearly exists. In the case of Nango, a line is drawn between the performer and the audience, but the two entities might interact with each other. In his artistic context he invited the audience to interact with the art piece and the urban environment rather than attend passively. In this way, the particularities and characteristics of the urban space (or the city, more broadly) were experienced and expressed as the condensation of countless motions and movements, textures, rhythms and flows that came together to create an instinctive sense of place. In both Iveković and Nango’s pieces the spectators participated by engaging their bodies in an urban choreography, although their ability to foresee the progression of the respective art pieces was quite limited.

*From public space to public sphere*

*Shamiyaana - Food for Thought: Thought for Change - Rasheed Araeen*

Rasheed Araeen created an installation using large tents, drawing inspiration from the 'shamiyaana', the traditional wedding ceremony tent in Pakistan. The installation was set in Kotzia Square, at the very centre of Athens. Under these canopies inspired by the shamiyaana, in a variety of vibrant colours and geometric patterns that appear in his recent work, the artist invited people to sit together and enjoy a free meal, while reflecting on possible scenarios on social change. Recipes from around the Mediterranean were prepared on site in collaboration with Organization Earth. During documenta 14 in Athens, two symposia were held per day with 60 people each. According to the artist, the project's location was selected to draw attention to the multi-faceted history of the city of Athens. Although the area has become increasingly deserted due to the recent decline of Athens' commercial centre, it has always been a vital meeting point for the city's inhabitants. Therefore, Araeen invites visitors to consider the present and historical dynamics of this public space and attempts to revitalise it on the basis of providing hospitality services to the audience (Ray, 2017).



Figure 5: Araeen's Shamiyaana - Food for Thought: Thought for Change (I) at Kotzia Square, July 2017 (authors' personal archive)



Figure 6: Araeen's Shamiyaana - Food for Thought: Thought for Change (II) at Kotzia Square, July 2017 (authors' personal archive)

*Social Dissonance – Mattin in collaboration with Dafni Krazoudi, Danai Liodaki, Smaragda Nitsopoulou, Ioannis Sarris, Dania Burger and Eleni Zervou*

In his project 'Social Dissonance', Mattin dealt with the estrangement and alienation within modern capitalist societies. Every single day, for the whole course of documenta 14, both in Athens and Kassel, four performers – sometimes with the participation of Mattin – presented the piece for one hour. Together, with the audience, they composed a 'social concert'. This kind of concert consisted of all the sounds in the room that were interpreted as the social soundtrack of our daily life. Performers and audience alike formed a group and used each other as instruments, who then hear themselves and reflect on their own conception and self-presentation (Bal-Blanc, 2017). Every performance was based on improvisation and evolved through discussions, often initiated by the audience's attempt to comprehend the concept of the piece and their supposed role in it. The performance involved physical interaction that the performers or a member of the audience initiated, sitting in a circle or imitating someone's movements, investigating the audience's social media profiles on a screen in the room, performers proceeding in provocative actions such as taking their clothes off, or even moments of silence and frustration.



Figure 7: Mattin's Social Dissonance (I) at Athens Conservatory, July 2017 (authors' personal archive)



Figure 8: Mattin's Social Dissonance (II) at Athens Conservatory, July 2017 (authors' personal archive)

Araeen and Mattin created a space for their performance and artistic expression which was more than a setting. Accessibility and publicity of space was not the key element to their art piece and their construction/use of public space and the public. The core of both

works lied in the audience's (as a community or individuals) opportunity, possibility and choice to have a decisive influence on the art piece and define its outcome(s).

None of the two artists, accepts the notion of the 'audience'. They both refer to the people as participants, practitioners or co-creators. Araeen introduced the idea of 'food for thought' allowing participants to produce art pieces by eating together and engaging in conversation.

"There is no such thing as audience in my project, but participants who create the work themselves collectively. I initiate an idea and then that idea is carried forward by the people themselves; which is then becomes the basis of my relationship with those who carried forward the idea" (Rasheed Araeen, personal interview to the authors, August 2017).

The meal was the artwork. Mattin did the same. He composed a piece of music and developed a concert comprised merely of the interaction between performers and participants.

"The public produces the work since they create a situation together with all the others. There is nothing that is outside this situation. Even if someone sits silent, he or she still offers in building the situation. The whole work is about how we perceive ourselves and, in that way, just being in a place is in a way a presentation of yourself, it is a performance" (Mattin, personal interview to the authors, August 2017).

