

Looking at Arts Institutions, Communities, and Space: Reflections and Research from the Field of Art Sociology

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<https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8069.20.3.01>

Keywords:

qualitative research,
sociology of art,
cultural institutions,
artistic communities,
space

Abstract: In this introduction to the journal issue, the editors characterize the individual scholarly articles included in the volume. They also briefly recall their research interests in the field of art. The texts in the volume deal with three intertwining dimensions: cultural and art institutions, communities (artistic and aesthetic), and space. Most of the authors presented their research at the academic conference 'Esthetic Communities and Artistic Institutions' (2023), organized by the Art Sociology Section of the Polish Sociological Association. Polish contemporary sociology of art is mainly empirical sociology. Qualitative research in the field of art sociology in Poland has been used since the 1960s. Initially, they had been treated as experimental, gradually transforming into an increasingly common approach. Sociologists most often used various types of qualitative analyses of materials as well as interviews. Researchers still often use these techniques today, but one can also see the use of other methods, e.g., as part of the art-based research approach (this methodological orientation was used in one of the articles).



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At least since the Renaissance period, the sphere of art has been treated as a unique space of human practice. The peak of this differentiation occurred in the 19th century and resulted in a romantic view of the artist as an entity of a 'demigod' status and an art system with its complex structure and system of values (Luhmann, 2016). However, the process did not include art in general. Sacralization was limited to the chosen set of artworks and artists, namely those accepted by Western elites. The other types of art, the 'adjective' ones, folk, ethnic, non-Western, applied – were treated as inferior. Sociology (Ossowski, 1966) and cultural anthropology (Clifford, 2000; Geertz, 2005) play some part in the deconstruction of this system. Although it is accepted that there is no one 'art world', but, rather, their multitude that intertwine and overlap, they are culturally contextualized spheres of social practice. This fact – sacrilegious for some artists, art historians, and estheticians – allows us to study art as other social objects. Social researchers can apply the methods and techniques they use to explore organizations, social order, deviation, systems of values, etc.

We can distinguish several stages in the development of qualitative research methodology: the period of early classical research; the period of the formation of original traditions; the period of checking the foundations and paradigm of research; and the period of new systematization of methods, procedures, and standards (Denzin, Lincoln, 2009; Bocharova, Kamińska, 2022: 312–317). At an early stage in sociology, qualitative research complemented quantitative methods. Their purpose was the detailed

description and interpretation of the phenomena under study. Today, qualitative methods are a separate category. The 1960s saw the publication of a number of monographs, considered classic in the history of qualitative research. In the field of the sociology of art, both quantitative and qualitative approaches as well as mixed methods, are used. However, a statement can be made that there is a particular thematic specialization. Quantitative studies have predispositions to explore large-scale social entities and thus are applied to study audiences and vast sets of artworks to find some general patterns (Griswold, 1981). Since Bourdieu (1984), it is known that art reception demonstrates class character. Searching for common patterns and generalizing about large collectives encourages the use of statistics, sometimes supported by focus groups or in-depth interviews. The study of art and its creator needs a more nuanced approach. It can be a far echo of this individualistic, romantic discourse, but qualitative sociology seems to be more appropriate to the study of artists and their creations. A smaller number of cases that characterize qualitative research allows for a more thorough and scrupulous examination of a particular object. The 'digging in', sensitive, and meticulous perception of numerous patterns, variants, and cases of artwork and artists allows us to picture art worlds in all their glory.

Art has much to do with ambiguity; it often contains various layers of meaning, is saturated with symbols, and is open to various interpretations. Thus, interpretive, hermeneutical, and interactionist approaches often relate to art research. The symbolic interactionist perspective has dominated the field since the 1930s and, although somehow moved aside by postmodern and critical studies, still is one of the most important ways of understanding and investigating esthetic phenomena. It is significantly related to the study of social roles (Znaniecki, 1937; Becker, 2009), collective action, and social (art) worlds (Fine, 2004; Becker, 2008). Herbert Blumer's (2007) definition of symbolic interaction, through which social actors perceive and redefine particular objects according to their understanding and needs, seems promising in the sociological study of art. The aforementioned publications (except Znaniecki's analysis of the social role of artists based on historical data) use research techniques that are 'traditionally' connected to symbolic interactionism, i.e., participant observation and in-depth interviews, merging to various degrees into ethnography with their long-lasting fieldwork. It is difficult to tell how the analysis was conducted, but, as the authors discuss in various materials published in this period, it was probably analytic induction (Znaniecki, 2008; Becker, 2009). Thus, induction and abduction (Gell, 1998; Geertz, 2005) would be those ways of reasoning that are connected with qualitative social studies of art.

