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The dual impact of public art: fostering civic engagement and advancing sustainable development goals

Abstract

Research background and purpose: This study shows the paradoxical impact of technology on contemporary social interactions and communication patterns. Although technological innovations are often praised for their potential to foster connectivity, research suggests that they may inadvertently contribute to social isolation.

Design/methodology/approach: Data were collected from creative-sector students using a structured CAPI questionnaire.

Findings: The discourse highlights several critical phenomena, such as the deterioration of interpersonal skills, particularly among younger demographics, attributed to excessive engagement with mobile devices. The emergence of social media has limited the exposure to diverse perspectives. The development of "bubbles" reinforces pre-existing beliefs and marginalizes dissenting viewpoints. The complexities involved in crossing these digital enclaves mitigate extreme polarization toward dissenting opinions. Growing intolerance among young people toward dissenting viewpoints fosters a culture of avoidance rather than constructive engagement.

Research limitations/implications: This study helps understand that the integration of artistic endeavours, particularly digital and public art installations, is a potential remedy to bridge these divides and cultivate meaningful connections. Therefore, this study could be expanded to include more professional groups.

Originality/value: This study shows that interactive art experiences can stimulate dialogue, encourage civic participation, and increase understanding of global issues, such as the SDG.

Keywords: *management, management competencies, management education, civic engagement, public art, sustainability, creativity*

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Classification: M1, M2, M3

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1. Introduction

In contemporary discussions surrounding technology, a prevalent notion is that it connects individuals. Slogans such as “connecting people” and “we are all connected,” suggesting that technology fosters communication and social interaction. However, upon closer examination, it becomes evident that technology may contribute to disconnection among individuals. This disconnection manifests in the erosion of essential social skills as many individuals, particularly younger generations, become increasingly engrossed in their mobile devices. The pervasive use of smartphones and similar technologies often leads to a reluctance to engage in face-to-face communication, resulting in a significant decline in meaningful dialogue.

Another critical aspect of this discussion revolves around the concept of social media bubbles. These algorithms form bubbles that curate content based on user preferences, leading to limited exposure to diverse perspectives. They can influence the spread of misinformation by reinforcing existing beliefs and limiting exposure to diverse perspectives, thus facilitating the dissemination of disinformation within like-minded groups (Chandra & Maydian, 2021).

Consequently, individuals find themselves surrounded by like-minded individuals who share similar beliefs, knowledge, and cultural perspectives. This phenomenon creates an echo chamber effect, where dissenting opinions are not only marginalized, but often met with hostility. The result is a society in which individuals are more likely to encounter others who think like them rather than engaging with a broader spectrum of ideas and viewpoints.

The challenge lies in overcoming these bubbles to prevent extreme polarization. When individuals are confined to their bubbles, they often react with intense negativity when confronted with differing opinions. This reaction can escalate to extreme sentiments such as wishing harm to those who hold opposing views. Such attitudes are detrimental to societal cohesion and inhibit constructive dialogues. It is essential to recognize that the exclusion of alternative perspectives limits our understanding of the growth of individuals and society.

Furthermore, it is noteworthy that many young individuals exhibit heightened sensitivity to differing opinions. This sensitivity often leads to refusal to engage in discussions with those who hold contrasting views. The phrase “I am offended” has become a common refrain, resulting in a culture of avoidance rather than engagement. This trend is concerning, as it fosters an environment where individuals retreat into their comfort zones, further entrenching their beliefs and stifling intellectual growth.

Based on these observations, the authors contemplated potential solutions to bridge the gaps created by technology and social media. One promising avenue is the integration of art, particularly digital art, as a medium for fostering connections among individuals.

