European Research Studies Journal
Volume XXVIII, Issue 3, 2025

pp. 591-614

Responsive Public Spaces and the Economics of Experience: Interactive Architecture in the Age of Urban Digitalization

Submitted 23/05/25, 1st revision 05/06/25, 2nd revision 20/06/25, accepted 20/08/25

Anna Pazdur-Czarnowska[1]

Abstract:

Purpose: *This paper investigates how interactive architectural installations in public urban spaces function as components of the experience economy, with a particular focus on their economic, spatial, and symbolic roles within contemporary cities.*
Approach/Methodology/Design: *The study applies a comparative matrix analysis to fifteen interactive public space projects realized between 2020 and 2025. Each case is evaluated across eight parameters, including technological complexity, civic function, symbolic messaging, infrastructural role, and economic activation. The research integrates architectural theory, urban studies, and cultural economics to interpret the findings.*
Findings: *Results indicate that interactive installations are increasingly aligned with urban soft infrastructure, offering benefits such as civic engagement, placemaking, and tourism stimulation. Projects with stronger symbolic or ecological narratives showed higher public memorability and branding potential. Technological sophistication correlated with infrastructural value, while spatial integration influenced long-term civic relevance.*
Practical Implications: *The findings support the inclusion of responsive design strategies in urban planning and policy, particularly in contexts focused on creative economy development, tourism, and sustainable public space innovation.*
Originality/Value: *This study provides one of the first systematic typologies of post-2020 interactive public installations from an economic and spatial perspective. It contributes new insights into how digital architecture interfaces with urban economies and civic culture in the context of rapid urban digitalization.*

Keywords: *Interactive Architecture, Urban Public Space, Experience Economy, Soft Infrastructure, Digital Placemaking, Symbolic Capital.*

JEL codes: *P25, Z10, Z32.*

Paper type: *Reaserch article.*

[1]*Dr., West Pomeranian University of Technology in Szczecin, Poland,*
e-mail: Anna.Pazdur-Czarnowska@zut.edu.pl;

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, cities worldwide have embraced technological transformation not only in governance and mobility, but also in the design of public space. The rise of smart cities has coincided with the development of interactive architecture—built environments equipped with digital systems that respond to human presence, gesture, or behavior.

These projects range from sensor-activated pavilions to AI-driven urban sculptures, and are increasingly visible in plazas, parks, and interstitial civic spaces. Yet despite their growing visibility and public appeal, such installations are often overlooked in urban economics, infrastructure policy, and planning discourse.

This article positions interactive public architecture as a form of *soft infrastructure*: a non-structural yet experience-shaping system embedded in the urban environment (Marciszewska and Wanagos, 2024).

Through light, sound, movement, and data feedback, these installations foster new forms of social engagement, placemaking, and urban branding. Their ability to animate public space and invite embodied participation suggests broader value for the experience economy, civic connectivity, and digital transformation of urban life.

While scholarship on smart cities has addressed data-driven governance and infrastructure, less attention has been paid to the symbolic, affective, and participatory qualities of digital public installations. Likewise, urban economic studies tend to emphasize built development or mobility over cultural and sensory interventions. This study seeks to bridge that gap by exploring how responsive public architecture can function as both cultural expression and infrastructure asset—enhancing urban vibrancy, attracting tourism, and promoting civic identity (Czaplinska, 2025).

The article presents a comparative analysis of ten recent international installations (2020–2025) that use human–computer interaction in urban outdoor settings. Through a matrix of technical, spatial, civic, symbolic, and economic parameters, the study argues that interactive architecture contributes to a digitally-enhanced public realm, and should be considered part of broader urban development strategy.

- Context: Rise of smart cities, digital placemaking, and human-centered urban design.
- Research problem: Interactive architecture often excluded from economic or urban policy discourse.
- Objective: To analyze interactive architectural installations as enablers of urban experience economies and civic innovation.
- Scope: Comparative, qualitative analysis of recent global examples.

2. Literature Review

The development of interactive architecture within public space is rooted in a diverse and interdisciplinary literature spanning architecture, human–computer interaction (HCI), media studies, urban sociology, and economic geography. These fields converge around a growing interest in how responsive environments shape urban experience, public participation, and economic vibrancy.

Early explorations into responsive environments focused on dynamic building façades and performative technologies. Bullivant (2006) and Haeusler (2009) offered foundational overviews of media architecture, cataloguing the use of embedded sensors, programmable lighting, and kinetic surfaces to create environments that react to external stimuli. Their works framed responsive architecture primarily through a technological and aesthetic lens. More recent analyses shift focus toward civic utility, temporality, and user interaction.

Meagher (2015; 2022) explores interactive public space as a form of participatory urbanism, emphasizing how media installations can activate democratic engagement and disrupt normative spatial use. Similarly, Lozano-Hemmer, both as a practitioner and theorist, advocates for "relational architecture"—works that invite urban dwellers to become co-authors in shaping the spatial and sensory dynamics of a city.

In parallel, scholarship in digital urbanism and smart city theory has introduced broader frameworks for understanding interactive public architecture. Townsend (2013) argues that smart city initiatives must go beyond data optimization to include participatory and affective dimensions. Karvonen, Cugurullo and Caprotti (2019) support this by examining how smart technologies can be appropriated at street level to support localized creativity, inclusion, and urban innovation.

From an ecological and infrastructural standpoint, Gissen (2014) and Mostafavi and Doherty (2010) offer relevant critiques. They argue that built environments should no longer be static or consumption-driven, but rather operate as adaptive, sensor-rich systems responsive to environmental inputs. This aligns with ideas of ecological urbanism that consider responsive architecture part of climate-resilient infrastructure. Similarly, the notion of "smart urban natures" (Gabrys, 2016) supports the idea that responsive urban technologies can engage environmental data in ways that alter urban ecological awareness.

