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Culture-Commerce-Tourism Integration in Xiamen Shapowei: Economic Outcomes and Governance Logic

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Abstract. China's urban renewal has entered a stage of upgrading the existing assets. The integration of culture, commerce and tourism has become the mainstream approach for revitalizing old neighborhoods. However, the experience of leading benchmark projects is difficult to adapt to the limited resource endowments of small and medium-sized characteristic neighborhoods. The transformation of production-oriented waterfront fishing ports faces particularly prominent contradictions. This article takes the Shapowei Fishing Port District in Xiamen as a case and uses the longitudinal time-series comparison method to analyze the economic effects and governance logic of the integration of culture, commerce and tourism. The research shows that the gradual renovation of Shapowei achieved significant revitalization results, with the rent level increasing by more than doubled, the business structure being comprehensively upgraded, and the passenger flow scale continuously growing. The rent premium follows a three-layer transmission path of "space scene empowerment - cultural traffic transformation - business iteration value increase", essentially being the process of gradually realizing the potential rent of the space through the replacement of business types; the local fishing business types being squeezed out is the result of market spontaneous evolution, not an inevitable trend. Through institutional designs such as gradient spatial layout and symbiotic business type cultivation, the coexistence development of the two can be achieved. The research in this article can provide a path reference for the high-quality revitalization of similar small and medium-sized fishing port districts.

Keywords: Old neighborhoods, integration of culture, commerce and tourism, rent premium, fishing port area

1. Introduction

Old neighborhoods are a core component of urban space and also a space that carries local cultural genes. However, with the progress of urbanization, from incremental expansion to quality improvement of existing spaces, the focus of old neighborhood renewal has shifted from the restoration of physical spaces in the early stage to the revitalization of cultural resources and the enhancement of industrial value. The integration of culture, commerce and tourism has thus become the mainstream model for the activation of existing spaces [1].

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In practice, each city has a group of benchmark projects that have formed relatively mature business operation models, such as Xintiandi in Shanghai and Covent Garden in the UK. However, as the widespread replication of these models leads to homogenized competition, local business formats are squeezed out, and the authenticity of culture is undermined. Particularly, numerous small and medium-sized characteristic old neighborhoods, due to limited resource endowment and basic passenger flow, often experience a mismatch when directly adopting the experience of leading projects. The Bay Fish Port District, as a special type with production functions and cultural value, faces more prominent contradictions during its transformation. On the one hand, the decline of traditional fishing leads to aging space, insufficient development momentum, and on the other hand, the integration of culture and commerce often accompanies the loss of local fishing business formats and the controversy over the symbolization of culture [2].

Based on this, this paper will take the Xiamen Shapowei Fishing Port District as the research sample, focusing on the core issue: how does the spatial rent premium form after the establishment of cultural tourism business in the straight road of the fishing port district? What is the internal transmission path of the economic effect? Through mechanism decomposition, this paper addresses the gap in scenarios of existing research and also provides practical references for the high-quality revitalization development of similar small and medium-sized fishing port districts [3].

2. Literature review and theoretical foundation

The academic research on the renewal of old urban areas has always been highly synchronized with the policies of urban renewal. It has undergone two paradigm shifts in general. In the early stage of incremental expansion, urban renewal was mainly based on large-scale demolition and construction, focusing the research on the reshaping of spatial forms and the protection of architectural styles. The core perspectives mostly came from urban planning and architectural science, responding to the core needs of preserving historical styles and reconstructing spatial forms during the rapid urbanization stage. The essence of this stage was the "protective paradigm", with the core goal being to preserve historical buildings and spatial textures, leaving cultural carriers for the future.

With the arrival of the era of stock renewal, the "large-scale demolition and construction" model gradually declined, and the concepts of micro-renovation and micro-updating began to become the consensus in the industry. The research direction also shifted from the "demolition and construction logic" to the "activation logic" paradigm shift. The academic community began to focus on cultural inheritance, spatial optimization, and the upgrading of industrial functions. The integration of culture, commerce, and tourism began to serve as the core path for the value exploration of stock spaces, gradually becoming a research hotspot. The existing achievements generally follow two lines of development, summarizing the pattern of one type of achievement focus. The renewal of culture, commerce, and tourism is divided into different types such as culture resource-driven, passenger flow-driven, and commercial-upgrade， to discuss their respective applicable scenarios and implementation paths. The other type is mainly case studies， summarizing the scene creation and business layout practical experience from benchmark projects in various regions， providing reference templates for subsequent implementation projects [4].

Overall, the existing research has established a basic theoretical framework for the integration of culture, business, and tourism. However, there are still issues of paradigmatic bias and theoretical gaps. Firstly, the perspective is biased towards spatial form. Most case studies focus on visual dimensions such as landscape design and scene creation, and there are systematic deficiencies in the study of the formation of rent premiums and the transmission of economic effects, as well as the internal economic mechanisms. Secondly, the research on scenes is biased towards flagship projects.

