

The First Complete Census of Public Artworks in Torino

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Abstract

Since the end of the 20th century, public art has registered a new tendency towards growing institutionalisation. The self-managed spontaneity of murals is increasingly conveyed in projects conceived or supported by public or private institutions. Public art has played an important role in the policies aimed at reviving cities. Since this was implemented in Torino in the last quarter of the century, public art has grown remarkably in the city, especially in the outskirts. The project *Arte per strada Torino* (<https://www.arteperstradatorino.it>) aimed to create a portal containing the first complete census of artworks in public spaces in Torino (Italy) and its belt. This census was carried out through an analysis of existing repertoires of public art works in the city, integrated by interviews with qualified witnesses and detailed field surveys. The project also collects publications, documents and other websites related to the field of public art. The data for the census were collected from existing repertoires of public artworks in Torino, through systematic site inspections, as well as from the Municipality of Torino and local art associations. The period considered is from 1990 to the present, that is to say, the age in which Torino experienced a great flourishing of public art. The *Arte per strada Torino* website offers three different ways to access the artworks collected: a textual list, a photo gallery and an interactive map. This project offers a solid basis for analysing public art in Torino and its outlying area, which will be useful for policymakers, artistic associations, researchers and interested citizens.

Keywords

Public art; Public spaces; Street art; Torino; Urban redevelopment

1. Introduction. Public Art and Its Evolution

Since ancient times, the idea of collecting objects and materials to which cultural and artistic values are attributed has been established in many cultures, in order to preserve them as works of 'human ingenuity', to build a collective memory among contemporaries, to strengthen the identity of a people, and to transmit a shared heritage to new generations. According to historians' findings, the first museum collections date back to ancient Egypt, when in Alexandria, at the Hellenistic age, King Ptolemy I created what is considered the first true museum in human history

(Rossi & Nicolai, 2003). For long centuries, however, such collections almost always remained private—the property of monarchs, wealthy individuals, patrons—and enjoyed in private or, at most, exhibited as status symbols in front of prestigious guests or peers. In this respect, we can mention, for example, the Giardino del Belvedere built at the beginning of the sixteenth century for Pope Julius II, which contained many statues realised during the classical era, or the Tribuna degli Uffizi in Firenze, where was gathered the private collection of the 'de Medici family.

A first significant transformation of the museum concept occurs in the modern age. As the focus on public opinion, modern democracy and civil rights becomes more widespread, the world of culture also becomes progressively less elitist, moving increasingly towards collections that are open to the public, to civil society. This was to be, for example, the distinctive and innovative feature of some great museums opened in the second half of the 18th century, such as the British Museum in London or the Collections Royales in Paris, not by chance in the capitals of two nations that were in the vanguard of modernity from both cultural and political points of view.

Outside museums, in public spaces, for much of human history, art and architecture have performed a function of public legitimisation, of celebration of power, whether religious, economic or military (Bolle et al., 2017).

This celebratory function performed by public art has been maximised and exalted by anti-democratic regimes. Even relatively recently, for instance, in the 20th century, various totalitarian regimes did not fail to fill cities with celebratory works of art. In many communist countries, these mainly took the form of large murals depicting symbols, leaders and heroes of the regime. In fascist Italy, they mainly took the form of large sculptural works, with a careful selection of materials (e.g. marble to recall imperial Rome) and

symbolism: fasces lictor, imperial eagles, as well as a great variety of representations of the dictator's head, to the point of turning it into a cult icon (see Figure 1).

Even on the democratic front, however, public art has often been used as an instrument of legitimisation to strengthen social cohesion. To cite just one example, following the great crisis of 1929, in the United States, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt launched a public art funding and development programme with the New Deal, in order to stimulate national identity pride, counteract the collective depression that followed the economic one, and reaffirm the relevance of the 'American Dream' (Bolle et al., 2017).

From the end of the 20th century, we enter a new phase, which further amplifies the trend towards the dissemination of cultural and artistic heritage, even in territories and among subjects once excluded from its enjoyment: artworks begin to disseminate outside the historic centres, in the working-class neighbourhoods, while—with the spread of literacy—literature and libraries increasingly open up to the poor class too. From the 1960s onwards, and even more so from the 1970s, works of art began to be taken out of the canonical places designated for their preservation, spreading more and more into urban public spaces. This first occurred thanks to 'bottom-up' initiatives (Montaldo, 2021), with projects by artists who, wishing to be involved in a



Figure 1. Use of public art to celebrate totalitarian regimes (in Italy, Germany, USSR) and the American Dream during the New Deal.

militant and organic way in workers' struggles, for housing, in schools, in neighbourhoods, also put their creativity and technical expertise at the service of these political instances. In projects of this kind, it often happens that the inhabitants themselves were involved in the production processes of the works of art: in the preliminary phase (e.g. by consulting them on the themes to be represented in the work, where to realise it, etc.), but sometimes also in the realisation phase, thus opening the season of 'participatory' art.

The term 'public art', as we understand it today, was coined precisely in this context, to define a new conception of presenting and enjoying art, inserting it into the living fabric of the city, going beyond the traditional conception of a passive public, silently parading in front of the works in a museum. However, regarding terminology, there is today a considerable confusion between different concepts (such as urban art, public art, graffiti or street art, used sometimes as mere synonyms, sometimes to name different artistic styles), especially in their linguistic declinations in different nations (Montaldo, 2021).

The same government bodies in various nations began to develop growing attention and sensitivity for public art, albeit in a continuous dialectical confrontation, not infrequently conflictual, with the more 'underground' and antagonistic art forms, in the grey zone between art and non-art, legal and illegal. During the 1990s, in particular, the

phenomenon of street art exploded, at first mostly in the form of writings—usually in block letters—on out-of-the-way walls or on stationary railway carriages in stations and depots (see Figure 2), i.e. in 'backstage' areas, to refer to a classic definition by Erving Goffman (1963).

This phenomenon developed—initially mainly in the United States, then spread to many other countries—generally on the initiative of young people (especially males) in marginal neighbourhoods, often in small groups and 'urban tribes' that reaffirmed their citizenship through "leaving a sign of themselves" on the territory (Sennett, 1992). A trace of this tradition is still very evident in some contemporary public art, for instance, in the street artists that create inscriptions and works in cities generally bound to an ephemeral destiny, i.e. to be covered in short order by other works.

