

Exploring Publicness on a University Campus through Art-Based Action Research

Sanat Temelli Eylem Araştırması Yoluyla Bir Üniversite Kampüsünde Kamusalılığı Araştırmak

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Abstract

Public space refers to physical or symbolic environments open and accessible to all members of a community, serving as platforms for social interaction, expression, and participation. Publicness, meanwhile, is not solely defined by spatial characteristics but by qualities such as visibility, inclusivity, and collective engagement that enable individuals to shape shared experiences. In this context, a university campus generates a distinctive form of publicness both spatially and socially; it differs from other types of public spaces in terms of patterns of use, levels of accessibility, and user profiles. This study explores the university campus as a site of distinctive publicness, where collective and participatory engagement in student-led artistic practices can foster social bonds and generate publicness. It asks how a collective artistic/cultural production process creates publicness on a university campus. Grounded in a qualitative, arts-based action research methodology, the study aims to uncover the dynamics of the student-centered collective process carried out during the Waiting for Godot Stop workshop and to critically evaluate the form of publicness that emerged. The process began with a dramaturgical analysis of Samuel Beckett's seminal play, selected for its relevance to contemporary architectural and social absurdities. Participants then designed and constructed a three-part installation on campus using waste materials through group discussions and on-site decision making. The findings suggest that hands-on collaboration, and interdisciplinary interaction fostered the emergence of new social bonds and areas of public engagement within the campus. Furthermore, the process facilitated spontaneous encounters and aesthetic experiences, allowing students to design spatial interventions that revealed a multi-layered sense of publicness. By documenting the shift from theatrical analysis to spatial intervention, this study demonstrates how alternative public spaces can be created on university campuses and how such practices in architecture and art education can enhance students' critical thinking and collaborative production skills.

Keywords: Public space, production of publicness, art-based action research, collective art production, university campus.

Academical Disciplines/Fields: Architecture, sociology, art education.

Özet

Kamusal alan, bir topluluğun tüm üyelerine açık ve erişilebilir olan, toplumsal etkileşim, ifade ve katılım için bir platform işlevi gören fiziksel veya simgesel çevreleri ifade eder. Kamusalılık ise yalnızca mekânsal özelliklerle değil; görünürlük, kapsayıcılık ve kolektif katılım gibi bireylerin ortak deneyimleri şekillendirmesine olanak tanıyan niteliklerle tanımlanır. Bu bağlamda bir üniversite kampüsü hem mekânsal hem de toplumsal düzeyde özgün bir kamusalılık biçimi üretir; kullanım biçimleri, erişilebilirlik düzeyleri ve kullanıcı profilleri açısından diğer kamusal mekân türlerinden farklılaşır. Bu çalışma, üniversite kampüsünü özgün bir kamusalılık alanı olarak ele almaktadır ve öğrenciler tarafından yürütülen sanatsal pratiklerdeki kolektif ve katılımcı etkileşimlerin sosyal bağları güçlendirebileceğini ve kamusalılık üretebileceğini tartışmaktadır. Çalışma kolektif bir sanatsal/kültürel üretim sürecinin üniversite kampüsünde nasıl bir kamusalılık yarattığı sorusuna cevap aramaktadır. Sanat temelli eylem araştırması yöntemine dayanan bu nitel çalışma, Godot'yu Bekleme Durağı atölyesi kapsamındaki öğrenci merkezli kolektif üretim sürecinin dinamiklerini açığa çıkarmayı ve bu süreçte ortaya çıkan kamusalılık biçimini değerlendirmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Süreç, günümüzün mimari ve toplumsal absürtlükleriyle ilişkisi nedeniyle seçilen Samuel Beckett'in *Godot'yu Bekleyen* eseri üzerinden yapılan dramaturjik analizle başlamıştır. Ardından katılımcılar, grup tartışmaları ve alanda gerçekleştirilen karar alma süreçleri sonrasında atık malzemeler kullanarak kampüs içinde üç parçalı bir yerleştirme tasarlamış ve inşa etmiştir. Bulgular, uygulamalı kolektif üretim ve disiplinlerarası etkileşimin kampüs içinde yeni sosyal bağların ve kamusal etkileşim alanlarının oluşmasını desteklediğini göstermektedir. Ayrıca süreç, kendiliğinden karşılaşmalara ve estetik deneyimlere olanak tanıyarak öğrencilerin çok katmanlı bir kamusalılık hissi üreten mekânsal müdahaleler tasarlamasını mümkün kılmıştır. Tiyatral analizden mekânsal müdahaleye uzanan dönüşümün belgelenmesiyle bu çalışma, üniversite kampüslerinden alternatif kamusal alanların nasıl üretilebileceğine dair bir örnek sunmakta ve bu tür pratiklerin mimarlık ve sanat eğitimi bağlamında öğrencilerin eleştirel düşünme ve kolektif üretim becerilerini nasıl geliştirebileceğini göstermektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kamusal alan, kamusalılığın üretimi, sanat temelli eylem araştırması, kolektif sanat üretimi, üniversite kampüsü.

Akademik Disiplin(ler)/Alan(lar): Mimarlık, sosyoloji, sanat eğitimi.

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GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Üniversite kampüsünü özgün bir kamusal alan olarak ele alan bu çalışma, kolektif bir sanatsal üretim sürecinin üniversite kampüsünde nasıl bir kamusal alan yarattığı sorusuna yanıt aramaktadır. Çalışmada kamusal alan, görünürlük, katılım, karşılaşma ve kolektif anlam üretimiyle şekillenen ilişkisel ve süreçsel bir olgu olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Bu bağlamda üniversite kampüsü, kurumsal rutinler, kimlikler ve aşına kullanıcılar üzerinden bir kamusal alan üretme potansiyeline sahiptir. Öte yandan, ders dışı ve öğrenci merkezli sanatsal pratikler kampüs içindeki rutinleri ve aşinalıkları bozarak, üniversite kampüsünü kamusal alan üretim alanı olarak yeniden tanımlama potansiyeline sahiptir. Bu yaklaşım çerçevesinde bu çalışma, üniversite kampüsünü öğrencilerin katılımı yoluyla sürekli üretilen ve tariflenen bir sosyal alan olarak kabul etmektedir.

