

Research on the Reform of the "Public Art" Curriculum Based on "Rural Locality": A Case Study of Hangzhou City University

Weilu Lv¹, Yingying Zhu¹, Yuyuan Zhu²

¹College of Art and Archaeology, Hangzhou City University, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 310000, China

²School of Design, Zhijiang College of Zhejiang University of Technology, Hangzhou, Zhejiang, 312030, China

ABSTRACT

The Public Art course aims to cultivate students' understanding of the artistic expression and social value of public Spaces, and to enhance their artistic thinking and practical abilities through the study of form composition, material language and social participation. There are three problems in the current teaching practice: First, the course content is too focused on theoretical explanations and lacks in-depth integration with local cultural resources and the spatial environment, and the "publicness" of the works is insufficient; Second, the teaching methods are relatively single and traditional, with the content mainly based on the analysis of literature cases, lacking on-site perception, and it is difficult to stimulate students' cultural identity; Third, the practical part mostly remains at the stage of scheme conception, and the lack of user thinking and demand leads to a low social conversion rate of students' works. This study combines the perspectives of "locality" and "publicness" of public art courses. Taking rural public art practice as an example, it adopts an approach that combines classroom instruction (theoretical learning), field research (demand analysis), acceptable engineering practice (feasibility of implementation), and multi-evaluation (community participation) to enable students to integrate art education with social practice closely. To cultivate the art and design talents of the new era with a sense of responsibility, creativity, and a deep sense of local cultural identity.

KEYWORDS

Locality; Public art; Rural public space

1 Introduction

In 2023, the Ministry of Education of China issued the "Notice on Fully Implementing the Infiltration Action of Aesthetic Education in Schools", clarifying the development direction of aesthetic education. Especially in the current art education in colleges and universities, aesthetic education activities are gradually expanding to rural areas, exploring ways to promote cultural revitalisation in rural areas through art rural construction, achieving good interaction between works and villagers based on optimizing and improving rural living space, and jointly promoting the construction of rural spiritual civilization. The teaching practice of local art deepens students' understanding and identification with local culture, and also promotes farmers' acceptance and participation in modern art forms. The introduction of rural art creation methods not only enriches the cultural ecology of rural areas but also provides new teaching content and practical platforms for aesthetic education in colleges and universities. Especially in recent years, the integration of culture and tourism in "harmonious and beautiful villages" has shifted from a single focus on environmental improvement to a systematic integration of culture, ecology, and industry. Through policy guidance, artistic empowerment and community participation, the countryside has not only become a carrier of cultural inheritance, but also a "living aesthetic space" shared by residents and tourists. In the future, it is necessary to break through further bottlenecks such as fragmented management and superficial culture to promote a comprehensive upgrade of the countryside from "external beauty" to "internal harmony", and truly achieve the sustainable development goal of "prosperous industries, rich farmers, beautiful countryside".

2 Public art from the city to the countryside

2.1 China's rural revitalization strategy and cultural tourism integration policy orientation

The policy orientation of China's rural revitalization strategy focuses on the dual-core linkage of "urban-rural synergy + farmers as the main body". This is first reflected in the integration of urban and rural areas and the activation of endogenous driving forces. By bringing urban talent, creativity and capital down to rural areas, activating rural cultural and natural ecological resources, promoting cultural innovation, and achieving "urban leading rural areas and mutual promotion between urban and rural areas". Secondly, advocate for the principal position of farmers. Emphasize the protection of farmers' rights to participate and benefit in the cultural industry, and establish a benefit connection mechanism of "farmers as the main body and multiple parties involved". At the same time, it is explicitly required at the policy level to "implement the cultural industry empowerment plan for rural revitalization", "promote the quality project of rural leisure tourism", "upgrade the quality of rural homestays", and cultivate new business forms such as culture and

sports, tourism and leisure. In contrast, strengthening the protection of agricultural cultural heritage, improving infrastructure and promoting the integrated construction of key villages for rural tourism.

2.2 The dual value of Chinese public art in the reconstruction of rural space: aesthetic empowerment + social participation

