



Visual Design of Old Communities in the Context of Scene Theory – A Case Study of W Community in Wuhan

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Abstract. The article introduces the concept and method of scene theory, and explores the feasibility of introducing scene theory into the visual design of old communities in Wuhan on the basis of analyzing the current situation of visual design of old communities, and provides a new thinking framework and method for the visual design practice of old communities. Taking the W community in Wuhan as the research subject, the author first analyzes the current scene construction of W community based on the five elements of scene; determines the value orientation embedded in W community; then enhances and creates the scene of W community through visual design; and finally proposes the strategy of visual design for the renovation of old communities. The exploration of visual design for old communities based on scene theory can meet the spiritual needs of community residents. Moreover, the scene transformation stimulates the endogenous power of old communities, which makes the communities an area with cultural value to guide the activities of residents, thus promoting the strategic transformation of the high-quality development of old communities in Wuhan.

Keywords: Scene Theory · Community Transformation · Visual Design

1 Introduction

According to the survey of National Bureau of Statistics, the urbanization rate of China's resident population will be 64.72% in 2021, which is 0.83 percentage points higher than that at the end of 2020. As the level of urbanization of China's population steadily increases, the issue of improving the satisfaction of community life is becoming more prominent. Deepening the study of the elements related to the renovation of old communities has become the key to enhancing the satisfaction of residents' lives. At present, China's cities are in a strategic transition period from high-speed development to high-quality development, and the road of new city construction and development during the 14th Five-Year Plan is facing complex and difficult challenges. The transformation of old communities is an important element in the new situation of urban development to improve the living environment of the masses and enhance the basic functions and public services of the city. Meanwhile, the exploration of spatial visual design in old communities requires the practical introduction of new research methods and research tools to

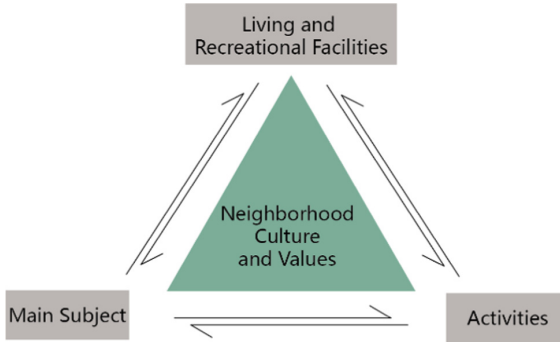


Fig. 1. The five elements of scene theory, Source: Author's own drawing

adapt to the new changes in community development, thus contributing to the promotion of a new urban construction and development path. [1] As a new paradigm for the study of urban and community development, the New Chicago School, represented by Terry Clark of the University of Chicago, has proposed scene theory and its related concepts. The Theory of Scenes expands a new perspective for re-understanding the visual design of old communities with consumption-oriented, lifestyle and entertainment facilities as the carrier and culture as the expression. By introducing the concept and method of scene theory, this article explores the feasibility of scene theory into the visual design of old communities in Wuhan. Based on the analysis of the current situation of visual design of old communities in Wuhan, this article aims to improve the quality of human living environment and rejuvenate the old communities in Wuhan.

2 Scene Theory and the Transformation of Old Communities in Wuhan

2.1 The Scene Theory

The starting point for the study of scene theory can be summarized as a triangular model of “subject-living and entertainment facilities-activities” with “culture and values” as the core (see Fig. 1). Firstly, the subject’s choice of work or living space is embedded in his or her demand for culture and values. Secondly, the culture and values of a particular area are embedded in the function, type and layout of living and recreational facilities. Thirdly, culture and values shape the order of modern life and attract individuals through the activities held in living and recreational facilities. [2].

The theory contains five important factors. The first is the neighborhood, which is what we call the community environment and neighborhood places; the second is the material, which is the infrastructure facilities of modern cities, such as art galleries, training schools, bookstores, supermarkets, shopping malls, etc.; the third is the crowd, which is the composition of diverse distinctions such as different genders, professions, ethnicity, etc.; the fourth is the activity, which is the organic combination of the first three factors, such as concerts, fairs, community art festivals, etc.; and the fifth is the

value, which is the symbolic meaning and value orientation embedded in the above four factors. [3].

