

Art in Urban Public Space

Dynamics in Intentions, Production and Reception, 1945-Present



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Public Art: Definition

The term 'public art' ('art in public space') basically describes either permanent or temporary artworks – comprising objects or processes – commissioned for sites with open public access which are located outside conventional (museological and 'private') locations and settings. One could think of city squares, parks, buildings' exteriors, and infrastructural sites such as railway stations, roundabouts and airports.

As extreme case, totalitarian state regimes ideologically control reproductive power dimensions of public art production by framing their judgements of taste in both formal- and political-institutional and financial manner (Figure 1).

Research Question

Project 2/4: Public Art Policy, 1945-Present: Venture Crystallising Out of Doors? The Netherlands (Amsterdam) and Flanders (Ghent) compared

Research Question wijzigen in:

To what extent does differentiability in policy affect the realisation of art in urban public space (with regard to quantity, location and type)?

Working hypothesis: money talks; (public art) policy does explicitly affect the realisation of art in urban public space where public art's budgetary context is concerned.

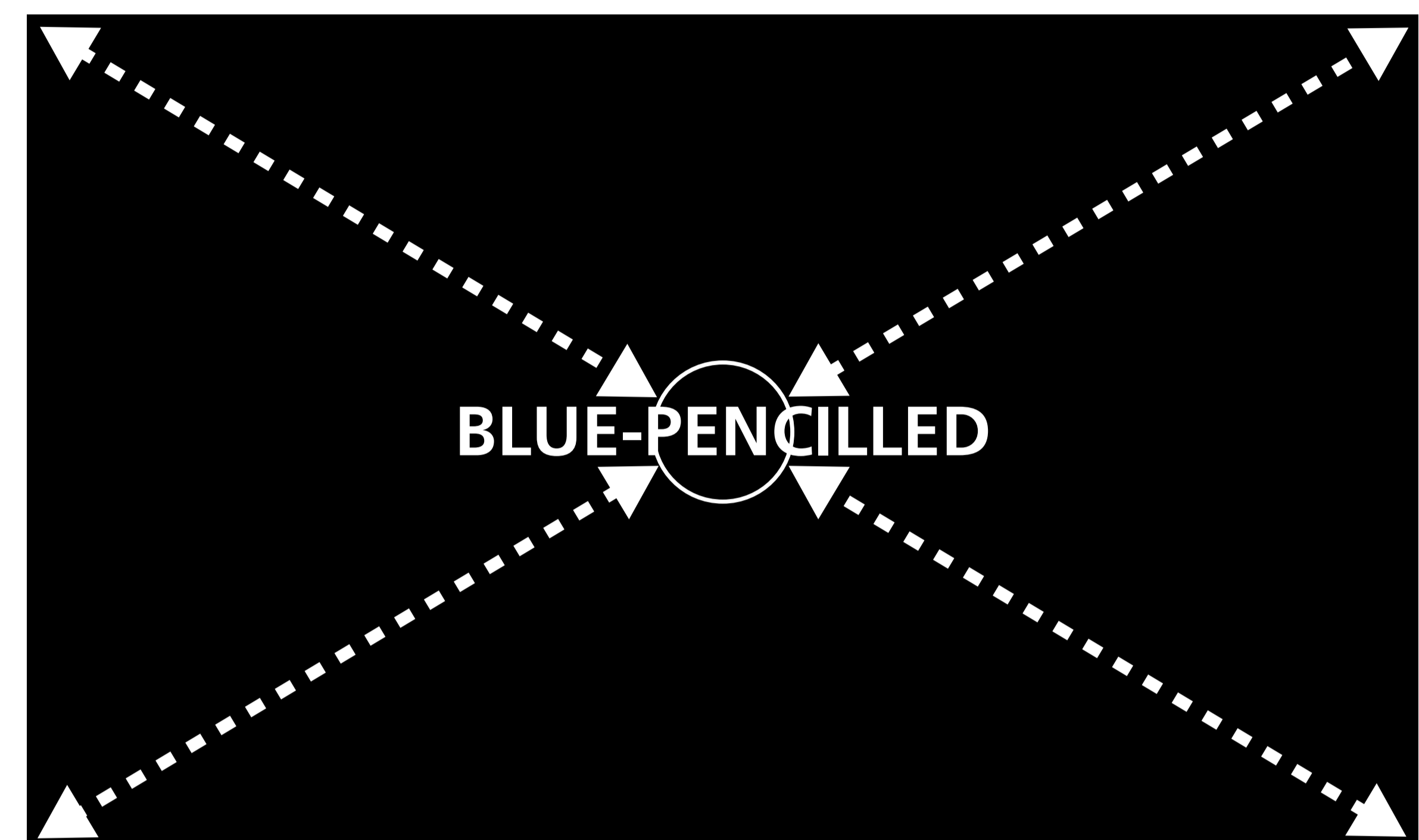


Figure 1: Public art as idealistic state apparatus: public art (art for or rather through the 'publics') is not supposed to be governed by a state regime judgement of taste. Art out of spatial politics or spatial politics out of art?

Methodology and Techniques

This research includes literature study, theory-based and empirical mapping of public artworks, expert interviews, archive studies, (local) media research, and discourse analysis.

Quantity? (Amsterdam vs. Ghent)

Table 1: Weighted average of number of realised public artworks per year*

	'45-'69	'70-'84	'85-'99	'00-present
Amsterdam	0.6	1.3	3.5	4.0
Ghent	0.8	0.3	2.3	1.9

*Yet, public art production 1945-present: higher in Ghent per 100,000 inhabitants (each period)
 Amsterdam: influence of percent-for-art policy ('54 onwards), Visual Artist Regulation (abolished in '87), foundations, and competitive art regime?
 Ghent: influence of (private) local initiatives, patronage's stimuli, and percent-for-art policy ('88 onwards)?

Where? (Amsterdam vs. Ghent)

Table 2: Location of public artworks

	'45-'69	'70-'84	'85-'99	'00-present
Amsterdam	City centre	South	City centre	City centre
Ghent	City centre	City centre	City centre	City centre

Amsterdam: influence of differentiating socioeconomic interventions, clustered deconcentration, and urban competition regimes?
