

MAPPING AWARENESS ABOUT ART IN PUBLIC SPACES IN FORT AREA OF MUMBAI

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ABSTRACT

Art in public space is a spatial and social phenomenon with the ability to produce intense emotions in audience as active receptors who constantly analyze the meaning of art thus contributing to the complete communication process of art creation. The way people think about the use of public art and the spaces around matters because the characteristics of these spaces such as the way they are designed, their accessibility and attractiveness, influence understanding of identities, general attitudes towards people, and politics. The knowledge and opinions about a place that a community has is important to understand as it is closely linked to awareness of these places among the community members. Several factors intertwine to create a sense of belonging for the arts in public space and other elements within it. This paper is an attempt to apply the quantitative methods to map awareness about public art in the Fort Area of Mumbai.

Keywords: Art Deco relief, belonging, Flora fountain, habitation, Hutatma Sculpture, participatory action, past, Pheroze Shah Mehta sculpture, Piloos Pochkhanawala's installation, place, public art.

INTRODUCTION

As far as I can remember my visits to Mumbai whether with family or for professional engagement always involved art trip to the historic Fort area in Mumbai. Walking in this vicinity was always a pleasure while looking at art works displayed at various art galleries, the fascinating architecture and the constant buzzing at the streets. All these invited me to walk and have close observation while experiencing a place and ambience. The natural progression of my fascination for the Fort area and interest in public art encouraged me to take this study to seek explanation by enquiring the opinions that people may have of public art in this location.

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Art in public spaces is a spatial and social phenomenon with the ability to produce intense emotions in audience as active receptors who constantly analyze the meaning of art thus contributing to the complete communication process of art creation. How people interact with, and experience their environment can be explored by studying public art.

This project was an attempt to undertake a research enquiry and apply the quantitative methods to analyze an issue at hand. The data gathered and presented in this research will contribute to a more informed discussion about the presence, acceptability, and awareness of different forms of sculptures, particularly in Fort area, Mumbai.

The lack of existing data on what people actually think about public art in Fort area required that I collect new information to answer my research questions. Data were gathered by conducting survey interviews. Finally, survey interviews provided quantifiable data on what people think about different forms of public art.

To deviate from this dialogue and highlighting the opinions of public about the public spaces they venture in or observe, this research tries to focus on the perspective of the urban audience. The general aim is to gain an understanding of the relationships between people and the places they momentarily station at by gathering information on what people think about different forms of public art.

For this purpose the following segments present a detail approach to the methodology of questionnaire design, non- probability sampling, research findings, and finally conclusion where I have tried to identify factors that have most positive response for awareness of a work. An attempt is further made to highlight future possibilities and research implications.

RESEARCH AREA

With the recent large scale undertaking of public art by Mumbai Street Art Festival with acclaimed street artists as participants, the public art scene is definitely increasing the visibility but there are several other examples of public art that can be found at various places within Mumbai. A few of these examples can be seen at various locations such as artist Arzan Khambatta installation of Dolphins called as “*scripture*” by the artist. Located at the Worli traffic island, this installation is made out of scrap metal. The sculpture of R K Laxman’s famous cartoon character ‘*Common Man*’ at Worli Sea Face by sculptor Suresh Sakpal is placed seated at the bench as an ideal interactive public installation. *Flying Bus* at BKC by artist Sudarshan Shetty also serves as a public gallery where different forms of art works are exhibited. The 30-feet high, steel ‘*Charkha*’ presented by Tata Steels in 2011 at Cross Maidan is an effort to develop the area as a recreational public space. Made by architect Nuru Karim, the *Charkha* is easily visible from the Churchgate area. ‘*Child giving birth to a mother*’ sculpture located at the Bandra-Mahim junction shows a woman with a child commissioned by hotelier Vitthal Kamat on a plot given to him for beautification purpose by MSRDC. The Wall Project at Tulsi Pipeline Road– ‘*Wall Project*’ was founded by Dhanya Pilo in 2010. The wall displays painted graffiti, messages etc done by over 400 people, with the support offered the BMC. Then, there is Dadabhai Naoroji statue facing the flora fountain, made by Mumbai-based sculptor BV Tambi in 1925. It is quite exquisite in capturing the details of the Grand Old Man of India.

