

## Original Paper

# A Study on Cultural Tourism Development in Historic Districts from the Viewpoint of Social Innovation

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### Abstract

*The rapid rise of the cultural tourism industry has benefited from the strategic promotion of the integration of culture and tourism, a process that plays an indispensable and important role in enhancing the comprehensive competitiveness of the local economy, the cultural industry and the image of the city. The core of the charm of the historic district lies in the living inheritance and presentation of culture, which not only meets the aesthetic needs of the modern society, but is also closely related to the profound humanistic and historical development of the historic district. This study takes Taipei Dadaocheng Dihua Street as the main research object, adopts literature exploration and field observation method to conduct the study, and employs graphical inductive analysis to discover the humanistic landscape of Dihua Street in which the old and the new are intertwined. And using the social innovation theory as the theoretical support, it discusses in depth the innovative development direction of the historical district from the point of view of cultural and tourism integration.*

### Keywords

*historic districts, social innovation, cultural and tourism integration, sustainable development*

## 1. Introduction

In today's rapid process of globalization and urbanization, historic districts, as important carriers of urban cultural heritage, are facing the challenge of balancing conservation and development. At the beginning of the development of local cultural industry, its development strategy and orientation is to pay attention to the revitalization and utilization of tourism resources in order to achieve the purpose of upgrading the local economy, and then inject vitality into the place. However, with the fierce competition in the market and changes in the consumer market, the local cultural industry is gradually falling into a bottleneck, how to transform and upgrade the local cultural industry and find new

opportunities? How to create new economic momentum and transform traditional resources into market advantages? In recent years, the study of social innovation has evolved. Social innovation has been defined as innovative products or services that aim to meet social needs and have the opportunity to create new social relationships or collaborations (Altuna et al., 2015). How to effectively integrate this concept into the preservation and innovation of historic districts is an important topic in both academic and practical fields.

At the same time, the integration of culture and tourism is also an important means of promoting the growth of diversified benefits in the region, spreading regional characteristics and culture and other core work. Through the in-depth integration of the cultural industry and the tourism industry, tourists can perceive, understand and recognize the rich cultural knowledge during their travels, realizing culture as the soul of tourism and tourism as the carrier of culture. This integration not only enriches the connotation of the industry, but also promotes the sustainable development of the industry. In this context, many attractions are actively innovating, integrating historical and cultural elements into the cultural tourism industry, making tourism more fulfilling under the inculcation of cultural experience.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the advantages and problems in the development of historical districts from the viewpoint of social innovation, and to propose innovative development measures in anticipation of achieving a balance between cultural heritage protection and modern development. This paper introduces a case study of Dihua Street in Taipei City, Taiwan Province of China, and the discussion of innovative design methods, in order to conduct experiential observation of the district in an exploratory form, and to propose innovative strategies for related construction, to enhance the experiential value of its district, and to provide suggestions for the sustainable development of historical districts.

## **2. Conservation and Development of Historic Districts**

### *2.1 Preservation Strategies for Historic Districts*

Cultural heritage, as defined by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), derives from the 1972 Convention concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, and consists mainly of cultural objects, groups of buildings and sites of outstanding universal value. Cultural heritage is not only the remnants of past civilizations, but it is also an important expression of cultural diversity, local identity and the spiritual wealth of humankind, and as such, needs to be preserved and transmitted. The concept note on cultural heritage issued by the International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS) also emphasizes the importance of heritage and the importance of integrating cultural heritage into urban development (ICOMOS, 2016). Early policies focused more on the historical character of historic buildings and traditional architecture as heritage, and with economic development and increased civilization awareness, conservation planning

gradually moved away from single building conservation to the conservation of tangible and intangible heritage across the entire space (Zhao et al., 2022).

