Public Art in Delhi: Art for all or City-branding?

Research Question

How does the institutionalization of art spaces (organization of exhibitions and festivals) contribute or undermine the access to art, in the sense of:

a) facilitating creative encounters for collective reflection, where artists and citizens take part?

b) framing a strategy for branding the city (guided by economic means) according to global tendencies?

Public Art at the India Habitat Center

The first large-scale public art festival in India was introduced in 2008 by the Goethe Institut and the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit as a crucial seed for the rise of contemporary art in Delhi’s public space. Throughout our analysis, it was not evident that the festival was only orchestrated according to a branding strategy. Rather, the growing aspirations and efforts of political/economic elites to promote Delhi as a world-class city were used to establish art, culture and current social issues, like climate change and economic growth, at the center of Delhi’s most concurred places.

Street Art Festival

Numerous artists from India and abroad were invited to paint on the newly created street art district, Lodhi Colony, and in Okhla where Asia’s biggest stock of containers resides. Clearly, the motivation relies on the desire to place Delhi on the street art cartography, like New York, London or Berlin (being most commonly cited by the organizers). However, the way each artist decided to work on the concept (i.e. research, dialogue with the citizens) and the elaboration (i.e. community involvement) was determinant for the citizens to identify her- and himself with the murals. Feelings of participating in the city-making process where thus generated, even though the selection of ‘art locations’ certainly sets off gentrification alarm bells...

Perspectives for further research

Our question cannot be fully answered theoretically but empirical insights are required. What is more, the tendency towards a) public art for all or b) city-branding does not de facto eliminate (conception and resulting) possibilities for both guiding principles in cultural policy to nurture or undermine each other. Hereby various questions derived which could be synthetized as: Which potentially positive or negative influences can art, being developed within a context of the ‘urban commons’, generate in contrast to institutionally planned public art?

Bibliography


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