Both works were based on improvisation and interaction between artists, performers and audience through discussion and embodied presence on "stage". Participation was employed as a tool for reconstructing a society ruined by the capitalist order (Bishop, 2012, p. 1). Araeen and Mattin's pieces became public solely through the audience's participation and engagement. Therefore, they developed and practiced participatory artworks or dialogical projects (Kester, 2013, p. 123) that represented a practical negotiation (self-reflexive but nonetheless compromised) around issues of power, identity, and difference.

At the same time, they were not interested in the concrete, absolute space in which they placed their pieces. Araeen admitted that he did not select the setting where the performance would take place himself, while Mattin used a white room with as few objects as possible for his performance. Mattin also used a random web-space to broadcast his piece. The space may have been of little interest to him, but the social meeting was of great importance: Participants (had to) communicate, agree and disagree, move around and perform for the piece to be developed. That's why neither artist addressed a random audience of individuals or passers-by. The pieces involved a specific audience which was engaged in the work for a specific time, actively participating rather than passing by.

Araeen and Mattin do not perceive public space as a field of mere gathering, but as a canvas of social meeting. Therefore, following Deutsche's argument (1992, p. 39) the notion of public sphere replaces definitions of public art as art that occupies or designs physical spaces and addresses independently formed audiences with a definition of public art as a practice that constitutes a public by engaging people in political debate. Public space here is associational, it is a public space that emerges anywhere and anytime as Arendt (1968, p. 4) describes it, people act in concert, and it is where freedom can appear (ibid, p. 4). And as Butler (2011) adds, this acting together reconfigures what will be public, and what will be the space of politics. Any site can be transformed into a public

or, for that matter, a private sphere. Indeed, these two works invited the public to take part in a debate or controversy. In Mattin's case, this controversy was certainly political, as his composition raised issues regarding the construction of our identity in a capitalist society. He claims that by amplifying alienation in performance and participation we are able to understand how we are constructed through various forms of mediation. In the case of Araeen a political controversy had also arisen, as his work made indirect references to the notions of 'community' and 'human communication' in the contemporary societies of late capitalism.

Araeen and Mattin transformed public space into public sphere since the latter emerges when and where people act in concert. It is a space defined by any topographical or institutional means. A city hall, a square or a park is not a public space unless people come together, communicate, debate, relate and interfere. Evidently, the two artists attempted to create such a space. A place that could be better identified as a public sphere. An open field of political debate between the participants who created the work. In that sense, participation becomes a very important – if not the most important – element of the work. The place created becomes public because people act together and in relation with it.

#### *From public sphere to counterpublics*

##### *Victoria Square Project- Rick Lowe*

Based in the ground floor of the Elpidos 13 apartment building, in the multinational and multicultural neighbourhood of Victoria Square in the centre of Athens, Rick Lowe along with numerous local people or groups and other stakeholders (natives and immigrants) established a place for the people in the neighborhood to meet and creatively express themselves. He attempted to form bonds and initiate a dialogue that related art and culture with everyday life. His main collaborators were small business in the area and wide networks of immigrants and solidarity groups. From the very beginning, the aim of the project was to live on, even after the end of documenta 14, and be established as an integral part of the local community. More than three years after the end of the exhibition, the project still goes on, hosting activities such as collective readings, screenings, discussions, groups' activities and creative lessons. According to Lowe, the artist seeks a dialogue involving key initiatives across the fields of arts and culture, business, and higher learning, as well as support networks for immigrant and refugee groups. He invites everyone involved in the project to focus on the current situation in Victoria Square. This historic crucible of the Greek middle class has slowly transformed, since the departure of its opulent inhabitants to the suburbs of Athens in the 1970s, into a contemporary cultural crossroads (Szewczyk, 2017). "Walking in the square, one hears Greek, Arabic, Albanian, French, Farsi, Polish, Turkish, Swahili", Lowe mentions.



Figure 9: Lowe's Victoria Square Project (I) at Victoria Square, September 2017 (authors' personal archive)



Figure 10: Art workshops at Lowe's Victoria Square Project, March 2020 (authors' personal archive)

Lowe argues that "it is vital my artwork be considered as an ongoing process which has its own life even after I disconnect from it". Indeed, three years since the end of documenta 14, the Victoria Square Project space continues to operate as an important reference point in the neighbourhood. But how did the work start?

"To get started the easiest thing is to call artists to do stuff, although the target is that the community finds a place to express themselves. So, we started with artistic workshops. Later, we started hosting events, for example a Ukrainian collective did a fashion show, there were screenings, a concert from African women, performances etc. We also had meetings with shop owners that wanted to work with us to hold events on the square. We rented three apartments next to the place, so artists from all over the work can come and work with us" (Rick Lowe, personal interview to the authors, August 2017)

Lowe's art piece refers to a public space which is not only public and accessible but fully influenced and defined by the community in and around it. The piece itself creates the conditions for its total appropriation by the community. We could even assume that the community itself is the art piece. "I am not placing myself at the core of my work. The core is the people that live, work and create in the area where my piece is exhibited", Lowe argues.