The above examples are some of the important works that are present within Mumbai and depict myriad of thoughts to the onlooker. But the choice of art works that I will be studying for this research purpose include five works dotting the mile- long road from Chatrapati Shivaji terminus and NGMA Mumbai near Regal cinema. The selection was also made for the reason that this vicinity was able to incorporate the most diverse set of sculptures based on the formal variations ranging from academic-style commemorative sculpture to abstract installation and from colonial period art to very modern Art Deco relief panels, placed within a short distance of each other.

Five works that I have selected for this research are the Pheroz Shah Mehta sculpture, Flora fountain, Hutatma Sculpture, Art Deco relief panel on the lower facade of New India Assurance Building, and Pilloo Pochkhanawala's installation in front of NGMA. The research will focus on the art works located in the historic Kala Ghoda area in the Fort precinct.

Fort area in the southern part of Mumbai can be historically traced back to the presence of a fortress in this area which was demolished during 1860s. Built by the British East India Company which took possession of the seven Bombay islands from Portuguese in 1668 and completed the construction by 1716, the Fort had three strongly fortified entrance gates one of which was Church Gate where the heritage structure known as Flora Fountain now stands.

With a mix of marvelous building and their enchanting facades which reflect a combination of Italian – Gothic, French - Gothic, Neo – Gothic styles, the Fort area was declared a protected precinct under the Heritage- Regulations formulated by the Urban Development Department of Maharashtra Government in the year 1995. This ensures that no further development or repairs can take place without the prior permission of the advisory committee appointed by the government.

Within this region lies the important commercial hub, the Kala Ghoda area. This important art district was named after a grand 12 feet 9 inch bronze statue of King Edward VII mounted on a black horse which was removed and placed in its present location at the Zoological Gardens, Byculla.

Historically, Kala Ghoda crescent evolved informally as a cultural node right from 1870's after the rampart removal when several educational, art and social institutions were built in its vicinity. Kala Ghoda precinct's role as a cultural node has continued since the area has long been a meeting place for cultural practitioners (artists, performers, journalists, etc) reinforced with the presence of art galleries, craft centers, restaurant and cafeterias.

Although the sculpture of King Edward VII has long been relocated, the memory of the horse (without its rider) continues to persist making Kala Ghoda area an important landmark for people in Mumbai. A survey was undertaken by the city-based architects, with the support of the Urban Design Research Institute to analyze the Kala Ghoda and its adjoining areas. They discovered that the area contained the largest concentration of contemporary art galleries in the country. Based on the report and findings of this research group, a public trust for the area was formed, which petitioned the local government to officially designate the area as an art district. It was declared so in 1999. One of the major activities of this trust is the creation of the Kala Ghoda Art Festival that is organized yearly and is visited by people from all walks

of life and from far off places to exhibit or as spectator. The art fair is a way of raising money to physically improve the area as well as to draw attention to the conservation of its heritage. This has not only driven the conservation process but also restored as a popular public space.

Image 1: Pheroz Shah Mehta sculpture.



(Image Credit: Author)

The Mumbai Municipal Corporation building which was finished in 1893 is an example of Gothic façade. In front of the MMC building, stands the academic style commemorative sculpture of Sir Pheroz Shah Mehta made by artist named 'Woods'. Mehta was an Indian political leader, activist, and a leading lawyer of Mumbai, who was knighted by the British Government in India for his service to the law. Placed on the road side traffic island on the busy junction in front of Chatrapati Shivaji Terminus main entry, the sculpture of Pherozs hah Mehta overlooks the D.N road intersection that leads towards the Kala Ghoda area.

Image 2: New India Assurance Relief Panel



(Image Credit: Author)

The D.N intersection has many examples of buildings designed in the Art Deco style and designed by architect firm, Master Sathe and Bhuta. One of the examples of their work is the design of Art Deco style building housing the New India Assurance. The building is adorned with relief panels made by another Mumbai-based sculptor, NG Pansare in the year 1935-1937. The panel represents the themes associated with the portfolio of the company and its general insurance schemes for the common people. Thus the panel represents working individuals from various quarters of life.

