

# Research on the Two-Way Empowerment Development Path of Public Art Intervention in Rural Spaces: Taking Quanzhou's Xunpu Village as an Example

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## Abstract

Against the backdrop of rural revitalisation, some public art villages have demonstrated the cultural and lifestyle conditions of different regions in the new era while coordinating the future development needs of rural areas. As a form of cultural and artistic communication and interaction with the public, public art plays a significant role in the protection and development of villages through various mediums. Public art is increasingly taking diverse forms in rural areas, with its local relevance and public nature being re-emphasised. This establishes an effective connection between the concept of 'rural revitalisation' and the practice of using art to empower rural areas. Simultaneously, public art and rural spaces are gradually forming a mutually beneficial, positive trend. This study takes Quanzhou's Xunpu Village as a case study, delving into the mutually empowering development pathways of public art's intervention in rural spaces, as well as the dimensions of balancing traditional cultural heritage with rural development. It provides new insights and methods for the planning and construction of rural areas.

**Keywords:** public art, rural space, two-way empowerment, rural culture

## 1. Research Background

In recent years, rural development has become one of the key issues in China's development. Rural areas have lost their unique characteristics due to urbanisation, rural culture has gradually eroded, and issues such as the destruction of the natural environment have become increasingly evident. Public art, through the interaction between artistic works and public spaces, not only beautifies the environment and enhances spatial quality but also promotes community interaction and strengthens cultural identity. By incorporating public art, we can deeply explore and showcase the cultural characteristics of rural areas, protect and preserve rural culture; activate rural public spaces, enhance rural cohesion and appeal; and improve rural spatial quality, thereby promoting the development of rural tourism and the economy.

As a typical fishing village in Quanzhou City, Fujian Province, Xunpu Village boasts a rich history, culture, and folk customs. Its unique geographical location, architectural style, natural landscape, and folk activities provide a wealth of material and conditions for the intervention of public art. However, in the process of urbanisation, Xunpu Village also faces issues such as cultural loss and the deterioration of its spatial environment.

## 2. Public Art and Rural Development

### 2.1 The Value of 'Public Art+' for Rural Development

Public art refers to tangible and intangible art forms in public spaces, including but not limited to murals, sculptures, installations, and artistic performances, emphasizing the public welfare and cultural benefits of art. As a form of urban culture, public art, through its unique visual appeal, not only enhances the city's aesthetic appeal but also narrates its historical evolution and humanistic spirit [1]. In modern society, which values multiculturalism and cultural innovation, people seek more cultural experiences and opportunities for expression within cities. Urban public art should address this need by offering diverse artistic forms and interactive projects that provide rich cultural experiences and enhance citizens' sense of social participation [2]. Public art often serves as an evaluation

factor for urban development standards. A city with excellent public art is one that is thoughtful, warm-hearted, and soulful. Public art fundamentally reflects a city's humanistic culture and artistic level, and can even promote the city's positive development [3].

As public art continues to evolve, its focus has gradually shifted from urban areas to rural and disadvantaged communities. Public art emphasizes public participation and shared ownership, while rural development is a comprehensive national rural strategy project with a long-term perspective, requiring higher and broader levels of participation. It plays a significant role in promoting social harmony and stability [4]. Many countries and regions utilise public art to address issues encountered in rural development, such as the degradation of rural living environments, the homogenisation of rural areas, the loss of rural culture, and the neglect of rural customs. As an important tool for community micro-renewal, public art is increasingly integrated with urban planning and architectural design, employing detailed design methods to improve and revitalise outdated community spaces, thereby empowering communities [5]. By intervening in declining villages through the 'public art+' approach, it is possible to improve the local living environment, activate local development opportunities, and enhance the region's self-development capabilities.

## 2.2 Current Status and Issues in Rural Public Art Development

Currently, without considering the unique characteristics and advantages of rural areas, and without conducting in-depth research into the ecological environment and cultural atmosphere of rural areas, some operators blindly replicate successful cases from other rural areas, copying their artistic styles. This results in the original unique artistic styles of local rural areas becoming homogenised, transforming from 'each village having its own distinct character' to 'many villages sharing the same character.' As a result, the artistic designs become vastly different from the original rural landscape and style, failing to align with the unique elements and symbols of the local rural areas. Rural tourism operators, in an effort to reduce costs, either undertake environmental creative design on their own or hire practitioners with low artistic and cultural literacy. Due to their own limited aesthetic sensibilities and lack of experience in independently creating mature artistic works, the public art they produce is often poorly crafted, lacking artistic appeal, and contrary to the original intent of using art to contribute to rural revitalisation.

