

Introduction

When public art appears in a Chinese residential compound or outside a university building, it is frequently perceived as decoration, cultural branding or a visible sign of investment. In a British high street or community centre, similar works may be framed as “engagement”, “placemaking” or “social practice”. In both settings, artworks sit at the intersection of everyday routines, policy ambitions and institutional agendas, yet the ways in which they shape relationships, feelings of belonging or small negotiations of power are not always examined in depth.

This project takes that intersection as its point of departure. It focuses on new genre public art (NGPA) and related socially engaged practices, and investigates how these approaches might operate within contemporary Chinese community contexts organised through residents’ committees, grid-based governance and university–community interfaces. Rather than presuming that NGPA is inherently progressive or transformative, the project asks a more cautious question: under what conditions, and for whom, can NGPA-like practices contribute to everyday forms of care, belonging and civic imagination—and in which situations might they quietly reproduce existing hierarchies and patterns of representation?

To explore this question, the essay develops a practice-led research framework. It proposes an ontology of practice that understands public art as relational events rather than isolated objects; an epistemology that treats artistic action, dialogue and co-creation as modes of knowledge production; and an axiology grounded in care, social justice, capabilities and cross-cultural dialogue. These philosophical commitments lead into a discussion of reliability, validity and trustworthiness in practice-led work, drawing on Lincoln and Guba’s naturalistic inquiry and Haseman’s performative research paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Haseman, 2006). The essay then addresses positionality and ethics, and argues for a transdisciplinary orientation that connects art and design with community studies, social work, public

health and cultural policy, while taking seriously the value of local, non-academic knowledge.

NGPA as a term was consolidated through Suzanne Lacy's edited volume *Mapping the Terrain*, which assembled texts and projects that move beyond stand-alone sculpture towards direct engagement with communities and social issues (Lacy, 1995). Since then, analogous practices have been discussed under labels such as socially engaged art, community-based art, dialogic art and social practice (Bishop, 2012; Kester, 2004). Grant Kester's concept of dialogical aesthetics foregrounds sustained conversation and mutual transformation as central to such practices (Kester, 2004), whereas Claire Bishop's historical and critical analysis of participatory art emphasises that participation is not automatically emancipatory and must be examined in relation to aesthetic form and political antagonism (Bishop, 2012).

Situated between Chinese and UK contexts, this project considers how NGPA-like ideas might be translated, adapted or challenged in everyday Chinese communities. These communities are shaped by specific forms of neighbourhood administration—residents' committees, property management bodies, homeowners' associations and grid-based social management—that became particularly visible during COVID-19 and continue to act as key mediators between state policy and daily life (Zhu, Zhu and Jin, 2021). Public art, cultural activities and community campaigns frequently intersect with these structures, yet their rationales and effects are not always explicitly articulated. The project is concerned with this gap between visible forms and less visible functions.

Against this background, the rest of the essay unfolds in a layered manner. It clarifies, first, how the project understands the nature of public art practice (ontology), then explains how knowledge is expected to emerge through that practice (epistemology) and which values guide it (axiology). It subsequently considers how ideas such as reliability, validity and trustworthiness can be reinterpreted for practice-led research, and how issues of bias, positionality and ethics can be addressed. A final section

reflects on transdisciplinarity in Nicolescu's sense and outlines implications for future practice.

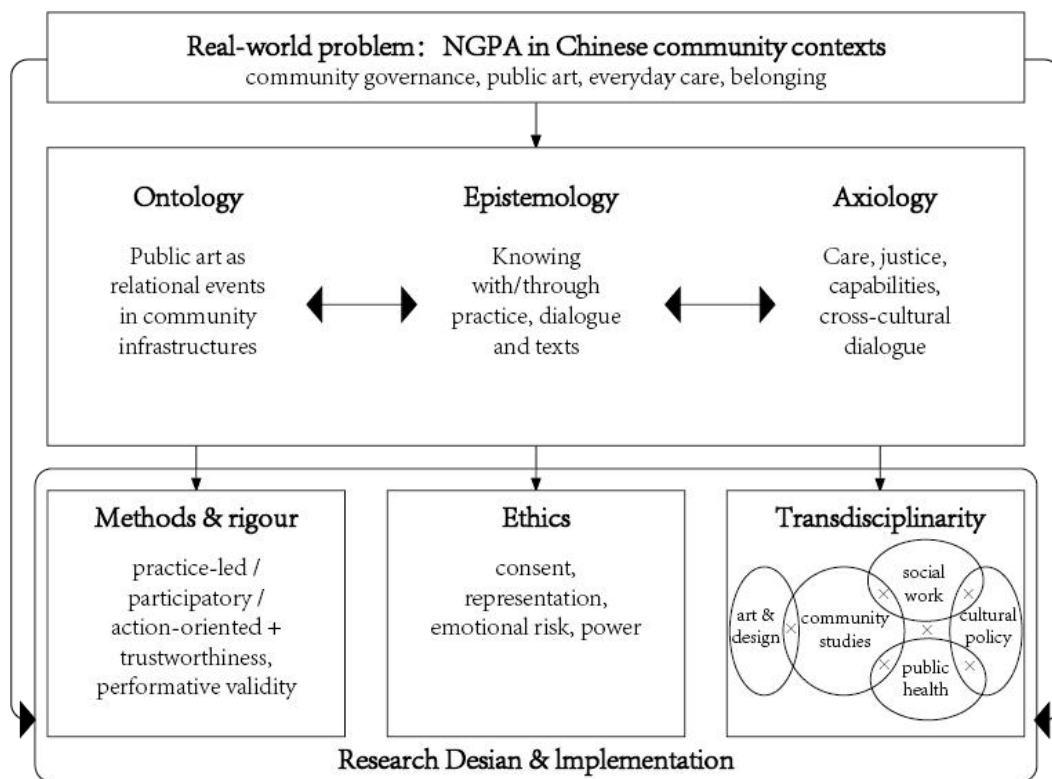


Figure 1. Overall conceptual framework of the practice-led NGPA project

Ontology of Practice: Public Art as Relational Event

Ontology concerns the assumptions a project makes about the kind of world in which it operates (Crotty, 1998). In the present research, the world of public art is understood as relational, layered and event-based rather than as a stable collection of objects. This orientation is partly shaped by my own training. Watercolour education in Hubei emphasised composition, light, surface and the finished picture. Exhibition contexts often reinforced the idea that art exists primarily as framed works in seemingly neutral spaces. At the same time, even in those settings, it was difficult to ignore the social life surrounding the work: conversations at openings, institutional narratives in catalogues and patterns of attention all influenced how works were seen and valued.