The last few decades have witnessed a process, which is still ongoing, of progressive transformation of the concept of public art and its many stylistic 'souls', to the extent that it is now becoming increasingly difficult to precisely define its boundaries both externally and internally. That is to say that, alongside the historical schools of 'murals' or figurative art, more recent traditions from the world of graffiti and underground street art are being inserted, producing a growing contamination between genres and between projects, being—at the same time—fully recognised as artworks (see Figure 3). Thus, for example, figurative works



Figure 2. Lettering on railway carriages, in the United States and Italy.

with realistic features are hybridised with caricature and cartoonish signs; the 'writing on the walls' often becomes more and more elaborate, with clear artistic ambitions, and specialises in precise stylistic sub-fields: tags, lettering, puppetry, throw up, etc. At the same time, works of "lettering" or "writing" (once created illegally and overnight) have increasingly entered institutional projects.

Recently, a growing virtuous circle has therefore been developing between a world of increasingly professionalised artists, attentive to the care of works, with more aesthetic ambitions, and an institutional front increasingly willing to accept these works and promote their realisation as part of urban development strategies. A growing number of administrations have identified art as a strategic element for attracting investment, resources, tourists (generating

positive economic impacts on the city), and as a way of redeveloping urban spaces and neighbourhoods, thus also aiming to revitalise their social fabric (Crivello, 2020; Griffiths, 1995).

The gradual institutionalisation of public art has led, since the 1990s and even more so since the beginning of the 21st century, to a very significant growth in the number of works present in cities, often disseminated through processes of progressive diffusion in all neighbourhoods. In addition, works have begun to be conceived and designed to last, opening up a whole new problem front. If public art is less and less ephemeral, it also becomes important to take census, document and catalogue an increasingly rich public art heritage. The *Arte per strada Torino* project,

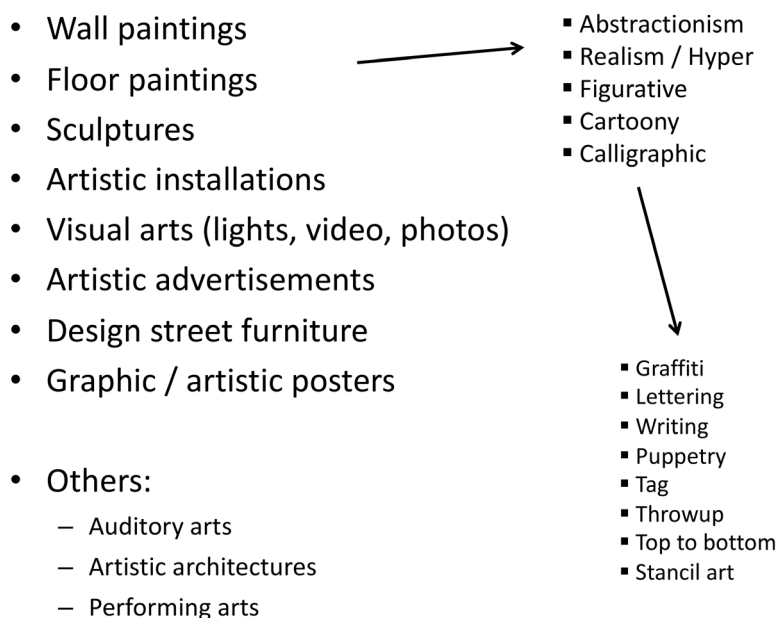


Figure 3. The variegated universe of public art today. Source: Montaldo, 2021.

described in the following paragraphs, tries to respond to this purpose. The need also arises to adopt actions aimed at the protection and enhancement of works and, therefore, criteria for selecting which works to preserve, the most appropriate restoration techniques, etc.

2. The *Arte per strada Torino* Project

In the case of Torino—as part of an epochal transformation, in which the city left behind the 'one company town' model that had characterised it for most of the 20th century—since the 1990s, local administrations have increasingly focused

on tourism, culture and art as new strategic development axes. Urban spaces are being radically transformed, reconvertng square kilometres of disused industrial areas into new neighbourhoods, where housing, shopping centres, services and parks are being built. In many run-down neighbourhoods, redevelopment projects (called Pru, Priu, Urban, etc.) are implemented to improve the physical environment (recovery of real estate, re-functioning of spaces and services, adaptation of infrastructures, etc.) and the social environment (empowerment of inhabitants, better quality of daily life, more social cohesion). Public art plays an increasingly important role in such planning interventions. It is gradually expanding both quantitatively and geographically, reaching neighbourhoods that have never before been affected by the presence of artistic works.

In order to document this phenomenon, starting in 2017, a research team from the DIST (Interuniversity Department of Regional & Urban Studies and Planning) carried out a complete census of all artworks in public spaces in Torino, the first one made in an Italian city. The fact of documenting the totality of public artworks, instead of a limited sample of the most significant works, constitutes a significant methodological breakthrough, as it makes it possible for the first time to have an overall picture for conducting quantitative and qualitative analyses on public art production.

To carry out this first census, some partial repertoires of works (e.g. those of projects such as the MAU–Museo Arte Urbana or PicTurin) were identified, collected and systematised. Subsequently, an extensive interview campaign was conducted with qualified operators of public art in Torino (art associations, public project managers). Finally, the picture was completed through systematic and capillary inspections—district by district, street by street—in search of other lesser-known works of art, unrelated to the more structured projects and often expressions of ‘underground’ cultures.

In the first phase, all works visible in the streets of the city were surveyed, including monuments and sculptures from past centuries, excluding works that no longer exist (since removed or covered by other works), temporary works (e.g.

the *Luci d'artista* installed only during the Christmas period) and works that are an organic part of buildings (such as decorations on buildings, monumental tombs in cemeteries, etc.).

A very delicate question that had to be addressed was the threshold of artistic content to be set as a discriminating factor to include or exclude works, as there is obviously a grey area on this topic between widely recognised works of art and graphic interventions socially labelled as “vandalism” (see Figure 4). This question, in fact, refers to the long-standing problem typical of modernity of establishing a boundary between what is definable as an ‘artistic’ product and what should not be considered as such. In the specific case of *Arte per strada Torino*, after careful consideration, it was decided to adopt a relatively low threshold—inclusive, for example, of works created by ‘non-professional’ artists (see Figure 5)—excluding only trivial graffiti interventions or wall writings without any obvious aesthetic research.

