

New Public Cultural Spaces in Libraries: Developments, Challenges, and Strategies (Postprint)

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Abstract

Exploring innovative experiences in the construction of new-type public cultural spaces in libraries facilitates their stepwise, hierarchical, and focused participation in building modern public cultural service systems. Through literature review and meta-analysis, this article distills the progress of libraries' governance practices in advancing new-type public cultural spaces, namely: expanding spatial service scope, highlighting distinctive spatial models, enhancing spatial standardization and upgrading, and broadening the spatial content system. The construction of new-type public cultural spaces is trending toward urban-rural integration, universal and equitable access, and comprehensive population coverage, while simultaneously confronting practical challenges such as insufficient policy supply, grassroots service blind spots, inadequate service content provision, and dysregulated evaluation institutional frameworks. Future development of libraries' new-type public cultural spaces should continuously forge new horizons through measures including accelerating grassroots gap remediation, promoting spatial upgrading and transformation, optimizing industry convergence, and guiding social participation, thereby contributing sectoral value to the high-quality development of public cultural service systems.

Full Text

Preamble

Exploring innovative experiences in the construction of new-type public cultural spaces in libraries facilitates their systematic, hierarchical, and focused participation in building a modern public cultural service system. Through literature review and meta-analysis, this article distills the progress of libraries' governance practices in advancing new-type public cultural spaces: expanding spatial service scope, highlighting distinctive spatial models, promoting standardized upgrades, and broadening spatial content systems. The construction of new-type public cultural spaces is trending toward urban-rural integration,

universal equality, and comprehensive coverage, yet faces practical challenges including insufficient policy supply, grassroots service blind spots, inadequate service content provision, and dysfunctional evaluation systems. Future development should accelerate filling grassroots gaps, promote spatial upgrading and transformation, optimize business format integration, and guide social participation to create new paradigms in new-type public cultural space construction, contributing industry value toward high-quality development of the public cultural service system.

Introduction

New-type public cultural spaces in libraries refer to physical venues for cultural activities and knowledge exchange that are either participated in by libraries or integrated into the main-branch library system [1]. These spaces carry social relations and cultural spirit, representing a complex system of cultural scene superposition, social spatial functions, symbolic representation, and daily activities, encompassing specific forms such as urban study rooms and community libraries [2]. They contain three dimensions: physical space, spiritual space, and social space [3]. As an important player in modernizing the public cultural service system, libraries embody inclusive historical culture and open cultural characteristics [4], playing an increasingly prominent role in public cultural governance. Under national cultural strategy directives, libraries have achieved certain results in constructing new-type public cultural spaces. With the implementation of spatial reshaping, branding, and other practical measures, the spatial value of libraries' new-type public cultural spaces has become further highlighted, gradually attracting attention from both practitioners and academics.

Existing research on library spaces has concentrated on planning and design [6], technological empowerment [7], functional upgrading [8], institutional mechanisms [9], and service innovation [10]. However, as library development has been incorporated into the national public cultural service system, spatial research has expanded from individual library venues to broader cultural fields. For instance, studies have analyzed libraries and reading spaces in national public cultural service system demonstration projects [11], explored operational models and mechanisms of urban study rooms [12], and examined public cultural space brand building [13]. Nevertheless, most research adopts a single-institution perspective to study venue spaces and services, with few investigating libraries' role in public cultural space governance. Only a few scholars have explored policy-guided spatial intelligent transformation [14] and libraries' role positioning and participation mechanisms in constructing new-type public cultural spaces under national policy directives [15]. There remains a lack of analysis from the perspective of public cultural undertaking governance regarding spatial construction value systems and their practical significance for libraries' public cultural service functions.