Lowe's art piece is neither site-specific, nor audience-specific. "First of all, I knew I wanted to work with the refugee and immigrant community, and Victoria Square symbolizes very strongly this community the last years" he answers when asked how he chose the site of the work. Therefore, Lowe's piece is closer to what Kwon describes as community-specific (2002), an art that in a way sets the target to provide artworks that depart from promoting aesthetic quality so to contribute to the quality of life. The engagements this project requires and promotes, are transformed into a community-specific piece of art which is collaborated and co-developed.

Merlino and Stewart (2016) examine the position of the non-artist as a partner in a participatory artwork. They argue that the audience's participation in an art piece provides them with as many opportunities for expression as responsibilities that do not exist in the canonical artist-audience relationship. This renewed relationship is evident in the cases of Araeen and Mattin. But, in the case of Lowe there is one additional vital element; community. Admittedly, his goal is to involve everyone present in the community and at the same time normalize the conflicts and intricate relationships among them. Engaging the community in the art process from the very beginning constitutes an attempt to empower the community beyond mere mediation upon great art.

Although the concept of public sphere, as defined by Habermas (1991), seems to be struggling to construct an open arena for political bargaining, the 'publicity' it offers is influenced by other social issues as well. The social prestige attached to the various levels of education, the use of language and the financial situation of every individual who participates in the public sphere, cannot be easily overlooked. As Fraser (1990, p.63) argues, societal discrepancies might not always be present, but are not eliminated. It is exactly these discrepancies on the basis of which women and members of lower social classes were prevented from participating equally in civic life. Participatory parity faces informal impediments that can persist even after everyone is formally and legally licensed to participate.

Ultimately, is Lowe taking a step towards tackling this problem by attempting to define the separate communities in the area? Separate communities that share different kinds of interests and exist in an inevitable conflict. If we follow Fraser's standpoint, we may



identify that in class societies the public sphere is the structured setting where cultural and ideological contest or negotiation among a variety of publics takes place (ibid, p. 68). We may also argue that the notion of public sphere brings up the question of the location of politics and the accompanying conflict(s) within. Lowe understands the problem of an authoritarian uniqueness of the public sphere and wants to stand against it. But to do so, he does not merely acknowledge that there can be unlimited collectives/communities. He tries to define them and study the relations of conflict and power between them. According to Lowe, public space is not just space, nor an open arena of controversy. It is an endless row of relationships between communities and groups that clash and intertwine. He seeks to integrate all communities, not with a spirit of reconciliation, but by recognizing the different identities and social dynamics that shape the public space around Victoria Square. His proposed way beyond and through the impossibility of community lies in bringing up the contradictions within it, rather than introducing total consolidation, wholeness and unity. Therefore, what emerges is the alternative commons, the counterpublics. It is nothing more than a parallel process, discursive arenas where subordinated groups invent and circulate counter discourses (Fraser, 1990, p. 67). These discourses, in turn, allow the participants to form oppositional interpretations (against the singular authority) of their interests, identities and needs. In this sense, subordinates may create their own public sphere, a controversial area where different groups could develop their own language, beliefs and interests. They are in constant conflict with the 'single' public sphere and aim to expand their multitude places by allowing different groups to participate in the social meeting(s) and dialogue(s).

### **Conclusions: the (re)emerging question of democracy**

In this paper, we proceeded to explore the relationship between public art and public space. Ultimately, we determined that these two concepts can be related in a variety of ways leading to a relationship that is always reciprocal. We also concluded that it is not possible to talk about public art without being confronted with questions about public space, public sphere, the public and inevitably democracy. The aforementioned narratives on public space derive from the various perceptions of the public as expressed and performed by the artists themselves. Therefore, we observed the multitude of ways of perceiving public art, even though produced in the same time and framework, without one being superior, preferable or more correct than the rest. Accordingly, the many perspectives on what public intervention means have led to art pieces affecting public space and sphere in numerous ways.

During documenta 14 in Athens in 2017, these five artworks, did not only become radiantly visible in the Athenian public scene, but also proposed another approach to the notion of the public, by making alternative use of artistic tools and methods. The table below includes the characteristics that shape the three different approaches proposed and analysed in this paper. These characteristics lie between art and social discourse, both defining a different intake of the public. Our scope is not to quantitatively compare the three categories, but to understand their differences and discuss their interrelations and subsequent understanding and reshaping of the public.

