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HOW GOVERNANCE MODELS INFLUENCE EMPOWERMENT MECHANISMS IN PUBLIC ART IN RURAL CONTEXTS: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW (2014–2024)

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ABSTRACT

Most existing research on public art and empowerment is drawn from urban settings, leaving considerable gaps in explaining why empowerment outcomes in rural contexts often diverge or falter. The rural governance environment—typically fragmented, low-resource, and institutionally fragile—raises questions that urban-based theories do not adequately address. Drawing on a PRISMA-guided systematic review of studies published between 2014 and 2024; this paper examines how governance arrangements shape empowerment processes in rural public art. The review maps the geographical and methodological patterns of existing research, compares government-led, community-led, and collaborative governance models, and identifies three recurrent mechanisms—Institutional Embedding (IE), Cultural Authorship (CA), and Participatory Continuity (PC)—that consistently influence political, economic, cultural, and psychological empowerment across cases. Methods: Following PRISMA procedures, searches were conducted in Web of Science (Core Collection) and Scopus in October 2024 and updated in March 2025. Inclusion criteria required English-language, peer-reviewed studies focusing on rural public art and governance-empowerment relations. A total of 1,903 records were identified; 29 met all criteria after screening. Evidence was synthesized through content analysis and critical thematic analysis, informed by empowerment and collaborative governance theory. Studies were concentrated in Europe (≈41%) and Asia (≈34%), with qualitative research dominating the field (≈76%). Across cases, empowerment in rural public art emerges multi-dimensional, cyclical, and vulnerable to decline. The consistency of three conditions is notable:

- a. *Institutional Embedding, reflected in policy entry points, organisational anchoring, and long-term funding arrangements;*
- b. *Cultural Authorship, expressed through locally grounded narratives and shared authorship in artistic production;*
- c. *Participatory Continuity, supported by volunteer infrastructures, local arts organisations, and partnerships that extend beyond project cycles.*

These mechanisms are more fully developed in community-led and collaborative arrangements, whereas government-led approaches, despite resource advantages, tend to produce symbolic participation and limited empowerment. Community-led cases show stronger political, economic, culture and psychological outcomes when supported by institutional linkages that mitigate rural resource and power asymmetries. The review synthesizes these findings into a multi-level analytical framework linking governance type, IE/CA/PC mechanisms, and four empowerment dimensions. In rural contexts, empowerment through public art does not follow directly from governance labels. Its depth and durability depend on whether institutional embedding, cultural authorship, and participatory continuity can be established and sustained. When these mechanisms operate together, public art is more likely to generate resilient political, economic, cultural, and psychological empowerment in resource-constrained rural settings. Current research, however, remains limited by uneven geographic coverage, methodological imbalances, and inconsistent empowerment metrics. Future work should examine how different configurations of IE, CA, and PC shape rural empowerment trajectories and develop measures that better capture empowerment dynamics in diverse rural environments.

KEYWORDS: Governance Models, Influence Empowerment Mechanisms, Public Art.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, public art has expanded far beyond its aesthetic function. In many rural areas, it has become a platform for participation, community building, and local decision-making, as shown in studies of Indonesian urban villages, rural New Zealand towns, and Chinese revitalisation projects (Irwindi et al., 2023; Perkins et al., 2023; Lu & Qian, 2023). Public art is used to support social cohesion, strengthen cultural identity, and enhance local capabilities, including through co-created storytelling, place-making activities, and community festivals (Crawshaw & Gkartzios, 2016; Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019). Rural regions often place additional expectations on public art, hoping it can help address economic fragility and social division, as found across cases from Indonesia to Europe (Van der Vaart et al., 2019; Qu & Zollet, 2023). These developments show that public art no longer functions as an isolated intervention; instead, it operates within multi-actor governance arrangements that rely on collaboration and local agency (Mackay et al., 2024; Irwindi et al., 2023).

Despite growing scholarly attention, major gaps remain in understanding how governance models shape empowerment in rural public art. Prior research documents tensions between state-led directives and community needs, including power asymmetries between external experts and local residents (Lu & Qian, 2023; Otte, 2019). Studies also identify uneven participation and the risk that engagement becomes symbolic rather than substantive, especially when artistic or entrepreneurial agendas override community priorities (Qu & Zollet, 2023; Perkins et al., 2023). Other work highlights persistent challenges in balancing cultural authenticity with economic goals, and in protecting disadvantaged groups from exclusion during collaborative processes (Mackay et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2024). Although many studies describe these “values and challenges,” they provide limited explanations for why empowerment outcomes vary so widely across rural contexts, even under similar governance arrangements (Crawshaw & Gkartzios, 2016).

This study argues that existing limitations stem from three issues. First, theories of public art and empowerment remain grounded in urban contexts, emphasising resource mobilisation and social capital while overlooking the fragility, reversibility, and cyclical nature of empowerment observed in rural settings (Tang, 2020; Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019). Second, governance types are often treated as fixed labels—government-led, community-led, or

collaborative—yet studies rarely examine how these arrangements operate through concrete mechanisms that generate divergent empowerment trajectories (Campbell, 2019). Third, existing research lacks an integrated mechanism perspective. Although many studies implicitly refer to institutional anchoring, cultural authorship, or participation continuity, no review has systematically analysed these elements together for the 2014–2024 period (Lee, 2015; Crawshaw & Gkartzios, 2016).

To address these gaps, this review adopts three mechanism categories that recur across the literature: Institutional Embedding (IE), Cultural Authorship (CA), and Participatory Continuity (PC). IE captures whether public art becomes anchored in local policy structures and organisational arrangements, as illustrated in studies of Australian art-centre governance and Chinese rural revitalization programmes (Mackay et al., 2024; Lu & Qian, 2023). CA concerns narrative authority and the ability of communities to define cultural meaning, a theme evident in research on Indonesian mural practices, Balinese women artists, and collaborative art in the Netherlands (Irwindi et al., 2023; Skippington & Davis, 2016; Otte, 2019). PC refers to whether participation continues beyond project cycles and develops into lasting organisational capacity, a pattern found in long-running rural festivals, grassroots leadership networks, and volunteer-driven art programmes (Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019; Perkins et al., 2023). These categories are not new concepts; they synthesise recurring constructs already present in the reviewed studies.

Although each mechanism has been discussed separately, no study has combined them into an integrated explanation. By analysing 29 studies from 2014 to 2024, this review proposes IE, CA, and PC as the basis of a mid-range analytical framework. The framework assembles three clusters of conditions that consistently shape empowerment depth and durability in rural public art governance (Campbell, 2019; Lu & Qian, 2023). This integration helps explain why similar governance models generate different empowerment trajectories across rural settings, and why empowerment often remains uneven or fragile when institutional, cultural, or participatory foundations are weak (Lee, 2015; Mackay et al., 2024).

This study also draws on empowerment theory and community-capacity perspectives to explain how IE, CA, and PC influence political, economic, cultural, and psychological dimensions of empowerment (Van der Vaart et al., 2019; Zimmerman, 1995). IE highlights the importance of institutional anchoring, including policy continuity

and organisational presence, as shown in Australian art-centre governance and Finnish-Irish festival cases (Mackay *et al.*, 2024; Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019). CA underscores community control over cultural narratives, seen in participatory murals, women's art networks, and activist-led visual practices (Irwandi *et al.*, 2023; Mathisen *et al.*, 2024; Lee, 2015). PC emphasises whether participation persists beyond individual projects, as documented in long-term place-making initiatives, recurring festivals, and community-based organisational structures (Perkins *et al.*, 2023; Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019). Together, these mechanisms explain how short-term involvement becomes structural and sustainable community capability.

Theoretical integration in this field remains limited. Participatory art theory focuses on democratic potential, cultural democracy emphasises expressive rights, and community-development scholarship highlights institutional and organisational capacity (Alston, 2013; Matarasso, 2019). Yet these frameworks rarely intersect in rural contexts. They also struggle to explain why similar governance labels produce divergent outcomes, why participation may become symbolic rather than empowering, and why cultural expression can reflect external narratives instead of local knowledge (Lu & Qian, 2023; Qu & Zollet, 2023). By foregrounding IE, CA, and PC, this study links these theoretical strands and identifies the conditions under which empowerment becomes more durable in rural public art.

Recent increases in rural art research—particularly after the COVID-19 pandemic—have not resolved these gaps. Many studies rely on qualitative case analyses and use fragmented measurement standards, making cross-case comparison difficult (Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019; Song *et al.*, 2024). Collaborative governance emphasises shared authority (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Zimmerman, 1995), yet in rural contexts weak institutional capacity and fragile social networks often lead to symbolic participation rather than genuine collaboration (Campbell, 2019; Tang, 2020). These patterns show the need for a simple and actionable mechanism framework that can identify the conditions under which empowerment emerges and persists.

