Research on the Design of Urban Pocket Parks based on Cultural Governance Concepts: Taking the "Xin Chou Memory" Scheme Design as an Example

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Abstract

The "15th Five-Year Plan" for urban renewal explicitly states that the new phase of urban renewal will focus on five dimensions: people's livelihood, functionality, ecology, culture, and governance. As an essential public space shared by citizens in urban construction and development, pocket parks possess unique and irreplaceable values. Currently, the construction of urban pocket parks mostly focuses on meeting functional facilities, with cultural expression primarily being represented by explicit artistic images. The artistic image forms, values, and functions of urban governance achieved through cultural innovation design in the construction of pocket parks are not fully reflected. This paper will take the award-winning works of the Shenyang Pocket Park Design Competition as examples to explore the connotation, function, social significance, and value of innovative design for urban pocket parks based on cultural governance in the context of urban renewal and upgrading.

Keywords

Urban renewal, cultural governance, pocket park, land art.

1. Introduction

Urban renewal is a comprehensive and systematic strategic action for China to promote high-quality urban development. It is a core measure for cities to shift from large-scale incremental construction to quality improvement and transformation of existing assets, as well as connotative development. The "15th Five-Year Plan" for urban renewal clearly states that urban renewal in the new stage will differ from traditional single-mode demolition and reconstruction, focusing on five dimensions: people's livelihood, functionality, ecology, culture, and governance. Adhering to a people-oriented approach, through the renovation and upgrading of old urban areas, inefficient spaces, and outdated facilities, functional reshaping, ecological restoration, cultural inheritance, and governance upgrading, we aim to address the shortcomings of urban development, optimize the living environment, activate the endogenous driving force of the city, and help build livable, resilient, and smart cities, fully meeting the people's demand for a high-quality life.

1.1. Cultural Governance Concept

The theory of cultural governance originated from British scholar Tony Bennett, who proposed the concept of cultural governance based on Foucault's theory of power and discourse and Gramsci's hegemony. He believed that "culture should be seen as a series of governance relations formed through historically specific institutions, with the goal of transforming the thoughts and behaviors of the majority of the population. This is achieved in part through the social system of forms, techniques, and rules of aesthetic intellectual culture, which allows culture to be conceived more convincingly.". [1] He advocates that culture is both the object and tool of governance, relating to the morality, etiquette, and lifestyle of social life, and serving as a means to intervene and regulate these objects. Culture is the soul of a city and the core of its

high-quality development. Integrating cultural elements into the public green space landscape environment that is used daily by urban community residents allows them, through behavioral psychological processes such as cultural understanding, aesthetic formation, and neighborhood mutual assistance in the public environmental scenarios they use during daily outdoor activities like leisure, entertainment, and social interaction, to achieve a common cultural connection and ideological cognition among community residents. This helps to promote the positive development of neighborhood relations among community residents and the formation of a mutually supportive society. As the birthplace of two dynasties and the capital of two emperors, Shenyang has a history of over 2,600 years, which endows it with special charm, including the inheritance of dynastic history, the memory of red culture, the spirit of the steel era, the legacy of Lei Feng's spirit, and so on. Shenyang has countless stories for the people of the new era to comprehend and praise.

1.2. Development and Application of Pocket Parks

The construction of modern urban spiritual civilization is not only reflected in "hard civilization" such as magnificent buildings and well-established infrastructure, but also embedded in high-level "soft culture" construction activities, such as unique cultural temperament and the spiritual outlook of citizens. [2] As a shared space for urban community residents, the construction of spiritual civilization in pocket parks plays a significant role in enhancing the overall cultural image of the city and improving public literacy. Pocket parks, also known as pocket-sized parks, refer to small-scale urban open spaces that are often scattered or hidden in patches within the urban structure, serving local residents. Various small green spaces, small parks, street gardens, and small community sports venues in the city are all common pocket parks. In 2021, Shenyang proposed the goal of "greening the city" for urban fine management, planning to newly build and renovate 1,000 "pocket parks". The "2022 Shenyang Municipal Government Work Report" pointed out that Shenyang will build 1,070 "pocket parks" with high quality. Compared to other cities, pocket parks have greater value in Shenyang. As a historical and cultural city and an old industrial base city, the old urban blocks and architectural planning decades ago were not standardized and suitable for the living needs of contemporary citizens. The city has seen many idle, forgotten, and neglected micro-spaces. Using the design strategy of pocket parks to activate these forgotten corners, realizing the landscape environment design of inserting green into every crevice, mending every gap space for ecological urban construction, and effectively implanting cultural elements, while beautifying the environment, the community outdoor space is created to form a community cultural environment friendly to community residents, practicing the concept of "being good neighbors and partners with neighbors" in environmental shaping. This not only achieves the refined utilization of land resources but also effectively stimulates community vitality and improves the urban environmental appearance.

