

Park Sculpture in the Cultural Spaces of Ho Chi Minh City: Current Situation and Proposed Solutions

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Abstract

In the context of rapid urbanization and cultural integration, park sculpture has become an essential component in shaping urban aesthetics, enriching public cultural spaces, and enhancing the spiritual life of city dwellers. As Vietnam's largest economic, cultural, and scientific center, Ho Chi Minh City holds significant potential for the development of park sculpture systems that harmoniously connect art, public spaces, and local cultural identity. However, field surveys reveal that the number of sculptures in public parks remains limited, their distribution uneven, and in many cases, public parks lack artistic works altogether. Furthermore, the artistic quality of some sculptures is inconsistent, often failing to integrate with surrounding landscapes or to meet the aesthetic needs of the community. This article examines the current situation of park sculpture in cultural spaces across Ho Chi Minh City, identifying key limitations in planning, management, investment, and preservation. Based on these findings, it proposes practical solutions, including: developing long-term strategies for integrating park sculpture into sustainable urban planning; strengthening collaboration among authorities, artists, and communities; encouraging socialization and diversifying investment resources; and enhancing conservation and restoration of existing works. Implementing these solutions not only elevates the aesthetic and cultural value of public spaces in Ho Chi Minh City but also contributes to building an image of a modern, humane, and culturally rich metropolis.

Keywords: *Park sculpture; Public art; Cultural space; Ho Chi Minh City; Aesthetic value; Urban culture; Preservation and development*

Introduction

As the country continues to develop, Ho Chi Minh City has undergone significant changes in various aspects, including a strong development in sculpture parks to meet the aesthetic needs of the people. The transformation and development of park models require many factors, such as natural landscapes, spatial scale, park decoration styles, residents' aesthetic appreciation needs, residents' cognitive abilities, and artistic creativity. Only by establishing overall harmony can a modern park environment be created in line with current development trends. Parks are not just social issues; they represent life philosophies, living beliefs, visions, and social responsibilities of everyone.

Today, sculpture is becoming increasingly accessible to the general public, meeting people's aesthetic needs everywhere, anytime. From architectural sculpture to sculpture in daily life applications and even sculpture in public works, sculpture parks have become popular worldwide over the past decades. "A state or government is considered civilized when in constructing community living spaces, the absence of parks or parks not serving their intended purpose becomes an endless irony" (Huy, 2020, p.97). Given the urgent and necessary reasons for sculpture parks in the cultural space of Ho Chi Minh City, facing the challenges of cultural and spiritual enjoyment needs and the strong development of modern society, sculpture parks play a special role and function for urban residents in the current context. Types of sculpture parks must meet the needs of the people and be closely related to the lives of the people, gradually playing an increasingly important role in the cultural life of the people. Preserving and developing sculpture parks in the cultural space of Ho Chi Minh City requires systematic research, delving into the depths of cultural values through the art of sculpture, to propose appropriate development solutions based on the current reality. Many solutions have been proposed by government authorities, urban planners, architects, and sculptors to affirm the importance and social significance of sculpture parks. In this article, based on the presentation of the current situation and the development

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needs of sculpture parks, the author proposes some new solutions to contribute to the development of sculpture parks in the cultural space of Ho Chi Minh City today.

Literature Review

Public Art and Urban Cultural Spaces: International Perspectives. Public art, particularly in the form of park sculpture, has been widely discussed in the global academic community as a vital element in shaping urban identity and cultural expression. Scholars such as Miles (1997) emphasize that public art not only contributes to the beautification of the city but also acts as a medium for public dialogue and civic engagement. Similarly, Hein (2006) highlights that sculptures in urban public spaces enhance community interaction, embody collective memory, and foster cultural sustainability. The development of park sculptures has also been linked with urban regeneration. Zebracki (2013) notes that the integration of sculpture into public parks and squares provides a sense of place, reinforces cultural heritage, and improves urban liveability. In cities such as New York, London, and Barcelona, sculptures are strategically installed to create cultural landmarks, attract tourism, and stimulate local economies (Sharp et al., 2005).