NGPA literature offers a vocabulary for this intuition. *Mapping the Terrain* presents public art as practice that brings artists into direct engagement with specific communities and social issues, rather than as autonomous objects placed in plazas (Lacy, 1995). Under this view, the “work” includes the process of collaboration and negotiation, not only the material trace. Kester extends this perspective through his analysis of dialogical art, where the primary site of meaning is an extended conversation: visitors, residents, activists and artists interacting over time (Kester, 2004). In such projects, the artwork can be described as a temporarily assembled public—a particular configuration of bodies, voices, spaces and institutional frameworks.

Bishop’s work on participatory art adds a further critical dimension. In *Artificial Hells* she reconstructs genealogies of participation that are deeply entangled with questions of power, conflict and representation (Bishop, 2012). Her analysis serves as a reminder that relational practices are never purely harmonious; they are formed within existing political and institutional conditions. Taken together, these perspectives suggest an ontology in which public art is not neutral decoration but a set of situated relations and events.

This ontological stance becomes especially relevant in Chinese contexts. In many urban areas, “community” is both an experienced and an administrative category. Residents’ committees, grid management systems and community service centres coordinate a wide range of tasks, from social services to public health to cultural activities. During the pandemic, these structures became visible as sites where lockdown, testing and mutual aid were negotiated in practice (Zhu, Zhu and Jin, 2021). Public art or cultural projects in such settings do not occur in a vacuum; they plug into infrastructures that organise space, time, information and responsibility.

From this standpoint, an NGPA intervention is understood as a temporary reconfiguration of these infrastructures. A workshop in a community room, a collaborative mural in a courtyard or a participatory walk through a neighbourhood all involve coordination with local staff, use of specific spaces and negotiation of rules

about who participates and under what conditions. The “unit of analysis” therefore cannot be limited to the visible art object. It must encompass workshop formats, institutional communications, policy documents, spatial arrangements and participants’ narratives.

Public art as a relational event within Chinese community infrastructures

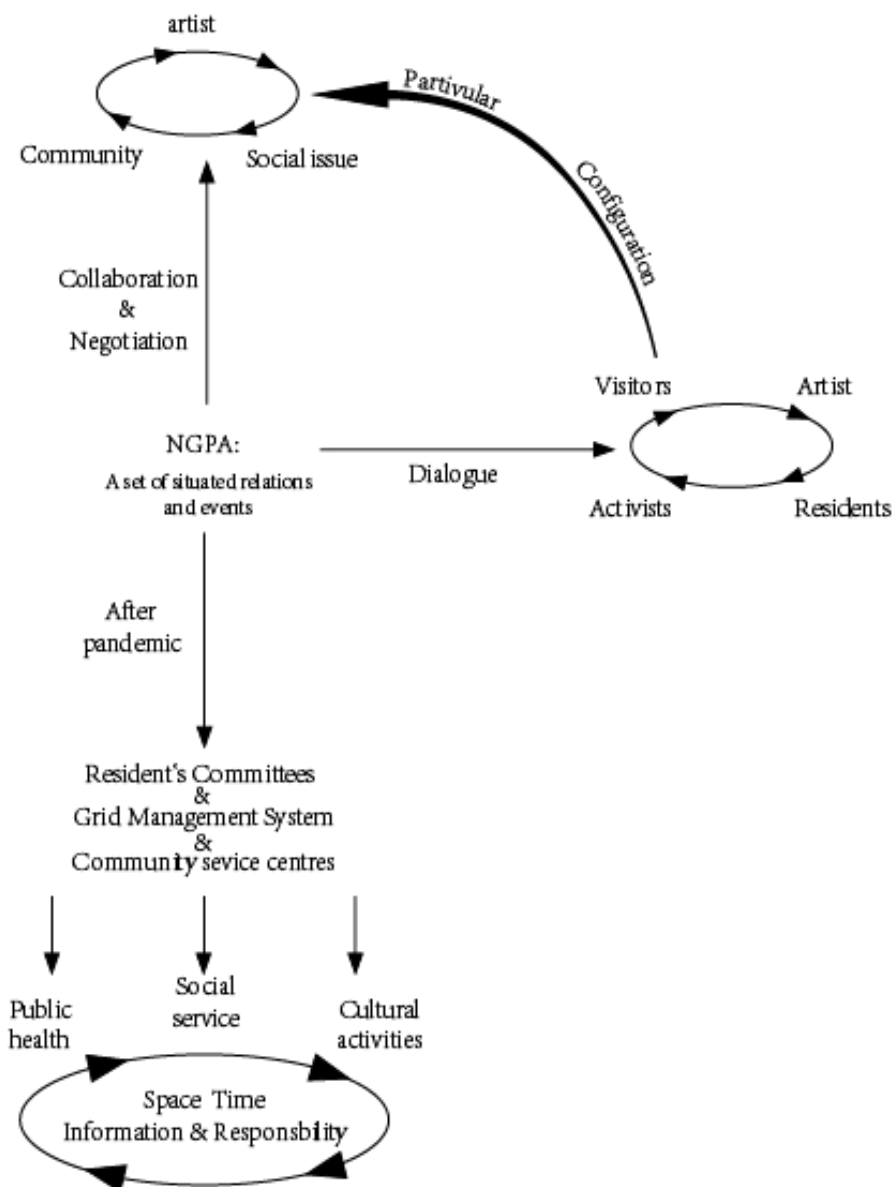


Figure 2. Public art as a relational event within Chinese community infrastructures

This way of seeing has several consequences. It treats “the public” as multiple and assembled rather than as a pre-existing, homogeneous entity. Different publics

emerge depending on how invitations are circulated, which time slots are chosen, whether the activity is framed as mandatory, voluntary or “extra”, and which languages or visual codes are employed. It also views the artwork as a moving boundary between artistic, social and political registers. A mural, for example, may at once be experienced as a painting, a community-building device, a form of soft propaganda and a prompt for informal discussion.