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The cases are highly concentrated on urban-level commercial benchmarks, and there is a significant lack of research on a larger number of small and medium-sized characteristic districts, especially special districts like coastal fishing ports, which have special production functions. The targeted research on these is even scarcer. This also leads to the limitations of the applicability of the existing conclusions to specific scenarios.

3. Xiamen Shapowei

Shapowei is located in the Xianggang area of Xiamen's Siming District. The core pedestrian section is approximately 330 meters long. It was one of the earliest fishing ports in Xiamen and an important inheritor of Fujian's marine culture. Its development process presents a complete path of natural evolution from a traditional fishing port to a cultural and tourism district. It can be roughly divided into two stages: Before 2015, it was the traditional fishing port stage. The core function of the district was mainly focused on fishery production. Fishing boats gathered in the sheltered dock, and along the coast, there were the restoration of fishing gear, fishing transactions, catering and other supporting industries. The spatial style was old, and the rental level had no significant difference from the rent prices of ordinary residential area shops along the coast. After 2015, with the promotion of Xiamen's urban renewal and the spontaneous entry of the art community, the district began a slight progressive renovation. While preserving the fishing port culture, the spatial environment was optimized, and cultural and tourism industries such as catering and creative industries were gradually implanted. Relying on the dissemination of marine cultural IP and the distinctive scenic area model, it eventually gradually developed into a well-known coastal cultural tourism destination.

This article selects Shapowei as a case because it is a typical representative of "small-scale coastal fishing port natural evolution-type"districts. It has three core research values. First, it has the attribute of natural evolution, different from other standardized renovation projects led by capital. The transformation of Shapowei was the result of spontaneous market aggregation and policy guidance, without large-scale capitalist intervention. Its evolution logic is more in line with the situation of most small and old districts. Second, it has the attribute of small-scale. The core district is only 330 meters long and belongs to a community-level characteristic district, rather than a city-level commercial landmark. The resource endowment, passenger flow foundation and scale represent the characteristics of most small-scale characteristic old districts, making the research conclusion more relevant. Finally, it has the attribute of fishing port culture. It has completely retained the sheltered dock, the wharf, and other diverse cultural carriers, making it have the functions of fishery production and coastal cultural value. It centrally reflects the symbiotic contradiction of the transformation from a production-oriented district to a consumption-oriented district, making it an ideal sample for studying the transformation of fishing port-type districts.

At the same time, Shapowei has a complete development history in recent years, and the temporal changes in rent, business types, and passenger flow are obvious. Relevant data can be obtained through official data, media research, on-site inventory, and other channels, which provides the basic conditions for conducting research and supports the in-depth analysis of the economic transmission effect mechanism.

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4. Problem analysis

4.1. The economic benefits of the transformation of commercial and tourism areas: A significant overall improvement in spatial value

The transformation of Shapowei into a cultural, commercial and tourism area has effectively enhanced the commercial value of the existing space. Both in terms of rental levels and market vitality, there have been significant improvements. This also confirms the positive impact of the integration of culture, commerce and tourism on small-scale fishing port areas.

In terms of space rental, the transformation of Shapowei has brought about a significant rental premium to the area. It also shows a characteristic of a stepped distribution of rents in the core-periphery pattern. Before the transformation, during the traditional fishing port stage, the core functions of the area revolved mainly around fishing, and the commercial value was low. Before 2015, the rent in the University Road area was only about 100 yuan per square meter, and the monthly rent for a 40-square-meter storefront facing the sea was only 4,000 - 6,000 yuan, with no significant difference from ordinary residential areas along the street. However, by 2023, the monthly rent for the core pedestrian section of the shops had risen to approximately 300 yuan per square meter. Over these years, rents more than doubled. At the same time, the rental levels showed a significant spatial difference. The rental in the scenic areas near the seaside and the core pedestrian section had a much higher increase rate than the peripheral sections, indicating that the closer to the core scene of the fishing port, the stronger the spatial premium. This directly reflects the enhancement of spatial value brought about by the transformation of culture, commerce and tourism [5].

In terms of enhancing market vitality, the reconfiguration of the customer group structure has led to a continuous increase in customer flow, forming a positive cycle of "customer flow - consumption power - rent". Before the renovation, the customer flow was mainly composed of local neighborhood residents, with a small base and limited consumption capacity. After the renovation, the influence of the brand area gradually increased, and the direction of the customer flow began to shift towards tourists and young consumer groups, with both the scale and consumption capacity of the customer flow simultaneously improving. Official data shows that during the May Day holiday in 2026, the total received customer flow in Xianggang area reached 486,000 people, an increase of 11% compared to the previous year. The number of visitors in the Shapowei pedestrian zone alone reached 210,000. The expansion of customer flow has driven the growth of commercial demand, further attracting the entry of high-value-added industries, and in turn, has promoted the increase in rent, forming a continuous positive cycle.