Symbolic interactionism is often connected with the grounded theory methodology and while it is difficult to note a particular example of a grounded theory of art, particular components of this methodology, such as several stages of coding and construction of theoretical categories, are applied to the studies in the field (e.g., Porczyński, Rozalska, 2021; Szenajch, 2022). This approach can be used in the study of social practice as well as particular art objects (books, music records, paintings, or handicrafts). In this case, hermeneutics as a method of 'reading' a cultural text and finding the meanings hidden behind it can also be applied, but it can also be used to interpret particular cases of reception (Zimnica, 1996). When it comes to the study of artists, biographical methods can be noted (Elias, Schröter, 2006; Szenajch, 2022). Proper contextualization of an individual in a particular historical

period and isolation of life trajectories need, once again, precision that only a qualitative approach can provide. It would not allow writing a life story of an average artist or building a statistically-correct model of the artist's life course, but it is still possible to indicate contexts, factors, and biographic structures that somehow influence his/her life decisions and creations. The research area of the sociology of art, along with the incessantly and rapidly changing reality, is constantly expanding. New phenomena provoke the search for new methods and tools, as well as modifications of those that we have had while conducting research so far. When examining social reality, we are now increasingly sensitive to the issues of gender inequality, sexual minorities, the shameful legacy of colonialism, as well as issues related to the natural environment and climate change.

The articles in this issue are characterized by the multitude of topics covered and the methodological diversity of research approaches within qualitative sociology. The leading topics of this issue include communities, artistic institutions, and space. They are the complex subjects of reflection in the social sciences and humanities (including the sociology of art). The issue presents research on the art museum, the artistic community within plein air painting, and the case study of "Pracownia." Artistic communities and institutions can be treated separately, but sometimes they function as hybrids. Describing common space, the authors focused on architecture. The young generation is described in the various articles as a community of attitudes, values, and expectations, but also as designers, users, and audiences. The issue starts with an article titled *The Future of Art Museums: Reflections on a Young Audience* by Przemysław Kisiel, which provides an extensive characteristic of young adults (early adults, persons aged 18–30, who belong to the adult segment of Generation Z). The author focuses on the way in which this audience segment perceives the institutions of art museums and what consequences this may have in the future for cultural institutions. Despite the changes that have taken place in museums over the last decades, young adults still seem to be a group whose needs are insufficiently noticed and considered when creating the offer. The author bases his considerations on qualitative research conducted among people studying in two Polish cities in 2023, but also refers to other similar studies. The empirical material was obtained in the form of free written statements of the respondents (essay, note, set of reflections, etc.) and a survey. The article ends with practical recommendations, the application of which may influence greater interest of young adults in the cultural offer proposed by museums.

Agata Sulikowska-Dejena in the article titled *A Plein Air Painting Event as a Liminal Experience Building the Artists' Community* tries to show the importance of plein air painting events for their participants that is overlooked by many researchers. In mainstream art, this formula has been replaced by a more modern model of artist-in-residence programs. For the author, plein air meeting is primarily a place and time for building an artistic community and bonds between the participants, which is achieved through joint, quasi-ritual activities. In her text, the author combines the perspectives of art history, sociology, and anthropology. At the theoretical level, she refers to Victor Turner and Arnold van Gennep. The described research process was organized according to the rules of grounded theory, and the data was obtained using in-depth interviews and participant observation. The article presents the results of research conducted among visual artists in the Podkarpackie voivodeship.

The text titled *More Than a Photograph: An Analysis of the Photographs of the Interdisciplinary Creative Research Center "Pracownia"* uses the six-moves methodology of arts-based research. Maja Dobiasz-Krysiak demonstrates the potential of arts-based research. She proposes an authorial typology of six movements (downward /two types/, upward, inward, along, and across) to describe and reflect on the activities of an art group and a specific cultural animation institution in Warmia. The author uses photography of "Pracownia" from the years 1978–1981 to present every point of the typology. Her article aims to demonstrate the usefulness of the methodology used to research alternative movements in cultural animation. Photographs, interviews, archival material, field search for traces of the past (buildings from photographs) – all these turn out to be sources for a fascinating description of a community of people and purpose. This applies to reflections on the aims and effects of cultural animation projects as well as their critical and research potential.

