

Research on the "Lightweight" Construction of Museums and Art Museums in Third - and Fourth Tier Cities

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Abstract: *As China's urbanization deepens, the cultural development of third- and fourth-tier cities, which are at critical junctures in regional development, has become increasingly important. As the primary vehicles for urban cultural dissemination, museums and art galleries have encountered numerous challenges in their development. In light of this, this paper first conducts a detailed analysis of the "inward-looking" status quo and underlying causes of museums and art galleries in third- and fourth-tier cities. It then proposes a "lightweight" development strategy for such institutions in these cities, followed by a thorough examination of the practical value of such a strategy, with the aim of providing guidance for relevant stakeholders.*

Keywords: *Third- and Fourth-Tier Cities; Museums; Art Galleries; Lightweight Construction; Cultural Development*

1. Issues Facing Museums and Art Galleries in Third- and Fourth-Tier Cities

1.1 The Current State of "Inward-Looking" Institutions

The "inward-looking" nature of museums and art galleries in third- and fourth-tier cities is characterized by their disconnect from the city's daily life and a lack of effective communication with the public. Such institutions typically prioritize the preservation and research of artifacts, as well as the planning and operation of exhibition spaces, while neglecting the demands of the external environment and the broader cultural development context of the city.

In terms of exhibition content, many museums and art galleries in third- and fourth-tier cities adopt relatively simple exhibition formats, primarily static displays, with vague and unengaging descriptions. Exhibition themes often focus on local cultural heritage, failing to align with current popular topics or public concerns, thereby failing to resonate with the general public.

From the perspective of service provision, the service philosophy of these venues is relatively weak, with little awareness of providing personalized services. For example, there are insufficient interactive and engaging experiential activities for young people, and inadequate supporting facilities and services for the elderly and individuals with disabilities. Additionally, there are limitations in terms of operating hours and promotional methods, making it difficult to adapt to the diverse needs of the public [1].

1.2 Causes of "introversion"

1.2.1 Talent shortage and lack of professional skills

Third- and fourth-tier cities offer few development opportunities and low salaries, making it difficult to attract and retain talented professionals in museums and art galleries. Due to the lack of professional knowledge and skills among existing staff, it is difficult to make significant improvements in areas such as exhibition planning, cultural relic protection, and educational promotion, which has become a bottleneck restricting their development.

1.2.2 Rigid Management System

Many museums and art galleries in third- and fourth-tier cities are public institutions with rigid operational mechanisms, lacking market-oriented competitive awareness and the motivation for reform. In their operations and management, they continue to rely on traditional administrative methods,

leading to many inefficient decisions that no longer meet the rapidly evolving needs of society and the cultural market.

1.2.3 Weak Public Cultural Awareness

The general public in third- and fourth-tier cities has relatively low levels of humanistic literacy and aesthetic appreciation, resulting in limited understanding and demand for museums and art galleries. Many people perceive these institutions as “highbrow” and unrelated to their daily lives, leading to a lack of interest in visiting them. Additionally, low levels of cultural consumption expenditure have become a significant constraint on the operation and development of cultural centers.

2. Key Perspectives and Strategies for “Lightweight” Development

2.1 Stability of Identity

In the process of “lightweight” development, museums and art galleries in third- and fourth-tier cities must first and foremost maintain their positioning. This requires local institutions to clearly define their roles, establish their missions, and uphold their cultural heritage and educational functions, avoiding deviations from their development trajectories due to short-term gains.

The stability of museums and art galleries' identities stems from their commitment to their cultural distinctiveness. Whether showcasing local history, culture, or artistic achievements, they must uphold authenticity and rigor, refraining from arbitrarily distorting historical facts or artistic values. Additionally, regions should establish their own regional brands, cultivate unique local characteristics, and enhance their reputation and recognition.

To maintain the stability of the identity of museums and art galleries, it is essential to establish a comprehensive exhibition management system and standards, and to strengthen efforts in all aspects, including the acquisition of exhibits, exhibition planning, and the protection of cultural relics. On this basis, active communication and collaboration with local governments should be pursued, and advanced management concepts and methods from abroad should be referenced to enhance professional competence.