At the same time, this ontology opens space for critique. If public art is understood as a relational event within wider structures, then questions such as “Who benefits from this project?”, “Whose labour sustains it?” and “Which voices remain marginal?” become internal to the work rather than external add-ons. This understanding prepares the ground for the epistemological and axiological choices that follow.

Epistemology: Knowing With, Through and In Practice

If ontology asks what kind of world is at stake, epistemology asks how knowledge of that world can be generated. The project combines constructivist–interpretivist, participatory and performative strands to address this question.

Constructivist and interpretivist approaches start from the premise that realities are multiple and context-dependent, and that meaning emerges through interaction between people and their environments (Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Crotty, 1998). Under this view, there is no single, fixed truth about “community” or “publicness” waiting to be discovered; rather, residents, students, community workers, officials and artists hold partially overlapping, partially divergent understandings. Research consequently becomes a matter of tracing how these understandings are formed, negotiated and sometimes altered, rather than measuring them against an external standard.

A participatory orientation extends this logic. In participatory action research, those affected by an issue are invited not only to provide information but also to help define questions and interpret results (Reason and Bradbury, 2008). For a project

centred on public art in communities, this implies asking how residents and frontline workers describe their neighbourhoods, which questions about space, care or visibility matter to them, and what counts as a “good” project from their perspective. Workshops, group discussions and informal interviews thus operate as sites where knowledge is co-produced, rather than as neutral instruments for extracting data.

The performative dimension draws on practice-led and practice-based research. Haseman argues that in certain art and design research, symbolic forms, actions and events constitute primary modes of inquiry, and proposes the term “performative research paradigm” to describe such work (Haseman, 2006). Sullivan similarly maintains that art practice can function as a mode of research when it is framed, documented and analysed with care (Sullivan, 2005). In this project, co-designed workshops, participatory walks or temporary installations are understood as situated experiments: they test how people re-see their environment, how they speak when prompted with specific images or tasks, and how they navigate shared spaces when new roles are introduced.

Knowledge production in the project will therefore draw on several sources simultaneously. Theoretical texts on NGPA, dialogical aesthetics, participatory art, care ethics, capabilities and community studies provide concepts and debates. Artistic and social actions—such as mapping “places of care”, revisiting overlooked corners of a neighbourhood or jointly rewriting familiar narratives—constitute forms of inquiry in their own right. Participants’ reflections, recorded through conversations, group discussions, visual diaries or brief written feedback, bring situated expertise into the frame. These materials are then brought into collective interpretation when preliminary analyses are shared back with participants or collaborators for comment, critique and refinement.

