

On the Improvement of Public Cultural Service Quality under the Background of Urban Organic Renewal: Based on Yueqing City

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ABSTRACT

Since the initiation of reform and opening up, urbanization has seen a shift towards modernization with the construction of new urban infrastructure to address the basic needs of urban and rural residents. However, the expansion of cities is reaching a saturation point. Given the changing societal dynamics, enhancing the quality of public cultural facilities within the context of revitalizing old spaces has emerged as a focal point to cater to the spiritual well-being of residents. This study examines the optimization strategies for public cultural services amidst urban revitalization in Yueqing City, a thriving economic hub, employing the concept of multi-center governance. The findings offer valuable insights into addressing comprehensive challenges related to public cultural services during urban renewal in small and medium-sized cities across China.

KEYWORDS

Urban organic renewal; public cultural service; quality improvement

1 Background

The rapid expansion of urbanization has been a prominent aspect of social development over the last three decades since the initiation of reforms and opening up policies. Recent data from the National Bureau of Statistics in 2023 indicates a rise in the domestic urbanization rate from 65.22% in 2022 to 66.16%, representing a 0.94 percentage point increase. This growth has led to the modernization of urban infrastructure, catering to the essential material needs of both urban and rural populations. In response to evolving societal demands, urban residents are now advocating for more diverse, high-quality, and accessible public cultural amenities. As outlined on the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development website, the country is set to commence the renovation of 54,000 old urban communities in 2024. Local statistics reveal that between January and April, there were 16,800 new constructions and upgrades of existing urban areas nationwide. Emphasizing the enhancement of living standards, these efforts span across various sectors. While traditional urbanization strategies have concentrated on existing resources, the current approach considers both existing assets and future growth, mirroring a shift in urban development ideology towards quality improvement. This aligns with core urban development principles such as prioritizing people's needs, fostering a better living environment, and promoting organic urban renewal.

The revitalization and growth of a city can be likened to a living entity, sustained by the renewal of its foundational urban spaces. This rejuvenation is intricately tied to the cultural essence and humanistic context that have evolved over time. In 2023, Yueqing City embarked on a systematic renovation of its old urban communities, successfully completing projects like the Oriental Plaza. The Yinhe Garden redevelopment initiative was recognized by the Ministry of Housing and Urban-

Rural Development as a standout project for urban community restoration. Noteworthy achievements included the installation of 18 residential elevators, advancements in affordable housing, and the transformation of urban areas. The city also spearheaded initiatives to enhance housing safety, addressing critical issues, resolving housing crises, and improving the living conditions of underprivileged families. These efforts were commended in the China Construction Newspaper. Yueqing's commitment to becoming a national civilized city was acknowledged when it was selected for the 2021-2023 nomination cycle, emphasizing the importance of enhancing urban public spaces, preserving cultural heritage, and enhancing service quality.

As one of the top 100 counties in China, Yueqing City, based on the new changes faced by public cultural services in the new era, explores the demand and optimization path of public cultural services under the background of urban organic renewal, which is of great significance to the sustainable development and connotative development of the city.

2 The current situation of public cultural service practice in Yueqing City

Yueqing City, a county-level city within Zhejiang Province and under the administration of Wenzhou City, encompasses a land area of 1174 square kilometers, a sea area of 270 square kilometers, and a coastline stretching 193.3 kilometers. As of October 2022, the city is divided into 8 streets, 14 towns, and 3 townships, with a population of 1.4758 million and an urbanization rate of 67.9% by the end of 2023. The city boasts a network of infrastructure including the Shenhai Expressway, Yongguan Expressway, Wenzhou Ring Expressway, 104 National Highway, and 228 National Highway, along with the 58-kilometer-long Yongtaiwen Railway. Renowned for its economic prosperity, Yueqing City is recognized for the low-voltage electrical appliance industry in the southern Liushi area and as the birthplace of the Wentai model. Yandang Mountain to the north is acclaimed as a premier natural attraction, designated as a 5A-level tourist site and awarded the prestigious title of "World Geopark." Furthermore, Yueqing City has been selected as one of the pilot regions for high-quality development and common prosperity demonstration zones in Zhejiang. In economic terms, the city recorded a gross regional product (GDP) of 166.353 billion yuan in 2023, reflecting a notable 8.4% year-on-year growth at comparable prices.

