Hedwig Overwater 2579976

Tomas van Daalen 2598668

Dr. Erika Kuijpers

Visualizing for Digital Humanities project Proposal

21 December 2018

The importance of placement of public art

Research on the motives on placing public art in the city center of Amsterdam

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

Faculty of Humanities

Minor digital humanities and social analytics

**Introduction**

Public art in the city center of Amsterdam has been a hot topic of discussion the last few months. With the removal of the public artwork “I amsterdam” near the Rijksmuseum, a discussion on individualism and tourism has arisen and with that the discussion of the relevance of public art. The “I amsterdam” artwork at the time part of so called city branding or city marketing to put Amsterdam on the tourist map.

The municipality of Amsterdam, and Femke Halsema in particular, argued that artwork does not fit the image of Amsterdam. The municipality wants to present Amsterdam as a city of the people that stands for diversity and solidarity. The “I” in the artwork is according to them too individualistic, and the attention it gets from tourists makes it too consumeristic. It has become a symbol of the growing flow of tourists that puts the capital under pressure, writes Thijs Niemantsverdriet in the NRC.

What started out at as an idea to enrich the public space, by using public art, has now become its own demise. By creating a brand out of Amsterdam, and thus increasing popularity under tourists, the solidarity (with regard to tourists) of especially locals has now decreased and according to Niemantsverdriet it has become a symbol of vulgarity and nuisance.

On the other hand, has the administration of the city of Amsterdam invested 1,8 million euros in the maintenance and realization of art in the public space, in 2018 (Het Parool). Simone Kukenheim, the alderman of art and culture, argues that public art is not only beautiful, but also contribute to the “themes” that live in the city (Het Parool). Public art can create solidarity, according to academics who have written about the purpose of public art.

It is clear that public art in Amsterdam is a very vivid subject at the moment. For that reason, public art will be the main topic of this research. To be more specific, the main topic of this research is finding out if there is a relationship between monumental public artworks and their locations. Before moving on to the research question, a paragraph on the theoretical framework of (monumental) public art will follow. This chapter should illustrate that (monumental) public art often serves a purpose and that they are often placed with a certain idea. The information provided in this chapter form the base of the research, along with a visualization of a dataset with public artworks in Amsterdam.

**Theoretical Framework and research question**

A definition of *public art* is provided the glossary of *New-Land-Marks.* It describes public art as “art placed in public places and spaces” which are “open to everyone to use and enjoy” (Bach 153 qtd. by Knight). Examples of this type of art are sculptures, wall-art, musical, dance and theatrical performances and so forth that are open for all. This is a rather simplistic definition, is what Cher Krause Knight argues in her book *Public Art: Theory, Practice and Populism*, because art that is placed outdoors, is not necessarily *public* or necessarily *art*.  Rather,

“art’s publicness rests in the quality and impact of its exchanges with audiences. These do not hinge on wide acceptance, but on the art’s ability to extend reasonable and fair opportunities for members of the public to understand and negotiate their own relationships with it” (4).

In other words, public art communicates with the public and the public spaces and thus serves a certain purpose. The avant-garde idea that art does not need a specific “purpose” is entirely ignored in this discussion. The link between art and public sphere that often is being made is that “it serves the agenda of economic, physical and social transformation of urban areas” (qtd. by Stevens and Lossau). Public art is then often criticized by historical and art critics as serving a consumer purpose (2), like the artwork “I amsterdam”.

One type of public art that serves a undeniably clear purpose is the monument or memorial. Although there is some discussion on whether there is a difference and what the exact difference between the memorial and the monument is, we’ll be using the two interchangeably. In this context, a memorial and a monument commemorate and memorialize an event or a person.

In *describing Holocaust memorials in Berlin*, James E. Young describes the more general meanings behind war monuments that are also applicable to the monumental artworks in the city center of Amsterdam. Young describes how memories are never shaped in a vacuum; and that there are motives behind each monument. Young describes that the aim of some monuments is to educate the next generation, while others represent a feeling of guilt or as self-aggrandizement. Strikingly, there are also monuments built especially to attract tourists (2).

