

# Research on the Renewal Design of Historical Districts Based on the Concept of 'Common Narrative': A Case Study of the Sanyang Area in Wuhan

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**Abstract:** The Sanyang Design Capital Area is an old residential district in Hankou and is currently a historic district in Hankou rich in historical and cultural resources, with significant development potential. However, in recent years, this historic district has been facing challenges of spatial disarray and a decline in vibrancy. To continue the historical narrative and rejuvenate the area, this article relies on spatial narrative theory to develop design strategies from four aspects: the reshaping of historical and cultural scenes, the interpretation of creative and vibrant travel routes, the integration of a smart shared system, and the creation of a multi-governance model. These strategies aim to provide suggestions for the renewal planning of historical and cultural districts.

**Keywords:** Urban renewal, historical district, spatial narrative

## 1. Introduction

Historical districts are spatial microcosms of urban social changes, serving as important spatial carriers that record lifestyles, shape urban character, and nurture humanistic spirit. At the same time, historical districts are vital spaces for contemporary residents, continually involved in production and daily life, and possessing dynamic sustainability.<sup>[1]</sup> Therefore, in the process of their renewal, the interpretation and expression can rely on spatial narrative theory, blending historical context with modern living spaces. This approach can invigorate the area and promote its development.

## 2. Background and Significance

The 19th National Congress proposed that protecting, utilizing, and inheriting historical and cultural heritage is of great significance for continuing historical traditions, promoting high-quality urban and rural development, strengthening cultural confidence, and building a culturally strong socialist nation. Currently, due to the dual nature of time and space and the spatial storytelling inherent in historical districts<sup>[2]</sup>, the concept of spatial narrative in planning academia shows great promise when integrated into historical districts. Some restoration and renovation work has already been carried out in parts of this district, achieving some success. However, as the renovation is still ongoing and does not cover the entire district, the effects are not significant, and the district's vitality has not yet been restored. Therefore, in line with current development needs, a reasonable cultural theme should be formulated for the district's renovation. On this basis, existing issues that concern residents should be addressed, the sequence of renovation should be clarified, and a comprehensive renovation system should be established to further promote the implementation of renewal measures.

## 3. Current Situation and Issues

### 3.1 Current Situation of the Sanyang Design Capital Area

The Sanyang Design Capital Area is located in the Hankou riverside region of Wuhan, covering a

total area of approximately 43 hectares. The area is bordered by the Yangtze River to the east, Sanyang Road to the north, Zhongshan Avenue to the west, and Chezhan Road to the south, making it a strategically advantageous and important node for the development and renewal of the main urban area. Currently, the land use in this historical district is primarily residential, commercial, and administrative, with a mix of functions. The road network density is relatively low, leading to weak transportation functionality. However, the area benefits from a good level of greenery due to its waterfront blue-green infrastructure. The building density is high, and the area has a rich historical heritage, with a high concentration of traditional alleyways such as Sandeli, Kunhouli, and Yanqingli.

### 3.2 Current Issues

Through preliminary visits and research, the current issues in this area mainly focus on the following four aspects.

#### 3.2.1 Lack of Integrated Open Spaces

The surrounding areas are mostly residential and industrial lands, with several leading enterprises and universities within a five-kilometer radius. Therefore, the site should complement the surrounding areas in terms of public service functions. However, the internal area lacks concentrated open spaces such as pocket parks and multi-level landscape axes and pedestrian systems that connect with the waterfront blue-green infrastructure. The public attributes are relatively weak, making it difficult to provide leisure and recreational spaces for nearby office workers and residents.

#### 3.2.2 Single and Rigid Street Functions

The internal area has high building density, primarily residential, with streets serving as the main vitality axis for daily life. Although the existing streets are relatively suitable in terms of width-to-height ratio, they have a single engineering design and should be transformed into mixed-use spaces. At the same time, the main roads prioritize vehicular traffic, resulting in disorderly street interfaces and encroachment on pedestrian rights, leading to frequent congestion and a decrease in street vitality.