Multiple sources of knowledge in the practice-led epistemology

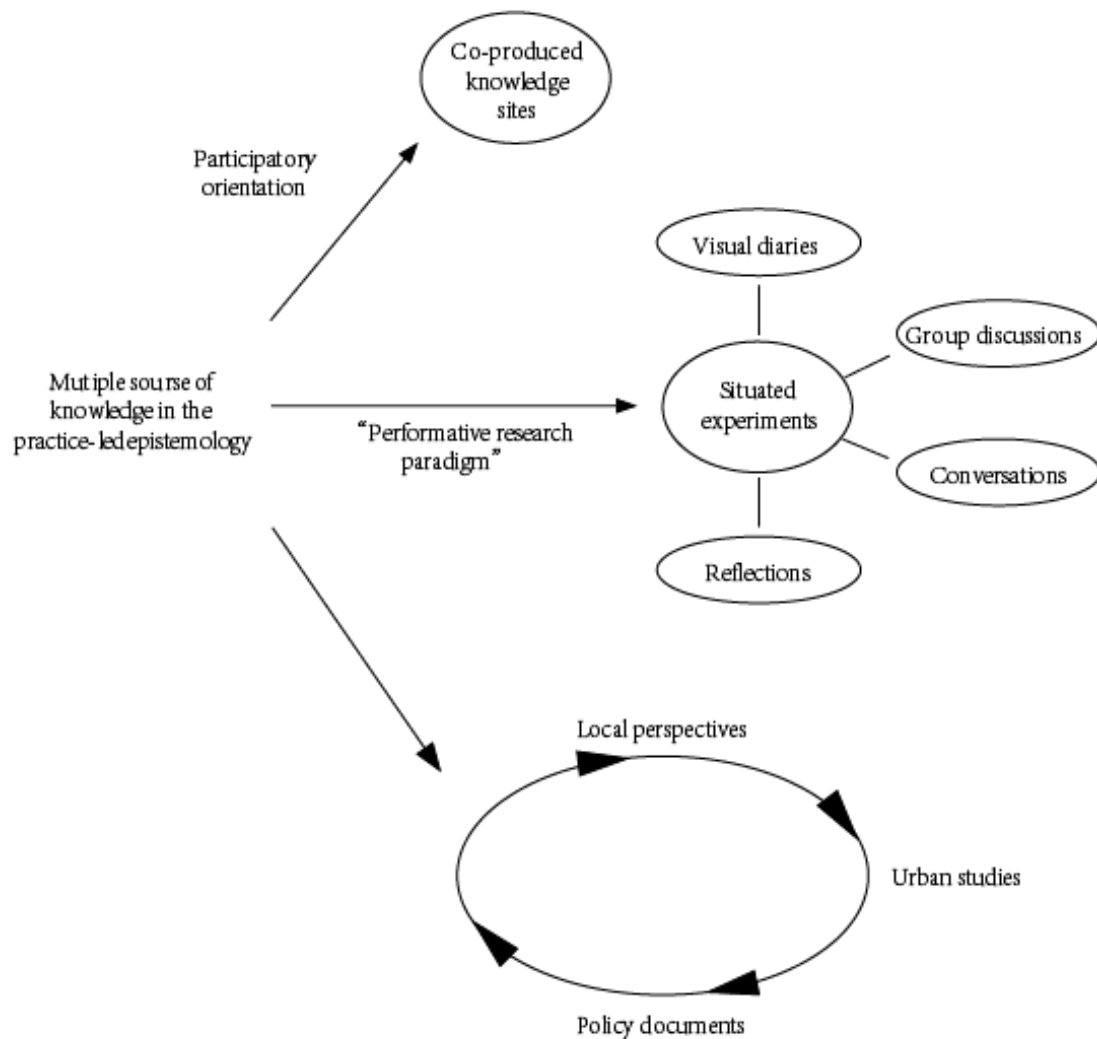


Figure 3. Multiple sources of knowledge in the practice-led epistemology

A hypothetical example may clarify this. Imagine a small university–community project in which students and local residents map everyday places where they feel supported: a shopkeeper who listens, a bench where people rest, a WeChat group where neighbours provide help. The mapping exercise forces participants to define “support”, select examples and tell stories. When these maps and narratives are later discussed collectively, new patterns may become visible—for instance, that informal support is clustered around particular individuals, or that certain groups feel they have few places to turn. Academic analysis then sits alongside these shared interpretations rather than supplanting them.

Engaging closely with local perspectives does not mean ignoring broader structures. Policy documents, urban studies and research on Chinese community governance can illuminate why particular forms of care concentrate in specific spaces, or why some voices remain less audible. The epistemological challenge is to move between these levels, allowing neither local accounts nor structural explanations to fully dominate.

Axiology: Values of Care, Justice, capabilities and Cross-cultural Dialogue

Axiology concerns the values that orient a project and the reasons for them. In this research, values are not peripheral; they form part of the starting point. Four are particularly salient: care, social justice, capabilities and cross-cultural dialogue.

Care is treated as a crucial but often under-recognised dimension of community life. Tronto conceptualises care as a basic human activity that tends to be undervalued and unevenly distributed (Tronto, 1993). In many neighbourhoods, those who quietly sustain social life—by checking in on neighbours, organising informal support or mediating minor conflicts—may not appear in official project narratives. If NGPA-inspired interventions are to be responsible, they need to acknowledge these existing care practices rather than positioning the project as the primary provider of support. Practically, this entails questions such as whose unpaid labour a workshop depends upon, whether the project adds to the workload of community staff, and how activities might be designed to recognise and, where possible, ease such burdens.

Fraser's understanding of justice as involving both redistribution and recognition provides a second lens (Fraser, 1997). Public art often operates strongly in the domain of recognition, making certain groups, stories or histories more visible. While recognition can be powerful, especially for those long absent from official narratives, it can also be frustrating if it is not accompanied by changes in material conditions or

decision-making power. The project therefore examines how public art might intersect, even modestly, with discussions about access to resources, influence over shared spaces or institutional responsiveness.

The capabilities approach associated with Sen and Nussbaum introduces a further dimension by focusing on what people are able to do and to be (Sen, 1999; Nussbaum, 2011). Applied to public art, it prompts questions that differ from standard evaluation criteria. Rather than asking only whether a project produces compelling images or raises awareness, the project is interested in whether participants gain capabilities—for example, to articulate concerns about their environment, to build relationships across social boundaries or to participate in conversations from which they were previously excluded. Such changes may be small and uneven, but they remain significant.

Cross-cultural dialogue is the fourth value, and in many respects the one that threads through the others. The project arises from movement between Chinese and UK art and research contexts. Theories of NGPA, dialogical aesthetics and participatory art have been formulated largely within Euro-American debates; they offer useful tools but also carry assumptions about public space, citizenship and institutional structure. Treating them as universally applicable would be problematic. Instead, the project treats them as hypotheses to be tested: do these concepts make sense to Chinese community workers, residents or students, and where do they fail to capture local dynamics?

These values—care, justice, capabilities and cross-cultural dialogue—do not prescribe a single method, but they do constrain what would count as an acceptable project. They support an emphasis on ordinary neighbourhoods and university–community interfaces rather than flagship cultural districts, and on quieter forms of participation rather than purely spectacular interventions. They also influence how “success” is imagined: not solely as the production of highly visible outcomes, but as a series of shifts in perception, relationship and capacity that can be described and discussed.

Value	What it means in this project	How it shapes design choices
Care	Recognising existing informal support	Avoid overloading staff; design low-pressure formats
Justice	Linking recognition with material conditions	Question who benefits, who decides
Capabilities	Focus on what people can do / be	Look for small shifts in voice, confidence, relations
Cross-cultural dialogue	Testing Western concepts in Chinese contexts	Treat theory as hypothesis, not universal truth

Figure 4. Axiological commitments and their implications for project design

Reliability, Validity and Trustworthiness in Practice-led Research

Once ontology, epistemology and values are articulated, questions of rigour arise. How might a practice-led, situated project make claims that can be taken seriously beyond its immediate context? Conventional notions of reliability and validity, developed for experimental or survey-based research, are difficult to apply directly. It is rarely possible to “replicate” a community-based art intervention under identical conditions, and the researcher is deeply implicated in the situations being studied.

Lincoln and Guba propose an alternative vocabulary for qualitative work: trustworthiness, operationalised through credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). These terms can be adapted productively for practice-led research. Credibility concerns whether the analysis resonates with participants and others who know the context well. If residents do not recognise themselves in the researcher’s account of their neighbourhood, this signals a problem. Transferability depends on providing sufficiently rich contextual detail that readers can judge for themselves whether insights may be relevant elsewhere. Dependability and confirmability relate to the transparency and coherence of the research process: can readers see how decisions were made, how data were generated and how interpretations evolved?