Economically, the relevance of interactive urban installations can be interpreted through the lens of the experience economy as defined by Pine and Gilmore (1999). Their work has been extended by urban theorists such as Richards and Palmer (2012) and Naylon and Florida (2003), who link cultural infrastructure and interactive environments to city branding, creative industries, and tourism economies. These authors collectively underscore the transition from product-oriented urban economies to experience-rich, participatory, and symbolic economies.

Complementing this is recent work on urban soft infrastructure, which shifts the conversation from hard, material networks (roads, utilities) to non-physical systems that support social, cultural, and emotional life. Scholars like Amin and Thrift (2013) argue that atmospheres, rhythms, and digitally mediated presences constitute critical but often invisible components of contemporary urbanism.

Despite this growing body of literature, relatively few studies have conducted comparative analyses of interactive architectural interventions as infrastructural and economic assets. This article addresses that gap by synthesizing contributions from media architecture, urban studies, and creative economy literature to offer a multidimensional framework for analyzing interactive public installations.

Specifically, it posits that these installations function as a form of "soft infrastructure," contributing to the experiential economy and fostering civic engagement in ways not captured by traditional urban planning or economic development frameworks (Chew, Loke and Hespanhol, 2020).

Despite these advances, few studies explicitly bridge interactive media architecture with urban economic outcomes. This article contributes to that gap by offering a structured comparison of recent installations as case studies in soft infrastructure—highlighting their symbolic, experiential, and urban activation capacities within the broader shift toward digital urbanization.

3. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framing of this article integrates four interrelated concepts: soft infrastructure, the experience economy, digital transformation of public space, and symbolic capital. Together, these constructs form a lens through which interactive public architecture can be understood not just as technological or artistic artifacts, but as civic tools embedded in broader urban processes.

Soft Infrastructure: Traditionally, infrastructure refers to the physical systems enabling cities to function—roads, water, energy, and communications. However, contemporary urban theory has broadened this definition to include "soft infrastructure," which encompasses the non-physical, often symbolic or experiential systems that underpin civic life (Amin and Thrift, 2017). These include cultural institutions, social networks, and increasingly, interactive digital systems. Installations such as *DUNE* or *Voxel Bridge* exemplify soft infrastructure by shaping atmosphere, engagement, and symbolic meaning without adding built volume. They support a digitally mediated urbanism in which responsiveness is as important as permanence.

The Experience Economy: As outlined by Pine and Gilmore (1999), the shift from service- to experience-based economies has redefined how urban environments generate value. Cities now compete on the basis of cultural vibrancy, uniqueness of

place, and emotional resonance. Interactive installations function within this logic, delivering immersive and often memorable experiences that enhance public space, attract tourism, and promote branding. Richards and Palmer (2010) further argue that cities must produce not just content, but context—interactive architecture becomes one such contextual producer.

Digital Transformation of Public Space: The smart city discourse has predominantly centered on data efficiency, surveillance, and mobility systems (Townsend, 2013). Yet an emerging counter-narrative emphasizes the embodied and affective dimensions of digitally transformed urban environments. Karvonen *et al.* (2018) and Gabrys (2016) advocate for hybrid models where public space becomes a site of interaction between data, environment, and human behavior. Interactive architecture plays a key role here: it visualizes hidden data systems, invites participation, and reflects collective presence.

Symbolic Capital and Civic Presence: Finally, interactive installations contribute to the accumulation of symbolic capital in cities (Bourdieu, 1986). Much like monuments, they represent a city's values, aspirations, and cultural currency. Unlike static statues, however, they are temporal, participatory, and often ephemeral—signalling a more dynamic form of civic identity. Their value lies not only in their form but in their capacity to host and reflect interaction.

These theoretical anchors establish interactive architecture as more than aesthetic novelty. It is a vehicle for digital placemaking, participatory engagement, and infrastructural imagination—serving not only the senses, but the strategic and symbolic needs of 21st-century cities.

4. Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study methodology to explore how interactive architectural installations function as soft infrastructure within public urban environments. The selected installations, developed and deployed between 2020 and 2025, were chosen based on three main criteria: (1) they were situated outdoors in urban centers (e.g., plazas, pedestrian corridors); (2) they included human–computer interaction as a primary mechanism; and (3) they were publicly documented through scholarly, media, or institutional sources.

The methodology is grounded in secondary source analysis. This includes project documentation (when available from designers or commissioning bodies), academic commentary, published interviews, press releases, and curatorial texts. These sources provided insight into the design intent, technological configuration, urban integration, and perceived public value of each installation. In addition, publicly available photos, videos, and user commentary were consulted to understand spatial behavior, media reception, and civic engagement.

The analysis follows a comparative framework based on key analytical parameters derived from the literature: interaction type, technological complexity, spatial setup, civic function, symbolic narrative, infrastructure potential, economic activation potential, and environmental messaging. Each case was then mapped against this matrix to draw typological patterns and thematic distinctions.

This research does not involve primary fieldwork or ethnographic observation, and its findings are interpretive rather than empirical. As such, the article is best understood as a contribution to conceptual and theoretical development in the intersection of urban studies, digital architecture, and infrastructure theory. However, this approach allows for a broad survey of diverse global examples, identifying overarching trends and proposing a novel classification framework for these emergent urban interventions (Fischer and Hornecker, 2012).

4.1 Interactive Public Architecture and the Urban Experience Economy: Economic Perspectives

The emergence of interactive architectural installations in public space is not only a cultural and technological phenomenon but also a growing economic strategy within urban development. In the context of the shift to experience-based economies, cities increasingly position themselves as platforms for symbolic production, participatory consumption, and emotional engagement (Pine and Gilmore, 1999). Interactive public installations—characterized by responsive systems, sensory interfaces, and digital interactivity—contribute to economic vitality through three principal channels: placemaking, tourism and branding, and symbolic capital accumulation.