This census—the results of which are published in a volume by Bolle, Davico, & Scira (2017)—identified 440 works, including 189 wall paintings, 128 sculptures and monuments, 98 installations and 25 other works; these types of works (pre-1990) were largely concentrated in the city centre; 46 of these works were created before 1900, 30 in the first half of the 20th century, 99 in the second half and 265 at the beginning of the 21st century. Of the monuments, 66 were concentrated in the historical centre and depicted 22 military personnel, 20 political figures, 11 monarchs and members of the royal house of Savoia and 13 other figures (see Figure 6).

In the two-year period 2021–22, the census of public art in Torino was deepened, updated and supplemented. For this second census, the choice was made to narrow the time span considered, focusing on the most recent works, created since 1990. On the other hand, it was decided to broaden the geographical boundaries of the area considered, including the numerous works of public art in the municipalities in the belt of Torino.

A website has been developed as a public showcase of the census, a flexible communication tool that can be



Figure 4. Examples of writings included in (left) or excluded from (right) the census of *Arte per strada Torino*.



Figure 5. Examples of artworks created by 'non-professionals' included in the census of *Arte per strada Torino*: Collettivo Crossfade Idea with schoolchildren, 1994 (left); unknown artists, 2009 (right).



Figure 6. Examples of public art works included in the first census. (1. Carlo Marocchetti, *Carlo Alberto*, 1860; 2. Cesare Reduzzi, *Quintino Sella*, 1894; 3. Giuseppe Canavotto, *Cesare Battisti*, 1929; 4. Goffredo Verginelli, *All'Autiere d'Italia*, 1965). Source: Bolle et al., 2017.

continuously updated and integrated, therefore useful for adequately documenting a constantly evolving heritage such as that of public art. The new website (www.arteperstradatorino.it) was conceived as a portal that brings together the entire production of public art and gives prominence through links and cross-references to other portals, publications and documents on this topic.

The second census also used analyses of existing partial repertoires, systematic reconnaissance in the neighbourhoods and municipalities of the belt and interviews with the municipalities and the main art associations. The site project was also discussed and developed in close synergy with the portals *Arte urbana a Torino* by Città di Torino, *Geografie metropolitane* by Urban Lab and the Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti.

Each work was photographed, and information was filed on the author, title, year of creation, category, project, address, district or municipality, geographical coordinates, author of the photograph and any links for further information (see Figure 8). The data was organised in a database, which was then used to compile the HTML files. In many cases, it was not possible to trace the name of the author, the title of the work, the project or the year of realisation.

Six categories of works were identified: multiple paintings (e.g. 'jam walls'), single paintings, installations, mosaics, panels and sculptures.

The location on the territory is indicated with the street address, the district in the case of the city of Torino or the municipality in the belt, and the geographical coordinates expressed in degrees, obtained from the metadata of the photograph taken. Each tab on the site shows one or more photographs of the works, the catalogued data and a topographical map with toponymic indications, with a pointer indicating the location of the work from which the Google Street View screen can be accessed.

The cards can be accessed through a textual list, divided into city districts and municipalities in the belt, from a photo gallery or an interactive map.

The map was created using cartographic software (QGIS). Geographic coordinates were used to georeference the position on the territory and obtain a punctual vector file (shapefile). The internal attribute table was suitably prepared to report all the information useful for presentation on the website. From the general database of the census, the main data were poured in, and some HTML code strings

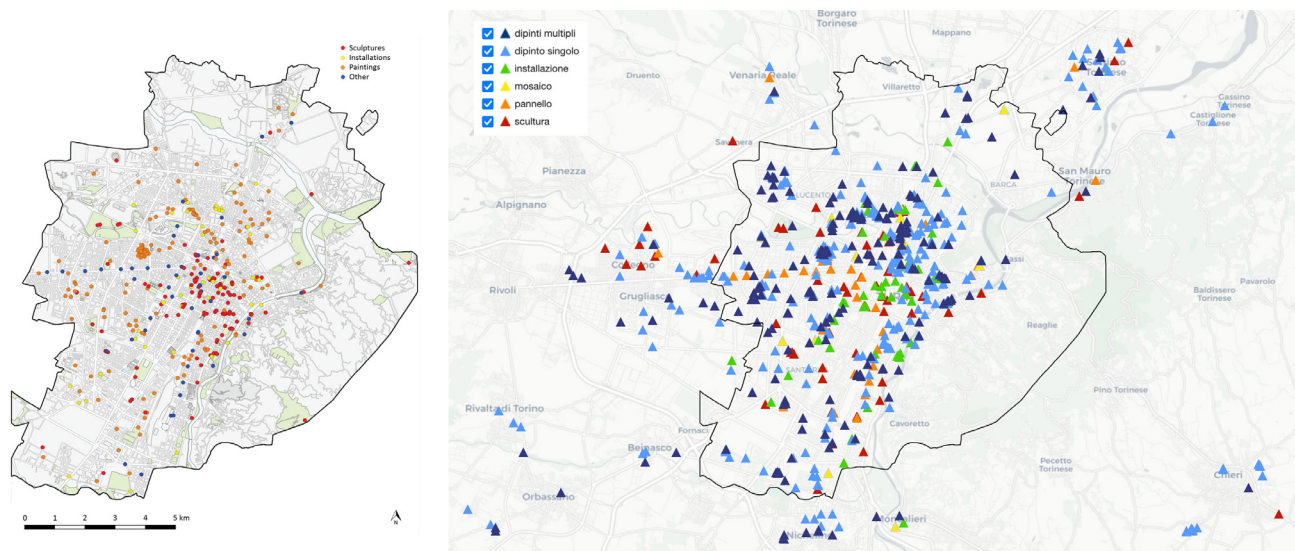


Figure 7. Maps of the first census of public artworks in Torino, 2017 (left) and of *Arte per strada Torino*, update to spring 2023 (right).