Therefore, this study adopts a systematic review design to retrieve, assess, and synthesise research published between 2014 and 2024. Guided by this aim, the review addresses three research questions: how existing studies have characterised governance arrangements in rural public art (RQ1); how different governance models shape political, economic,

cultural, and psychological empowerment outcomes (RQ2); and through what recurrent mechanisms IE-CA-PC these governance arrangements influence the depth and sustainability of empowerment (RQ3). Based on the evidence, the review develops an analytical framework linking governance types, IE-CA-PC mechanisms, four dimensions of empowerment, and conditions for sustainability (Lu & Qian, 2023; Perkins *et al.*, 2023). The aim is not to test causality, but to provide a mechanism-based explanation grounded in community-development theory. This framework bridges the gap between urban-centred theories and rural realities and offers clear variables and pathways for future comparative and empirical work, including QCA and longitudinal research designs (Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019; Crawshaw & Gkartziou, 2016).

2. METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a systematic literature review (SLR) approach to examine how governance arrangements shape empowerment in rural public art. The SLR method allows published evidence to be assessed in a transparent and replicable way and is well suited to answering predefined research questions (Wright *et al.*, 2007; Mohamed Shaffril *et al.*, 2020). Unlike narrative reviews, SLRs follow structured procedures that enhance rigour and reproducibility.

2.1. Search Strategy

The review follows the PRISMA guidelines (Page *et al.*, 2021). The initial search was conducted in October 2024 and updated in March 2025. Two databases were used: Web of Science (Core Collection) and Scopus. To improve precision, the search employed field-specific constraints and Boolean operators.

Step 1: Identifying Search Terms

The review focuses on how governance arrangements influence empowerment mechanisms in rural public art. Core search terms therefore included “governance,” “empowerment,” and “public art.” To increase coverage and accuracy, the search also incorporated synonyms and closely related terms linked to these concepts.

Because databases use different indexing systems and controlled vocabularies, equivalent search strings were constructed for each database. Table 1 shows the query used in Web of Science and the parallel syntax used in Scopus (TITLE-ABS-KEY).

Step 2: Inclusion And Exclusion Criteria

Screening was guided by criteria related to publication type, scope, language, and year. Studies were included if they met the following conditions:

Inclusion Criteria

- A. Peer-reviewed journal articles published in English between 2014 and 2024.
- B. The study examined how governance arrangements (government-led, community-led, or collaborative) influence empowerment outcomes in rural public art.
- C. Empirical studies providing original data.
- D. Theoretical studies offering conceptual frameworks directly related to governance and empowerment.

Exclusion Criteria

- A. Studies focused solely on art markets, exhibitions, school art education, or aesthetic analysis without links to community development.
- B. Research limited to urban contexts with no rural relevance.
- C. Commentaries, editorials, or conference abstracts without empirical or theoretical contribution.
- D. Architecture-focused research unrelated to public art or empowerment.
- E. Studies discussing intangible heritage or funding policy without examining governance or empowerment.
- F. Publications without accessible full text.

Step 3: Study Selection

All records retrieved from Scopus and Web of Science were imported into Mendeley. Duplicates were removed at this stage. Title and abstract

screening were then conducted using the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Two reviewers independently assessed full texts and determined eligibility. Disagreements were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. A total of 29 studies met all criteria and were included for data extraction.

Step 4: Data Extraction and Analysis

Data extraction took place in two stages.

First, a deductive content-analysis procedure was used to code each study against a predefined framework. The coding captured:

- (a) the governance arrangement (government-led, community-led, collaborative);
- (b) empowerment outcomes across four dimensions (political, economic, cultural, psychological); and
- (c) the presence, absence, or partial presence of the three mechanisms—Institutional Embedding (IE), Cultural Authorship (CA), and Participatory Continuity (PC).

This step ensured that cases were comparable and established the empirical basis for the descriptive synthesis in Sections 3.2 and 3.3.

Second, a critical thematic synthesis was undertaken to integrate the coded findings. This synthesis identified cross-case patterns in how governance configurations shape empowerment and how IE, CA, and PC operate across contexts. Through iterative comparison, the analysis generated the mechanism-based explanations presented in Sections 4.1–4.3. These explanations highlight recurring structural (IE-related), cultural (CA-related), and processual (PC-related) conditions that strengthen or weaken the durability of empowerment in rural public art.

Table 1: Keywords Earch Strategy.

Databases	Keywords
Scopus Web of Science	TITLE-ABS-KEY (("public art" OR "community art" OR "participatory art" OR "socially engaged art") AND ("governance" OR "governance model" OR "collaborative governance" OR "participatory governance") AND ("empowerment" OR "community empowerment" OR "social empowerment" OR "economic empowerment" OR "psychological empowerment")) AND ("rural" OR "rural community" OR "rural development" OR "non-urban") (TS = ("public art" OR "community art" OR "participatory art" OR "socially engaged art") AND ("governance" OR "governance model" OR "collaborative governance" OR "participatory governance") AND ("empowerment" OR "community empowerment" OR "social empowerment" OR "economic empowerment" OR "psychological empowerment" OR "agency" OR "capacity building")) AND ("rural" OR "rural community" OR "rural development" OR "non-urban"))

2.2. Quality Appraisal

A narrative appraisal based on the MMAT (2018) was conducted to assess the methodological quality

of the included studies. As reflected in Section 3.2, most qualitative studies demonstrated basic coherence between research aims, data collection,

and analysis, although validity procedures were often underreported. Mixed-method studies met general MMAT criteria but showed limited integration between qualitative and quantitative components. Quantitative studies provided clear sampling information yet relied on narrow operationalization's of empowerment and governance. Overall, methodological transparency varied considerably across the corpus, indicating partial adherence to MMAT standards.

3. RESULT

This section presents the findings in the order of the research questions. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 address RQ1 by outlining the distribution, methodological features, and governance characteristics of the included studies. Section 3.3 addresses RQ2 by examining how government-led, community-led, and collaborative governance models relate to political, economic, cultural, and psychological empowerment. The cross-case observations at the end of this section prepare the ground for the discussion of RQ3, which focuses on the mechanisms that shape variations in empowerment. This structure ensures a clear link between the evidence reviewed and the analytical aims of the study.