Haseman suggests that art and design research additionally require attention to performative validity, or performative effectiveness (Haseman, 2006). A project may be considered “valid” if it enacts, at least to some degree, the kinds of change it claims to explore—for instance, if it genuinely opens up questions, alters perceptions or modifies relationships. Sullivan’s account of art practice as research supports this view by insisting that creative work can generate knowledge when framed, documented and analysed with care (Sullivan, 2005). For a public art project, this might translate into asking whether an intervention has in fact invited new forms of participation or simply restaged familiar patterns with a different vocabulary.

Transdisciplinary research adds another layer. Belcher and colleagues propose assessing such work in terms of relevance, credibility, legitimacy and effectiveness (Belcher et al., 2016), while Lang and co-authors emphasise joint problem framing with non-academic actors and attention to socially robust solutions (Lang et al., 2012). In this context, a project on NGPA should be judged not only by academic peers in art and design, but also by community partners, policy actors and participants.

Trustworthiness criteria and related strategies in the project design

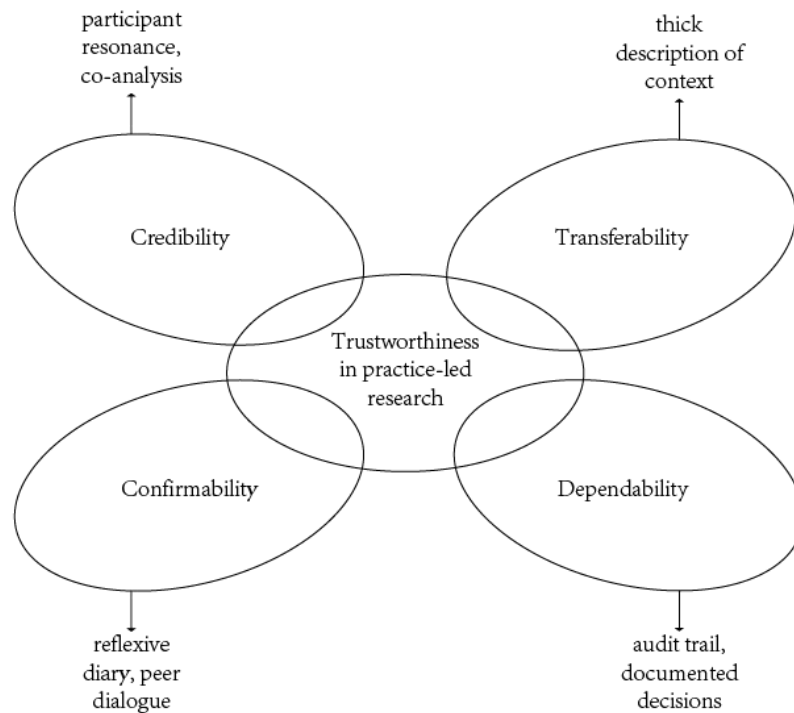


Figure 5. Trustworthiness criteria and related strategies in the project design

Taken together, these perspectives generate several guiding questions for evaluating future interventions in this project: Do participants and local collaborators recognise the situations described in the research, even if they contest specific interpretations? Does the documentation offer sufficient detail about institutional contexts, spatial arrangements and everyday routines to support learning beyond the case? Is there a transparent record of how design choices were made, how activities were adapted to local conditions and how analytic claims were developed? Do the artistic processes contribute, even in modest ways, to shifts in how people perceive their environment, relate to each other or imagine possible futures? Are the issues addressed relevant for those involved, and are the processes experienced as fair and respectful?

These questions do not yield single numerical scores. They function instead as prompts for reflection and structured dialogue, both within the research team and with external interlocutors. In that sense, considerations of reliability and validity become integral to the broader conversation that the project seeks to foster.

Positionality, Bias and Reflexivity

Efforts to strengthen trustworthiness in qualitative and practice-led research need to address the researcher's own position. In this project, positionality is understood as shifting rather than fixed. Being a Chinese artist trained in watercolour and fine art in Hubei, and currently working within a UK art and design research environment, produces particular forms of access, affinity and distance.