The predecessor of public art in China can be traced back to urban sculptures in the 1950s and 1960s. With the passage of time and the introduction of Western concepts of public art, public art in China has evolved and expanded in terms of subject matter, conceptual expression, and material language^[1-3]. Entering the 21st century, with the advancement of "beautiful countryside" construction, public art has shifted from urban squares to rural fields, and its connotation has expanded from a single commemorative and decorative function to multiple dimensions, including cultural revitalization, community participation, and ecological sustainability. The practice, which demonstrates the dual value of aesthetic empowerment and social participation in reshaping rural Spaces, has formed an organic unity of cultural revitalization and community activation through the coordinated advancement of policy guidance and case studies. Policies such as Lishui's "Measures for the Application of Art to Boost Rural Revitalisation Projects" have facilitated the implementation of the "art + rural" model through financial support and brand building. At the practical level, cases such as the "Flower Field Art Painting Project" in Bicheng Village, Dazhou, Sichuan Province, the Dongfengyun project in Mile, Yunnan Province, and the Z MUSEUM Weaving Art Museum in Songzhuang Village, Songyang County, have achieved the integration of traditional aesthetics and contemporary rural construction through means such as theme wall paintings, deconstruction of local buildings, and modern transformation of traditional craftsmanship, reshaping the aesthetic value of rural Spaces; In Shijiezi Village, Tianshui, Gansu Province, the mass art gallery model, the village co-creation model of Yangding Art Cooperative of Sichuan Fine Arts Institute, and the renovation of the old auditorium of Chenjiapu People's Bookstore have activated the endogenous power of rural communities through art to demonstrate community cohesion, cultivate cultural awareness and promote employment and income growth.

At the academic theoretical level, the "publicness" and "artistry" of public art are increasingly recognized and accepted by the public, and the emphasis on "locality" has led to a deeper focus on the integration of natural and human resources in artistic creation, achieving environmental reshaping through deconstructing traditional symbols and activating cultural memory. The multi-subject linkage mechanism requires the collaborative participation of artists, villagers, the government and enterprises to balance economic demands and the elevation^[4] of spiritual culture. The interaction of these policies and practices validates the dual functions of public art in rural Spaces, which are to enhance environmental quality and activate community participation, providing a composite path of art education innovation and cultural governance for revitalization. In the future, interdisciplinary cooperation and systematic methodological construction need to be further deepened to achieve the strategic goal of comprehensive revitalization.

2.3 The significance of domestic public art for aesthetic education of college students and concern for the ecological environment

According to the Ministry of Education's "Guidelines for Public Art Courses in Higher Education Institutions", public art courses are explicitly included in the talent training programs of higher education institutions, and students are required to complete 2 credits before graduation. This policy elevates aesthetic education from a "soft task" to a "hard indicator", promoting the construction of a three-in-one curriculum system of "aesthetic theory + art appreciation + practical experience" in colleges and universities.

This guideline, in a broad sense, is about the cultivation of art and aesthetic literacy, and there are specific differences from the narrow sense of the "Public Art" course. The former often incorporates regional culture and diverse forms of expression. For example, the Majiayao Cultural Pottery Workshop enables students to have in-depth contact with ancient civilisations and enhance their cultural identity through various forms, such as study Tours, painting, and dance. As for the teaching of the "Public Art" course, due to the limited number of class hours, the creative space and organization of the course content, despite the abundance of practical cases, there are still three core problems in teaching:

(1) The one-way nature of the course content. Most courses focus on artistic skills (such as painting and sculpture), emphasizing urban Spaces while neglecting the in-depth exploration and expansion of rural fields. (2) The criteria for evaluating courses are monotonous. Teacher classroom evaluation is the main form, lacking a third-party user evaluation. (3) Low implementability of the program. The evaluation of proposals is mainly based on creativity, and most of the projects designed by students are challenging to implement. Curriculum design in art teaching is often limited, resulting in practical plans that are difficult to implement due to the neglect of social, economic, and ecological complexity.

3 Thoughts on the reform of public art curriculum from the perspective of rural 'locality'

3.1 Breaking the "urban centrism" tendency in public art courses

(1) Rural natural fields support cross-disciplinary courses that are difficult to achieve in cities. Urban space, as the birthplace of public art, serves as an "experimental field" for public art research and creation, with a focus on the relationship among the city, the environment, and the public in terms of "locality". When the experimental field extends into the countryside, the vast site offers students a much broader learning environment. Thinking about "locality" can be achieved through a combination of folkloric research, sociological research, and participatory design, integrating traditional handicrafts with innovative teaching concepts to enhance students' hands-on ability and enable them to learn to create ^[5] in practice. (2) Features of rural public art courses. Resource origin - natural and human resources are not teaching AIDS but the curriculum itself; Subject diversity - Villagers, students, and artists form a "knowledge symbiosis"; Benefit systematicness - one class can simultaneously activate cultural inheritance, industrial incubation, and ecological protection.