From the perspective of placemaking and regeneration, interactive installations animate underutilized urban spaces, transforming them into attractive civic destinations. Scholars demonstrate that such installations can increase footfall and influence adjacent commercial activity via spatial reprogramming and user engagement (Montgomery, 2003; Gehl, 2011). Thus, responsive architecture acts as a form of non-extractive soft infrastructure, capable of reenergizing neighbourhoods in post-industrial contexts (Lee, Ostwald and Kim, 2021).

In terms of tourism and urban branding, interactive public spaces enhance city identity and experiential appeal. As cities compete globally to attract visitors and talent, immersive and visually engaging installations support cultural tourism strategies and reinforce urban distinctiveness (Lorentzen, 2009). Empirical studies demonstrate that such interventions can improve place image and correlate with visitor retention and local spending (Dinnie, 2010; Tham, Croy and Mair, 2013).

Viewed through the lens of symbolic capital and civic economy, interactive public spaces serve as urban signals of innovation, inclusivity, and cultural sophistication. Drawing on Bourdieu's concept of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1986), these installations function as intangible assets that contribute to territorial

competitiveness, especially for mid-size European cities aiming to elevate their profiles within global innovation ecosystems (Hospers, 2003; Musterd and Kovács, 2013).

A study published in *European Research Studies Journal—"Development of Tourism Products and the Concept of Experience Economy"* (ERSJ 2024, Vol. XXVII Issue 2)—argues that experiential tourism products are key drivers of value creation and local economic strategy. Its authors emphasize that cities leveraging emotional and sensory dimensions in tourism design can stimulate visitor engagement and participate effectively in the global experience economy.

This perspective aligns with the understanding that place identity, quality products, and urban regeneration are intrinsically linked to a city's capacity to offer unique, engaging experiences (Sepe and Pitt, 2017).

Though economic effects are often indirect, research indicates that interactive environments can increase dwell time, engagement, and commercial adjacency effects (Wrigley and Dolega, 2011). These insights support the integration of interactive architecture into policy frameworks for cultural planning, urban innovation, and tourism development.

Overall, interactive public architecture should be recognized as strategic civic infrastructure—not peripheral spectacle—and incorporated into urban policy as a tool for economic activation, city branding, and civic innovation. Furthermore, the co-creation of value through interactive installations fosters a deeper connection between citizens and their urban environment, turning passive consumers into active participants in the urban experience (Jung and Dieck, 2017).

4.2 Case Studies

Each of the ten selected case studies highlights a unique intersection of human–computer interaction, public space design, and digital responsiveness. They are described below to reveal the diversity of design strategies and urban roles played by such installations.

Portal (NYC – Dublin). Situated in the core of two major metropolitan centers, Portal establishes a real-time audiovisual connection between New York City and Dublin. Conceived by Lithuanian artist Benediktas Gylys, the installation features a large, circular screen enabling pedestrians to observe and interact with individuals in the corresponding city. This symbolic representation of cross-cultural discourse and embodied telepresence facilitates diplomacy and fosters human empathy within the digital public sphere.

DUNE (Studio Roosegaarde). Installed in multiple urban corridors globally, it comprises thousands of interactive fiber-optic rods that respond dynamically to

pedestrian movement and ambient sound. This installation cultivates a tactile and immersive lightscape, transforming pedestrian pathways into sensory experiences and exemplifying how public infrastructure can simultaneously function as environmental art, engaging with urban ecology and promoting energy awareness.

The Eye of Mexico. Unveiled in 2022 within the Polanco neighborhood of Mexico City, this AI-driven sculpture articulates urban data through real-time dynamic visualizations. Developed by GM Studio with support from Grupo Danhos, it underscores technology's interpretive capacity to reflect a city's operational characteristics back to its populace, thereby integrating aesthetics with civic intelligence.

Musical Pavement Series. Across various global metropolises, these tactile auditory installations, developed by Daily tous les jours, transform public plazas into interactive musical instruments. Activated by pedestrian movement or ambient shadows, the integrated pavement tiles generate harmonious sonic outputs, thereby fostering playful and collective user engagement. These installations effectively gamify quotidian locomotion and promote inclusive interactivity through the judicious application of minimal technological components.

Point of Action (Flatiron Plaza). Commissioned by the Flatiron/23rd Street Partnership in New York City, this installation featured nine illuminated circular elements embedded within the pavement. Each element emitted light upon being trodden upon, thereby encouraging congregation, performance, or repose. The installation's merit resided in its animation of the civic commons and its cultivation of transient social performances at a high-traffic intersection.

The Urban Conga – Oscillation. A temporary installation deployed in U.S. public plazas, comprises a ring of posts that emit synchronized audio-visual pulses in response to user presence. The Urban Conga design collective emphasizes interactivity as a catalyst for community activation, fostering moments of collective discovery within underutilized public spaces.

PUZZLE MAZE (Shanghai). This pressure-sensitive maze embedded in a central plaza invites users to explore and trigger sound and light as they navigate. Geared toward younger audiences, it mixes education and kinetic play with artistic surface design. The installation adds dynamic programming to an otherwise static pedestrian landscape.

Living Lantern (Winteractive Boston). Part of Boston’s winter light festival, the Living Lantern uses motion sensors to trigger colored lights in response to pedestrian proximity. Situated in city squares, this temporary work transforms cold-weather space into a warm, interactive environment. It reflects seasonal urban programming and emotional ambiance in civic design.

Voxel Bridge (Vancouver Biennale). Positioned beneath Cambie Bridge, this permanent augmented reality installation overlays digital content onto physical infrastructure. Viewers can utilize their smartphones to reveal animated forms and soundscapes embedded within the underpass. Conceptualized by Jessica Angel, it reconfigures an overlooked urban void into an immersive, educational, and artistic corridor.

