

## **Participatory Cultural & Audiences Engagement:**

### **Case study of Georgetown Penang, Malaysia**

**Sub-Theme: Participatory Methods and the Historic Urban Landscape Concept**

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Cultural Heritage is a legacy from the past, which is passed on to future generations. This paper presents a case study of participatory cultural and community interactions at the Georgetown Art Festival in Penang, Malaysia. This festival aims to advance heritage and arts education, promote dialogue, encourage understanding of the continuities between past and present, and serve as a platform to engage and celebrate Georgetown's diverse cultures. In addition, the festival celebrates Georgetown as a UNESCO World Heritage site.

Engaging in community interaction is integral to exploring social intersections. People often want to tell stories about their experiences and to share meanings and values. At the same time the advent of social media has placed an emphasis on this sharing. Interactions define the structure and behavior of interactive products and services. As such, interaction designers seek to create compelling relationships between people and interactive systems. In the context of culture heritage, the overall aim of interaction artists is to envision new paradigms for audiences' engagement in cultural heritage, especially as the emergence of new patterns of cultural transmission open new possibilities for participatory approaches in the design of heritage experiences. Possibilities include changing the traditional, top-down, linear approach of communicating to audiences, in favor of a multi directional flow of information.

This paper focuses on the interactive relationships between heritage places, communities, and participants. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Gell and Bourriaud respectively, the author shows how interactivity is at the core of the Georgetown Art Festival. In particular, Gell and Bourriaud's theories are instrumental in illustrating the different ways that participants in the festival are involved as agents in its formation: they do not exist passively as an audiences, but actively as co-creators. This serves to strengthen visitor's sense of place and context in the heritage area and therefore, connect living societies with formal heritage.

**KEYWORDS** Participation, Social media, Interaction, Community

#### **INTRODUCTION**

In order to approach and understanding of audiences participation in art performances, the works must not be understand as an object but work relationships in social relationships. Penang's mural art, art street, wall painting and steel sculptures are visual arts created in public locations unsanctioned artwork executed outside of traditional

art venues. The term of “urban art”, “guerrilla art”, “post-graffiti”, and “Installation art”, are also sometimes used when referring to artworks created in these case study context. Artists who choose the streets as their gallery are often doing so from a preference to communicate directly with the public. Some artists have gained cult-followings, media and art world attention, and have gone on to work commercially in the styles which made their work known on the streets. Around the globe street art exists worldwide. Large cities and regional towns of the world are home to some form of street art community, from which pioneering artists or forerunner of particular mediums or techniques emerge. Internationally known street artists travel between such locations to promote and exhibition.

Attraction both local and foreign visitors to visit George Town UNESCO World Heritage Site, Malaysia is to witness the delightful fusion of the East and West that rich in history and culture. That's what for visitor past trips but currently, what attract them the most was for its vibrant showcase of these unique and beautifully painted art street, wall paintings and steel sculpture across the heritage area of George Town city.

This paper will apply two distinct theatrical approaches in examining the way art festival in Penang, Malaysia operates interactively and relationally: British social anthropologist Alfred Gell's theory of agency and French curator Nicolas Bourriaud's conception of relational aesthetics. Bourriaud's book *Relation Aesthetics* provide a conceptual framework for identifies as a distinct trend in artistic practice of human relations and social context. Bourriaud asserts the aesthetic nature of relational works, and hence their value as art, by identifying formal qualities in the interpersonal relationships that they engage. Gell's theory of agency may seem less apposite. Gell's book *Art and Agency* presents an anthropological theory of art that provides a means of understanding the way art operates in its social context by examining, in his words, “the practical mediatory role of the art object in the social process”. The essential premise underpinning Art and Agency is that “art objects are the equivalent of persons, or more precisely, social agents”, such that they act in particular ways in given social situations. In other words, Gell looks at how art objects make things happen. Whereas Bourriaud sought to champion a particular trend in contemporary art, Gell sought to create an approach that, while being universally applicable, would also be especially useful for understanding the way art functions. Although the respective theories of Gell and Bourriaud are markedly different in terms of their aims and scope, both are predicated on the fact that art operates in terms of human relations.

## **REASONS FOR COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION**

It is interesting time to tackle this subject: As new forms of The Participatory Cultural & Audiences Engagement. The term “community or audience” may ambiguously refer to anyone viewing or participating in an installation. To clarify those roles, person(s) activating an installation will be referred to here as the “player(s),” as in a musician playing music or someone playing a game. Audience members simply viewing the players will be called “spectators” implying a group's role in a live event. The term Public Art is art in any media that has been planned and executed with the intention of being staged in the physical public domain, usually outside and accessible to all. Public arts may include any art form which is exhibited in a public space including publicly accessible buildings, walkways, parks and other spaces where public is accessible.

The different stakeholders promote heritage conservation such as the Government, professional organizations, academic institutions, non-governmental organizations, private organizations and the public take part in heritage conservation.

### **Government + Public Participation**

The Government is responsible for formulating heritage conservation policies and implementing the related measures. The Government will adopt various methods to carry out public education and publicity, to promote public understanding of its policy directions and their implementation, and enhance public participation in the process.

