

# City Talk: Exploration on the Interventional Approach of Micro-renewal Participatory Design for Public Space of Old Communities in Qingdao

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**Abstract**—In the context of Qingdao's rapid economic development and urban construction, Qingdao has attracted a large number of people with international attitude. In response to the call of Qingdao Municipal Government's "Old Town Revival" policy, the government has launched a special fund for the micro-renewal and renovation of the community public space in the old city of Qingdao, injecting new vitality for this city. The main purpose of this paper is to enhance the sense of identity and belonging of people living in the city, emphasize the importance of humanistic care and talk. At the same time, combined with the micro-renewal of the old community space in Qingdao, it aims to enhance the dialogue between cities through participatory design intervention while solving the problems including lack of vitality, aging and passivity of the old community space. And the paper is designed to stimulate the vitality and initiative of the city itself through creative participatory expression of the community public space with the micro-renewal of the trivial daily public space of old communities as the carrier, spread urban culture and collective memory in a limited space, and promote the formation of a more civilized way of life in the interaction with the city.

**Keywords**—community micro-renewal; city talk; participatory; design approach

## I. INTRODUCTION

For Qingdao, a modern city where progress and tradition coexist, the organic renewal and governance of the high-density old community space and urban corner space has become an urban problem that needs to be solved urgently in the context of urban renewal. It is necessary to solve the urban problem by using "city acupuncture", conduct micro-renewal design of old communities with the participatory design that goes deep into the communities as the starting point, encourage multi-participation, activate new functions, create a rich urban living environment, stimulate the potential urban feelings of urban residents, and use silent dialogue to improve neighborhood environment, increase the sense of urban identity and happiness, and realize the embarrassment of community residents for a better life through joint construction and sharing.

## II. THE BACKGROUND OF COMMUNITY MICRO-RENEWAL

In the past 30 years of rapid development in China, it has largely pursued a profit-oriented planning approach. The rapid and large-scale urban construction model conforms to the spatial production mode under the operation of rights and capital, the urban space has undergone tremendous changes and also caused great destruction and waste[2]; from the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee to the Nineteenth National Congress, the government has paid more and more attention to community governance in urban development, the micro-renewal design practice of the old communities in Qingdao under the community governance section is a positive response to the national policy.

Qingdao continues to develop at a rapid rate, and its city size and population are also growing; at the Qingdao Party Congress, it is proposed to promote the revival of the old city and strive to build a more dynamic, more fashionable and more attractive urban area of Qingdao; under such a background, the urban renewal method of large-scale demolition and violent construction in the old city that has been built should be avoided, and a new light and flexible situation - micro-renewal of community space is adopted; through this stock renewal method, attention is paid to the reconstruction and quality of the community space, will the city cares for people in the new era, enhancing the vitality of the community public space.

At present, there are big problems in the community public space environment: crowded, dirty, aging, lack of vitality, etc.; it is necessary to use the problem-oriented principle, adopt the method of design intervention, solve the basic demands of community space function, and realize the improvement of small and micro space; take "community micro-renewal" as a breakthrough, promote "co-construction, co-governance and sharing" of community public space, integrate the feelings of the community residents and even the people in the city with "talks", thus building the community public space into a "big family" with a sense of identity and humanistic concern in the city.

### III. MICRO-RENEWAL OF PUBLIC SPACE OF OLD COMMUNITIES IN QINGDAO

#### A. *Daily Universality of Community Space*

The ordinary and trivial daily public space in communities can be seen everywhere but often forgotten. The micro-renewal of community must first clarify the state of the existing space. It seems to be disorderly, but it reflects the authenticity and diversity of daily life and the compensating confrontation against the lack of spatial function. Office workers coming and going fast, college students passing by, primary school students playing around, elderly people looking after children, middle-aged people exercising, etc.; the active behavior of residents in the community and various informal activities have created the use and form of these built spaces. The daily activity space of communities is the entry point for the most concerned and participatory design of spatial reconstruction and renewal.

The daily experience of Qingdao old communities is negative and indifferent. The space marginalized by community is like the abandoned community vitality, lacking emotional and humanized expression between each other. As a result, the residents living here are strange and indifferent to each other, lacking interactive expression and dialogue; residents have no sense of identity and belonging, and it is very different from the personal "street life" and vibrant and modern community on the Hudson Street that Jacobs discusses and depicts. With the urban renewal based on "rapid development", the common phenomenon is to broaden the roads to meet the needs of motor vehicles, and set up high-end stores to meet the needs of economic development, replacing the community public space that used to be energetic [2].