Bu bağlamda çalışma, öğrenciler tarafından yürütülen sanatsal pratiklerdeki kolektif ve katılıma dayalı etkileşimlerin sosyal bağları güçlendirebileceğini ve kamusal alan oluşturabileceğini tartışmaktadır. Araştırma, sanat temelli eylem araştırmasına dayanan nitel bir çalışmadır. Bu yöntem, sanatsal pratiğin kendisini bir sorgulama, veri üretimi ve eleştiri biçimi olarak konumlandırır. Bu yaklaşımda sanat, deneyimlerin, duyguların, müzakerelerin ve sosyal ilişkilerin görünür kıldığı bir süreç olarak işlev görür. Bu bağlamda çalışma, sanat temelli eylem araştırması yaklaşımlarından biri olan ve sanatsal üretim sürecini araştırmanın bilgi üretimine zemin oluşturan düşünsel alan olarak konumlandırılan araştırma olarak sanat yaklaşımını benimsemektedir. Bu çerçevede çalışma, sanatsal üretim sürecinin kendisine ve bu sürecin sonuçlarına odaklanmaktadır.

Çalışmanın temel amacı, öğrenci merkezli kolektif bir üretim sürecinin dinamiklerini açığa çıkarmak ve bu süreçte üniversite kampüsünde ortaya çıkan kamusal alan biçimini değerlendirmektir. Bu kapsamda çalışma, bir üniversite kampüsünde gerçekleştirilen ve Samuel Beckett'in *Godot'u Bekleyen* adlı eseri üzerine odaklanan bir atölye çalışmasında, katılımcıların atık malzemeler kullanarak kampüs içinde üç parçalı bir yerleştirme üretme sürecini merkeze almaktadır. Atölye boyunca yalnızca fiziksel tasarıma odaklanan bir süreç yerine, yorumlama, müzakere ve kolektif uygulama biçimlerini de içeren çok katmanlı bir mekânsal deneyim hedeflenmiştir. Burada amaç, kolektif üretim, eleştiri, diyalog ve mekânsal müdahalenin akademik bir ortamda kamusal alan üretimine nasıl katkıda bulunduğunu tartışmaktır.

Sanat temelli eylem araştırması yöntemini kullanarak bir üniversite kampüsünde kolektif sanatsal üretim yoluyla kamusal alan nasıl inşa edilebileceğini inceleyen bu çalışma, kuramsal çerçevesini kamusal alan, kamusal alan ve mekânın sosyal üretimine ilişkin disiplinler arası tartışmalara dayandırmaktadır. Kamusal alanın sosyal etkileşim, spontane karşılaşmalar ve kolektif üretimden kaynaklandığını vurgulayan ve kamusal alanı sosyal bir çerçevede ele alan literatür ile kamusal alan eylem, konuşma, çekişme ve çoğulculuk üzerinden politik bir çerçevede kavramsallaştıran literatür, çalışmanın kuramsal çerçevesini şekillendirmiştir. Özellikle, kamusal alanı uzlaşmadan ziyade bir çatışma alanı olarak gören, eleştirel sanat pratiklerini bu çatışmaları görünür kılan ve hegemonik anlamlara meydan okuyan araçlar olarak konumlandırılan Chantal Mouffe'un agonistik yaklaşımı, bu çalışmanın kuramsal arka planında önemli bir yer tutmaktadır. Ek olarak bu çalışma, mekânı günlük pratikler, temsiller ve deneyimler aracılığıyla sosyal bir ürün olarak kavramsallaştıran Henri Lefebvre'nin mekân üretimi teorisinden de yararlanmakta; sanat temelli pratikleri ise alternatif mekânsal üretim biçimlerini mümkün kılan potansiyel müdahaleler olarak değerlendirmektedir.

Çalışma kapsamında öncelikle lisans düzeyindeki mimarlık öğrencilerinin katılımıyla iki günlük bir atölye çalışması yürütülmüştür. Atölye kapsamında katılımcılar Absürt Tiyatro'nun temel eserlerinden biri olan Samuel Beckett'in *Godot'u Bekleyen* isimli oyununu tartışmışlardır. Oyun, özellikle bekleme, belirsizlik, anlamsızlık ve kopukluk temaları aracılığıyla çağdaş toplumsal ve mekânsal koşullarla kurduğu ilişki nedeniyle seçilmiştir. Katılımcılar, dramaturjik analiz ötesine geçerek, absürtlüğün yapısal çevrede nasıl tezahür ettiğini incelemiş, Beckett'in II. Dünya Savaşı sonrası eleştirisi ile irrasyonel ve kopuk yapısal çevrelerin çağdaş örnekleri arasında paralellikler kurmuşlardır. Daha sonra, katılımcılar geri dönüştürülebilir malzemeler kullanarak kampüste bekleme durağı, labirent ve gölgelik olmak üzere üç mekânsal bileşenden oluşan geçici bir enstalasyon tasarlamış ve inşa etmişlerdir. Tüm bu süreçlerde, yer seçimi, malzeme kullanımı ve üretim yöntemleri üzerine verilen kararlar kolektif olarak alınmıştır.

Bulgular, kampüsteki kamusal alanın enstalasyonun fiziksel varlığından ziyade, esas olarak onun kolektif üretim sürecinden kaynaklandığını göstermektedir. Ortak bir probleme odaklanırken yürütülen iş birliği ve sosyal etkileşim katılımcılar arasında sosyal bağlar kurulmasına yardımcı olmuş, onları pasif kullanıcılardan aktif mekân üreticilerine dönüştürmüştür. Enstalasyon, kampüs yaşamının rutin dolaşım ritimlerini bozarak duraklama, merak ve karşılaşma anları yaratmıştır. Yoldan geçenler, durarak, gözlemleyerek, metinleri okuyarak, labirentte gezinerek veya bekleme alanında oturarak kamusal alanın geçici katılımcıları haline gelmişlerdir. Böylece kampüs mekânı planlanmış işlevinin ötesinde, paylaşılan ve sorgulanan bir deneyim alanına dönüşmüştür. Atölye sürecinin bulguları anlatı temelli ve deneyimsel tasarım süreçlerinin pedagojik bir yöntem olmanın dışında kampüste kolektif üretim ile gerçekleşen kamusal alan biçimlerine dair mekânsal bir strateji olabileceğine de işaret etmektedir.