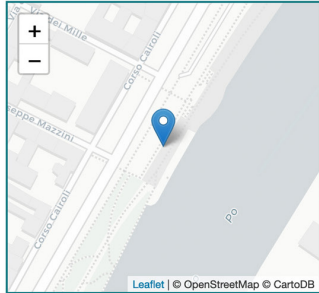
HOME GALLERY CARDS MAP



2 / 2

Truly Design

Author	Truly Design
Title	Trittico de Murazzi - Heron, Swan and Squirrel co-living on the river side!
Year	2022
Category	Multiple paintings
Project	Iren Loves Energy
Address	Murazzi Farassino (presso ex scalo battelli sul Po)
District	Centro
Geographical coordinates	45.060146864819885, 7.6925670121635325
Photograph	Bruno Montaldo



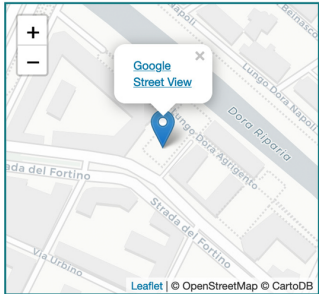
Leaflet | © OpenStreetMap © CartoDB



HOME GALLERY CARDS MAP



Author	Stoisa Luigi
Title	Le Letture
Year	2008
Category	Sculpture
Project	Arte Lungo Dora
Address	piazzetta Vittime dello stadio Heysel
District	Aurora Valdocco
Geographical coordinates	45.08625, 7.677361
Photograph	Luca Davico
Insights	http://www.comune.torino.it/circ7/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/5055



Google Street View

Leaflet | © OpenStreetMap © CartoDB

Figure 8. Examples of tabs about different types of works of art on the website of *Arte per strada Torino*.

were added to obtain the insertion of the photograph and the link to the card. The point elements were then selected according to the six categories of works, and six differently themed layers were created. The user then can act independently on the legend, enabling or disabling the information layers individually, in order to display the type of interest. A Web Map Service (WMS), CartoDB Positron© by OpenStreetMap© forms the base map. Finally, the map was exported, made interactive via the

QGIS2Web plug-in and inserted into the site. The user can select different zoom levels, search by address and measure distances over the territory. The position of each work is indicated by a triangular symbol, of a different colour depending on the type. By clicking on a symbol, a pop-up window appears. It contains a thumbnail of the photograph of the work (or a detail of it), the category, the street address and a link to access the card.

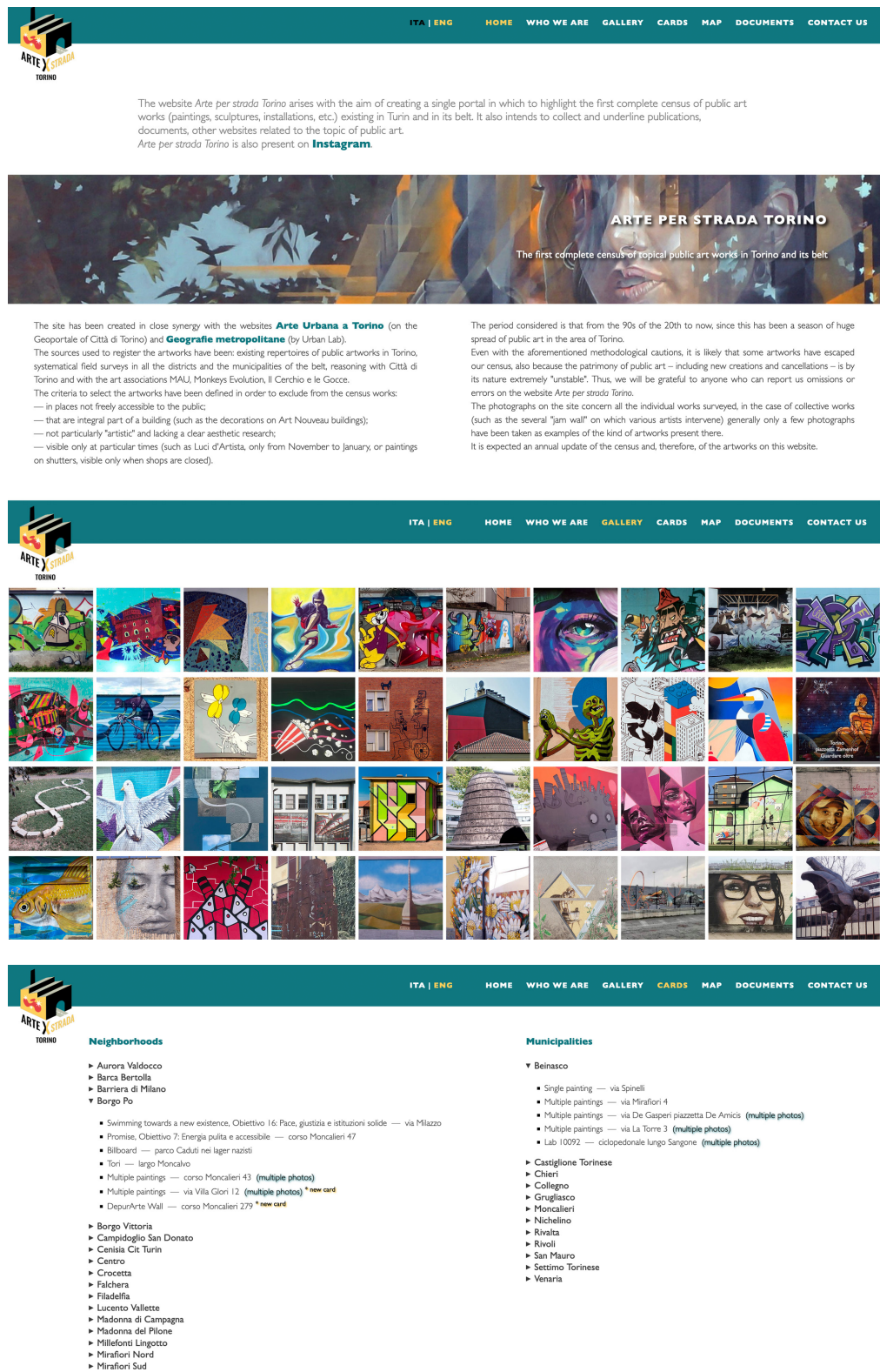


Figure 9. Some screenshots of the website of *Arte per strada Torino*: home page, gallery and textual list of the cards.

The pages of the site are in Italian or English. The homepage explains the history and purpose of the portal. The other pages contain the photo gallery, the textual list of cards and the interactive map (see Figure 9). There is also a page with the names of all the participants in various capacities in the project, a collection of bibliographical documents and links to sites on street art. The contact page contains a form for sending reports on new, modified or missing works, or any errors found on the site.

