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Revitalizing Urban Green Spaces and Reweaving Ecological–Social Relations

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Reflecting on the trajectory of urban development in China, the construction of green spaces has achieved remarkable results. The number of parks has continued to grow, greenway networks have steadily expanded, and waterfront spaces have progressively opened to the public. Country parks, community parks, and various attached green spaces have collectively reshaped the urban landscape. The overall green coverage rate in built-up urban areas has exceeded 40%, placing Chinese cities among the higher levels globally. Chinese cities have delivered remarkable achievements in terms of "whether green space exists" and "how much is provided." Today, however, the critical question has shifted to "how vibrant these spaces are."

The core challenge facing urban green space development in China lies in the fact that the accumulation of green quantity has not automatically translated into the generation of vitality. Many green spaces appear lush yet lack liveliness; many parks are exquisitely designed yet fail to attract sustained use. Green space vitality should not be understood simply as an increase in the intensity of human use, but rather as the re-coupling of ecological processes and social life within the urban context. Green spaces are not only associated with soil, water, vegetation, insects, birds, and microclimates, but also support staying, interaction, leisure, mobility, consumption, and place identity. They are among the few urban spaces capable of accommodating both natural life and public life. Only when ecological and social processes are effectively re-coupled can green spaces truly transform from "constructed spaces" into "sustainable living systems."

Reactivating green space vitality must begin with a return to their ecological foundations. Green spaces are not mere decorative plant assemblages, but living systems with intrinsic ecological rhythms. Future efforts should shift from an emphasis on "landscape coverage" to "ecological processes," respecting natural dynamics and succession. This entails allowing soils to breathe, enabling rainwater infiltration, and retaining leaf litter and deadwood to provide habitats for microorganisms, insects, and small fauna, thereby fostering self-sustaining and self-renewing systems. In addition, green spaces should evolve from "monocultural planting" to "multi-layered communities," offering diverse habitats for bird nesting, insect pollination, and small animal foraging. More importantly, it is essential to move beyond the limitations of ecology confined within parks and accelerate the construction of interconnected blue–green networks. Through ecological corridors and stepping-stone habitats, fragmented green patches can be linked, enabling the movement of wind, water, seeds, and wildlife across the city. Only when ecological systems function as networks can green spaces move beyond isolated landscapes to deliver systemic benefits, including microclimate regulation, mitigation of the urban heat island effect, and enhanced urban resilience.

While consolidating the ecological foundation, it is equally important to stimulate the social vitality of green spaces through strategies of spatial integration. First, accessibility must be maximized by breaking down enclosed boundaries and embedding green spaces into everyday urban life. Green spaces

should no longer be destinations requiring deliberate visits, but natural extensions of streets and integral components of daily routines. When greenery permeates from parks into streets and neighborhoods, residents can truly experience greenery as part of everyday life. Second, the conditions for staying and diverse uses within green spaces should be strengthened. Vitality lies not only in movement, but also in staying and social interaction. Comfortable seating, child-friendly play areas, accessible facilities for the elderly, and inclusive public amenities encourage people of all ages to linger and connect. Green spaces should function as open-air theaters, outdoor classrooms, and community living rooms, accommodating cultural events, local markets, environmental education, and public exchange, thereby enabling public life to flourish within green environments. Finally, green spaces should serve as "green engines" for surrounding urban regeneration. Through a "park+" approach, commercial services, cultural facilities, and community functions can be integrated along park edges, allowing vitality to spill over into adjacent areas and promoting the coordinated enhancement of neighborhood-scale economies, community vitality, and spatial quality. In this way, ecological value can be effectively translated into social and economic values.

The focus of urban green space development in China has shifted from simply increasing greenery to activating it—activating both the spaces themselves and the urban systems in which they are embedded. Ultimately, revitalizing green space means enabling nature to thrive again within cities, reintegrating social life into green spaces, and reintegrating ecology with everyday urban life.

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提升城市绿地活力，重塑生态社会关系

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回望中国城市发展的历程，绿地建设成绩斐然。公园数量持续增长，绿道网络不断延展，滨水空间逐步开放，郊野公园、社区公园和各类附属绿地共同重塑了城市景观。城市建成区总体绿化覆盖率超过40%，处于全球较高水平。中国城市以快速推进的发展态势，在“有没有”和“多不多”两个维度上交出了引人瞩目的答卷，而当下的关键，则在于“活不活”。

当前中国城市绿地发展的核心矛盾在于：绿量的积累并未自动转化为活力的生成。许多绿地看似葱郁，却缺乏生机；许多公园设计精美，却难以吸引停留。所谓绿地活力，并非简单的人流强度提升，而是生态过程与社会生活在城市中的再耦合。绿地既关乎土壤、雨水、植被、昆虫、鸟类和微气候，也承载停留、交往、休闲、通行、消费与地方认同，是城市中少数能够同时容纳自然生命与公共生活的复合空间。唯有当生态过程与社会过程在绿地中重新耦合，绿地方能真正从“被建成的空间”转变为“可持续的生命系统”。

重塑绿地活力，首先应回归其自然属性，激活生态活力。绿地并非简单的植物装饰，而是真实且具有生命节律的生态系统。未来首先应推动绿地从“重景观覆盖”向“重生态过程”转变，尊重自然的野性与演替，让土壤得以呼吸、雨水得以下渗，使枯枝落叶和部分枯木得以留存，为微生物、昆虫和小型生物提供栖息繁衍的环境，让绿地成为能够自我维持、自我更新的有机体。其次，要推动绿地从“单一植被”向“复层群落”演进，为鸟类筑巢、昆虫传粉及小型动物觅食提供多样化栖息空间。更关键的是，需突破“园内生态”的边界，加快构建连通的蓝绿网络。通过生态廊道、踏脚石生境等，将分散的绿地斑块加以串联，使风、水、种子和动物能够穿行于城市之中。只有当生态系统形成网络，绿地才能超越单体景观，发挥调节微气候、缓解热岛效应及提升城市韧性的系统性功能。

在夯实生态基底的同时，还需通过“溶解”策略激发绿地的社会活力。首先，应最大限度提升绿地的可达性。打破封闭界面，将绿地深度嵌入市民的生活路径，让其不再是需要专程前往的目的地，而成为街道的自然延伸与社区的日常背景。当绿意从公园内部外溢至街角巷尾，市民才能真正实现推窗见绿、出门入园。其次，应强化绿地内部的停留条件与复合功能。活力不仅体现于空间中的流动，也体现在停留与交往中。舒适的座椅、友好的儿童活动空间、便利的老年设施及包容性的公共服务，将促使不同群体在此驻足并建立联系。绿地应成为露天剧场、自然教室与邻里客厅，承载文化展演、社区市集、自然教育及公共交流，让公共生活在绿色空间中重新生长。最后，绿地还应成为带动周边更新的“绿色引擎”。通过“公园+”模式，引入商业服务、文化设施和社区功能，使公园活力向外溢出，带动街区经济、社区氛围与空间品质的协同提升，实现生态价值向社会价值与经济价值的有效转化。

中国城市绿地建设的重点已由单纯“增绿”转向“激活”——既激活绿地自身，也激活其所嵌入的城市系统。重塑绿地活力，本质上是让自然重新在城市中生长，让社会重新在绿地中相遇，让生态与生活不再彼此分离。