4.2. The transmission logic of rental premium: a three-level progressive realization process

The rent premium in Shapowei is not the result of a simple commercial operation. Instead, it follows a three-level transmission path of "space scene empowerment - cultural traffic transformation - business model iteration and value increase". Its core essence is the process by which the potential land rent of the space is gradually realized through the replacement of business models [6].

The first layer involves the combination of the preservation of the original fishing port culture and the micro-renovation to enhance quality, which creates differentiated scenarios and lays the foundation for value increment. Unlike standardized renovations that involve large-scale demolition and reconstruction, Shapowei has completely preserved the original spatial texture of the fishing port, including the windbreaks, docks, and old buildings. This has resulted in a distinctive and

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recognizable scene that is different from ordinary commercial streets. At the same time, through street and port renovations, the quality of public spaces has been slightly improved, enabling the fishing port area, which originally only had production functions, to acquire commercial consumption capabilities. This "preserving the base color + minor renovation" approach has created a significant rent gap between the actual rent and potential rent, leaving room for subsequent value growth.

The second layer involves attracting visitors through local cultural IPs and converting cultural appeal into commercial demand. The fishing port culture and old Xiamen culture are the core differences and advantages of Shapowei. Relying on social media platforms for dissemination, the fishing port scene has transformed from a local production space into a city cultural IP, attracting a large number of tourists and young people, achieving the transformation from cultural appeal to an increase in visitor traffic. The 210,000 visitors during the May Day holiday in 2026 is essentially the result of the conversion of cultural traffic; and the growth in the scale of visitor traffic directly stimulated the market demand for dining and cultural and creative leisure industries, creating market space for the entry of high-value-added industries and completing the transformation from traffic to demand.

The third layer involves the entry and substitution of high-payment capacity business types, promoting the gradual increase in rent, and ultimately realizing the realization of the rent gap. After the formation of market demand, high-payment capacity cultural and tourism industries begin to enter the core stage and compete for space resources with traditional fishing industry types. Under the impetus of commercial competition, the rent level gradually rises, traditional business types gradually exit the core area due to insufficient profitability, and high-value-added business types take the lead. From the comparison of rents in 2015 and 2023, the essence of the rent increase is that potential rent is continuously converted into actual rent through business replacement, ultimately achieving the full realization of spatial value.

4.3. The predicament caused by the dominance of local business models: a spontaneous structural contradiction in the market

While the commercial value is increasing, the displacement of local fishing business models is an inevitable outcome of market self-selection. However, excessive displacement will undermine the cultural core of the neighborhood and pose a hidden threat to long-term development.

From the actual situation, the traditional fishing-related supporting businesses have significantly shrunk, and the local productive functions have continued to weaken. Before the renovation, the supporting businesses for fishing were the core functions of the neighborhood, with fishing gear stores, fish catch trading points, and fishing service stations scattered along the coast. Currently, the proportion of traditional fishing supporting businesses in the core area is less than 10%, and most of the local old merchants have withdrawn due to rent pressure and market contraction. The productive functions of the fishing port have continued to weaken. As a result, the authenticity of culture has been undermined. The fishing port culture has gradually simplified from a vibrant productive culture to a background-like and symbolized commercial landscape, losing its original unique cultural core [7].

From a logical perspective, the three factors of cost, demand, and policy jointly drove the one-way substitution of business models. On the cost side, the doubling of rent directly pushed up operating costs. The traditional fishing business model had weak profitability and was unable to bear the high rent in the core area, which was the direct reason for the displacement. On the demand side, after the customer group structure shifted from local residents to tourists, consumer demands tilted

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towards cultural and tourism experiences. The market space for traditional fishing support services continued to shrink, which was the market root cause for displacement. On the policy side, during the renewal process, more emphasis was placed on commercial revitalization effects and landscape improvement, lacking protection mechanisms and support policies for local business models, allowing the market to self-select, ultimately leading to the gradual exit of weak local business models.

However, it needs to be dialectically recognized that fishery displacement is an inevitable stage in market evolution, but it is not irreversible. Complete commercialization would actually lose the core competitiveness of the district. Business model upgrading is itself the process of district revitalization. Moderate business model replacement is reasonable. But if the local productive business models completely exit, the district will lose its cultural background of the fishing port and become a uniform tourist commercial street, ultimately losing its differentiated competitiveness. From the theory of urban diversity, a fully commercialized district with a single function is difficult to maintain long-term vitality. The original fishing production function itself is the core competitiveness of the district. The two are not a zero-sum game and can be mutually coexisting and developing through reasonable institutional design [8, 9].