## 3. Advantages of Public Art Intervention in Xunpu Village

### 3.1 Advantages of Cultural Resources

#### 3.1.1 Historical Background

Xunpu Village has a history of thousands of years and was one of the important starting points of ancient Maritime Silk Road. It is also one of the important ports in the coastal areas of Fujian. This rich historical background provides a profound cultural soil for public art. Xunpu Village is rich in cultural heritage, including red brick houses, stone carvings, wood carvings and other buildings with traditional architectural styles in southern Fujian. As well as unique buildings such as oyster shell houses, which are valuable materials for public art creation, as shown in Figures 3-1 and 3-2.



Figure 3-1. Red Brick House

Source: Baidu Images



Figure 3-2. Oyster Shell House

Source: Baidu Images

#### 3.1.2 Folk Culture

The traditional customs and festival activities in Xunpu Village are rich and colorful, such as offering sacrifices to the sea and praying for blessings, Tianxiang patrol, etc. These activities not only show the cultural traditions and

spiritual features of the local people, but also provide vivid content for public art. As the local characteristic cultural symbols, Xunpu Girl and hairpin with flower decoration have become cultural business cards and cultural tourism resources. It provides unique creative elements for public art, as shown in Figures 3-3 and 3-4.



Figure 3-3. Tianxiang Tour

Source: Baidu Images



Figure 3-2. hairpin with flower decoration

Source: Baidu Images

### 3.2 Advantages of Tourism Resources

Since 2023, the number of tourists has increased significantly, and Xunpu Village has continued to be popular because of its unique cultural IP of "Xunpu Village Hairpin Flower Enclosure". It has become a phenomenal hot spot of national cultural tourism. Since this year, Xunpu Village has received more than 3.4 million tourists. It shows high tourism attraction and market potential.

At the peak of holiday tourism, during the holidays, such as the May Day holiday, the number of tourists in Xunpu Village reached 290000. The average number of tourists per day reached 60000, and the highest number of tourists per day exceeded 80000. This phenomenon of tourism peak shows that Xunpu Village has a very high tourism fever during the holidays.

## 4. A Feasible Path for Public Art to Intervene in the Two-Way Empowerment Development of Xunpu Village

### 4.1 Public Art Intervenes in the Space of Xunpu Village

#### 4.1.1 The Principle of Intervention

##### 4.1.1.1 Hommisation

Humanisation should be a fundamental principle of public art. As a public art piece placed in a public space to serve a rural community, it should align with the daily habits and routines of rural residents. This alignment is essential to encourage public interaction with the artwork, thereby establishing its value and significance. Public art creators should conduct on-site investigations, research, and analyses of the site's characteristics, incorporating the principle of human-centred design into the creation process. Through scientific, standardised, and reasonable methods, they should continuously refine and optimise the potential relationships between people and public artworks. Additionally, artists should consider human sensory systems such as vision and touch to create public art spaces that truly belong to the local rural community.

##### 4.1.1.2 Interactivity

Good public artworks possess inherent public appeal, capable of guiding the public to engage with them. They emphasise interaction and communication between the public and the artwork. Artists should adopt the perspective of a rural resident from the outset of their creative process, incorporating their perceptions and understanding of rural public spaces into their artistic creations. This approach enables local residents to more readily accept the resulting public artworks. The ultimate goal of rural public art is to enhance residents' aesthetic awareness, enabling them to discover the beauty around them and actively engage with public art. Only through such integration can public art truly become part of rural life, ultimately realising the aspiration for a beautiful way of life.

#### 4.1.1.3 Regionalism and Ecological Conservation

Public art only becomes public art when it is placed in public spaces. By choosing Xunpu Village as the subject of study, one must first consider the differences between Xunpu Village and urban public spaces, as well as its unique characteristics. This village embodies the lifestyle, history, culture, folk customs, and natural ecology of its residents. Therefore, public art should align with the humanistic environment and natural ecological landscape, creating works without overly intervening in the local context, while respecting and protecting the village's original humanistic and natural systems.