The idea is to use art as a catalyst for dialogue and reflection, encouraging individuals to engage with one another in ways that they may not have previously considered. By creating interactive art experiences, we aim to stimulate thought and provoke discussions that transcend the limitations of technology.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. In the literature review, we identified the roles of art and public art installations. On this basis, we formulated hypotheses that public art installations can promote civic participation as well as understand global issues, such as Sustainable Goals. Frequency and correlation analyses will be used. Finally, we elaborate on the results, implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

2. Literature review

Public art installations play a significant role in enhancing community engagement and social cohesion. Research indicates that these installations not only beautify urban spaces, but also foster a sense of identity and belonging among residents. Public art installations have been increasingly recognized for their ability to enhance community engagement and foster social cohesion within urban settings. This literature review synthesizes various studies that highlight the multifaceted benefits of public art in urban recreation spaces and community identity.

Nyaiyonga (2024) explored the role of public art installations in urban recreational spaces, emphasizing how these artworks can enhance community engagement and social cohesion by promoting social interaction, cultural vibrancy, and a strong sense of place. Similarly, Demtillah and Gesare (2024) argued that public art reflects cultural narratives while also fostering social capital, further enriching urban spaces and strengthening community ties. At educational institutions, the significance of public art has become even more pronounced. Khairunnisa et al. (2023) investigated campus public sculpture installations, revealing that these installations positively influenced the university atmosphere and contributed to community engagement and identity among students and faculty. Furthermore, the CREATE Resilience project illustrates the power of public art installations to instigate collaboration and knowledge sharing within communities, enhancing the interconnectedness among participants (Khairunnisa et al., 2023). This finding underscores the transformative potential of collaborative public art practices to foster social cohesion. Chinedu (2024) supported these claims by highlighting the importance of public art in urban revitalization, noting that it fosters inclusivity and dialogue, which, in turn, enhances community engagement and a sense of belonging. Similarly, Nur et al. (2023) focused on specific installations, such as the Luminous River, showing how they create memorable experiences and positive socio-spatial relationships within public spaces. The literature also points to the emotional resonance of public art installations, as

illustrated by the case study of Arc de Triomphe wrapping, which evokes strong emotions and enhances community engagement (Vlachou & Panagopoulos, 2022). This emotional engagement can further catalyse social interactions and discussions within the community. Finally, Nursey-Bray (2020) emphasizes that public art plays a critical role in placemaking by fostering connections among people, their environment, and cultural narratives, thereby promoting social cohesion and integration in urban areas. Installation art has the potential to help people perceive a city differently way (Binti Sulaiman, 2024).

Art exhibitions and installations have emerged as powerful tools to communicate sustainability concepts to diverse audiences. Rodríguez et al. (2024) highlighted that art exhibitions can effectively convey sustainability concepts, thus fostering broader engagement and envisioning future societal transformations. By analysing a specific exhibition in a university museum, this study underscores the potential of art as a medium for communicating complex ideas related to sustainable communities. Further exploring this theme, Degiacomi et al. (2024) argue that interactive art exhibitions significantly raise awareness about SDGs through innovative and technological approaches. Their meta-analysis shows how artistic techniques can enhance public understanding and promote engagement with sustainability-related issues. Scarano (2024) discusses how artistic expressions inspire individuals toward sustainability, suggesting that art can facilitate inner transformations that lead to actionable sustainable practices within society. This perspective highlights the intrinsic connection between artistic engagement and behavioural shifts towards sustainability.

Over the last decade, Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR) have gained popularity across various industries, particularly the arts, thanks to technological advances and inexpensive hardware and software availability. VR and AR facilitate the development of immersive tales and dynamic storytelling experiences. Users have the ability to participate actively in the narrative, exerting influence on the direction of the plot or engaging with virtual components in real-time. VR and AR improve the accessibility and inclusivity of art interaction. These technologies enhance the inclusivity and participation of persons from varied backgrounds and abilities in the realm of art (Wand et al., 2024).