5. Governance suggestions

5.1. Construct a gradient-based spatial layout and reserve the space for the survival of local businesses

In response to the homogenization trend across the entire neighborhood, the core differentiation advantages should be retained. A three-level gradient spatial structure of "core consumption area - over-mixed area - original cultural protection area" can be constructed. The core consumption area is mainly focused on the layout of cultural tourism commercial formats, which undertake the functions of commercial value increase and passenger flow carrying, and create the commercial core; the transition mixed area retains convenience commercial, community services and some fishery supporting formats, which can also meet the daily life needs of local residents and the survival space of local formats; while the original cultural protection area is designated as an exclusive fishery culture space. Through methods such as rent subsidies, property swaps, and policy assistance, the core production scenarios of the fishery are retained, and the core cultural nucleus of the fishing port is protected. Through the spatial gradient layout method, commercial functions are avoided from being fully covered, and the spatial coexistence of production functions and consumption functions is achieved.

5.2. Cultivate a symbiotic business structure, and promote the deep integration of the fishing industry and tourism

Establish a business model entry guidance mechanism, set reasonable thresholds for the proportion of business models, control the proportion of homogeneous online celebrity catering and retail models, and avoid the hyper-commercialization of the entire district. At the same time, increase support for local characteristic business models. On the one hand, provide rent reduction and operation subsidies to traditional fishing merchants and local well-known brands to lower their operating costs; on the other hand, promote the deep integration of fishing culture and cultural tourism products, cultivate local characteristic business models such as fishing port experiences, fishing catch markets, and marine cultural products, making the productive fishing scenarios

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themselves become cultural tourism products, achieving the value transformation of local business models from "elimination" to "distinct IP", and forming a virtuous cycle of mutual empowerment between business and culture.

5.3. Establish a multi-party collaborative governance mechanism to safeguard the rights and interests of local communities

It is possible to change the single-governance model dominated by the government, and establish a multi-party deliberation platform involving the government, communities, merchants, and indigenous fishermen. Also, establish a consultation mechanism for neighborhood renewal and operation. In key issues such as business adjustment, space renovation, and rent pricing, ensure the voice and participation rights of the local community, and prevent commercial capital from single-handedly dominating neighborhood development. At the same time, establish a benefit-sharing mechanism, use the increased profits from neighborhood commerce to support local businesses and community public services, enable the indigenous people and local merchants to share the benefits of neighborhood renewal, avoid the inclusive dilemma of "upgrading industries while marginalizing local people", and achieve balanced development of the neighborhood.

5.4. Shift to a long-term operation model and extend the value conversion chain

Break away from the short-term operation logic of merely collecting rent, and shift from the "property rent mindset" to the "cultural IP operation mindset". Relying on the cultural IP of the fishing port, create distinctive festival activities and cultural experience projects, extend the value chain of cultural tourism, and shift from solely relying on rental income from shops to diversified revenue structures such as tickets, events, cultural products, and brand licensing. At the same time, cultivate specialized street operation entities, coordinate the three goals of cultural protection, commercial operation, and community services, balance short-term commercial gains with long-term cultural value, achieve sustainable operation and long-term value appreciation of the street, and avoid falling into the short-term prosperity phenomenon of "flourishing but then declining" [10].

6. Conclusion

This article takes Xiamen Shapowei as a case to systematically analyze the economic effects, transmission logic and practical difficulties of the integration of culture, commerce and tourism in small and medium-sized coastal fishing port areas. The main conclusions drawn are as follows. First, the integration of culture, commerce and tourism has significant activating value for small and medium-sized fishing port areas. The gradual renovation of Shapowei has achieved a significant increase in rental prices, a comprehensive upgrade of business models, and continuous growth in foot traffic, which verifies the applicability of the natural evolution model for small and medium-sized characteristic areas and provides a reference for similar areas to improve their revitalization. Second, the rent premium of fishing port areas follows a three-layer transmission path of "space scene empowerment - cultural traffic transformation - business model iteration and value increase", which is essentially a process where the potential rent of the space is gradually realized through business model replacement. Spatial differentiation is the foundation, cultural traffic is the driving force, and business model iteration is the core link for value realization. Third, the local fishing business model substitution is the result of market spontaneous evolution and is not an inevitable trend; the original culture of the fishing port area is the core differentiation competitiveness of the

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area. Through gradient spatial layout, symbiotic business model cultivation, and diversified collaborative governance, it is possible to achieve the symbiotic development of productive culture and consumption-oriented business models.

This article expands the research scenario of the integration of culture, commerce and tourism in old areas, supplements the economic mechanism analysis of small and medium-sized fishing port areas, and provides practical references for the renewal of similar areas. However, the research still has certain limitations. The conclusions of the single-case study have limited general applicability and need to be further verified. In the future, more case comparisons can be conducted to deepen the research on the activation paths of different types of characteristic areas and improve the theoretical system of existing renewal.

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