2.2 Transition from Authoritative Narratives to Public Narratives

2.2.1 Uncovering Public Stories and Cultural Memories

In the cultural development process of third- and fourth-tier cities, museums and galleries should not merely rely on traditional models centered on physical exhibits. Instead, they should actively assume the role of a bridge connecting local culture with public emotions. By deeply exploring local public events and historical contexts, these cultural institutions can truly become “spiritual homes” that carry people's sense of belonging. Such cities often possess deep-rooted regional cultural heritage. The old artifacts preserved in residents' homes not only trace the city's transformation but also carry the warm memories of a specific era, embodying the collective emotions and recollections of a community. Various venues can systematically launch a “City Memory Collection Initiative,” combining community visits with online collection efforts to gather old photographs, letters, traditional handicrafts, and other items from residents, while meticulously documenting the family stories, industrial fluctuations, folk customs, and other vivid narratives behind these objects.

2.2.2 Conduct interactive exhibitions and activities

Interactive displays and experiences can be used to increase public participation. Museums can launch “exhibition co-creation” projects, soliciting suggestions from the public on exhibition themes, exhibit selection, and display methods through online surveys, community forums, expert seminars, and other means during the exhibition preparation stage, ensuring that exhibitions better meet local needs. Additionally, museums can establish immersive interactive experience zones. For example, digital technology can be used to recreate traditional craft production processes, allowing people to personally experience the operational processes of ceramic pottery-making and paper-cutting techniques. Alternatively, a “cultural relic restoration simulation platform” can be established, utilizing virtual reality technology to enable citizens to directly experience the professionalism of cultural relic conservation work. Furthermore, the museum could regularly host a series of cultural activities, such as inviting local intangible cultural heritage inheritors to conduct skill workshops, organizing public participation in exhibition planning salons, and hosting “urban culture lectures.” Through these

activities, the general public can deepen their understanding of local culture through mutual exchange, thereby enhancing their sense of belonging and identification with urban culture [2].

2.3 Transition from “static” to “dynamic”

2.3.1 Innovative exhibition formats

With the assistance of multimedia technology, static exhibits can be transformed into vibrant, interactive experiences. For example, in historical exhibition halls, the application of VR technology can create an immersive atmosphere: After putting on VR helmets, tourists seem to instantly “travel” to ancient war scenes, with the sound of gold and iron horses echoing in their ears, experiencing the shocking scenes of war firsthand. This immersive experience is far more impactful than simple language explanations. With AR technology, visitors can simply point their phones at an exhibit to view its dynamic narrative and interact with virtual artifacts in real-time through body movements, thereby gaining a deeper understanding of the artifact's creation process. To further enhance exhibition effectiveness, temporary and mobile exhibition formats should be introduced. Short-term exhibitions can focus on current popular cultural themes, promptly addressing the public's cultural needs; mobile exhibitions, on the other hand, can bring high-quality content to communities, schools, and other venues, making cultural dissemination more accessible to the general public. Through this dynamic, updated display method, both the freshness of the content and the long-term appeal of the exhibition can be maintained.

2.3.2 Organizing Diverse Cultural Activities

Through various forms of cultural activities, the scope of cultural venues can be expanded. In addition to regular exhibitions, there are also cultural performances and art markets, allowing the public to experience the humanistic atmosphere in a relaxed environment. Holding small classical concerts in art museums, where viewers are surrounded by oil paintings, listening to beautiful music resonating with the artwork, provides a dual aesthetic experience. When art museums host folk art exhibitions, artists demonstrate traditional crafts like paper cutting and clay sculpture on-site, allowing visitors to experience the beauty of these artisanal techniques firsthand. During screenings, viewers can choose videos related to the exhibition, accompanied by commentary, to gain a deeper understanding of cultural heritage. This approach breaks away from traditional solemn atmospheres, making cultural exchange more relatable and heartfelt.