1. Progress in Library New-Type Public Cultural Space Governance

Under the demands of high-quality development, libraries are transitioning from emphasizing reading promotion to promoting holistic human development through culture. Integrating new-type public cultural spaces into the main-branch library system has become an important path for expanding library spatial services. The Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China mandates establishing main-branch systems adapted to local characteristics and improving digital and networked service systems [19]. The main library strengthens business guidance for branch libraries and grassroots service points [19]. By constructing urban study rooms, themed branch libraries, and other micro-service points, libraries uniformly distribute resources, conduct human resource management, implement performance assessments, and cooperate with social forces to integrate into residents' daily life circles. This approach extends service positions, improves the accessibility and convenience of spatial services such as exhibitions, and promotes rapid layout and rational adjustment of new-type public cultural spaces. The small-radius service circle has increased the number of effective service points and achieved comprehensive coverage of new library spaces, while collaborating with other institutions in community cultural creation and governance.

1.1. Expanding Spatial Service Scope Through Main-Branch System Advantages

Leveraging the main-branch system, libraries have expanded spatial service scope by increasing service points and adjusting layouts, moving from internal venue spaces to broader external public cultural fields, and from partial coverage to comprehensive, criss-crossing networks. The "Public Library Law of the People's Republic of China" provides for establishing locally-adapted main-branch systems [19], with the main library providing business guidance to branches and grassroots points [19]. By building urban study rooms, themed branches, and other micro-spaces, libraries achieve unified resource distribution, human resource management, and performance assessment through cooperation with social forces, embedding service points into residents' daily life and work circles. Specific cases like "Neighborhood Libraries" demonstrate how this system expands library spatial service scope. Incorporating these small yet beautiful public cultural spaces into the library system diversifies supply entities, strengthens service capacity, and enables high-quality library resources to extend beyond traditional venues, renewing libraries' existence forms and service content.

1.2. Highlighting Characteristic Spatial Models Through Branding

Library service branding increasingly promotes career development and improves service effectiveness [20]. Branding helps new-type public cultural spaces clarify positioning and enhance service specialization [13]. Through brand cultivation, these spaces aggregate high-quality elements such as comfortable visual

experiences and distinctive narrative scenes, enabling replication and model promotion. Under new development concepts, branding emphasizes both creating small, beautiful spaces and preserving regional cultural heritage. For example, Guangdong's "Library City" planning incorporates new public cultural space construction into urban planning, requiring reading resources to reflect local culture and tourism characteristics. This has created numerous small yet refined urban study rooms, condensing spatial characteristics and building new-type public cultural spaces that highlight local features. Similarly, demonstration project construction promotes quality improvement through branding. The "Most Beautiful Public Cultural Spaces" competition in the Yangtze River Delta and other regions has discovered and developed innovative, leading new-type public cultural space brands in spatial design, service effectiveness, and other aspects.

1.3. Promoting Standardized Upgrades

Standardization constitutes an important foundation for healthy library development, essential for achieving standardized, refined, and scientific library work that enhances quality and efficiency [21]. China has preliminarily established a top-down library standardization system covering basic data, township library room standards, and social participation [22]. Provinces and municipalities have actively formulated relevant standards, providing top-level design and directional guidance for new-type public cultural space construction. For instance, Foshan summarized neighborhood library development experience to formulate the "Neighborhood Library Construction and Service Standards," while Shenzhen established standards for future community public cultural space construction and 24-hour self-service libraries. These standards specify basic elements such as location layout, hardware configuration, and service content. The "Future Community Public Cultural Space Construction Standards" explicitly requires community public cultural spaces to have public reading, immersive experiences, and themed spaces, specifying area, venue sources, and other details. Standardized, systematic supply accelerates upgrading of new-type public cultural spaces, promotes equalized resource allocation, and addresses weaknesses in cultural undertakings and industries—a necessary path toward building a socialist cultural power in the new era [23].