From a policy perspective, public art is often positioned as a tool for promoting cultural diversity and inclusiveness. Cartiere and Willis (2008) argue that sculptures in parks serve as democratic art forms accessible to all citizens, contributing to social cohesion and cultural democratization. The emphasis on participatory approaches, where local communities are engaged in the conceptualization and placement of sculptures, is another trend observed in international practice (Phillips, 2003).

Park Sculpture in Asian Urban Contexts. In Asia, research highlights both the opportunities and challenges of integrating sculpture into public parks. In China, Xu and Yeh (2005) examine how large-scale urban sculpture projects reflect national modernization goals while also raising debates about cultural authenticity. Similarly, in Japan, park sculptures are closely linked with the philosophy of “public aesthetics,” emphasizing harmony between nature, art, and community well-being (Kurokawa, 2001). Recent studies in Southeast Asia suggest a growing awareness of sculpture as part of urban cultural policy. For instance, Singapore has systematically promoted public art in parks through the National Arts Council’s initiatives, framing sculptures as a means of cultural branding and tourism development (Kong, 2012). In Thailand, research by Chantanaphan (2018) demonstrates that park sculptures enhance civic identity while simultaneously facing sustainability challenges due to urban expansion and limited conservation strategies.

Vietnamese Research on Public Art and Park Sculpture. In Vietnam, scholarship on public art remains relatively limited, though there has been increasing interest in the relationship between sculpture, cultural identity, and urban development. Vietnamese researchers often emphasize the symbolic function of sculpture in representing national history and revolutionary values. According to Tien (2015), public sculptures in Vietnam serve as collective monuments that connect communities with shared historical narratives.

At the same time, scholars such as Duong (2012) highlight the growing gap between the demand for aesthetic enrichment of urban spaces and the actual distribution of sculptures in parks. In particular, Ho Chi Minh City has been identified as lacking a systematic policy for integrating sculpture into public spaces. Existing sculptures are unevenly distributed, concentrated mainly in central parks, and often limited in terms of artistic diversity and contemporary expression.

Moreover, the challenges of preservation and maintenance are significant. Đỗ (2020) notes that weather conditions, urban pollution, and insufficient conservation strategies threaten the longevity of park sculptures in Vietnamese cities. This indicates an urgent need for comprehensive planning and interdisciplinary cooperation between artists, urban planners, and policymakers.

Research Gap and Contribution of the Study. The literature review shows that while international scholarship has extensively analyzed public art as a tool for cultural engagement, identity formation, and urban regeneration, Vietnamese research is still in its early stages, with a predominant focus on historical and symbolic functions of sculpture. Few studies have systematically examined the role of park sculpture in enhancing cultural space and urban aesthetics in Ho Chi Minh City. This study contributes to filling that gap by providing a comprehensive analysis of the current state of park sculpture in the city, assessing its distribution, artistic value, and cultural significance. It also proposes practical solutions for preservation and development, aligning with international practices while taking into account local socio-cultural conditions. By situating Ho Chi Minh City’s case within the broader

discourse of public art and urban cultural space, this research not only addresses a local issue but also contributes to the global conversation on sustainable cultural urbanism.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research approach, combining document analysis, case study methods, and field observations to provide a comprehensive understanding of park sculpture in the urban cultural space of Ho Chi Minh City. The methodology is designed to capture both theoretical insights and practical realities, ensuring a balanced perspective between international literature and domestic contexts.

Literature Review and Document Analysis. The research begins with a systematic review of international and domestic literature on public art, urban cultural spaces, and park sculpture. Sources include peer-reviewed journal articles, books, conference proceedings, and policy documents published between 1990 and 2025. Databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar were used to access international works, while Vietnamese journals, theses, and official reports from cultural authorities provided local insights. The purpose of this stage is to identify theoretical frameworks, research gaps, and comparative perspectives between global trends and the Vietnamese context.