In the context of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD), Niederhauser (2023) emphasized that artistic practices can elucidate the complexities of the SDGs through vision development and multiperspectivity. By fostering an inquiry-based spirit, art becomes a pedagogical tool that enhances understanding and promotes engagement among the audience. Environmental art exhibitions have been noted for their effectiveness in conveying the complexities of sustainable development concepts. A recent analysis (Aol, 2024) indicated that such exhibitions adeptly communicate environmental protection ideas and serve as models for sustainable development, enhancing public awareness and understanding. Omar (2021) emphasizes the use of visual storytelling

and creativity in artworks, such as the 'Hidden' installation, to effectively convey sustainability messages and stimulate consciousness around the SDGs. This form of artistic intervention demonstrates the ability of art to engage audiences emotionally and intellectually with important sustainability issues.

The reviewed literature illustrates that art installations are vital to enhancing community engagement and social cohesion, providing shared cultural experiences, and fostering a strong sense of community identity across various contexts. Art exhibitions and installations play a crucial role in effectively communicating sustainability concepts, promoting awareness of the SDGs, and inspiring audiences towards sustainable actions.

3. Method

The study group was selected to account for the group specificity. The study group was rather homogeneous; therefore, the results could be generalized to similar populations of young people active in the field of creative industry.

Data were collected from creative sector students. They were active students of specialization such as graphic design, animation and visual communication. Creative-sector students were chosen as the study group because in the article, as in the study itself, the topic of public art was addressed. Moreover, the study focuses on the impact of technology on contemporary social interactions and communication patterns. Such a topic was possible to undertake among young people, professionally active, who can speak in the field of social impact and communication.

Quantitative research was conducted in June – July 2024 at the Summer Digital School in Warsaw, which was organized by the Academy of Art from Szczecin, Warsaw Fine Academy of Art and Media Design Association. Sixty participants were aged between 18 and 23 years. They were from Poland, Germany, Brazil, Vietnam, and the Ukraine.

The study participants were invited to complete a structured CAPI questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into modules to address aspects related to visual arts and sustainable development and to ensure the possibility of determining correlations between the variables studied. The CAPI technique proved effective in collecting data from a specific group of respondents at a specific time and place, and at the same time giving them the opportunity to think about their answers. The CAPI technique is particularly well-suited for surveys targeting young people, students of creative arts, and individuals in the creative sector for several compelling reasons. CAPI's digital nature aligns with the tech-savvy habits of young people and creative students who are accustomed to interacting with technology. The multimedia capabilities of CAPI (e.g., showing images, videos, or animations) can make the survey more engaging and relatable, particularly for those in the visually-driven creative arts sector. Creative professionals and students

often think in multidimensional ways. CAPI allows for adaptive question flows, such as branching logic and dynamic inputs, which can accommodate complex survey designs and encourage thoughtful responses. The combination of technology-driven efficiency, flexibility, and engaging design makes CAPI an ideal choice for conducting surveys among young, creative individuals. By aligning with their preferences and expectations, this method can elicit richer, more authentic responses, ultimately leading to more insightful and actionable results.

4. Results

The present study reduces the research-to-practice gap pertaining to the impact of technology on contemporary social interactions and communication patterns. Although technological innovations are often praised for their potential to foster connectivity, research suggests that they may inadvertently contribute to social isolation.

The study once again confirmed the role of funds in educating the creative sector, that is, in art programs (Figure 1).