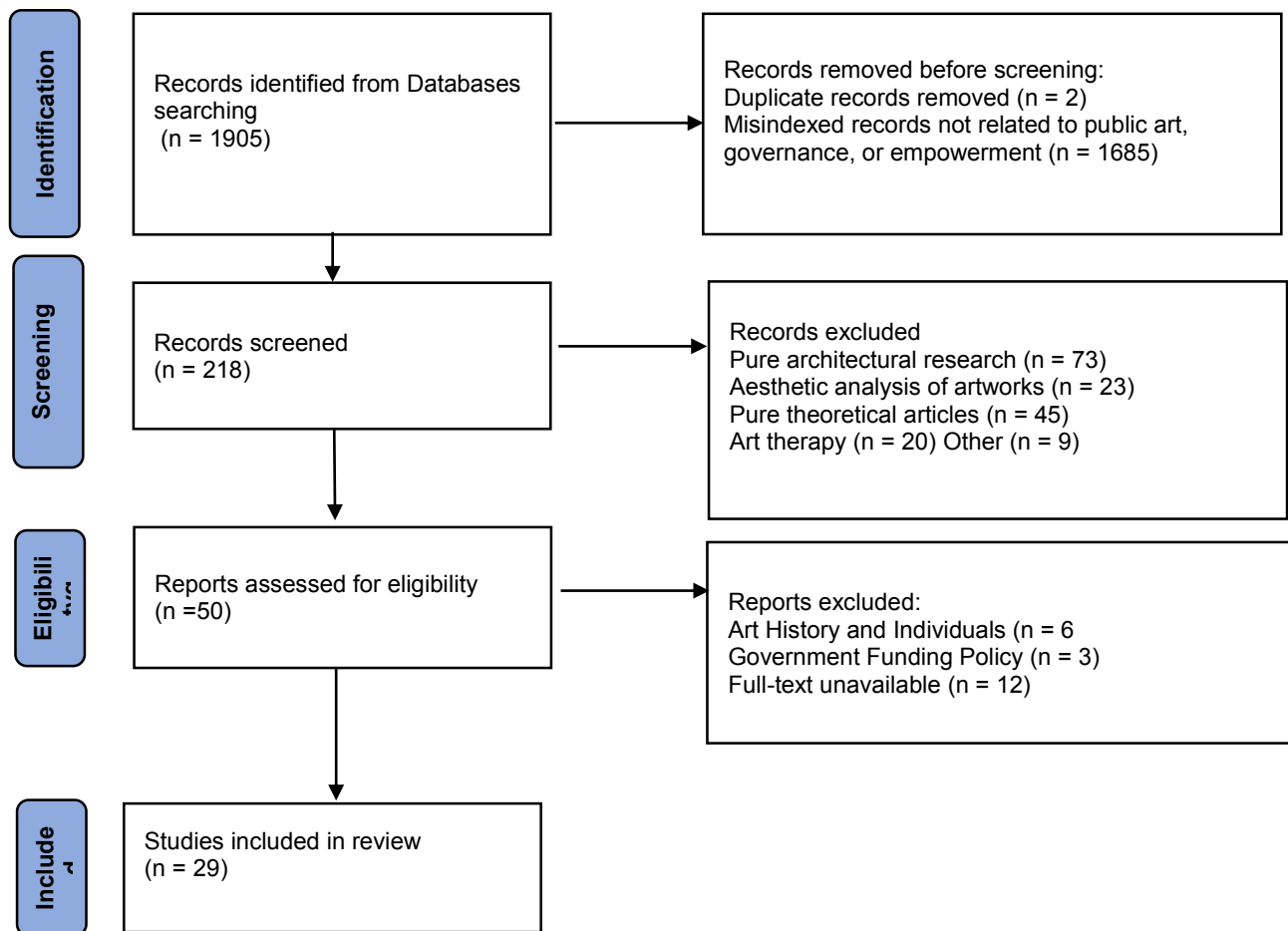
3.1. Study Selection

The database search initially identified 1,905 records. After removing duplicates, 1,903 records remained. Title and abstract screening excluded 1,685 records because they fell outside the scope of this review. These records focused on areas such as art markets, exhibitions, school-based art education, or purely aesthetic analysis with no connection to community development, governance, or empowerment.

A total of 218 full-text articles were assessed for eligibility. Of these, 189 were excluded for several reasons: some examined architectural design without addressing public art or empowerment; some discussed intangible heritage or funding policies without linking them to governance structures; others focused solely on urban contexts, lacked methodological detail, or did not provide analysis related to empowerment. A small number of articles were removed because the full text was not available.

In the final stage, 29 studies met all inclusion criteria and were retained for data extraction and synthesis. The full selection process is summarised in the PRISMA flow diagram (Table 2).

Table 2: Flow PRISMA Diagram for the Process Adapted from Page Et Al. (2021).



3.2. Characteristics of The Included Studies

Across the 29 included studies, qualitative research was dominant. A total of 22 studies (75.9%) used qualitative designs, including interviews (n=12), case studies (n = 9), and one focus group. Most of these studies examined a single community or art project and provided clear information on participant characteristics and sample size. Five studies used mixed methods, combining surveys with interviews to measure perceived empowerment, project impacts, social network density, or governance awareness. These studies generally reported higher data transparency. Two studies employed quantitative survey designs, focusing on the statistical relationship between governance quality and empowerment outcomes, and provided explicit details on sample size and variable operationalization.

Geographically, the studies covered multiple world regions. Europe accounted for 37.9% of the sample (n=11), followed by Asia at 34.5% (n=10). Oceania represented 13.8% (n=4), the Americas 10.3% (n=3), and Africa 3.5% (n=1). Two studies involved cross-continental research across Europe, Oceania, and Asia.

With regard to internal and external validity,

17.2% of the studies (n=5) reported clear sampling procedures and demonstrated relatively strong external validity. Another 31.1% (n=9) presented partial validity, often grounded in interview-based or case-based designs without explicit sample verification. The remaining 51.7% (n=15) did not report validity or reliability procedures, which was most common in qualitative, conceptual, or commentary-type publications.

Research trends also shifted over time. Studies published between 2014 and 2017 (n = 7) focused on community-based artistic practice and cultural identity formation, with governance treated mainly as contextual background. Work from 2018 to 2020 (n=8) incorporated concepts such as artistic participation, policy, local management, and sustainability. During this period, empowerment moved from community involvement toward structured co-production and capacity building, and governance-empowerment relations became central themes. Between 2021 and 2022 (n=5), mixed and quantitative approaches began to appear. Studies from 2023 to 2024 (n=9) increasingly framed rural settings as testing grounds for collaborative and participatory art practices, and explored governance models and empowerment mechanisms in more

depth.

In terms of thematic focus, most studies examined political and cultural empowerment (n=24, 82.8%). Psychological empowerment also appeared frequently (n = 21, 72.4%), whereas economic empowerment was addressed less often (n=13, 44.8%).

Regarding governance types, collaborative or hybrid governance was the most common approach (44.8%, n=13). Community-led governance accounted for 31.0% (n=9), while government-led arrangements represented 17.2% (n=5). Basic information about all included studies is provided in the Appendix. (Appendix Table 3. Overview of Included Studies)

3.3. Governance–Empowerment Linkages

Among the 29 included studies, 10 (34.5%) directly examined how governance structures influence empowerment in rural or community-based public art. The remaining 19 discussed governance and empowerment as parallel or implicit themes but did not analyse their causal or structural connections. Of these 19 studies, 8 treated governances as background context, 7 focused on empowerment outcomes such as participation, well-being, or identity, and 4 examined governance types or policy frameworks without linking them to empowerment.

To better understand how governance frameworks shape empowerment processes, the findings were organised by governance type and the empowerment outcomes associated with each category.

A. Government-Led Model

Seven studies examined governance structures dominated by government agencies or policy bodies. These studies show that local governments acted as the main planners, resource distributors, and institutional supporters. They did not function as facilitators of collective agency. Communities, artists, and non-governmental organisations were positioned largely as implementers within predetermined policy frameworks. Participation boundaries were set in advance by government departments or planning documents. Empowerment under this model followed a top-down and policy-driven pattern. It was delegated or dependency-based rather than negotiated. Citizens and communities could participate in public art projects but did not hold decision-making power.

Empowerment outcomes were most evident in the economic and cultural domains, accompanied by

policy-based institutional empowerment and symbolic psychological effects. Economic empowerment was the most visible result. Government funding and policy incentives supported infrastructure development, tourism, employment, and craft-based economic activity (Ćurčić *et al.*, 2021; Suminar *et al.*, 2019). These gains reflected policy-driven economic empowerment but remained dependent on state investment and market priorities. Cultural empowerment appeared when national cultural policies incorporated local arts and heritage into broader nation-branding strategies (Gallagher, 2021; Tang, 2020; Otte, 2019). Public funding helped restore local cultural symbols and strengthen community identity, often alongside cultural branding and tourism promotion (Gallagher, 2021). However, residents had limited influence over artistic content. Cultural empowerment therefore tended to take the form of symbolic representation and the reaffirmation of official cultural narratives.

Political empowerment was reflected in the formal participation channels provided by government programmes. Policy documents frequently included consultation events, training sessions, or project hearings (Sadikoglu, 2021; Park & Kovacs, 2020). Yet decision-making authority remained concentrated in government cultural offices or planning institutions. Psychological empowerment appeared in reports of increased self-esteem and local pride among participants (Suminar *et al.*, 2019; Sadikoglu, 2021). Women in training programmes described feeling more visible and capable (Suminar *et al.*, 2019). Festival-based projects also strengthened local identity and emotional attachment (Sadikoglu, 2021). These psychological effects, however, were often short-term and lacked institutional support for continuation (Gallagher, 2021).

B. Community-Led Model

Ten studies examined governance structures led by community groups. These studies show that local residents, artist collectives, or community organisations played the central governing role, while government agencies or NGOs provided only limited financial or technical support. The resulting governance structure was loose but sustained, with power distributed horizontally (Lee, 2015; Irwandi *et al.*, 2023). Under this model, power relations were reorganised from the bottom up through self-organisation and community-managed structures, with local identity and shared consensus serving as the foundation (Van der Vaart *et al.*, 2019; Skippington & Davis, 2016). Empowerment emerged

through processes of self-organisation, co-creation, and continuous participation. It was endogenous and culturally driven (Lee, 2015; Irwandi et al., 2023). Power was “generated from within the community,” grounded in practice-based and experiential knowledge, while external actors played secondary or supportive roles (Van der Vaart et al., 2019; Skippington & Davis, 2016).