Recently, an Instagram page of the project has been created, where photographs of the works with their census data are posted.

The cataloguing of works is continually supplemented, and the site is updated approximately twice a year. On the occasion of the updates, the pages are enriched with content. In the future, it is planned to supplement the indexing with new entries on the works (such as size, technique used and state of preservation) and also to collect and index missing and deleted works. This last objective will be very challenging, especially to find out documentation on street art (in particular, graffiti that lasted only a short time on city walls). For three-dimensional works, the preparation of 3D models to supplement the static images is being considered.

3. First Research Outcomes: Contents and Objects of Public Art

About 1,500 works created between 1990 and March 2024 have so far been surveyed and documented on the *Arte per strada Torino* website. The majority of the works are wall paintings (singles, 46 % of the total, or multiples, 28 %), followed by installations (15 % of the total), sculptures (10 %) and mosaics (2 %).

The following graph (see Figure 10) shows the impressive growth in the number of public artworks in Torino, with a particular acceleration in the last decade. This impressive growth depends largely on an actual increase in the number of works, but also on the realisation of new paintings superimposed on others created in previous years. The growth effect shown in the graph (which only counts the works still visible in 2023) is therefore amplified by the disappearance of some works realised years ago.

Until the 1970s, only 30 % of the works were located outside the city centre. This share had already increased to 55 % in the 1990s, and today it reaches 80 %. This mainly depends on the strategies and projects for the redevelopment of working-class and peripheral neighbourhoods, in which the creation of artworks has often played an important role.

From a stylistic point of view, the research team of *Arte per strada Torino* attempted a (not easy) classification of the works, defining four macro-types (see Figure 11):

- abstract, characterised by geometric shapes, in which figures of people, animals, objects are not recognisable or are represented in highly stylised forms
- realistic, which, conversely, tends to represent the portrayed subjects as naturally as possible
- cartoony, in which caricature-like features and comic style prevail
- writing, a category that includes the various (already mentioned above) and more or less elaborate techniques: lettering, tags, etc.

Most of the works surveyed in Torino can be traced back to a comic style (41 %) or an abstract style (36 %). Realistic works are significantly less present (15 %) and even less so is writing (8 %). Obviously, the boundaries of the four categories are not so clear: there are hybrid works (e.g. writing with a cartoonish character), for which we opted to classify the prevailing style (with respect to the total surface area of the work). Ours is one of the first attempts to classify works, as hitherto very few (and very partial) classifications existed, which at most considered the type of work and/or the technique used.

The most represented subject category (see Figure 12) is that of living beings, primarily people, then animals (mainly wild, reptile and amphibian species, hence elephants, ungulates, lions and monkeys).

In the case of human beings, male figures predominate, accounting for 56 % of the people represented in the works, against 36 % females. The remaining 8 % consists of undefined figures, typical of the abstract style, for example, in which a human silhouette is represented, leaving its features undefined. As for the different age groups, young

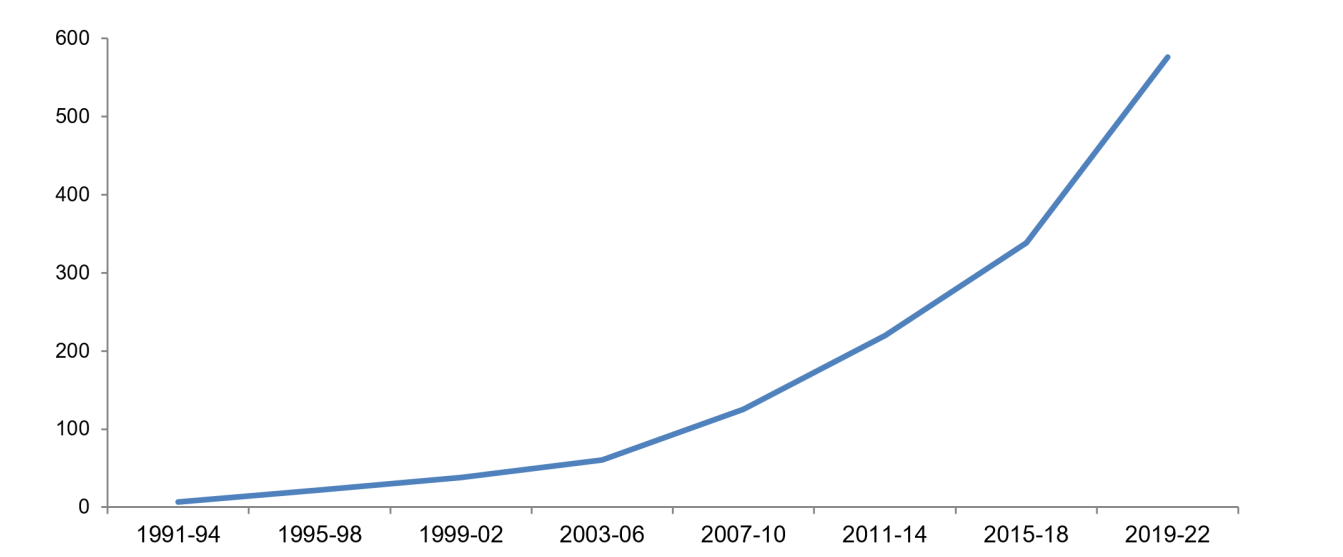


Figure 10. Number of existing public works of art in Torino and surrounding area, by construction period (update April 2023). Source: *Arte per strada Torino*.



Figure 11. Examples of the four stylistic categories in which the works are classified: abstract, realistic, cartoony, writing (1. Nevercrew, *Fade*, 2018; 2. Karim Cherif, *Piero Angela*, 2023; 3. Angelo Barile, *Il Cappellaio*, 2013; 4. Duke1 e Wave, *Street Attitude*, 2022). Source: *Arte per strada Torino*.

figures prevail (41 %). Adults account for 18 %, while a few works depict children (4 %) or the elderly (4 %); in the remaining cases, people of various age groups (11 %) or of indefinite age (23 %) appear.