Sonuç olarak, sanat temelli eylem araştırmasını üniversite kampüsüne konumlandırılan bu çalışma, kamusal alan, katılım, diyalog ve paylaşım mekânsal uygulamalar yoluyla ortaya çıkan dinamik ve ilişkisel bir durum olduğunu vurgulamaktadır. Çalışma sonucunda, üniversite kampüsündeki sanatsal pratiklerin, kampüs mekânının gündelik ritmini kolektif ve eleştirel etkileşimler çerçevesinde dönüştürerek diyalojik bir kamusal alan ortaya çıkardığı görülmüştür. Bu yönüyle çalışma, mekânın temsil biçimleri ve yaşantılar aracılığıyla üretildiğini savunan Henri Lefebvre'nin mekânın üretimi yaklaşımıyla örtüşmektedir. Çalışmanın sonuçları üniversite kampüslerinin sadece eğitim alanları olmanın ötesinde, sosyal etkileşimi ve eleştirel düşünceyi tetikleyen, özgün kamusal alanlar üreten kamusal alanlar oldukları kabulünü desteklemektedir. Bu çalışma, üniversite kampüsünde kamusal alan üretimine ilişkin literatüre, sanat temelli eylem araştırması yöntemiyle ve sanatsal üretim odağında katkıda bulunmaktadır.

1. Introduction

Public spaces are open to use by individuals for any purpose and at any time (Carr et al., 1992, p. 233; Neal, 2009, p. 4). In urban life, they facilitate social cohesion by encompassing the social, political, and cultural expressions of city dwellers. Similarly, the university campus functions as a public space where the university community comes together not only for knowledge production, education, or research, but also for cultural interaction, socialization, and extracurricular activities. Just as public spaces within the city enable meaningful social interactions among urban residents, the university campus plays a vital role in shaping students' academic and social lives. In this context, the various university communities that exist within the campus are of particular importance.

University communities engage not only in educational and research activities on campus but also participate in cultural gatherings that feature diverse cultural performances and artistic expressions. Unlike the spontaneous and incidental social encounters typical of urban public spaces, collaborative engagement in cultural and artistic practices on campus fosters the development of distinct public and social relationships among students. In this context, student groups and clubs that unite around a common purpose play a vital role in the production of the campus as a public space. These collective efforts bring together students from different social backgrounds, who begin to work and create around shared interests. Through this collaborative production, a unique form of communication and solidarity emerges (Amin, 2008, p. 17). In recent years, the production of art on university campuses has gained significant attention in literature (Grenier, 2009, p. 1-13; Pedrabissi, 2015, p. 1-4; Zebracki et al., 2017, p. 6-43). However, the ways in which participation in extracurricular cultural activities contributes to the creation of public space has not been widely discussed. This study emerges from this gap in literature.

The aim of this study is to decipher the dynamics of the collective art-making process centered on students and to explore the sense of publicness generated by the resulting installation. For reaching this aim, it focuses on the outcomes of the workshop *Waiting for Godot Stop*. This research explores how extracurricular artistic activities on a university campus can foster the creation of public space and a sense of publicness through collective production. It addresses the central research question: *How does a collective artistic/cultural production process create publicness on a university campus?* This study focuses on unpacking the dynamics of a student-led collaborative production experience. It also aims to critically assess the form of publicness that emerged from this experience. Adopting a qualitative approach, this research employs art-based action methods. For this study, a seminal work of Absurd Theatre, which is *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, was chosen for its continued resonance with contemporary social and spatial realities, highlighting the ongoing relevance of the absurd condition articulated by Beckett in 1952. This study tries to present a case for how unconventional forms of public space can be generated in academic environments. It also illustrates the potential of artistic and architectural education to cultivate critical thinking and collaborative production skills among students.

2. Methodology: Art-Based Action Research

This study utilizes the methodology of art-based action research, a distinct approach within the broader field of action research. Action research is a collaborative approach in which participants critically reflect on their social or educational practices within specific contexts, aiming to deepen their understanding of these practices through this reflective process (Kemmis and McTaggart, 1988, p. 4-7). Commonly used in the social and educational sciences, action research is built on a cyclical learning process in which researchers and participants collaborate to address a design or practical problem. This process, which embodies a cyclical nature, typically involves the stages of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting, and it prioritizes not merely the outcomes but also the continuous and evolving nature of the learning process (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 232). In action research, researchers transcend the traditional role of passive observers and become active participants, directly engaged in the practice (Wang, 2015, p. 99). With its focus on context, experience, and user engagement, action research offers a powerful methodological framework for both practical and critical knowledge production.

Art-based action research is an approach that utilizes art in various forms as a means of inquiry, intervention, knowledge production, and dissemination (Wilson and Flicker, 2014, p. 58). In this research approach, art functions for investigating, comprehending, representing and critically questioning human action and experience (Savin-Baden and Major, 2010; Savin-Baden, Maggi Wimpenny, 2014). By integrating traditional qualitative research methods with artistic forms of expression, it enables deeper understanding, interpretation, meaning-making, and creative expression, while also fostering alternative forms of

knowledge and ways of knowing (Knowles and Cole, 2004, p. 71-72). Within this framework, researchers employ art as a tool for data collection, analysis, and communication. It is particularly well-suited for exploring and articulating participants' emotional experiences (Knowles and Cole, 2007, p. 73). In the field of architecture, art-based action research not only supports the development of spatial solutions but also promotes the generation of knowledge rooted in users' experiences. In this process, the researcher is not merely an expert directing the design but becomes a co-learner, a critical inquirer, and an agent of transformation alongside users (Wilson and Flicker, 2014, p. 60). Accordingly, this study has been shaped within the framework of art-based action research methodology. In literature, art-based research exists in three main approaches, which are *research about art*, *art as research*, and *art in research* (Wang et al., 2017, p. 14). This study adopts *art as research* approach, which accepts the artistic process as a mode of inquiry and situates the researcher as an artist working from within the process.

Through the lens of art as a research approach, this study places active student participation and collaborative production at its core and is structured around three main phases. In the first phase, students were asked to read *Waiting for Godot* by Samuel Beckett, a seminal work of Absurd Theatre (Beckett, 1988). The concept of Absurd Theatre and its relationship to the built environment were introduced and critically discussed through a comprehensive presentation and dramaturgical analysis on the first day. In the second phase, students were divided into groups to design and construct a three-part waiting station installation on campus, consisting of a labyrinth, a shaded area, and a stop. Recyclable materials were used, and the installations were intended to embody the theme of absurdity both in form and content. The third and final phase involved observing the installation's impact on campus users. Particular attention was given to interactions among participating students, spontaneous encounters, and the ways in which forms of publicness emerged through the installation.