With the lack of communication of things and communication media in the city, the "hardware" represented by urban construction and the urban "software" such as urban culture and community culture are already out of balance in the process of urban development; analyzing the daily existence of community space, the community micro-renewal needs to find a balance point from "hardware" and "software", conduct humanistic expression of the public space and function of community through participatory design intervention, and call the residents' sense of belonging and identity to the city life to obtain the emotional sustenance and comfort.

In the process of community micro-renewal, landscape architects need to play the role of "expresser", help to explore and deepen the needs of community residents through research, use the professional knowledge of designers to "express" the demands of residents, and improve the existing community conflicts and effectively intervene in the micro-renewal practice of the old community public space to some extent.

#### B. *Design Intervention of Community Public Space Construction Platform*

The community public space construction platform needs to use a variety of flexible and interactive design methods to

intervene in the practice of micro-renewal; the community is where the crowd gathers, which refers to the regional living environment and multi-directional meaning such as the life, history, industry, culture and environment attached to it, and imply the emotional consciousness of "hometown" [6]. The public space environment of community seems to be small in scale, low in investment, and small in scope of influence, but its substantial effect is huge. Community construction is similar to "urban acupuncture", which emphasizes renovating the small-scale space that is marginalized in the city and lacks vitality with innovative ideas and progressive artistic methods, attracting residents to participate in through design intervention, constructing and sharing together, repairing the space and human ecology, activating the whole with a small entry point; paying attention to the life of ordinary people from the perspective of ordinary people; the purpose of such community construction is not only the material space level, but also the community co-construction in the spiritual space level.

The old communities in Qingdao are built in high density, with dense population and chaos, and have greater diversity, with more complicated functional requirements for the community public space. Community construction is a comprehensive grasp of the overall situation of the community, not limited to the isolated construction of a single community, but also the trigger point of "urban renewal", which can stimulate the vitality of the city itself. This method is more in line with the law of the city's own development, the results are easier to grasp, and it is easy to bring positive benefits.

The construction of community public space needs to consider the physical space level and emphasize the authenticity of community life. Such authenticity is the accumulation of daily life experience, and is based on the "emotional" expression between the community and the urban residents. The way of "talk" spreads this "emotion" to people in the city, and such "talk" is not limited to face-to-face communication in real space, but also space-time talk beyond space.

In community construction, it takes the satisfaction of the needs of residents a starting point for the community construction through the participatory design approach, so that residents can participate in the community construction personally, and such a new model of community transformation can stimulate the real vitality of the community.

#### C. *"Participatory" Design Intervention Approach*

The core of participatory design is "participation". The participation of people is a key factor in community micro-renewal design. When community residents actively participate in, the final result of participatory community planning is not a blueprint lacking flexibility, but a series of operational action plans and adapting to environmental change, and residents in the community can spontaneously participate in community life and even city talk.

1) *Participation of spatial elements*: Residents' participation in spatial elements mainly includes two layers

of meaning. The first is the space's open inclusiveness to residents: all community residents are open and inclusive and maintain the security of the community. On the basis of stability, it also provides services to residents in neighboring communities or larger city scope. The second is the residents' adaption to the diversity of space. The community micro-renewal public space should investigate the behavior characteristics of different groups of people, meet the diverse needs of the applicable population, and the space design should be able to provide a variety of activities, so that everyone can find a space that suits them.

2) *Participation of resource elements*: The involvement of resource elements enables the community's "participatory" design to be truly vital and sustainable rather than one-time participation. Through a certain community participation mechanism, it integrates community resources, activates community idle resources, meets the diverse needs of residents, and achieves sustainable development of the community. Residents bring the idle items in their house to the sharing platform of community, the community and even the urban residents can participate in the exchange for their own needed items; or it builds information resources collection in the community participation platform, community sharing APP, etc., residents can make friends, ask for help, and share when participating in platform building, and increase mutual trust when participating in community life, enhance mutual feelings, build a warm and cultural environment for the community, and draw closer to each other through silent talk among residents in the city, so as to promote the construction of a harmonious city.

3) *Participation of activity elements*: Through grassroots organizations or third-party organizations, a variety of community activities or workshops can be held regularly in community, such as painting, photography, sculpture and dance, to attract residents to participate, and promote mutual understanding among residents; or to invite professional groups of various industries, such as doctors, dieticians, electrical mechanics, artists, etc., to enter the community to fully serve the community and residents, further enrich the experience, and comprehensively improve the overall life quality of the community from material basis to mental state. In addition, the form of "shared dinner" in "co-housing" can be gradually introduced, and collective gatherings are held in the community, so that community residents collectively participate in the activities to share the good times of life and establish "Utopia" at the urban community level.