From an ethnic perspective, signs of Torino’s ongoing transition towards an increasingly multi-ethnic city are also emerging in the world of public art. The majority of people depicted in the works (51 %) are white-skinned, but the

share of blacks (7 %) and people belonging to other ethnic macro-groups (Hispanics, Indians, Arabs, Orientals, together amounting to 3 %) is not insignificant. Eight per cent of the works depict, at the same time, people of more than one ethnicity and in the remaining 31 % of the cases the somatic features are not characterised to the point of distinguishing the ethnicity of the persons portrayed, thus referring to their generic belonging to the ‘human race’.

Finally, 15 % of the total works represent well-known personalities, with a prevalence of political figures, iconic figures (fairy tales, mythological, etc.), comic strips and literature.

4. Public Art and the Urban Context

As pointed out above, one of the main reasons for the great expansion of public art in recent decades is the growing conviction that it can contribute to the redevelopment of urban public spaces.

However, it is appropriate to introduce some food for thought and critical analysis. The concept of urban regeneration

appears pertinent in relation to artistic interventions planned and organised in concert between authors, administrators and other actors. It is less applicable in cases where interventions are stratified following more or less 'wild' logics of continuous overlapping, typical of traditional 'underground' cultures. The latter type of intervention is less widespread in Torino than it used to be, thanks to the strong growth of artistic projects channelled along more institutional tracks, and to the forms of self-regulation within the world of street artists (Montaldo, 2021).

The outcomes of urban regeneration of spaces are also rather differentiated in the case of artistic interventions planned

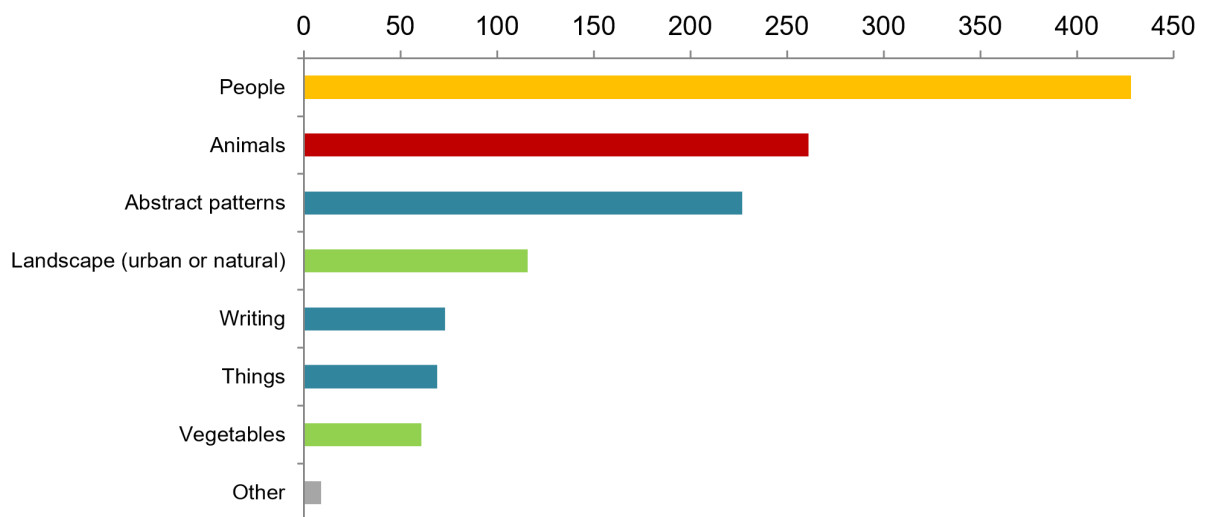


Figure 12. What public artworks depict (updated in April 2023). Source: *Arte per strada Torino*.

and agreed upon with public authorities. A relevant aspect in this respect concerns the size of the works. In the case of small- to medium-sized works, urban redevelopment seems to take forms that harken back to the concept of 'mending', coined a few years ago by architect Renzo Piano about micro-interventions that redevelop small urban spaces, such as refurbishment of little spaces, local gardens, urban design solutions and so on. Larger works (such as those on the blind side walls of large apartment blocks or on extensive boundary walls) probably produce the greatest effects both on the urban environment and on citizens' perceptions. In this regard, see the following images (Figure 13), in which shots (taken from Street View) of some urban views of Torino

before the artistic interventions and corresponding current images of the same places have been juxtaposed.

The issue of the redevelopment of urban spaces has close connections with the theme of the dialectical relationship between the work of art and the public place where it is created or installed. This theme has played a central role throughout the history of public art, at least since the 1970s, especially with its dissemination in different neighbourhoods.

In this regard, a not infrequently controversial reflection has developed in the public art world on the importance of realising 'site-specific' works, that is to say designed

specifically for a peculiar territorial context. In the traditional conception, the artwork is designed or created in an atelier, and then realised or installed in a relatively indifferent spot in the territory. Instead, the site-specific conception starts from a preliminary knowledge of a place, studies its characteristics and historical roots by confronting those who inhabit that territory on a daily basis, because they live, study or work there. Following this knowledge phase, the artist synthesises the collected elements and develops them through his own creativity and technical skills in the realisation of the work. In the world that explicitly refers to the 'site-specific' concept, however, there are very different ways of putting this general orientation into practice. At one end of an ideal continuum are artists who, in order to respectfully adapt to the context,

produce works that are as 'assimilated' as possible, often almost mimetic, to the point that they are sometimes not even identified as works of art by many citizens. Others insert more or less explicit 'citations' of the territorial context in which the works are created, highlighting characteristic elements, territorial symbols of the neighbourhood or of the city. At another end of the continuum, however, are artists who follow a designedly 'intrusive' line. Having taken note of a specific context, they propose a work that is designedly 'breaking', in marked discontinuity, in order to radically innovate that specific territorial context.

In about two-thirds of the cases, the works surveyed do not explicitly reveal the artist's communicative objective. In the



Figure 13. Urban spaces in Torino, before and after the artistic interventions (1. Milla Bandiera, *Turtles*, 2019; 2. Millo, *Il re di Barriera*, 2014). Source: *Arte per strada Torino*.

remaining third, the works launch precise 'messages'. Among them, the reference to the local area (the neighbourhood, above all) is by far the most prevalent, followed at some distance by pacifist, environmentalist or cultural heritage messages (see Figure 14).

As already emphasised, the attitude of taking into account the context in which a work is to be inserted often goes hand in hand with a focus on those who live in that neighbourhood daily. This refers to the more general theme of citizen participation in a project, which also concerns

other disciplines such as architecture or town planning.