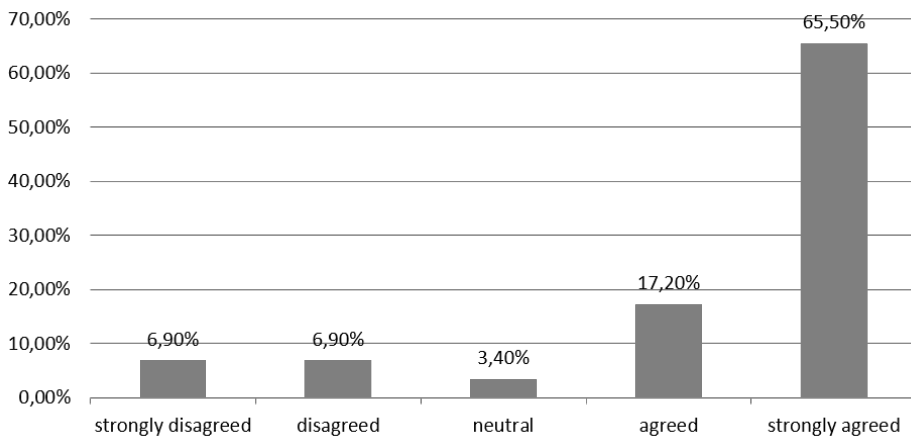


Figure 1. Answer to the question: Public funding for art programs is essential

Source: own elaboration

The bar chart shows responses to the statement, “Public funding for art programs is essential.” 65.5% strongly agreed and 17.2% agreed, so the top two answers were the opinions of a large majority (82.7%).

Overall, the majority strongly agreed that public funding for art programmes was essential. Public funding for art programs plays a crucial role in enhancing various aspects of the society. These programs contribute significantly to cultural enrichment as they help preserve the heritage of communities while fostering creativity and diversity. This cultural richness is vital for maintaining a vibrant community identity. The economic benefits of the arts cannot be overlooked; they often drive tourism, create numerous job opportunities, and stimulate local economies, thereby contributing to the overall economic growth.

Art programs in educational settings enhance students' critical thinking, creativity, and problem-solving skills, which are essential for their personal and professional development. They serve as a powerful tool for community engagement, bringing people together, promoting social cohesion, and providing a platform for expression and dialogue among diverse groups. Public funding also ensures access and inclusion, making art programs available to all individuals regardless of their socioeconomic status.

Finally, the arts encourage innovative thinking and inspire new ideas, which can lead to advancements in various fields. Subsidizing art with public money attracts highly educated individuals, enhances city appeal, and boosts earnings for workers with a basic education, creating a competitive cultural landscape. Büttner and Janeba (2009) emphasized that public funding is vital for supporting a vibrant and equitable arts ecosystem that benefits society as a whole.

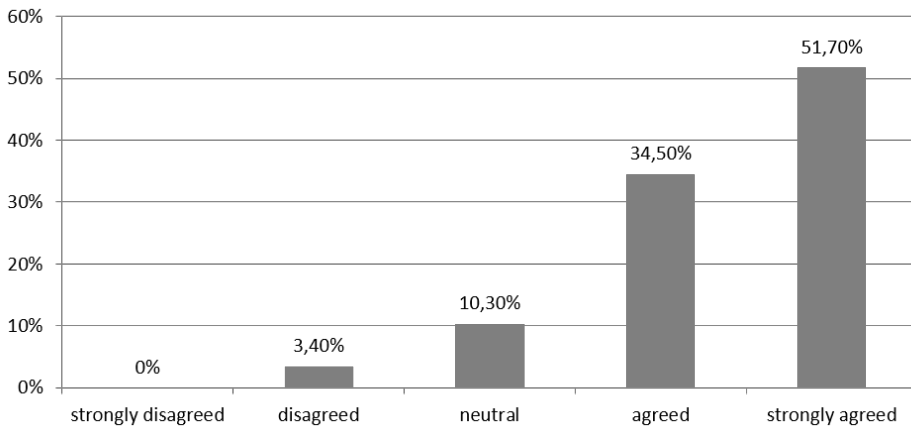


Figure 2. Answer to the question: Digital platforms for art can enhance community engagement

Source: own elaboration

According to respondents, digital platforms for art can enhance community engagement. Figure 2 shows the responses of 51.70% people who strongly agreed and 34.50% who agreed with that statement. The bar chart (Figure 2.) provided valuable insights into the role of digital platforms in enhancing community engagement through art. An expanded analysis of the data revealed the distribution of responses across the five rating categories. None of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement, while only 3.4% disagreed. 10.3% remained neutral. This could indicate either a lack of strong opinions or a possible need for more information or experience with digital art platforms.

