

# The Perception of Street Art and Organized Cultural Events by the Public at Alexanderplatz, Berlin

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## *Abstract*

*Street performance is a well-established multidisciplinary art form widely present across Europe as well as the city of Berlin. We wanted to explore the perception of street art and organized cultural events at Alexanderplatz, the main tourist hub in Berlin. To this aim, over a thousand TripAdvisor reviews were analyzed. TripAdvisor includes a star-based rating system that allows the random visitors to rate the level of their overall experience. Our data indicates that street art as well as organized cultural events are strongly viewed as a positive experience, while the main source of complaints were crime and degrade. Moreover, our data reports a net decline in the presence of street artists in Alexanderplatz from 2016 and on, as a consequence of unfair or absent regulations. Such decline is negatively correlated to the number of complaints for crime and degrade and the overall negative experience in the square.*

## *Introduction*

Street performance is a centuries old open air art form, including a wide variety of expressions such as music, dance, puppetry, theatre, circus arts, painting, etc. Much like many other European cities, Berlin has a strong presence of international street musicians throughout.

In fact, such a presence is so prevalent that the overall impression at both a local and international level is that street art is supported, organized and protected in Berlin.

However, the reality is quite different. There has never been a clear, fair and functional system regarding street music on the city level in Berlin. Each of the city's sixteen districts has its own policies that are anachronistic, inaccessible and bureaucratically cumbersome even for native speakers. Such policies allow for unsanctioned unfair treatment of street artists by local authorities such as Ordnungsamt and Police. The examples of such instances are exaggerated fines (currently up to 50 000 EUR), instrument and equipment confiscation, that are implemented upon arbitrary decisions. Random policing of unclear regulations generates confusion, misinformation and uncertainty for artists.

Moreover, such restrictions are most often in disagreement with the majority of the public (for example, the Initiative Save Mauerpark collected over 9000 signatures in support of street music in the park, of which over 60% came from local residents, while the overall complaints amounted to 60-70 signatures).

We decided to look at Alexanderplatz, a main busking pitch in Berlin, where the overall presence of artists has diminished over the last few years as a consequence of the aforementioned problems.

We referred to TripAdvisor reviews as a source of impartial feedback by random visitors of Alexanderplatz, to sense for the perception of street music in the square, as well as the perception of the square in general.

We were interested in discovering whether the street art was perceived either as a positive cultural attraction or a nuisance by visitors of the square. Moreover, we wanted to explore if street art, as well as organized cultural events had a positive impact overall.

### *Materials and Methods*

TripAdvisor reviews are written comments that are graded on a five point scale, from one star depicting the worst experience to five depicting the best. Each review has a publication date and the date of the experience itself. We decided to focus only on English language reviews referring to a period from January 2013 to the end of December 2019. The English Language reviews were by far the most numerous and they reflected opinions of a broad spectrum of local and international users, more so than any other language.

The data was collected for each year individually. For each individual year, the reviews belonging to different star categories were grouped and analyzed separately as TripAdvisor star grading depicts a different level of experience. The reviews were scored and classified between the following five categories in order to further access which aspect contributed to which grade of satisfaction: CULTURE/EVENTS, BUSKING, DEGRADE, CRIME and OTHER.

Inclusion criteria for each category are the following:

**CULTURE/EVENTS:** Any official event taking place at Alexanderplatz. These are mainly the Christmas Market, Easter Market and Oktoberfest organized by the Bergmann group exclusively each year. Occasional other events such as Berlin Lacht! Busking festival, Vegan Food Market, etc that take place during August and September are also included. Albeit being a street art festival, Berlin Lacht! is included in this category as it is not a spontaneous form of street music, rather an organized event involving planned performances by street artists.

**BUSKING:** Any reference to individual street artists performing spontaneously on Alexanderplatz, outside of any organized events.

**DEGRADE:** Any reference to dirt, rubbish, bad odour or general street decay.

CRIME: Any reference to crime, mostly petty.

OTHER: Any mention of shopping malls, transportation facilities, the TV tower, the World Clock, and Alexanderplatz architecture in general.

Any mention of these categories within a certain review was scored with +1. For each review, the publication date, the experience date, the full text and the scoring per category were reported.

All of the reviews can be found here:  
<https://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Search?q=alexanderplatz&searchSessionId=9754F4E953B24070A394DCF7B877F5D81591698074927ssid&searchNearby=false&sid=AA35298E93E03C742DBC7E92F4B335471591698103180&blockRedirect=true>

The statistical analysis was performed using binomial regression and chi-square tests for goodness of fit.

### *Results and Discussion*

We observed that busking as well as organized cultural events were prevalently present in the top ranking reviews, depicting the best experience (four and five stars), independently of the time period (Table 1). Moreover, both categories were nearly absent from the two poorest ranking review categories, but when mentioned, they were reported as the single positive part of the overall experience.

As expected, degrade and crime were more prevalent in the lower graded reviews (one star and two stars). When mentioned in the higher ranking reviews, degrade and crime were still depicted negatively.

Three star reviews referring to a mixed experience had all categories present, however they maintained the trend of crime and degrade depicted negatively and art and culture depicted in the positive light.

Not one single complaint about street artists was registered within our dataset. The total of 1067 reviews were analyzed.

TOTAL DATA PER EACH REVIEW CATEGORY INDEPENDENTLY OF THE YEAR						
REVIEW TYPE	CULTURE/ EVENTS	BUSKERS	DEGRADE	CRIME	OTHER (shops, transports)	
5 stars	135	44	9	5	155	
4 stars	117	53	11	10	209	
3 stars	36	14	32	11	136	
2 stars	1	1	25	4	30	
1 star	1	2	11	4	11	
TOTAL REVIEW PER CATEGORY	290	114	88	34	541	
EXPECTED FREQUENCIES	58	22.8	17.6	6.8	108.2	

Table 1. reports the overall frequencies for each category within the TripAdvisor star ranking system.