Harbor Fog (Boston Greenway). Installed along Boston's Rose Kennedy Greenway, Harbor Fog integrates mist, light, and sound, with activation triggered by movement. This installation responds to both environmental conditions and human presence, cultivating an ambient and poetic experience within the linear park. Representing an early example of AI-informed urban artwork, it harmonizes infrastructure, climate consciousness, and subtle interaction within a cohesive urban rhythm.

Avenida Houston – Weci / Koninut (Houston, TX, 2025). A light-and-sound installation featuring six luminous dreamcatcher structures activated by movement and environmental sensors. Visitors trigger changing audio-visual effects as they pass through, creating immersive public presence. This long-term installation revitalizes underpass areas with artful interactivity and cultural resonance with Indigenous Atikamekw seasonal cycles.

Climate Parliament by Rafael Lozano-Hemmer (Rice University passageway, 2024). A sound and light installation composed of thousands of speaker nodes and LEDs, responsive to pedestrian presence. The work creates immersive archways of audio-visual stimuli, fostering awareness of collective participation and environmental rhythms.

The Pool by Jen Lewin (World tour ongoing since 2020). Consisting of 100+ illuminated pads that respond with light and sound when participants step across them, creating communal ripple effects. Though frequently deployed as temporary installations, "The Pool" has been installed in plazas worldwide since 2020, encouraging playful interaction and shared urban experience.

Cimbalom Circle by Daily tous les jours (Budapest, Hungary, 2022). Situated at the entrance to the House of Music in Budapest, Cimbalom Circle is a permanent musical pavement installation comprising pressure-sensitive tiles. These tiles enable pedestrians to play a cimbalom, a traditional Hungarian string instrument, by traversing the surface. Designed by Daily tous les jours, this audiovisual installation harmoniously integrates cultural symbolism with public interactivity, yielding both local relevance and tourist appeal. Cimbalom Circle garnered recognition among the Top 10 Public Space Projects of 2022 and received the Interaction Award 2022 from Core77.

These diverse examples collectively illustrate how interactive urban installations function as dynamic interfaces, fostering novel forms of public engagement and reconfiguring the experiential dimensions of shared civic spaces.

4.3 Parameter Definitions and Evaluation Criteria

To ensure analytical consistency across the comparative matrix of interactive urban installations, a set of evaluative parameters was applied. These parameters, informed by literature on responsive environments, soft infrastructure, and public space typologies (Gehl, 2011; Cohen, 2013; Wrigley and Dolega, 2011), allowed for a multidimensional assessment of each project beyond purely aesthetic or technological considerations.

The qualitative designations—such as *low*, *medium*, or *high*—were derived through interpretive analysis of publicly available documentation, including design briefs, videos, media coverage, curatorial statements, and in some cases academic commentary. The matrix categories are described below.

Interaction Type:
This dimension identifies the primary modality of user engagement, ranging from ambient environmental responsiveness to bidirectional audiovisual communication. Categories include tactile and kinetic engagement (e.g., pressure-activated tiles), sensorial ambient responses (e.g., fog or light triggered by proximity), dialogic or live feeds (e.g., video portals), and algorithmic interactions based on real-time data. These distinctions capture the user's behavioral threshold and the intended depth of interaction—whether passive, participatory, or immersive.

Technological Complexity:
This parameter reflects the sophistication and integration of technological components within the installation. Classifications range from *low* (e.g., simple pressure or motion sensors) to *high* (e.g., AI-driven data visualization, augmented reality overlays, multi-sensorial feedback systems). The assessment considers the number of systems involved, their interactivity, software–hardware integration, and reliance on advanced computation or data inputs. Installations designated as *high* complexity typically demonstrate integration with external data streams or rely on platform-based interaction, such as smartphone-enabled augmented environments.

Civic Function:
Civic function refers to the public-oriented role the installation plays in shaping urban behavior and social interaction. Installations may facilitate contemplative pause, encourage playful movement, host performative encounters, or enable civic data engagement. The typology reflects both intentionality (as inferred from design discourse) and spatial programming, examining whether the installation is designed for transient interaction, community gathering, symbolic representation, or knowledge dissemination in the urban commons.

Symbolic Layer:
Symbolic content measures the degree to which an installation conveys conceptual, cultural, or political narratives. A *high* symbolic rating denotes works that carry civic, ecological, or ideological meaning (e.g., urban diplomacy, environmental consciousness, hybrid urban identity). Conversely, installations with *low* symbolic layering typically prioritize visual spectacle or entertainment without embedded messaging. Symbolism in this context aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) notion of symbolic capital, especially when installations participate in shaping the city's representational image.

Infrastructure Role:
This axis evaluates the extent to which an installation contributes to the city's soft infrastructure—defined as non-material systems that shape civic experience, rhythm, and public value (Amin & Thrift, 2017; Lazzeretti et al., 2012). A *high* rating indicates installations that persistently reprogram space or circulate meaning through durable integration, while *low* ratings apply to ephemeral or art-object-style interventions with minimal spatial impact. This category differentiates installations that act as ongoing systems from those functioning as temporary spectacles.

Economic Activation Potential:
This parameter reflects the installation's capacity to stimulate local economic value, particularly through tourism, event-based commerce, or place branding. *High* potential installations tend to be integrated into larger urban strategies (e.g., seasonal festivals, permanent cultural corridors), generate foot traffic, or receive international media attention. Economic activation may also be inferred from the alignment of the installation with cultural policy or creative industries development, as seen in ERSJ literature on the experience economy (e.g., ERSJ, 2024).

Environmental Integration / Sustainability Messaging:
This dimension considers both thematic engagement with ecological issues and the sustainable design qualities of the installation. A *high* designation reflects installations that visualize environmental data, use renewable materials, or aim to shift environmental perception. Medium ratings apply to projects with low-energy design or ambient awareness themes, while *low* reflects absence of ecological messaging. This axis also encompasses symbolic sustainability, such as artworks that metaphorically reference environmental rhythms or climate conditions.

