

Perception Of Youth Towards Kochi-Muziris Biennale

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ABSTRACT

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale seeks to establish itself as a centre for artistic engagement in India by drawing from the rich tradition of public action and public engagement in Kerala, here Kochi is located. In a world of competing power structures it is necessary to balance the interests and independence of artists, art institutions and the public.

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale seeks to reflect the new confidence of Indian people who are slowly but, surely, building a new society that aims to be liberal, inclusive, egalitarian and democratic. KMB has helped to explore the hidden cultural practices, traditions, artistic traditions and practices in the country.

This paper attempts to understand the perception of youth towards KMB with special reference to the driving forces and their experience.

Key Words: *Cultural Event, Kochi Muziris Biennale, Youth Perception*

INTRODUCTION

Kochi-Muziris Biennale (KMB) is an initiative of the Kochi Biennale Foundation with support from the Government of Kerala, India. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale seeks to invoke the latent cosmopolitan spirit of the modern metropolis of Kochi and its mythical past, Muziris, and create a platform that will introduce contemporary international visual art theory and practice to India, showcase and debate new Indian and international aesthetics and art experiences and enables a dialogue among artists, curators and the public. (India's First Biennale, Kochi Biennale Foundation (KBF), 2014)

The term "biennale" refers to a large-scale event held every other year, and in the context of the art world, to exhibit centered on contemporary art mostly shown in alternate spaces

whose scale and potential for resistance attracts widespread attention (Altshuler, 2013). The single most prestigious art biennale is that of Venice, which held its first such event in 1895; with the ability to make or break artists' careers, the Venice Biennale is known as "the Olympics of the art world" (Alloway, 1968). Art biennales are not uncommon in developed nations, and currently are held in Sydney, Havana, Shanghai, Hong Kong and Istanbul (Ashbury, 2006; Sassatelli, 2017), among other cities and regions. The most prominent biennales after Venice are the Sao Paulo Biennale (started in 1951), the German Dokumenta (founded in 1955 and held every five years), and the Kwangju Biennale in South Korea (Rodner et al., 2011).

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale seeks to create a new language of cosmopolitan and modernity that is rooted in the living experience of this old trading port, which for more than six centuries, has been crucible of numerous communal identities. Kochi is among few cities in India where pre-colonial traditions of cultural pluralism, globalisation and multiculturalism. They can be traced to Muziris, the ancient city that was buried under layers of mud and mythology after a massive flood in the 14th century. The site was recently identified and is currently under excavation. It is necessary to explore and when necessary, retrieve memories of this past and its present, in the current global context to posit alternative to political and cultural discourses emanating from the specific histories of Europe and America.

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale seeks to be a project in appreciation of and education about, artistic expression and its relationship with the society. It seeks to be a new space and a fresh voice that protects and projects the autonomy of the artist and her pursuit to constantly reinvent the world we live in (Kochi Biennale Foundation, 2014)

Kochi-Muziris Biennale explored the possibilities of erasing all boundaries: geographical, political and personal. The topology offered the possibilities to create a visual culture.

For a place like Kochi, an art biennale was the obvious choice. For a land and its people who have experienced a long history of trade, colonisation and migratory experiences, making them at once receptive and responsive to novel ideas and thought, a biennale is a window of possibilities and opportunities.

Kochi is the confluence of heterogeneity, a city where more than 30 non-Malayali communities have over the centuries come to find refuge, trade, proselytise and much else, only to develop roots and integrate into local society. (Bose Krishnamachari and RiyasKomu, KBF, 2014)

"The first year, people didn't know what a biennale was, let alone how to pronounce it," says V Sunil, Secretary, Kochi Biennale Foundation (KBF). "I remember locals gathering around

[artist] Subodh Gupta as he set up his boat installation [What does the vessel contain, that the river does not]. It really connected with them, perhaps because they've seen the fishermen's struggle in real life and in various Malayalam films. That year, the words 'installation' and 'biennale' entered the average Malayali's vocabulary."(The Hindu, 2018)

The Kochi Biennale Foundation, in association with the Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art (FICA) and the Foundation for Indian Art and Education (FIAE) has developed the Students' Biennale – an exhibitor platform which runs parallel to the Kochi-Muziris Biennale. A part of the Foundation's educational initiatives, the Students' Biennale reaches out to art colleges across South Asia, to encourage young artists to reflect on their practice and exhibit on an international stage. The initiative is thus invested in using the potential of a global biennale platform to energise art schools and art production. (KMB, 2018)

Statement of the Problem

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale seeks to establish itself as a centre for artistic engagement in India by drawing from the rich tradition of public action and public engagement in Kerala, here Kochi is located. In a world of competing power structures it is necessary to balance the interests and independence of artists, art institutions and the public. This paper attempts to understand the perception of youth towards Kochi Muziris Biennale with special reference to the driving forces and their experience. It is also important to find the reasons for not visiting Kochi Muziris Biennale.

