

Reflections on Practical Challenges and Countermeasures for Activation and Utilization of Historical and Cultural Heritage in the Process of Integrated Urban-rural Planning

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Abstract: In the context of the integrated and improved development of urban and rural areas, the phenomenon of similar urban and rural spatial styles has become increasingly prominent. Exploring and making effective use of local historical and cultural resources is an important way to maintain regional cultural characteristics and continue local cultural traditions. It has a practical effect on improving the quality of urban and rural spaces and promoting balanced regional development. From the perspective of grassroots construction, at present, the connection between cultural heritage protection and development is not tight enough. The development degree of existing cultural resources is shallow and the utilization forms are single, and a large amount of cultural value has not been fully released. Based on the concept of integrated urban and rural development, this article, combined with the actual construction scenarios, discusses various practical obstacles encountered in the implementation and connection of the urban and rural planning system and heritage protection standards. At present, there are still many practical problems in the process of heritage activation and implementation. Issues such as insufficient planning coordination, fixed development paths, limited participation channels for governance, and incomplete supporting mechanisms are particularly prominent. The continuous weakening of rural cultural ecology further leads to the idle and loss of local cultural resources, impacting the foundation of regional cultural inheritance. In response to these practical problems, the article builds an optimized system from five dimensions: planning control, characteristic development, diversified governance, institutional support, and cultural ecological protection, and explores the heritage activation paths suitable for the integrated urban and rural development scenarios. The research results can provide practical references for heritage protection work in urban and rural renewal, promoting the simultaneous improvement of regional cultural construction, economic development, and grassroots governance.

Keywords: City and countryside integration; Historical and cultural heritage; Activation and utilization; Town and country planning; Cultural inheritance.

1. Introduction

Domestic urbanization has moved beyond the previous model of merely expanding scale and pursuing speed, with the overall development focus now shifting toward improving quality and promoting coordinated integration between urban and rural areas. For a long time, urban-rural development exhibited a clear one-sided bias, with resources predominantly flowing from cities to rural areas. This pattern is now changing: core resources such as talent, capital, and land can now move freely between urban and rural regions, enabling more rational allocation of regional resources. Urban and rural infrastructure have largely achieved balanced provision, while cultural exchange and functional complementarity between the two areas have effectively driven steady improvements in regional development standards [1].

Numerous valuable historical and cultural resources remain across urban and rural areas, preserving comprehensive records of changes in local living environments and people's lifestyles. These resources mainly fall into two categories: tangible and intangible cultural heritage. Physical landscapes such as ancient villages, traditional streets and alleys, historic buildings, old water systems, and modern industrial sites represent typical examples of tangible heritage. Meanwhile, local folk customs, traditional crafts, and folk arts constitute distinctive forms of

intangible cultural heritage. These unique cultural assets help avoid uniformity in urban and rural construction and serve as key vehicles for shaping regional identity and strengthening local cultural cohesion.

The three major development strategies—urban renewal, rural revitalization, and urban-rural integration—are closely interconnected, creating favorable conditions for the protection and utilization of local cultural heritage. Rational development and use of existing cultural heritage resources not only optimize urban and rural spatial layouts and address shortcomings in public space construction but also promote resource circulation between urban and rural areas, narrow development gaps, and achieve multiple benefits in culture, society, and economy. Standardized, repetitive construction models are no longer adequate to meet current development needs; instead, leveraging local culture to create distinctive development identities has become the mainstream approach in urban and rural planning.

Continued improvements in domestic cultural governance have made the protection of urban and rural cultural heritage more standardized and orderly. The state has introduced multiple specialized management policies to strictly regulate development activities in heritage zones, preventing excessive renovation that damages original appearances. Protection approaches within the industry are also evolving, moving beyond static preservation to emphasize dynamic revitalization and innovative utilization. Across regions, practical initiatives such as ancient village restoration,

upgrading of historic districts, and promotion of intangible cultural heritage are being carried out, gradually establishing a comprehensive, integrated framework for cultural heritage conservation that covers both urban and rural areas.