Case Studies in Ho Chi Minh City. Selected case studies of park sculptures in Ho Chi Minh City were analyzed to illustrate the interaction between public art and urban cultural development. Criteria for case selection included historical significance, aesthetic value, cultural symbolism, and community engagement. Representative sites such as Tao Đàn Park, 23/9 Park, and urban cultural squares were examined in detail.

Field Observations and Expert Interviews: Field visits were conducted to document the current state of park sculptures, focusing on their artistic form, maintenance, spatial arrangement, and social usage. In addition, semi-structured interviews were carried out with sculptors, urban planners, cultural managers, and residents. This step provided diverse perspectives on the role of public sculpture in fostering cultural identity and enhancing community life.

Comparative and Analytical Approach. The findings from literature, case studies, and fieldwork were compared systematically to highlight similarities and differences between international experiences and the domestic situation. This comparative analysis allowed the study to draw implications and propose context-specific solutions for the preservation and development of park sculpture in Ho Chi Minh City.

Through this mixed qualitative approach, the study seeks to not only document the current state of park sculpture in Ho Chi Minh City but also position it within broader debates on urban cultural space and sustainable cultural development.

Results and Discussion

Current Situation of Sculpture Parks in the Cultural Space of Ho Chi Minh City

The number of sculpture parks within the cultural space of Ho Chi Minh City remains insufficient, and they are not receiving adequate investment in line with the current societal development. Many parks have very few sculpture pieces, and some parks lack sculptures altogether, such as 30 April Park, 23 September Park, Ben Bach Dang Park, Le Thi Rieng Park, and Gia Dinh Park. Conversely, some parks are overly crowded with sculptures, like Tao Dan Park, which houses around 40 sculptures scattered without a coherent theme, most of which are deteriorating. Many parks are not receiving the proper attention, leading to wastefulness. Meanwhile, in other areas such as districts and Thu Duc City, with dense populations, there is insufficient land allocated for park development. "There are park projects that have been planned for decades but still haven't been realized. Many 'golden' land plots designated for parks have not been utilized effectively, resulting in wastefulness without accountability" (Tien, 2015, p. 5). Some large parks located in prime areas of the city are deteriorating due to neglect. With the current population growth rate in the city, the number of parks is insufficient to meet the needs of the people. The commercialization or neglect of parks has made the need for parks in cities more urgent than ever. Despite the increasing population density in large cities, the land allocated for public park construction still fails to keep up with the overall city development pace. Currently, Ho Chi Minh City, with one of the highest population densities in the country, still falls short of the green space standard for Type 1 urban areas, which should ideally provide 6-7 square meters of park space per person, remaining at a significantly lower level. "In response to the urgent need to increase green

coverage, Ho Chi Minh City has planned over 11,000 hectares for parks, equivalent to 7 square meters of parkland per person" (Hai, 2023, p. 4).

Sculpture in parks represents a desire for the cultural and spiritual enjoyment of the working people. Sculptural works play a crucial role in shaping and enhancing the aesthetic space of parks and urban cultural spaces. To achieve this, sculptures need to incorporate several elements: appropriate themes, well-structured compositions, artistic language, material techniques, etc. All these factors combined create sculptures of high artistic value, serving the artistic appreciation needs of the people. There are numerous themes in park sculpture, but careful consideration and calculation are required to determine which themes are suitable for each type of park. Each park type has different requirements regarding themes and expression methods in sculptural works. Sculptures must align with the park type and cultural space before creation. Sculpture in park spaces is a form of public communication art that significantly impacts urban architectural spaces, aesthetic preferences, and the aesthetic level of the community living there. "In Vietnam, outdoor sculpture has long been silent in urban architectural planning. It can be said that we have not valued or lacked confidence in affirming the value of outdoor sculpture in modern social life" (Huy, 2020, p. 80).