Objectives

The present study aims to serve the following objectives:

- To study the perception of youth towards KMB
- To understand the major reasons for not visiting KMB
- To comprehend the major attractions to visit KMB along with the limitations.
- To find the association, if any, between socio economic variables and the perception of youth towards KMB

METHODOLOGY

The study is empirical in nature employing both primary and secondary data. Primary data has been collected from 200 sample respondents on a random route basis using structured

interviews Along with descriptive statistics Friedman Test, Mann Whitney U Test, Kruskal Wallis H Test and One Sample Sign Test are used to draw inferences.

RESULTS

Table 1
Profile of the Sample

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	80	40.0
	Female	120	60.0
	Total	200	100.0
Age	Below 20	20	10.0
	21 to 25	116	58.0
	26 to 30	64	32.0
	Total	200	100.0
Region	Rural	72	36.0
	Urban	128	64.0
	Total	200	100.0
Family Type	Joint	24	12.0
	Nuclear	176	88.0
	Total	200	100.0
Annual Family Income	Up to Rs 2 Lakhs	120	60.0
	Rs 200001 to Rs 500000	32	16.0
	Rs 500001 to Rs 1000000	24	12.0
	Above Rs 10 Lakhs	24	12.0
	Total	200	100.0
Religion	Christian	56	28.0
	Hindu	128	64.0
	Islam	16	8.0
	Total	200	100.0

Source: Survey Data

Table 2
Experience of Visiting Kochi Muziris Biennale

Experience with KMB	Frequency	Percent
Not Visited	120	60.0
Yes, all editions	8	4.0
Yes, few editions	72	36.0
Total	200	100.0

Source: Survey Data

Majority of the local youth surveyed have not visited any editions of KMB. This calls for further need of reach to be created for the event.

Table 3
Reasons for not visiting KMB

Reason	Mean Rank	Chi Square	Df	P Value [#]
Personal Inconvenience	2.56	26.354	6	< 0.001**
Lack of Interest	3.81			
Inconvenient Timing of Events	4.28			
Hesitance to Overcrowding	4.31			
Scattered nature of Events	4.06			
Entry Fee	3.97			
Other	4.00			

Source: Computed from Survey Data

#Friedman Test

**Highly Significant

Personal inconvenience and lack of interest heads the list of reasons for not participating in the KMB.

Table 4
Association between Socio Economic Variables and Main Reason for Not Visiting KMB

Variable	Category	Mean Rank	Chi Square	Df	Z	P Value [#]
Gender	Male	14.77	==	==	-1.134	0.257
	Female	18.03				
Age	Below 20	19.50	4.219	2	==	0.121
	21 to 25	17.59				
	26 to 30	10.50				
Region of Residence	Rural	16.50	==	==	0.000	1.000
	Urban	16.50				
Family Type	Joint	10.50	==	==	-1.580	0.114
	Nuclear	17.36				
Annual Family Income	Up to Rs 2 Lakhs	18.28	2.541	3	==	0.468
	Rs 200001 to Rs 500000	10.50				
	Rs 500001 to Rs 1000000	14.17				
	Above Rs 10 Lakhs	15.50				
Religion	Christian	14.25	4.136	2	==	0.126
	Hindu	18.60				
	Islam	10.50				

Source: Computed from Survey Data

#Mann Whitney U Test / Kruskal Wallis H Test

The main reason for not attending seems to be the same across different socio economic categories.

Table 5

Major Attractions Prompting Visitors to Kochi Muziris Biennale

Major Attractions	%	Rank
International Artists and Artwork	53.80%	2
Innovative Installations and Curators	69.20%	1
Hospitality	15.40%	4
Kid's Biennale and Opportunities	0%	8
Amenities including Food and other facilities	15.40%	5
Local Transportation	7.70%	7
Other Tourism Attractions in and around Kochi	30.80%	3
Others	14.10%	6

Source: Computed from Survey Data

Innovative Installations, Curators, International Artists and Artwork are the major attractions prompting visitors to KMB followed by other Tourism attractions nearby.