Empowerment outcomes in this model were strongest in the cultural and psychological domains. Political empowerment remained limited, as communities gained visibility through cultural expression and self-organisation rather than through formal institutional positions (Irwandi et al., 2023). Economic empowerment developed through cooperatives or local production cycles, which strengthened economic autonomy. These processes were slower but offered higher independence (Malema, 2017).

Cultural empowerment was the most distinctive outcome. It did not simply involve broadening opportunities for cultural participation. Rather, communities assumed direct control over cultural definition and representation. Artistic practices became a means through which cultural authorship was expressed (Mathisen et al., 2024). Through murals, festivals, oral histories, and other forms of collective artistic activity, residents reclaimed narrative authority. Cultural meaning was produced within the community, and public art became a vehicle for reinforcing cultural belonging and symbolic space-making (Irwandi et al., 2023; Plińska, 2017). Variation in narrative control became an important indicator of empowerment depth.

Psychological empowerment was also prominent. Local action and symbolic achievements strengthened feelings of pride and belonging (Van der Vaart et al., 2019). The collaborative nature of artistic work fostered social connection and gave participants a sense of presence and recognition. This experience supported continued community engagement by strengthening intrinsic motivation (Malema & Naidoo, 2017; Lee, 2015).

The sustainability of empowerment varied. Some community-led art projects lost momentum once external funding ended, while others—such as cooperative-based initiatives—continued to operate (Suminar et al., 2019; Lee, 2015). This variation shows that the durability of empowerment depends on the stability of community self-organisation and the strength of locally anchored structures.

C. Collaborative Model

Twelve studies examined collaborative

governance arrangements. These studies show that power was shared among multiple actors, including NGOs, artists, universities, and private organisations. Government agencies acted mainly as policy providers and coordinators. Communities participated as invited partners or as co-creators, but decision-making still occurred within institutionalised frameworks (Sun et al., 2024). Power relations were negotiated rather than fully horizontal. Collaboration enabled partial power sharing, yet the actors’ controlling resources continued to shape key decisions. Empowerment emerged through joint project work and institutional linkage (Balfour et al., 2018).

Collaborative projects often built formal support networks through partnerships across sectors. Public art outcomes were incorporated into local tourism and cultural policy systems. Local governments, art institutions, and Indigenous or local artists co-developed long-term mechanisms for project maintenance (Mackay et al., 2024). Artistic activities were integrated into rural governance agendas, creating formal interfaces between cultural projects and local institutions. This integration enabled the institutional continuation of project outcomes. Empowerment in this model relied heavily on structured channels and cross-sector coordination (Lu & Qian, 2023). It involved institutional, market, and cultural dimensions but remained shaped by power asymmetries and external dependencies (Dushkova & Ivlieva, 2024; Mackay et al., 2024).

Cultural and psychological empowerment were the most prominent outcomes. Political empowerment was present but limited. Policy platforms offered communities opportunities to participate in agenda-setting, yet decision-making authority did not fully shift downward (Sun et al., 2024). Economic empowerment grew through links with tourism, creative industries, and branding initiatives, but remained vulnerable to external funding and market fluctuations (Balfour et al., 2016). Cultural empowerment emerged when villagers, artists, and researchers worked together to reinterpret cultural identity. Through collaborative production, participants acted as “co-creators” and “space negotiators,” generating shared narratives and renewed attachment to place. These cultural outcomes were often absorbed into policy frameworks or branding strategies, where cultural identity was reworked as a governable and marketable asset.

Psychological empowerment stemmed from confidence gained through collaborative work and recognition from cross-actor cooperation. However,

these effects were closely tied to project continuity and external networks. When projects ended, psychological gains often weakened (Lu & Qian, 2023; Mackay et al., 2024; Sun et al., 2024).

Across the 29 studies, the three governance models produced different empowerment patterns across political, economic, cultural, and psychological dimensions. Government-led models produced policy-driven empowerment, with particularly strong economic and cultural outcomes, while community participation tended to be delegated or implementation-based. Community-led models demonstrated strong bottom-up agency, with pronounced cultural and psychological empowerment rooted in local knowledge and self-organisation. Collaborative models sat between the two, characterised by cross-actor cooperation and institutional integration. Empowerment in this model concentrated on cultural reproduction and the building of relational trust, though it remained dependent on external support (Table 4. Governance type × IE/CA/PC × Empowerment Outcomes)

Overall, the studies show that empowerment is not a fixed outcome. It develops through interactions between institutional embedding, cultural expression, and community continuity. Cultural and psychological dimensions appeared most frequently across all models, while political and economic empowerment were influenced more directly by governance structures and control over resources.

4. DISCUSSION

This chapter interprets the findings in relation to the three research questions. It first revisits the research landscape identified in RQ1 to clarify the contextual conditions under which governance models operate. Building on this foundation, the discussion deepens the analysis of RQ2 by explaining why government-led, community-led, and collaborative models produce different patterns of political, economic, cultural, and psychological empowerment. The chapter then addresses RQ3 by examining how the mechanisms of Institutional Embedding (IE), Cultural Authorship (CA), and Participatory Continuity (PC) account for these variations and shape the conditions for durable empowerment. Together, these discussions provide an integrated explanation of how governance structures and mechanism configurations influence empowerment trajectories in rural public art.

4.1. *Embedded Mechanisms of Empowerment*

The findings show that empowerment in rural public art is not a linear outcome. Instead, it is shaped

by governance structures and local social relations (Campbell, 2019; Lu & Qian, 2023). Empowerment depends on stable connections between public art and local policies, cultural narratives, and participation structures. These connections take the form of three mechanisms: institutional embedding, cultural authorship, and participatory continuity.

The results in Section 3 indicate that government-led projects often achieve only financial embedding. They rarely develop deeper links with local organisations or cultural logics. In the Ihwa Mural Village case in South Korea, for example, government-led planning lacked channels for community feedback. This led to resistance and the destruction of installations (Park & Kovacs, 2020). Such cases show that when governance structures fail to create both cultural and institutional interfaces, empowerment tends to remain symbolic.

In contrast, community-led cases—such as Kampung Pelangi in Indonesia and women’s art cooperatives in South Africa—demonstrate stronger local embedding. When art projects align with cultural practices and social networks, empowerment emerges as renewed social capital and reconstructed identity (Irwandi et al., 2023; Malema, 2017). Communities gain greater cultural authorship, sustained participation capacity, and context-specific institutional support. Under these conditions, empowerment shifts from short-term involvement to a process driven by all three mechanisms. Through festivals, murals, and oral histories, communities link cultural expression with emotional attachment. Empowerment becomes a social process that continues beyond the project cycle.

The findings also show that participation alone is insufficient. Empowerment depends on whether collaborative practices can be translated into institutional recognition. Effective art projects restructure local cooperation, reproduce cultural meaning, and gain legitimacy within policy systems (Lu & Qian, 2023). Without institutional embedding, empowerment remains experiential and temporary, resulting in cycles of short-term mobilisation and symbolic participation (Campbell, 2019). These patterns form the foundation for the three mechanisms that structure empowerment. Differences across governance models—in resource mobilisation, negotiation practices, and the distribution of expressive authority—ultimately determine whether emotional experience can develop into institutional and durable forms of empowerment.

4.2. *Differences in Empowerment Mechanisms Across Governance Models*

A. Government-Led Model: Concentrated Resources and Delegated Participation

Government-led governance showed a concentration of resources and a form of delegated participation. Power flowed from the top down. Empowerment depended on institutional arrangements rather than community-driven processes. As a result, cultural and psychological empowerment tended to be symbolic and short-lived. Public art was framed within national or local policy agendas such as “rural revitalisation” or “cultural branding,” and administrative performance was often prioritised (Zhang et al., 2024).

The findings indicate that empowerment under this model was permissive rather than autonomous. Political empowerment took the form of formalised participation. Residents were included in consultation processes but lacked negotiation power. The emphasis remained on compliance rather than co-governance (Sadikoglu, 2021). Institutional embedding occurred mainly through short-term resource injection and policy directives, yet it rarely developed into stable agenda-setting, budgeting, or organisational interfaces (Park & Kovacs, 2020).

Economic empowerment appeared in the form of temporary financial inflows and increased tourism revenue (Park & Kovacs, 2020). However, this externally driven empowerment did not build local economic autonomy, as shown in the Ihwa Mural Village and rural tourism projects in China (Zhang et al., 2022; Park & Kovacs, 2020). Community members often acted as implementers and lacked substantive control over decisions or project agendas.