Urban public art is primarily led by professional artists and institutions, with limited public participation and often removed from the community context. Rural public art, on the other hand, is co-created by villagers, educational institutions, and enterprises, and is deeply integrated with local cultural heritage. See Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1 Comparison of public art participants in urban and rural areas

Dimensions	UrbanPublicArt	Ruralpublicart
Dominant forces	Professional artists, institutions	Villagers, schools, and businesses are all working together
Breadth of participation	Limited public interaction	Co-creation by all (children, seniors, artisans, etc.)
Cultural rooting	is often detached from the community context	Deeply integrate local cultural genes

Table 2 Comparison of Urban and Rural Curriculum Resources

Dimensions	UrbanCurriculumResources	Ruralcourseresources
Material Access	Standardized industrial materials	Sourcing locally (straw, sea waste, clay, etc.)
Cultural carriers	Simulated scenes (such as 3D printed models of ancient buildings)	Real intangible cultural heritage workshops and living villages
Practice Field	Classroom/Business Gallery	Mountains, forests, fields, coasts and other natural classrooms

3.2 Fix the "floating design" caused by the disconnection between teaching and practice

The "suspended design" is mainly manifested in the following aspects: (1) Cognitive gap, with the course content overly focusing on the Western modern art theory system, imposing the logic of urban art museums on rural scenes, and neglecting the productivity of rural Spaces and the metaphorical nature of cultural symbols. (2) Disconnection from practice: Urban projects account for more than 80% of the teaching case library, and virtual topics lack real constraints, resulting in students' schemes being presented as conceptually idealized, de-scene-based" characteristics, unable to respond to the actual needs of the countryside. See Table 3.

Table 3 Comparison of public art participants in urban and rural areas

Case Types	Case Description	Core of the Problem	Implications
Success Story: Peasant Painting Project in Yudong Village, Zhejiang	Through the "Cultural Village chief" system, artists and villagers create together, integrating peasant paintings into rural tourism to achieve a win-win situation of cultural inheritance and economic benefits.	Deep community engagement, cultural symbol activation, and benefit-sharing mechanism.	Public art needs to be rooted in local culture and establish a "villager - artist - government" collaborative model.
Failure case: A rural project imitating urban sculpture	Due to the neglect of the local culture of the village, the sculpture style was seriously out of harmony with the surrounding environment, which caused resistance among villagers and eventually led to its demolition.	The reasons included a formalized design, a lack of cultural research, and a disregard for community opinions.	Avoid "urban aesthetic colonization" and respect rural ecosystems and cultural genes.

Correcting the essence of suspended design involves shifting art education from "knowledge imparting" to "scene empowerment". Rural public art education can genuinely become a cultural engine for revitalisation when curriculum design begins to respect rural "production logic" rather than "aesthetic logic", when teaching evaluation begins to measure "social value" rather than "artistic value", and when students' works begin to solve "villagers' problems" rather than "express themselves". This transformation requires not only an innovation in teaching methods, but also for educators to set aside the urban-centric perspective and, with a humble attitude of "squatting down to look at the

countryside", to reconstruct the dialogue relationship between knowledge and the field.

3.3 Insert multiple evaluations

According to the "2023 China Art Education White Paper", 72% of public art courses are mainly taught in classrooms, and students conduct on-site research at least once a year (covering 26 universities in 8 provinces). Most public art courses in China are taught in the classroom, and the course content is mainly based on visual images or case studies, lacking on-site perception and research, and the recognition of the works cannot be confirmed. Rural public art is rooted in rural Spaces and has a more diverse audience. Tourists, villagers, rural entrepreneurs, and others can all be the subjects of evaluation in the works. Based on this, the final evaluation subjects of the course outcomes can be diverse. Methods such as written evaluations by teachers, on-site evaluations by villagers, and mutual evaluations among students can all help establish whether the work meets expectations and promote mutual evaluation and learning among students.

4 Practice of the public art course: a case study of shanhe village, anji county, huzhou city

4.1 Creating a chain of public art courses

The "Public Art" course at Zhejiang University City College is a compulsory professional course for undergraduate students majoring in environmental design, comprising 48 class hours divided into two parts: theory and practice. Specifically, the course consists of 12 class hours of theory and 36 class hours of practice. To break through and reform the existing classroom teaching methods, this time the course conteorganizedanized as a whole through classroom instruction (theoretical learning) - field research (demand analysis) - precision engineering practice (feasibility of implementation) - multi-evaluation (villager participation), and is broken down in detail as: (1) With the social value and local creation of rural public art as the core, systematianalyzenalyze the theories of ecological aesthetics, community participation and cultural inheritance, and in combination with the background of the "Two Mountains concept" in Anji, guide students to understand the ethical boundaries and innovative paths of art intervention in rural areas, and lay the methodological foundation for subsequent practice. (2) Teachers and students conduct field research in mountain and river villages. Through structured interviews with villagers, spatial mapping, folk culture sorting and cognitive map drawing, accurately identify the design types and spatial locations of public art.. (3) Based on the research conclusions, students propose design plans, conduct feasibility studies, and then carry out creation and refine the structure and materials of the works to enhance the feasibility of implementation. (4) Establish a multi-dimensional evaluation system and introduce "four-dimensional indicators" (aesthetics, practicality, diversity, sustainability) to expand public art courses from theory to practice and from urban to rural areas. Students set up exhibitions in rural Spaces and invite villagers, village officials and rural entrepreneurs to visit. Students present and defend their work on the spot, and the three parties conduct a comprehensive evaluation to select the works that best fit the art rural construction of Shanhe Village. See Figure 1 and Figure 2.