In 2022, Yueqing City is dedicated to advancing the development of public cultural communities within cultural centers. This initiative aims to consolidate key cultural establishments such as municipal libraries, cultural centers, museums, non-heritage exhibition halls, and opera centers to create a centralized public cultural service hub within a 5-minute radius, offering a comprehensive 'one-stop' cultural experience. Emphasizing prime locations and parkland, the plan involves the establishment of 30 urban public library clusters and numerous 'cultural points' in villages, setting the stage for a new public cultural realm known as '1 + 30 + N'. Within this framework, '1' signifies the primary position of a Yueqing cultural center, '30' denotes 30 premium cultural venues, and 'N' represents cultural points dispersed across urban and rural communities. Presently, over 600 public cultural service points have been established, with a focus on reading, boasting a collection of 625,000 books. This initiative has attracted over 10,000 cultural volunteers, facilitated more than 20,000 themed reading events, and engaged 1.25 million readers. The famous attribute of urban public bookstores, in addition to convenience and beauty. Following the construction concept of the most beautiful space, shared by the whole people, the bookstore emphasizes crowd gathering, embedding and co-construction in the layout. In the park green space and scenic spots of the new and old urban areas with crowd gathering and convenient transportation, all kinds of idle and reformed building space are used for special design and beautification. Up to now, Yueqing has built 28 open bookstores.

3 The problems of public cultural services in Yueqing City in urban renewal

3.1 Facilities construction lack of city memory

Currently, Yueqing has only one public library, cultural palace, and museum. The library was established in 2016, while the museum opened its doors in 2019. Despite the urban coverage of basic public cultural facilities in Yueqing, the number remains insufficient given the city's total population. The significance of libraries as essential public cultural service venues is paramount. While online book borrowing is an option, its utilization among the public is limited. Accessibility is a concern, especially for elderly residents who must traverse long distances to reach the library. The existing library does not adequately cater to the needs of residents. A local resident expressed frustration over the distant location of the library, making it challenging to access resources, such as electronic and leisure reading areas. There is a call for additional reading spaces tailored to children and other age groups to address the current inadequacy in meeting the community's needs.

The allocation of resources is fundamentally shaped by the interplay of supply and demand. While the market is pivotal in this allocation process, the government also wields influence through macro-control measures. Pure public goods such as those related to public safety and essential economic functions are subject to government regulation. In Yueqing, the provision of public cultural services is rapidly expanding in response to the increasing consumption levels and cultural interests of urban residents. However, historical issues have left the cultural service supply characterized by systemic flaws, limited variety, and subpar quality. The existing infrastructure struggles to meet the demands of the populace, highlighting a prominent issue of supply-demand imbalance. This disparity is a central challenge in the development of urban public cultural services, extending beyond local contexts to manifest as regional discrepancies nationwide that require thorough examination and corrective action.

3.2 Service content not to meet the cultural needs

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3.3 Hollow phenomenon of audience

After multiple rounds of rigorous scientific evaluation and integration of key metrics during the initial phase, public cultural events have emerged as a vital component within the retained indicators for public cultural services. Analysis of the data reveals a discrepancy between participation rates in activities compared to metrics such as per capita access to public library resources, highlighting the need to actively engage and incentivize the public to take part in these cultural service offerings. This underscores the substantial opportunity for enhancing involvement in public cultural activities. During interviews, community residents shared their perspectives.

Resident B noted, "Community organization events can be hit or miss. Some activities like public lectures or training sessions fail to attract attendees if they lack appeal. Introducing fresh activities could be more beneficial." Resident C added, "Occasionally, the community newsletter features events for us to join, but weekends are challenging as people prefer to rest. Considering activities tailored for office workers to participate from home could be more enticing."