Cultural empowerment emerged through heritage revival or art interventions but was frequently redirected into cultural landscaping or policy narratives. Local cultural expression became a tool of governance rather than a form of autonomous authorship (Tang, 2020). Psychological empowerment was also constrained. Participation procedures were mainly symbolic, with limited space for sustained negotiation (Sadikoglu, 2021). Artistic outputs often reflected external aesthetic preferences, creating feelings of distance rather than ownership. Community pride was tied to external recognition rather than internal agency.

Overall, the government-led model excelled in institutional embedding but showed weak cultural authorship and limited participatory continuity.

B. Community-Led Model: Local Agency and Cultural Authorship

Community-led governance placed local actors at the centre. Empowerment was embedded in local social networks, cultural practices, and self-organised structures (Irwandi et al., 2023). However, limited institutional support and scarce external resources often restricted the development of long-term structural capacity.

Political empowerment took the form of local agenda-setting. Communities gained control through cooperatives, festival committees, and other grassroots structures (Van der Vaart et al., 2019). Economic empowerment was modest but meaningful. Cooperatives, craft production, and community festivals generated small-scale circular economies and strengthened local autonomy (Suminar et al., 2019).

Cultural empowerment was the most distinct dimension in this model. It was closely tied to cultural authorship. Communities used artistic activities to rebuild and reclaim their own narratives. Through festivals, murals, and other community-led expressions, residents articulated local stories in their own terms (Skippington & Davis, 2016; Plińska, 2017). This created a strong sense of ownership over cultural meaning.

Psychological empowerment was shaped by belonging and pride. Community members formed new identities through ongoing participation and self-expression. In the Indonesian and South African cases, women and young people entered leadership roles for the first time and gained organisational authority. They shifted from participants to creators (Malema, 2017).

In sum, the community-led model demonstrated strong cultural authorship and psychological empowerment. But institutional embedding remained weak, and participatory continuity relied heavily on the community’s own organisational capacity.

C. Collaborative Model: Multi-Actor Co-Governance and Institutional Embedding

Collaborative governance involved joint action among governments, artists, researchers, and communities. It reflected multi-actor cooperation and negotiated relations (Ansell & Gash, 2008). Many cases displayed institutional-embedding effects. Cross-sector and cross-level coordination enabled the integration of cultural work into local governance systems (Balfour et al., 2018). Empowerment emerged within collaborative relationships and was redistributed as projects became institutionalised.

Political empowerment increased through expanded opportunities to place issues on policy

agendas. Events such as the Setouchi Triennale and the Savannah Way Art Trail showed how cross-sector partnerships could embed art into regional development structures (Qu & Zollet, 2023; Mackay et al., 2024). Yet governments and institutions continued to dominate agenda-setting, reflecting negotiated but unequal power.

Economic empowerment resulted from resource pooling and market development. In Setouchi, collaboration among governments, artists, and local communities created regional economic cycles and long-term development pathways (Qu & Zollet, 2023; Mackay et al., 2024).

Cultural empowerment emerged through co-creation. Villagers, artists, and researchers jointly shaped place narratives and cultural symbols (Lu & Qian, 2023). Cultural outcomes were institutionalised through policy frameworks or branding strategies. While this created continuity, it also carried the risk of diluting local authorship (Crawshaw & Gkartzios, 2016).

Psychological empowerment was reflected in strengthened trust and shared confidence. Indigenous art initiatives, in particular, generated pride and reinforced local identity (Mackay et al., 2024). However, without sustained platforms, psychological gains often faded once projects ended. The collaborative model demonstrated the strongest balance between institutional embedding and participatory continuity. Yet cultural authorship remained constrained by cross-actor power relations.

Summary Across the Three Models

Across the three governance models, empowerment outcomes differed in political, economic, cultural, and psychological dimensions. Government-led governance increased economic visibility and policy presence but yielded limited political and psychological empowerment. Community-led governance excelled in cultural and psychological dimensions but faced resource and institutional barriers. Collaborative governance offered multi-dimensional potential through institutionalised cooperation, yet depended on stable external support and balanced power relations.

Overall, the differences do not stem from the governance labels themselves but from the models' ability to activate and institutionalise the three mechanisms—institutional embedding, cultural authorship, and participatory continuity. Governance arrangements that support cultural expression and organisational continuity are more likely to transform project-based empowerment into structural capacity (Lu & Qian, 2023; Campbell,

2019).

4.3. Integrated Logic and Structural Relations of the Empowerment Mechanisms

The analysis above shows clear differences among the three governance models in their patterns of institutional embedding, cultural authorship, and participatory continuity (Table 5. Mechanism Combination and Expected Empowerment Outcomes). Building on these differences, this section integrates cross-case evidence to propose a framework for explaining the conditions under which empowerment emerges in rural public art. The findings show that empowerment is not a direct outcome of policy nor a simple effect of participation. Instead, it develops through a layered set of mechanisms embedded in community development processes. These mechanisms—Institutional Embedding (IE), Cultural Authorship (CA), and Participatory Continuity (PC)—shape whether short-term mobilisation can evolve into sustained community capacity.

A. Institutional Embedding (Ie): From Project-Based Activity To Structural Support

The durability of empowerment depends first on whether public art can establish stable connections with local governance, economic structures, and cultural institutions. In government-led models, institutional embedding often takes the form of short-term policy support or resource injection. Communities seldom gain a stable position in agenda-setting, budgeting, or organisational structures. The Ihwa Mural Village and several rural tourism programmes illustrate this pattern. Communities carried out implementation tasks but held little influence over decision-making, resulting in shallow institutional embedding (Park & Kovacs, 2020; Zhang et al., 2024).

In collaborative governance, IE is achieved through cross-sector partnerships. Projects such as the Setouchi Triennale and the Savannah Way Art Trail created institutional platforms that linked resource integration, operational actors, and long-term cooperation to regional development structures (Qu & Zollet, 2023; Mackay et al., 2024). By contrast, community-led models lacked formal institutional interfaces, which made local organisations vulnerable to disruption (Skippington & Davis, 2016).

Thus, IE does not depend on the degree of government involvement but on whether communities gain stable positions in policy channels, financial structures, and spatial governance. Only

with such embedding can empowerment shift from project-based mobilisation to structural capacity building (Balfour et al., 2018).

B. Cultural Authorship (Ca): From Participatory Narratives to Cultural Agency

Cultural authorship refers to the community's ability to define narratives and symbolic meanings in public art. In government-led projects, culture is often instrumentalised for policy communication or tourism agendas. In the North Cyprus festival, for example, municipal authorities framed the event as inclusive, yet retained agenda control, reducing participants to symbolic performers (Sadikoglu, 2021).

In community-led and collaborative models, CA becomes a primary driver of empowerment. Indonesian mural initiatives enabled residents to redraw local memories and spatial meanings through collective painting (Irwandi et al., 2023). In the Bishan project in China, villagers and artists co-created cultural forms, though local agency weakened when external narratives dominated (Lu & Qian, 2023).

Real empowerment does not come from increased visibility alone. It depends on whether communities can define how they are represented and gain legitimacy for their cultural knowledge. CA thus determines whether cultural practices become modes of self-definition rather than instruments of governance.

C. Participatory Continuity (Pc): From Project Cycles to Social Reproduction

The third mechanism concerns whether participation continues after the formal project ends. Without continuity, empowerment effects tend to drop sharply (Van der Vaart et al., 2019). Sustained empowerment requires the community to maintain organisational structures, collaboration networks, and cultural practices beyond the project cycle.

The Savannah Way Art Trail demonstrates this clearly. Indigenous groups and local organisations sustained collaborative mechanisms after initial project support ended, allowing artistic practice and empowerment to persist (Mackay et al., 2024). Government-led projects rarely achieved this, as participation remained tied to events or activities without institutional follow-through (Sadikoglu, 2021). Community-led projects produced strong emotional cohesion and social capital, yet lacked the institutional support needed to sustain these organisations across time (Skippington & Davis, 2016).

PC therefore reflects a shift from episodic participation to ongoing social reproduction. It is a core indicator of sustainable empowerment within community development (Campbell, 2019).

Integrated Mechanism Dynamics

The three mechanisms do not operate in isolation. IE provides structural grounding. CA provides cultural agency. PC maintains social reproduction. Government-led governance offers strong institutional resources but weak cultural authorship and limited continuity. Community-led governance excels in CA and psychological empowerment but struggles with institutional weakness. Collaborative governance balances IE and PC, but CA may be constrained by unequal power relations (Lu & Qian, 2023; Mackay et al., 2024).