Image 3: Flora Fountain and Hutatma Chowk



(Image Credit : Author)

The New India Assurance panel is placed on the way towards two other structures -the Hutatma Chowk and the Flora Fountain. The statue of Flora, the Roman goddess of flowers and spring, is situated on the broad Square that lies at the main traffic junction on the Mile Long Road. Within the same vicinity is the Hutatma Chowk, which has a sculpture representing two martyrs holding a torch. Both these sculptures are elevated at the same height enclosed by fence.

It is interesting to note the similarities and the dissimilarities between the two works. Flora Fountain with its circular construction filled with mythical figures, was constructed in 1864 by the Agri-Horticultural Society of Western India. The funding came from a donation of Rs. 20,000 by Cursetjee Fardoonjee Parekh. Designed by Richard Norman Shaw, it was sculpted in imported Portland stone by James Forsythe. On the other hand, the design of the Hutatma Chowk memorial portrays a contrasting layout. The memorial was erected to commemorate 106 martyrs during a 1960 demonstration in which the police shot numerous members of the Samyukta Maharashtra Samiti (United Maharashtra Committee), a political group demanding the establishment of a Marathi-speaking State of Bombay. This incidence is made visible by representing a map using cartographical contour lines within the garden space. By positioning the Hutatma Chowk memorial alongside the Flora Fountain, the recognition of the space's history is highlighted.

Image 4: Pилоo Pochkhanawala's Sculpture 'Spark'



(Image Credit: Author)

Flora Fountain and the Hutatma Chowk lead to the end of the road till the NGMA Mumbai where the abstract installation by Pилоo Pochkhanawala is placed. One of India's few female sculptors; she worked alongwith the Baroda School of sculptors in 1960s. Pochkhanawala experimented with a number of media and art techniques in the 1960s and 1970s but her signature style was junk welding, using found objects. One of her sculptures, *Spark*, commissioned by BEST (Brihanmumbai Electric Supply and Transport), was installed at the Haji Ali traffic circle which was demolished due to traffic management problems. While a miniature version of the sculpture now stands, in a garden opposite the NGMA, the original work was actually, four times its present size.

These public art enmeshed with the history of the area has been properly conceptualized by Keith Basso (1996) who believes that public art is a tool by which people enhance their conceptions of the past, present, and future thus positioning public art as a "cultural practice" that develops over a time period in a given context and geography.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on public art generally encompasses topics such as: urban identity politics and formation, class-caste representation of other, incorporation of heritage and culture, presentation of self, territorial formations, site-specificity, and semiotics etc. Majority of engagement with public art circulates around the question of its existence and reason for existence with generally seeking answers to the aspect of "why".

These affects are basically ways of connecting, to other people and situations that heighten the sense of belonging. This sense of belonging to a public space is further highlighted by elements that render positive aspects of habitation at public places and generate a set of concepts that methodologically orient and design activities towards place-person engagement, and further help in creating awareness of the spaces. Hence, a strong engaging place character, and an active reaching out towards the novice, or outsider can be identified as various qualities of a habitational space that encourages public engagement. These factors contribute to the general definition of awareness.

Apart from textual narratives, there are dialogues/discussions with policy makers, cultural practitioners and theoreticians based on their knowledge/experience and perceptions about art in public spaces and its engagement with people. There are numerous records of narratives, observations, theories and lived experiences of theoreticians and practitioners about people and their engagement with arts in public places.

The present paper intends to bring in the intervention of public opinion of places at a very basic level. The paper will try to gauge the level of awareness of a public art work and the factors they think make it visible and popular for uninitiated audiences.

METHODOLOGY

For the purpose of this research, descriptive research has been used to gauge the current status of awareness level that people have about the five works. The methods involved in this type of study range from the surveys which describes the status quo and correlation between variables.

SURVEY METHOD

Survey research was carried out to gather information on public awareness about the existence of various art works.