In the Theory of Scenes, Clark states that the most appropriate unit for analyzing scenes is the community rather than the country, province, nation or city or metropolitan area, because the community avoids being too macro and reflects larger distinctions at the same time. [4] The scene theory analyzes the main groups of people and their values in a community from the perspective of physical facilities and their activities in the community, and by improving and creating physical facilities and their activities, it attracts more people, activities, and facilities to gather, thus forming a distinct and unique community scene. The scene model focuses on creating spaces with cultural values for consumption activities, guiding the establishment of cultural values and spiritual life of residents in the scene, and closely integrating factors such as culture, entertainment and related material facilities and activities with scene construction, so that the scene becomes an important force in the development of urban form and social structure.

2.2 The Transformation Methods of Old Communities in Wuhan

“Old communities are systems formed by older residences and their surroundings in a certain socioeconomic form and natural geographical space.” The problems of old communities are mainly reflected in the fact that the current development status of the community can hardly meet the growing needs of residents, and therefore presents a depressed state in terms of community environment and business pattern. According to the “Notice of the General Office of the Municipal People’s Government on Further Promoting the Transformation of Old Communities” (Wuhan Government Office [2021] No. 69), Wuhan plans to complete the transformation of 300 old communities in 2021; formulate the basic institutional framework, policy system and working mechanism for the transformation of old communities by 2022; and fully finish the transformation of old communities built before 2000 by the end of the “14th Five-Year Plan” period. [5] The old neighborhoods in Wuhan present a fragmented and scattered character, with insufficient utilization of resources and a low degree of scale. The Notice encourages the old neighborhoods within the jurisdiction that are close or connected to break the spatial division, further promote the integration of the old neighborhoods, and combined with regional characteristics, start from the transformation of individual neighborhoods to the deepening transformation of concentrated and continuous neighborhoods. It also promotes the creation of neighborhood characteristics, the upgrading of continuous neighborhoods, as well as fine transformation of historical heritage.

2.3 Analysis of Visual Design Practice in Old Communities in Wuhan Under Scene Theory

In practice, there are already excellent examples of visual design for old communities created through “scenes”, and their successes can be used as a model for other visual design for old communities. Taking the Tanhualin community in Wuchang District as an example, the community has adopted a parallel path of cultural orientation and social mechanisms for revival in exploring new mechanisms for revival. When the community was renovated as a historical and cultural area, it presents a great deal of its historical and

cultural heritage by applying visual design techniques. The community with historical and cultural heritage has also used visual design techniques to promote the integration of "scenic areas, neighborhoods, and communities" in the area. The renewal of the community has made the scene more youthful, exuding vitality and art sense, and has successfully built the community into a cultural and consumer scene. Kuanzhai Alley in Chengdu is also based on the concept of "repairing the old as the old", in which Kuanzhai Alley has been renovated from a former antique commercial street into a unique landmark of Chengdu today. The renewal of Kuanzhai Alley is not limited to the appearance of the historical buildings, but focuses on the cultural heritage behind the buildings, which is reflected through visual design to create a visual space and community with Chengdu characteristics. In sum, previous practical experience has verified the feasibility of scene theory in the visual design of old communities in Wuhan.

3 Exploring the Space Visual Design of Old Communities in Wuhan Under Scene Theory

3.1 Analysis of Five Scene Factors in W Community

Neighborhood

The W community is located in on Grain Road Street, south of Tanhualin in Wuchang District, Wuhan. The community was developed and constructed by Wuhan Municipal Construction Group Co., Ltd. as a commercial housing residence, with the building type of tower building and the construction year of 1995. During the same period, as the construction department of the municipal government renovated the road surface of the W community, Wuhan cloth sales and garment processing enterprises settled around the community, and the number of individual business operators increased rapidly. The W community gradually developed into a downtown area with a concentration of people and a trade market. And after the investment of Wuchang District Government in 2010, the W community continued to come alive with a European look. However, as time goes by, the buildings in the W community are old and dilapidated nowadays, and the community businesses have suffered a huge impact. As the vitality of the community decays, it gradually becomes a forgotten old neighborhood.

Material

Based on preliminary survey and analysis, the material factor of the W community is summarized in the following three aspects.

1. *In terms of spatial layout, the W community has a very advantageous location, but the traffic system is complicated.* It has two-way two lanes and parking spaces along each side, which does not leave enough space for stores along the street, resulting in a crowded and dirty main road in the community. Meanwhile, the internal space layout of the W community is unreasonable. The space is crowded and disorganized, and the building facade is old and aging. Therefore, the visual image of the community is seriously affected.