This approach is stimulated by a couple of reflections. The first has to do with the observation that the inhabitants of a place, of a neighbourhood, are often the best experts of that place and therefore their skills and ideas are almost always instrumental in the realisation of a good quality project. The second concerns the central importance of public spaces for people's daily lives. Every day, citizens walk, look out of their windows and meet in public spaces whose quality influences perceptions, opinions, experiences and, consequently, also their sense of belonging or, vice versa, of estrangement or

repulsion from their neighbourhood.

On the subject of participatory planning, a rich body of literature has developed over the last decades, which makes it possible to distinguish between different participatory approaches, methods, and tools for involving citizens in planning choices (Ciaffi & Mela, 2006).

Limiting themselves to the field of public art, participatory processes can be traced back to a scale of different levels, which nevertheless have in common the desire to overcome the traditional conception of citizens as mere 'spectators'

of a work of art. At a minimal participative level, project proponents and/or artists take care to consult the inhabitants of a territory through interviews, more or less structured surveys, meetings with local associations, etc. In other cases, citizens are also involved in the implementation phases of the artwork (Zukin, 1995). Sometimes the inhabitants are also given a voice so that they can express themselves and evaluate the outcomes of the artistic processes.

In truth, there are not many investigations in Torino that have explored citizens' opinions on public works of art: the

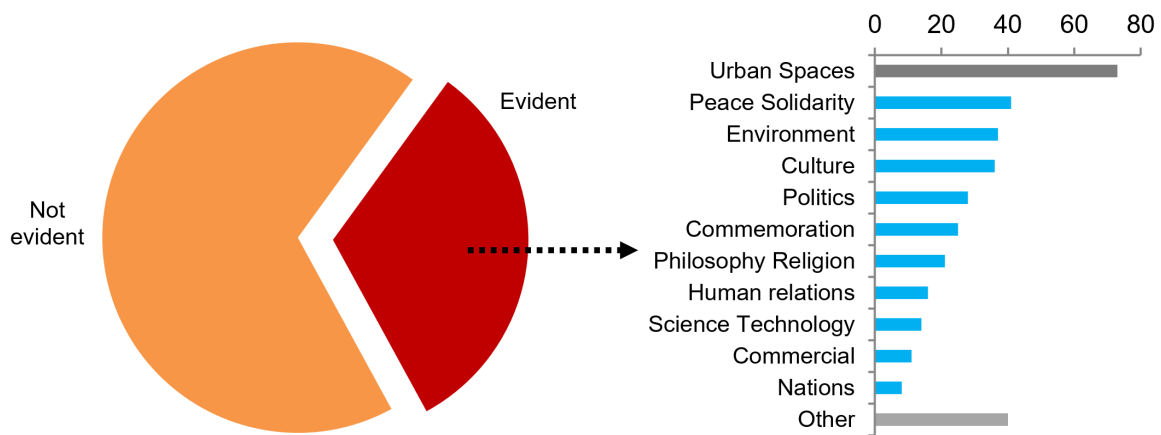


Figure 14. Themes and 'messages' of public works of art (updated in April 2023). Source: *Arte per strada Torino*.

surveys based on interviews with passers-by in four Torino neighbourhoods with a high concentration of works—Campidoglio, Barriera di Milano and San Salvario, carried out for two degree theses: Dellarossa, 2016; Milan, 2023—and in the case of the Borgo Po district (survey was carried out by the association of artists who have just created a new work of art, in the spring of 2023). These surveys revealed strongly differentiated levels of appreciation: in particular, to the question "Have the new public artworks improved the quality of the neighbourhood?" in Borgo Po 88 % of respondents answered positively, compared to only 49 % of respondents in the Barriera di Milano district. These differences may depend on the perceived quality of the individual works, and on the fact that in the first district

they are more concentrated in a few blocks, and therefore more easily identified by the inhabitants. Furthermore, the repertoire of works is more heterogeneous, better able to intercept, at least in part, the tastes of the public. Conversely, in Barriera di Milano almost all the works can be traced back to two large blocks, one comprising 14 large walls created by the same artist (Millo), the other consisting mainly of sculptures and installations in an abstract style in Parco Peccei. The survey revealed that abstract works are more difficult to understand and, therefore, less appreciated by citizens.

With regard to the survey conducted in the Borgo Po district, it is interesting to underline that it polled opinions

both before and after the realisation of the works, finding that between the two rounds of interviews the levels of appreciation for the quality of the neighbourhood in terms of pleasantness, liveliness and orderliness on average increased. This would thus seem to confirm what has already emerged from previous similar surveys: not only does public art not go unnoticed, but it is predominantly perceived as improving a place (see Figure 15).

5. Conservation of Works

For the past couple of decades, a process of progressive transformation of public art (especially its street art variants, graffiti etc.) towards increasingly less ephemeral and extemporary interventions has been underway. This has contributed to the development of a debate on the

documentation of works, their valorisation and conservation. With regard to the documentation phase, the *Arte per strada Torino* project had to deal with relatively new issues, such as the units of analysis to be considered when filing the works and the parameters to be used. In this regard, the research team of *Arte per strada Torino* established contacts with researchers from the Chemistry Department of the Università di Torino who, as part of the CAPuS project, analysed several street artworks from the point of view of their state of preservation (Ricci et al., 2023).

Similar unprecedented problems concern the valorisation of works. Whether one is addressing a local target (citizens wishing to discover the works of art in their city) or a more tourist-oriented target, it is not easy to propose