This article evaluates the outcomes of the three phases of the research—discussion, design, and analysis—and examines the role of artistic production in the formation of publicness within a broader theoretical framework. In this context, this article aims to highlight both the social and public dimensions of art, as well as to explore alternative modes of learning and production within university campuses.

3. Public Space and the Formation of Publicness in the University Context

A campus community comprises faculty, students, and administrators who are united not only by institutional roles but by a shared purpose and collective goals (Kenney et al., 2005, p. 50; Chapman, 2006). Chapman (2006, p. xxv) defines the academic community as a group committed to mutual sharing and common interests, where even everyday activities -such as sitting in a campus public space- can foster a sense of belonging. Users who gather around shared academic or social interests tend to engage more actively with campus spaces and daily life (Halsband, 2005, p. 8).

From a physical perspective, campuses should not be understood solely as collections of learning spaces but as environments that also provide public spaces and facilities for both university members and, at times, the wider urban population (Gumprecht, 2007, p. 78). Literature frequently characterizes campuses as pedestrian-oriented settings with abundant green space, lower traffic, and rich social and cultural amenities, offering conditions that support focused engagement and social interaction (Gumprecht, 2003, p. 64; Filion et al., 2004, p. 332). Social life on campus is therefore central to the formation of a learning community, as meaningful interaction prevents academic life from becoming a mere sequence of classroom transitions (Yanni, 2006, p. 21; Chapman, 1999, p. 28).

Recent studies emphasize universities as spaces that actively generate social interaction and diverse forms of encounter beyond formal educational settings (Kumar, 1997, p. 27; Chapman, 2006, p. xxiv; Cheng, 2004, p. 216). Informal gatherings in student clubs, sports teams, libraries, cafes, and cultural venues contribute to creativity, social connection, and exposure to new perspectives (Salovey, 2005). In this sense, campuses function as ideal micro-publics (Amin, 2008, p. 969), where dialogue, diversity, and shared activities enable students to experience public life and engage with unfamiliar social worlds.

In the literature on public space, various forms of socialization in urban environments are frequently discussed. However, there has been limited research on where and how students interact on campus. While existing studies emphasize how interactions between students and academics contribute to learning processes and intellectual development (Pascarella et al., 1988, p. 415), the role of socio-cultural activities outside the academic curriculum has not been sufficiently examined. Yet, art exhibitions, theater performances, and extracurricular activities in open public spaces -created or participated in by students-

are also essential components of campus life. As such, the impact of engaging in these collective practices beyond academic contexts remains an area in need of further exploration.

The significance of publicness on a university campus lies not merely in the quality of education it offers, but in the existence of an environment where the academic community lives, learns, creates, and engages in richer and more sustained interactions than typically found in urban life. For example, the ways in which universities become public spaces through art-based activities are central to Chatterton's work (1999, p. 121; 2000, p. 173). His studies explore how universities form relationships with local and cultural partners in the cities they inhabit (Chatterton, 1999, p. 121), and how artistic communities emerge through these interactions (Chatterton, 2000, p. 175). Chatterton (2000, p. 175) emphasizes the role of student collectives in organizing cultural events. He argues that these student-led cultural productions have a meaningful and direct impact on urban life. Unlike spontaneous encounters, participating in or observing collective practices fosters new forms of social relations on campus. Joining student groups or sports teams enables students from diverse backgrounds to engage in non-instrumental, creative processes, contributing to a more integrated and holistic campus experience. Being part of collaborative groups formed around shared interests and goals supports the development of unique forms of communication and solidarity (Amin, 2008, p. 20).

Another figure who explores the role of art in social change is Naidus (2005, p. 191-206). She focuses on the processes behind student-created art projects and argues that the most powerful outcome of students collaborating on an art project is their ability to discover and express a collective voice. Through spontaneous encounters where young people share and reflect on their personal experiences, they can create common ground through dialogue, social exchange, and interaction. Similarly, Lefebvre (1991a, p. 78) discusses how leisure practices in public space can disrupt everyday routines. In contrast to the structured routines imposed by academic programs, the socio-cultural practices that take place on university campuses are, in the Lefebvrian sense, shaped by leisure, creativity, and the free agency of participants. Such practices introduce a rupture into the regulated rhythms of daily life, opening space for new forms of action and experience (Lau, 2012, p. 39).

Drawing from Lefebvre's insights on production of space, everyday life, and public space, we argue that encountering art in public spaces, such as on a university campus, within the routine of daily life can disrupt ordinariness, give rise to unconventional perspectives and ultimately expand the potential of public space. Thus, this study focuses on extracurricular, student-led, art-based practices on campus. Through the workshop and resulting artistic outcomes, it examines how students created collective artistic performances, the nature of the shared experiences, and how this extracurricular collective practice contributed to the formation of a public space.

4. Exploration of Publicness through Art: The Waiting for Godot Stop

Within public space theory, theoreticians with political focus (Arendt, 1958; Habermas, 1989; Fraser, 2004; Oskar and Kluge, 2004; Mouffe, 2002a; 2002b; 2008) discuss public spaces to understand how democracy can emerge for diverse publics and they conceptualize publicness through debate, action, speech and conflict. Political theorist Chantall Mouffe refers to public spaces as battlegrounds of differences and argues that publicness emerges not from consensus but from contestation (Mouffe, 2007, p. 3). Highlighting the role of critical art practices, she argues that critical art can trigger contestation, reveal contradictions, disrupt hegemonic narratives and provoke public debate (Mouffe, 2007, p. 4; Mouffe, 2008, p. 154). Through critical art, the dominant definitions of public space and publicness shaped by the hegemony of neoliberalism, including how they are constructed and given meaning, can be discussed (Mouffe, 2013, p. 101).

Building on this perspective, the production of publicness through art-based action research can be understood as a process through which critical art practices create spaces of encounter, contestation and public debate beyond hegemonic structures. The production of publicness through art-based action research involves not only artistic output but also the emergence of shared social experiences, negotiations, and collective meaning-making processes. Through art-based action research, publicness can occur when diverse subjects come together and engage within a shared spatial and discursive framework (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 34). However, a strong sense of communication is needed, and people need to be gathered voluntarily at the outside of formal hegemonic structures (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 37). In line with this relationship between critical art and publicness, and through the framework of art-based action research, the Waiting for Godot Stop Workshop was held with students from the Department of Architecture at Yaşar

University, taking place on the university campus. The workshop framed methodologically as art-based action research and aimed to explore the production of publicness through critical art, developed via a collective and student-led creative process in a public space. Over the course of two days, students collaborated to design and construct a shared installation -a waiting stop- which was temporarily exhibited in a public area on campus. The conceptual foundation of the workshop was rooted in Beckett's (1988) *Waiting for Godot*, a seminal work of Absurd Theatre, and engaged with the core theme of the absurd.