The next three articles are devoted to common space and architecture, which is less frequently studied from the point of view of art sociology (Wejbert-Wąsiewicz, Porczyński, Rozalska, 2021: 12). Two of them combine the themes of architecture and young adults. Each of them covers different problems and methods.

Dominik Porczyński's article titled *The Architecture of the Rzeszów Downtown from the Flâneur Perspective* concerns the phenomenon of architecture reception. The author undertakes the problem of the reconstruction of the process of the esthetic valorization of architecture. The analysis is limited to young adults, students in their early 1920s, and was conducted in the historical center of Rzeszów. In addition to materiality, historicity, symbolism, and functionality – which are usually discussed by researchers – the author broadens the spectrum of analysis to include the aspect of esthetics. A huge advantage of the article is the detailed description of the complex research procedure as well as the course of field research.

Magdalena Matysek-Imielińska in the paper titled *Francis Kéré: A Spokesperson of African Architecture? Modernism and Decolonization* analyzes the status of African, innovative architecture and one of its creator – Francis Kéré – in the hierarchies of the Western art world. The author wonders to what extent awarding him the Pritzker Architecture Prize heralds a necessary turn in contemporary architecture in times of climate crisis, and to what extent it could be just a patronizing gesture resulting from the feeling of Western superiority. To capture all the specific features of the context and the nuances in which the phenomena analyzed in the paper are embedded, she decided to use the case study method. The architectural prize, architecture biennial, the architectural press, and academic research in the field of architecture Matysek-Imielińska treats as discursive practices played out within architecture, and to study them, the author applies discourse analysis, which by using Jyoti Hosagrahar's categories of indigenous modernity provides a new research perspective.

Angelika Lasiewicz-Sych in the article titled *A Space of Choice: Exploring New Patterns of Common Student Spaces* discusses an especially important topic of design common and pro-social spaces that meet the needs of users in their programs. The introduction provides a comprehensive overview of the

literature in the field of social sciences and architecture, regarding the main challenges and problems in user-centred design. The author analyzes changes in the understanding of the concept of “user” and how it affects the design practice of contemporary architects. In the article one can find a detailed description of the process of designing space by and for the students at the Kraków University of Technology, in which design is also the production of knowledge drawing from the practical lived experiences of the group members and some contextual factors such as the history of place.

The five articles included in the issue were presented at the academic conference titled “Esthetic Communities and Artistic Institutions”, which took place in Lodz on 18th–19th May, 2023 (Faculty of Economics and Sociology, University of Lodz). The conference was organized by the Art Sociology Section of the Polish Sociological Association and this is a regular event dedicated to the Polish sociology of art.

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Cytowanie

Agata Sulikowska-Dejena, Dominik Porczyński, Ewelina Wejbert-Wąsiewicz (2024), *Looking at Arts Institutions, Communities, and Space: Reflections and Research from the Field of Art Sociology*, „Przegląd Socjologii Jakościowej”, t. XX, nr 3, s. 6–13, <https://doi.org/10.18778/1733-8069.20.3.01>

Patrząc na instytucje artystyczne, wspólnoty i przestrzeń. Refleksje i badania z pola socjologii sztuk

Abstrakt: W niniejszym wprowadzeniu do numeru czasopisma redaktorzy charakteryzują poszczególne artykuły naukowe zamieszczone w tomie. Przypominają także krótko zainteresowania naukowe na polu sztuki. Teksty zamieszczone w tomie dotyczą trzech wzajemnie przenikających się wymiarów: instytucji kultury i sztuki, wspólnot (artystycznych i estetycznych) oraz przestrzeni. Większość autorów prezentowała swoje badania na konferencji naukowej „Wspólnoty estetyczne i instytucje artystyczne” (2023), organizowanej przez Sekcję Socjologii Sztuki Polskiego Towarzystwa Socjologicznego. Polska współczesna socjologia sztuki to socjologia w głównej mierze empiryczna. Badania jakościowe na polu socjologii sztuki w Polsce były stosowane od lat sześćdziesiątych XX wieku. Początkowo traktowane były jako eksperymentalne, stopniowo przekształcając się w podejście coraz bardziej powszechne. Socjologowie najczęściej stosowali różnego rodzaju analizy jakościowe materiałów, wywiady. Te techniki nadal są często wykorzystywane przez badaczy, lecz możemy dostrzec również sięganie do innych metod, np. w ramach podejścia *art-based research* (tę orientację metodologiczną wykorzystano w jednym z artykułów).

Słowa kluczowe: badania jakościowe, socjologia sztuki, instytucje kultury, wspólnoty estetyczne, przestrzeń