2. *In terms of the business form, the stores in the community are divided into a haphazard manner, with custom-made clothes, ready-made clothes and fabric and accessories stores as the main business modes.* Because the business concept is relatively backward, most of the stores are old-fashioned in appearance, affecting the overall community image. At the same time, the supporting commercial conditions in the W community is not perfect. The catering is mainly occupied by low-grade fast food and snack-type stores, which is difficult to meet the increasing consumption demand of residents and tourists [6]. Both economic and social benefits are extremely limited, which is unfavorable to the long-term development of the W community.
3. *In terms of the leisure life, there are only two plazas in the community for daily use.* Meanwhile, the two plazas have relatively single functions and outdated facilities, which cannot attract residents to stay.

Crowd

The crowd in the W community currently is residents and visitors. The residents are mainly the indigenous people who tend to be aging and the young tenants. This is because that in the process of urban expansion, a large number of young people have flooded into the city and rent houses here due to work reasons. Indigenous people live here for the improved surrounding living facilities. Visitors come here mainly for the customization of clothing. As a “ready-to-wear street”, the W community’s unique business format attracts the old local Wuhan people. Most of the customers are middle-aged women, with a relatively fixed clientele and influence limited to the three towns of Wuhan. Then, there are also students and teachers from colleges and universities related to clothing and technical personnel specialized in clothing.

Activity

As a local old community in Wuhan, the W community has less public space and a single form of community activities, which to some extent leads to low community vitality. Therefore, when creating the scene, the activities can be created according to the residents’ life hobbies and the commercial form of the community.

Value

From the perspective of spiritual and cultural values, the southern section of the W community is connected to the First Revolution Rising Cultural Park under construction, and the northern section is connected to the Taihualin Historical and Cultural District. The whole community is surrounded by the Snake Hill First Revolution Rising Park, the Yellow Crane Tower, and the Garden Hill Catholic Church, with favorable historical and cultural conditions. This makes the W community a promenade connecting two famous historical and cultural tourism areas in Wuchang, and an important area with cultural resources in Wuhan. From the perspective of material values, the W community is formerly a spontaneous fabric retail and wholesale market. By the end of the 1990s, fabric wholesalers had changed their business ideas and formed a professional market for apparel with retail, wholesale and garment processing as the main service. Further enhancing the use of community values not only helps the community to improve its image, but also is the basis of a virtuous cycle of development in the W community.

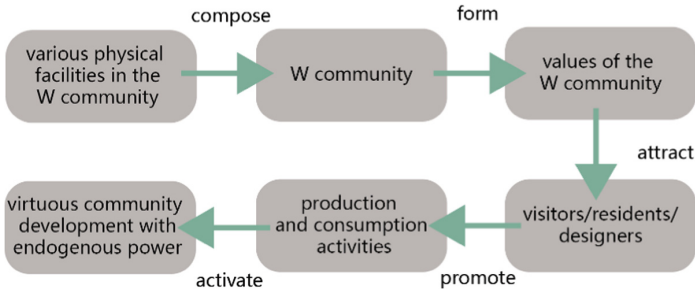


Fig. 2. The transformation process of W community based on scene theory, Source: Author's own drawing

3.2 Visual Design Exploration in the W Community

In order to explore the visual design of the W community, we need to introduce new theories and methods on the original community creation, combine the needs of the times and draw on the excellent achievements at home and abroad to enrich the connotations and methods of community visual design. The research vehicle of scene theory is mainly the various physical facilities in the community, from which the value orientation of the community is analyzed to promote the renewal of the community (see Fig. 2). The introduction of scene theory can look at the study of visual design in old communities from a new perspective, grasp the development pulse of visual design in today's old communities more accurately, and guide the strategic transformation of high-quality development in old communities.