Young later points out that the relationship between the state/government and monuments is never without an underlying motive (3). Governments can use monuments to shape a form of nationhood and solidarity. A similar statement can be found in the article ‘Collective culture and urban public space’, where the author Ash Amin adds something to the description of public art of Young. According to Amin, monuments are also placed in the public sphere to create feelings of connectedness between the inhabitants of the city. The monuments are often remembrances of a history that is shared by the inhabitants, and by emphasizing this shared history, a sort of bond is created between the inhabitants.

Since Amsterdam has a great collection of monuments, varying from ones that memorialize the Second World War to monuments that honor great historical figures, it could be interesting if the mentioned theories on the placement of public monumental art also applies to the artworks in Amsterdam. Therefore, the main question of this research is:

*Which relationship between the monumental artworks of the city center of Amsterdam and their placement can be found?*

This question will be answered with the theory on the placement of public art in combination with a visualizations of a dataset that includes the public artworks in the city center of Amsterdam.

**The Dataset**

The visualization that will be carried out for this research is based on a dataset that is published on the website of the Dutch government. The dataset can be achieved via the following link <https://data.overheid.nl/data/dataset/dpf-kunstwerken-amsterdam-centrum>. The dataset should contain all the artworks in the city center of Amsterdam that are placed up until 2016. The border of the city center of Amsterdam is drawn at the outer canal ring, and every public artwork within this area should be included in the dataset. The dataset contains 84 entries in total. Every entry contains information about the title of the artwork, the artist, the year of placement, the location (expressed in address and in longitude and latitude) and a short description of the artwork.

The information in the dataset can help with giving insight in multiple questions. For example, it can help with finding out if there are specific periods where there are more public artworks placed. This type of information might provide a start for a research why there were more artworks placed in a certain period. Something that will be used in this research, is the fact that the dataset enables users to make maps with the locations of the artwork with the provided longitude and latitude data. Mapping the artworks can help with finding out if there are certain areas where there are more public artworks and if so, why there are more artworks on these specific places.

The dataset contains very few gaps and the information within the dataset seems accurate after checking some of the data. There are a few gaps in the dataset and the missing data of the gaps can easily be found on the internet. This makes the dataset ready to use without having to change too much in order to make the dataset work.

While there are no big problems with the information in the dataset, there is a problem with information about the dataset. On the website where the dataset is extracted from, there is hardly any metadata, which can be seen as a problem. The only useful metadata that can be found on the website is information about the theme of the dataset, the modification date and the terms of reusing the dataset. When critically reviewing the dataset, there should be at least some information about the methodology, the provenance, the purpose of the dataset and if the dataset is used for certain researches.

Another problem of the dataset is that there is no information about the author of the dataset. The website only briefly mentions the owner of the dataset: Dataplatform NL. Dataplatform NL is a non-governmental organization, which works with institutions like governments, companies and knowledge institutions. However, there is no further information on the author(s) is displayed on the website. Besides that, the dataset can be edited by everyone, but it is not checked if the entered data is correct. All this makes the dataset less reliable because users of the dataset are unable to look up the editors and find out whether this person is an expert in the field or not.

The final problem with the dataset, is that it is hard to tell if the dataset is complete or not. Since the last time the dataset was modified was in 2016, it is very likely that artworks after the last modification date are not included. It is even uncertain if all the artworks up to 2016 are included in the dataset, since there is no information about the methodology at all. It is even harder to check if everything is included in the dataset because there is no register or document that contains all the public artworks of Amsterdam. Although the dataset has some missing information, the information that actually is provided in the dataset seems to be accurate. For that reason, we decided to use the data for this research, even with its uncertainties.

**Enrichment of Data & Methodology**

As mentioned before, the research question will be answered with the mentioned dataset and a visualization of this dataset. The chosen visualization is a map of the city center of Amsterdam with a dot (or pin) for every artwork. Within the map, different dots will be used for the different types of artworks (monumental artworks or ‘normal’ artworks). By doing this, it is possible to display the locations of the artworks, enabling further research on why an artwork is placed on a certain location.

In order to make a working map with different dots for the different artworks, some extra information needed to be appended to the dataset. In order to make the different dots, we distinguished 4 types of artworks in the city center: Artworks (kunstwerk), Monument for events (monument gebeurtenis), Monument for persons (monument persoon) and finally a separate type for war monuments (oorlogsmonument). By tagging the artworks with their type of artwork, it became possible distinguish the different types of artworks in the map.

