

# Study on Urban Micro-Renewal Project Planning Based on Curatorial Concepts

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### Abstract:

Urban renewal has become a key topic in modern societies where urbanization is accelerating. Focusing on the background of the phenomenon of urban renewal that emerges in the urbanization process, this study aims to explore urban micro-renewal projects based on the concept of curation. The concepts of curation and urban renewal are elaborated in detail through an extensive collection of relevant literature for in-depth study and a comprehensive analysis of the actual cases. At the same time, the paper also illustrates the specific application of curation in micro-renewal projects, and based on this, further analyzes the positive impact of curation on urban space, culture, and society, including but not limited to the revitalization and utilization of space, the inheritance and innovation of culture, and the reshaping of social relations. Finally, based on the research results, practical strategies and methods for urban micro-renewal project planning are proposed to provide a reference for future research in this field.

**Keywords:** Curation; urban curation; urban renewal; micro-renewal; urban site-specific exhibition.

## 1. Introduction

With the implementation of the new human-oriented urbanization strategy, large-scale demolition and construction is no longer the main theme of the current urban renewal; a more humane, small-scale urban micro-renewal that pays attention to daily life has gradually become a new trend. At the same time, with the development of contemporary art in China, curation has also been continuously integrated into the development of urban culture. In many areas of China, the integration of curation into urban renewal projects has become a topical practice in the development of current urbanization. This paper uses the literature review and case study method to find and

read related materials and literature. Take the Shenzhen Shajing Relic Reborn project as an example to explore the feasibility and effectiveness of the application of curatorial concepts in urban renewal and to provide ideas for urban micro-renewal projects based on curatorial concepts.

## 2. Overview

### 2.1 Curation

The word 'Curate' is derived from the Latin word, which means 'heal, care for' in its Latin etymology. Originally, it also meant 'one who cares for people's

souls' in religious cultures. Curatorial culture, however, is a product of Western society in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, imported into China in the new era. The broadest concept of curation is that curators collect, select, sort, and organize materials for a specific theme and then present them to the public. When discussing this broad concept with practical significance, the curator becomes an inextricable part of it [1]. In the 1960s, with the development of curatorial culture, independent curators began to emerge in the West. At the end of the 1980s, the curator system entered China, and in 1989, the Exhibition of Modern Chinese Art created the first batch of Chinese curators. In the past 30 years, curation has become an important part of Chinese contemporary art, not only related to art exhibitions but also promoting the development of urban cultural undertakings and expanding the influence of Chinese art to the outside world [2].

## 2.2 Curation in an Urban Context

In modern society, where urbanization is accelerating, curation is no longer limited to art spaces such as museums and art galleries. Applying the thinking and methods of curating to urban space, with the city or urbanization as the fixed theme, through curating and organizing a variety of exhibitions and activities to display the characteristics and values of the city, the concept of curating with practical significance bursts into new vitality in the urban context [3].

The origin of urban curation can be traced back to the beginning of the 20th century, when some international exhibitions, such as the first Venice Biennale in 1895 and *Maisons de la Weissenhof-Siedlung* in Stuttgart, Germany, in 1927, can be regarded as the early forms of urban curation. With the passage of time, the content and form of urban curation have been enriched and developed and gradually become an independent cultural phenomenon [4]. In China, the rise of urban curation is relatively late, but it has developed rapidly in recent years. As represented by Beijing International Design Week, Shenzhen/Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale of Urbanism/Architecture, etc., urban curatorial activities have gradually become an important brand of urban culture [5].

Urban curation is not only simply organizing exhibitions but also reinterpreting and shaping the urban space, which involves many aspects of the city's history, culture, society, economy, etc. [6]. Urban curation activates restricted space and improves the quality of space through the re-planning and design of urban space [7]. In the historical and cultural neighborhoods of some cities, curators introduce new cultural businesses through the curatorial approach so that historical culture and modern life can

be integrated. In this way, it can promote the diversified development of urban culture and shape the image and brand of the city while protecting and inheriting the historical and cultural heritage [8]. In recent years, urban art seasons, which have emerged based on the concept of urban curation, have attracted audiences of different ages and backgrounds through public artworks and activities, enhancing community cohesion and social integration, as well as promoting economic transformation and development [9].