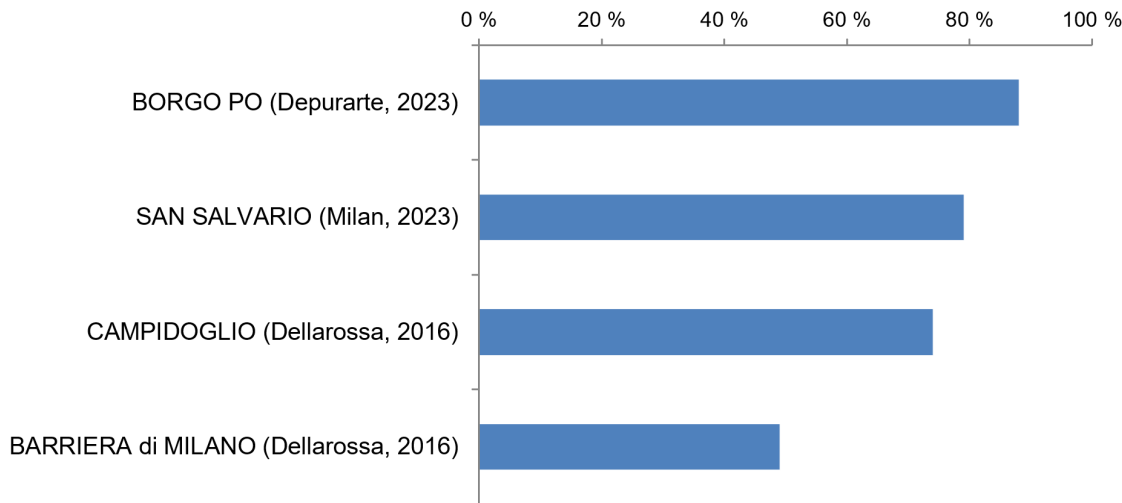


Figure 15. Levels of appreciation of public art by citizens in four districts of Torino ("Do you like works of public art? Do they improve the neighbourhood?"; percentages of positive responses). Data processed on following sources: Dellarossa (2016), Milan (2023), and project *Depurarte*.

tours to discover works spread over relatively large areas. It is no coincidence that in Torino, the works of the MAU in the Campidoglio district are more easily identified and appreciated by citizens because of their concentration in a relatively small area, which facilitates the organisation of visiting routes. At the MAU, in fact, the distances to be covered on foot are not much greater than those of a large

indoor museum, with hundreds of works concentrated in a quadrangle of 160,000 square metres, about three times the size of the Louvre in Paris.

Finally, the issue of conservation of the works raises technical questions, regarding the choice of durable and less wearable materials during the construction phase of the works which,

due to their outdoor nature, are almost always exposed to atmospheric agents and thermal shocks, and the best way to intervene afterwards with restoration and rehabilitation actions.

There are a number of complex aspects that are being progressively defined, which concern the criteria for classifying works, so as to establish a sort of priority ranking between those more and less deserving of restoration work, also taking into account their cost. The problem of the lack of resources for conservation also emerged in Torino in recent years for works by artists of considerable renown. In the city, the case of a large sculpture by Arnaldo Pomodoro, inaugurated on the occasion of the 2006 Winter Olympics, at the centre of a busy and polluted road roundabout, caused quite a stir. It was removed after a few years and returned to its creator because neither public nor private entities invested the necessary financial resources for its restoration.

The problem of conservation arises for sculptures, and even more so for wall paintings, both because of their greater intrinsic fragility and because of the effects of the recent quantitative 'boom' in public wall art. Local administrations, especially in cities with the richest street art collections, are only recently starting to think over new methods and tools to manage the very rich heritage of works. These new tools must address both the administrative and the cultural dimensions: for example, who are the parties entitled to determine which works are more or less worthy of preservation? Who judges the artistic quality of works? With what criteria, logic and procedures? On the basis of which cultural references? Are there categories or styles more or less worthy of conservation? Should we or should we not rely on the criterion of the author's fame and therefore preserve the works of the most famous artists? These are all decidedly difficult questions, particularly if we take into account the extreme fragmentation of a world like public art, which is strongly segmented internally into very different currents, approaches and styles. Technicians and public decision-makers often still lack the cultural competences necessary to analyse the recent heritage of public art and thus to establish rules and parameters for its conservation.

To complicate this picture further, public art is still in a moment of transition between the phase in which it was predominantly conceived as ephemeral and the current phase in which works are designed with the perspective of lasting for a relatively long time. In urban policies dealing with public art, we often see a paradoxical situation today in which, on the one hand, criteria and methods for preserving works, that are degraded after many years, are discussed, and, on the other hand, in an excellent state of preservation, are cancelled only a few months after their creation, in order to cover them up with others (see Figure 16).

This latter attitude, in part, relates to a tendency still present in several specific contexts and areas of the public art world, which claim as their identity trait the tradition of urban 'graffiti artists' who, at night, created clandestine works destined to last only a short time. On the part of many public administrations, the tendency to indulge in—if not decisively promote in some urban locations—the practice of 'disposable' art is justified by an alleged lack of suitable spaces to accommodate new works. In the case of Torino, observing the abundance of walls and blind walls of buildings in a poor state of repair, the inconsistency of this argument is evident. Thus, this justification seems only a pretext to justify the laziness and delays of the offices and actors who should identify potentially suitable spaces to house new works and initiate the necessary negotiations and administrative procedures to make them usable for this purpose.

The practice of ephemeral public art is less and less justifiable, especially in an era characterised by an increasing focus on sustainability. Firstly, because the very idea of 'disposability' is structurally at odds with one of the very foundations of the concept of sustainability (favouring durability), as well as for various reasons of unsustainability:

- social (waste of resources—creative, planning, work, expectations—invested in the realisation of a work of art and thwarted shortly afterwards by its cancellation)
- economic (waste of public and/or private investment to buy materials, pay artists, etc.).
- environmental (CO₂ and waste produced during the realisation phase of the work, aspects on which the art world is only recently beginning to think critically).



Figure 16. Examples of public artworks that survived in Torino for very short periods. Source: *Arte per strada Torino*.

Finally, the strongly negative subliminal message conveyed to citizens about the value of the works should not be overlooked. If the promoters and creators themselves remove the artworks after a short time, these are evidently artefacts of little value. So why should citizens appreciate them, identify them as positive territorial symbols and, consequently, take care of them and protect them from degradation and vandalism?

6. Conclusions

The public art movement has a relatively long history, but since the 1990s it has experienced a remarkable quantitative and qualitative growth, posing for the first time unprecedented problems concerning the documentation, protection and recovery of this heritage.

The *Arte per strada Torino* project was set up to create a complete and constantly updated census of public artworks in the metropolitan area of Torino. To date, documentation on approximately 1,500 works has been collected and published on a website. For the first time, a broad and comprehensive directory of all public artworks in a city is made available to the public, and can be used for tourist, administrative and research purposes. Useful insights can be gained into the most recurring themes and subjects, prevailing styles, relationships to the urban context and citizens. The analysis of the *Arte per strada Torino* database also makes it possible to develop critical reflections on aspects that have never been fully resolved, such as those relating to the criteria for safeguarding the works themselves.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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