CultureCase

The eight different impacts of public art

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Summary

‘Public art is fundamentally about creating artistic and life-enriching experiences for people within the everyday, shared public realm’. This paper is a systematic review of previous research. It concludes that public art has eight kinds of impacts: place-making, society, culture, economy, sustainability, wellbeing, wisdom and innovation. These impacts are not always universally positive – and the success of public art is dependent on the way its creation and display are managed. Despite all of the evidence of impact, the researchers also say that there is little rigorous measurement of ‘community perception, experience and engagement with public art’.

Public art can create and amplify the identity of a place

Public art projects can galvanise a community together, although if poorly managed they can become the site of contestation between local interest groups. Public art monuments can support society-wide efforts to document and process historical events and bring about a sense of civic pride. An encounter with public art can bring about a deeper appreciation of art and culture more generally.

Public art is a mechanism for improving local economies through place branding, tourism and regeneration

To support sustainability, public art has been shown to be an effective way for local citizens to understand climate change. Public art can ‘humanise’ a

location – and help individuals reflect on their own lives. Previous research has revealed that people felt ‘participating in public art projects on a regular basis benefited their wellbeing’. If done well, a public art encounter can get people to think afresh about a place, and wisely evaluate its strengths and weaknesses. Public art is able to innovate and push the boundaries of what audiences and the art world consider is possible. Digital public art is an especially interesting development, with hybrid virtual and on-site works further enhancing people’s experience of art.

Keywords

public art **systematic review**

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