2.4 Integration of Digital Technology

2.4.1 Development of Cultural and Creative Products

The integration of digital technology and the application of big data are important means of achieving innovative development in cultural venues. Utilizing digital technology to develop cultural products with local characteristics not only enhances the economic value of venues but also expands their cultural influence. For example, museums can use 3D modeling and AR technology to transform precious historical sites into digital collections. Young people can scan these with their smartphones to access 3D explanations and collect historical fragments, making them more appealing to younger audiences. Additionally, developing locally themed apps with interactive features such as “cultural knowledge quizzes” and “virtual historical site restoration” allows the public to deepen their understanding of local history and culture through engaging experiences, thereby enhancing the efficiency of cultural exchange.

2.4.2 Building a Big Data Platform

Establishing a big data platform lays the foundation for venue operations and management. After constructing a tourism information system, comprehensively collecting and analyzing data on visitor movement patterns, consumption behavior, and feedback provides precise basis for developing operational plans. Analyzing visitor frequency and time distribution, for instance, when weekend afternoons see higher foot traffic, guide services can be increased during weekends and holidays; to address the issue of sparse visitor flow on weekend mornings, group booking discounts can be introduced to balance visitor flow. Based on visitor feedback, if most people wish to increase interactive exhibitions, exhibition plans can be appropriately adjusted to add touchable and operable devices; exhibition areas can be reasonably divided according to the preferences of different age groups to make the exhibitions more aligned with visitor needs. With the support of digital and big data technology, cultural venues can achieve a win-win situation of economic benefits and cultural

exchange.

3. Issues to Consider in the Development of “Lightweight” Museums and Art Galleries

3.1 Introducing Community Management Mechanisms

In the process of museums and art galleries in China's third- and fourth-tier cities transitioning toward a “lightweight” development model, it is essential to integrate social governance concepts into the construction and operation of these institutions. As the most grassroots-level urban units, communities are closely intertwined with citizens' daily lives. Based on this characteristic, a new development model centered on communities can be proposed.

3.1.1 Establishing Community Participation Mechanisms

Establish a "homeowners' committee" with residents' representatives, community cadres, and venue staff as the main body to comprehensively grasp the operation and decision-making of the venue. Regular meetings need to be held to collect citizens' opinions and suggestions on various venues, and to discuss the development plans and activities of each venue. On this basis, residents' sense of belonging and responsibility towards the site can be enhanced through guiding visits, explaining services, organizing activities, and other means.

3.1.2 Conduct community cultural co-construction activities

The venue and society jointly organize various cultural construction projects, such as exhibitions, cultural festivals, and training courses. Taking this as an opportunity, strengthen communication and collaboration among neighbors, and enrich their spiritual and cultural life. For example, the venue can collaborate with social organizations such as "Neighborhood Art Exhibition" to showcase artworks from neighbors; Cooperate with various sectors of society to hold calligraphy and painting training courses to enhance the cultural quality of citizens.

3.2 Balancing the Needs of Indigenous Communities, Businesses, and Tourists

Museums and art galleries in third- and fourth-tier cities are typically located in the heart of the city or in areas of historical significance, surrounded not only by local residents but also by many business professionals and tourists. During the process of “lightweight” development, it is important to consider the interests of local residents, businesses, and tourists to achieve a win-win outcome for all parties.

3.2.1 Respecting the Living Rights of Indigenous Communities

During the construction and operation of venues, it is important to respect the living customs and rights of indigenous communities, ensuring their daily lives are not disrupted. For example, when renovating or expanding a site, sufficient communication should be maintained with local residents to hear their opinions and suggestions; appropriate measures should be taken to manage foot traffic and noise levels to ensure the quality of life for indigenous communities.

3.2.2 Promoting the Sustainable Development of Businesses

The construction of museums and art galleries can stimulate surrounding commercial activities, but care must be taken to avoid excessive commercialization that could negatively impact businesses. By collaborating with surrounding businesses to jointly develop tourist routes and cultural products, resource sharing and mutual benefits can be achieved. Specifically, venues can assist surrounding businesses with promotions, creating more consumption options for local residents; in turn, surrounding businesses can provide visitors with dining and accommodation services, thereby enhancing visitor satisfaction.

3.2.3 Meeting the diverse needs of visitors

As the main target group of museums and art galleries, service levels should be continuously improved to better adapt to the diverse needs of visitors. For example, the museum's tour guide system and supporting service facilities should be improved to enhance the visitor experience; diversified sightseeing routes and cultural experience activities should be developed to cater to the preferences and needs of different visitors [3].