- Inviting non-profit organizations to take part in conservation and revitalization initiatives
- Open access to meetings
- Providing information on heritage conservation to the public
- Organizing educational promotional activities

### **Non-Government + Public Participation**

Non-governmental organizations are independent from the Government and the business sector. Apart from enhancing public understanding of the issues of heritage conservation, these organizations also encourage the public to discuss and voice different opinions on conservation issues.

- Motivating social actions to promote public participation
- Launching publications to raise public awareness of heritage conservation
- Organizing public education and promotional activities

### **Professional + Public Participation**

Professional organizations are formed by practitioners of the profession concerned. Professional knowledge, these organizations provide their expert opinion to the Government on heritage conservation, conduct research and offer related professional services. These organizations also arrange activities to raise public awareness on heritage conservation.

- Organizing educational and promotional activities
- Promoting professional development of heritage conservation work
- Responding to Government policies

### **Academic + Public Participation**

Academic institutions include tertiary institutions and research institutes, which mainly carry out research and teaching. Architecture schools and history departments of local universities are actively taking part in heritage conservation.

- Organizing academic activities
- Opening up research findings as publicly accessible resources
- Organizing educational activities

### **Public + Public participation**

As a stakeholder of historic buildings, members of the public can take part in heritage conservation work through the various activities mentioned. They can also take the initiative to express their opinions to the various government departments, or organize concern groups on important heritage conservation issues. No matter what views they have on heritage conservation or what form of participation they choose, members of the public can play a role in driving heritage conservation forward.

### **Participation in the conservation GTWHI**

George Town World Heritage Inc. (GTWHI) are monitoring and planning, education, and promotion. GTWHI does a regular program of activities and projects dedicated mainly to conservation and the heritage of George Town, both built heritage as well as intangible culture. Public engagement on conservation of George Town

the mission to educate people about heritage run a Resource Center which house sample traditional building materials, and a library and digital archive of historical documents, maps and photographs. The Government will adopt various methods to carry out public education and publicity, to promote public understanding of its policy directions and their implementation, and enhance public participation in the process. Education is one of the main role of GTWHL, to help people understand the importance of heritage, to share knowledge on how to care for George Town as a heritage city. And to celebrate the culture and stories of share city.

The following are some examples:

- Talks and Seminars

A series of public talks as well as specific events targeted at professional bodies.

- Kopi Conversations

Coffee and conversations around heritage, conservation, culture and issues that matter in the George Town World Heritage Site.

- Heritage Exploration

Special tours for school children, conducted by the Friends of George Town Heritage specially trained volunteers

- Capacity Development Workshops

Specialist workshops to develop professionals in areas of conservation and heritage management, as well as basic workshops to develop individuals interested in learning more about heritage.

**The Physical Factor** involves the installation space and set, including items used to create the space and interface, such as sensors, props, video screens, constructions, printed images, and furniture. How people move around the space and the activity required to interact with physical material. The feeling of the venue and location also contribute to the audience's reaction to a work.



Fig 1: The urban arts are clever and charming, and each one leaves a distinct impression on the audiences, because each one requires input from the spectators.  
Source by:  
Budsakay  
INTARAPASAN

**The Social Factor** examines the relationships between people before, during, and after the installation experience. Artists may consider designing situations where social interactions are likely to occur based on decisions regarding the number of formers allowed to participate and the role and location of spectators.

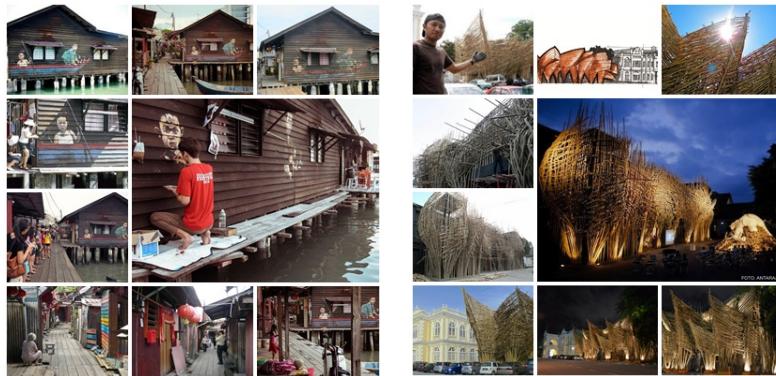


Fig 2: Installation arts invite the audience to literally take part in a piece, the audiences are the process. In the case, the process is the art; the series of mural art, art street, wall painting and steel sculptures are arts and the final products are participatory cultural & community Interactions.

Source by: Budsakay INTARAPASAN

**The Personal Factor** is the area most difficult for artists to predict and influence, although the physical and social factors all contribute to create the individual experience. Beyond the control of the installation artist are issues such as a person's mood, musical taste, interest in technology, or whether they have the knowledge and skills required to participate and understand the installation.