## 2.3 History and Approach to Urban Renewal

The concept of urban renewal also emerged in the West. It is a series of solutions put forward by Western countries to address problems emerging from urban development. In modern times, urban renewal primarily started in the nineteenth century and reached its peak in the 1940s with urban reconstruction after World War II.

Urban renewal from the post-World War II period to the end of the nineteenth century was generally dominated by urban reconstruction, which was led by government agencies and carried out in a bulldozer-like manner to improve urban living space and clear slums. However, within this phase, in addition to the main type of urban reconstruction as a renewal approach, there are also urban redevelopment, urban revitalization, and urban renaissance approaches interspersed in the process of urban renewal. The urban revitalization and urban renaissance approaches were concentrated in the 1870s and 1890s. Both approaches were dominated by private developers, social groups, and market forces, with the government in a coordinating position, and used economic development as an engine for real estate-oriented development of old cities within a certain urban area.

The approach to urban renewal in the period from 1990 to the present is very different from that of the previous period. Renewal in the new period is a small-scale, gradual, acupuncture-type organic renewal in social, economic, cultural, and ecological dimensions, which is led by cultural factors and is carried out by the government, private developers, social organizations, scholars, and the public in collaboration, mainly in response to the phenomenon of urban decline [10].

## 2.4 “Micro-Renewal” in the New Era

“Micro-renewal,” as a new-era approach to urban renewal, differs from large-scale construction in that it emphasizes “lightness” and “organicism.” Micro-renewal treats the city as a living organism and renews it based on a long-term vision. Without changing the nature of the land and the main structure of the building, it gradually renews

and repairs the function and ecology of small-scale public spaces, bringing about change with a slight gesture. Urban micro-renewal is characterized by small-scale projects, light means of intervention, and more daily living functions. Urban micro-renewal emphasizes the reorganization of the time and space of daily life with a focus on use enhancement and the creation of places to stimulate the interaction between people and space to achieve a sense of belonging. This type of renewal approach can perpetuate and continuously activate change while facilitating the creation of connections between people and the community and the improvement of the living environment [11].

### 3. Case Study: Shajing Relic Reborn

With the acceleration of urbanization, cities face many challenges, such as the decline of spatial quality, the lack of cultural characteristics, and the lack of social vitality. To cope with these problems, urban renewal has become an important issue in urban development. As an innovative approach, urban curation provides new ideas and methods for urban renewal. It activates urban space, improves urban quality, and promotes sustainable urban development by curating and organizing various cultural, artistic, and design activities. The following article is based on related literature, and the project of the Shajing Relic in Bao'an,

Shenzhen, is selected to be discussed.

#### 3.1 Background

Shajing Relics is a mixed-type historic district located in Shajing Street, Shenzhen, covering an area of approximately 260,000 square meters. The architectural ensemble within the Shajing Relics includes the Longjin Riverbank landscape, the Longjin Stone Tower, old houses, ancestral halls, ancient wells, memorial arches, and ruins. At the same time, it is a mixture of urban villages, temporary buildings, and informal immigrant communities, and the overall landscape presents a characteristic mix of old and new and a diverse symbiosis. To maximize the preservation of the history and culture of the Shajing Relic and to explore an urban renewal model based on the value of the authenticity of the daily life site, the ARCity Office was commissioned by the Shajing Street Office and China Resources Land Group to plan and design a set of urban micro-renewal projects, including river remediation, landscaping, architectural and interior design, art curation, and event operation. Starting from September to December 2019, the whole project process lasted four months.

#### 3.2 Urban Micro-Renewal and Urban Site-Specific Exhibition



**Fig. 1 Distribution of the six groups of renovation and new design projects on both sides of the Longjin River**

The micro-renewal project of the Shajing Relic mainly contains two sections: urban micro-renewal design and urban site-specific exhibition. The main project of the micro-renewal design is to carry out exemplary water body remediation and landscape renovation for a section (about 70 meters) of Longjin River, as shown in Figure 1. Along

the Longjin River, six groups of representative locations are selected through the four clues of site, place, scene, and field for identification: A. Longjin Riverbank Landscape; B. Longjin Waterside Pavilion; C. Public Stage; D. Ruin Garden; E. Liujiiao Pavilion; and F. Old House. Based on authenticity, the method of integration design

is adopted to maintain the characteristics of the place, simplify the complexity, and follow the trend, avoiding the rupture of the social structure and spatial texture of the area due to the sudden intervention of the design, and increasing the spatial attraction of the whole area.