From a community development perspective, the key to empowerment lies not in governance labels but in whether public art practices create sustained interaction, cultural co-production, and institutional linkage.

Across the 29 cases, IE, CA, and PC form interacting configurations that shape whether empowerment becomes multi-dimensional and resilient. Strong IE without CA or PC often results in symbolic and temporary empowerment. The Ihwa Mural Village, despite strong funding and policy support, failed to build cultural ownership or sustained participation and triggered community resistance (Park & Kovacs, 2020). Strong CA without IE, as seen in Seoul's Mullae art district, produces rich cultural and emotional effects but remains structurally fragile when redevelopment pressures intensify. A third configuration—IE plus CA but weak PC—appears in festival or training-based programmes. These initiatives produce visible outcomes during the project cycle but lose momentum once external facilitation ends (Suminar et al., 2019; Skippington & Davis, 2016).

In contrast, cases with strong IE, CA, and PC show the most stable empowerment trajectories. European rural arts festivals combined multi-level institutional anchoring (IE), strong local cultural authorship (CA), and long-term cycles of creative participation (PC). Communities sustained cultural identity, social networks, and economic benefits over time (Mahon & Hyyryläinen, 2019). In South Africa, women's craft cooperatives linked NGO support with community organisation (IE), local cultural labour (CA), and ongoing collective production (PC), generating empowerment that continued beyond the project cycle (Malema, 2017).

Synthesising the findings, the evidence suggests

that each mechanism can produce partial empowerment. However, resilient empowerment is most likely when IE provides structural embedding, CA ensures narrative ownership, and PC sustains

participation across time. If anyone mechanism is missing, empowerment tends to be one-dimensional or to fade once the project or funding ends.

Table 5: Mechanism Combination and Expected Empowerment Outcomes.

Mechanism Combination	IE - Institutional Embedding	CA - Cultural Authorship	PC - Participatory Continuity	Empowerment Outcomes (Political / Economic / Cultural / Psychological)	Mechanism
IE only	√	–	–	Political: (√) / Economic: √ / Cultural: – / Psychological: (√)	Resource-driven; delegated empowerment
CA only	–	√	–	Political: (√) / Economic: (√) / Cultural: √ / Psychological: √	Narrative autonomy; symbolic empowerment
PC only	–	–	√	Political: – / Economic: – / Cultural: (√) / Psychological: √	Sustained participation; limited influence
IE + CA	√	√	–	Political: (√) / Economic: √ / Cultural: √ / Psychological: √	Institutional support for local narratives
IE + PC	√	–	√	Political: (√) / Economic: √ / Cultural: (√) / Psychological: √	Formal channels with continuity
CA + PC	–	√	√	Political: (√) / Economic: (√) / Cultural: √ / Psychological: √	Community-led cultural continuity
IE + CA + PC (full activation)	√	√	√	Political: √ / Economic: √ / Cultural: √ / Psychological: √	Full activation; strongest sustainable empowerment

Note: √ = Present; (√) = Partial Present; – = Not Evident

4.4. Theoretical Implications: Extending Participatory Art, Cultural Democracy, And Community Development Theories

This study extends existing theories of community development and participatory art by identifying three mechanisms—Institutional Embedding (IE), Cultural Authorship (CA), and Participatory Continuity (PC). These mechanisms offer a more contextual and structural understanding of how empowerment takes shape in rural public art. They also provide a comparative framework for explaining why empowerment varies across governance models.

First, the study expands participatory art theory into rural governance settings and addresses the limits of the assumption that participation itself produces empowerment. Participatory art scholarship (Alston, 2013; Matarasso, 2019) has long emphasised the democratic and subjective value of participation, but most evidence comes from urban contexts. The findings here show that participation does not automatically lead to empowerment in rural environments. Empowerment depends on whether participation is connected to institutional structures

and supported by ongoing organisational capacity (Campbell, 2019). This insight refines participatory art theory by introducing conditions under which participation becomes meaningful, rather than assuming it functions as an inherent source of agency.

Second, the study highlights a gap in cultural democracy theory regarding control over narrative authority and strengthens the theory through the mechanism of cultural authorship. Cultural democracy frameworks emphasise cultural participation and cultural rights (Matarasso, 2019) but pay less attention to who controls the production of cultural meaning. Evidence across governance models shows that cultural empowerment depends on whether communities maintain authorship in artistic production, rather than simply joining participatory activities (Skippington & Davis, 2016). The mechanism of CA therefore adds a focus on symbolic power, representation, and inequality in cultural production, enhancing the ability of cultural democracy theory to explain rural public art practices.

Third, the study fills a theoretical gap in community development literature by recognising

culture and art as mechanisms for building community capacity. Traditional community development theories emphasise organisational capability, social capital, and institutional support, but they rarely position cultural or artistic practices as central drivers of development. The findings on IE and PC show that public art can serve not only as a medium of cultural expression but also as a mechanism for shaping organisational foundations, mobilising social networks, and sustaining cross-sector collaboration (Lu & Qian, 2023; Campbell, 2019). This broadens the scope of community development theory by positioning public art as a core component of community capacity formation rather than an auxiliary activity.

4.5. Practical Implications

The findings show that empowerment in rural public art does not depend on governance type alone. Instead, it hinges on whether governance structures enable three key mechanisms: Institutional Embedding (IE), Cultural Authorship (CA), and Participatory Continuity (PC). Building on this insight, three practical implications for rural public art governance and community development emerge.

First, institutionalised collaboration is essential for sustained empowerment. Government-led models benefit from resources, yet empowerment remains short-lived and symbolic when community organisations, budget channels, and collaborative procedures are not formally embedded (Park & Kovacs, 2020; Tang, 2020). Public art initiatives should therefore establish clear cross-sector structures at the planning stage. These may include legally recognised roles for community organisations, long-term operating bodies such as cooperatives or community arts centres, and stable financial arrangements. Such institutional foundations allow public art to evolve from a one-off project into an ongoing organisational resource, strengthening community influence over agendas and resource mobilisation.

Second, safeguarding cultural authorship is central to cultural empowerment. Whether communities can shape narratives, visual language, and symbolic meaning determines the depth of cultural and psychological outcomes (Skipington & Davis, 2016). Practice should avoid external teams dominating cultural narratives, especially in heritage, identity, and Indigenous contexts. Effective measures include co-creation instead of outsourced artistic production, community veto power over thematic and narrative decisions, and representation

structures that ensure marginalised groups hold meaningful expressive roles. These strategies ensure that artistic outputs align with community identity and reinforce local agency.

Third, long-term participation infrastructures are necessary for building community capacity. Evidence shows that mechanisms such as volunteer networks, local arts groups, and recurring festivals play a decisive role in sustaining empowerment (Malema, 2017; Campbell, 2019). Governance practice should prioritise investment in local artistic training, youth engagement, and community-led organisations, accompanied by regular communication platforms such as artist residencies or community advisory groups. These structures allow participation to persist beyond individual projects and support a transition from project-based involvement to long-term community leadership.

Together, these implications underline that durable empowerment arises when governance supports stable institutional links, protects cultural authorship, and maintains ongoing participation platforms. Such arrangements help rural communities shift from passive project participants to active agents in local development.

4.6. Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Although this review synthesises a wide range of rural public art governance experiences, several limitations remain.

- a. The sample shows clear regional imbalance. Most studies focus on rural areas in Europe and Asia (about 75%). Evidence from Africa, Latin America, and remote regions in North America is limited. This may bias the findings toward contexts with stronger governance capacity or more established cultural policies.
- b. The evidence base relies heavily on qualitative methods and lacks long-term quantitative data. Most studies draw on interviews, participant observation, and case studies. Few provide longitudinal data that could capture the durability, decline, or intergenerational effects of empowerment. Rural empowerment often fluctuates over time, yet systematic long-term measurement is rare.
- c. Causal relationships between governance types and empowerment mechanisms remain under-examined. This review identifies three mechanisms – Institutional Embedding, Cultural Authorship, and Participatory Continuity – but existing research is largely descriptive. Few studies use comparative

designs or QCA to assess the necessity or sufficiency of these conditions.

- d. Power asymmetries are insufficiently analysed. In collaborative governance, artists, institutions, and government actors often hold structural advantages in resources and narrative authority. However, most studies do not examine how these imbalances shape empowerment outcomes or influence participatory processes.

Based on these limitations, several avenues for future research emerge.