Architectural Context:
The architectural context parameter assesses the degree to which the installation is integrated into its spatial and urban setting, drawing on urban design theory (Sitte, 1889; Wejchert, 1981). A *high* rating is reserved for installations that engage with formal characteristics of their site—such as facades, voids, sightlines, or movement flows. *Medium* designations reflect general spatial responsiveness without strong material or geometric integration. *None* applies to mobile, modular, or spatially agnostic installations that could be sited in any context without alteration.

This matrix-based typology enables a structured understanding of how interactive architecture contributes not only to aesthetic or technological innovation, but to urban systems, economic dynamics, and civic meaning-making. It also supports the article's positioning of these installations as potential components of strategic urban infrastructure—aligned with current debates in soft infrastructure theory, creative economy development, and responsive urbanism.

5. Results

This section analyzes the ten selected case studies through a comparative framework to draw out broader insights into how interactive architecture contributes to urban experience, soft infrastructure, and digital transformation. Rather than treat these installations solely as aesthetic or entertainment features, the discussion positions them as prototypes of civic technology and symbolic placemaking.

By mapping them against shared parameters—interaction type, spatial logic, symbolic expression, infrastructural capacity, economic activation, and ecological alignment—we aim to identify typological clusters, strategic potentials, and recurring urban functions (Table 1). These patterns not only reveal how cities are leveraging interactivity as an asset, but also suggest models for future urban interventions that blend responsiveness, identity, and value creation.

Table 1. *Comparative Matrix of Urban Interactive Installations (2020-2025)*

Case	Interact. Type	Tech Com ple-xity	Civic Function	Symbolic Layer	Infrastru cture Role	Economic Activation Potential	Environmen t and sustainab.	Arch. Contex t
Portal	Dialogic live video	Med.	Cross-city empathy	Urban diplomac-y	Medium symbolic interface	Medium tourism appeal	Low no explicit eco element	None
DUNE	Reactive light & sound	Med.-High	Sensory/ ambient	Nature–tech. fusion	High adaptive ambience	Medium placemak. effect	High energy-sensitive	None
Eye of Mexico	AI-based data visualiz.	High	Data Engag.	City as living system	High smart city asset	Medium civic branding	High visualizes urban data ecology	Med.
Musical Pavement Series	Tactile audio-visual	Low-Med.	Playful movement	Embodied rhythm	Medium cultural activation	Low casual local use	Low no sustainability messaging	Med.
Point of Action	Light-activated circles	Med.	Assembly/ Perform.	Social choreogra-phy	Medium temporary placema-king	Medium event engag.	Medium low energy / minimal materials	Med.
Urban Conga	Proximity-triggered sound/visual	Med.	Interact. leisure	Sonic resonance	Low temporary artwork	Low short-term install.	Low no known eco theme	None

PUZZLE MAZE	Pressure-activated tiles	Low	Child-focused play	Gamified navig.	Low transitory installation	Low educational function	Low basic materials	None
Living Lantern	Kinetic light	Med.	Seasonal gathering	Winter-themed wonder	Medium event-driven	Med. festival commerce	Medium light-reactive ambiance	None
Voxel Bridge	AR-overlay arch.	High	Hybrid reality	Invisible layers of city	High smart art	Med. tech tourism	High reveals hidden city ecologies	High
Harbor Fog	Sensor-based fog/light/ sound	Med.-High	Contemplative pause	Digital atmo-sphere	High early AI urban art	Med. ambient placemak.	High climate-inspired medium	None
Weci / Koninut	Light and sound activated	High	Cultural resonance	Indigenous seasonal cycles	Medium temporary influence	Med. ambient placemak.	Low basic materials,	None
Climate Parliament	Movem. detection	High	Reflective	Environm-ental collapse	High adaptive ambience	Med. tech tourism	High climate-inspired medium	High
The Pool	Kinetic detection	Low	Playful movement	Social choreogra-phy	Low temporary artwork	Low casual local use	Low no explicit eco element	None
Cimbal. Circle	Kinetic-sound effect	Low	Playful movement	Music legacy	Low temporary artwork	Low educational function	Low basic materials	Low

Source: *Own study.*

To support clarity, the final four columns of the matrix—Infrastructure Role, Economic Activation Potential, Sustainability Message, and Architectural Context—use simplified categorical ratings (*Low, Medium, High*) based on project documentation, physical integration, thematic depth, and urban impact. Below is an expanded interpretation for each of the 14 installations, including the four newly added examples:

Portal: Moderately infrastructural and highly symbolic; the installation promotes cross-city interaction and tourism branding. Lacks environmental emphasis and is spatially disconnected from architectural context.

DUNE: High infrastructural function with strong ecological symbolism. Its light-and-sound interactivity is spatially responsive but operates in non-specific architectural voids.

Eye of Mexico: Functions as a smart city interface, with strong infrastructural and symbolic roles. High-tech visualization of live urban data offers ecological messaging. Moderately contextualized within a new urban plaza.

Musical Pavement Series: Medium infrastructural value through embedded design and rhythmic engagement. Low sustainability concern and limited architectural integration.

Point of Action: Medium placemaking infrastructure fostering social choreography. Moderate event-based economic role with material efficiency. Modest architectural context sensitivity.

Oscillation: Low infrastructural ambition; designed for temporary leisure in flexible public spaces. Minimal ecological or contextual integration.

PUZZLE MAZE: Low infrastructural depth and civic function. Designed for child-oriented interaction, with minimal environmental or spatial adaptation.

Living Lantern: Medium infrastructural presence via seasonal activation. Evokes a soft ecological ambiance and supports event-driven tourism. Spatially autonomous but suited to festive public contexts.