Creating Artistic and Cultural Scenes to Enhance the Harmonious Atmosphere in the Community

Since the beginning of the construction of the W community, relevant departments have clearly defined the positioning of the W community as a street of clothing culture and tourism. It is clearly proposed to “effectively explore the cultural heritage of the community” as the starting point for the construction of the neighborhood, to deeply explore the historical and cultural characteristics of the neighborhood, and to attract professional talent resources to drive the development of the community. Therefore, the design of the entrance of the community is quite important. It is necessary to consider the directional function of the entrance and build the entrance of the community into a cultural scene with a sense of design, so as to achieve the purpose of attracting the flow of people. Moreover, for the commercial block, the internal core space mainly plays the role of shopping and display, which requires creating certain display spaces inside the community block, such as window displays, interactive installations, flash exhibitions, etc. The use of small but beautiful spaces enhances the scene atmosphere of the neighborhood environment and increases the artistry and drama inside the W community. (See Fig. 3).

Improving Guide Design and Renovate Service Facilities in the Community

In order to solve the problem of complicated traffic system in the W community, on the

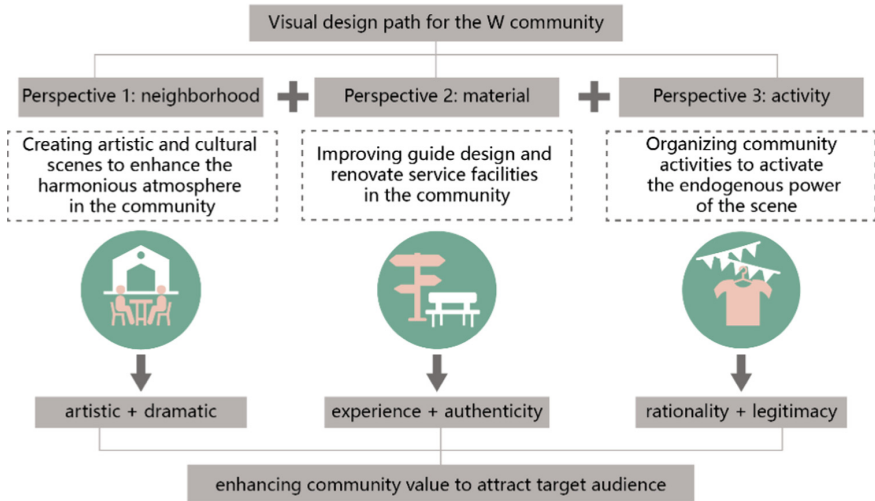


Fig. 3. Reconstruction path of W community based on scene construction, Source: Author's own drawing

basis of planning the traffic network of pedestrian-vehicle separation, the traffic system should be sorted out by means of visual design, and the design of guidance system, night lighting and barrier-free facilities in W community should be gradually improved to eliminate safety hazards. The renovation of service facilities in the W community needs to increase the public space for daily activities for the residents who actually use the community most frequently [7]. Therefore, when renovating the service facilities, it is appropriate to set up spaces in the units of the community buildings and create small green areas, pocket squares and other activity places, so that the residents can feel the chic landscape in the public space and enhance the experience and authenticity of the space. (See Fig. 3).

Organizing Community Activities to Activate the Endogenous Power of the Scene

The W community should actively guide community residents and artists, designers and other new citizen groups to participate in community life together based on their interests, and regularly carry out bottom-up activities such as clothing culture week, new Chinese bazaar and ready-to-wear customization salon, etc. In addition, festival activities and flash mob activities can also be held frequently, such as mid-autumn garden party, retro balls, etc. Relevant visual design should be carried out for these activities, such as event posters, easy-to-use display, exhibit design, cultural products of the W community, etc. Activating the endogenous dynamics of the scene requires providing opportunities for the creative class to plan and organize activities, so as to establish an interactive cycle based on community and activities. [8] The emotional resonance of the group should be enhanced through artistic experiences, which allows those in the scene to feel the integration of community and daily life, thus believing in the rationality and legitimacy of the scene. (See Fig. 3).

4 Conclusion

Unlike traditional transformation of old communities, the scene theory provides a certain reference for studying the renovation of old communities, and also provides a research framework for visual design of old communities. The new research idea is proposed under the perspective of scene theory, which not only pursues the renovation and upgrading of physical facilities of old communities, but also achieves the reshaping of community values and the regeneration of community vitality by using visual design means under the guidance of scene theory. The visual design of old communities based on scene construction can clearly meet the needs of the target group for old communities, increase the attractiveness of old communities through systematic visual design and cultural consumption activities, and eventually lead to the formation of endogenous dynamics in the community and drive the overall renewal of old communities. In sum, this article has provided a new thinking framework and method for the visual design practice of old communities in Wuhan.

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