#### 3.2.3 Weak Inheritance of Historical Context

The protection and renovation of the Sanyang Design Capital Area currently only remain at the material level, distinguishing historical heritage buildings from modern ones through zoning, limiting public activities. Such protection mostly only preserves the buildings themselves, treating them with a "keep it as it is" approach. Current renovations focus only on creating "internet-famous nodes," without delving into and promoting the deep historical and cultural values contained within, such as dock culture and revolutionary culture.

#### 3.2.4 Lack of Quality Living Facilities



Figure 1: Analysis Map of the Sanyang Area's Current Situation

Affected by the area's renovation, most of the houses in the site have been vacated. The existing residents are mainly elderly, lacking vitality. The quality of the existing residential community spaces is relatively low, with inconsistent appearances and severe unauthorized construction, and some houses

suffer from leaking. Based on Point of Interest (POI) data analysis, it was found that the current living service facilities such as public toilets and supermarkets are relatively scarce and unevenly distributed, not matching the needs of the residents(see Figure 2).

#### **4. Development Factors and Objectives**

On this basis, this design proposes two concepts: "Spatial Narrative" and "Shared Urban Home." It emphasizes embracing history while heading towards the future. Through the overlapping of time and space and the shaping of plots, the multi-dimensional coupling of place, culture, creativity, and life is achieved. This aims to co-build a future urban home that reconstructs memories, is intensive and efficient, diverse and shared, and creative and inclusive. This approach can enhance the consensus and cohesion of community residents, create a warm cultural space, and seek sustainable development and resource recycling.<sup>[3]</sup>

The "people" are the diverse groups within the home, and they are the main thread of development in the Sanyang Design Capital Area. This design centers around the memories of old Hankou, with local residents as the core, to create a unique urban living room for Sanyang, realizing the scene reconstruction of the Sanyang area and generating new social memories. The area and its surroundings aim to create a core area for creative cultural sharing with shared value. The cultural and administrative attributes of the area highlight its public nature; "sharing" is the essence of the people sharing the area. At the same time, the area is also the home of the residents living in it, and sharing is achieved through participation in the entire planning and design process.

#### **5. Planning Strategies and Proposals**

Based on the characteristics and existing concepts of the area, it can be seen that the Sanyang Design Capital area bears four major responsibilities: inheriting urban history and culture, creating traditional living areas, stimulating economic vitality in the area, and assuming public attribute functions. Therefore, the regional planning strategy can be integrated into the term "co narrative" and the following update and renovation strategies can be proposed.

##### ***5.1 Continuation of Historical Memory***

The Sanyang Design Capital area is positioned as a mixed experience area for residential, office, and cultural activities. It requires both the protection of the material form of the block and functional replacement to activate the historical block, and the active protection and renewal of traditional culture.<sup>[4]</sup>

##### ***5.1.1 Texture repair***

The street texture of the site presents clear characteristics: the north-south "street" is the main transportation artery, responsible for transportation functions; The east-west "alleys" are connected to the Jiangtan Park, with a strong sense of liveliness.<sup>[5]</sup> Buildings that can be demolished and affect the structure and quality of streets and alleys; Complete missing buildings; Renovate excellent historical buildings through the "repair as old" approach; Unify the renovation of building facades, continue the street interface, and update the texture.<sup>[6]</sup>

##### ***5.1.2 Morphological reconstruction***

Neighborhood deconstruction refers to connecting the existing street-side shops with the surrounding block texture and integrating them into lines through street connectivity. By incorporating multiple forms of greenery and decorating the main axis of public spaces, and distinguishing them through paving in public areas such as schools and museums, the shape of the block is reconstructed.