2. Analysis of the Design of the "Xin Chou Memory" Pocket Park Scheme

2.1. Current Status of the Project Site

In order to implement the requirements of the Shenyang Municipal Committee and Government for meticulous urban management and high-standard construction of pocket parks, and effectively enhance the quality of urban life, Shenbei New Area has pooled the wisdom of the people, actively guided students to participate, collected creative inspiration, and assisted in the construction of high-quality parks, aiming to create a happy life for the people of Shenbei. In the early planning and design of traditional urban parks, the government and design units played the main role. However, this traditional model lacking public participation has caused many problems. As community parks are the core places for urban residents to relax and unwind, the absence of direct public participation and feedback often leads to vague

planning objectives and a disconnect from the actual needs of citizens. [3] In this pocket park design project, we fully mobilized the enthusiasm of residents for community participation and extensively solicited design proposals from teachers and students at local universities. According to the pocket park implementation plan, Shenbei New Area launched a "Pocket Park Creative Design Proposal Collection" competition for college students. Among them, Site No. 6 in Group D is located at the northwest corner of Renhe Street and Fangcao Road, surrounded by residential buildings and close to Yijie Road and Yiyi Road. After on-site research and analysis, the following issues were identified at this site: First, the existing functional facilities are limited in number and function, lacking appeal to residents; second, there are few lighting facilities, limiting the use of the site to daytime and failing to fully utilize it at night; third, there is a lack of artistic and cultural atmosphere. The existing advantage of the site is its rich greening layers, which can be regarded as a quiet place in a bustling city.

2.2. Design Theme and Concept

The design theme "Xin Chou Memory" is derived from the year 2021, which marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China (CPC). 2021 is a year worthy of being remembered, with significant events such as the 100th anniversary of the CPC, the nationwide fight against the pandemic, China's first Mars exploration landing with "Tianwen 1", and the successful launch of Shenzhou 12. These memories represent China's great rejuvenation and the real scenes of Chinese people's happy lives. The main elements of the park design will rely on historical and cultural elements such as bamboo slips and inkstones, combined with modern design techniques, to showcase a pocket park in the form of landscape art that integrates "culture and nature". The walls of the park will be engraved with these eternal memories in another form of bamboo slips. The colors on paper will eventually fade, but engraved on stone, they will be permanently preserved, solidifying memories and passing down the culture of the era.

2.3. Innovative Aspects of the Design

Xin Chou Memory Park leverages historical culture to showcase modern culture, inherits Chinese culture, and fosters a beautiful and virtuous culture within the community. The traditional Chinese culture, spanning five thousand years, has withstood the test of time and embodies a rich cultural spirit. In this new era, we are making progress. In the design of pocket parks, we fully utilize cultural elements to shape the theme of the venue, create a sense of scene and atmosphere, and achieve educational functions in terms of environmental beauty, cultural beauty, and artistic beauty during scene activities and use. Through the presentation of cultural imagery and art from different periods, we aim to achieve the goal of cultural governance for urban community residents.

In the process of public design for the venue, based on functional design, the form of public art, specifically landscape art, is adopted to unify and innovate the design elements such as form, function, material, and light and shadow across the entire plot. Under the premise of presenting a sense of formal beauty, modern material elements are incorporated into the pocket park. Outdoor plexiglass tree pools replace cement tree pools, breaking the rigidity of the park and forming landscape ornaments while expanding the range of sight; environmentally friendly materials are used for colored pavement, which poses no harm to children's health when used, achieving a child-friendly design for the community pocket park. At night, the pocket park's faint light outlines the contours of the venue structures, presenting a sense of formal beauty in the form of light and shadow, realizing the alternation between daytime usage and nighttime leisure scenes in the pocket park.

The Xinchou Memory Park presents a natural beauty and atmosphere in the form of micro-spaces, while also carrying certain cultural and educational significance. The culture and aesthetic presented in the park can be accepted by all groups in the community, and while

coexisting with aesthetics and culture, it also has educational implementation significance. After being reviewed by experts in the landscape design industry of Shenbei New District, Shenyang, the project won the third prize in the Shenbei New District Pocket Park Scheme Design Competition.