Before creating a survey about public art, it was first necessary to familiarize myself with the different types that exist with the area chosen for my research. For this purpose I made two visits to the Fort and Kala Ghoda precinct and identified various types of art works in public spaces, such as sculptures, mural paintings, graffiti, reliefs on the building façade, etc. but as I delved deeper in my research question it became necessary for me to reduce the number of art works so that the classifications and comparisons between the responses could be made easier.

Due to the visual nature of this project and survey it was important for me to take photographs and document the works to be shown to people. I took images of the works from different angles to facilitate multiple views of the work. But I refrained from naming and tagging these images as I wanted to know if people immediately recognize the work or take longer duration of time.

QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN

The survey design consisted of six main sections, which was repeated for all the five selected works selected. The questionnaire had variables ranging from nominal to the by-nominal and ordinal. The nominal questions were the ones where the respondents were expected to choose from a range of categories such as – public rally, film shooting, ceremonies, others. The by-nominal questions were based on simple questions such as – have you seen this work, yes or no. On the other hand for the ordinal variables, Likert scale questions were meant to gauge the intensity of respondent opinions on a variety of indicator statements regarding the depicted art-work. Respondents were asked to rate each statement using a five-point scale of strongly disagree, disagree, neither agree nor disagree, agree, and strongly agree. Statements were worded as neutrally as possible. Concepts used in the statements were developed based on theories found in review literature.

The other part of the questionnaire contained questions that were divided on the awareness of various aspects. These included the parameters of historical, political and social awareness. These divisions were again based on the literature survey and definitions.

Since there were various questions that had the option of ‘Other’ that respondents could opt for, it was essential to know the nature of these options that the respondents wanted to add to the answers to gain better understanding of the social structure that are integral to the observation a respondent makes of the environment around the art in public spaces.

Also included within the questionnaire were demographic questions which were kept expecting responses that would reflect an association with the questions on the public art works, such as the questions on the age were included to see if the difference in the age factor between the respondents had any significant impact or relation with the responses given for the art works.

Considering the lack of space in Mumbai, a specific question was inserted to seek opinions of respondents whether they would like to use the public space around the art installation

in a different manner or incorporate other amenities. Hence factors such as trees, benches, pedestrian ways, etc were included as option within the question.

Finally a question on the route that people take while commuting to their work place was also included to understand whether people only know about the art works that come on their daily commuting route or they are also aware about the works that do not come on that particular route. For this a map of the area was included in the questionnaire along with the images of the five art works. At the end of the questionnaire was space provided for the respondents to record opinions and suggestions apart from the ones already included in the questionnaire.

LIMITATIONS OF QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN AND SURVEY

Following limitations could have affected results of the findings

1. *Questionnaire design.*

- The length of the questionnaire was one of the central problems as it could be administered only with people who were willing to spend a time limit of 15-30 minutes. Thus some of the questions were responded to very hurriedly without much of thought being given to them. Thus the sample of population was not a random selection but became exclusive.
- As there were only 15 respondents, the sample size was insufficient to represent the larger population and thus any valid analysis could not be tested with statistical tools. For example T-tests could be conducted to compare the demographic variables to the composite score for each public art example in the survey. This analysis would have been productive towards providing insight into socioeconomic factors that may be influencing people's thoughts about public art.
- Some of the questions should have been framed in a better manner as those did not generate required response from the respondents.
- The demographic questions had many divisions and with the small sample size of 15 the average in each segment became 2 -3 responses. Thus no valid analysis could be formed.

2. *Survey bias*

- Non-response bias: Many respondents did not answer to some questions. Thus the overall ratio between the number of response that the researcher got as opposed to the number of responses that were not given affected research. For example many respondents did not give any response to the Spark installation and the Art Deco relief panel of New India Assurance Building;
- Convergence bias: Since this research required finding people who were willing to give their time from the busy work schedule, hence on a number of occasions the researcher had to take prior appointments. Thus, the research was not sufficient to accommodate every member in the sample frame. I did not find respondents beyond the limit of Kala Ghoda circle, hence the researcher could not capture the responses of

people who were more in proximity to the Spark sculpture placed in front of NGMA. This has led to very few positive responses towards this particular work.