##### ***5.1.3 Functional replacement***

After the renewal of the area, the quality of the buildings will be improved, and the commercial value will be significantly increased. There are two forms of attracting diverse groups and building residential brands through functional replacement: one is the "residential+commercial" model, which integrates commercial and residential functions to enhance the economic vitality of the area; The second is the "residential+creative" model, which creates artist workshops and forms a cultural and creative industry community(see Figure 2).

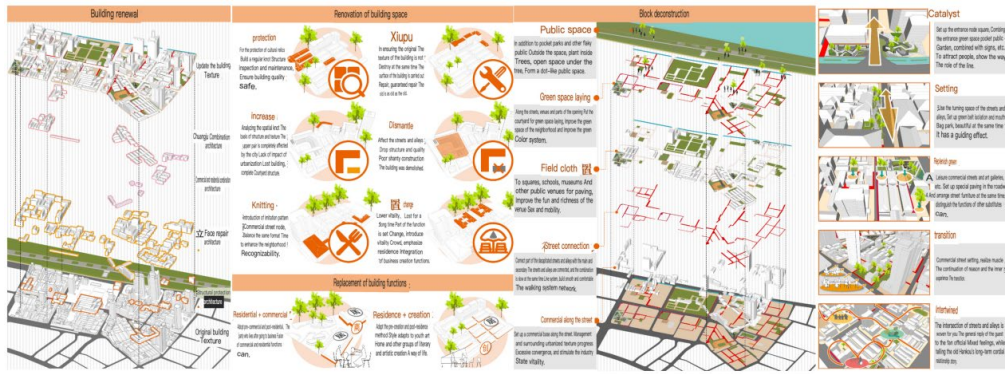


Figure 3: Block renovation analysis chart

### 5.2 Vitality space reshaping

Starting from the spatial structure of the area, the planning first reorganizes its axis framework and functional zoning, selects important nodes on the axis as cultural and tourism spaces, and formulates travel routes based on different narrative themes to further improve the slow traffic system of the block. Finally, incorporating diverse activities into the unique culture and customs of the area, reshaping the vitality of the area.

#### 5.2.1 Series connection of travel lines

Based on the spatial structure of "cross axis, circular bead string" within the venue, combined with cultural resources and land foundation, three themed tourist routes are integrated. The Li Fen historical tourism line connects the Li Fen concentration area on the west side of the site, highlighting the local lifestyle culture and traditional Li Fen history. The Creative Sanyang Tour Line is located in the southern part of the venue, which combines popular elements such as cultural and creative industries and high technology to form a distinctive commercial pedestrian street. The waterfront scenic tour line is set up along the Yangtze River Avenue, combined with the Yangtze River Green Belt, highlighting the waterfront characteristics. [7]

#### 5.2.2 Activity Settings

Activities can be set up by making use of the public space in the venue, combining the daily travel characteristics and leisure habits of the crowd to set up mobile blind date corners, markets and other market activities. Annual activities targeting different groups of people can be reasonably set up at important cultural and tourism nodes in the venue, covering themes such as citizen leisure and smart technology, to create cultural and tourism characteristics.(see figure 3).