Absurd Theatre is a theatrical movement that emerged in response to the devastations of World War II, which deeply affected the human spirit and mind (Şener, 1998, p. 290). In Absurd Theatre, human existence is defined by mortality and striving for meaning despite the inevitability of death. This contradiction renders human behavior nonsensical-absurd by rejecting the idea that life or human actions are purposeful. Absurd Theatre presents the world as disordered, where humans are driven by primitive instincts rather than reason, social order is unattainable, and society is communicatively broken (Şener, 1998, p. 298). Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, written in 1952 and first performed in 1953, is a quintessential example of Absurd Theatre (Ackerley and Gontarski, 2006, p. 83). Written in the aftermath of World War II, the play encapsulates the social devastation, mass death, and destruction of cities, as well as the societal despair and psychological collapse that followed the war. The horrors of the war permeated everyday life, with a pervasive sense of societal crisis and anxiety taking hold across Europe (Image 1).



Image 1. Mother and Child Wearing Their Gas Masks: Associated Press, 1941.

Shaped by the trauma of World War II, Beckett (1988) was deeply influenced by existentialist philosophy - especially Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* (Camus, 1997)- while writing *Waiting for Godot* (Şener, 1998, p. 300; Brater, 2003, p. 110). Existentialism views human existence as absurd and accepts life as random and purposeless, with individuals guided largely by primitive instincts and impulses. Camus (1997, p. 16-20) was the first philosopher to articulate the concept of the absurd by asking how individuals respond to the absurdity of existence. *Waiting for Godot*, (Beckett, 1988) echoes the fundamental question posed by Camus. In the world Beckett constructs, all forms of social connection have disintegrated. Human beings are portrayed as confused, cowardly, malevolent, and untrustworthy. The era is one marked by fear and insecurity. There is no meaningful communication between individuals. Life is depicted as chaotic, and the human mind proves incapable of adapting to this disorder. Set against this bleak backdrop, the play centers on two main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, who spend their time circling a tree, endlessly waiting for Godot -a figure whose identity or nature is never revealed. Despite their despair, Vladimir and Estragon cannot stop waiting. Yet no one ever arrives. As the play unfolds, other characters appear. One of them is Pozzo, a pompous figure who treats himself as superior to others and drags along Lucky- a character bound by a leash and trapped in perpetual suffering. Pozzo and Lucky represent the internal contradictions of the human condition (Anamur, 1990, p. 7). Pozzo symbolizes humanity's delusion that it can rise above and control the chaos of life, while Lucky embodies human vulnerability and helplessness, eternally bound to suffering and incapable of escaping imposed conditions. By the end of the play, Pozzo and Lucky exit the stage, leaving behind Vladimir and Estragon, who are still waiting for Godot.

By the time we organized our workshop inspired by *Waiting for Godot*, the absurdities present in the social sphere had already begun to surface within the field of architecture. Certain architectural projects and buildings clearly reflected the traces of the absurd. While in theatre this notion conveys the meaninglessness and dissonance of existence, in architecture it manifests as ways of living that are disconnected from both their physical context and the society they are intended to serve. For example, Donald Trump had already announced plans to build a big and beautiful border wall between the United States and Mexico, even launching an international design competition for its realization (Surana, 2017). What renders this project absurd is the wall's function as both a physical and symbolic tool of division, reinforcing social fragmentation and alienation. The description of the wall as big and beautiful reflects a senseless pursuit of aesthetic grandeur, echoing the meaningless beauty often depicted in Absurd Theatre. While the competition attracted serious proposals, it also gave rise to parody designs that underscored the project's absurdity. One notable example is the Prison Wall, a bright pink border barrier conceptualized by Mexican architects from the Guadalajara-based design studio Estudio 3.14 (Image 2). This satirical project, embodying the ironic and critical spirit of absurd, serves as a symbolic act of defiance against the wall's proposed reality. The choice of pink, a color often used in absurdist aesthetics, aims to ridicule a supposedly serious and divisive political initiative by turning it into a theatrical spectacle.



Image 2. Prison Wall Project: Estudio 3.14, 2016.

Another striking example of absurd can be found in the Mudurnu district of Bolu, Turkey. The Burj Al Babas project, entirely disconnected from the town's urban fabric, brings the notion of the absurd from the realm of theatre into the lived reality of urban life. Constructed in complete disregard for the city's aesthetic coherence and historical context, the project starkly contrasts with its surroundings. As in Absurd Theatre, Burj Al Babas symbolizes the meaninglessness and incongruity of existence, which is manifested in a cluster of structures that lack any organic relationship with their environment (Image 3). According to media reports, construction began in 2011 and included 732 villas, a shopping mall, a hotel, and two convention centers (Şahin, 2018). However, after the company declared bankruptcy in 2018, the project was halted, leaving behind a surreal landscape suspended in time that resembled a ghost town. The project is the product of an approach that not only fails to engage with Mudurnu's historical and cultural heritage but also actively disregards it. The theme of absurd is vividly embodied in this project, offering a powerful example of how architecture can, at times, become entirely detached from society, alienating rather than serving the communities it inhabits.



Image 3. Burj Al Babas Residencies: Turna, 2020.

Another case of absurd and incongruent living spaces in architecture can be seen in the Marmara Ereğlisi Municipality building, constructed in an eclectic style in 2018 (Image 4). The debates surrounding how well this eclectic style aligns with the fabric and history of Marmara Ereğlisi are further underscored by the municipality's statement, which highlights this incongruity. According to the municipality, the design of the building employs a universal architectural language that integrates the cultural heritage of Perinthos, Heraklea, and Marmara Ereğlisi (CnnTurk, 2018). It is indicated that the building will be constructed using Marmara marble, with its triangular pediment and columns symbolizing the architectural vocabulary of the classical period, while the windows and arched frames represent traditional Turkish architecture (CnnTurk, 2018). Moreover, the municipality building is described with its representational role until the archaeological excavations of the ancient city of Perinthos are completed (CnnTurk, 2018). In the long term its symbolic architectural presence is expected to inspire the surrounding area (CnnTurk, 2018).



Image 4. Marmara Ereğlisi Municipality Building: CnnTurk, 2018.