The data revealed an overwhelmingly positive sentiment towards the statement. A combined 86.2% of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that digital platforms for art can enhance community engagement. More than half of the respondents (51.7%) strongly agreed with this statement, indicating a robust belief in the potential of digital platforms to foster community engagement through art.

Our findings have several implications. This strong positive response suggests that investing in and developing digital platforms for art could be a valuable strategy for enhancing community engagement. Arts organizations and community leaders might consider prioritizing digital initiatives to reach and engage their audiences more effectively. The data support the idea that technology and art can synergize to create stronger community bonds.

It is worth noting that, with a total of 60 respondents, while the sample provides valuable insights, a larger sample size could offer more definitive conclusions and potentially reveal more nuanced opinions. This opens up the potential for further research, including investigating the specific types of digital platforms that are most effective for community engagement, exploring any demographic factors that might influence these perceptions, and examining real-world case studies of successful digital art platforms and their impact on community engagement.

The data strongly support the notion that digital platforms for art are perceived as effective tools for enhancing community engagement, with a vast majority of respondents viewing them favourably. This insight could be valuable for policymakers, arts administrators, and community leaders in shaping future arts-based community development strategies.

In assessing the issue that art can effectively raise awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the number of neutral people was slightly higher but still low – 17.20% (Figure 3). Nevertheless, the top two answers strongly agreed and agreed reached a 75.9% level.

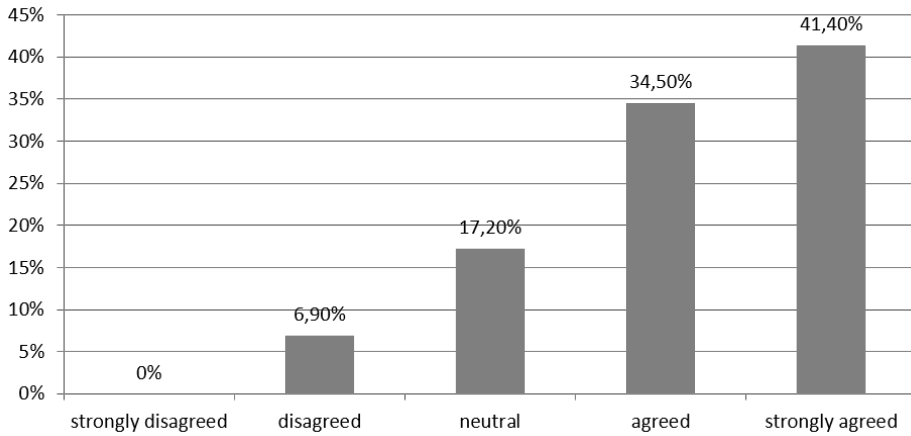


Figure 3. Answer to the question: Art can effectively raise awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals

Source: own elaboration

This means that most participants rated the statement as either 4 or 5, indicating a strong agreement that art can effectively raise awareness about the SDGs; thus, the data reveals a clear trend towards agreement with this assertion.

Responses were distributed across a five-point scale, with higher values indicating stronger agreement. None of the respondents selected the lowest value of 1, suggesting an absence of strong disagreement with the statement. Only 6.9% chose a value of 2, indicating mild disagreement. A middle value of 3 was selected for 17.2% of the participants, which could be interpreted as a neutral stance or uncertainty.

The majority of the responses were clustered at the higher end of the scale. 34.5% of the respondents, 34.5% chose a value of four, signifying agreement with the statement. The largest group (41.4%) selected the highest value of 5, indicating a strong agreement that art can effectively raise awareness about the SDGs.

Cumulatively, 75.9% of respondents chose either value 4 or 5, demonstrating a robust consensus on the potential of art as a medium for increasing awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals. This strong positive skew suggests that the majority of participants recognized and affirmed the power of artistic expression in communicating and promoting an understanding of global sustainability objectives.