Amidst the harsh environmental changes like rain, sun, wind, storms, and humidity, sculptures aiming for sustainable existence require highly durable materials. Material selection in sculpture is crucial as it influences the aesthetic values that the artwork can convey. It involves the cohesion of space, material, and composition to create aesthetically pleasing works that resonate with the space and withstand time. A sculpture achieves high aesthetic values when the artist understands the relationship between space, material, and composition within the public cultural environment, especially when presenting the artwork to the public. Typical and common materials such as stone, baked clay, bronze, iron, and stainless steel are often used.

Moreover, park sculpture projects in the cultural space of Ho Chi Minh City are not only intended to beautify public cultural spaces but also serve as places of concern, remembrance, and gratitude towards those who have contributed to the nation. They also serve as symbols of a city or region. Sculptural works are not just historical landmarks or urban park decorations; they also reflect the aesthetic and aesthetic appreciation needs of the local population, helping to enhance the aesthetic and cultural awareness of the residents.

The demand for developing sculpture parks in the cultural space of Ho Chi Minh City

The inclusion of sculptures within the cultural fabric of a city holds the promise of transforming its urban landscape into a vibrant tapestry of artistic expression. Yet, across our nation and specifically in Ho Chi Minh City, this potential remains largely untapped. The dearth of sculptures within our urban centers deprives them of unique focal points that could serve to define and distinguish each locality within the broader urban cultural sphere. Ho Chi Minh City, in particular, grapples with a glaring lack of attention towards its sculptural heritage, leaving it neglected and underappreciated.

The current state of sculptural affairs in Ho Chi Minh City reflects this negligence, with insufficient investment and sporadic development resulting in haphazardly scattered sculptures that fail to coalesce into a cohesive narrative. These sculptures, often devoid of a unifying aesthetic, stand as disjointed artifacts rather than integrated elements of the urban landscape. In light of the rapid evolution of urban architecture, there emerges an urgent imperative to infuse our cityscapes with the beauty and majesty of sculptural art. Whether adorning the interiors of homes, gracing public gardens, or punctuating the serene ambiance of parks and schools, statues and reliefs have the potential to imbue our surroundings with a sense of cultural richness and aesthetic delight.

Moreover, sculptural art serves as a powerful medium for the preservation and celebration of our national identity. By infusing traditional sculptural forms with innovative techniques and contemporary themes, artists breathe new life into age-old traditions, ensuring their relevance and resonance in a modern context. In doing so, they not only pay homage to our artistic heritage but also propel it forward into the global arena.

Therefore, the development of sculpture parks represents not merely a pursuit of aesthetic enhancement but a concerted effort to reclaim and revitalize our urban spaces. It is an opportunity to celebrate the legacy of our cultural heritage while embracing the dynamism of contemporary artistic expression. By investing in the proliferation of sculptures throughout our cities, we lay the groundwork for a more vibrant and culturally enriched urban environment, one that resonates with the spirit of creativity and innovation.

Developing Sculpture Parks in Cultural Spaces in Ho Chi Minh City

Vietnamese sculpture currently struggles to engage with the public. One of the reasons is that the artistic and practical values have not been widely disseminated within the community. Sculptural works have not received enough attention and investment to bring them closer to the public and art enthusiasts. In fact, in living spaces, the space for sculptural works is still unfamiliar to the public. Many statue projects and sculpture gardens from sculpture camps, as well as sculptural works from exhibitions, are often forgotten, failing to fulfill their role in educating the public about aesthetics. There needs to be a management mechanism and direction for the development of sculpture decoration in parks. There should be a harmonious combination of sculpture art, architecture, and greenery decoration to create rhythm in the urban cultural space.

The scarcity of materials, limited space in the environment, the habit of manual craft decoration, and small-scale production have deeply permeated the cultural essence, shaping perspectives, making Vietnamese sculptors almost lacking in knowledge, experience, and aesthetic sensibility about outdoor sculpture. The ideas in the works lack typical abstraction, the scale of the works is not suitable for the space they occupy, the spatial planning for placing the works is not scientific, and there is a lack of interdisciplinary collaboration in park construction. "Outdoor sculpture works will be more beautiful if placed in the right space, thereby enhancing the beauty of the environment, landscape, and living space" (Tien, 2015, p. 80-81).