4) *City talk in the context of "participatory" community micro-renewals*: Modern cities are not only a material place, but also an aggregate and production space of diverse meanings. The city is the most extensive place for meaningful talks [5]. The method of "participatory" design intervention is combined with the connotation of city talk to jointly solve the problem of lack of vitality in old

communities. Mumford believes that "the most meaningful activity in the city is talk, which is one of the highest expressive forms of urban life, and a flower on the long green vine." [5] Qingdao's old communities can restore humanistic ecological environment through the intervention of "participatory" design approach, so that the community residents can be integrated into the warm community environment, express their emotional appeals in the community public space, find the resonance point of life fun, pass the warmth and guard sincerity. Such neighborhood talk that transcends space will drive the formation of a community environment full of "human touch". People living in the community actively participate in all aspects of the community to facilitate their own lives, and such "participation" is spontaneous, active, alive and warm; through the talk in a larger area of the city, people living in the city can also be closely linked, thereby enhancing the sense of identity and happiness of urban residents.

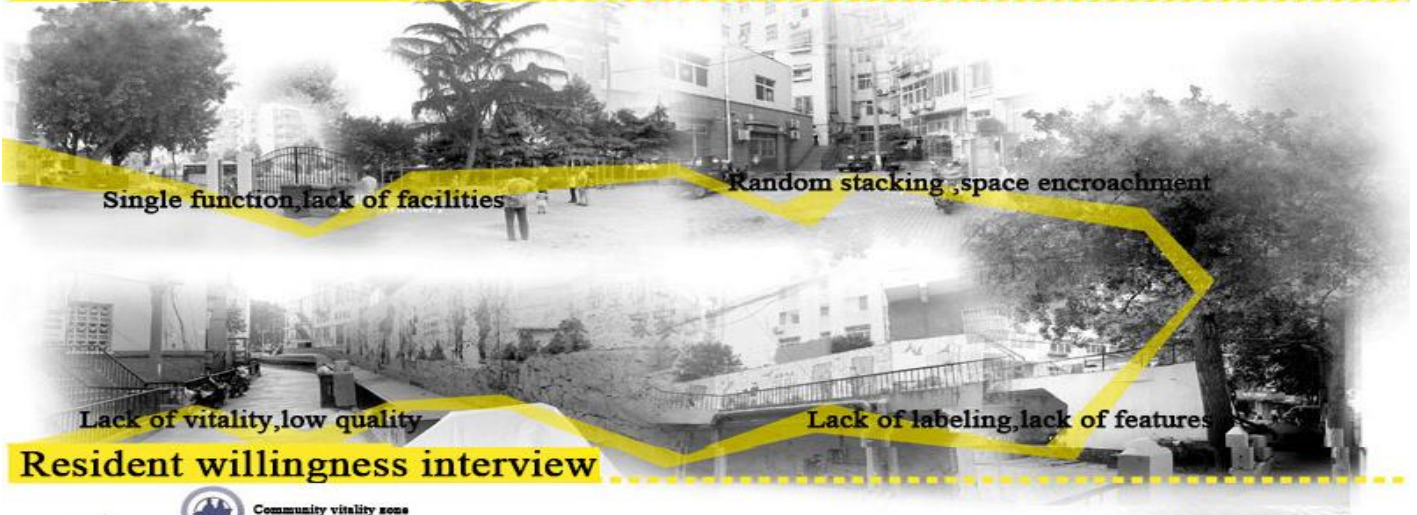
#### IV. RESEARCH ON MICRO-RENEWAL APPROACH BASED ON PARTICIPATORY DESIGN — TAKING THE CONCEPTUAL DESIGN OF MICRO-RENEWAL OF FUSHUN ROAD COMMUNITY, QINGDAO AS AN EXAMPLE

##### A. *Earlier Involvement of Micro-renewal in the Context of Current Community Status*

After a thorough understanding of the overall profile of Fushun Road Community (see in "Fig. 1"), it is found that the community pays little attention to the diverse needs of different users, leading to insufficient public space vigor. In the new era transforming from incremental planning to stock planning, it is necessary to fully listen to the different opinions and diverse demands of the masses. The main functions and forms of community renewal should be decided by the residents. After preliminary research, the design, anthropology, internet, big data and other methods are used, as well as questionnaires, voting and other methods, and the data results are analyzed and processed, so as to obtain a more comprehensive analysis of the status quo of the site (see in "Fig. 2"); residents are encouraged to participate in all stages of planning and construction, to strive for the satisfaction and benefit of the largest population, guarantee the quality of community renewal, and let the masses share the "dividends" of community renewal.



