

Study on the Role of “Cultural City” in Promoting the Service System of Urban Public Libraries

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Abstract: The “Cultural City” is of great significance for promoting urban development, enhancing city competitiveness and improving the level of urban civilization. When promoting the service system of urban public libraries, the role of “cultural city” is mainly embodied in four aspects. It promotes the upgrading of facilities and networks of public libraries to achieve the full coverage of public reading services; it extends the service scope of public libraries, and innovates service modes; it establishes the concept of universal and equal service, and help public libraries to play the social education function more effectively; it expands the cross-border communication and cooperation of public libraries on the basis of “Cultural City” communication, and expands the development space of public libraries.

1. Introduction

With the development of urbanization, urban culture and city competitiveness have become the focus of urban development. Cities with strong competitiveness also have strong cultural atmosphere, rich cultural heritages and developed cultural undertakings. Therefore, these cities have more inclusive culture, as well as stronger cultural charm and attraction. As one of the urban landmarks, public libraries are deeply influenced by the level of urban cultural development and play a huge role in promoting the development of urban culture. The “European Cultural Cities” has a history of 35 years. The “East Asian Cultural Cities” initiated by China also proves that the construction of “Cultural City” has positive, extensive and far-reaching impacts in many aspects, such as increasing the input of urban culture, gathering high-quality urban resources, stimulating urban cultural innovation and creativity, and attracting all forces to participate in urban cultural construction. This urban selection mechanism, which takes culture as its main content and promotes urban renewal and development, is conducive to highlighting cultural traditions, activating cultural space, promoting cultural integration, enhancing regional consensus and improving social environment.

Public culture is a key factor in the application and evaluation of “cultural cities”. Public libraries, museums, cultural museums, art galleries and memorials provide important support and strong foundation for the construction of “cultural cities”. Public libraries are the core of a city's public cultural service. From the perspective of institutions, public libraries have many functions, such as knowledge preservation as well as document information organization and transmission. From the perspective of users, the three important functions of libraries are providing more information for citizens, participating in educational activities and promoting the learning activities of individuals. Promoted by the construction of “cultural cities”, public libraries have broke the boundaries of traditional operation methods which include book collection, borrowing, reference and other activities. Their functions have been further extended; more attention has been paid to the satisfaction of citizens' diversified cultural needs and the promotion of urban cultural development. Public libraries also undertake the responsibility education function, which provides them multiple advantages in the study of citizens, the construction of cultural atmosphere, and the development of lifelong education. During the construction of “cultural cities”, the important position of public libraries in the urban public cultural service system have been further highlighted. They have become the main component in cultural activities and exchanges through improving the network system of public library service facilities, building characteristic literature resources, and carrying

out in-depth reading promotion activities, public welfare training activities, as well as cross-border exchanges and cooperation. In the construction of “cultural cities”, main measures to promote the service system of public libraries are analyzed as follows.

2. Upgrading Library Facilities and Equipment

Among all kinds of public cultural facilities in “cultural cities”, the numbers of public libraries which are newly built, rebuilt and expanded are the largest. From the practical results, the construction of “cultural cities” has brought new opportunities for the construction of urban public libraries in corresponding cities. According to EU statistics, between 2000 and 2017, more than half of the 40 European “cultural cities” have formulated and implemented various construction plans directly related to libraries. Reykjavik, Iceland, for example, officially opened a new library with an area of about 30,000 square meters when it was elected as the “European Cultural City” in 2001. In 2009, the elected “European Cultural City” of Vilnius, Lithuania built a new comprehensive research library, the Open Access Scholarly Communication and Information Center. It becomes an important symbol of Vilnius, the first “cultural city” in Lithuania. In 2010, the “European Cultural City” of Pécs, Hungary, built the Regional Library and Knowledge Center in the region South to the Danube River. The center is the first comprehensive knowledge center which integrates the resources of municipal public libraries and libraries of local universities. It is the most influential achievement of Pécs in the construction of the “European Cultural City” for the future development and construction of the city. It is also an important project for the city to build a high-level public cultural service system with European and international characteristics. Wroclaw, Poland is the “European Cultural City” and the “Book Capital of the World” of 2016. The city built a new public library in the central railway station, which became a symbol of urban public cultural construction. The library not only serves local residents, but also provides a warm and family-style reading environment for foreign tourists. It imitates the home-style decoration. The library has a porch, a kitchen, living rooms and studies. Readers can not only read books, but also listen to music and enjoy delicious food here. With the decoration of works of art, the whole railway station also becomes a fashionable and modern “art gallery”. In 2017, Aarhus, Denmark was selected as the European Cultural City. It has Dokk1, the largest public library in Nordic Europe. Dokk1 is a modern comprehensive living space for citizens, which integrates books borrowing, reading service, citizen service, large parking lots, public squares and other municipal services. It covers a total area of 356,000 square meters. The budget of the whole project exceeds 280 million Euros. It is the largest cultural facility construction project in the history of Aarhus.

