Public art can take many forms but each type shares the goal of bringing art directly to a local audience. It is designed to engage the community in which it is created and often has a special connection or meaning to the place where it is displayed. Murals are particularly visually captivating forms of public art due to their size and accessibility. Mural images capture public attention and provoke viewers to explore layers of meaning and find hidden stories.

This paper discusses the Mystic River Mural Project of Somerville, Massachusetts, USA. It addresses how the local art councils, the mural artists, local school students, community members, and non-profit organizations collaborated to carry out this ongoing mural project. This process can serve as an example for other communities in addressing their environmental concerns through public art.

Several research questions are addressed:

- How are eco-murals created?
- How are social concerns represented through eco-murals?
- How do eco-murals reflect or affect the meaning of the place or community?
- What challenges or benefits can eco-murals provide?
- How can eco-murals promote environmental awareness and inspire youth about their communities and local environments?

To explore these questions, this paper utilizes the phenomenological case study method. It examines the Mystic River mural by 1) conducting site visits to the mural, 2) reviewing contextual information and literature, and 3) interviewing project participants, sponsors, and other muralists worldwide.

An in-depth study of the Mystic River mural is presented in this research. In relation to environmental art and education, it is particularly meaningful in that the eco-mural
was created through a collaborative effort between artists, students from the community, and local art councils. It has been an ongoing project since 1996, with new panels being added every year. Situated by a low-income housing complex, it is perhaps the only, but very prominent, work of public art in the community.

This paper discusses how the Mystic River mural 1) united diverse community members through a shared visual arts experience, 2) boosted investigative skills and developed leadership capabilities, 3) promoted stewardship for the local environment, 4) transformed space aesthetically, 5) transformed perspectives and helped break down stereotypes, 6) empowered its participants, 7) transformed notions of who can be an artist, and 8) created an outlet for creativity and communication.

The conclusion reached is that eco-murals are effective in fostering a sense of group action while working to address broad issues through collective thought and action.

The Mystic River Mural was particularly engaging for youth because they received a deeply meaningful learning experience that took place almost entirely outside the classroom. It allowed them to explore, question, debate, and create something that helped them invest in their communities in a positive way and diminish existing negative stereotypes. Furthermore, it enabled participants and viewers to adopt new ideas and transform perspectives on ecological issues.

Keywords: eco-mural, environmental art, public art, mural, community

References:


