

Vitality and Value of Urban Green Spaces

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Urban areas have become one of the most important human habitats. According to UN-Habitat, by the middle of the 21st century, the global urban population is expected to rise from about half to nearly 70%. China's urbanization level has already approached this threshold, with the urban population continuing to grow. At the same time, green spaces have increasingly become a major land-use type in urban construction. Recent statistics indicate that both the green space ratio and green coverage rate in China's built-up areas have reached relatively high levels, while the per capita park green space area also continues to increase. Clearly, urban green spaces—primarily consisting of public green land—not only provide essential venues for daily recreation, but also serve as critical foundations for a high quality of life and sustainable development.

Currently, China's urbanization has shifted from rapid expansion to stable development. Urban construction is transitioning from large-scale growth to a focus on urban renewal, quality improvement, and efficiency enhancement. Similarly, the development and management of urban green spaces have entered a new stage of transformation. Against this backdrop, the vitality and value of urban green spaces have become pressing topics for in-depth research.

“Vitality” here primarily refers to the level of green space usage. Over the past decades, driven by national strategies such as the initiative of “extensive greening with prioritized improvement” and the promotion of Garden Cities, both the total area and proportion of urban green spaces in China have increased rapidly. Nevertheless, several practical challenges persist. In some cities, the spatial distribution of green spaces remains uneven, supply does not meet demand, and accessibility is limited. Within these green spaces, recreational facilities are often unevenly allocated, service amenities are inadequate, and environmental quality is suboptimal. Collectively, these factors result in low usage rates—that is, insufficient vitality. Enhancing the use of existing green spaces is thus an effective approach to activating urban natural assets. This can be achieved

by improving openness and accessibility—for example, optimizing walking routes from residential and office areas, opening previously inaccessible green areas, adding entrances, and expanding shared lawns—to attract a broader range of users. Simultaneously, upgrading the quality of existing green spaces can sustain and extend the frequency and duration of use. Moreover, it is essential to remove barriers to recreation and encourage more inclusive participation in green space activities.

Why should we prioritize the use of urban green spaces? A substantial body of research has demonstrated their profound impact on human well-being. Although terminology varies across studies, there is a broad consensus that green spaces contribute significantly to residents' physical, psychological, and social health. At the individual level, they strengthen place attachment to communities or cities; at the societal level, they enhance public health and help reduce urban healthcare costs. These benefits arise from the cultural services provided by green spaces as part of ecosystems. Only when both the quantity and quality of green spaces meet residents' needs can users experience inclusion, equity, and even justice through freely engaging in meaningful activities.

While these insights are widely recognized in research and practice, it remains essential for scholars to rigorously investigate the mechanisms and pathways that generate vitality and value in urban green spaces. Such spaces are inherently complex and dynamic, and cannot be easily controlled. Evidence-based, methodologically sound research design is therefore crucial to ensure reliable and valid findings. Systematically evaluating the vitality and value of urban green spaces is not only a cutting-edge topic in scientific inquiry but also a critical foundation for advancing high-quality urban development and promoting social equity.

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城市绿色空间的活力与价值

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城市已成为人类最重要的聚居地之一。联合国人居署预计, 到本世纪中叶, 全球城镇人口比例将从当下的约一半提升至近七成。中国的城镇化水平也已接近这一水平, 城镇人口规模持续增长。与此同时, 绿地逐渐发展成为城市建设中的主要用地类型。近年的中国城市建设统计数据显示, 全国城市建成区的绿地率与绿化覆盖率已达到较高水平, 人均公园绿地面积亦不断提升。由此可见, 以城市绿地为主体的绿色空间既承载着居民日常休闲游憩的功能, 也是保障高品质生活和推动可持续发展的重要基础。

当下, 中国的城镇化进程正由高速增长转向稳定发展, 城市建设也从大规模增量扩张逐步转向存量更新和提质增效。同样, 城市绿色空间的建设和管理也进入了新的转型阶段。在这一背景下, 城市绿色空间的活力与价值成为亟待深入研究的议题。

本文所界定的“活力”主要指绿色空间的使用率。过去数十年间, 在“普遍绿化、重点提高”的方针及各类园林城市建设政策的推动下, 中国的城市绿地面积和绿地率快速提升。然而, 在实践中仍然存在一些突出问题: 部分城市绿地布局不合理、供需不匹配、可达性差, 或绿地内部游憩场所分布不均、服务设施不足、环境质量欠佳, 导致整体使用率偏低, 即“活力”不足。因此, 提升城市绿色空间的使用水平是“盘活”现有自然资产的有效途径。具体而言, 可以通过提升绿地的开放性与可达性吸引更多广泛的使用群体, 如改善居住区和办公区通往绿色空间的路径条件、“开墙透绿”、增加出入口与共享草坪等。同时, 提升现

有绿地品质, 保持乃至延长使用频率和时长。此外, 还应设法消除潜在的游憩障碍, 促进更多的人群积极使用绿色空间。

为何必须重视城市绿色空间的使用? 已有大量研究表明, 这些空间对人类福祉具有深远影响。尽管这些益处在于术语表述上略有差异, 但普遍共识在于, 绿色空间能够显著促进居民的身体、心理与社会健康。对个体而言, 它增强了对社区或城市的场所依恋; 对群体而言, 它提升了公共健康水平, 进而减少了城市的公共卫生支出。这些价值的生成机制源于绿色空间作为生态系统所提供的文化服务。只有当绿色空间在数量与质量上都能满足居民需求, 使用者才得以在自由选择中实现包容、公平, 甚至正义的使用体验。

这些认识已经在学界和实践中形成共识。然而, 作为科研工作者, 我们仍需通过更为严谨的科学研究, 揭示城市绿色空间活力与价值的内在机制及生成路径。这类空间通常是复杂且难以人为控制的生活环境, 唯有基于科学合理的研究设计, 才能保证结论的信度与效度。因此, 系统评估城市绿色空间的活力与价值, 既是科学研究的前沿议题, 也是支撑城市高质量发展与社会公平的关键任务。