3. Extending the Public Reading Service System

While continually completing the network and service system of urban public libraries, many “cultural cities” also innovatively extend public reading services to schools, hospitals, parks, hotels, airports, beaches and other public places, so as to break the restriction of “traditional” concepts like public reading services should be provided by public libraries. For example, the city of Sharjah in the United Arab Emirates is the “Arab Cultural City” in 1998, the “Islamic Cultural City” in 2014 and the “Arab Tourism City” in 2015. It attaches great importance to improving the quality of urban reading services. During the construction of the “Islamic Cultural City” in 2014, Sharjah invested more than 40 million US dollars to implement the “Knowledge Without Borders” project, which aimed to build a “Home Library” for 42,000 Sharjah families between 2008 and 2016. Each family library is equipped with 50 books which cover topics of health, food, education, literature, science and technology. A total of 2.1 million books are needed. For Arab cities with low reading rates and high illiteracy rates, it is of far-reaching significance to take the opportunity of “cultural city” construction in improving public reading consciences and the literacy level of citizens. According to statistics, by July 2017, the government had provided about 1 million books and successfully established the “family library” for 20,000 Sharjah families. In addition, Sharjah equips schools with mobile libraries, provides hospitals and clinics with knowledge carts, and builds Neighborhood

libraries in urban parks. The city also cooperates with the United Arab Airlines to build on-board Library. It is also building a Hotel Library. It is worth mentioning that the city of Sharjah was awarded the title of World Book Capital in 2019 by the UNESCO in June 2017. In addition, in Glasgow and Liverpool, the “cultural cities” of Britain, community libraries also build branches in cooperation with churches, art galleries, museums, restaurants, clubs, geriatric centers, kindergartens and neighborhood centers to strengthen the capacity of grass-root level public cultural service. Their convenient and efficient services enormously enrich the daily cultural life of community residents.

4. Exerting the Social Education Function of Public Libraries

The reason why public libraries have the function of social education is that they have the information resources platform and the environment in which educational activities can be carried out. Public libraries can cultivate well-educated citizens with insights and participation consciousness for the society. They are important powers in supporting personal development, maintaining social harmony, promoting cultural understanding and protecting the democratic system. Public libraries have a large quantity of ordered knowledge and information resources, which are important carriers of the socialization of social education contents. For example, in 2011, Turku, Finland's “cultural city” launched a year-round characteristic public reading activity with the theme of “meeting in the library”, which accounted for 30% of Turku's “European cultural city” activities. In 2016, Poland's second largest financial center and the fourth largest city, Wrocław won the titles of European Cultural City and the World Book Capital. In this year, Wrocław took the promotion of urban reading quality and the improvement of library service system as the key points in the construction of a “cultural city”. The city held numerous literary-related activities and invited hundreds of writers, poets, scholars and cultural-related persons from all over the world to come to this city.