- a. Comparative and geographically broader studies are needed. Future work should include rural contexts in Africa, Latin America, and low-resource regions to test whether the three mechanisms operate similarly under different governance capacities, cultural settings, and resource constraints.
- b. Longitudinal and quantitative approaches are necessary to assess the durability of empowerment and the conditions under which it persists. Potential strategies include multi-wave interviews, follow-up surveys, QCA-based mechanism testing, and long-term performance data from festivals, cooperatives, and community art organisations. These methods can help verify the causal effects of Institutional Embedding, Cultural Authorship, and Participatory Continuity.
- c. Further research should address power relations within governance processes. Key questions include: how narrative imbalances influence cultural authorship; how external artists and institutions affect local agenda setting; and how power negotiation shapes long-term community agency.
- d. Future studies should deepen understanding of the functional role of public art in community development. Public art is not only a cultural activity but also a mechanism that shapes organisational capacity, social capital, and cultural reproduction. Research could examine how public art functions as an entry point for mobilisation, how it serves as a platform for cultural reproduction, and how it acts as a mediator for cross-sector collaboration. These directions can strengthen theoretical links between public art and community development and provide more mechanism-based evidence for rural revitalisation, community governance, and cultural policy.

5. CONCLUSION

This systematic review synthesised 29 peer-reviewed studies published between 2014 and 2024 to examine how government-led, community-led, and collaborative governance models shape empowerment in rural public art. The findings show that empowerment is driven not by governance labels but by the operation of three mechanisms: Institutional Embedding (IE), Cultural Authorship (CA), and Participatory Continuity (PC). Only when these mechanisms function together and become embedded in local governance structures do political, economic, cultural, and psychological forms of empowerment gain depth and durability. When any mechanism is absent, empowerment tends to be short-lived or symbolic. Based on this insight, the review proposes an integrated framework for explaining the conditions under which rural public art generates sustainable empowerment.

First, the analysis demonstrates that empowerment in rural public art is neither linear nor guaranteed by increased participation. Its strength depends on the stability of institutional links, the extent of community control over cultural narratives, and the durability of participation structures. The absence of IE, CA, or PC leads to early gains that weaken over time, producing recurring cycles of symbolic or project-bound participation rather than lasting community capacity.

Second, the review shows that collaborative governance is not inherently superior to government-led or community-led approaches. Its advantages materialise only when power sharing, joint decision-making, and long-term resource commitments are institutionalised. Without such arrangements, collaborative projects risk devolving into symbolic participation, which undermines empowerment rather than strengthening it.

At the theoretical level, the mechanism framework (IE, CA, and PC) deepens understanding of empowerment processes and strengthens links between public art research and related theoretical literatures. IE adds an institutional dimension to participatory art theory by highlighting that sustained empowerment requires public art to become part of community organisations and governance structures, thereby correcting the assumption that participation itself is sufficient. CA complements cultural democracy theory by emphasising narrative authority and showing how rural public art influences local agency and cultural identity. PC extends community development theory by clarifying how empowerment depends on sustained participation, organisational capacity, and long-term social structures. Together, these

mechanisms provide a more conditional and context-sensitive explanation of how participatory art, cultural democracy, and community development theories operate in rural settings.

At the policy and practice level, the findings suggest three priorities for achieving sustainable empowerment through rural public art. Governance structures should institutionalise co-governance mechanisms, including joint decision-making, shared budgeting, and cross-sector coordination, to strengthen IE and shift public art from project-based intervention to institutional agenda; Long-term and flexible resource arrangements are needed to avoid organisational collapse after short funding cycles and to support PC by enabling communities to build capacity over time; Cultural authorship must be protected through co-creation processes, community-led narrative control, and deliberative structures that prioritise local knowledge, ensuring that CA remains central and that cultural identity aligns with community perspectives.

This study also faces several limitations. The sample shows regional concentration in Europe and East Asia; most studies rely on qualitative methods;

causal inference remains limited; and empowerment indicators vary across studies, reducing comparability. Dependence on English-language publications may also introduce language bias.

Future research should address these limitations by adopting longitudinal and mixed-method designs, expanding geographical coverage, developing culturally grounded empowerment indicators, and investigating how governance structures interact with gender, ethnicity, migration, and other social factors.

Overall, this review shows that empowerment in rural public art is not determined by governance labels but by the extent to which IE, CA, and PC are realised and institutionalised within specific local contexts. When agenda and budget channels are stable, cultural narratives remain under community control, and participation is supported by long-term organisational and resource structures, rural public art can generate sustained political, economic, cultural, and psychological empowerment and contribute to long-term community capability building.

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Table 4: Governance Type × IE/CA/PC × Empowerment Outcomes.

Governance type	IE - Institutional Embedding	CA - Cultural Authorship	PC - Participatory Continuity	Political empowerment	Economic empowerment	Cultural empowerment	Psychological empowerment	Pattern summary
Government-led	√	–	–	(√)	√	√	(√)	Top-down empowerment; strong institutional embedding; cultural/psychological gains symbolic and short-lived
Community-led	(√)	√	√	(√)	(√)	√	√	Bottom-up, narrative-led empowerment; strongest cultural and psychological outcomes
Collaborative	√	(√)	(√)	(√)	√	√	(√)	Cross-sector embeddedness; shared authorship; outcomes dependent on external resources

Note: √ = Present; (√) = Partial Present; – = Note

Appendix Table 3: Overview Of Included Studies.

Study ID	Author(s), Year	Context (Country + Setting)	Governance	Method & Type	Public Art Form	Empowerment Focus
1	Diana Dushkova & Olga Ivlieva (2024)	Multiple countries (comparative global review)	Collaborative (NGOs + local communities + hybrid governance)	Qualitative (Systematic Review + Thematic Analysis)	Not directly public art-focused; includes community engagement tools, participatory planning, resilience initiatives	Political√, Economic√, CulturalΔ, Psychological√,
2	Haiou Song, Muhizam Mustafa & Shuai Chen, 2024	Cross-national (Rural contexts across Europe, Australia, Asia)	Collaborative (Government-led, Community-driven, and Collaborative cases synthesized)	Qualitative SLR (Systematic literature review + Thematic synthesis)	Multiple: place-based arts, festivals, participatory projects, creative interventions	Political√, Economic√, Cultural√, Psychological Δ
3	Li Sun, Jiangnan Li, Zeyi Wang, Weishang Liu, Shuo Zhang & Jiantao Wu, 2024	China (Luanzhou, heritage-based rural community)	Collaborative (Local government + universities + heritage bearers + community orgs)	Mixed Methods (Questionnaire Survey + Case Study + expert interviews+ Thematic Analysis)	Shadow play redesign, performance-based tourism, heritage education workshops	Political Δ, Economic√, Cultural√, Psychological√,
4	Mackay, Ellison, Thompson, Preece & Harrevel, 2024	Australia (Remote Indigenous communities in Northern Territory)	Collaborative (Art centres + NGOs + Local government)	Qualitative (Case Study + Thematic Interviews)	Indigenous art production, local exhibitions, art centre programming	Political√, Economic√, Cultural√, Psychological√
5	Mathisen,	Sweden (Rural)	Community-led	Qualitative (Semi-	Visual art	Political Δ, Economic