Positionality map of the practitioner-researcher

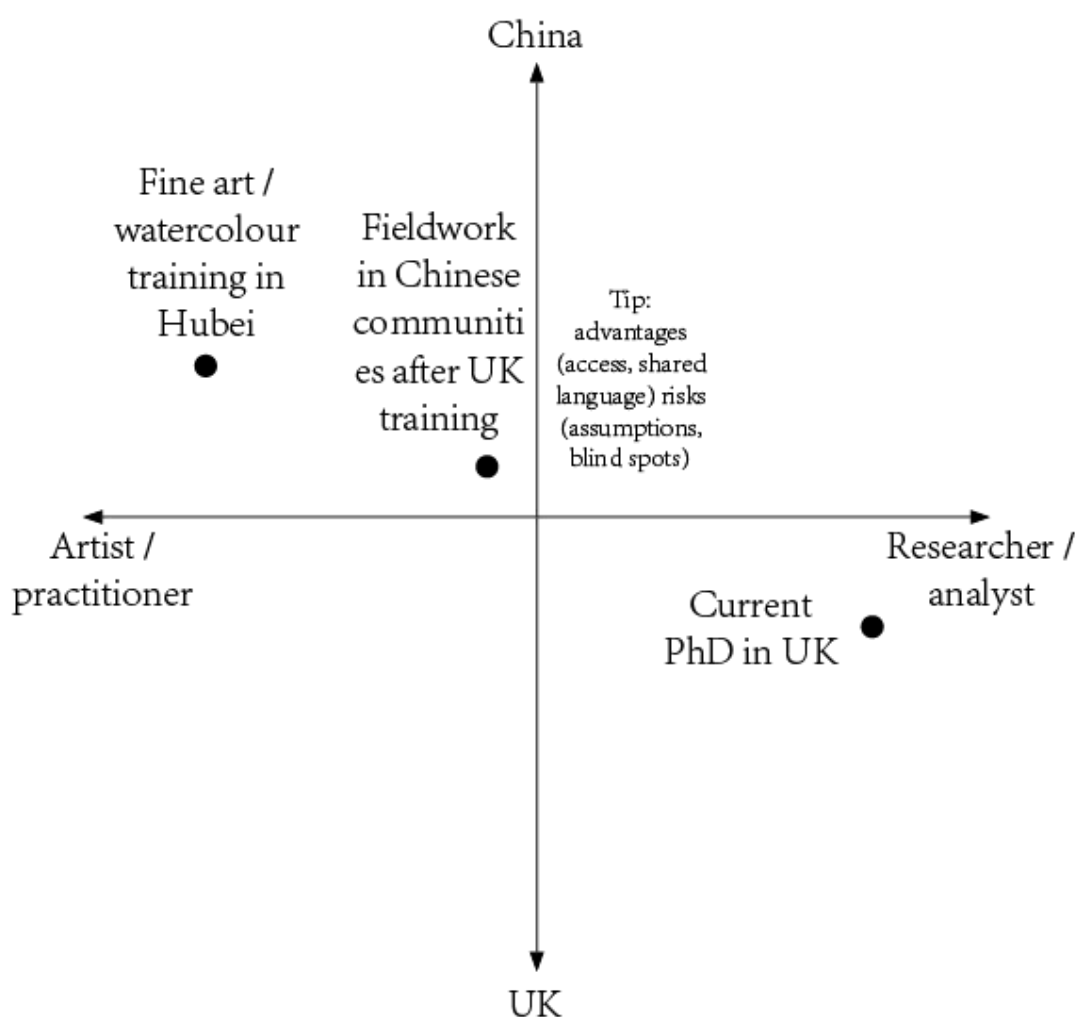


Figure 6. Positionality map of the practitioner-researcher

In some Chinese settings—art schools, local museums, university communities—this background may foster a sense of familiarity. Shared educational experiences or institutional networks can facilitate collaboration, but they may also make certain

assumptions appear “natural” when they are in fact specific to particular institutions or regions. In UK contexts, by contrast, the same background situates me more clearly as a newcomer, learning how public art is discussed and governed in policy and everyday language.

Bias can enter at multiple points. A strong interest in NGPA, dialogical art and socially engaged practice, shaped largely by English-language literature, may incline me to value projects that fit these frameworks and to overlook informal practices that are not recognised as art but play important roles in community life. A watercolour training shapes visual attention, perhaps drawing my eye to atmospheric detail and compositional balance more readily than to issues such as accessibility or long-term maintenance. In certain Chinese contexts, expectations of harmony and respect for hierarchy may make it more challenging to invite explicit critique from participants, or to interpret silence as potential disagreement.

Rather than treating these biases as flaws to be hidden, the project approaches them as conditions that require ongoing reflection. A research diary and sketchbook will be used to record not only events and observations, but also moments of discomfort, surprise or uncertainty. Writing soon after workshops or meetings can capture practical details—who spoke first, who remained silent, how the room was arranged, how people reacted to particular words or images—that might otherwise be forgotten. Returning to these records later can reveal patterns, such as recurring tendencies to foreground certain voices or themes.

Reflexivity also has an interpersonal dimension. Sharing early analyses with participants, supervisors and peers creates opportunities for disagreement and revision. A colleague might question whether a particular reading of a situation adequately considers gender or age dynamics; a community partner might highlight constraints on staff time that the researcher has underestimated. Finlay describes this kind of reflexive practice as “negotiating the swamp” of qualitative research, where clarity and uncertainty coexist (Finlay, 2002). In this project, such negotiation is treated as part of methodological rigour rather than as an optional supplement.

Mitigating Bias and Enhancing Trustworthiness

Recognising the influence of positionality is a necessary step, but further measures are required to enhance trustworthiness in practice. Several strategies will therefore be built into the design of the project.

Triangulation is one such strategy. Instead of relying on a single type of material, the research will bring together field notes from workshops and walks, photographs or sketches of installations and settings, co-created visual artefacts such as maps or timelines, short interviews or group conversations, and relevant policy or planning documents. Where appropriate and ethically feasible, simple quantitative indicators—for instance, participation counts or brief wellbeing scales—may also be used to complement qualitative insights. The aim is not to create artificial agreement across these sources, but to view the same situation from multiple angles.

Participant validation and co-analysis constitute another strategy. Rather than treating “member checking” as a final stage at the end of data collection, the project integrates it into the creative process. For example, after a mapping workshop, preliminary themes may be visualised and shared with participants. Their responses—agreement, disagreement, additions—are then recorded and incorporated into subsequent analysis. Disagreement is not treated as a failure, but as an indication of where perspectives diverge and further clarification is required.

Peer dialogue supports this process. Discussing emerging findings with supervisors, fellow researchers and practitioners from different backgrounds can reveal assumptions that feel self-evident within one context but appear striking from another. For instance, a UK-based colleague might query the taken-for-granted role of certain state actors in community life, while a Chinese colleague might challenge idealised notions of “bottom-up” participation drawn from Western theory.

Documentation and an audit trail provide a further layer of rigour. Systematically recording decisions about site selection, recruitment strategies, facilitation choices

and analytic moves allows others to follow how the project develops over time. Importantly, this includes documenting ideas that prove unworkable or collaborations that cannot be sustained. Such “failures” are part of what the project learns about the conditions under which NGPA-like practices can or cannot function.

Ethical Framework: Responsibilities in Collaborative Public Art

Ethical questions are present from the moment a project proposes to intervene in community life. They are not confined to formal review procedures, although those procedures remain important. In this project, ethics is understood as a continuous, relational practice.

Informed consent is one central concern. Participants in workshops, walks or co-creation sessions need accessible information about the aims of the project, the kinds of data that will be collected, how those data may be used and what options they have concerning anonymity or visibility. Consent is approached as an ongoing negotiation rather than as a single signed form; participants may revise their preferences as the project evolves.

Representation and voice raise additional questions. Any written or visual account simplifies complex realities, and there is a persistent risk that the researcher’s voice will dominate, even in processes described as participatory. To respond to this, the project will explore co-authored materials, participatory mapping and shared decision-making about which images or narratives are made public. Such measures cannot fully resolve representational tensions, but they can render them more explicit and open to discussion.