China's urban development has a history of several years, and the old urban areas in many places have accumulated a deep historical and cultural heritage, forming local historic districts with their own distinctive characteristics. The revised Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of Cultural Relics of the People's Republic of China in 2002 clarified the concept of historical and cultural districts. The call for the protection of the texture of historic districts is growing. In the definition of historic districts, blocks, buildings, towns and villages that concentrate on cultural relics or that can fully reflect the traditional features and local characteristics of a certain historical period (Lu et al., 2006; Ruan et al., 2006). It not only reflects the image of a city, but is also an important part of its cultural heritage.

## *2.2 Conflict and Balance in Historic District Development*

Well-preserved historic districts in urban development areas are special regional cultural spaces with traditional architectural features, regional culture, social and historical values and local characteristics, which are not only very distinctive and representative cultural landscapes in the urban landscape, but also important carriers to show the history and style of urban and regional development and change. With the development of the times and the intensification of regional economic differences, the issue of updating historic districts has been brought about, so the connotation of historic districts is no longer limited to the traditional spatial pattern of streets and landscape elements, but also covers the social structure, life style, cultural identity and other aspects.

The urban fabric of historic districts varies due to different local development processes and policies. With the acceleration of China's urbanization and modernization, historic districts are facing changes in their internal and external environments (Zhang et al., 2018). Many cities have begun to renovate historic districts (Kim, 2015). By preserving the historic fabric of an area, many cities hope that culturally oriented revitalization is used as a means to attract investment and consumption to stimulate the economy and promote development (Zhou et al., 2017).

However, with the rapid development of urban construction, historic districts generally show the phenomenon of commercialization and serious homogenization of district renovation (Zhao et al., 2022). Therefore, sustainable development should be considered along with urban construction. Historic cities possess assets of cultural and economic value with high potential for sustainable development (Girard, 2014). Since its introduction in the 1980s, the theory of sustainable development has gradually become an important topic of common concern on a global scale. It emphasizes the coordinated development of the economy, society and the environment.

### 3. Integration of Culture and Tourism

#### 3.1 Social Innovation Development in Historic Districts

In recent years, the concept of Social Innovation has gradually entered the academic and public discourse. There are many definitions of Social Innovation in the academic field, and its widely cited definition is: “A Social Innovation is a novel solution to a social problem that is more effective, efficient, sustainable, or just than existing solutions, and that creates value that is primarily attributable to society as a whole, rather than to the individual ((Phills, Deiglmeier, & Miller, 2008). Social Innovation is a difficult concept to pin down because social factors are hard to identify and the term “innovation” as it relates to “social” is a complex issue. Innovation is mainly understood and applied in terms of tangible goods or services (Oeji et al., 2019). Social Innovation consists of new ways of cooperation between individuals or organizations that generate new ideas that could at least be considered for implementation. In the context of regional development, such Social Innovation can have a positive impact on society, improve the quality of life and change social or power relations (Wirth et al., 2023).

In recent decades, historic districts with a rich cultural heritage in urban centers have developed rapidly and are characterized by overcrowding, lack of infrastructure, poor architectural quality, bad sites, etc. (Steinberg, 1996). Through the concept of Social Innovation, which cuts across the innovation aspect of the environmental experience, historic districts are transformed not only to preserve the traces of history, but also to provide the city with a lasting impetus, as well as immeasurable economic, social and environmental benefits. Incorporating modern features into the development of historic districts not only meets the needs of residents and visitors for modern services, but also provides opportunities for preservation and renewal of historic districts (Bian & Shi, 2024). An important aspect of Social Innovation in cultural tourism is how to revitalize the use or development of unique cultural tourism products in an innovative way, so that they can become an important part of the tourism industry, increase the attractiveness of tourism and also disseminate and protect cultural heritage.

#### 3.2 Creative Integration of Culture and Tourism

Many cities have developed leisure tourism based on historic buildings or cultural heritage as an economic strategy to create jobs, sources of income and develop the city as a whole, as well as to increase residents' access to local culture, with enhancing the quality of life (Lak & Hakimian, 2019). Historic districts experience a rich history of social life and contain a wealth of buildings and spaces that symbolize different periods of history. Not only reflects the image of a city, but also an important part of the historical heritage of the period (Jones & Bromley, 1996; Prieto et al., 2017). Due to the high cultural value of historic districts, a number of cultural industries with cultural tourism as their main business have begun to rise in historic districts. Tourism is an important value embodiment of historic districts in the demand of modern people for historic districts.

Cultural tourism as a tourism activity, the basic motivation of tourists is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural landscapes or products of the destination (Richards, 2018). Richards and van der Ark (2013) identified the dimensions of cultural consumption in cultural tourism in their research and analysis to illustrate that the type of vacation and the setting of the attraction have a strong influence on the type of cultural consumption, and to confirm that the physical environment has a significant impact on cultural tourism behavior. In the field of cultural tourism, Seyfi et al. (2020) developed a theoretical model of a memorable cultural tourism experience and proposed the main influencing factors of the experience, such as the pre-perceived significance of the experience, authenticity, participation, cultural exposure, gastronomic attraction, and service quality. The synthesis illustrates that the integration of culture and tourism requires the deep integration of culture into the tourism experience and the realization of a win-win situation for both culture and tourism through diverse cultural displays, creative product development, digital technology application, and community participation and sustainable development strategies.

#### **4. Methods**

##### *4.1 Case Study*

Dadaocheng Dihua Street is a traditional regional name located in the southwestern part of Datong District, Taipei City. In the first year of Xianfeng (1851), Lin Lantian, a native of Tongan County, Quanzhou Prefecture, moved to Dadaocheng from Keelung to escape pirate looting and set up a store, starting the commercial activities in Dadaocheng. As one of the first important transportation bases and major trading places for the Taipei port area, Dadaocheng also began to become the largest distribution center for Taiwan's northern and southern goods, traditional Chinese medicine, and fabrics. After the end of the Great War, the Dadaocheng area began to decline and lost its former grandeur, and the announcement of the implementation of the Dadaocheng Urban Plan in 2000 allowed for the preservation of the gorgeous architectural façade on both sides of Dihua Street, and the industries of Dadaocheng continue to this day. In recent years, urban regeneration policies driven by the conceptual core of cultural and creative orientation have also been practiced one after another.

##### *4.2 Research Methodology and Steps*

###### *4.2.1 Research Methods*

Many people think that the "observational method" is merely looking through the naked eye, but in reality, the observational method is a method of collecting data through the various human senses and then analyzing and interpreting the data in order to discover the "problem" hidden behind it. The value of observation is that it allows researchers to study in their native environment in order to understand things from their perspective (Baker, 2006).

The KJ method: A technique for analyzing data derived from Japanese ethnology. It also known as affinity diagram method and card method, is a comprehensive analysis method, which classifies and summarizes the similar attributes of disordered opinions and information through cards to obtain the interconnections between the attributes, so as to become an ordered system structure (Huang & Wang, 2022).

#### 4.2.2 Research Steps

The experiential observation process of this study is divided into:

- 1) Experiential observation: Three observers, who are doctoral students at the Institute of Creative Industry Design, National Taiwan University of Arts, jointly entered the Dihua Street area to conduct observation, and each person took photos in response to what he or she felt and thought, and a total of 150 photos were taken.
- 2) Photo Selection: Each person selected 14 photos with the most impressive and touching feelings among all the photos taken and shared the reasons for taking them. The photos were then categorized according to the type of photo, and divided into three major categories: street, store, and building; and then subdivided into 10 subcategories: (1) landscape, (2) signboard, (3) other, (4) garage, (5) clothing store, (6) grocery store, (7) food store, (8) imitation of a Western-style building, (9) Minnan-style, and (10) modernism, as shown in Figure 1.
- 3) Record of Thoughts: The three observers will select their favorite photos, 20 photos each, and the screened photos will vary according to each person's experience, personal memories and preferences, and explain the reasons for their choices, their thoughts, and their feelings about them, and will first extract the photos that do not have any written text. As in Figure 2.
- 4) Discussion on the types of experiential observation: The doctoral supervisor led a group of two other doctoral students and three observers to discuss, filter and categorize each photo and the reasons for it, and write down the types of experiential observation. The KJ method was used to reorganize and classify the text, and the attributes or keywords of the Dihua Street were rearranged according to the text pairs. According to the results of the discussion, the text was categorized into four directions: (1) Cultural Activities (2) Traditional Impressions (3) Contrast between the old and the new (4) Nostalgic Feelings, as shown in Figure 3.