2. The Contemporary Significance of The Activation and Utilization of Historical Cultural Heritage in The Process of Urban-rural Integration

The core objective of urban-rural integration construction is to narrow the gap between urban and rural development and achieve overall coordinated improvement. This is fundamentally different from the traditional construction approach that solely focuses on the uniformity of urban and rural spatial forms. In the new era, urban-rural integrated development places greater emphasis on leveraging the original cultural texture of the region to create distinctive living environments and establish differentiated regional competitive patterns. Historical cultural heritage, as an irreplaceable scarce human resource, has completely preserved the evolution of regional administrative divisions, folk customs, skill inheritance, and humanistic spirit, and is the core carrier for consolidating local sentiments, strengthening regional cultural identity, and solidifying the cultural foundation of urban and rural areas. In high-quality urban-rural construction, it possesses irreplaceable spatial and cultural value [2].

Compared with standardized key protection units in the control system, rural heritage scattered in urban streets and villages and rural settlements has a more life-oriented attribute. It deeply integrates into the daily production and life scenarios of residents and is the main way for the general public to perceive local culture and retain rural memories. The traditional static isolation protection model can only preserve the physical form of the heritage and is difficult to adapt to the modern urban-rural development rhythm and the diversified living needs of residents. Through scientific activation methods to renovate old buildings, update street spaces, and revitalize folk cultural resources, historical remains can be adapted to modern urban-rural living scenarios, continuously extending the regional cultural heritage, and fundamentally solving the problem of homogenized urban-rural landscapes.

Old urban areas, transitional areas between cities and suburbs, and core residential areas in rural areas gather a large amount of low-efficiency and idle historical remains. These existing resources are important carriers for urban-rural space renewal and improvement. Through micro-updating methods such as refined restoration, functional reconfiguration, and scene re-creation, idle traditional residences, clan public buildings, and old street spaces can be transformed into cultural exhibition venues, intangible cultural heritage research bases, community leisure spaces, cultural and creative characteristic districts, and rural public service stations. This low-intervention, lightweight activation development model can not only revitalize idle land and building resources, improve urban-rural public service facilities, optimize the overall spatial structure, but also continuously improve the quality of the living environment, strengthen residents' sense of belonging and happiness to the local area, and achieve the dual empowerment of urban-rural space renewal and cultural inheritance [3].

Historical cultural heritage has prominent potential for

tourism and cultural development and industrial radiation, which can effectively promote the deep integration of urban and rural industries, enrich regional industrial forms, and optimize the industrial structure. Through the creation of new business forms such as cultural tourism experiences, cultural and creative research and development, immersive intangible cultural heritage, rural folk studies, and rural health care and rejuvenation, it can effectively solve development problems such as urban industry homogenization, rural industry hollowing out, and single channels for farmers' income increase. It helps to improve the quality of rural collective economy and expand local employment and entrepreneurship channels. At the same time, heritage activation projects can guide urban high-quality resources to flow to rural areas, optimize the two-way allocation of urban and rural elements, and build a favorable situation of complementary and coordinated development of urban and rural industries, promoting balanced and coordinated regional economic development.

Heritage activation is not a single cultural construction project, but a comprehensive governance work covering multiple fields and involving multiple entities. Its business scope includes planning, construction, tourism, agriculture and rural areas, natural resources, etc. involving multiple participating entities such as the government, market, social organizations, and residents. Regularly promoting heritage protection and activation practices can force the optimization and upgrading of urban-rural planning management systems, improve cross-departmental collaborative working mechanisms, and effectively solve industry pain points such as urban governance segmentation and departmental rights and responsibilities disconnection. At the same time, it can guide social forces and grassroots people to actively participate in urban and rural construction and cultural protection work, build a modern urban-rural governance system of joint construction, governance, and sharing, and steadily improve the refinement and modernization level of urban-rural governance [4].

3. The Practical Challenges of Revitalizing and Utilizing Historical Cultural Heritage in the Integrated Urban-rural Planning

The in-depth advancement of urban-rural integration construction has continuously reshaped the regional spatial layout, industrial structure and living environment. Various development contradictions are intertwined and overlapping, directly affecting the quality of heritage protection and the effectiveness of its activation and implementation, and restricting the long-term inheritance of urban-rural cultural traditions. Based on the practical experience of local areas, the current development challenges of heritage activation and utilization mainly concentrate in five dimensions: planning connection, development model, governance mechanism, guarantee system, and cultural ecology.

The lack of smooth connection in the planning system is the core bottleneck restricting the high-quality implementation of heritage activation. The problem of independent planning and insufficient coordination and collaboration is particularly prominent. At present, the national spatial overall planning, urban-rural detailed planning and heritage special protection planning have not established an efficient linkage mechanism, and the overall

coordinated management system suitable for regional development has not been fully implemented. Some local governments focus their development efforts on space expansion, infrastructure upgrading and industrial project implementation, and have insufficient understanding of the long-term cultural value and strategic value carried by the heritage. They view heritage protection as a restrictive factor for regional development. The core contents such as heritage census, dynamic control, and activation utilization have not been deeply integrated into the overall urban-rural planning system, resulting in the inability to precisely match the heritage protection red line, style control standards, and development boundaries with urban construction, land use, and industrial layout, significantly reducing the practical effectiveness of planning control [5].

The heritage-specific planning generally adopts an independent compilation and separate implementation mode, with insufficient integration with the overall regional development planning. The planning and construction are disconnected, a "two-skin" phenomenon is very common. Some regions, in order to accelerate project construction, have reduced the protection scope of heritage, relaxed the style control standards, and carried out excessive demolition and renovation of ancient villages, traditional streets, and old houses, seriously damaging the original spatial texture and street layout of the heritage. At the same time, the existing heritage census work has limited coverage and lagging information update, with the focus concentrated on provincial and municipal key cultural protection units. A large number of small-scale local cultural relics, modern industrial heritage, and folk cultural relics have long been out of the official protection system and suffered irreversible damage in the process of urban construction.

The heritage activation work in various regions generally has problems of homogeneous development and shallow utilization. The characteristic development system adapted to the differences in urban-rural resource endowments has not been fully established. Most regions directly adopt mature development templates without formulating differentiated implementation plans based on local resource characteristics and cultural heritage. The renovation of urban historical districts overly relies on commercial development models, introducing common general business such as mass catering and online retail in batches, stripping away the original historical functions and cultural heritage of the streets and alleys, resulting in excessive commercial attributes and continuous weakening of cultural attributes of the streets. The heritage activation in rural areas only focuses on exterior renovation, environmental improvement, and lacks business innovation and functional extension, making it difficult to build a sustainable market-oriented operation model with self-sustaining capacity [6].

Most activation projects have the problem of emphasizing hardware construction and neglecting cultural exploration. The soft cultural resources such as historical anecdotes, folk culture, and traditional skills retained in the region have not been deeply developed and value transformed. The shallow display mode is difficult to create a distinctive cultural IP with regional identification, preventing the full release of the core cultural value of the heritage. Some market entities pursue short-term traffic and economic benefits, carry out utilitarian and online celebrity-style renovations of the heritage, and modify the building structure and original style, seriously damaging the authenticity and integrity of the heritage. In

addition, the progress of domestic heritage digitalization construction is generally lagging, and most regions have not established standardized digital heritage databases and online display platforms. The implementation of smart applications such as 3D replication, immersive experience, and cloud study is insufficient, making the digital protection and dissemination capabilities of heritage unable to adapt to the needs of the new era of cultural development.

The imperfect governance mechanism significantly hinders the improvement and enhancement of heritage activation efficiency. The problems of unclear property rights definition and the absence of participating entities need to be solved urgently. The historical and cultural heritage in both urban and rural areas often suffers from issues such as dispersed property rights, overlapping ownership, and unclear division of responsibilities, which significantly increase the difficulty of implementing integrated revitalization and overall renovation. The protection intentions, cognitive levels, and interest demands of different property rights holders vary significantly, making the promotion of unified restoration and integrated development particularly challenging. Most private heritage property owners often have weak protection awareness, insufficient funding for restoration, and inadequate professional capabilities. Moreover, the local incentive policy systems for restoration, technical assistance, and property custody are not yet fully established, resulting in a large number of private heritage sites remaining idle and deteriorating year by year, leading to a continuous loss of cultural resources.