Voxel Bridge: High infrastructural integration beneath a bridge structure. Utilizes augmented reality and environmental storytelling, fully embedded within architectural and symbolic layers.

Harbor Fog: Long-term sensory infrastructure evoking ecological ambience. High environmental messaging and integration with adjacent greenway; strong poetic resonance.

Weci / Koninut: Medium infrastructural influence with strong indigenous symbolism. Temporarily enhances ambient placemaking. Low ecological messaging and minimal architectural specificity.

Climate Parliament: High infrastructural function via sound-reactive corridor. High sustainability messaging related to environmental collapse. Strong spatial framing under architectural canopy.

The Pool: Low infrastructural ambition, playful in nature. Limited economic role and no overt sustainability or spatial contextualization.

Cimbalom Circle: Low infrastructural presence, focused on playful musical engagement. Functions as cultural reference to local heritage. Minimal eco-integration and architectural embedding.

These detailed interpretations highlight the varying degrees to which each installation functions as soft infrastructure, with some exhibiting robust civic functions and environmental integration, while others primarily serve as ephemeral artistic expressions (Innocent, 2016).

6. Analysis and Typological Patterns

The comparative matrix reveals a broad typological and strategic diversity among urban interactive installations. Several key distinctions emerge across technological, spatial, and symbolic dimensions, indicating evolving paradigms in how cities deploy responsiveness as part of their public design and economic infrastructure. With the expanded dataset—including 14 installations realized between 2020 and 2025—emerging patterns reinforce the article's central argument: that interactive architecture increasingly acts as soft infrastructure within the urban experience economy.

Technological Complexity and User Thresholds:
Projects in the matrix span a wide range of technological complexity and interaction modes. High-end installations such as *Eye of Mexico*, *Voxel Bridge*, *Harbor Fog*, and *Climate Parliament* utilize artificial intelligence, augmented reality, or reactive sound–light systems that function not only as artistic interventions but as platforms interfacing with urban systems (e.g., environmental sensors, civic data, public communication). These works blur the boundary between art and infrastructural service.

In contrast, tactile and analog-oriented works like *Musical Pavement*, *Cimbalom Circle*, and *PUZZLE MAZE* employ pressure-sensitive pads or basic sensor logic. While technologically simpler, they maximize accessibility, especially for children, older users, or casual pedestrians. Notably, *The Pool* balance low-complexity interfaces with broader narrative goals and spatial activation, revealing a trade-off between user inclusivity and system sophistication.

Spatial Configuration and Urban Morphology:
The installations also reflect diverse relationships with urban morphology. Highly integrated works like *Voxel Bridge* (embedded beneath a bridge) and *Climate Parliament* (nested into an academic passageway) demonstrate architectural sensitivity and strategic use of site geometry. *DUNE* and *Harbor Fog* similarly reprogram architectural voids, corridors, or underutilized public zones into performative or contemplative experiences.

In contrast, works such as *Oscillation*, *The Pool*, or *Weci/Koninut* exhibit spatial flexibility, functioning effectively as modular or ephemeral elements in urban environments without deep architectural integration. While this allows for mobility and replication, it also limits their contextual resonance and long-term impact. The expanded dataset thus confirms that site-specific design remains a critical factor in transforming interactivity from spectacle into durable public value.

Civic Role and Participatory Logic:
Installations vary significantly in their civic intentions and logics of participation. *Portal* and *Point of Action* exemplify embodied social interaction, fostering

performance, co-presence, and ritualized engagement across urban thresholds. *Cimbalom Circle* and *Musical Pavement* transform everyday pedestrian movement into acts of shared musicality.

Others, like *Harbor Fog*, *Living Lantern*, and *Weci/Koninut*, focus on affective ambience, using light, mist, or cultural symbolism to shift the emotional atmosphere of public space. Meanwhile, *Eye of Mexico* and *Climate Parliament* foreground data, feedback, and environmental perception, presenting the city as a responsive organism that reflects or dialogues with its inhabitants. This range of participatory logics—from ambient to performative—underscores the elasticity of interactivity as a civic tool.

Symbolic Expression and Narrative Messaging:
Symbolism continues to emerge as a core differentiator among installations. *Harbor Fog*, *DUNE*, and *Climate Parliament* embed ecological metaphors, emphasizing human–environment relations and sensory awareness. *Portal* positions itself as an architectural diplomacy device, enabling literal and symbolic cross-border communication. *Eye of Mexico* offers a civic mirror, projecting live urban data as a form of spatial self-awareness.

The inclusion of *Weci/Koninut* and *Cimbalom Circle* adds culturally specific narratives—Indigenous seasonal cycles and Hungarian folk instruments, respectively—highlighting how symbolism also operates as a form of local heritage encoding. Conversely, projects such as *Oscillation* or *The Pool* lean into immediate sensory delight, favoring kinetic engagement over deep narrative. As the dataset suggests, thematic richness tends to correlate with civic durability, memorability, and integration into broader urban storytelling.

Infrastructural and Economic Orientation:
A core distinction concerns whether installations function as temporary interventions or infrastructural systems. *Voxel Bridge*, *DUNE*, *Harbor Fog*, and *Climate Parliament* operate as soft infrastructure—durable, integrated, and layered with spatial logic and civic utility. Their sustained presence enables repeated interaction, behavioral modification, and city branding.

Economic potential varies. Installations such as *Living Lantern*, *Portal*, and *Eye of Mexico* align with tourism cycles and branding strategies, benefiting from visibility and seasonal event tie-ins. By contrast, *The Pool* and *PUZZLE MAZE* offer low economic yield, though their entertainment value supports soft placemaking. The expansion of the dataset reinforces the role of interactivity in the urban experience economy, where emotion and participation are leveraged as spatial assets.

