CultureCase

Three barriers that hold back the use of public art to provoke debate

This research was conducted by **Meghan Robidoux** and **Jason F. Kovacs** at **Queen's University, Canada** and the **University of Seoul, Korea**

Summary

This article is based on conversations with artists and leaders at arts organisations in Toronto, Canada that produce public art intended to provoke thought about the environment. The paper reveals 'three key impediments' to successfully using public art as a tool for environmental outreach. These are: the present state of public education about art, which is not always at the level needed for the art to provoke a high quality of debate; the way that temporary works of art are subject to lengthy and laborious planning procedures, despite the fact that they might be more popular than expensive and permanent public works; and thirdly, a lack of evaluation evidence relating to public reactions to ecological art projects in the city.

The study is based on 12 interviews with artists and officials involved in public art and urban planning in Toronto

Like many cities around the world, Toronto has a "Percent for Art" policy, which helps fund the production and promotion of art, some of which seeks to promote debate about environmental issues. Interviews with art collectives in two other Canadian cities (Calgary and Hamilton) helped contextualise the findings from Toronto.

There is no easy or obvious way to evaluate the outcomes of ecological public art projects

However, should more data become available it will be easier for artists and arts organisations to navigate local policy-making procedures that increasingly seek to be “evidence-based”.

Keywords

cities **interview** **Canada**

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