

UN CULTURAL RIGHTS AND PUBLIC SPACES

Submitted

By

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According to The Sindh Local Government Bill, 2013 “public place” means any building, premises or place to which the public have access. In Pakistan the definition of public spaces include parks, beaches, and government owned libraries. This definition has not matured with time to include budding urban spaces including creative spaces, educational spaces and art galleries as they are serving the same purpose according the definition in the bill. The scope of public spaces or creative spaces to be exact has grown exponentially in Karachi alone in the last 5 years. As more private owned creative/public spaces are establishing themselves as free and accessible to one and all to discuss and practice culture and art related discussions, workshops and innovation projects to raise awareness among people regarding creative spaces in Karachi.

Article: 26 Non-discrimination in 1973 Constitution in Pakistan states that in respect of access to public places, Non-discrimination in respect of access to public places.-(1) In respect of access to places of public entertainment or resort, not intended for religious purposes only, there shall be no discrimination against any citizen on the ground only of race, religion, caste, sex, residence or

place of birth.(2) Nothing in clause (1) shall prevent the State from making any special provision for women and children.

In Pakistan the word *Mela* is used for all sizes of gatherings and can be religious, commercial, cultural or sport-related. In rural traditions melas or village fairs were (and in some cases still are) of great importance. They were seen as a public space to provide entertainment to masses while this idea translated progressively in major cities like Karachi in the form of creative spaces.

The very first privately owned space established as *The Second Floor in Karachi (T2F)* in 2007 and since then it became synonymous with film screenings, open dialogue on culture and women role in society. Founded by Sabeen Mehmood to provide an open and safe space to enhance the cultural landscape of Karachi.

T2F laid foundation and concepts for private stakeholders in community and art to start creative spaces in Karachi as well Lahore. In 2019 there are more than 10 creative spaces are now working alone in Karachi. A key positive aspect is that out of 10 spaces 3 were started by women and a positive change has been observed since the inception of these places, as more women artists, especially women stand up comedians are making waves in entertainment circle across Pakistan which was unheard of, just 3 years ago. Facebook and social media have played an integral part in the growth of these spaces to outreach people across Pakistan especially youth. Facebook being used by nearly 204,596,442 users in the country, with an Internet penetration of 21.8 % in Pakistan. Facebook has provided virtual creative spaces for Pakistani artists

to surpass the barriers of censorship and to raise their voices against social issues through contemporary art forms.

From virtual spaces to these physical creative spaces the ideas and aspirations are pretty much same. It is welcoming to see youth, which are now actively participating in talks on art and culture without discriminating on the basis of gender, religion or ethnicity. These spaces have revived the cultural scene of Karachi & Lahore, which lack spaces to encourage progressive ideas and talks about culture, media and society. These spaces have bloomed into well known public exhibit places with easy accessibility to all and sundry without discrimination on the basis of age, religion or ethnicity. For a city like Karachi with nearly 2500 ethnic communities, these cultural spaces are Godsend for emerging artists with contemporary art approach on regular basis and some of the events have an entry fee which people are glad to pay. Hence providing a platform to start a financial stable career in arts and media for the newcomers.

Government of Pakistan has passed the 18th amendment bill, empowering provinces with the rights to make cultural policy to the provincial government. Yet a concrete and progressive policy that would recognize and include these Creative spaces as a part of progressive cultural landscape is missing. The other side of the coin is the assumption that in a way these creative spaces avoid being funded by the government to maintain their freedom of speech & expression. In absence of a national cultural policy, which dictates the definition of, what is acceptable in terms of media and art is debatable in Pakistan. In 71 years history of the country a singular cultural policy cannot be

produced as each democracy and dictatorship brought different rules, ideas and restrictions about Pakistani culture. In Creative spaces case if government provide funds, it would surely come with restriction on what not to discuss. This would diminish the concept and soul for a creative space as it encourages freedom of speech and expression in terms of diversity, taboos in society and equal rights of all genders. These spaces operate mostly on ticket sales with each having different policy and regulations. Their focus is mostly to advocate and promote creative content produced in Pakistan. Like Starz Club in Karachi which houses portraits and stories of famous Pakistani film stars and musicians who visited the place in 1950s. They also have a recording studio provided free of charge to upcoming singers and musicians. In-house cafes supplement their income to make them sustained in absence of government aid.

In terms of diversity, access and openness, these spaces are doing a commendable job in their present resources. Highlighting human rights, gender balance in creative arts and public rights to leisure activities. Yet they want and need to renovate virtually on social media and physically in terms of space to maximize their housing capabilities for visitors and audiences. These are the recommendation that should be looked into for Creative Spaces, which can be utilize to

- Encourage Artists from minorities, activists and bloggers can be reached through these spaces and could be asked to share their experiences with youth.
- Create a unified cultural policy to adapt as framework for running these spaces and to collaborate with international artists to introduce environment

friendly art projects.

- How other urban spaces can be transformed in mini cultural hubs in different parts of the city to ensure diversity. To add youth voices with equal participation from women and LGBT community through collaborating with universities in major cities in Pakistan.
- To create a Creative hub kit by the government which would allow creative sector especially youth to set up these creative spaces in their city to promote and highlight culture & arts from their communities and to aid their establishment in major cities across Pakistan.

In the present scenario of cultural spaces and public rights the private sector of Pakistan is growing in a progressive direction which can effectively be maximized with the recognition, proper framework and financial aid by the government to provide easy access to these creative hubs which is a basic cultural right to all and sundry in the Pakistan.