

# The Shift of Artistic Public Space Construction from National Narrative to Everyday Narrative

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**Abstract:** This article explores the trend of how art in public space shifts its focus from being centered around national narratives to everyday life and individual experiences, as well as the influencing factors of this transition. It introduces the definition and historical background of art in public space, discussing the application of national narratives in such spaces, including the presentation of artworks with national symbolic significance and the introduction of commemorative public spaces like national monuments and historical museums. As an integral part of urban spaces, the construction of art in public spaces should prioritize human-centered approaches, focus more on individual experiences and everyday life, and elevate public cultural literacy, aesthetic education, and emotional resonance with the city.

**Keywords:** Public space; Society; Publicness; National narratives; Everyday narratives

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## 1. Historical Background of Art in Public Spaces

The history of art in public spaces can be traced back to ancient Greek and Roman times. Over time, public spaces gradually became an essential part of urban culture. During the Middle Ages, public spaces were suppressed for religious reasons, but the arrival of the Renaissance brought about a revival and appreciation of ancient cultures, leading to a rediscovery of the aesthetic significance of urban spaces. From the 18th to the early 19th century, urban space design in Europe and North America increasingly emphasized aesthetics and artistic aspects. In the first half of the 20th century, public art further developed in Europe and the United States, with an increasing number of artists delving into the realm of public space art. Today, art in public spaces has evolved into a significant urban spatial form. For example, New York's High Line Park, constructed on a disused railway line, has become an iconic landmark in the city, attracting a large number of tourists and locals alike. The Pompidou Center in Paris is one of France's most important modern art institutions and one of the city's most popular cultural venues. The establishment and operation of these art-filled public spaces not only enriches urban cultural life but also become a global representation of the cities they belong to.

## 2. National Narratives in Art Public Spaces

### 2.1 The Application of National Narratives in Art Public Spaces

The application of national narratives in art public spaces often takes the form of modern art, such as sculptures, murals, and more. These artworks often carry national symbols such as flags, emblems, national anthems etc, and are displayed prominently in public spaces, creating a unique and contrasting visual experience within the urban environment. Additionally, public spaces with commemorative significance, such as national monuments and national history museums, serve as important carriers of national narratives, documenting a country's history and cultural heritage, making them ideal places for people to experience the spirit of the nation in art public spaces.

Public art in China has shown intermittent characteristics. Scholars trace its origins back to the period of the Anti-Japanese War when there was a brief period of confrontation between public and private domains. During this time, the political public domain was formed, which was protected through the creation, publication, and strengthening of political newspapers to facilitate public discussions. It was mainly reflected in forms like propaganda posters, slogans, and posters. These works, with vivid colors, concise texts, and lively imagery, promoted the righteousness of the resistance, the importance of national unity, and the heroic deeds of the

people during the war. Among them, famous works such as the “Ten Years of Anti-Japanese War” propaganda poster and the “Eight Route Army Song” became representative pieces of public art during the war. This art form, centered around the national ideology, became a public domain for public communication and consensus-building.

After the war and with the arrival of peace, during China’s transformation in the post-1990s, public art began to rise gradually. However, different interpretations of its public nature led to debates about understanding public art. Public art should address public issues with universal common interests and consolidate a sense of shared existence through consensus. Through research, we can conclude that publicness is a concept that has evolved over time. Throughout history, art has been used to serve rulers, generals, and religious authorities, such as the Egyptian pyramids and Chinese imperial tombs, which has evolved into representations of public art.

## **2.2 Public spaces of commemorative significance include national monuments and national history museums**

National monuments and national history museums, as public spaces of commemorative significance, represent a country’s history and culture. They serve as symbols of a nation’s spirit and are typically built to commemorate significant events or individuals. They are important landmarks of a country’s history and culture, taking various forms such as buildings, sculptures, and pillars. Common national monuments include the Monument to the People’s Heroes, the Washington Monument, the India Gate, and the Eiffel Tower. They fulfill functions such as commemorating historical events and heroic figures, preserving cultural heritage, enhancing the cultural atmosphere of cities, and guiding societal values. A national history museum is a concentrated representation of a country’s history and culture. Through exhibitions and displays, it showcases the history, culture, and values of a nation. Visitors to national history museums can gain an understanding of a country’s history through various forms such as artifacts, pictures, and physical objects. Examples include the National Museum of China, the National Museum of American History, and the Louvre Museum in France. With their existence, people can learn about and remember the history and culture of a country, making them an important means of upholding national image and cultural heritage.