Emotional risk and care also require attention. Some activities may touch on experiences of exclusion, conflict or loss. For example, inviting participants to identify “places of care” may also highlight areas where care is perceived as absent. The project will avoid opening up topics that require specialised therapeutic support it cannot provide, and will prepare information about local support services where

appropriate. This cautiousness reflects the broader ethic of care that underlies the project.

Power and voluntariness form a further strand of ethical reflection. In both Chinese and UK contexts, projects associated with universities or public institutions can carry implicit pressure: individuals may feel obliged to participate or worry about the consequences of refusal. The project will pay close attention to how invitations are framed, who issues them and how non-participation is presented as a legitimate option.

Ethical considerations across the project lifecycle

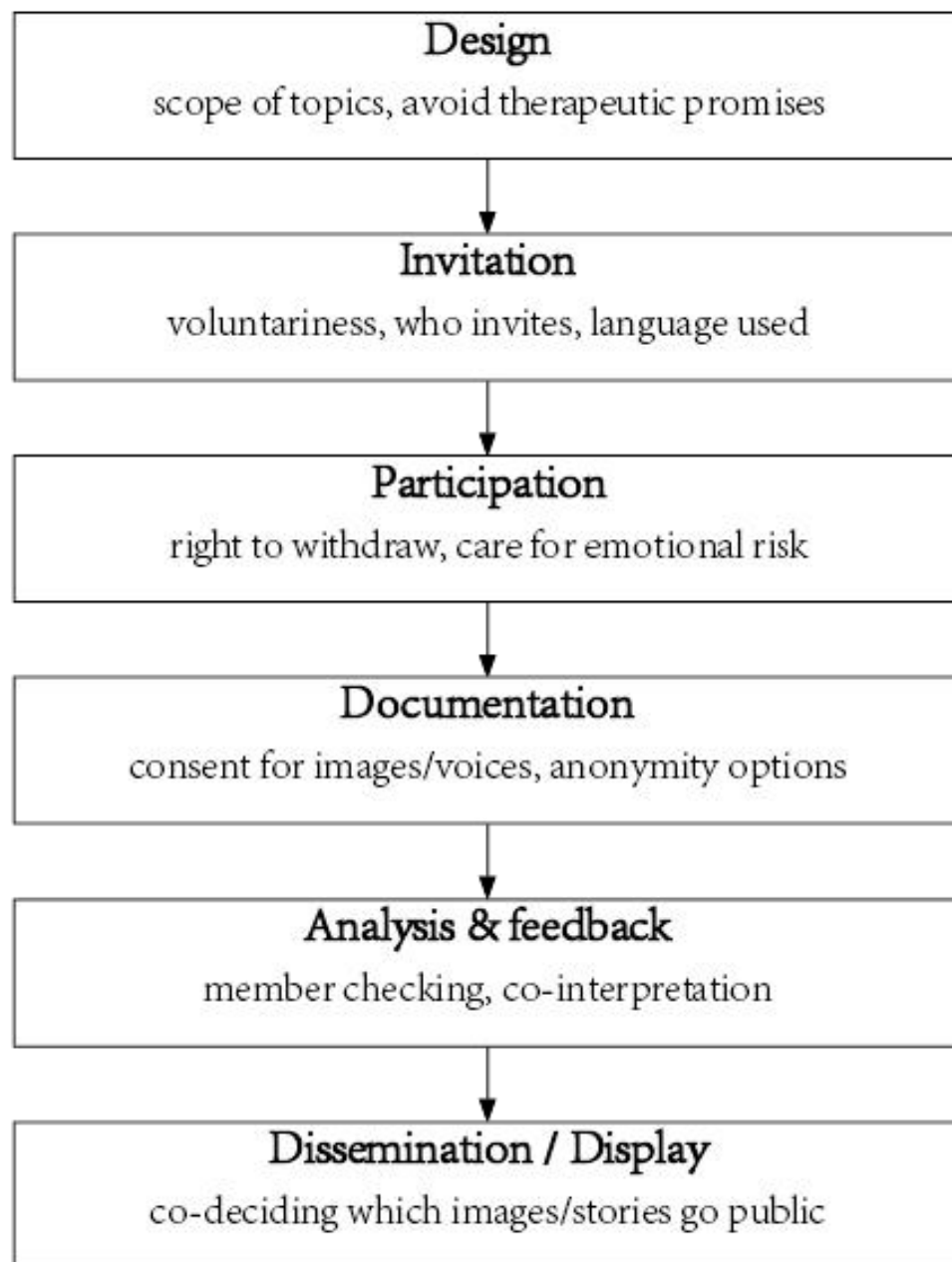


Figure 7. Ethical considerations across the project lifecycle

Formal guidance such as BERA's *Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research* offers a structured set of principles concerning consent, confidentiality and the balancing of risks and benefits (BERA, 2018). However, these guidelines were developed primarily within UK educational contexts. Applying them in Chinese institutions will require careful discussion with local partners and sensitivity to local norms and regulations.

These ethical considerations are closely linked to the project's axiological commitments. A focus on care implies attentiveness to workloads and emotional labour; a concern with justice prompts careful management of visibility and risk; a capabilities perspective raises questions about what kinds of opportunities or constraints the project generates; and cross-cultural dialogue warns against imposing external standards of "good practice" without adaptation. Ethics is thus not external to the project's aims, but part of shaping its practice.

Transdisciplinary Thinking and the Shaping of Practice

Although the project is grounded in art and design, its questions are not confined to these disciplines. They touch on community governance, wellbeing, everyday urbanism and cultural policy. Nicolescu's distinction between multi-, inter- and transdisciplinarity helps clarify how the project positions itself (Nicolescu, 2008).

In a multidisciplinary arrangement, different disciplines address the same topic alongside one another: for instance, an artist, a sociologist and a planner might each conduct separate analyses of a neighbourhood. Interdisciplinarity involves greater exchange; concepts and methods move between fields, and an integrated academic account is produced, but the work largely remains oriented towards disciplinary audiences. Transdisciplinarity, in Nicolescu's sense, seeks something more. It brings together scientific, professional and local knowledges around complex real-world issues, and allows non-academic actors to help shape research questions, methods and evaluation criteria.