Environmental Integration and Architectural Context:
Ecological awareness and architectural sensitivity remain uneven across projects. *Harbor Fog*, *Climate Parliament*, and *DUNE* embed sustainability through form,

content, and system logic. These installations react to ambient stimuli (fog, sound, presence) and communicate environmental phenomena via poetic or analytical modes. *Eye of Mexico* offers an urban environmental dashboard, while *Living Lantern* suggests seasonal harmony, albeit through atmospheric rather than systemic means.

Architectural integration remains strongest in *Voxel Bridge*, *Climate Parliament*, and *Point of Action*, each engaging existing spatial boundaries with careful attention to rhythm, material, and movement. In contrast, works like *Oscillation* and *The Pool* are spatially agnostic, offering portability but reduced site specificity. *Cimbalom Circle*, while culturally grounded, lacks formal architectural engagement, functioning more as a symbolic gesture than an integrated spatial intervention.

Architectural Context Parameter Definition:
The Architectural Context parameter assesses the degree to which an interactive installation is formally, visually, and spatially integrated with the surrounding physical features of the urban interior. Drawing on the urban spatial theories of Camillo Sitte and Kazimierz Wejchert, the urban square or plaza is conceived analogously to an architectural interior, comprised of compositional "planes": the horizontal plane (floor), vertical enclosures (facades and frontages of surrounding buildings), and the upper boundary (tree canopy, built rooflines, or open sky).

Within this framework, an installation is considered contextually integrated when its form and responsive elements engage—either materially, geometrically, or perceptually—with these spatial boundaries. This includes alignment with sightlines, resonance with architectural rhythms or textures, or activation of movement patterns embedded in the surrounding built fabric.

Emerging Typologies:
With the updated comparative scope, the dataset now supports the emergence of four broad typologies of interactive urban installations. These categories are not mutually exclusive but help clarify the strategic orientation of different projects:

1 Civic Connectors
→ Enable social interaction, gathering, and visibility
Examples: Portal, Point of Action,
2 Environmental Mediators
→ Translate ecological processes and foster climate awareness
Examples: Harbor Fog, DUNE, Climate Parliament
3 Playful Interactives
→ Prioritize kinetic play, sensory delight, and casual participation
Examples: PUZZLE MAZE, Oscillation, The Pool, Cimbalom Circle
4 Cultural Embedders
→ Rooted in site-specific symbolism, heritage, or civic identity
Examples: Weci/Koninut, Eye of Mexico, Voxel Bridge

While overlaps exist, these typologies aid in understanding how interactivity is deployed across urban goals—whether to educate, enchant, engage, commemorate, or revitalize.

These categories are not exclusive but overlapping, and many projects blend functions. However, their distinctions help identify patterns in how cities deploy interactivity—whether to educate, enchant, engage, or energize.

In sum, interactive architecture operates as both urban software and public spectacle, capable of shaping emotion, behavior, and perception. Its continued relevance depends not only on technological novelty, but on how it aligns with broader urban values: inclusion, sustainability, memory, and joy.

7. Discussion

The extended comparative matrix demonstrates a nuanced interplay among technological, spatial, symbolic, and infrastructural dimensions that influence both the design logic and public reception of interactive architectural installations in urban contexts. The findings reflect a broad diversity of approaches while also revealing shared tendencies in how such works mediate civic engagement and spatial meaning.

In terms of technological complexity, several installations—including *Eye of Mexico*, *Voxel Bridge*, *Harbor Fog*, *Climate Parliament*, and *DUNE*—exemplify high levels of digital sophistication, employing artificial intelligence, data visualization, sensor arrays, or immersive media systems. These examples illustrate a clear shift toward integration with smart city paradigms, wherein interactive architecture operates as a responsive urban layer rather than as isolated artistic expression.

From a civic perspective, most installations exhibit medium to high levels of participatory intent. Projects such as *Portal*, *Point of Action* encourage active social interaction or choreographed presence, while others—*Harbor Fog*, *Living Lantern*, *Weci/Koninut*—enhance the experiential quality of space through atmosphere and symbolism. Collectively, these examples reinforce the proposition that such installations can function as forms of soft urban infrastructure, contributing to social connectivity and place identity.

Regarding symbolic expression, numerous projects convey layered cultural or environmental narratives. Installations like *Harbor Fog*, *Portal*, *Eye of Mexico*, *Weci/Koninut*, and *Climate Parliament* engage with topics ranging from urban diplomacy to ecological awareness, embedding interpretive potential within the urban fabric. Symbolic richness appears linked to long-term memorability and alignment with city branding or cultural strategy.

The infrastructural value of these works also varies. Notably, *Voxel Bridge*, *DUNE*, *Climate Parliament*, and *Harbor Fog* operate as enduring spatial systems, organizing movement, framing experience, and maintaining relevance over time. Their sustained physical and sensory integration distinguishes them from more ephemeral or event-based installations, positioning them closer to infrastructural assets than temporary interventions.

Economic activation potential is generally moderate. Projects like *Living Lantern*, *Eye of Mexico*, *Portal* demonstrate clear links to tourism, event programming, or urban revitalization. While not explicitly commercial in function, these installations support the urban experience economy by fostering engagement, visibility, and emotional resonance.

Environmental themes were unevenly distributed. While *Harbor Fog*, *DUNE*, *Climate Parliament*, and *Eye of Mexico* integrated ecological content either through responsive design or thematic framing, other projects—such as *Oscillation*, *Cimbalom Circle*, and *The Pool*—did not explicitly address sustainability. This indicates an opportunity for more intentional ecological alignment in future implementations.

Finally, architectural context was addressed with varying depth. Some installations—*Voxel Bridge*, *Point of Action*, and *Climate Parliament*—demonstrated a strong spatial relationship with their built surroundings, leveraging form, circulation, or material logic. Others, such as *Oscillation*, *The Pool*, and *PUZZLE MAZE*, functioned more as autonomous elements, independent of architectural specificity. This variance underscores an ongoing tension between experiential spectacle and site-responsive coherence in interactive urban design.