The municipality's statements reflect a juxtaposition of various and incongruous elements, echoing the concept of the absurd. The project's eclectic architectural style, its detachment from social and historical contexts, and the assertion that it will inspire Marmara Ereğlisi mirrors the purposelessness and existential characteristic of Absurd Theatre. The absurdity arises from the tension between societal needs and aesthetic claims, revealing a conflict between architecture and social reality. In this sense, such projects exemplify structures that are incompatible with their social and architectural contexts in terms of meaning, and purpose. Much like how Absurd Theatre reveals the incompatibility between the meaninglessness of characters and social reality, the disconnection of these projects from reality is manifested through their spaces, functions, and forms. The key difference is that Absurd Theatre is conscious of its inherent incompatibility and adopts a critical approach. In contrast, these projects unintentionally employ absurdity

through their disconnection from social and architectural contexts by disregarding social needs, cultural dynamics, and disrupting the functionality and aesthetics of spaces. From this standpoint, the Waiting for Godot Stop workshop was conceived because we still observe that the absurd world Beckett created in 1952 persists in both social and architectural contexts today.

As part of the workshop, students were tasked with designing a temporary waiting stop for Vladimir and Estragon, the main characters of Beckett's (1988) *Waiting for Godot*, to be temporarily installed on the Yaşar University campus. The brief aimed to translate the play's central themes -waiting, temporality, ambiguity, and absurdity- by exploring the spatial experience within a campus environment. To encourage experimentation, improvisation, and sustainable production, participants were asked to use discarded materials. This approach was based on two intentions: First, to parallel the play's materially ambiguous environment; and second, to foreground the idea of making with what is available, mirroring the characters' limited agency. A wide range of waste materials including newspapers, milk cartons, cardboard boxes, plastic bottles, fabric pieces, and string were collected, with additional metal pieces used to ensure structural stability.

The design process evolved through a series of group discussions and on-site decision-making. During the on-site discussions, we gathered feedback that revealed students' perspectives on public space. These insights into spatial decision-making, material choices and notes on waiting were documented to be evaluated as post-workshop data to be evaluated in the article process. These participatory contributions, which became visible through their on-site discussions, material selections and spatial decisions during workshop, offered meaningful perspectives into how publicness conceptualized on campus.

On the first day, all participants who had read the play engaged in a dramaturgical analysis session. The workshop began with a presentation that examined the relationship between absurd theatre and the built environment, focusing on how irrationality, discontinuity in space, and arbitrariness are manifested in architectural and urban contexts. Examples of Trump's so-called great and beautiful wall, the Burj Al Babas project, and the Marmara Ereğlisi Municipality Building were identified by students as strikingly absurd and were discussed as manifestations of irrational built environments. This discussion was followed by a close reading of Beckett's play, during which students analyzed the spatial atmosphere conveyed in the text. Together, we identified key dramaturgical elements such as the absence of a defined time and place, the repetitive nature of waiting, and characters' passive yet enduring presence. These concepts were later redefined as conceptual anchors during the design process. Moreover, it is concluded that the characters could symbolize the absurd and irrational conditions increasingly found in today's architectural settings. Within this framework, the students engaged in a deep and critical discussion, exploring how the play's absurdity and its characters might inform and shape the built environment.

On the second day, the focus shifted to designing and constructing a temporary waiting stop on campus. Building on the previous day's discussions, students collaboratively discuss the installation's potential location and material organization (Image 5). These mock-up presentations became the core design stage, substituting conventional sketching with a situated, dialogic approach to generating spatial ideas shaped by the principles of arts-based action research, which are reflexive and dialectical critique (Winter, 1996, p. 13); collaboration (Winter, 1996, p. 14); practical problem solving (Hult and Lennung, 1980, p. 241); in-situ practice (McKernan, 1991, p. 32); cyclical process including problem identification, planning and intervention, implementation and evaluation (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 241).



Image 5. Discussions on Site and Material Selection for the Temporary Installation on Campus.

Several key criteria shaped both the site selection and the design process, including accessibility, pedestrian flow, visibility, the temporal rhythms of campus life, and the relationship with surrounding buildings. A large green space situated among main campus buildings such as the Sports Hall (R), Library (S), Administrative Building (P), and Architecture Studios (N) was identified as the most appropriate location for the site (Image 6). The site was selected primarily for its central and highly visible location, positioned among buildings serving different functions. It is also situated at a major intersection of pedestrian pathways within the campus, making it a frequently used thoroughfare for students, faculty, and visitors. Thus, its centrality, high pedestrian circulation, and symbolic openness made it a suitable site for fostering public engagement and collective encounters. After the site was chosen, students began working with the arrangement of the collected materials directly in the open space. Without predetermined drawings, the prototype took shape through hands-on manipulation, negotiation between team members, and continual adaptation to spatial conditions. This process not only produced physical installation but also generated a series of social interactions, including moments of negotiation, spontaneous collaboration, and shared decision-making, all of which became integral to the study's findings.

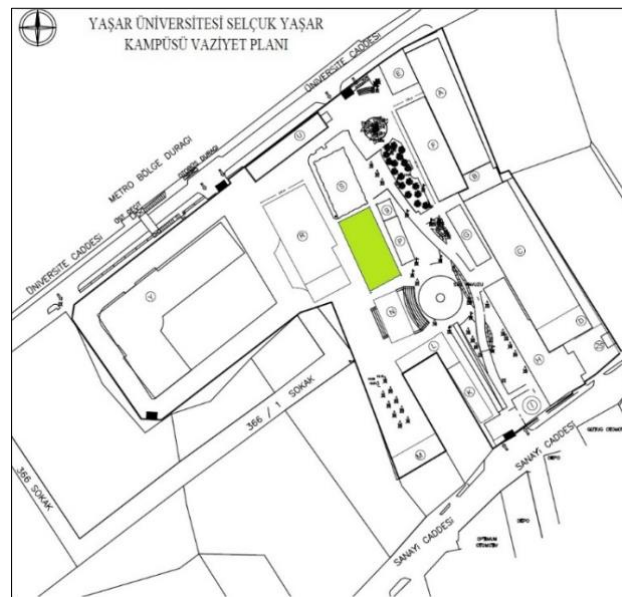


Image 6. The Chosen Site for the Installation within the Campus.