The distribution of responses implies a general acknowledgment of art's capacity to engage audiences with complex societal issues such as those addressed by the SDGs. This finding could have significant implications for policymakers, educators, and

artists seeking effective methods to disseminate information and generate an interest in sustainable development initiatives.

The data present a compelling case for the efficacy of art in raising awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals, with a clear majority of respondents expressing agreement or strong agreement with this concept. This insight could inform strategies for promoting SDG awareness through artistic means, potentially leading to more engaging and impactful sustainability education and advocacy.

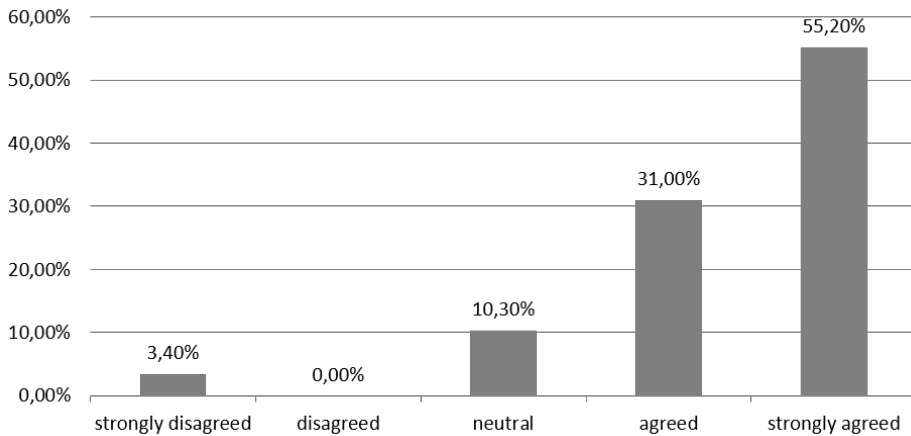


Figure 4. Answer to the question: Can public art installation promotes civic participation

Source: own elaboration

Figure 4 shows responses to the statement, “Public art installations can promote civic participation”. The majority of participants rated the statement as either 4 (31%) or 5 (55.2%), indicating strong agreement that public art installations can promote civic participation.

The overall data revealed a strong inclination towards agreement with this assertion. Interestingly, none of the participants chose a value of 2, indicating the absence of mild disagreement. 10.3% selected the middle value of 3, which could be interpreted as a neutral stance or uncertainty regarding the statement.

The data show a significant concentration of positive responses. Combining the responses for the top two values, 4 and 5, we see that an overwhelming 86.2% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. This substantial majority

suggests widespread belief in the power of public art to engage citizens and foster community involvement.

5. Discussion

The distribution of the responses implies that public art installations are perceived as effective tools for encouraging civic engagement. This finding has significant implications for urban planners, policymakers, and community leaders. This suggests that investing in public art projects could be a valuable strategy to increase community participation and foster a sense of civic responsibility.

The strong positive sentiment towards the role of public art in promoting civic participation aligns with contemporary urban development theories that emphasize the importance of creating engaging public spaces. This supports the idea that art in public spaces can serve not only an aesthetic purpose but also a social and civic one.

The minimal disagreement further reinforces the consensus on the positive impact of public art. However, the presence of neutral responses indicates that there might still be some uncertainty or a lack of strong opinions among a small segment of the population.

These data present a robust endorsement of public art installations as catalysts of civic participation. The strong skew towards agreement suggests that communities might benefit from increased investment in public art projects as a means of boosting civic engagement. This insight could inform future urban planning strategies, art funding decisions, and community development initiatives, potentially leading to more vibrant, participatory urban environments.

The authors also counted the correlation between statements using Pearson's correlation (Figure 5). This is a statistical measure that quantifies the linear relationship between two continuous variables. It determines the strength and direction of the linear association between the two variables. The correlation coefficient (r) ranges from -1 to +1, where +1 indicates a perfect positive linear relationship, -1 indicates a perfect negative linear relationship, and 0 indicates no linear relationship.