Time Drift-Shajing Relic Reborn is an exhibition of 23 artists, consisting of three thematic units and synchronized with the micro-renewal design section. As a new type of exhibition, the site-specific exhibition focuses more on the authentic experience, using residents' daily life places as exhibition venues as well as exhibition objects so that residents can participate in the exhibition personally.

Similar to the concept of integration design in micro-renewal, several integration concepts are reflected in the exhibition. The first is the merging of viewing and being seen. The curatorial team uses outdoor spaces such as the walls of the buildings in the neighborhood as a display site for the artworks, guiding the audience to pay attention to things that are easily overlooked while viewing the exhibits and, at the same time, some random behaviors of the residents in their daily life are also merged into part of the artworks, forming a vivid on-site artwork, which is viewed by the audience together. Second, the integration of history and the present. Historical buildings have inherited the memories of generations of people's lives, but they do not necessarily trigger the resonance of the present generation. The curatorial team integrates the elements of current life into the historical scenes to generate a sense of place and identity belonging to the present generation. Third, the merging of authenticity and fashion. The authenticity of the daily life scene is not absolute but a relative concept. When the most fashionable elements are implanted in the base of authenticity, relative authenticity is stimulated. In a way, fashion is a catalyst for authenticity, and the curatorial team has strictly controlled the proportion of the catalyst to avoid irreversible damage to the authenticity caused by the fashion factor. Finally, it is the merging of information and sites. The information conveyed by the exhibition is extremely diverse. Textual information, image information, visual design information, and multimedia image information are used together with the on-site space in the form of posters, light boxes, projections, and screens to shape the festival-like atmosphere of the on-site exhibition [12].

## 4. Discussion

In the Shajing Relic project, the urban site-specific exhibition is not just a simple exhibition but also an innovative experiment in urban scenarios, which has a positive impact on urban renewal. The curatorial team's curatorial thinking is based on the authenticity of daily life and the

design concept of integration, which preserves the local history and culture and, at the same time, improves the acceptance of urban renewal. Urban curation offers a new strategy for the reinvention of a series of historic districts represented by the Shajing Relic.

However, it is undeniable that some problems will still be faced during the renewal process. Urban micro-renewal, as an external intervention, can trigger resistance and sabotage from residents to a certain extent. Therefore, more adaptive strategies should be adopted to let residents get used to these updates and changes, such as choosing micro-renewal programs that are more adaptive to the habits and ideas of residents, listening to local people's suggestions while planning and adjusting the design and exhibition programs on time; and organizing a large number of free public activities in synchronization with the exhibitions, such as academic forums, band performances, festival parade, children's education activities, and graffiti. By demonstrating to residents how to use the new daily life site shaped by micro-renewal through these interesting activities, the idea of micro-renewal will be deeply rooted in people's minds to keep the renewal ongoing and activated [12].

## 5. Conclusion

The introduction of the curatorial concept provides new ideas and methods for designing and planning urban micro-renewal projects. The Shajing Relic Reborn project demonstrates the feasibility and effectiveness of urban micro-renewal projects based on the curatorial concept. Through the implementation of strategies such as integration of spatial design, thematic curation based on authenticity, and a large number of public activities, the goals of urban micro-renewal projects can be realized - to enhance spatial quality, to pass on the history and culture of the community, and to promote sustainable development of the city. In the future, urban micro-renewal projects based on the concept of curation may face more opportunities and challenges. As people's demand for living quality continues to rise, renewal projects need to be more innovative and sustainable. Curators need to continuously improve their professionalism and innovation ability to meet the rising demand. Meanwhile, in the process of urban development, the government plays a key role in leading and planning, formulating relevant policies, providing financial support, and carrying out macro-control. Enterprises, with their professional technical capabilities and abundant resources, inject strong impetus into urban renewal projects. All sectors of society, including social organizations, community residents, experts, and scholars, etc., can provide a diversified perspective and a broad

base of public opinion for the project. Only when the government, enterprises, and all sectors of society fully utilize their respective advantages and strengthen cooperation and communication among themselves that the development and implementation of urban renewal projects be effectively promoted, and more favorable conditions will be created for the sustainable development of the urban areas.

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