8. Conclusions, Recommendations, Limitations

This study has examined how interactive architecture functions as a transformative agent in contemporary public space. By analyzing ten recent urban installations, we observed how digital responsiveness reshapes spatial experience, stimulates civic participation, and embeds symbolic meaning into the urban fabric. The matrix-based comparison revealed a spectrum of approaches—ranging from high-tech data visualizations to playful tactile interfaces—reflecting a broader trend toward cities as experiential platforms.

Importantly, the findings highlight a growing tension between technological sophistication and spatial or environmental integration. While many works demonstrate strong symbolic and participatory potential, their contextual alignment with architectural surroundings and sustainability goals remains inconsistent.

Interactive public architecture should therefore be recognized not only as a cultural practice but also as a strategic tool for placemaking, urban identity-building, and

economic activation. As soft infrastructure, these installations contribute to the experiential economy of cities, supporting new modalities of public life and collective meaning-making.

8.1 Vision for the Future: Responsive Urbanism and Public Value

Looking ahead, interactive architecture will likely play an increasingly central role in the development of responsive urbanism—where digital systems are embedded not only in utilities and transport, but in the very spatial language of public life. The convergence of AI, sensor networks, and participatory design opens pathways for cities to become more adaptable, inclusive, and symbolically rich.

Future interventions should move beyond visual spectacle toward context-aware and ecologically sensitive installations that resonate with their built surroundings and community narratives. The integration of interactive architecture with environmental sensing, urban analytics, and community feedback systems may enable dynamic spatial ecosystems that evolve with civic needs. Moreover, greater interdisciplinary collaboration among architects, artists, data scientists, and urban economists will be essential in maximizing the infrastructural and public value of these interventions.

In sum, interactive architecture should be positioned not at the margins of urban planning, but at its core—as a responsive, affective, and participatory medium capable of addressing the challenges of 21st-century urban life.

This requires a deeper understanding of the language of sensors, actuators, and control systems, fostering an interdisciplinary approach that merges material, electronic, and digital domains to create complex adaptive systems (Meyboom, Johnson and Wójtowicz, 2011; Biloria, 2012).

Such an understanding enables architects to design spaces that are not static entities but rather dynamic environments that can respond to changing environmental conditions, occupant needs, and even mediate conflicting requirements among various users (Meagher, 2015; Nguyen and Moere, 2024).

8.2 Policy Implications for Urban Innovation and Governance

The findings presented in this study carry notable implications for urban policy-makers, cultural administrators, and municipal planning authorities. As cities increasingly invest in digital transformation and smart infrastructure, the role of interactive architecture should be reassessed not merely as public art, but as a form of civic technology with spatial, economic, and symbolic impacts.

First, urban governments should consider the integration of responsive installations into long-term development frameworks. These interventions can be deployed to enhance underutilized public spaces, create new cultural corridors, and revitalize

declining districts. Given their capacity to attract visitors, stimulate local economies, and foster placemaking, they merit inclusion in urban branding and regeneration strategies, especially when co-produced with local stakeholders.

Second, funding mechanisms for such installations require innovation. While many projects are financed through temporary cultural events or one-off grants, municipalities could benefit from hybrid public-private models. Partnerships with technology firms, real estate developers, and cultural foundations could support both experimental design and ongoing maintenance—transforming these installations from ephemeral novelties into durable public assets.

Third, policy frameworks should incorporate criteria for spatial integration, sustainability, and inclusivity. Municipal guidelines or calls for proposals could require designers to consider the architectural context, environmental footprint, and accessibility of their interactive interventions. Encouraging open data platforms and community co-creation can further democratize the production of responsive public space.

Moreover, cities could develop institutional capacities to evaluate such interventions not only aesthetically but also functionally—examining their contribution to walkability, public safety, or mental well-being. By embedding responsive architecture within performance metrics used for public space planning, its value can be legitimized within broader urban governance.

Ultimately, the policy orientation must evolve from tolerating interactive public installations as artistic experiments to strategically leveraging them as dynamic tools for social engagement, spatial equity, and urban innovation.

8.3 Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While this study provides a comparative overview of recent interactive installations in urban public space, it is important to acknowledge several limitations inherent to the research design.

First, the analysis is based exclusively on secondary data sources, design documentation, and media reports, without direct field observation or user interviews. This restricts the ability to assess lived experiences, behavioral impacts, or long-term spatial dynamics resulting from the installations.

Second, the selection of case studies—although diverse in geography and design—reflects a visibility bias toward high-profile, often Western or Global North examples. Interactive architectural projects in less-documented or informal urban contexts may offer alternative models of public engagement that remain underrepresented in this comparative matrix.

Third, the methodological framework relied on a qualitative matrix with descriptive indicators. While this approach effectively captured thematic and typological variation, it does not allow for quantifiable measurement of impact, nor does it incorporate economic or demographic data about user participation or spatial outcomes. Future research could benefit from integrating mixed methods, combining spatial analysis, sensor data, or ethnographic techniques with comparative design assessment.

Moreover, the long-term durability and operational challenges of these installations—such as maintenance, weathering, technical breakdown, or changing user habits—are not addressed in this study. These factors are crucial to understanding the sustainability and governance of responsive public space.

In light of these limitations, several avenues for future research are proposed. Empirical studies involving urban residents, designers, and policy-makers could yield deeper insight into the social efficacy and institutional support for interactive architecture. Further, comparative research across cities or regions could reveal cultural and regulatory differences in how these interventions are implemented and received.

Finally, economic evaluation tools could be developed to quantify the public value, return on investment, and resilience of interactive public installations in the broader context of urban innovation.

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