The chi square tests confirmed that the prevalence of street art as well as other cultural events within the positive review categories was statistically significant, within the confidence interval of 1%.

Therefore our data suggests that the street art and cultural events in general are perceived as a positive attraction by the random visitors of Alexanderplatz. Moreover, our data indicates that degrade and crime constitute the main source of complaints and negative experience overall. Furthermore, the contribution of street art and culture to complaints from visitors of the square is non-existent.

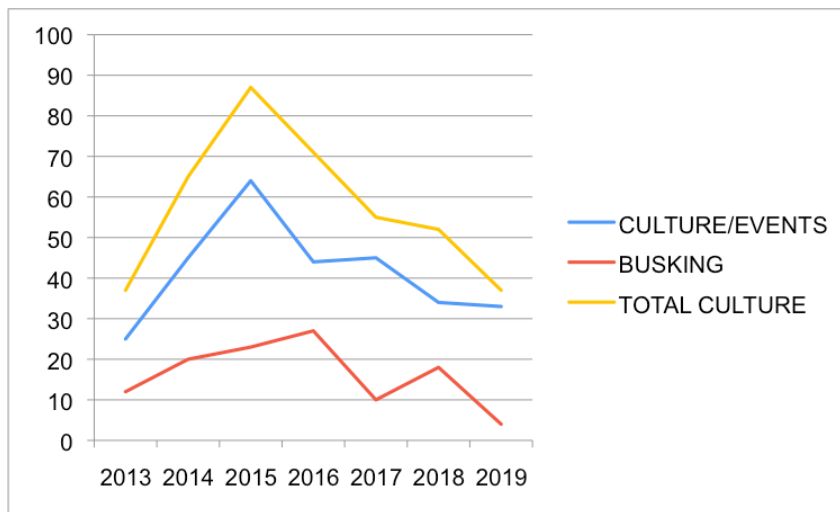
As a stand-alone category, street music was reported in roughly 12-13% of the highest ranking reviews with 4 and 5 stars, and about 6% of medium ranking reviews (3 stars), and as such constitutes an individual tourist attraction at Alexanderplatz. Moreover, despite the lack of protection of the street artist community, unclear and unfair rules and difficulty of performances during winter months and in presence of organized events such as markets, spontaneous street music performances account for the staggering 28% on average of all cultural events present at Alexanderplatz, without any form of organization or support (Table 2).

CONTRIBUTION OF STREET MUSIC TOWARDS THE OVERALL CULTURAL EVENTS ON ALEXANDERPLATZ: YEARLY BREAKDOWN

ABSOLUTE FREQUENCIES				PERCENTAGES/NORMALIZED DATA			
YEAR	Culture /Events	Buskers	TOTAL CULTURE	YEAR	Culture /Events	Buskers	TOTAL CULTURE
2013	25	12	37	2013	67.56756757	32.43243243	100
2014	45	20	65	2014	69.23076923	30.76923077	100
2015	64	23	87	2015	73.56321839	26.43678161	100
2016	44	27	71	2016	61.97183099	38.02816901	100
2017	45	10	55	2017	81.81818182	18.18181818	100
2018	34	18	52	2018	65.38461538	34.61538462	100
2019	33	4	37	2019	89.18918919	10.81081081	100

Table 2. The contribution of street music towards the overall cultural events on Alexanderplatz.

Such contribution has declined over the years due to aforementioned issues, going from 32.43% in 2013 to only 10.81% in 2019 (Graph 1, Table 2).



*Graph 1. The frequencies of street art and cultural events reported from 2013 to 2019, yearly breakdown.*

The binomial regression shows a net decline in the presence of street artists in the square from year 2016 to year 2019, with a certain recovery in 2018. This data is in consistency with what is observed within the busking community in Berlin, where the growing general discomfort regarding the performance conditions at Alexanderplatz was reported.

Our data also notices a negative correlation between the presence of the artists in the square and degrade and crime, especially in the years 2015 and 2019 ([Annex 1](#)). This indicates that busking and cultural events impact the variation in complaints regarding degarde and crime. This can be due to several factors. For example, the larger presence of street art and cultural events may outweigh the negative factors within a certain experience. Alternatively, the presence of street artists in the square may leave less space for crime in general as it creates a peaceful audience and atmosphere. A similar phenomenon was observed in Mauerpark as well.

Within the “OTHER” category, the transportation facilities at Alexanderplatz were widely praised, while the presence of shopping malls displayed some mixed views - in more high ranking reviews, the presence of shops was viewed as a positive factor, while in more lower rated reviews it was seen as a form of disappointment, as a lack of any distinctive landmark of the city itself. Another curious observation was relatively poor feedback regarding the architecture of Alexanderplatz, with the sole exception of the TV tower. No in depth analysis was performed on these observations as they are not the focal point of our research.

## *Conclusions*

Our analysis of TripAdvisor reviews indicates that street art is perceived as a defining characteristic of Berlin culture, being one of the main attractions within the tourist hotspots around the city such as Alexanderplatz despite lacking any form of support. The same can be said for organized cultural events that enjoy the official support by the city.

Moreover, our data confirm that the street art is in net decline due to the lack of functional organization, fair performance conditions and government support.

An introduction of clear, fair and functional performance conditions at city level would help stimulate and conserve street art in a sustainable manner.