## Analysis of current situation



## Resident willingness interview



Fig. 1. Analysis of current situation.

<sup>a</sup> Source: painted by the author.

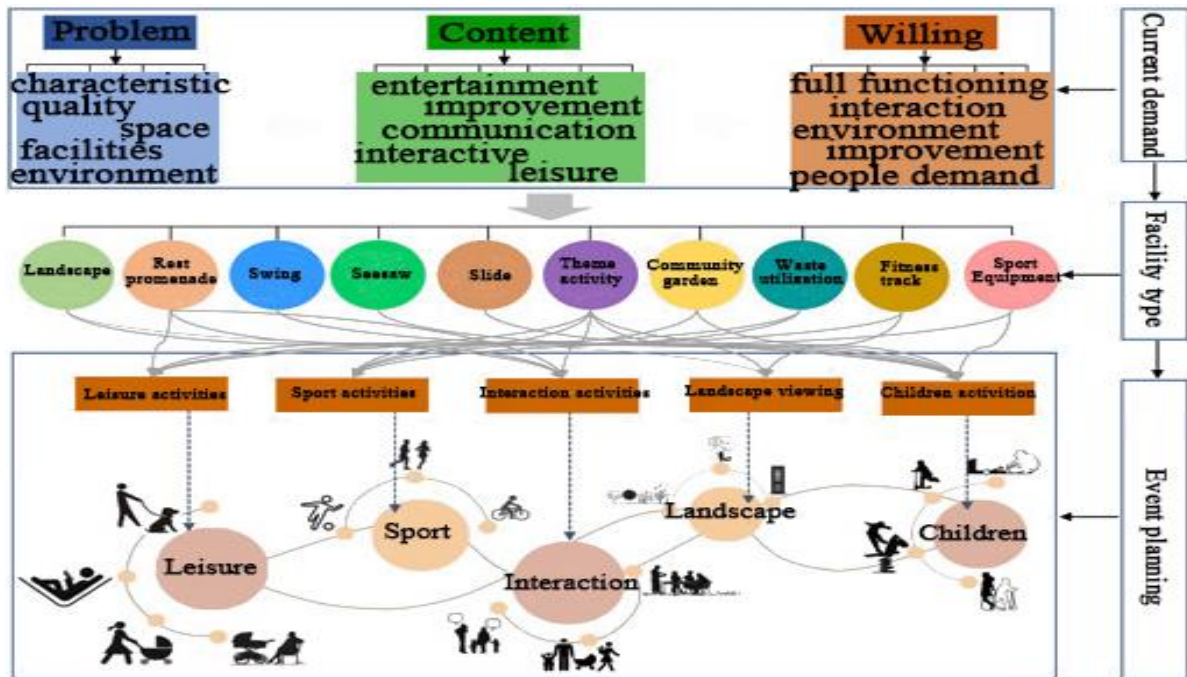


Fig. 2. Current Situation and Demand Analysis.

<sup>a</sup> Source: painted by the author.

**B. Fushun Road Community Micro-renewal Design Approach Based on "Participatory" Design**

At the beginning of the community "micro-renewal" design, it is necessary to understand the actual needs of the community residents, change the previous top-down design of passive acceptance and use, for the behavior of residents in this design without the right to choose and participate must be confrontational and inefficient in the long run; in fact, man-made landscape that is meticulously processed with no emotion is forced to accept the resistance of external forces and gradually decline from the beginning of

construction. The design is based on the "participatory" design core, and stimulates the community vitality to optimize the landscape through a series of activities planning; its investment is low, the design and construction is simple and easy, the identity of the community residents has changed from the traditional landscape product consumers to the responsible producers; the residents create a landscape of their own community, which is a process from vague to precise. In this process, the community residents gradually form a community life with temperature, memory, and affection through invisible participation and invisible talk (see in "Fig. 3" and "Fig. 4").



Fig. 3. Community Micro-renewal Plan.



Fig. 4. Community Micro-upgrade Elevation.