**Figure 1. Experience  
Observing Photo  
Classification**

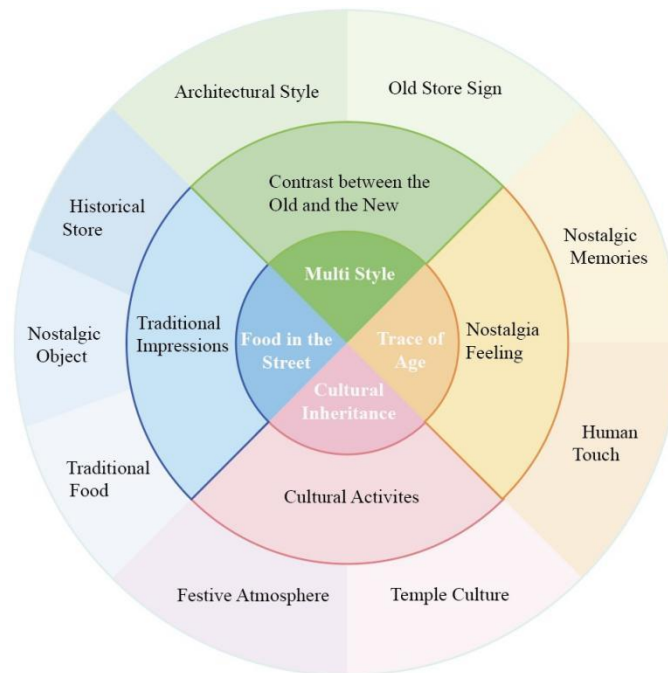


**Figure 2. Experience  
Observation Photo Screening  
Reasons**



**Figure 3. Text Attribute  
Classification**

5) Reorganization: After the classification of the groups, find out the implicit relationship, arrange them according to their relationship position, and then after continuous discussion and revision, subdivide them according to the four directions: (1) Temple Culture (2) Festival Atmosphere (3) Historical Store (4) Nostalgic Objects (5) Traditional Food (6) Old Store Sign (7) Architectural Style (8) Nostalgic Memories (9) Human Touch. Finally, the four thematic directions of tourism experience in Dihua Street (Figure 4) were identified as Multi Style, Cultural Inheritance, Trace of Age, and Food in the Street.



**Figure 4. Graphic Cluster Summarization of Experiential Themes in Dihua Street**

## 5. Findings and Discussion

### 5.1 Resource Advantages of Cultural and Tourism Integration Development in Dihua Street

#### 5.1.1 The fusion of multiple styles

Dadaocheng Dihua Street is located in the core of Taipei City, and is the most complete and historically significant existing neighborhood in Taipei City. The street carries rich cultural connotations and humanistic landscapes, just like a vivid historical scroll, showing people the prosperity and changes in the past. Due to the frequent overseas trade in Dihua Street in the past, it was influenced by the colonial style of European and American foreign houses, the Nanyang region, and foreign-style architecture such as that of Xiamen. In front of the original traditional buildings, the appearance of the European and American colonial buildings was added, forming the style of imitation foreign buildings. With the evolution of time, the streetscape, the appearance of the houses have changed greatly, from the simple Minnan-style stores, foreign-style buildings to the gorgeous baroque decorations, and then to the modernist style to replace the past baroque style, Dihua Street has become the most existing architectural styles. These buildings, which have survived the vicissitudes of a century, have witnessed the rise and fall of the Dihua Street area.