The interpretation of Beckett's absurd reality into the context of campus setting was grounded in the concepts of spatial discontinuity, indeterminacy, and the practice of waiting. These themes became spatial guiding principles for the design of the installation. After observing the circulation routes on campus, students proposed organizing the waiting stop as three separate components: a labyrinth, a shaded structure, and a waiting shelter (Image 7). This decision was not only based on the observation of the circulation routes on campus, but also the theoretical discussion on connectivity and urban discontinuity that was made on the first day of the workshop. In contemporary urban design, fundamental principles provide a framework and guide designers to create livable, functional, and sustainable urban environments (Barnett, 1974, p. 1-13; Bently et al., 1985, p. 9-11; Yeang, 2000, p. 100). In other words, they act as guidelines to ensure that cities operate efficiently and support quality in urban life. Especially, connectivity has become one of the most important principles of contemporary urban design. Since, places in the city need to be easy to reach and be integrated physically and visually with their surroundings (Cowan, 2005). Effective connectivity between different parts of the city is therefore essential for overall urban functionality. However, in contemporary cities, where large scale buildings dominate and urban areas are sprawled out, it is hard to talk about connectivity in contemporary urban life (Gehl, 2010, p. 55-56). Since, contemporary urban experience is shaped less by elements that form a coherent whole and more by spatial collages that emerge almost inadvertently, continually being demolished, reshaped and rebuilt (Harvey, 1990). As a result, urban discontinuity has come to characterize the lived experience of the contemporary city. Gehl (2010, p. 53) draws attention to this condition by arguing that in large-scale, dispersed built environments, there is generally nothing to experience. Taking this notion of nothing to experience as a starting point and acknowledging the prevalence of urban discontinuity in contemporary urban environments, students decided to design installation as three fragmented parts, echoing the spatial discontinuities that shape today's urban experience.



Image 7. The Waiting for Godot Stop and Its Components, the Labyrinth, the Shaded Structure, and the Waiting Shelter.

To conduct the design process students were divided into three groups. The first group designed a labyrinth in the southeastern part of the site to activate pedestrian movement. Constructed entirely of metal, the labyrinth was intended to evoke the oppressive militaristic atmosphere of World War II. Its surfaces were covered with wartime propaganda posters, photographs illustrating the absurdities of daily life during the war, and selected excerpts from the play that highlight these absurdities (Image 8). The labyrinth was conceived not merely as a physical obstacle or a navigational game, but as an installation prompting reflection on the meaninglessness of war and daily existence. Constructed of metal, it reflects the harshness and coldness of war, while the posters and photographs reveal the contradictions of absurd daily existence. The students interpreted the experience of losing oneself and finding direction within the labyrinth as a parallel to the confusion and despair experienced by individuals during wartime. The propaganda posters inside the labyrinth, with their messages supporting war and manipulating the masses, reinforced the social

critique central to absurd theatre. The photographs of absurd daily life emphasized the mundane and meaningless aspects of existence. The dialogues from the play effectively conveyed the hopelessness and futility of the characters' waiting in Beckett's work. Through this, the students transformed the labyrinth into a powerful narrative device, both physically and conceptually.



Image 8. The Installation of the Labyrinth.

The second group designed a shaded structure, which captures attention with its light patterns on the ground, positioned to align with the pedestrian axis coming from the southwest of the campus (Image 9). Within this structure, absurd situations observed in our built environment, two-dimensional representations of absurd structures, photographs, and city fragments are displayed. The design of the structure aims to highlight the disjointed, nonsensical, and meaningless parts of our built environment. The students envisioned this structure as both an aesthetic and critical environment, encouraging those passing through to become aware of the structural absurdities present in their surroundings.



Image 9. The Shaded Structure.

The third group designed a waiting shelter that abstracts the dry tree, the only environmental clue in the text, where the main characters, Vladimir and Estragon, await Godot. In this shelter, the act of waiting is intended to be carried out while sitting. In the final scene of the play, Vladimir and Estragon attempt to hang themselves from the dry tree but are unable to do so due to the ropes' fragility. The futility of their endless waiting is emphasized by a worn-out rope coiled around the shelter. This design was placed in the

northeastern part of the campus to attract pedestrian traffic from that direction. Additionally, to direct pedestrian flow from the southwest axis, excerpts from the play and photographs have been placed on the ground, facing the shelter (Image 10).



Image 10. The Waiting Shelter.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This study sets out to explore *how a collective artistic/cultural production process creates publicness on a university campus*. It emphasizes that university campuses are not solely spaces for academic pursuits and knowledge production but also function as vital public realms where social and cultural interactions unfold. Centered on how public space can be generated through artistic and cultural practices within a university context, this study explores these dynamics through the Waiting for Godot Stop workshop conducted at Yaşar University. Inspired by Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* and the broader framework of absurd theatre, the workshop invited participants to spatialize its themes by designing a temporary installation on campus. Its collective nature encouraged co-presence, dialogue, and negotiation, effectively transforming an otherwise functional campus space into a site of encounter and expression.

The findings indicate that publicness emerges not solely from the physical qualities of space, rather it is flourished through collective production, shared making-meaning, and social interaction. It is revealed that such an artistic and cultural process not only transforms physical spaces but also enables new forms of social interaction. The workshop demonstrates that when individuals collectively discuss, design and construct spatial interventions, the campus shifts from a purely academic environment into a site of reflection and experience of collectivity. Hence, this study affirms that extracurricular cultural activities play a vital role in campus life, contributing to the formation of meaningful public spaces and stronger social ties within the university community.

Throughout the process, students' communication and solidarity, along with the social bonds and culture of sharing fostered through collective creation, enriched the campus experience with a new dimension. For reaching this new dimension, the participatory art project at the center of this research served as a catalyst for publicness by disrupting conventional hierarchies and inviting diverse actors such as students, faculty, staff, and occasional passersby into a shared act of creation. By introducing absurdity into campus, this three-part installation transformed the everyday neutrality of the campus. The labyrinth, shaded structure and waiting shelter operated as critical spatial elements that questioned the rationalities of the built environment and encouraged reflection. This disruptive, questioning, and rebellious installation situates itself at the heart of student public life, interrupting daily flows, creating new stopping points for interaction, and inviting participation through themes of waiting, uncertainty, and spatial discontinuity. Thus, the installation can be understood as effecting a transformation in the experience of public space, in which the

space itself transcended its condition as a merely physical setting and became an experiential realm. Within public space theory, theoreticians with a socio-spatial focus (Jacobs, 1961; Sennett, 1992; Mitchell, 1995; 2003; Banerjee, 2001; Amin, 2008) associate this transcendence with *social interaction of strangers*, emphasizing that informal encounters, spontaneous meetings and collective activities foster social interaction in public life; in turn, social interaction reinforces publicness (Jacobs, 1961; Amin, 2008).

