Research on the Neighborhood Culture of “Future Resident Communities” in China

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Abstract. In March 2019, the Zhejiang Provincial Government of China issued the "Zhejiang Future Community Construction Pilot Work Plan", taking the lead in launching the Chinese version of the construction model for comprehensive future communities. This paper analyzes the future community’s construction of the neighborhood cultural system and proposes that the future community should expand the neighborhood culture discussion around the fundamental life of the residents. The community needs to solve the basic survival conflict among residents. And designers are suggested to think of reshaping the entire life chain as a starting point, fulfilling humanized life details for different groups. For administrators, they would conceive future life by applying the idea of "cultural reshaping" rather than "cultural integration", creating a new neighborhood relationship. It will give a better match of the core ideas of future community creation. In this article, the author will explore the Chinese version of the future community neighborhood culture system derived from the seven dimensions of life.

1. Introduction

The concept of the community was first introduced by German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies. He described the community as a social group with a close relationship and a community composed of people with common customs and values.[1] What we can conclude is that the essential connotation of the community actually lies in the common culture of any specific people. It is the culture that closely binds the relationship between the residents of the community, which would create a sense of identity between the community members, and gradually forms a psychological relationship—"spiritual sense" of the community rather than the spatial relationship of community residents.

From the 1950s to the 1990s, the traditional community was a form of collective gathering in which residents are from the same working unit. The traditional concept of neighborhood watch existed among the residents. The similarity between occupation and living habits formed a relatively consistent cultural lifestyle. Nowadays, researchers in China pays more attention to the new phenomena and new problems of modern urban communities caused by the evolution of housing commercialization, who learned from other countries in the world such as Singapore, Japan, the US, and other countries, trying to seek the future community development path of the cities.

The future community has come, what should we do when we are facing those newly emerged challenges of design and construction? The trend has triggered a lot of thinking, discussion, and practice in academia and business. After the completion of the future community, the new community structure will probably generate a different neighborhood relationship from the past. How should the cultural identity and value orientation of the community residents be integrated? What are the intrinsic relationship and cultural fundamentals?

2. The Research Perspective of Neighborhood Culture in Future Communities

The future community is still a social organization form, which will inherit and follow the existing basic theories of community research. Meanwhile, the future community is also an embodiment of
new concepts and ideas not only a form of social organization but also a new regional cultural structure. Therefore, future community research should appropriately differentiate from the original research methods and theoretical framework of modern urban communities. This article tries to explore some new ideas and methods with the pioneer project practiced in Zhejiang province, China.

Studies have shown that community populations may have heterogeneity and indifferent neighbor relationships, which are directly related to the lack of interpersonal trust in modern society and the spatial barriers in urban housing design.[2]

There are many formulations about the concept of community culture. The "broad and narrow sense" describes that the broad sense of community culture refers to the sum of material culture, conceptual culture, and institutional culture created during a long-term practice in a specific area. And community culture in a narrow sense refers to the sum of values and behavior patterns, etc.[3] "Lifestyle theory" believes that community culture is the sum of humanistic environmental behavior patterns and the lifestyles created, nurtured, and formed by people.[4] From these theories, this article is more inclined to continue the perspective of the "lifestyle theory" in the study of community culture, which shows that the neighborhood culture of the future community is in a certain area and space, and the diversified groups of people are participate in creating, constructing, and reshaping the whole process of life culture with common natural resources, human resources, historical resources, and social resources.

3. Cultural Reconstruction of the Future Community of Shibanqiao in Hangzhou, Zhejiang

3.1. Basic Overview

Shibanqiao Community in Shangcheng District, Hangzhou is the first batch of pilot projects modified as a future community in Zhejiang Province. With 6,730 residents, the community has basic areas constructed from the 1970s to 1990s, especially with the regional plates such as the Wahaha production plant area and the former South Bus Station. The area is mainly faced with problems such as building structure aging, aging facilities, and lacking supporting facilities, making it a complex "high-density old city center reconstruction" project. Relative departments of Shangcheng administration will completely rebuild the community. It is estimated that there will be 7,400 residents and 1,600 bring-in talents after its completion[5].

3.2. Resident Population Composition

Two types of residents are composed of the main residential population in the Shibanqiao community: resettled residents and bring-in talents. The core "people-oriented" concept of in the rebuilding project is to guarantee 7,400 original households to relocate in the area which constitutes the first type of the residents. Apartments and subsequent property service expenses must be "affordable" to relieve the financial pressure of the low-income people and it is also critical to keep a low level of property management fees.[6] The first type of resettled residents has a certain cultural commonality in neighborhood relations, who also have a strong communication foundation and prefer keeping the traditional way of life. The second type is the introduction of talents of 1,600 people such as the Wahaha corporate talents, the international financial staff, and the innovative industry labors, conceived to be more diversified, open, and adaptable to modern lifestyles.

3.3. The Cultural Logic Based on Life Rebuilding

Through a series of spaces construction, operation & management methods, Shibanqiao Community reshapes neighborhood culture and builds a new cultural value system, taking “lifestyle” as the starting point.

