

CONTEXTUALIZING CULTURAL SCULPTURE INTO PUBLIC SPACES FOR ALL

"What attracts people most, it would appear, is other people." but popular gathering spots are where people have voted with their feet- William-H.-Whyte (Hine 2013)

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Abstract

Sabouri et al, in their study titled "Role of urban sculptures in Beautification and Improvement of quality of urban spaces (case study: Fuman County)" concluded that urban spaces are the places in which citizens' civil and social life occurs. Hence, attention to design of these spaces causes improvement of quality and realization of urban life and interaction between citizens and city. In their study, arrival of urban sculptures to public spaces has been mentioned as one of the suitable solutions for beautification and improvement of quality of urban spaces. **Problem** In Nairobi, there are many open spaces suitable for such sculptural expression. Unfortunately, the spaces are at best neglected, bare and devoid of recreational ambience. **Objectives** Hence, the present research sought to examine role of these sculptural elements in beautification and Improvement of quality of urban spaces. **Design** Library study, case study and distribution of questionnaire have been used as the research method. **Setting:** the study was conducted in Nairobi, Kenya under the auspices of the school of the Arts and Design of The University of Nairobi.

Subjects: visitors to the park, Nairobi county staff of the environmental department, key informants and seasoned sculptors.

Results: Art of sculpture at public spaces directly associates to people, causing improvement of citizens' visual culture and improvement of quality of urban environments. Urban sculptures in addition to beautifying urban spaces can undertake positive and

important features such as identity-building in urban spaces, building mental image, transferring valuable messages, transferring culture and history within community, causing more interaction of citizens at urban spaces through creation of interesting and high-quality spaces. **Conclusion:** from the study, it was proved that the volumetric elements such as sculpture have a positive effect on urban spaces. Ultimately, several suggestions have been proposed to improve this art and expand it.

Keywords: *Public art, Sculpture, Culture, Public spaces*

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Public urban open spaces are public land that have been developed and are managed by public authorities for the recreational and environmental or visual benefit to the community (City of South Perth, 2012). Over time their quality has continued to deteriorate with current trends observing that in many cities globally there is increasing degradation of existing urban green spaces (Greenkeys, 2008). Urban parks in Kenya are likewise suffering from lack of attention, poor maintenance, lack of development and underutilization (Rabare, Oketch, & Onyango, 2009). A study by Makworo and Mireri (2011) titled, "Public open spaces in Nairobi City, Kenya, under threat" concluded that public open spaces in Nairobi City have been increasingly threatened by congestion and deterioration as a result of the rapid rate of urbanization, poor planning, weak management and illegal alienation. This study was at best very general. There is hence a need to evaluate the design measures and structures in place to ascertain which factors contribute to its ineffectiveness. The expected outcome would be the development of a Self-sustaining visually appealing model of an ideal urban park.