3. *Response bias*

- **Social desirability bias:** This is the crucial bias by which the survey findings were most affected. As Fort area is considered to be the heritage area, many respondents have answered to the questions in a manner that would make their answers favorable towards this aspect. For example the response to the New India Assurance Building relief and the Spark installation where the respondents were expected to answer whether they had seen people visiting this area, the response were not based on their own experience but merely assumptions. As these works come within a heritage area, hence there would be people who are bound to visit them. Thus the respondents were feeling pressured to respond in a favorable manner to the survey.

The above mentioned biases, sampling and questionnaire structure also come under probability sampling. But researcher also employed the non-probability sampling in the survey to overcome these constraints.

NON-PROBABILITY SAMPLING

- **Judgment Samples:** This sampling method was very useful in the survey considering the length of the questionnaire. Researcher included certain respondents based on own judgment. Respondents from art galleries, curators of museums, hawkers, store managers, shop owners, assistants and even school attendant were chosen. This sort of selective sampling ensured that researcher get views from various strata of population and from different economic level.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

These research findings are based on the frequency of responses that were gathered. In the columns below each sculpture is assigned a number.

Table 1

Name	Work
Pheroz Shah Mehta	1
Flora Fountain	2
Hutatma Chowk	3
Spark	4
New India Assurance Building	5

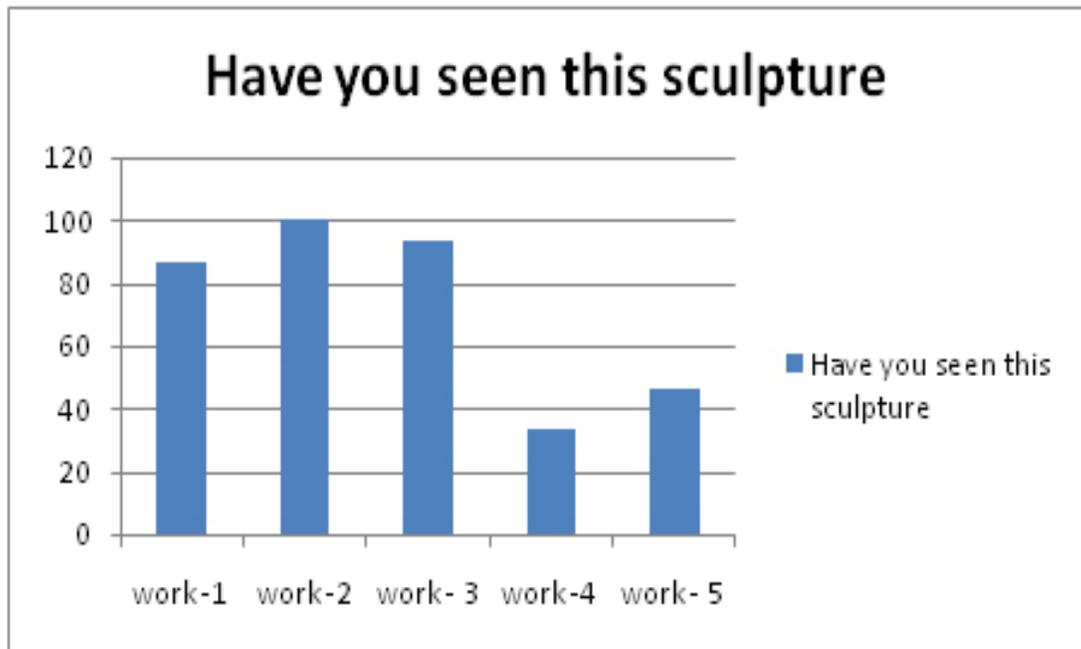


Figure 1

As this research was conducted to assess the level of awareness, it was essential to know the percentage of respondents who would know about the sculptures to be able to answer the questions. The frequency chart (Figure 1) shows the percentage of response against each work and accordingly we can make out that 100% responses came for the Flora Fountain sculpture, 93.3% responses for Hutatma Chowk and 86.7 % people responded for the Pheroz Shah Mehta sculpture. Within these five works the lowest response came for the Spark installation in front of the NGMA Mumbai with 33.3% and 46.7 % responses came for the Art Deco relief panel at New India Assurance Building.