#### 4.1.2 Design Strategy

##### 4.1.2.1 Make Full Use of Natural Elements

The public art in Xunpu Village is based on the fundamental concept of respecting the natural environment. In practice, it is fully integrated with the natural vegetation, mountains, rivers, and farmland, as well as the existing architectural forms. Artistic designs are created according to the original terrain of the village and the different spatial requirements, and artistic creations are made based on the characteristics of the natural environment. Fully utilise the natural elements of the ocean for artistic treatment to enhance the overall artistic quality of the space and increase the recognisability of the village's artistic landmarks. Artistic creations based on natural elements are unique due to the characteristics and irreplicability of the environment, particularly the distinctive marine culture and oyster farming of Xunpu, which make public art and public spaces more distinctive and appealing. This serves as an important foundation for rural artistic practices.

##### 4.1.2.2 Respect for Local and Cultural Elements

The cultural customs of each place are mostly based on specific contexts and are also the lifestyles that local people have gradually formed over a long period of time. The behaviour and thinking patterns of people in different regions are influenced by the local humanities and historical environment. Therefore, on the basis of fully respecting local customs and regional culture, integrating the language of public art into villages has a positive effect on the cultural and ethnic confidence of local people and their identification with their own living environment. In the creation of public art in Xunpu Village, the regional cultural context is consistently upheld. The architectural space and form are rooted in the cultural soil of the Minnan maritime region. Local construction techniques and materials are combined with artistic thinking, such as red bricks, oyster shells, etc. Villagers can find clues and key information in the artworks through their understanding of their hometown's culture, evoking 'empathy' when viewing the works, thereby reflecting the humanistic concern of the artworks for the local community.

##### 4.1.2.3 Focus on Mental and Emotional Memory Elements

Providing a spiritual space, it is particularly important for public art to reflect people's daily lives and genuine feelings. The mural art of Xunpu Village originated from folk life. Its unique patterns and colours convey the humanistic and spiritual messages of the countryside, embodying the materialisation of regional spirit. The spiritual pleasure derived from deep engagement is enhanced through interaction with the environment, deepening the interpretation of local culture from both perceptual and cognitive perspectives. The memory of a place is constructed by time and location. The places where people have lived for a long time always carry the stories and unique historical and cultural attributes of the area, preserved in the traces of the lives of the local people. The so-called memory of a place is the sociological significance established between the place and the people. Telling stories through art and displaying typical works is an excellent way to express memory and emotion.

#### 4.1.3 Implementation Strategy

##### 4.1.3.1 Holistic Strategy

In the local practice of public art, Xunpu requires holistic consideration of the village as a whole. By employing "micro-updates" and "acupuncture-style" approaches, artworks are strategically placed throughout the village. Whether in architectural art, sculpture, or performance space design, all creations are rooted in the village's overall atmosphere. Public art spaces are positioned according to distinct environmental characteristics, offering photo spots for visitors to help promote Xunpu's cultural identity. From a holistic perspective, emphasis is placed on the overall relationship between public art and the village's spatial environment, balancing uniqueness with overall coherence. At the macro level, a comprehensive layout is devised in accordance with local conditions, resulting in a harmoniously organised village art environment.

#### 4.1.3.2 Endogenous Strategy

The public art in Xunpu emphasises the inherent qualities and development of the village itself, adhering to the principle that local residents are the primary drivers of internal development. This approach aims to strengthen collective identity and awareness among the community, protect the rights of local residents, and encourage them to take an active role in building their hometown. By leveraging local resources, the initiative seeks to foster self-sustaining development within the village. Local designers, who have lived in their hometowns for a long time, complete their work based on a deep understanding and respect for nature, land, culture, and daily life. These local practices serve as excellent examples in fully tapping into, mobilising, and leveraging the initiative of local residents, reflecting their spiritual world and aesthetic needs. Such endogenous rural practices also effectively build local identity.