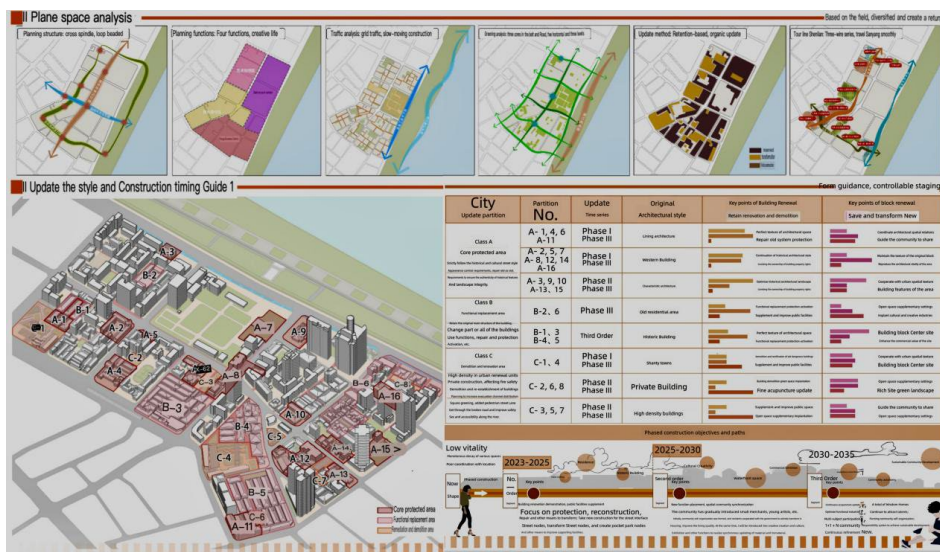


Figure 4: Analysis of Urban Renewal General Plan

### **5.3 Smart Empowerment Development**

By combining smart city technology, a smart city data system will be built in the area from four levels: "urban perception and data capture", "urban data management", "urban data analysis", and "service provision".<sup>[8]</sup> We will launch a smart life app in conjunction with the system, creating a smart experience from various aspects such as information, leisure, internet, and transportation. The application of this technology aims to promote diversified sharing in the area and turn it into a smart service industry leading creative living room.

#### **5.3.1 Multidimensional Intelligence Network**

Relying on the high-tech and innovative industries within the site, we will build an intelligent service system with multiple modules and functional zones, and create a diversified information sharing platform. The content covers various needs of residents' livelihoods, achieving multi-purpose use on one network, and is committed to achieving various information exchange and sharing, as well as unified access to life services.

#### **5.3.2 Mobile System**

By building an intelligent APP system, we can achieve unified mobile services, provide real-time data provision, online manual services, record personal preferences and other personalized services, and create a more convenient, secure, and efficient mobile application service experience, provide tourists with one click query services such as hot scenic spots, tourism guides, and tourism policies, gather and promote local cultural characteristics, and leave a deep impression of a smart city for tourists.

### **5.4 Public participation updates**

In urban renewal, there is a general contradiction between local interests and overall interests, protection and development, and planning goals reflect the distribution of interests and values.<sup>[9]</sup> In this regard, a working model of public participation and collaborative creation can be introduced in the renewal process of Sanyang District. First, before the renewal, grassroots public participation work at the community level should be organized to collect public opinions and build a communication platform. Second, during the renewal process, a third-party decision-making body should be introduced to assist the government in integrating public opinions and reasonably formulating relevant policies.

#### **5.4.1 Multi party participation**

The government takes the lead in organizing participation, formulating relevant policies, and jointly building basic units with the community. A community governance committee is established, and residents and the community jointly negotiate and participate in community governance, jointly manage, make decisions, and build, truly achieving a management model of "coming from the people, going to the people".

#### **5.4.2 Reinforcement mode**

It is crucial to establish grid management, promulgate co-governance regulations, and set up a community co-governance party committee jointly built by local residents, migrant population and merchants. At the same time, a community Internet platform should be created to connect people's livelihood circle with the urban network, and further build smart communities and smart cities from the bottom up to guide residents to use and regularly maintain the Internet.

## **6. Summary**

The protection and renewal of historical districts in our country are moving towards maturity and rationality, and exploring scientifically feasible renewal strategies and methods has practical guiding significance. In the process of updating, the Sanyang Design Capital area combines the concepts of spatial narrative and sharing, and builds a conceptual framework of "co narration", based on which renewal strategies are extended. The update strategy not only includes specific means that are in line with the "micro updates" of Western cities, but also takes into account local conditions, introduces cultural and tourism creativity, and clarifies the update ideas. The update of this area will stimulate its vitality, improve its economic value, drive the development of surrounding areas, and provide reference for similar updates. At the same time, there are also issues with insufficient spatial exploration and

limited technology in this update concept, which need further exploration and improvement.

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