Since the response for the Spark sculpture and New India Assurance Building work was less than 50%, the data would not yield much support for analysis and hence the sample was further sub-divided into two parts. The better known sculptures of Pheroz Shah Mehta, Flora Fountain and Hutatma Chowk can give better understanding of the factors that would generate the level of awareness.

For reasons explained earlier in the Coverage bias for the *Spark* sculpture and also to gain better understanding of awareness, the researcher removed the New India Assurance Building sculpture from the analysis and only focused on three works more formally aligned as 3D works placed on the traffic signal and on high pedestal and have visibility from at least three routes, rather than the New India Assurance Building work that is a relief and characteristically different.

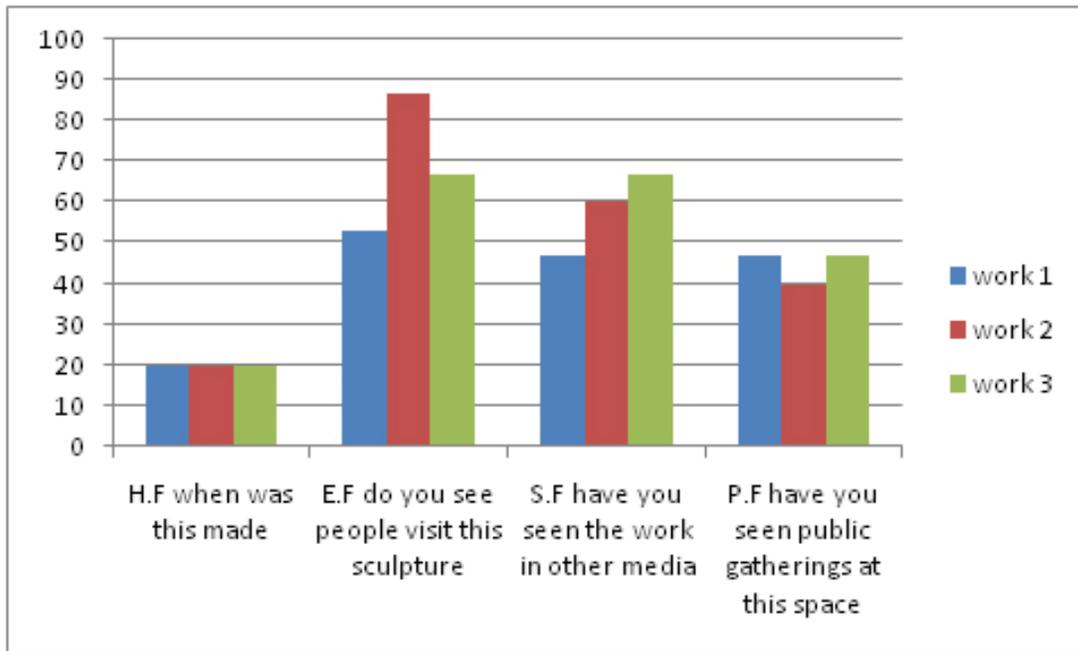


Figure 2

In this second chart (Figure 2) , factors that reflect importance in creating awareness have been reflected . These factors were identified from the literature review. The factors thus identified are HA (Historic Factor), EC (Economic Factor), SF (Social Factor) and PF (Political Factor). These questions were by nominal variable with respondent expected to answer in either yes or no.

All the three works generated equal response for the historic factor. On an average the most number of responses have converged on the economic factor with Flora Fountain rating the highest followed by the Hutatma Chowk and Pheroz Shah Mehta sculpture.

The social factor has also generated fairly good response with Flora Fountain getting 60% but it is the Hutatma Chowk that has gained 66.7% positive response. This can be due to the factor that more people have responded by associating the work with Marathi films, where the work is used as a backdrop for patriotic subjects (as expressed by a few respondents on being asked about the type of films).