	Jansson & Power, 2024	Värmland region, peripheral but culturally active)	(Artist-driven+ no formal governance structure)	structured Interviews + Participant Observation + Document Analysis)	(painting, sculpture, performance)	Δ, Cultural √, Psychological √,
Study ID	Author(s), Year	Context (Country + Setting)	Governance	Method & Type	Public Art Form	Empowerment Focus
6	Ernest Irwandi, Setiawan Sabana, Andryanto Rikrik Kusmara & Tisna Sanjaya (2023)	Indonesia (Urban villages, Java)	Community-led (Community leaders + artists + local residents)	Qualitative (Comparative Case Study + Field Interviews + Visual Methods)	Murals, participatory visual art, creative place-making installations	Political √, Economic, ΔCultural √, Psychological √
7	Harvey C. Perkins, Michael Mackay, Chiara Massacesi, 2023	New Zealand (Rural towns in South and Mid Canterbury)	Collaborative (Local governments + community groups + regional planners+ Local residents)	Mixed Methods (questionnaires, interviews, and document analysis)	Murals as part of broader place-making and revitalization strategies	Political √, Economic ΔCultural √, Psychological √
8	Lu & Qian, 2023	China (Bishan Village, Anhui Province; rural revitalization with peri-urban interaction)	Collaborative (Artist-driven+Community Engagement)	Qualitative (Ethnographic Fieldwork + Participant Observation + Document Analysis)	Socially engaged art, cultural events, village theatre, participatory planning	Political √, Economic √, Cultural √, Psychological √
9	Meng Qu & Simona Zollet (2023)	Japan (Rural areas with population decline)	Collaborative (Entrepreneur-driven + Community Engagement + External Agency Support+Local Governments)	Qualitative (Case Study + Field Interviews + Document Analysis)	Rural art festivals (e.g., Echigo-Tsumari Art Triennale, Setouchi Triennale)	Political √, Economic √, Cultural √, Psychological Δ
10	Zhang, Liu, Feng & Feng, 2024	China (Culturally themed rural tourism villages)	Collaborative (Artist-driven+Public/Visitor Engagement+Managerial Coordination)	Quantitative (Structural Equation Modeling + Survey of 391 respondents)	Environmental graphic design, public signage, artistic visual landscape elements	Political Δ, Economic √, Cultural √, Psychological √
Study ID	Author(s), Year	Context (Country + Setting)	Governance	Method & Type	Public Art Form	Empowerment Focus
11	B. Kathleen Gallagher (2021)	United States (Rural communities across several states)	Government-led (National Endowment for the Arts and Local Governments Provide Institutional and Financial Support)	Mixed (Policy analysis + Secondary data from National Endowment for the Arts + Case illustrations)	Nonprofit community arts programs (performing arts, mural projects, rural art centers)	Political √, Economic √, Cultural √, Psychological Δ,
12	Nevena Curčić, Andrijana Mirković Svitlica, Jovana Brankov, Željko Bjeljac, Sanja Pavlović, Bojana Jandžiković (2021)	Serbia (Zlakusa village - rural cultural tourism)	Government-led (Although there is Community Engagement,there is no Leadership or Planning Power)	Qualitative (Case Study + Field Observation + Interviews)	Traditional pottery, local crafts as tourism-driven cultural expression	Political √, Economic √, Cultural √, Psychological Δ
13	Rahme Sadikoglu, 2021	Northern Cyprus (Semi-rural municipalities, post-conflict context)	Government-led (municipal orchestration of cultural events, Community Engagement but no decision-making)	Qualitative (Ethnographic Fieldwork + Interviews + Participant Observation)	Cultural festivals, parades, performances	Political Δ, Economic ×Cultural √, Psychological Δ,
14	Benjamin R.	Ecuador (Rural	Community-led (The	Qualitative	Children's	Political √, Economic Δ,

	Bates, Daniela A. Grijalva, Mario J. Grijalva (2020)	Loja Province, Chaquizhca village)	agenda is co-created by the community and researchers)	(Participatory art-based method + Phenomenological analysis)	drawing and group mural painting	Cultural √, Psychological √,
Study ID	Author(s), Year	Context (Country + Setting)	Governance	Method & Type	Public Art Form	Empowerment Focus
15	Hayun Park & Jason F. Kovacs, 2020	South Korea (Urban-rural fringe, Ihwa Mural Village, Seoul)	Government-led (Top-down initiative + limited community involvement)	Quantitative (structured questionnaire survey)	Murals, outdoor art installations, tourism-focused interventions	Political ×, Economic Δ, Cultural Δ, Psychological ×
16	Campbell, 2019	Indonesia (Bali; Kamasan village, traditional patriarchal art setting)	Community-ed (traditional community-level family networks + individual female agency)	Qualitative (Ethnographic Fieldwork + In-depth Interviews + Visual Analysis)	Kamasan painting (narrative scroll painting); ceremonial and market-oriented art	Political √, Economic Δ, Cultural √, Psychological √,
17	Grace Siu-fan Tang, 2019	Australia (Policy-level cultural governance analysis; mixed urban-rural applicability)	Government-led (The government provides venues and management mechanisms)	Qualitative (Policy analysis + Theoretical discourse synthesis)	Not specific to one form; encompasses public art, cultural infrastructure, festivals	Political √, Economic Δ, Cultural √, Psychological ×
18	Hanka Otte, 2019	Netherlands (Rural Friesland, socioeconomically peripheral)	Government -led (Top-down policy-led cultural governance)	Qualitative (Ethnographic interviews + Comparative case study)	Community art projects, participatory performances, local arts networks	Political √, Economic ×, Cultural √, Psychological √,
19	Marie Mahon & Torsti Hyyryläinen, 2019	Europe (Comparative case studies: Finland & Ireland rural regions)	Collaborative (Community + Local Government + External Partners+ public institutions)	Qualitative (Case Study + Policy Review + Interviews)	Arts festivals (multi-disciplinary: music, performance, exhibitions, workshops)	Political √, Economic √, Cultural √, Psychological √
Study ID	Author(s), Year	Context (Country + Setting)	Governance	Method & Type	Public Art Form	Empowerment Focus
20	Tri Suminar, Emmy Budiartati, Dewi Anggraeni, 2019	Indonesia (Samin community in Klopo Dhuwur village, rural tourism village context)	Government-led (Top-down cultural-economic integration)	Mixed (Quasi-experimental + Questionnaire + Observation + Interview)	Cultural Batik production (handmade and stamped)	Political √, Economic √, Cultural √, Psychological √
21	Gwenda van der Vaart, Bettina van Hoven & Paulus P.P. Huijgen, 2018	Netherlands (rural and small-town youth in participatory community development)	Collaborative (Artists-driven + community residents Engagement in co-creation)	Qualitative (Participatory Action Research + Visual Methods + Reflective Evaluation)	Video diaries, mapping, photo-narratives, installations co-created with youth	Political √, Economic ×, Cultural √, Psychological √,
22	D.R. Malema & S. Naidoo, 2017	South Africa (Rural provinces involved in NGO arts and crafts projects)	Community-led (NGO-facilitated + local women's cooperatives)	Qualitative (Interviews +Case Study+ Focus Groups)	Textile crafts, beadwork, ceramics, community-based art production	Political √, Economic √, Cultural √, Psychological √
23	Hyejin Jo, 2017	South Korea (Urban village - Mullae Arts Village, Seoul)	Community-led (artist-driven+Community Initiation and Sustainment)	Qualitative (Ethnography + Participant Observation + In-depth Interviews)	Multimodal: murals, performances, lectures, art	Political √, Economic Δ, Cultural √, Psychological √,

					markets, everyday artistic practices	
24	Van der Vaart, D., van Hoven, B., & Huigen, P. P., 2019	Netherlands (Pingjum; rural village with strong artist presence)	Community-led (Artist-driven+community Engagement)	Qualitative (Participatory Research: Walking Interviews, Group Discussions, Workshops)	Participatory arts, exhibitions, performing arts	Political √, Economic ×, Cultural √, Psychological √
Study ID	Author(s), Year	Context (Country + Setting)	Governance	Method & Type	Public Art Form	Empowerment Focus
25	Weronika Plińska, daniel rycharski, 2017	Poland (Rural village of Kurówko + Cracow and Warsaw exhibitions)	Community-led (Artist-driven+local community Engagement)	QualitativeEthnographic fieldwork + participant observation	Murals, site-specific sculptures, installations (e.g., 'Monument to a Peasant')	Political√,Economic Δ, Cultural√, Psychological√
26	Balfour, B., W-P Fortunato, M., & Alter, T. R. 2018	USA (Multiple rural communities in Pennsylvania and Texas)	Collaborative (Community Embedding + Arts and Cultural Institutions + Local Government + Enterprises)	Qualitative (Case Study + Conceptual Framework)	Festivals, local performances, visual arts events	Political √, Economic √, Cultural√, Psychological√
27	Peter A. Skippington*, Diana F. Davis 2016	Australia (Remote/rural communities in Western Queensland)	Community-led (Local community arts council + artists + residents, the government is only a partner)	Mixed (Survey + Semi-structured Interviews)	Arts festivals, murals, workshops, community exhibitions	Political √, Economic Δ, Cultural √, PsychologicalΔ
28	Doreen Lee, 2015	Indonesia (Urban-rural activist networks in Java and Kalimantan)	Community-led (Community and artist-driven cultural practicess)	Qualitative (Visual ethnography + Discourse analysis + Interviews)	Muralism, protest banners, graffiti, street installations	Political √, Economic Δ, Cultural √, Psychological √
29	Julie Crawshaw, Menelaos Gkartzios (2015)	UK (Northumberland, rural island community)	Collaborative (Artists and academic teams + community + residents)	Qualitative (Ethnography + Participant Observation)	Processual art-making, walking-based art, socially engaged practice	Political √, Economic ×, Cultural √, Psychological √