To address this situation, it's not something that can be resolved overnight; it requires a sufficiently long time for change and synchronized development of the cultural and aesthetic environment of individuals and society.

Appropriate urban space planning and land use planning by the city should ensure standards, regulations, and values that enhance urban aesthetics and environment, while considering the characteristics of each locality. Developing sculpture parks must be in line with the different stages of social development and the evolution of global art, ensuring feasibility and meeting the increasing social demand for sculpture parks. Enhancing planning, improving the aesthetic quality of artworks, and establishing and refining legal frameworks are necessary to ensure the essential role of sculpture parks. Organizing creative workshops in localities or enhancing the artistic activities of art associations locally can contribute significantly. Investments should focus on gradually improving the uneven distribution of sculpture park works among parks in the city, particularly through linking city outdoor sculpture exhibitions with sculpture park creation competitions.

Maximizing urban space for the development of public sculpture park works is crucial. Diversifying themes, styles, and materials and inviting international sculptors to participate can enrich the variety of beautiful sculptures.

In the current city development process, urban planners and architects have begun to pay more attention to the cultural space for sculpture parks in parks. Sculpture parks have tirelessly sought and expressed beauty in life through various themes, materials, and styles. Despite modern or traditional changes, artists carry with them a creative value and dedication from each period they go through in a process of contemplation, nurturing, and expressing those sentiments through sculptural language.

In planning, there should be a direction for the development of sculpture parks within the cultural space of Ho Chi Minh City in the future, hoping for more coordination among departments such as the Department of Culture and Information, Art Association, Architects Association, etc., to play a major role in directing the development and preservation of sculpture parks.

Managing the development of sculpture parks within the cultural space requires tight coordination between urban planning and sculptural artistic planning, as well as enhancing the quality of professional sculptor teams through training. Because "Environmental art is always a symbiotic factor in the overall integration of fields: planning, architecture, sculpture, decoration, transportation, lighting, greenery..." (Duong, 2012, p.19).

There should be plans to build a reserve of quality sculpture works to be placed in modern park projects. This attention will drive the development of sculpture parks in Ho Chi Minh City, creating more artistic and cultural spaces that truly reflect the cultural essence of the region, worthy of being a cultural and artistic center of the Southeast region, rich in national identity, and commensurate with the overall cultural and economic development of the country.

Conclusion

Sculpture parks within the cultural space of Ho Chi Minh City have undergone fluctuating developments throughout the country's history, yet they have retained the unique characteristics of sculptural art and demonstrated their role in each stage of the city's development. Despite remaining modest in quantity and facing spatial limitations, they still showcase aesthetic functions and the distinctive cultural essence of the city. During the development process of sculpture parks within the cultural space of Ho Chi Minh City, there is still an element of spontaneity, thus not fully meeting the requirements of high artistic standards. They have not yet achieved the aesthetic values of sculptural language or demonstrated their role in aesthetic education and the enhancement of aesthetic appreciation in people's spiritual lives. Sculpture parks within the cultural space need to integrate with urban architects to design comprehensive and harmonious plans between sculpture and architecture. Parks are lacking the presence of high-quality artistic works, especially sculptures of high artistic merit. To enhance the artistic value of parks in Ho Chi Minh City, the following solutions are necessary: improving the management policies of state agencies regarding urban planning and development in the city; organizing exhibitions and exchanges with major art scenes worldwide; enhancing the quality of professional teams to create artworks of high artistic value; integrating scientific and technical knowledge into the process of creating modern sculptures in park environments. If these steps are taken, then in the future, there will be sculptural works of artistic value that meet the aesthetic needs of the people in Ho Chi Minh City, worthy of the country's development journey.

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