Nowadays, there are still traditional buildings in Dihua Street. These buildings are mostly red-brick tiled houses, showing an ancient and elegant style. The diversified styles of buildings and the newly built buildings in the surrounding area present a picture of old and new, which can be said to epitomize the history of architecture through the past, present and the west.

#### 5.1.2 Revitalization and Transmission of Traditional Culture

The cultural heritage of the Dewar's Quarter is profound, not only in its architectural style, but also in its religious beliefs, commercial activities, traditional cuisine and many other aspects.

Among them, in terms of religious beliefs, the Xiahai City God Temple is the most popular. Xiahai City God Temple was named after Xiacheng, who traveled from Quanzhou, Fujian Province to Taiwan in 1821, and took root as the patron saint of Taipei. Due to the presence of foreign powers at the time, commerce flourished on Dihua Street. The merchants were willing to subsidize more temple activities of the City God Temple, and the number of believers grew, making it one of the most incense-rich temples on the island of Taiwan.

Nowadays, although the commercial status of the Dihua Street area has diminished, many traditional stores still retain their traditional ways of doing business and goods. Moreover, Dihua Street also carries many traditional folk arts and crafts. Here you can find many stores that perpetuate printed fabrics, bamboo and wood products, as well as the surrounding area that still retains other traditional industries formed in the colony, like buttons and live printing. In the later reconstruction of the local creative project, many merchants were attracted to move in and sell ceramic artifacts and so on. Dihua Street has developed numerous cultural industries, including not only the traditional cloth industry, tea,



rice, and Chinese herbs, but also the traditional food and beverage culture of northern and southern goods and food ingredients. Dihua Street is the distribution center for Taiwan's north and south goods food. There are even high-priced medicinal herbs such as ginseng and bird's nest, which are integrated with traditional eating habits such as medicinal diets or dietary supplements (Yin, 2016). Therefore, many old traditional gourmet stores are celebrated here, and there is an inseparable connection between Dihua Street and traditional gourmet culture.

## *5.2 Problems in the Development of Cultural and Tourism Integration in Dihua Street*

### *5.2.1 Low Integration of Cultural Tourism Products*

As a well-known historical and cultural district in Taiwan, Taipei Dadaocheng Dihua Street attracts many tourists with its rich historical and cultural heritage and unique folk culture. However, at present, the cultural tourism products of Dihua Street have not yet formed a complete system and lack of systematic and scientific theoretical guidance, which to a certain extent restricts the development of its cultural tourism.

For the cultural tourism products of Dihua Street, most of them still remain in the traditional guide services, souvenirs and other surface level, lacking in-depth excavation of the history, culture and characteristics of Dihua Street. This leads to the difficulty for tourists to get in-depth experience during the tour and unable to fully feel the unique cultural charm of Dihua Street. At the same time, the singularity of product types also limits the choices of tourists, making it difficult for the cultural tourism products of Dihua Street to meet the needs of different tourists.

In addition, cultural tourism products in Dihua Street may be provided by a number of different organizations, businesses and individuals, lacking unified planning and management. This situation leads to a lack of coordination and coherence between products, and tourists may feel a fragmented experience during their visit.

### *5.2.2 Tourism Facilities Need to be Upgraded*

Taipei Dadaocheng Dihua Street, as a major tourist attraction in Taipei City, despite its unique history, culture and gastronomic charm, the current level of tourist facilities and services is not yet able to meet the diversified needs of tourists. Some infrastructures in the Dihua Street District, such as roads, walking paths, and signage systems, may be aging or imperfect. This not only affects the tourists' experience of visiting the area, but may also pose potential threats to their safety. The Dihua Neighborhood may be lacking in providing modern conveniences, such as no sitting-out facilities and inadequate e-payment facilities, which may reduce tourists' satisfaction. The quality of tourism services is crucial to visitor satisfaction and repeat business. Although the Dihua Street area is famous for its history, culture and cuisine, a single tourism product may not be able to satisfy the needs of different tourists. The lack of diversified tourism products, such as cultural experience activities and theme tours, may limit tourists' choices and satisfaction. Effective management and supervision are key to ensuring

the upgrading of tourism facilities and services. There may be deficiencies in the management and supervision of the Dihua Street, such as the lack of a unified management organization and an inadequate regulatory system, which may lead to problems in the maintenance of facilities and the quality of services.