1.4. Expanding Spatial Content Systems Through Innovative Technology

The integration of online and offline spaces and digital-physical fusion creates new scenarios for digital cultural experiences, expanding public cultural space forms and content systems. Information technologies represented by artificial intelligence have transformed traditional library spatial models [25], injecting new vitality and providing novel solutions for updating spatial content systems. Digital-physical fusion has become a hotspot in new-type public cultural space construction. Using digital twinning, augmented reality, and other technolo-

gies, libraries build immersive digital cultural spaces that integrate online resources within physical spaces, improving convenience and participation. The National Library's VR, AR, and AIGC technology integration exemplifies immersive reading experiences. For physical space construction, new-type public cultural spaces comprehensively employ facial recognition, visual guidance, and smart management to save labor costs and improve service efficiency. The "National Public Cultural Service System Construction Plan" proposes building a national smart library system [26], establishing entity smart service spaces in libraries at all levels to achieve intelligent management. These applications innovate spatial scenarios and greatly improve accessibility of digital cultural resources. Platforms like "Yue Reading Pass" in Guangdong achieve resource docking and cross-library services, broadening public participation channels and improving online spatial resource service efficiency.

2. Realistic Challenges in Library New-Type Public Cultural Space Governance

Despite achievements through main-branch system innovation, branding, and standardization, libraries' new-type public cultural space governance faces challenges including insufficient policy supply, grassroots service blind spots, suboptimal spatial content, and inadequate evaluation systems.

2.1. Insufficient Policy Supply and Grassroots Service Blind Spots

While national policies guide development, the specific policy supply system for new-type public cultural spaces remains imperfect. At the practical level, there is no nationally replicable standard for new-type public cultural spaces. Existing standards mention compliance with national accessibility design standards, but specific provisions for spatial standards and content serving elderly, children, and other groups are lacking. In standard implementation, some regions show passive and negligent attitudes, with slow or non-existent implementation. Urban study room standards are numerous, but standards for other space types are insufficient. The policy supply system needs improvement regarding spatial management, cultural volunteers, and other aspects.

Facility layout in grassroots areas exhibits service blind spots. A prominent shortcoming in urban library development is unscientific facility layout and unreasonable density arrangement [29]. New-type public cultural spaces have not yet permeated daily life, showing block-shaped concentration with high density in core areas and fewer service points in peripheral regions. Compared with cities, rural areas face greater challenges. In towns, economically developed areas operate better while facilities and services in other peripheral areas are lacking. Rural public cultural service construction is crucial for protecting villagers' cultural rights, regulating rural cultural ecology, and maintaining rural cultural order [30]. Accelerating urban-rural integration and expanding rural public cultural space supply represents both a challenge and an opportunity for

high-quality development.

2.2. Suboptimal Service Content Supply

New-type public cultural spaces often integrate cultural creativity, exhibitions, and other business formats, presenting libraries' open and inclusive philosophy. However, excessive element accumulation can blur spatial positioning, increase operational management difficulty, and weaken libraries' public welfare and social education functions through excessive commercial content. Some spaces overemphasize design aesthetics while neglecting publicness, cultural attributes, and public welfare, squeezing out reading and spiritual cultivation functions. As public cultural service facilities, libraries should prioritize meeting citizens' cultural needs, such as promoting reading and supporting scholarly society construction. Changes in reading habits and deep integration with other leisure scenarios require libraries to integrate into different spatial contexts, breaking architectural constraints to achieve innovative development in the era of contextualized knowledge services [38].

2.3. Incomplete Evaluation System

Evaluation and grading work has played a role in promoting construction and enhancing effectiveness in public library development [31]. China has completed the seventh public library evaluation, with assessment teams developing multi-dimensional criteria and bonus points focusing on innovative concepts and technological applications [32]. However, an evaluation system specifically for library new-type public cultural spaces has not been established. While urban study rooms have some evaluation and supervision standards for space and partial service content, spaces like homestay book bars lack specialized evaluation criteria. Evaluation and supervision are generally absent for new-type public cultural spaces [33]. Quality improvement requires strengthened supervision and evaluation by governments and industry associations throughout the entire process of construction, operation, and management.

3. Strategies for Library New-Type Public Cultural Space Governance

As a backbone in the public cultural service industry, libraries play an important role in advancing the legalization, systematization, and intelligentization of new-type public cultural space construction. Governance should adhere to national cultural policies, uphold people-centered principles, and promote high-quality development according to requirements of having characteristics, quality, and integration, achieving urban-rural integration and universal coverage.