 Ghent: influence of incoherent public art policy (2000: first Ghent public art vision), private ad hoc initiatives, and decentralised urban development?

What? (Amsterdam vs. Ghent)

Table 3: Diversity of public art types (13 in total)

	'45-'69	'70-'84	'85-'99	'00-present
Amsterdam	4	7	10	10
Ghent	6	3	6	8

Amsterdam: overall top 4: art & architecture ('00-present) / autonomous sculpture ('70-present); figurative sculpture ('45-'84); painting ('45-'69)
 Ghent: overall top 4: figurative sculpture ('45-present) / scenario-narrative art ('85-'99); monument ('45-'69); autonomous sculpture ('00-present)
 Influence of commissioned art policy and autonomous art world trends?

Prefatory end points: discourse vs. practice

- Amsterdam vs. Ghent: stronger national incentives policy → not more public art
- Decentralisation policy does affect the where of public art
- Public art and money: manifest marriage of convenience (arts foundations' relevance of own capital accumulation), and art goes where the money goes: centres and urban developing zones
- Vigorous art policy (Amsterdam) → enriching variety of public art?
- Marginal position of community art in particular: policy or no policy
- Implications to further research: corroboration, and project 3/4's focus on publics' lived experiences (presentation on URU days 2010)

Relevance, Knowledge Gap and Case Selection

Public art is omnipresent on the urban stage. It integrates, represents and communicates vision, image and space, and is hence inherently a pertinent subject field to the visual discipline of geography. Literature poorly conveys to what extent contextual detail of public art production reveals that (public art) policy – and more abstractly either converging or diverging political-institutional developments – links up to the actual production of public art in space, time and place. (Public art) policy developments in the Netherlands and Flanders are embedded in different political-institutional and sociospatial contexts. The Netherlands has a far stronger tradition of public intervention in and engagement with the arts sector than Flanders (laissez-faire politics and strong municipal autonomy). The argument of this sociospatial adjacency and political- and cultural-historical entanglement (both regions are Dutch-speaking and -informed regions and historically part of the (wider state rescaling contexts of the) Low Countries) yet political-institutional disparity has been of overriding importance for opting for the comparative study on the regions concerned and the historical cities of Amsterdam and Ghent.