Table 1: The characteristics of the three public-art categories (in relation to public space) according to our hypothesis

Categories according to our hypothesis	Artists from documenta 14 in each category	Specificity	Relation to the discourse	Participation	Following Cartiere's definition	Artists' authorship (intensity [3 the highest, 1 the lowest])	Design of space (intensity [3 the highest, 1 the lowest])	Time of engagement (intensity [3 the highest, 1 the lowest])	Public
<i>1 - Public space as a stage</i>	Sanja Iveković; Joar Nango	site	Site - specific art	Immediate audience	in a place accessible or visible to the public	3	3	1	space
<i>2 - From public space to public sphere</i>	Rasheed Araeen; Mattin	audience	Participatory art	Volunteers and performers	concerned with or affecting the community or individuals	2	2	2	sphere
<i>3 - From public sphere to counterpublics</i>	Rick Lowe	community	Community art	Collaboration and co-development	maintained for or used by the community or individuals	1	1	3	counterpublics

Thus, in the first category, artists perceive public space as the external and accessible space where the general public and random passers-by relate themselves, on a scale of commitment, with an art piece. We are allowed to assume that they perceive public space as a scene open for action. The public influences the art pieces by its continuous motion around the space as part of an endless choreography. The pieces are grounded in the reality of their location: geographical, psychological, political and philosophical borders as they intersect with individual and collective movement (Hillary, 2018, p. 151).

In the second category, artists make public art that is influenced by individuals. Their goal is to engage their audience in a political debate, in a social confrontation. Artists, in this context, perceive the public as a public sphere and create a political arena. The audience is committed to creating the experience itself, conversing with the "other" and thus gaining a better understanding of themselves. Artwork is merely a framework for the creation of a public sphere or a miniature of it. In this open framework, the artwork itself becomes a comment on either the political landscape or the social context of a particular place (Briggs, 2018). As McCormick (2018, p. 7) reminds us, today the public practice of most of the contemporary artists, whether they work as individuals, teams, collectives or community facilitators, in one way or another aims at engaging the public beyond the role of audience. Following this tendency, both artists in the second category, propose participation and not merely interaction, but as an activation of certain relations that is initiated and directed by them and do not happen incidentally (Milevska, 2016).

In the third category, the artist makes public art for the community of a particular place. For Rick Lowe, the intervention in the community is an art piece itself. At the same time, he seeks and invites the audience (which is the community or the users of a public space) to fully undertake his artwork. Hence, the public is structured and identified by the formed relations with the different "commons" of the public arena. What the artwork itself leaves behind is not necessarily a construction, but the process which is able to build up knowledge, consciousness, and trust (Ammendola, 2019). Specific characteristics are recognized in the subgroups of the community and in the relations between them. The impact on the groups involved is tangible, as the different communities in the area come closer through their participation in shared experiences. Their relationships are subject to change.

Through the different recruitments of public art, we end up with a number of different narratives on the public and the public space: Public space as a stage, public space as a spatial expression of the public sphere, public space as a spatial expression of different commonalities and interrelationships. Which, of all these, is (the) public space? Is it the accessible space open to all, composed of the erratic and unexpected choreography of random movements? Is it the result of the common action of the people, who, albeit individuals, commit themselves to a confrontation for their common interest? Or is this common interest non-existent, and in fact we must analyse the public sphere as a whole of alternative commons that form their own public spheres that are interconnected in a variety of ways?

These different narratives on the concept of public bring up, explicitly or implicitly, the question of democracy. Deutsche has repeatedly referred to the interplay between public art and democracy, understanding it as a reciprocation, which can be approached in more than one way. According to her, the emergence of this topic in the art world corresponds to an extensive eruption and diffusion of struggles over the meaning of democracy, in

political theories, social movements, and cultural practice (Deutsche 1992, p. 35). By the same token, Massey, in her famous article of the 1990s "A global sense of place" (1991) argues that the idea of places gaining their specificity, not by some long-internalized history but by "a particular constellation of social relations, meeting and weaving together at a particular locus".

Maybe the contemporary challenge is to think how that kind of radical re-identification of the sense of place that Massey proposes could be extended to the current conjuncture. In other words, what are the new concepts of 'place', 'articulation of local, interlocal and global dimensions', 'public place' and '(counter)publics' under the (analytical) lens of public art? We may not have a clear answer, but we attempted to contribute to the existing discourse by focusing on the artistic methods and tools used and how they reshape the concept of public. Our contribution, lies on the attempt to support the already existing bibliography on public art and public space theory by creating a model and an empirical study analysis available in order to research how specific artworks reshape the public space. We strongly believe that future works studying public art in this framework, can add to a re-conceptualisation of space including its political, social and democratic openness.

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