3.1. Fill Grassroots Gaps and Improve Facility Coverage

New-type public cultural space system construction can clarify overall spatial layout, identify regional gaps, and address grassroots service voids to improve

coverage. Libraries should build criss-crossing offline public cultural spaces and convenient, efficient, rich online spaces using digital technology. According to the Public Cultural Service System Construction Plan, combining old residential area and urban village renovations to create new-type public cultural spaces with distinctive features and humanistic quality is recommended [26]. Using progressive and micro-renewal approaches to transform old buildings from urban regeneration continues to revitalize existing spaces. For example, Hangzhou's Gongshu District transformed old industrial areas into regional cultural landmarks by deepening culture-tourism integration and developing Grand Canal cultural genes. The main library and node libraries form a city-wide public reading network, achieving universal borrowing and returning within regions and remote postal borrowing services.

3.2. Promote Upgrading and Expand Traditional Space Functions

The Public Cultural Service System Construction Plan proposes improving grassroots public cultural service networks and upgrading traditional grassroots public cultural spaces and facilities like rural theaters [36]. Libraries can integrate culture and tourism, employ new technologies, and transform internal spaces of existing public cultural facilities to create comfortable reading and learning environments, enhancing architectural aesthetics and technological sense. For instance, libraries create smart reading spaces, ancient book activation panoramic experience spaces, and intangible cultural heritage exhibition halls. Zhejiang's implementation of "quality and efficiency enhancement" through standardized renovation of public cultural spaces, including creative transformation of industrial sites into grassroots service projects and art bookstores, promotes innovative development in environmental construction, service content, and institutional mechanisms.

3.3. Optimize Business Integration and Embed in Social Life

New-type public cultural spaces should be embedded in bustling urban commercial circles, cultural creative parks, and other high-traffic areas, combining with tourism to create cultural landmarks. By superimposing different types of spaces, libraries can break architectural constraints and integrate into various spatial scenarios. The National Cultural Park construction creates small, beautiful spaces with public reading, art appreciation, and other functions, jointly creating small-radius cultural life circles through linkage with surrounding facilities. Libraries should cooperate with enterprises, institutions, and community property management through construction, operation, contracting, or adoption methods to create urban study rooms integrating multiple functions. Before co-operation, governments should investigate social forces' qualifications regarding venues, funding, and operations, clarify responsibilities between governments and public libraries, and develop contingency plans for potential risks. For example, cultural and tourism departments can lead cooperation with commercial complex management to build new-type public cultural spaces, embedding them

in citizens' lives while highlighting brand characteristics.

3.4. Guide Social Participation and Encourage Multi-Party Cooperation

Social participation is a fundamental principle in building China's modern public cultural service system [40]. Encouraging social forces to participate in new-type public cultural space construction helps increase facility density, build public reading networks, and improve accessibility. Currently, China faces challenges in clarifying rights and responsibilities among parties and managing operational risks of contracted enterprises. Governments should coordinate overall urban new-type public cultural space brand building, formulate detailed bidding conditions including location, area, and operational qualifications, and conduct trial operations before formal opening. Creative reading activities should be developed to expand library service positions and enhance influence and social awareness. The state encourages physical bookstores to integrate into the public cultural system, creating specialized areas for book borrowing and sales, cultural creativity, catering, and training to promote reading contextualization and provide new reading ecologies and experiences for citizens [39].

4. Conclusion

This article systematically reviewed libraries' innovative practices in new-type public cultural spaces and proposed optimization strategies addressing policy supply gaps and insufficient grassroots coverage. Libraries, as a backbone in the public cultural service industry, have effectively promoted rational layout of public cultural facilities and safeguarded citizens' cultural rights through a series of innovative practices. Future research will further refine spatial types and study their governance mechanisms, building new library service systems oriented toward the future and the public.

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