The political factor is low for all the works but still lowest for the Flora Fountain and high for Pheroz Shah Mehta sculpture and Hutatma Chowk. This factor was associated with the occasional political meetings that are held in the vicinity of these areas or because of the Commemoration Ceremonies.

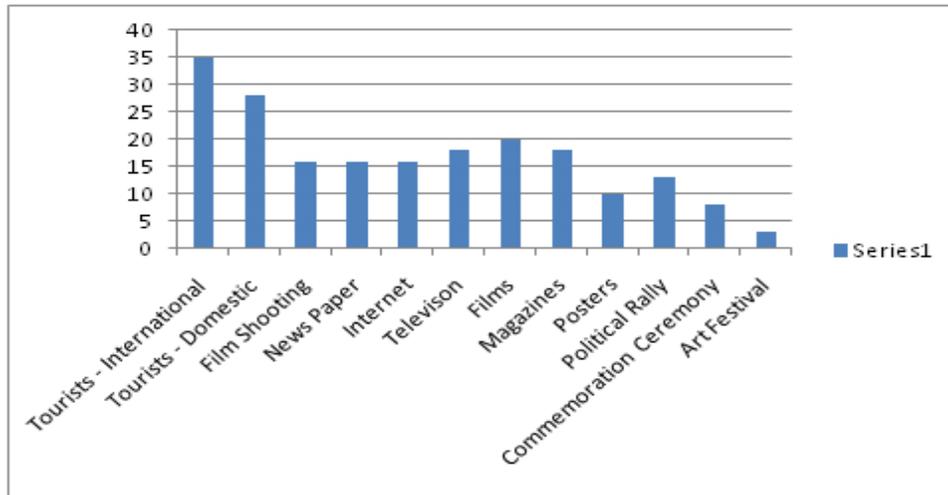


Figure 3

Figure 3 represents the total number of frequencies that each variable under the four different factors identified earlier has garnered. As evident from the chart, the association with Tourists is high, followed by the category of Mass Media such as Films, Magazines, and Television.

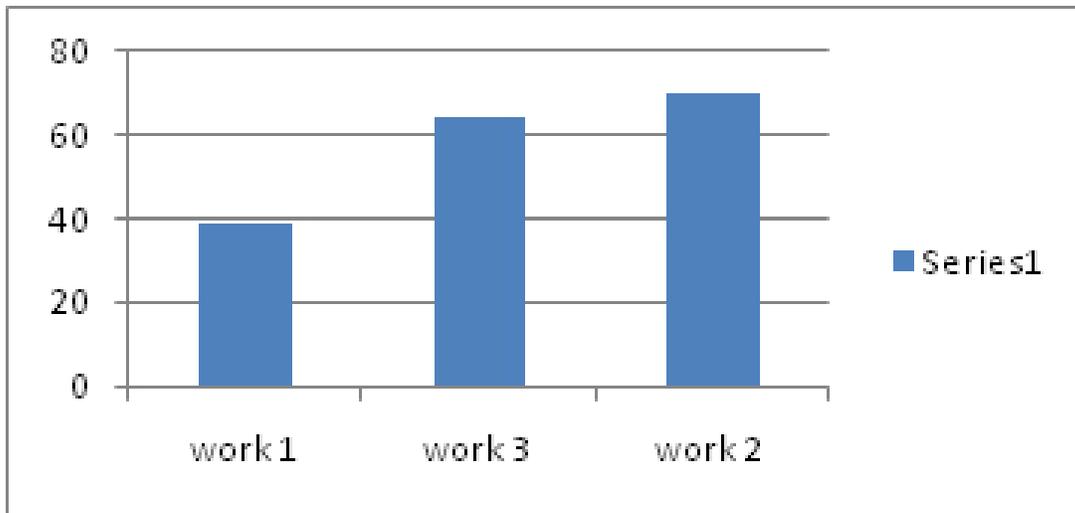


Figure 4

If we calculate all these factors together and take total count for each of the sculptures, then Work 2 (Flora Fountain) has got more responses on most of the factors followed by Hutatma Chowk and then Pheroze Shah Mehta sculpture.