Table 6

Limitations Experienced by Visitors to Kochi Muziris Biennale

Major Limitations	%	Rank
Traffic Blocks	9.10%	5
Non Availability of Local Transportation	27.30%	3
Overcrowding	18%	5
Inadequate Narrators or Descriptions to Art Forms	63.60%	1
Lack of Proper Hospitality	9.10%	5
Attitude of Local Residents	9.10%	5
Scattered Location of Event Venues	36.40%	2
Inconvenient Timing	18.20%	4

Source: Computed from Survey Data

Inadequate narrators or descriptions to art forms seem to be the major limitation experienced by visitors followed by scattered location of event venues.

Table 7

Perception of Youth towards Kochi Muziris Biennale

Factors	Mean	Z	P Value [#]
KMB has added to the fame of the heritage town of Kochi	4.32	-6.045	< 0.001**
KMB has resulted in General Infrastructural Development in Kochi	3.36	-2.373	0.018*
KMB has resulted in Development in Transport facilities in Kochi	3.20	-0.530	0.596

KMB has resulted in Development in Tourism facilities in Kochi	4.40	-6.482	< 0.001**
KMB has resulted in boosting in Foreign Tourism Business in Kochi	4.24	-6.045	< 0.001**
KMB has resulted in boosting in Greater Domestic Tourism and Business in Kochi	4.12	-5.879	< 0.001**
KMB has resulted in Employment Opportunities in Kochi	3.48	-3.834	< 0.001**
KMB has created greater curiosity to witness Arts and Cultural Activities	3.88	-5.167	< 0.001**
KMB has created greater opportunity for local people to witness International Artists and Artworks	4.08	-5.534	< 0.001**

Source: Computed Survey Data

One Sample Sign Test

**Highly Significant

*Significant

Except transportation facilities, the youth perceive that KMB has created a positive impact on the different dimensions enquired. The moderate perception w.r.t. development transportation facilities are not found to be statistically significant.

Table 8

Association between Socio Economic Variables and Perception towards KMB

Factors	P Values [#]					
	Gender	Age	Region	Family Type	Annual Family Income	Religion
KMB has added to the fame of the heritage town of Kochi	0.895	0.761	0.788	0.051	0.450	0.175
KMB has resulted in General Infrastructural Development in Kochi	0.133	0.641	0.233	0.624	0.243	0.140
KMB has resulted in Development in Transport facilities in Kochi	0.450	0.742	0.450	0.053	0.051	0.052
KMB has resulted in Development in Tourism facilities in Kochi	0.243	0.551	0.243	0.966	0.175	0.175
KMB has resulted in boosting in Foreign Tourism Business in Kochi	0.051	0.175	0.051	0.576	0.140	0.450
KMB has resulted in boosting in Greater Domestic Tourism and Business in Kochi	0.624	0.140	0.624	0.761	0.052	0.243
KMB has resulted in Employment Opportunities in Kochi	0.231	0.052	0.053	0.175	0.450	0.051
KMB has created greater curiosity to witness Arts and Cultural Activities	0.917	0.325	0.966	0.146	0.243	0.140
KMB has created greater opportunity	0.541	0.092	0.576	0.052	0.051	0.052

for local people to witness International Artists and Artworks						
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Source: Computed from Survey Data

#Mann Whitney U Test / Kruskal Wallis H Test

Socio economic variables are not found to be associated with the perception of youth regarding the different dimensions enquired. There seems to a uniform perception to these dimensions.

DISCUSSION

The Kochi-Muziris Biennale was India’s first art biennale, which was launched in December 2012 and holds its fourth edition in December 2018. It is an international exhibition of contemporary art held in Fort Kochi, in Kerala. Every two years, works are shown in converted galleries and halls, and site-specific installations in public spaces, heritage buildings and disused structures. Up to 100 international artists have been represented in each of its successive editions under the curatorship of notable Indian artists. The first edition attracted close to half a million visitors. Various commentaries, including from the former Director of Tate Modern, Chris Dercon, have come to refer to the event as the ‘People’s Biennale’ due to its close connections with the local populations, and also an on-going year-round programme of education, business and innovation and cultural exchange and residencies. Members of the Critical Practice Research Group at Winchester School of Art have engaged with the Biennale since its inception. It provides a fascinating context in which to research, and furthermore the work of the Critical Practices group has fed back to the Biennale to extend the critical thinking of what it means to stage a globally-orientated art ‘perennial’.

There is serious shortage of attitude from the local youth to participate and enrich the cultural expeditions as envisaged by the Biennale Foundation, though the positive impacts are perceived uniformly across different dimensions. Increased participation and active cultural interactions can produce magical effects in the social, cultural and economic landscape of the hosting region.

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