Figure 1 Photo of students discussing with rural entrepreneurs Picture
(On-site photos :Taken by the author)



Figure 2 Photo of students discussing with village cadres (On-site
photos :Taken by the author)

4.2 Emphasize the "local" design of rural areas

Site-Specificity: KwonMiwon's three-dimensional theory of "spatial-social-history". The "Site-Specificity" of public art is a core feature that distinguishes it from traditional art, emphasizing the deep connection between the artwork and the specific place, mainly: the embedding of physical space, the translocation of rural cultural genes, the participation of social relations, the concern for the sustainability of the ecosystem, and the growth in the temporal dimension. Each village has its own unique spatial texture context, influenced by local geographical and environmental features. Therefore, rural public art design should conform to the local spatial environment and be in harmony with its surroundings. Make the art form focus on the daily life of the villagers and avoid disconnection between the public artworks and the original rural environment. In terms of physical space embeddedness, when students designed, they searched for the local characteristic plant of Shanhe Village - bamboo - and created public art installations that incorporated the characteristics of Shanhe Village, blending in with the surrounding environment and providing a certain functionality. In terms of the transliteration of rural cultural genes, localness requires the transformation of local cultural symbols (such as folk customs, materials, and craftsmanship) into contemporary artistic language to avoid the simple replication of symbols^[6-7]. Students associate the cultural industry of Shanhe Village with intangible cultural heritage and create public artworks with the intangible cultural heritage skills of "green lion", etc.

Regarding the participatory nature of social relations, students' works fully consider the interaction needs of villagers in Shanhe Village, designing artistic recreational installations that incorporate low-carbon technologies. This approach ensures the subjectivity of villagers' participation while adhering to the design concept of sustainable development. The public art piece "Theatre of the Earth" was designed by students who seized the temporal dimension characteristics of the "locality" of the countryside and perfectly integrated the landscape creation of seasonal plants with the site, allowing the public to experience the charm of rural art in different seasons.

At the same time, the "local" design also needs to consider low ecological impact and climate response. The countryside is different from the city, where low-density residential buildings give up more extensive public Spaces that include areas where people can gather and crops can be grown. Therefore, the principle of low intervention should respect the natural background and historical traces of the site, avoiding disturbance and destruction of the original site ecosystem through large-scale and irreversible renovations. For example, the work "Rainbow Climbing" effectively utilizes the red leaf plum trees within the site, creating a web-like structure that connects multiple trees and protects the plants, while also serving as a climbing area for children. The principle of climate response means that the design and material selection of public art must actively adapt to local climate conditions and be able to effectively respond to extreme weather events, thereby enhancing the resilience and lifespan of the work. See Figure 3 and Figure 4.



Figure 3 Student Work "Rainbow Climbing School"
(contributed by students)



Figure 4 Student Work "Earth Theater"
(contributed by students)

4.3 Innovation in the evaluation system of rural "locality"

The evaluation system of rural public art "locality" curriculum needs to break away from the aesthetic centrism of traditional art evaluation, construct a three-dimensional framework centred on cultural fit, community participation, and ecological sustainability, and measure whether the works are genuinely rooted in the rural field through a combination of quantitative indicators and qualitative assessment. (1) Shift from "artistic value" to "social value", downplay the weight of form innovation, and strengthen social benefit indicators such as cultural inheritance and community co-construction. (2) Dynamic continuation of the work, long-term tracking and documentation to ensure that the work is truly integrated into

rural life. (3) The role of evaluation is reversed, with villagers' satisfaction as the core indicator, subverting the traditional evaluation model of "teacher-led".

5 Conclusions

"Take the countryside as the partner, the villagers as the main body, solid rural construction as the approach, and rural development and artistic practice as the vision of the art festival. In this way, the role of the art festival can be integrated into the daily life of the local area." Based on the teaching reform of the "local" public art curriculum, students' understanding of the core principles of rural public art design is enhanced. The curriculum chain of "public art" from creativity to implementation is proposed, allowing art to intervene in the restoration of the relationship between people and land, providing practical scenarios for public art education, improving students' cultural literacy while adding new vitality to the local culture of the countryside. It can enable art to coexist harmoniously with nature, add vitality to the rural environment, and facilitate the better inheritance and development^[8] of rural culture.

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