### 5.2.3 Lack of Synergy with Neighboring Regions

The Dihua Street is dominated by traditional wholesale and retail businesses, but with the transformation and upgrading of the overall economy of Taipei City, the neighboring districts may have developed more new industries such as high-tech industries and cultural and creative industries. This mismatch in industrial structure leads to difficulties in creating effective synergy in economic development between Dihua Street and the surrounding areas. The traffic condition of Dihua Street and its surrounding areas may be relatively complicated, with narrow roads and heavy traffic flow, which to a certain extent restricts the communication and cooperation between Dihua Street and its surrounding areas. In planning and developing the city's economy, the government may have paid more attention to the development of new industries and regions, while giving relatively little policy support and orientation to traditional business districts such as the Dihua Street. This has, to a certain extent, affected the synergistic development of the Dihua Street with the surrounding areas.

As a commercial district with a long history, Dihua Street carries a rich cultural and historical heritage. However, in the pursuit of commercial development, the protection and utilization of these cultural and historical heritages may have been neglected, leading to conflicts and imbalances in the cultural and commercial development of the Dihua Street.

### 5.3 Suggested Measures for the Integration of Culture and Tourism in Dihua Street

#### (1) Adding an Introduction to History and Culture

For many tourists, they may only be attracted by the unique architectural style and bustling commercial atmosphere of the district, with little understanding of the historical background and cultural characteristics behind the district. Therefore, additional historical and cultural exhibitions and introductions have become an important way for visitors to gain a deeper understanding of the Dihua Street.

#### (2) Organization of Cultural Activities

In order to revitalize the neighborhood and attract more visitors, events such as traditional festival celebrations and folkloric performances have become essential initiatives.

#### (3) Optimization of Tour Routes

As the number of tourists continues to increase, the problem of tour route planning is becoming more and more prominent. In order to ensure that tourists can visit the various attractions smoothly, it is particularly important to optimize the tour route.

#### (4) Enhancement of Landscape Nodes

In order to enhance the attractiveness of this area, it is particularly important to strengthen the design of landscape nodes. First of all, the design of landscape nodes should focus on the coordination and unity with the overall appearance of the street. Secondly, the design of landscape nodes should be identifiable and attractive. At the same time, through the use of modern technology, such as light shows, interactive devices, etc., to create dynamic landscape nodes, attracting tourists to stop to watch and participate in the interaction.

#### (5) Improvement of Public Facilities and Navigation System

The improvement of public facilities is the foundation for enhancing the visitor experience. Streets should have additional infrastructure such as rest areas and restrooms so that visitors can comfortably enjoy the journey during their visit. Secondly, the optimization of the navigation system is also the key to enhancing the visitor experience. A clear and easy-to-understand guide system can help visitors better understand the history and culture of the street, the architectural style and the characteristics of each attraction.

### 6. Summary and Outlook

In the integrated development of culture and tourism, Social Innovation is an important driving force to realize cultural preservation, community participation, technological progress and sustainable development. This paper explores the sustainable development of the district from the theory of Social Innovation, finds out the problems of the district from field observation, and improves the renewal and construction strategy of Taipei Dadaocheng Dihua Street District from the perspective of cultural and tourism integration. Through continuous exploration and research, Social Innovation Theory provides a powerful framework for the development of historical districts. It can inject new vitality into the cultural tourism industry. Future research and practice can further phlegm how these innovations can be promoted and applied in different cultural contexts and urban development environments.

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