3.3 Avoid Excessive Commercialization

3.3.1 Define the Boundaries of Commercial Activities

Museums and art galleries should clearly define the boundaries between public welfare and commercial operations to ensure that public welfare is not disrupted by commercial activities, thereby enabling museums and art galleries to fulfill their cultural functions. For example, exhibition venues should be separated from the main exhibition areas as much as possible to minimize disruption to exhibitors and visitors; advertising and promotion should align with local cultural characteristics and must not engage in overly commercialized entertainment-oriented commercial activities.

3.3.2 Strengthen the management of commercial activities

Museums and art galleries should improve their management systems for commercial operations, strengthen the approval and supervision of commercial activities, and review the organizing entities, content, and scale of events to ensure the legality and standardization of commercial activities. On this basis, they should further standardize the use of commercial revenues to ensure that all proceeds are invested in the construction and development of public welfare undertakings.

3.3.3 Emphasize the inheritance and promotion of cultural values

When conducting operations, museums and art galleries should focus on inheriting and promoting cultural values, integrating commercial activities with cultural exchange in an organic manner. For example, in the process of promoting cultural and creative products, it is important to value the cultural, artistic, and other aspects of the product itself, and to convey the local history, culture, and artistic achievements to the public through the product; When conducting commercial performance activities, attention should be paid to promoting them at a high level to enhance the public's appreciation level.

4. Application Value

4.1 Promoting Urban Cultural Development

Conducting “lightweight” renovations on museums and art galleries in third- and fourth-tier cities can enhance the city's cultural heritage and elevate its cultural sophistication. Through diverse forms of exhibitions and cultural activities, this approach enriches citizens' cultural consumption patterns, enhances their cultural literacy and aesthetic standards, and fosters a harmonious urban civilized environment. “Lightweight” development also facilitates the exploration and inheritance of local history and traditional arts, preserving and promoting local cultural characteristics, and enhancing the city's cultural identity and cohesion.

4.2 Promoting Regional Economic Development

“Lightweight” development of museums and art galleries not only attracts more visitors but also effectively stimulates surrounding industries such as catering, accommodation, and transportation, thereby promoting local employment and revitalizing the regional economy. Under these circumstances, developing cultural and creative products based on venue resources can foster new economic growth poles, injecting momentum into the development of the entire cultural industry. Taking some third- and fourth-tier cities as examples, they have built museums and deeply integrated them with local tourism resources to create unique tourism routes. This innovative model has successfully attracted more tourists, opening up new development paths for the local area [4].

4.3 Improving the Quality of Public Life

Museums and art galleries that adopt a “lightweight” development approach can provide people with a wealth of spiritual and cultural activities, making their leisure time more fulfilling and meaningful. Citizens' participation in various exhibitions and cultural activities is also a process of broadening horizons, expanding knowledge, and refining character. This not only enhances individuals' overall literacy but also improves the quality of life. Additionally, as public spaces, such venues provide platforms for interaction and communication, fostering understanding and connection among social members, thereby promoting the harmonious and coordinated development of society as a whole.

4.4 Providing reference experience for other regions

In third- and fourth-tier cities, museums and art galleries adopting a “lightweight” construction approach have opened up a new path for small and medium-sized towns to conduct similar activities. Their successful experience holds practical reference value for other regions across the country. Especially for those areas with relatively underdeveloped economies and scarce cultural resources, the “lightweight” development philosophy is particularly valuable.

5. Conclusion

The “lightweight” development of museums and art galleries in third- and fourth-tier cities is a systematic endeavor requiring the collaborative efforts of government, institutions, communities, and businesses. Such development should prioritize the public interest, emphasizing the preservation and creative expression of culture. In third- and fourth-tier cities, museums and art galleries can fully realize their cultural functions through “lightweight” construction, bringing new vitality to the city's cultural development, enhancing the city's cultural sophistication and competitiveness, and contributing to the city's growth. It is foreseeable that, with the joint efforts of all parties, museums and art galleries in third- and fourth-tier cities will shine even brighter.

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