After enriching the dataset, we started working on the mapping in the program Tableau. Tableau was chosen over Rstudio, because Tableau offered a lot of tutorials on mapping, which we considered a big advantage. Tableau allows the user to make a map of the data in a dataset if there is information about locations in the dataset (for example addresses, coordinates or longitude and latitude information). In this case, information about the longitude and latitude was provided in the dataset. The only problem was that Tableau recognized the longitude and latitude data as a string format and not as values. So, in order to make the map work we needed to convert all the strings to values. After the conversion, it should be possible to plot the locations on the map. In order to display the locations on the map, the information on latitude has to be downloaded in the columns of the map and the information on longitude in the rows of the map. Immediately after loading the information in the map, dots that represented the artworks became visible. However, there was no information which dot was which artwork. To display this information, the wanted information (like title, artist, etcetera) needed to be loaded into the header “marks”. After this information was loaded in the header, every dot was provided with a pop-up message with the information in the “marks” section. The total result was a basic map of Amsterdam with dots that represented artworks and information on these artworks.

After managing to plot the locations of the artworks on the map with the basic information, it became clear that the visualization needed to be clearer. The first thing that was changed was the layout of the map. At first, the map of Amsterdam was grey without any information on the streets. In the section “Map Layers” it was possible to display street names on the map, along with colors for water and parks. Information like this could be useful when trying to specify the location of the artworks on the map. Besides the esthetics of the map, it was also important to implement different dots for the different artworks. Following the text of Matthew Ward, it could helpful to make a differentiation for the different marks in the visualization (Ward 137-142). Ward mentions eight different ways to distinguish marks from each other. Two methods that are applicable for this visualization are the use of different colors and the use of different shapes for the types of artworks. After trying both colors and shapes, colors seemed to be the most effective and distinguishable. The earlier tagging in the dataset turned out to be very useful, because Tableau allowed color tagging based on names. This color tagging also made it possible to filter out or leave in certain types of artwork out of the map to make it even more clear. Also included in the visualization is a slider that is based on the data on the years of placements. With the slider, it is possible to only display artworks that are placed in a certain period.

The total result of the visualization is a map of Amsterdam, filled in with dots that represent the artworks in the city center of Amsterdam. Every dot is tagged with a color, based on which type of artwork it is. It is also possible to use filters on the map, to filter on types of artworks or on year of placement.

**The visualization**

The ideal situation is using the map as an interactive map. The problem is that the interactive map only works in the program Tableau itself, because it is not possible to export the program to an external viewer. However, when examining the map in Tableau, it is possible to gain a lot of insights. In Tableau, it is possible to hover over the dots of the artworks to gain more information about the artwork on that location. When the mouse is on the dot, a pop-up screen will appear that displays information about the name of the artwork, the artist, the year of placement, the material, the address and a short description of the artwork. Tableau also allows the user to zoom in on the map and take a closer look at the exact locations of the artworks.

Besides that, it is also possible to make use of the filters on the right side of the map. With the filters, it is possible to exclude or include certain types of artworks. This can be useful if the user only wants to look at War Monuments for example. Another possibility to edit the dots on the map, is by using the previously mentioned slider for the years of placement. The slider allows the user to only view the artworks that are placed in a certain period that is specified by the user in the slider. This can be useful for examining if there is a certain period when there were a lot of new artworks placed in the city center. Finally, it is also possible to change the layout of the map under the “Map Options” folder. Here it is possible to include/exclude postal codes, street names or land covers (water, green, etc).

Since the interactive map does not work in a paper like this, we also included a couple of images of screen captures of the interactive map. In these maps, it is hard to display the general information about the artworks like name, year of placement, etcetera, since it is not possible to hover over the dots on the map. However, it is possible to show the distribution of artworks over the city center of Amsterdam or it can be used to find out how artworks are placed in the public sphere. A short explanation of each image will be given.

Image 1 (see image 1 on the appendix) is a representation of how the map looks like in tableau. Each dot on the map is a representation for an artwork, and the colors display which type of artwork (artwork, monument for an event, monument for a person or war monument). On the right side of the map are the filters and the sliders, which can be used to filter out the artworks. Besides filters, a legend of the different artworks and their colors can also be found next to the map.