3.3.1. "Rooftop Farm" and Green Dining

Considering that food supply during transportation will cause spoilage and waste, the design team proposes that the transportation of agricultural products should be within a short distance. So the design of a food self-produced and sold model was set up on the rooftop of the building for the
residents to grow a variety of green vegetables. The rooftop farm allows residents’ to self-produce organic vegetables which can be consumed by their families and be sold to the other residents in the community, which will provide the community with a modern organic and green food circle.

3.3.2. "Urban Forest" and Ecological Residence
The design of Shibanqiao Future Community provides each household with a staggered-height super large balcony with planting ponds, creating a personal garden for every family. What’s more, a vertical green belt is built on the outer wall of the community. Some of the roofs are designed with a small garden, and the overall green area in the community will obtain 40%-50% of the public area, realizing the "urban forest" scene. The design project shows people's yearning for ecological living and pastoral life, matching with almost all types of residents in the community.

3.3.3. "Three-dimensional Connectivity" and Smart Travelling
One goal of Shibanqiao’s three-dimensional connectivity strategy for future communities is to connect the underground spaces along Wujiang Road and the east passage of the city train station. People can walk directly from the community through the underground passage to the subway station. The local government utilizes the digital technology convenience of Hangzhou internet economy to build up mobile traffic information releasing platform considering the different needs of people. Administrators also focus on the conversion of subways, buses, shared cars, bicycles, and other public transportation modes connecting traffic endpoints. The starting point of the design of the Shiban bridge is to provide intelligent and convenient sight viewing scenarios for all kinds of people, which meets the common needs of residents’ travelling and leisure.

3.3.4. "Five-minute Life Circle" and Experiential Retail
The community is equipped with sufficient daily commercial shops. And the underground floor space of the residential building is all open, which is planned to build a prosperous commercial city street, allowing residents to fulfill their basic shopping needs. It not only provides consumer experiential scenes for residents who prefer offline shopping but also supports the surrounding areas of the community by opening up commercial blocks.

3.3.5. "Air Track" and Health
The community’s main feature concerning residents’ daily health is the construction of slow walking trails and “Air Runways”, which runs through 2/3 of the community area, connecting with surrounding area trails. Due to the planners intend to arise the fitness awareness of the surrounding areas, bicycle lanes are designed in the community, and smart facilities such as smart greenways and holographic interactive systems are supposed to be deployed to provide residents with better fitness space and experience.

3.3.6. "Changeable Space" and Lifelong Learning
Based on the learning needs of all age people, the community uses idle space to foster happiness sharing school, community school, and other different functional spaces. The future community contains bookstores, mobile micro-libraries platform, and fine art education workshops which can create an educational alliance relationship between the community and the society, gradually introducing community shared courses and adding functions to change the original community school.

3.3.7. "Sharing Public Spaces", "Time-Sharing Spaces” and “Entertainment Sharing”
The community has been designed into a series of public places for residents to entertain and communicate freely such as neighborhood centers, neighborhood parks, inter-building parks, rooftop farms, sky corridors and shared libraries, etc. establishing a “sharing utilization system in different period of time in a day” to empower the maximization of space utilization with the thinking mode of sharing economy. The residents are able to use the online appointment as a means to give full play to the value of the multifunctional spaces. Community activity rooms can be
time-shared as offices, business usage, theme salons, family gatherings, learning room, group sports gym, and other different functional spaces. The community property manager will encourage residents to participate in public entertainment events with the creation of other users and promotes neighborhood communication.

4. The Construction of a Neighborhood Culture System Based on the Life

In the future community such as Shibanqiao community, there will be resettled residents, new residents, permanent residents, short-term residents, local visitors, and foreign tourists. It can be seen that the neighborhood culture of the future community includes the traditional life culture of the resettled residents, new residents’ Modern life, and foreign tourists’ lifestyle. What we can expect is that the neighborhood culture of the community will inevitably seek new breakthroughs in a multicultural value collided environment. Different ages, different occupations, different regions, and different living habits will put these people who seem to have nothing in common in the same living area. The follow-up will bring great challenges whether in terms of cultural identity or community management. As the result, the neighborhood culture of the future community is facing reconstruction. It is necessary to find a cultural fulcrum that takes the fundamental interests of all residents as the goal to reshape the neighborhood relationship. This fulcrum can be explained as daily life, which enables community groups to form a cultural identity and behavior pattern.

The neighborhood culture of the future community should be a new cultural expression based on new lifestyles and modern life culture. It requests planners to think about how they can build a neighborhood cultural system while fully unleash people’s cultural content expression. On multidimensional levels, 7 aspects of daily life can be developed further into different themes to deal with challenges, which are diet, living, health, learning, transportation, consumption, and entertainment.