In terms of interpretation, a positive correlation means that as one variable increases, the other tends to increase. Conversely, a negative correlation indicates that, as one variable increases, the other tends to decrease. The strength of the relationship was determined by the closeness of $|r|$ to 1, with values closer to 1 indicating a stronger relationship.

In impact model (Figure 5) based on the correlation analysis, the highest correlation occurred between the statements:

- “Public art installations can promote civic participation” and “Art can effectively raise awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)”: 0.85;

- “Public art installations can promote civic participation” and “Digital platforms for art can enhance community engagement”: 0.82;
- “Public art installations can promote civic participation” and “Public funding for art programs is essential”: 0.80.

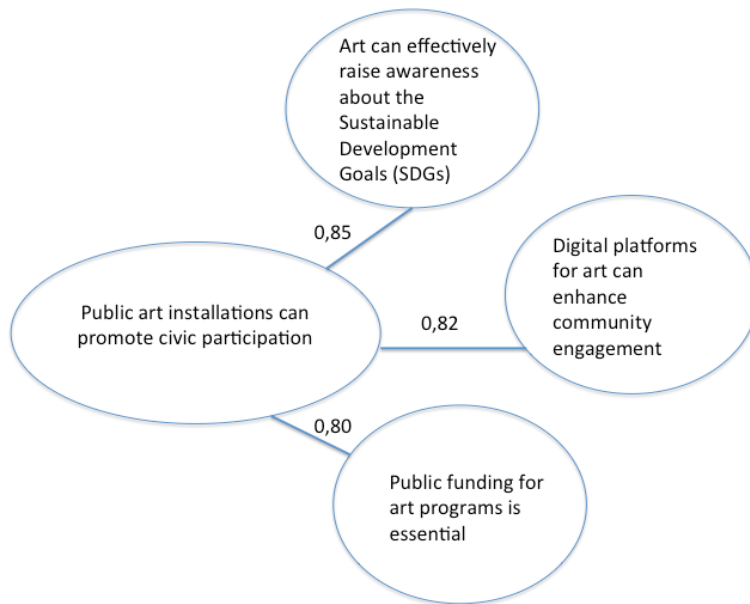


Figure 5. **Impact model based on correlation analysis**

Source: own elaboration based on quantitative research June-July 2024

This means that public art installations can be very important in shaping people's attitudes. Art in public spaces can contribute to awareness of SDG. Adding digital contexts, such as digital platforms, can also contribute to public art. When analysing art in urban spaces in other countries, it is often seen that it goes hand in hand with technology and the possibilities it offers (Portals, 2024).

The developed model also suggests that public funding and art installations are correlated with increased civic participation, awareness of broader goals, and community engagement.

Therefore the high correlation (0.85) between the statements “Public art installations can promote civic participation” and “Art can effectively raise awareness about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)” is significant for several reasons:

1. Recognition of Art as a Catalyst for Social Engagement

This strong correlation suggests that public art is widely recognized as a vehicle for engaging communities in meaningful discourse. Civic participation often entails active engagement with societal issues, and art installations provide a creative and accessible platform for this. If art can draw people into civic activities, it can also facilitate awareness and action on global challenges like the SDGs.

2. Interconnectedness of Local and Global Issues

The SDGs address universal challenges—poverty, inequality, climate change, and more—that require local action for global impact. The correlation reflects the belief that public art installations, by promoting civic participation, can connect individuals and communities to these broader issues. This makes public art an effective bridge between local activism and global objectives.

3. Empowering Communities

Public art encourages collective reflection and dialogue, empowering communities to take ownership of the challenges they face. When aligned with SDGs, this empowerment becomes a pathway for sustainable development, fostering active citizenship and collective problem-solving.