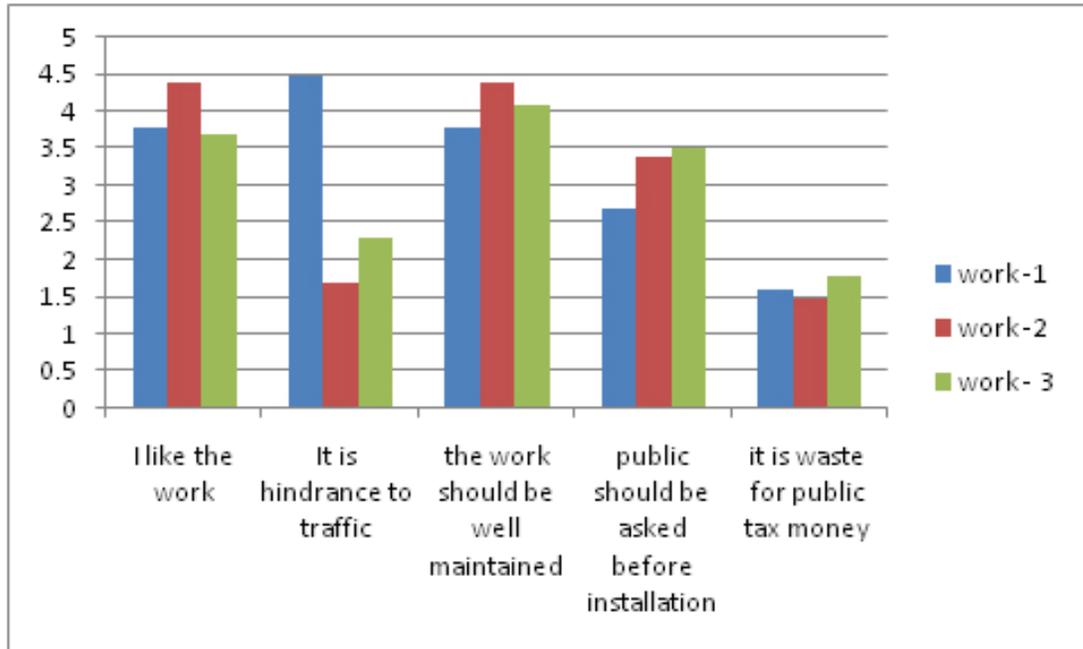


Figure 5

As the questionnaire also included opinion-based questions, the results further brought parameters of subjectivity into the responses. Overall, the assessment of these parameters and the trend thus generated is reflected in Figure 5. Respondents have strong affinity to the works and they want the works to be well maintained. This trend can be linked to the factor of high rating that the Tourists section has got; giving overall validity to the awareness that Fort is the heritage site with many tourists coming to visit, hence the works ought to be maintained well.

Respondents gave low rating to wastage of public tax money but they did give high value to being more involved with the opinions and decision making with the public space art and its management.

The trend again is tilted towards the Flora Fountain with most people saying that they like the work; it causes least hindrance to traffic; and it should be well maintained. Most respondents would like to be involved actively in decision making for the work. Surprisingly the Pheroze Shah Mehta sculpture has been highlighted as a hindrance to traffic where all the rest of the works have scored low in this respect. This could be an association not with the sculpture but the near vicinity of the work, such as the Azad Maidan just next to the island sculpture where most of the time public gatherings take place and almost always there are police vehicles parked on the edge of the road, making the space look visually chaotic.

CONCLUSION

The data gathered based on the questionnaire reflects a pattern where the questions were not just about awareness but also moved beyond to seek opinions thus highlighting a strong sense of association and belonging. The data also reflects trends such as people demanding maintenance of the works to suggesting active participation in decision making for the works. The data also identifies overall high and positive responses for Flora Fountain asserting the fact that the respondents value the cultural significance of the work. The potential in this study is vast as the results may help in creating policies for active participation in public art by the officials and other groups who can subsequently identify indigenous aspects that would enhance interaction of these works with public at the local level.

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