Currently, the heritage protection work still follows a single government-led core model. The participation channels for the market, social organizations, and grassroots people are limited, and the incentive mechanisms are lacking. A multi-coordinated governance pattern has not yet been formed. The government fully takes charge of the entire process of planning, construction, and operation, which often leads to decisions that deviate from the actual conditions of the grassroots, rigid operation models, and inefficient resource allocation. Heritage projects generally have long investment cycles and high policy sensitivity, which to some extent reduces the enthusiasm of market entities to participate in construction and operation. At the same time, the core participants of cultural heritage transmission, namely urban and rural residents, are often passively involved and lack effective and income channels, making it difficult to implement the living inheritance mechanism on a large scale [7].

The shortcomings in supporting elements such as funding supply, talent reserves, and long-term operation are unable to support the high-quality development of heritage revitalization. The costs of heritage restoration, style renovation cultural exploration and daily maintenance are high, and the project's public welfare attributes are prominent, with long investment return cycles. The market appeal of private capital is weak. Local heritage revitalization funds are highly dependent on special fiscal allocations, and a single source of funds cannot cover the demand for all heritage protection and utilization. This further burdens the local fiscal burden. Meanwhile, the entry barriers for social capital are high, the supporting policies are not complete, and the promotion of market-oriented models such as concession operation, crowdfunding co-construction, and entrusted operation is insufficient. The development vitality of social capital cannot be fully unleashed.

There is a prevalent short-term development mindset in the construction field at the grassroots level, focusing on construction but neglecting operation. Most heritage renovation projects only focus on the implementation of hardware facilities. After the project is completed, due to the lack of continuous operation funds, professional operation teams, and mature business models, it eventually falls into a vicious cycle of "reconstruction - abandonment - deterioration", unable to convert resource investment into long-term development benefits [8].

To pursue uniformity in urban and rural styles, they blindly demolish old buildings, renovate traditional streets, replace original style components, and replace real historical remnants with artificial ancient-style landscapes, causing distortion of style and pseudo-retroism. This seriously damages the original historical texture and cultural atmosphere of the heritage.

The regular flow of urban and rural populations and the rapid iteration of residents' lifestyles continuously change the transmission environment of local culture. The subjective willingness of the younger generation to participate in local cultural heritage transmission has continuously declined. The problem of aging of the inheritance practitioners and talent shortage in traditional customs and local skills has become increasingly prominent. The survival space of traditional folk customs and local skills is continuously shrinking. The material heritage carriers that have undergone standardized restoration lack the corresponding humanistic scenes and living atmosphere. A large number of historical buildings have become hollow landscapes, resulting in the continuous degradation of the living cultural ecology of the heritage, and unable to achieve true long-term living inheritance [9].

4. Optimal Countermeasures for the Activation and Utilization of Historical Cultural Heritage in the Process of Urban-Rural Integration

In response to various practical problems exposed during the implementation of heritage revitalization, urban and rural heritage protection and utilization work need to strictly adhere to the core principles of prioritizing protection, dynamic inheritance, reasonable utilization, and adapting to local conditions. Through a series of systematic measures such as optimizing the overall planning control system, innovating differentiated revitalization models, improving the multi-party collaborative governance mechanism, filling the gaps in resource and talent support, and safeguarding the original cultural ecology, it can fully release the diverse value of heritage, promote the deep coupling of cultural inheritance and urban-rural development, and effectively enhance the comprehensive benefits of heritage protection and revitalization.