The current provision of public cultural services in Yueqing City does not effectively meet the actual demands, particularly in the following areas: Firstly, the range of services offered lacks diversity and inclusivity, with some cultural activities or services being too limited or exclusive for certain groups. As societal and economic advancements continue, the public's expectations for cultural services have shifted towards more personalized and tailored experiences. Presently, public cultural services in Yueqing City predominantly focus on general and uniform offerings, catering mostly to the general population, while the provision of specific cultural activities, themes, or services for unique groups requires enhancement. Secondly, there is a geographical imbalance in the distribution of public cultural services across different regions, leading to some residents in certain areas facing difficulties in accessing such services. Remote or underprivileged areas may lack the necessary cultural infrastructure and resources to support residents' cultural needs. Moreover, some public cultural activities lack mechanisms to facilitate interaction and communication, failing to meet the communal desire for engagement, sharing, and participation. This deficiency may result in decreased interest and involvement in public cultural services among the populace.

3.4 Overall satisfaction improved

The level of mass participation in cultural activities remains low with limited scope in the central city of Yueqing. The public cultural service system in the area, stemming from the planned economy era, is primarily divided into three parts: the administrative department, institutions, and non-governmental organizations. The government plays a dominant role across these bodies due to the historical development of limited non-governmental organizations in China. As economic structures evolved since the 1980s, there has been a gradual decentralization of public institution management, leading to increased autonomy. Some institutions have also undergone privatization reforms amid market economy changes. The overall supply system in Yueqing shows minimal marketization, resulting in a singular approach for residents to access urban public cultural services, largely influenced by the longstanding government-centric supply model. The enhancement of innovation in public cultural service content is imperative. In today's digital age, the integration of digital processes into public life is becoming increasingly prevalent. However, current public cultural initiatives are noticeably lacking in modern content and presentation. The services offered are repetitive and limited, failing to keep pace with societal progress and innovation, thus falling short of contemporary needs. The content remains conservative and traditional, neglecting to showcase the unique local cultural characteristics and activities that are rich in regional brand culture. Attention towards certain mass cultural services tends to remain superficial, overlooking their actual impact.

4 Analysis of influencing factors under the background of urban organic renewal

4.1 Lack of organic consciousness in urban renewal and insufficient excavation of cultural memory

The provision of urban public cultural services in China is primarily overseen by the government, which is also the case in Yueqing City. While the third sector and market-oriented entities are

involved in offering public cultural services and products, their growth has been limited in scale and numbers due to historical and current factors. Nonetheless, these entities are experiencing rapid development. Despite the recent rapid growth of the cultural industry in Yueqing City, there is a lack of cohesive awareness regarding urban renewal in public cultural services, leading to a limited supply channel. Therefore, diversifying the cultural supply subjects by breaking the local public cultural service monopoly and supporting related cultural enterprises is crucial for future development.

4.2 Cultural supply lacks audience orientation, and service content supply and demand do not match.

Based on the principles of socialized mass production and driven by market forces and division of labor, an active and interconnected network is established through competitive mechanisms. Information plays a crucial role as the lifeblood of the market, where its efficient circulation signifies a free market environment. In well-developed markets, the seamless flow of product and service information is essential for effective market regulation. Urban public cultural services prioritize equity and effectiveness. While a government-led cultural supply model aligns with the historical and practical context of Yueqing City's central urban area, emphasizing socialist values of fairness and public ownership, relying solely on government entities for urban cultural services could hinder progress, resembling outdated planned economy approaches. To enhance efficiency in product supply and facilitate information exchange, it is crucial for the government to involve non-governmental organizations in urban public culture, promoting market-driven regulation and fostering development in Yueqing City's central urban area. For example, on March 12, 2022, the paper books circulation and return business of all public libraries at or above the county level in Zhejiang Province was officially opened in Yueqing City Library, which also met the needs of Yueqing residents to borrow library documents.

4.3 The weak of marketization of cultural supply subjects, and the supply capacity needs to be improved.

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