In image 2 and 3 (see image 2 and 3 on the appendix), the slider for the years is applied to the map. Image 2 displays the public artworks placed before 1950 and image 3 shows artworks placed after 1950. What is striking on these images, is that there seems to be a big emergence in the placement of public artworks after 1950.

The use of the filter for the artworks is displayed in image 4 (see image 4 on the appendix). In this image, the artworks are filtered out of the map, in order to only display the monuments on the map. This can be very useful, especially for this research, to find out if there are certain returning patterns in the placement of monuments. At first glance, it seems that there are more monuments placed in the crowded and touristic parts of the city center of Amsterdam. When zooming in (see image 5 on the appendix) it also becomes visible that multiple monuments are placed in crowded public spaces like squares, intersections of streets or in and close to parks.

Something that cannot be seen in the images on the appendix, is the fact that monuments often have a relationship with their location of placement. It is not possible to display this in the images of the visualization on the appendix, because the provided information about the artwork is needed. In the provided information, there is often some information about the monumental artwork and its relation to its placement. A certain pattern in the placement of artworks and its relation to its location can be deduced from these pieces of information. This pattern is the fact that monumental artworks are often placed on locations where certain historical events took place, and the monument in question has a direct relationship with this historical event.

In short, the visualization of the dataset can provide information that cannot be retrieved from the dataset itself. Especially the information on the division of the placements of the artworks over the city center of Amsterdam is something that works well with this visualization. The filters in the visualization offer the possibility to gain more insight in the patterns in which the artworks are placed, for example if there are more artworks or monumental artworks.

**Conclusion**

In order to answer the question what the relationship between the monumental artworks and their placement in the city center of Amsterdam is, the results of the visualization will be combined with the earlier theory on public art.

As introduced in the introduction a public artwork can help to create an identity, a brand, for a public sphere. The visualization also showed that there seem to be multiple visible patterns in the placements of monuments in the city center of Amsterdam. Examples of patterns are the placement of monuments near or in parks, placement of monuments on crowded spaces such as squares and busy streets and intersections and finally the placement of monuments in places with an eventful history. Because there are multiple patterns in placement, there is not one overall answer to the question why monumental artworks are placed on their specific locations. For that reason, the conclusion consists of an explanation of each pattern found in the visualization.

The first pattern that will be discussed is the placement of a monumental artwork on a crowded/touristic place like squares or intersections of important streets. One of the most striking examples of this kind of pattern is the “Nationaal Monument” or the “Monument op de Dam” (see image 6 on the appendix). It is a monument to commemorate an event, in this case the Second World War. The monument is placed on Dam Square, one of the most famous squares of Amsterdam, and maybe even the Netherlands. It memorializes a shared tragic event in history that not only contributes to a form of nationhood, but also a world-wide solidarity. Amsterdam, and especially Dam Square is one of the most visited places by local tourists, but also tourists from other nations. So, by visiting this monument they are made familiar with Dutch history, but also connect it to their own history. In other words, this monument and its placing create common-ground for remembrance, and thus a feeling of world-wide unification.

The second pattern is the placement of monumental artworks of people. The statues for famous people are often placed on a location that is either associated with them or their work. For example, with the rise of nationalism of the 19th century, the statue of Rembrandt was erected on another famous square in the city center, namely Rembrandtplein (see image 7 on the appendix). Two other interesting examples of a monumental artworks that are placed on their specific locations are the statue of ‘Johnny Jordaan’ and ‘Tante Leen’ on the Elandsgracht in the Jordaan (see image 8 on the appendix). Johnny Jordaan and Tante Leen were two local famous singers coming from the Jordaan. To commemorate the two singers, two statues were placed on the intersection of two important streets in the Jordaan. The placement of these two statues can also be connected to the earlier mentioned theory of Ash Amin about connecting people by emphasizing the shared history. In this case, the statues of the famous singers could be seen as a way of connecting the inhabitants of the Jordaan by emphasizing that the origin of these singers was the Jordaan.