In this project, elements of all three modes are likely to appear, but the longer-term aspiration is transdisciplinary. Using analytical tools from community studies or public health to describe a neighbourhood is primarily interdisciplinary: it enriches the art and design perspective but remains within academic logics. The work moves towards transdisciplinarity when residents, students, community workers and institutional partners are involved not only as respondents but as co-framers of the

problem. When a community worker remarks that “our main difficulty is that residents seldom come to the cultural centre unless attendance is compulsory”, that insight helps reframe the research. When residents express a desire for shared spaces to sit and talk rather than for additional murals, their priorities challenge certain art-centred assumptions.

Transdisciplinary practice in this sense involves several domains. Community and urban studies offer frameworks for understanding neighbourhood dynamics and local power relations. Social work and public health bring concepts such as social support, loneliness and collective efficacy into view. Cultural policy and arts management clarify how public art is commissioned, evaluated and linked to broader agendas. Education and youth studies become pertinent when projects take place in or around universities and schools. Involving practitioners from these fields—rather than only engaging with their literature—brings practical experience into the design of interventions.

Transdisciplinary knowledge domains involved in the project

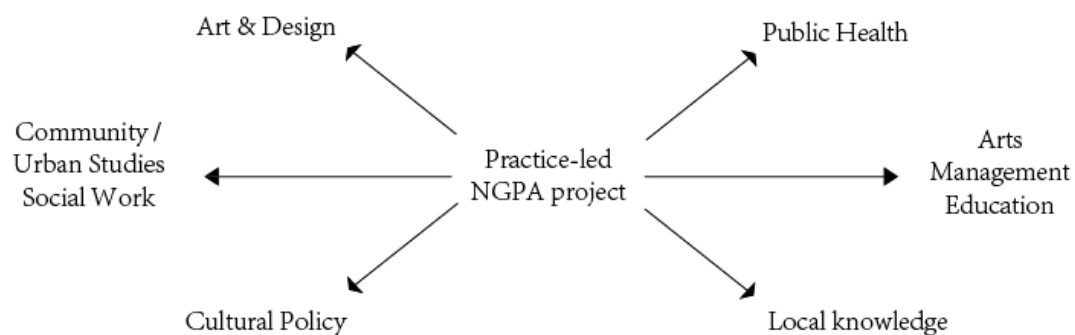


Figure 8. Transdisciplinary knowledge domains involved in the project

A hypothetical scenario may illustrate this. Consider a “places of care” project in a grid-governed neighbourhood. A multidisciplinary approach might involve an artist designing a mapping exercise, a sociologist conducting interviews and a public-health researcher administering a wellbeing scale. A transdisciplinary approach would seek deeper integration. Community workers might participate in planning the timing and

location of activities, ensuring they align with residents' routines. Public-health staff could advise on ways of discussing stress or social connection that avoid stigma. Residents would be involved in defining what counts as "care" and in deciding how results are used. In this configuration, the artistic intervention functions as a shared platform where different forms of knowledge interact.

Yet transdisciplinarity is not guaranteed simply by invoking many fields in a proposal. Superficial borrowing of language can quickly dilute depth. For this reason, the project treats transdisciplinarity as selective and situated. Each case study is likely to focus on a small number of key intersections—for instance, art, community studies and cultural policy in one setting; art, wellbeing and social work in another. Where expertise is limited, gaps are acknowledged, and collaboration is sought rather than presumed.

This understanding of transdisciplinarity feeds back into how practice is conceived. Artistic methods—mapping, walking, storytelling, co-creation—are used not only to generate aesthetic experiences but also to conduct joint inquiry with community and institutional partners. Evaluation, correspondingly, becomes plural. A project might be visually compelling yet exhausting for over-stretched community staff; another might appear modest but be experienced as meaningful and sustainable. A transdisciplinary stance encourages the project to keep such tensions in view and to learn from them rather than smoothing them over.

Conclusion: Towards a Situated, Transdisciplinary Practitioner-Researcher

The essay has outlined a philosophical and methodological framework for a practice-led investigation of new genre public art in contemporary Chinese community contexts. Beginning from everyday encounters with public art in China and the UK, it has argued that such work is best understood as relational events embedded in institutional and social structures, rather than as isolated objects.

The ontology of practice presented here treats public art as a set of situated configurations of people, spaces, policies and narratives. The epistemology acknowledges that knowledge arises with, through and in practice, as artistic interventions, conversations and reflections interact. The axiology emphasises care, justice, capabilities and cross-cultural dialogue, shaping both the questions the project asks and the criteria it uses to evaluate its own work.

On this basis, the essay has reinterpreted reliability and validity through the lens of trustworthiness and performative effectiveness, proposing strategies—triangulation, participant validation, peer dialogue and careful documentation—to support rigour in practice-led research. Positionality and bias have been treated as integral to responsible inquiry, inviting ongoing reflexivity rather than claims to neutrality. Ethics has been framed as a continuing practice of negotiation around consent, representation, emotional risk and power, grounded in explicit values rather than solely in formal procedures.

Transdisciplinarity, understood in Nicolescu's sense, emerges as a key orientation. By bringing art and design into conversation with community studies, social work, public health and cultural policy, and by involving non-academic partners in framing questions and assessing outcomes, the project seeks to respond to real-world issues in ways that are both critically aware and practically grounded.

Taken together, these elements sketch the outline of a situated, transdisciplinary practitioner-researcher. This figure moves between studio and street, between readings of theory and conversations in community rooms, between planning and improvisation. The framework presented here is provisional and intended to be tested and revised. As case studies are selected, collaborations formed and interventions undertaken, some assumptions will be confirmed, others will require adjustment. The hope is that this ongoing process will deepen understanding of NGPA in Chinese contexts, while also contributing to broader debates about what public art can be and do in complex, rapidly changing societies.

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