## **3. Everyday Narratives in Art Public Spaces**

In modern and contemporary art, the application of everyday narratives has become more widespread and diverse. Some artworks in public spaces create contexts and engage the audience. Below are several examples of the application of everyday narratives in modern and contemporary art within public spaces:

**Mural Art:** Taking the Beijing subway murals as an example, in the 1980s, the Beijing Metro Line 2 first set up six murals at station platforms, pioneering the use of public art in domestic subway stations. Notable works such as Mr. Zhang Ding’s “Yanshan Great Wall” and “The Great River Flows East” employ traditional techniques, embodying the grandeur of the nation. By the end of 2022, with 459 completed stations, over 170 stations feature mural artworks. These public art pieces encompass various aspects of people’s daily lives, blending Beijing’s historical and cultural heritage with the demands of urban development. They serve as “windows of art” showcasing culture, promoting urban development, and serving the people.

Public art: they represent a specific manifestation of China’s public art shifting from national narratives to everyday narratives.

**Interactive Art:** This form of art places audience interaction as a primary element, surpassing the traditional notion of passive observation and encouraging people to become active and engaged spectators. Social art often appears in city public spaces such as squares and parks, where it becomes a form of social activity.

The application of everyday narratives in modern and contemporary art within public spaces aims at provide new life experiences in daily life while emphasizing interaction between audiences and their response to the environment. It represents a trend where art and society mutually evolves.

## **4. How to perceive the shift of art in public spaces from national narratives to everyday narratives?**

### **4.1 The Impact of Art in Public Spaces**

The rise and development of contemporary public art can be attributed to three significant factors. Firstly, the increasing power of state intervention. The Mexican muralist movement and Roosevelt’s New Deal art in the 1920s and 1930s gave birth to contemporary public art through policy implementation and guarantees. Secondly, urban regeneration promoted the institutional recognition and protection of public art as an important tool for beautifying cities, leading to its widespread application. Consequently, public art has become an area of wide attention and vigorous development in practice. Public art, being situated in public space, involves various

power dynamics, and in a certain sense, the production of public art is the production of spatial power.

## **4.2 Public Awareness and Cultural Values of the Masses**

There is a close connection between public awareness and cultural values of the masses. Cultivating public awareness requires cultural support and inheritance, while the inheritance and development of culture also require the participation and support of public awareness. Public art spaces, as carriers of culture, can help strengthen the public's understanding and appreciation of culture through exhibitions, displays of artworks, and sculptures of public art, thus promoting the understanding and inheritance of cultural values. Therefore, there exists a mutually reinforcing relationship between public awareness and cultural values. People should cherish public art spaces while also emphasizing and promoting the inheritance and development of public awareness and cultural values.

## **4.3 Issues and Challenges in Constructing Art Public Spaces**

In the practice of constructing art public spaces, there are several issues and challenges. Funding is a major obstacle to building art public spaces. The construction of public art spaces requires investment in manpower, materials, and finances, which often necessitate cooperation from various stakeholders, including government, businesses, and private capital. Additionally, there is considerable regional variation in the public's understanding and acceptance of art public spaces. In some areas and communities, the public's cultural awareness and literacy are relatively low, making it difficult for them to comprehend and appreciate the significance of public art, thus hindering the development of art public spaces. The management and maintenance of art public spaces also need to be addressed. Acts of vandalism and improper behavior, such as graffiti, pose challenges to the security of public art installations, requiring professional management and maintenance. This increases the cost of maintaining art public spaces, necessitating the establishment of better regulations and guidelines to manage and resolve conflicts. Lastly, cultural differences and diversity present a challenge in art public spaces. Different ethnicities, beliefs, and cultures have unique cultural values and aesthetic standards, leading to significant differences in the appreciation and understanding of art public spaces. These factors must be fully considered in the design and construction to better serve various communities.

## **Conclusion:**

This paper explores the transition between national narratives and everyday narratives through the study of the construction of artistic public spaces. We also need to recognize that national narratives and everyday narratives are not mutually exclusive; they can intertwine and together build a diverse and vibrant public space. Future research should further explore how to balance the relationship between national narratives and everyday narratives and how to promote broader participation and inclusivity in artistic public spaces.

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