Optimize the overall planning control system to break through the barriers of multi-plan coordination. Each region should rely on the overall land space planning as the core support, and fully embed the rigid control requirements of heritage protection, cultural lineage inheritance, and revitalization into the legal plans for urban-rural integration development, urban renewal, and rural construction, ensuring that heritage protection work runs through the entire process of urban planning, construction, and management. Comprehensively carry out detailed surveys of all heritage resources across the region, establish a dynamic updated

resource ledger, build a comprehensive database and classification protection list covering both material and intangible heritage, and include all small-scale local heritage, modern heritage, and folk and intangible cultural resources within the protection scope, achieving full coverage of heritage protection.

Based on the differentiated characteristics of urban and rural spatial layout and resource endowment, formulate regional heritage revitalization special plans. Integrate and connect fragmented heritage resources within the region, create characteristic cultural corridors and thematic cultural areas, and promote the transformation of heritage management from the traditional point-like protection model to a systematic and intensive utilization model. Establish a pre-review mechanism for heritage project construction, strictly implement the style management system, strictly control blind demolition, false revival, and excessive commercialization of illegal construction, adhere to the bottom line of heritage authenticity and integrity, and fundamentally solve problems such as planning disconnection and management disorder at the institutional level.

Innovate differentiated revitalization models to avoid the drawbacks of homogenized development. Based on the differences in urban and rural resource endowment, establish a classified policy implementation and locally adapted heritage revitalization system, and avoid the use of a single development template throughout the region. Urban old districts, industrial heritage, historical streets and alleys abandon the idea of extensive commercial development, focus on cultural empowerment and public service improvement, moderately incorporate diversified business models such as cultural innovation research, art exhibitions, cultural salons, and immersive experiences, and create urban cultural landmarks with historical depth and contemporary characteristics. Rural ancient villages and local heritage resources focus on local style characteristics, fully preserve the traditional village layout and life scenarios, rely on distinctive business models such as folk handicraft workshops, rural study tours, rural tourism, and folk experience, and form a differentiated rural cultural development pattern with unique characteristics for each village [10].

Deeply explore core resources such as regional historical anecdotes, cultural figures, folk customs, and traditional skills, extract distinctive regional cultural symbols, create distinctive cultural IPs with clear recognition, and promote the coordinated output of economic, cultural, and social values of heritage resources. Utilize digital technologies such as 3D modeling, big data, and virtual reality to build a digital heritage display platform across the region, complete the digital preservation, cloud display, and immersive dissemination of heritage resources, effectively expand the development dimensions of heritage protection and utilization. Reasonably control the development intensity and commercial scale, scientifically balance the heritage protection bottom line and the needs of urban development, avoid problems such as revitalization alienation, excessive commercialization, etc., and ensure the benign and sustainable development of heritage revitalization.

Improve the multi-party collaborative governance system and optimize ownership management and operation mechanisms. Actively promote the implementation of supporting policies such as property rights custody, compliant transfer, and cooperative operation, and specifically solve

development bottlenecks such as scattered property rights, unclear rights and responsibilities, and difficult renovation. Through diversified models such as government coordination, property rights custody, government-enterprise cooperation, and lease operation, effectively revitalize existing heritage resources.

Clarify the boundaries of rights and responsibilities among the government, the market, and social organizations, and build a modern governance pattern with clear divisions of labor and efficient collaboration. The government should focus on core tasks such as planning coordination, policy formulation, and supervision and control, and continuously simplify the process for social capital entry and optimize the market environment. Encourage market entities and social organizations to deeply participate in the entire process of heritage activation through means such as franchise operation, project cooperation, and overall operation, fully leveraging the core advantages of the market in innovation and long-term operation. Improve the mechanism for public participation throughout the process, protect the legitimate rights and interests of the public in aspects such as planning design, scheme review, construction renovation, and income distribution, and fully stimulate the vitality of grassroots self-governance and cultural inheritance drive.