*1) Community culture-oriented spatial participation:* Community culture is the soul of community. The residents of Fushun Road Community are mostly middle-aged and elderly, who often collect old or abandoned materials around their house, and plant special plants or fruits and vegetables, from a few pots to a "micro vegetable garden" in the community corner space (see in "Fig. 5" and "Fig. 6"). The landscape reconstruction of such micro-space is often

small and indigenous, built and maintained by the residents themselves, each with distinct characteristics and overall consistency. These spontaneous participatory activities are in line with the love of the middle-aged and elderly in the community, reflecting the residents' pursuit of the quality of natural life and the spontaneous transformation and use of the public space environment (see in "Fig. 7").





Fig. 5. Spontaneous Micro-garden in the Status Community.

a. Source: photographed by the author.



Fig. 6. Current Community of "Micro Vegetable Garden".



Fig. 7. Proposed Model of the Community "Micro Vegetable Garden".

a. Source: painted by the author.

It has the broadest base of mass participation. Therefore, the community has opened up an independent public space to be a "micro-vegetable garden" and supporting management facilities. Interested residents can harvest green and healthy food or enjoy pleasant plant landscape through their own labor; the surplus fruits and vegetables can also be shared on the online community platform, and the development of the design site of the "micro-garden garden" also has a certain educational significance while beautifying the community.

Old communities are high-density complex communities in urban blocks, and the creation of "micro-vegetable garden" reflects the different dimensions of public participation of community residents. Residents participate in the micro-renewal and construction of the shared community. At the beginning of community renewal design, it respects various effective suggestions and opinions of community residents, and focuses on the rationalization of residents' demand orientation. Through the workshops organized by multiple parties in the design process, especially the conception from the child-friendly perspective, it can cultivate practical ability of children while playing a certain scientific and educational significance. Community residents work together to promote community

neighborhood relations. The community has spontaneous organizations to start and gradually form a standardized system, establish a negotiation system, supervision system and evaluation standard. The community management committee sorts out the list of participants, counts the appropriate free time and makes a duty schedule, and maintains the construction of the community "micro-vegetable garden". Community residents will form intangible connections in specific spaces. Through different levels of dialogue mode, community cultural participation and intervention with "micro-vegetable garden" with a medium will make up for the cultural emptiness of old communities.

The "micro-vegetable garden", in which the community residents spontaneously transform the community landscape environment, is similar to the construction process of Shanghai BaiCao Yuan (see in "Fig. 8"), and builds the community cultural connotation with the participation of residents. Through the landscape space, it creates a characteristic landscape area with strong participation of residents, and can share the labor results, beautify the space and form a public community space with temperature, dialogue and response on the basis of "participation".



Fig. 8. Shanghai BaiCaoYuan.

2) *Participation in recreational activities to meet the diverse needs of communities:* The space of Fushun Road Community is bleak and indifferent. Through questionnaires and on-site visits, it is concluded that residents do want to be active in the community, but the community lacks relevant venues to meet the diverse needs of different groups of people. Based on this conclusion, the relevant government departments demolish the illegal buildings in the community to build modular event venues for the community residents, such as children's entertainment space, creative activity space, fitness and entertainment, tea and reading, etc., to meet the diversified needs for different spaces and recreational activities of children, students, middle-aged people, elderly and other people. It makes



Fig. 9. Diversified Demand Functional Area.

3) *Sustainable participation in establishing a resource sharing platform:* It is recommended to establish a resource sharing platform in the community and activate the community's idle resources. There are many idle personal items in life that may bring convenience to others. Residents can donate idle items to the resource sharing platform for exchange of equivalent points, and can use the points to exchange for the things they like (see in "Fig. 10"). At the same time, soft and hard design, online and offline mutual communication build a network platform, so that the community residents' talk is not limited to a specific space or time; creating flexible space on the network is an important breakthrough in participatory design. Through the built network platform, community residents use the mobile phone navigation to share resources, timely release

<sup>a</sup> Source: The picture is from: <http://www.yogeev.com/article/70782.html>

community micro-renewal practice truly focus on everyone and benefit everyone in participating in community life. (see in "Fig. 9")

<sup>a</sup> Source: painted by the author.

information, timely recycle and process, and the closely connects the community residents in the same thinking space. Through the exchange of objects, emotion is transmitted, which can not only make community resources green and sustainable in development, but also enables the community to have new vitality (see in "Fig. 11").