4.1. Cultural Content Derived From "Diet"

The diet culture includes sub-cultures such as light food and vegetarian food, healthy diet, coffee, and tea culture, and brunch and dinner culture. Future planners need to consider how to build corresponding functional space, specific infrastructure related to the lifestyle, and relative business management system. The cultural functional space includes organic food planting and sales spaces, light food dining space, and food production, sharing, and communication space. The cultural functional space also can be specifically developed into traditional breakfast shops, coffee shops, tea bars, and fashionable restaurants. The management system includes space utilization rules and methods, business operation management mechanism, and resident participation mechanism, etc.

4.2. Cultural Content Derived From "Residence"

The “residence” can be further explained as the pastoral lifestyle, sustainable recycling, low-carbon life, and integration of residence and business. In the future community, it is necessary to pay attention to the occupants' requirement of "the harmony between man and nature" and the traditional concept of "pastoral life". The relationship between occupants and nature is reflected through spatial reconstruction and functional implantation of pastoral gardens.

On the basis of the life philosophy of modern society, the planner will carry out sustainable development with green & low-carbon concept, constructing a new circulation system lifestyle and life process, re-positioning the future community space as an independent living subject with an upgraded internal circulation model.

4.3. Cultural Content Derived From "Travel"

The idea of “travel” includes convenient and smart travelling, ecological slow travelling, and green tourism. The convenient and smart travel sub-culture of the community conveys the external traffic connection of the community’s TOD and smart shared parking, etc. The ecological slow traveling is the design of green corridors inside and outside the community and ecological landscape path or walking path. The green tourism covers the space settings of shared bicycles, the seamless docking system of public transportation, and maintenance of energy supply for new energy vehicles.
4.4. Cultural Content Derived From "Consumption"

The idea of “consumption” can be divided into two levels: online and offline shopping such as the offline consumer experience and online shopping culture. In the future community, the offline consumer experience could be designed as specific locations like commercial streets, open commercial plazas, and flea markets. While, the spatial environment of residents’ consumption and the types of business should be planned reasonably according to the real community location. Online shopping culture could follow the normalized mode of online shopping. Projects will be established such as the logistics distribution optimization system and parcel packaging distribution and utilization system. The community will apply product offline experience area and exhibition & sales exchange area in order to offer community residents with "fingertip shopping" and comprehensive shopping experience of the life chain.

4.5. Cultural Content Derived From "Health"

The idea of “health” contains fitness, home care system, and medical care system. In addition to the planning and design of basic community outdoor venues and indoor public fitness spaces, in this part, planners would develop the fitness sub-culture into providing fitness enthusiasts with a full range of services such as the introduction of professional fitness training, design of jogging lines in the community, and drinking fountains at rest points, etc.

The home care system is mainly for the senior residents in the future community, which has designed spaces for temporary nurseries, canteens for the elderly, and entertainment and health-care areas.

Medical care involves the medical service areas in the community, including common pharmacies, regular appointment TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) clinic, community first-aid stations, and community doctor offices, etc.

4.6. Cultural Content Derived From "Learning"

The idea of “learning” consists of lifelong education, early childhood education, and parent-child education culture. Nowadays the concept of lifelong learning has been deeply rooted in people’s minds. The residents in the community who come from different industries and different educational backgrounds have a variety of knowledge and experience that worth sharing with each other. Thus the future community guided by the lifelong learning could open up shared education classrooms, talents education platform, and community knowledge resource bank.

Children especially aged 1-3 are important groups of community residents. Before they reach the school age, children spend a long time in the community in China. So early childhood education is one undivided part of residents’ life. In the future, it is necessary to create a safe and convenient public early education spaces, professional childcare areas, and child care activity centers. Further, the future community will have new type social learning places for older children (aged 4-6) and young people, setting up parent-child interactive projects such as parent-child kitchen, parent-child vegetable garden, and parent-child art workshop.

4.7. Cultural Content Derived From "Entertainment"

The purpose of "entertainment" is to encourage residents to communicate, which will help residents to forge the idea of "shared entertainment culture". "Sharing" is the core concept and sharing is the status quo and even the trend. Resident members of the future community will become a part of the shared members. In the future community, the interaction-oriented "shared entertainment" can be reflected on shared farms, shared libraries, shared game rooms, shared parks, and shared swimming pools. Neighbors will establish friendship and share life experience through delicately designed life scenes.

5. Conclusion

There is currently no unified template for the development of the Chinese version of the future community, but it seems that neighborhood cultural conflicts will be inevitable. The residential
population turns out to be more diversified and variable in the future community. However, the administrators and planners realize the importance of sustainable ecological development of future communities in terms of area forms and spaces usage, ecological lifestyle, online and offline business combination, and new residential culture. They should examine the general environment of a modern lifestyle by constructing the "future life" in their mind. The administrators also need to closely focus on the survival interests and life commonality of residents and develop new cultural life spaces so as to innovate community operation models by analyzing the lifestyle, life path, and life content of future residential groups.

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[5] The data listed above comes from the construction project of the Shibanqiao community 2019 proposed by the project study team from China Academy of Art.