Improve a diversified guarantee system to lay a solid foundation for the long-term development of heritage. Establish a diversified funding guarantee mechanism consisting of special fiscal allocations, social capital investment, public donations, and cultural tourism funds, and continuously strengthen the financial support for public heritage projects. Through policy incentives, interest-free loans, land support, etc. widely attract social capital to participate in the construction of heritage activation, and rely on asset revitalization, crowdfunding operation, etc. to alleviate financial pressure. Completely abandon the short-term development mindset of emphasizing construction while neglecting operation, and establish a development concept of planning, construction, and operation integration. Create a sustainable business model that combines public attributes with market value, forming a virtuous cycle of "protection empowering development, operation safeguarding inheritance".

Strengthen the construction of a composite talent team, accurately introduce professionals in heritage protection, planning and design, cultural innovation operation, and cultural dissemination, and fill the gap in industry talent. Regularly conduct specialized training for grassroots practitioners, traditional artisans, and local craftsmen, continuously improve the professional quality of grassroots practitioners, and improve the talent incentive and retention mechanism, providing solid human resources and technical support for the implementation and effectiveness of heritage activation work.

Update the overall development concept, systematically protect the original cultural ecology. Through various means such as policy promotion, special training, and new media popularization, regularly popularize scientific heritage protection concepts, reversing the grassroots's utilitarian and one-sided development cognition. Standardize the approval and supervision processes for urban and rural construction, regularly carry out special inspections for heritage protection, severely punish illegal renovations, random demolitions, and alterations of style, and maximize the preservation of the original spatial texture, architectural style, and historical

memory of the heritage.

Promote the coordinated protection and integrated activation of material and intangible heritage, taking into account both the repair of physical carriers and the soft cultural inheritance. On the basis of renovating historical buildings and improving the spatial environment, systematically explore and excavate soft resources such as local customs, traditional skills, and folk culture. Regularly carry out special activities such as folk performances, intangible heritage inheritance, and skill teaching, build standardized platforms for cultural heritage display and experience, and cultivate local professional inheritance teams. Actively adapt to the needs of modern urban and rural development, promote traditional culture to deeply integrate into people's daily lives, retain the flavor of urban and rural life, and safeguard the roots of regional culture, achieving the sustainable inheritance of heritage in an active and dynamic manner.

5. Conclusion

During the steady progress of urban-rural integration construction, the protection and utilization of historical cultural heritage face many practical contradictions. This article, based on the actual situation of urban-rural construction, systematically examines the core issues that commonly exist in the process of heritage activation, such as insufficient planning coordination, similar development models, incomplete governance systems, weak supporting resources, and damaged cultural ecology. In combination with the differentiated characteristics of urban-rural development, practical measures such as zone-based heritage activation construction, comprehensive planning and control of the entire area, multi-party collaborative governance, and all-round element guarantee are proposed. An operational system for heritage activation suitable for the scenarios of urban-rural integration development is established. This research effectively addresses the current practical problems of imbalance between cultural inheritance and spatial development in the field of urban-rural construction. It can provide feasible references for heritage protection, business model innovation, and long-term operation in urban renewal and rural construction processes, and has positive practical significance for optimizing urban and rural spatial quality and continuing the regional cultural heritage tradition.

This research has certain limitations. The overall research perspective is biased towards the macro level, focusing on summarizing the common problems and general solutions of heritage activation throughout the entire area, without conducting detailed explorations based on regional development differences and the attribute characteristics of different types of heritage. The depth of analysis for the specific activation paths of small-scale rural heritage and modern industrial heritage is insufficient. At the same time, the optimization strategies proposed in the article are mainly general governance solutions, and have not been verified through specific regional cases for implementation. There is still room for improvement in the scene adaptability and practicality of the countermeasures.

Future research can select typical urban-rural areas and characteristic heritage samples as research cases, and refine the differentiated activation plans for different types of heritage. Academia can conduct in-depth exploration in the forefront directions such as digital technology empowerment and innovation of market operation mechanisms, and further

refine the balance mechanism for heritage protection and development. Continuously improving the implementation system of heritage activation can enable regional cultural heritage resources to deeply integrate into the entire process of urban and rural planning layout, industrial upgrading, and grassroots governance, and fully exert the enabling value of cultural resources, laying a solid cultural foundation for the high-quality and sustainable development of urban-rural integration.

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