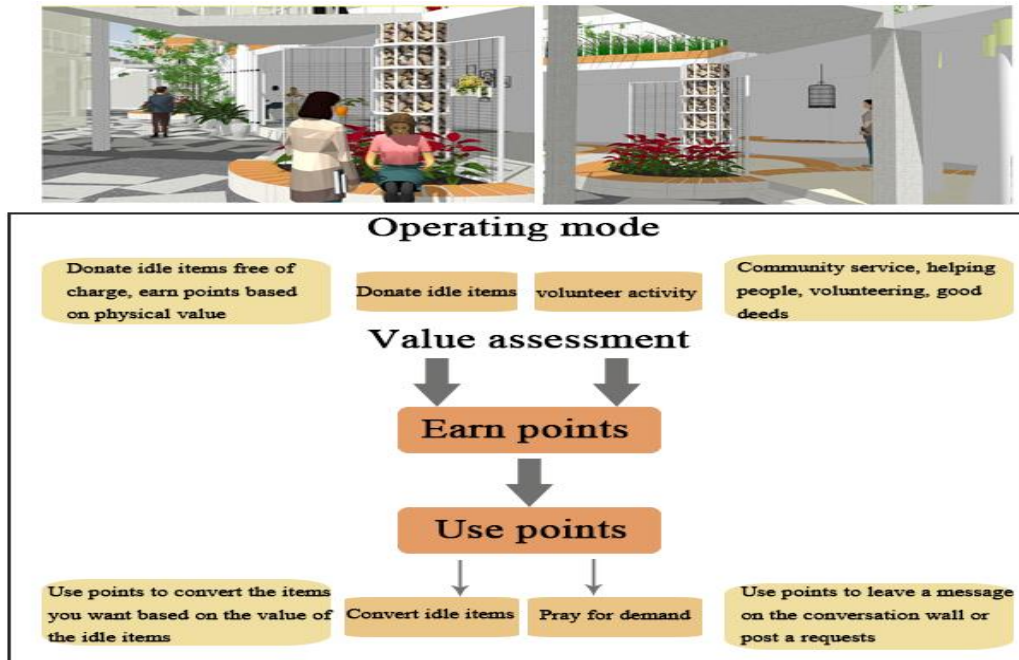


Fig. 10. Operation Mode of Resource Sharing Platform.

a. Source: painted by the author.



Fig. 11. Resource Sharing Platform.

a. Source: painted by the author.

Resources can flow in the community, and can also add some fun to life through this silent dialogue, maximize the utilization of resources, and enable residents to participate in community activities sustainably in this way, bringing convenient for life.

4) *Humanized participation in serving community life:* Community life is a complex and changeable organization that can pay attention to the living conditions and living problems of residents in the community and provide certain

help and convenience. A variety of cultural activities are organized by the community or third-party organization: photography, dance, painting, music, etc. or professionals such as doctors, nutritionists, teachers, lawyers, etc. are invited to enter the community as a community service platform; residents also need to exert their own abilities and values to help others in the community while enjoying the service. The community forms a living atmosphere of mutual help and mutual assistance, in which everyone



participates, and everyone shares the warmth of community life.

### C. Discussion and Outlook

The application of “participatory” design approach in community micro-renewal can activate the public idle or marginalized small and micro-space in the community, and has strong vitality; the way of design intervention is also diverse: temporary installations, landscape events, creative activities, public exhibitions, etc., therefore, design intervention is an ongoing process, and an integration of a series of operations including creativity, construction, production, service, operation and so on. Through the small-scale adjustment of the community public space, the community will be activated, and then the residents’ sense of identity will be enhanced at the community and even the city level, reflecting the humanistic care given to the residents by the city, which is conducive to a more harmonious social environment.

## V. CONCLUSION

“Participatory” design intervention is a continuous and gradual process. By exploring the “participatory” design intervention approach in Qingdao old communities, based on practice orientation, problem orientation and comprehensive orientation as the characteristics, it takes public participation as the core, and adjusts the small-scale module function of community public space, so that community residents can truly share the results of the “participatory” community. In “participation”, they can help solve life problems, and can also maximize their value in “participation” to help others. Residents infiltrate, integrate, and care for each other in a “participatory” community based on neighborhood talk and city talk. Community micro-renewal has become a way of warm community transformation.

The intervention of “participatory” community building design has become a platform for communication and promotion of designers, city managers and residents, and also puts forward higher requirements for multi-participatory landscape design. This is people’s understanding of the essence of good life and the deep realization of the self-worth of citizens. Based on this idea, it may provide some useful lessons for similar community public space micro-renewal practice, and puts forward higher requirements for landscape architects, planners and designers. In the design work, it is necessary to fully devote to the creation of a better life, and bring the beautiful vision into action and practice.

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