3. Prospects for the Design Value of Pocket Parks based on the Concept of Cultural Governance

3.1. Realize the Construction of Common Cultural Cognition in the Community

The design essence of traditional pocket parks leans towards enhancing the greening capacity of small spaces, primarily focusing on functional space design and creative design of various landscape elements, with an emphasis on innovating in environmental and ecological aesthetics. However, there is less consideration for creating a unique cultural and environmental atmosphere suitable for various urban communities. Pocket parks, which serve as auxiliary spaces for daily community life, should not only consider greening and usage functions during the design process but also be constructed from a cultural perspective. Pocket parks play a significant role as a medium for cultural inheritance. The social significance of pocket parks as urban facilities far exceeds their aesthetic significance as design works. Therefore, it is essential to design and utilize them more effectively to address corresponding urban issues. Culture serves as the underlying code that links community residents. Culture can shape sociological aspects of community relations, such as shared values and a harmonious view of social development. During the construction phase of community pocket parks, it is important to deeply explore cultural elements such as intangible cultural heritage forms, cultural relics and historic sites, celebrity stories, cultural arts, and folk traditions. Additionally, attention should be paid to the phased achievements of contemporary China's development and the exemplary deeds of contemporary social celebrities, such as the collective effort to combat the epidemic, China's "Tianwen-1" Mars probe landing, and the successful launch of Shenzhou-12. Depending on the location of the community pocket park, it is necessary to fully investigate the existing surrounding environmental characteristics, deeply explore traditional historical and cultural elements, and enhance the aesthetic and sociological significance of cultural elements in the environmental design of pocket parks.

3.2. Foster the Formation of "Empathy" Ability for Fostering Friendly Neighborhood Relations

Empathy, also translated as synesthesia, understanding, and emotional resonance, is a form of humanistic care. It is the ability to empathize with others' situations, thereby achieving the perception and understanding of their emotions. The construction of mutual aid and friendly relationships among residents in traditional communities mainly exhibits spontaneous characteristics, as well as the promotion and active advancement of community organization activities. The construction of empathy among community members is the foundation for achieving good neighborly relations among community residents. Through the design and creation of public, shared, and friendly spatial environments, it can better promote the formation of the concept of mutual assistance between neighbors, making empathy among neighbors more practical and routine in the process of interaction in external public spaces, and building a symbiotic scene among community culture, environment, and residents. Jan Gehl pointed out in "Life·Space·Design" that a series of outdoor spaces should be established adjacent to residential areas, with various activity facilities carefully arranged, forming semi-public, intimate, and familiar spaces to enable residents to better understand each other. [4] A shared cultural identity can foster a convergence of social values among community residents, which is conducive to creating a positive social atmosphere. By creating external public spaces

tailored to the needs of community residents, residents can engage in diverse outdoor activities and extend their outdoor activity time. This allows for diverse interactions between residents in terms of time and space, gradually fostering a series of empathetic abilities such as understanding, appreciation, and care, thereby establishing healthy community relationships characterized by mutual help and support. The shaping of community environments based on cultural construction creates venues that disseminate positive social energy, allowing community residents to regain the long-lost sense of human connection through interaction in these venues. Positive and effective communication and interaction facilitate the co-construction, co-governance, and sharing of community relationships. Customized functional venues tailored to community needs build beautiful living scenarios for future communities.

3.3. Create an Urban Environmental Aesthetic Characterized by "Planting Greenery Wherever Possible"

The community pocket park has realized the construction of a "five-minute living circle" in urban communities, with "cultural governance" and "community interaction" as its core objectives. Through spatial design strategies, it has established a multi-level and multi-functional community park system, realizing the planning vision of "meeting basic needs and stimulating community vitality within five minutes". [5] It serves as a powerful supplement and expansion for the overall construction and development of the city's ecological environment, quality of life, and urban aesthetic characteristics, achieving a "small but significant" effect in the city's ecological environment. Pocket parks are an important component of the urban green space system. Although small, they are fully equipped with all the elements that a park should have. From the perspective of the overall urban green space system planning structure, pocket parks belong to the "point" shape of green spaces and are a functional "node" in the urban green space network structure. They have unique characteristics in content and form, echoing roads, buildings, and human activities, jointly shaping an attractive urban environmental space. Pocket parks, which focus on supplementing the green ecological environment of community residences, provide practical supplements for the gradually disappearing green spaces in old residential areas, the monotony of shared social spaces, and the diverse needs of residents from different social groups. They form unique green cells in the city, and the incremental proliferation of such green cells can accelerate the improvement of urban residents' quality of life and quality of life.

4. Conclusion

As urban gap spaces, pocket parks play a pivotal role in "seeing the big picture" through ecological development concepts such as urban nature, history, and culture in the process of enhancing the overall environmental quality of the city. They are also living scenes that constitute the main unit of urban communities. Only when the daily living scenes of community residents achieve a humanized, naturalized, and aesthetic atmosphere can the concept of "being good neighbors and partners" be better promoted in daily life. The good and companionable relationship between neighbors can gradually be realized through the scene of the community pocket park environment, gradually becoming a normal part of residents' lives, and ultimately achieving a better and happy life for community residents.

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