Finally, the third pattern is the relationship between the placement of monumental artworks and the historical events that happened on this specific place. In this case, a monumental artwork is placed on a location to commemorate the events that happened on this specific location. A great example is the ‘Oorlogsgedenkteken Fusillade’ in the ‘Eerste Weteringplantsoen’ (see image 9 on the appendix). The Eerste Weteringplantsoen was a location that was used to execute people in the Second World War. The monument was set up to commemorate the people that were executed on this location. This example goes hand in hand with the earlier mentioned theory provided by James E. Young. In this theory he explains that monuments can be placed to show solidarity or even guilt. The ‘Oorlogsgedenkteken Fusillade’ can be seen as a monument that displays solidarity to the people who were executed on that location.

In short, the relationship between public monumental art and their environment in the city center of Amsterdam differs for every separate artwork. There is not one single relationship that applies for every artwork, but there are a couple of trends that can be retrieved. The three trends that are most frequently seen in the city center of Amsterdam are connecting the environment to the history with monumental artworks, connecting the people within the environment through monumental artworks or displaying important culture of the environment with monumental artworks.

**Evaluation**

We expected it would be the hardest to *make* the actual visualization. However, because we found a program that is relatively easy and has a lot of tutorials on how to work with the program, we very quickly managed to make a visually pleasing visual. The hard part came with the question why our visualization was relevant and how we could *use* the visualization to support theory and our research questions. We hope we’ve made a clear context surrounding our research and that we have proven why our subject is relevant nowadays, by referring to an actuality.

As for the collaboration with each other, there is nothing to complain about. We did an equal share in the research and the amount of text we produced. We made clear agreements before we started and used each other’s strengths to the benefit of this project.

What we would like to improve to make our project even more complete, is adding actual pictures of the art works, so that if you browse through the map in tableau, you get a visual. We thought about doing this, but it would be extensive manual work, to add every single image to the corresponding art work. Furthermore, there is a problem of copyright with using other people’s images, since not everything is open source data. A solution would be that we would make our own photos, and that would’ve been even more work, for the short time span.

Moreover, the dataset is now limited to just public art in the city center, and not the entire city of Amsterdam. Interesting follow-up research would be finding a dataset that also contains artworks outside the ring. This could give insight on how famous touristic attractions are scattered around in Amsterdam. This in turn could maybe also give insight in why the center is too crowded with tourists. We now have not extensively tackled the issue of mass tourism and how public artworks and monuments contribute to this growing problem. Making people aware of other artworks or moving certain artworks could maybe solve some issues with regard to mass tourism and make the center more liveable. We could with the help of a visualization of this new “dataset” even write a recommendation for this problem, for example whether certain artworks should be and could be moved to let the city “breathe again”.

**Works Cited**

“Artistiekkunstwerk.” *Data Overheid,* 1 Jan.  2016, <https://data.overheid.nl/data/dataset/dpfkunstwerken-amsterdam-centrum>.

Amin, Ash.”‘Collective culture and urban public space.” *CITY,* 2008, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13604810801933495>.

Het Parool. “1,8 miljoen extra voor kunst in de openbare ruimte.” *Het Parool,* 1 Feb. 2018,

<https://www.parool.nl/amsterdam/1-8-miljoen-extra-voor-kunst-in-de-openbareruimte~a4564863/>.

Knight, Cheryl Krause. *Public Art: Theory, Practice and Populism*. 1. publ ed., Blackwell, 2008.

Lossau, Julia, and Quentin Stevens, editors. *The Uses of Art in Public Space*. Routledge, 2015, <https://www-taylorfrancis-com.vu-nl.idm.oclc.org/books/e/9781317631903>.

Niemantsverdriet, Thijs. “Hoofdstad wil af van letters ‘I amsterdam’.” *NRC,* 10 Oct. 2018, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/10/10/hoofdstad-wil-af-van-letters-i-amsterdam-a2417538>.

Niemantsverdriet, Thijs. “Ook zonder letters blijft Amsterdam ‘merk’.” *NRC,* 11 Oct. 2018, <https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2018/10/11/ook-zonder-letters-blijft-amsterdam-merk-a2417702>.

Ward, Matthew, Georges G. Grinstein, and Daniel. Keim, *Interactive Data Visualization: Foundations, Techniques, and Applications*, Peters, 2010.

Young, James Edward, et al. *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*. Yale University Press, 1993.