#### 4.1.3.3 Slow Growth Strategy

The public art in Xunpu emphasises a state of natural growth. From the outset, it has been laid out in a 'micro-renewal' and 'acupuncture-like' manner, not emphasising instant results, but rather maturing one by one, emphasising the slow growth of art in the village space environment. Under the guidance of a slow growth strategy, public artworks should not be clustered together. Instead, public art should be integrated with the regional characteristics of Xunpu, blending into the creation of artistic landscapes and humanistic architectural design. This approach highlights the unique regional characteristics of Xunpu, such as the sense of secrecy contrasted with modern urban life, the purity of the natural environment, and the artistic atmosphere that harmonises with the mountains and waters. The creation of public art in Xunpu should be orderly and restrained. The works rely on Xunpu's unique marine scenery to slowly build a multi-dimensional service system that integrates cultural tourism, art, and local products. Through the power of art, the vitality of the ancient village of Xunpu is gradually revitalised. At the same time, the moderate commercialisation of rural public art enables local residents to obtain certain economic benefits.

### 4.2 Public Art Empowers Xunpu Village

#### 4.2.1 Uncovering Rural Value and Enhancing Regional Identity

Public art, with its public nature, local relevance, and diversity, has established a stable platform for rural areas to engage in multi-faceted exchanges with the outside world. By fostering connections across diverse fields, it opens up new possibilities for the future of rural communities. The future development of public art in Xunpu should begin with the unique characteristics of local stories, progressing to the creation of an artistic brand, the collection and preparation of exhibition works, and the integration of social resources and various industries. Through this process, the cultural treasures and natural resources of the rural area will be rediscovered and made known to a wider audience. The story of Xunpu Village will continue to spread to more surrounding areas, taking longer to create a new cultural layer with contemporary meaning for Quanzhou.

#### 4.2.2 Continuing Rural Culture

The flower pin culture and marine labour culture of the women of Xunpu are important elements of Xunpu's public art. Local traditions and regional specialties embody the essence of indigenous culture, reflecting both the commonalities and uniqueness of China's rural heritage while showcasing the cultural ethos of specific regions. Public art in rural spaces not only preserves and revives local cultural customs to some extent, but also provides new avenues for younger generations and visitors to engage with these traditions. This initiative helps us rediscover and preserve the Chinese rural culture that has been gradually lost during urbanization. Through its intervention, public art reshapes people's historical understanding of their homeland and rekindles the cultural confidence rooted in Xunpu.

### 4.3 Empowering Art in Xunpu Village

#### 4.3.1 Developing Local Arts and Culture

In the past process of urbanisation, people's excessive reliance on industrial civilisation and blind pursuit of modern society have led to the core values of Chinese culture being questioned or even rejected. Rural civilisation, under the impact of modern civilisation, is gradually being lost. At the same time, contemporary public art creation is shifting towards social participation, urgently needing to break free from its long-standing reliance on and borrowing from Western discourse, and instead ground itself in the local environment to overcome its cultural challenges. As the cradle of Chinese civilisation, the countryside provides contemporary Chinese public art with a rich and enduring source of local cultural resources and historical context, offering artists an ideal creative environment within the heartland of local culture. Just like in Xunpu Village, it is a collision and fusion of

contemporary artistic concepts and traditional cultural soil, as well as a convergence of traditional values and modern civilisation.

#### 4.3.2 Giving Art Social Significance and Enhancing Artistic Responsibility

Art needs to be experienced in real spaces. Artists need to have their feet on the ground, value the experience of real spaces, fully understand the land and the people who live there, and invite villagers to participate in creating villages where scenes and life are artistic. 'Xunpu Village' is an opportunity to explore the integration of public art into rural development, thereby achieving a re-examination of traditional culture and a restoration of contemporary social relations. The focus is not on art itself, but on creating public art that truly integrates into the rural environment, thereby stimulating the sense of agency and participation of local residents and visitors, and perpetuating the Chinese people's warm resonance and reverence for their homeland. Fostering positive interaction between the public and artworks, cultivating and guiding public awareness of participation in public spaces, forming a new rural lifestyle in step with the times, enhancing the public's aesthetic literacy regarding public art, and thereby achieving high-quality public artworks. Therefore, such public art practices are conducive to strengthening artists' sense of social responsibility, respecting the agency of villagers, and respecting the diversity of regional cultures.

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