4. Strategic Tool for Advocacy and Education

The alignment of these two perceptions underscores the strategic value of public art for raising awareness about the SDGs. Art can break down complex ideas into relatable, emotional, and actionable narratives. For instance, a public art installation on clean water can simultaneously raise awareness and inspire local civic actions to improve water resources.

5. Influence on Policy and Public Perception

Art installations that highlight SDGs can influence policymakers by demonstrating public interest and engagement with these goals. They can also shift public perceptions by making abstract concepts tangible, fostering a sense of urgency and accountability.

Thus this correlation emphasizes the dual role of public art: engaging individuals in civic life while also addressing critical global challenges. It highlights the potential of art as a transformative tool for sustainable development, suggesting that initiatives integrating public art with SDG awareness campaigns could yield powerful outcomes for both community engagement and global progress.

6. Conclusions

The analysis of the societal role of art reveals a complex interplay of factors that significantly influence civic engagement and social awareness. Public funding for art programs demonstrates a strong positive correlation (0.80) with civic participation, underscoring the critical importance of governmental and institutional support in maximizing the

societal impact of art. This relationship suggests that the strategic allocation of public resources towards artistic initiatives can effectively foster community involvement and contribute to broader social development objectives.

Public art installations have emerged as particularly potent catalysts for social change, exhibiting robust correlations with both civic participation and awareness of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (0.85). This finding illuminates the capacity of accessible, community-centred art to not only enhance public spaces but also to stimulate dialogue and consciousness regarding pressing societal issues. The visibility and immediacy of public art installations appear to serve as effective conduits for disseminating information and inspiring civic actions. The alignment of these two perceptions underscores the strategic value of public art for raising awareness about the SDGs and education in this field.

The integration of digital platforms in art dissemination and engagement correlated strongly with community involvement (0.82), highlighting the transformative potential of technology in democratizing access to artistic experiences and fostering community connections. This relationship underscores the importance of leveraging digital tools to expand the reach and impact of art initiatives, potentially overcoming the traditional barriers to participation and engagement.

The interconnectedness of these art-related factors presents a compelling argument for a holistic approach to art policy and its implementation. The model illustrates a symbiotic relationship wherein enhancements in one area, such as increased public art installations, positively influence others including civic participation and SDG awareness. This suggests that targeted interventions in the artistic sphere can precipitate wide-ranging societal benefits through a cascade of positive effects.

The implications for policy formulation are significant. Understanding these correlations can inform the development of comprehensive strategies that prioritize and allocate resources effectively, thereby optimizing the role of art in promoting civic engagement and addressing global challenges. Policymakers and stakeholders in the arts sector should consider these relationships when designing initiatives, recognizing that investments in public art, digital platforms, and funding programs can yield multifaceted returns in terms of social cohesion, civic participation, and progress towards sustainable development goals.

This analysis elucidates the profound and multifaceted impacts of art on societal dynamics. By recognizing and leveraging the interconnections between public funding, art installations, digital platforms, and community engagement, stakeholders can harness the full potential of art as a driver of social change and civic participation. Future research and policy initiatives should further explore these relationships to refine strategies for maximizing the societal benefits of artistic endeavours. In further work, it would be worth expanding the research sample beyond young people from the creative sector to achieve the possibility of broader generalisation of the results. Considering the

fact that the study is conducted as a quantitative study, it would be valuable to increase the number of people in the sample.

The thesis that public art installations can promote civic participation and understanding of global issues, such as Sustainable Development Goals, offers a rich area for empirical research. Studies could measure civic engagement levels before and after the introduction of such installations or compare communities with and without a significant public art presence. Thus, this study makes a significant contribution to identifying the connections between public art and other areas of social life, indicating areas for further analysis.

Authors' contribution

M.S-W., M.K, M.A. and L.G.: article conception, theoretical content of the article, research methods applied, conducting the research, data collection, analysis and interpretation of results, draft manuscript preparation

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