Public libraries can organize a large number of activities on public welfare training during the period of constructing “cultural cities”. In 1998, the library in Stockholm, the “European Cultural City” in Sweden, held a series of public education and training programs for public service staff in order to enhance their understandings on the local culture, the political history and scenic spots of the city. In 2008, Liverpool launched the “Windows Project”, a public program on reading service training throughout the city, as well as the “City of Poem” writing training program for the elderly, disabled and young people to further improve the writing and reading ability of citizens. Since Cork was elected as the “European Cultural City” in 2005, libraries in the city have not only successfully held the first World Book Day and many other large-scale reading activities, but also organized various public reading promotion activities in communities, parks and other outdoor venues near the library. Since then, the city has continued these activities. They are still held regularly by the Municipal Library every year.

It can be said that in the construction of “cultural cities”, public libraries which root in the information society have gradually developed into supporters of educational activities, intervenors in learning behaviors and managers of information poverty. This kind of social reading activity builds a platform for people to exchange knowledge and information. To a certain extent, it helps to enrich the information sources of citizens, thus has a potential impact on people's behaviors of information acquisition and utilization, and can help to alleviate the polarization between the rich and the poor in information acquisition.

5. Expanding International Exchange and the Cooperation among Public Libraries

Under the background of global economic integration, international exchanges and cooperation play an important role in promoting the sustainable development of libraries. Adequate and high-level international exchanges and cooperation have become important symbols of first-class public libraries. International exchange and cooperation are important practical links for libraries to participate in international competition. Today, with the deepening of international cooperation and

exchanges, cultural cities are an innovative form of multilateral exchanges and cooperation among different regions. They have constructed an international urban network, which broadens the international vision of urban public cultural development and highlights the regional sharing and global participation of cultural resources and services. In “cultural cities”, the cultural construction should not only meet the needs of local residents, but also adapt to and guide the needs of more populations. Only by continuously releasing its extroversion and openness can a “cultural city” maintain its diversity. Therefore, from the perspective of cultural soft power, for “cultural cities” with international elements, the public cultural construction should not be inward-looking and closed, but be outward-looking and open. For example, Reykjavik (Iceland), Bergen (Norway), Helsinki (Finland), Brussels (Belgium), Prague (Czech Republic), Krakow (Poland), Santiago de Compostela (Spain), Avignon (France) and Bologna (Italy) were elected as “European Cultural Cities” in 2000. In order to celebrate the coming of the new century, the nine cities in have strengthened their transnational cooperation in archives, libraries, museums and other urban public cultural institutions to realize the “Nine Cities Cooperation” between libraries and archives. The Archives of Bergen and Norway proposed to launch a “Cultural Heritage Preservation Project” to establish a digital preservation project, in order to strengthen the capacity of cultural heritage protection. In addition, the public libraries, archives, museums, art galleries and other public cultural institutions in these nine cities exhibit public local documents and objects with great cultural values through exhibition tours, so that citizens can feel the richness and diversity of European culture.

6. Conclusion

International “cultural cities” like the “European Cultural City”, the “East Asian Cultural City” and the “Arab Cultural City” have a high demand for the “cultural soft power”. For public libraries which can reflect the material and humanistic spiritual environment of the “cultural city”, the construction of “cultural cities” has promoted the service ability of public libraries and improved their service system. The construction of “cultural city” does not place cities in the focus of political debate, nor attach too many ideological conditions to them. Different “cultural cities” have their own requirements and evaluation criteria, but they do not have constraints and restrictions on responsibility. Although there are certain national, regional and local constraints, the internationalization is the mainstream because of the large number of cross-border and cross-regional exchanges and cooperation. This kind of city alliance with the “cultural city” as the link is a kind of city interaction behavior that crosses the boundary of interests; it aims to maintain the cultural diversity and enhance the vitality of social development. It is also a re-orientation of city culture and the re-cultivation of city spirit. The “cultural city” is harmonious because of the culture; residents of the elected cities can become more learned and refined because of the culture. In order to provide citizens with high quality services and guide them to live a happy life, public libraries need to bring spiritual enjoyment and pleasure to residents; they need to lay the foundation and guide people's self-cultivation. Therefore, the construction of “cultural cities” should further enhance the city's taste, aiming to achieve universal and equal public cultural services and expand the city's international vision through the improvement of public libraries' services.

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