During the workshop, students' collaboration—through discussing the play's themes, negotiating design materials, and choosing locations—fostered strong social bonds and shared a sense of spatial ownership. In this process, *students have transformed from passive users to active producers of space*. This transformation resonates with Lefebvre's theoretical reflections on the production of space, everyday life, and public space (Lefebvre, 1991a, p. 78; 1991b, p. 31-52; 2009, p. 185-195; Wilson, 2013, p. 364-380). Lefebvre (1991b, p. 31) conceptualizes space as a social product shaped through human activity and everyday practice. Social space embodies both individual actions and the broader cultural life of society (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 33). However, under modern capitalist conditions, social space is increasingly reduced to *abstract space*, which functions as an instrument of domination (Lefebvre, 1991b, p. 49-50). To explain this process, Lefebvre (1991b, p. 31-52) introduces two interrelated triads as important moments in the production of space. The first consists of *Spatial Practices, Representations of Space* and *Representational Space*. Spatial practices concern the physical dimension of space and denote the networks of interaction and communication that shape the material and physical dimensions of everyday life. Representations of space correspond to the conceptual and mental dimension of space, which includes scientific knowledge created by technocrats, architects and urban planners. Representational space refers to the symbolic and experiential dimension of space, expressed through meanings such as power, authority or gender. The second triad reframes conceptualizations of *perceived, conceived* and *lived space*. Perceived space refers to the collective production of the spatial practices of everyday life such as residential, work or leisure activities. Conceived space is generated through professional knowledge, signs and codes of space related disciplines and refers idealized and regulative spatial models expressing how to have spatial practices in society. Lived space is the space of direct experience, where potential resistance mechanisms against conceived spaces emerge in the effort to regain social spaces. The subordination of the lived space to abstract space promotes the fragmentation and deterioration of urban life. Under these conditions, state and capitalist actors tend to prioritize the quantifiable aspects of space such as size, location, area and economic value, while disregarding lived experience, memory, and everyday use. Consequently, users are progressively estranged from the spaces they actively produce through everyday spatial practices.

Although Lefebvre does not explicitly theorize publicness, he identifies public space in modern societies wherein this estrangement becomes visible (Wilson, 2013, p. 366). To resist this estrangement and reclaim the social space, Lefebvre (1991b; 2009, p. 195) introduces the concept of *differential space*, which privileges use value over exchange value. His idea implies that public spaces should support the autonomy of the lived space, enabling a multiplicity of activities and practices through which social relations become visible and alienated everyday life can be transformed (Lefebvre, 1971; 2013; Mitchell, 2003). Moreover, Lefebvre's notion of *right to the city* frames public space as a collective claim by diverse publics to actively shape urban space through participation in creative processes (Mitchell, 2003, p. 18). In this regard, Lefebvre (1971) recognizes the mundane aspects of everyday life while foregrounding its creative potential, which emerges in public spaces through resistance to the practices of abstract spaces. Thus, this dialogue between public space and everyday life offers a potential differential space in which emancipatory creative practices can emerge (Kılıç Özkan, 2023, p. 75). By means of differential space, public spaces can be transformed into fields of resistance and creativity against capitalist mechanisms of control. From this perspective, space gains public meaning and value through social and collective activities.

In the context of this study, Lefebvre's triad reveals how socio-cultural practices—particularly collective artistic activities in campus environment—can operate as *forms of differential space* that rework dominant representations of space and resist the subordination of the lived space to abstract space. Thus, the study illustrates that publicness was generated both in the production of the installation and in the social outcome and bonds. Moreover, participating in collaborative groups formed around shared interests and goals within the campus environment fosters creativity, a unique sense of communication and solidarity (Amin, 2008, p. 17). In this regard, it is possible to state that publicness is not inherent to space itself but is produced through action and engagement. Similarly, it is observed that students working together toward a common purpose during the workshop developed stronger bonds of communication and mutual support. The discussions and design activities, shaped by the concept of the *absurd* derived from Absurd Theatre, encouraged participants to critically reflect on the irrationalities of the built environment and offered new interpretive perspectives.

The project's temporality -its emergence, evolution, and eventual disappearance- encouraged repeated interactions and open-ended interpretations. By resisting fixed meanings and embracing multiplicity, the work embodied key characteristics of public space. Its grounding in artistic and cultural practices further enriched the experience, adding symbolic and imaginative dimensions that expanded the conventional roles of the university environment.

This art-based extracurricular process also altered pedestrian circulation on campus and created opportunities for spontaneous interactions among students and faculty. A particularly meaningful moment arose when a student, previously unfamiliar with Absurd Theatre, learned about the genre during the workshop and later explained it in their own words to another student at the installation. Through this process, students not only deepened their awareness of absurdities in their spatial surroundings but also strengthened their interpersonal communication and interdisciplinary engagement. Architecture students participating in the workshop, for example, introduced students from engineering backgrounds to images of absurd built environments featured in the installation. Such exchanges may create a critical platform for future architects and engineers to ask essential questions about the built environment.

In conclusion, it can be said that artistic activities of this kind on university campuses not only contribute to students' intellectual and social development but also play a vital role in fostering a sense of publicness within the campus environment. The form of publicness created through art can enable individuals from diverse social backgrounds within the university community to form new relationships and experience a richer, more inclusive campus life. The Waiting for Godot Stop workshop clearly demonstrated the role that artistic and cultural practices can play in the creation of public space on campus. Through the workshop, a creative and critical atmosphere emerged, allowing students from different disciplines to come together around a shared goal and engage in collaborative production. The collaborative nature of the process reshaped participants' relationships with the campus environment by opening a broader space for public interaction and awareness. Therefore, this study demonstrates that collective artistic and cultural production can cultivate publicness in a university setting by creating inclusive, dialogic, and affective spaces. In this sense, the experience contributed to the formation of publicness through the discursive negotiation of diverse perspectives, which echoes Habermas (1989, p. 31-43), and through the critical art practices that reveal contradictions, and stimulate public debate, as emphasized by Mouffe (2007, p. 4; 2008; p. 154). University administrations and education policies that encourage student participation in artistic and cultural activities can further support the creation of inclusive public spaces, enhancing the overall public dimension of campus life.

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