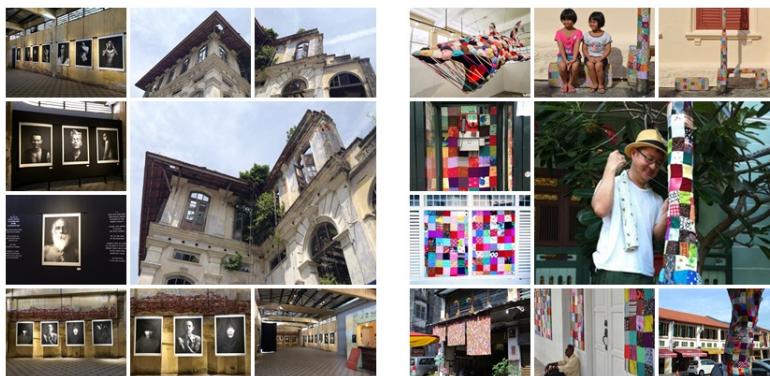


Fig 3: The artists create works that leaves a strong and clear message and the audiences are very active part of works. The art works engage to the audiences to create the experience that they will remember and retain.

Source by:  
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One of the big challenge to the installation artist is to know the full range of audience members, and provide a multi-layered work that will be engaging on many cognitive, physical, and emotional levels. Ideally, all of these factors add up to more than the sum of their part, reinforcing the artist's intentions, and leaving the participants with transforming ideas or emotions. The minimum and maximum times needed to get a good understanding of the work. The scope of the installation may determine the necessary range of time needed for a full experience. Factors that influence the duration of use include: attraction to the material, intellectual and emotional interest, ability to understand and enjoy the contents, the feeling of engagement with the physical, social, and personal interactions. Three modes are playful environments that encourage convention, eye contact, and movement between performers and spectators, companions and strangers. The participants are the subject of this work, their actions, response, facial expressions, and social interactions are much more significant than the actual visual and sonic material they generate.

## CONCLUSION

The aspects of art installations have a significant impact to audiences perception. It is a general team that the audiences are co-present in a performance. Participants are asked to become artist collaborators, performers and, finally, content in mediated works. By continually respecting the intelligence of audiences and leaving a small mental task to be completed, artists have connected with their audiences. By not underestimating the audience, artists and audience can all create brilliant and beautiful works. For my own practice the idea of interaction and relation between performers and the other human beings in the audiences are a main point. Participating in the historic environment and their motivations, and the barriers faced by potential participants is an important issue for the heritage sector. Successful culture organization stem from strong audiences. Given that audiences are such as a strong force in the culture dynamic. As sensing for culture heritage mature, artists will be compelled to conceive of works where physical, social and personal interactions are vital to creating new forms of expression and experience.

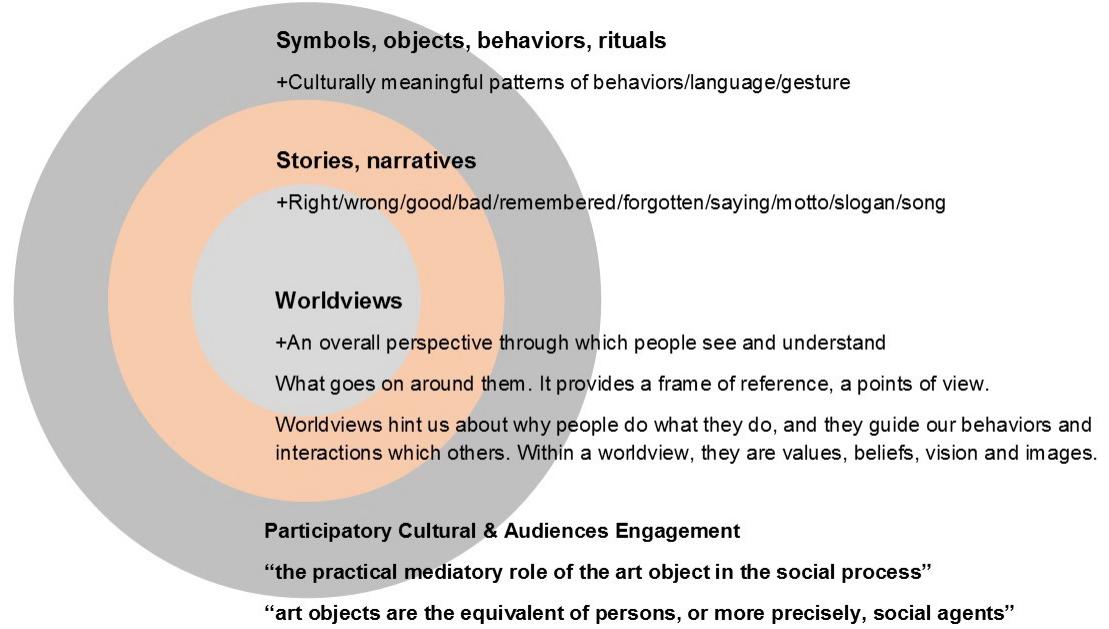


Fig 4: Attending a performance at the stand can be a gateway experience.

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