

The Catalytic Role of Soft Cities in Urban Development Systems

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ABSTRACT

In the context of Industry 4.0, the development of global cities has shifted from large-scale industrialization to intelligent and sustainable development. Contemporary urban researchers classify urban systems into three categories: hard cities, soft cities, and resilient cities. A hard city refers to the physical framework and infrastructure of urban space, while a soft city encompasses aspects of urban life such as art, culture, civilization, aesthetics, and humanities. On the other hand, resilient cities reflect the necessary plasticity for sustainable development. This article employs case study methods and comparative studies to analyse the positive impact of the development of soft city systems on hard and resilient cities. Through analysis, the following conclusions can be drawn. The development of soft cities has promoted the transformation of physical space planning and design in hard cities, promoted the renewal of resilient cities, and accelerated the integration of soft and hard cities, laying a foundation for the sustainable development of the entire city.

Keywords: *Soft cities, catalyst, urban development*

INTRODUCTION

The world's urban population is rapidly increasing, and urbanisation processes in countries around the world are accelerating at a swift pace. The urban development departments of various countries have shifted their focus to the construction of spiritual spaces within cities. Compared to the construction of physical urban spaces, the spiritual space of a city shapes its soul. How to make the soul of a city interesting is a topic of interest to every urban scholar. According to the chairman of the London City Research Centre, the development and improvement of soft city systems is capable of promoting the coordination and integration of physical and spiritual spaces in contemporary cities (Ma, 2021), . Through the study of the article, explore the positive effects of different types of public art in the development of

soft cities, and explore the significance of the integration and symbiosis of soft cities, hard cities, and resilient cities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The study of soft cities has been extensively researched by urban scholars, architects, and public artists in both China and Europe. In 2017, Professor Wang Zhong from the China Central Academy of Fine Arts introduced the concept of "soft cities" in his speech titled Art Leading Urban Innovation. Wang (2017) believes that "soft cities focus more on the soul of the city, and when it comes to the soul of the city, art undoubtedly plays a spiritual role." Professor Wu (2018) from the Communication University of China argues that the core of soft city culture lies in inheriting urban memory, activating urban vitality, changing urban quality, and enhancing people's happiness. Chinese urban scholar Tai Jie (2016) believes that the significance of constructing an art city lies in the integration of art and the city, making the urban art space system flexible and variable.

In 1999, the UK's Urban Task Force, led by renowned architect Lord Richard Rogers, completed a research report titled *Towards an Urban Renaissance*, also known as the *Urban Yellow Book*. The core content of the report focuses on how to maintain urban sustainability under the dominance of culture, and it encompasses the characteristics of a soft city system. This article draws on the perspectives of the three scholars mentioned above, but primarily analyses the positive effects of the development of soft city systems on urban development through case studies of public art in soft cities.

METHODOLOGY

As mentioned above, this paper is a comprehensive academic study that thoroughly reviewed a large amount of literature. It collected extensive background data to examine the current development status of the soft city and to demonstrate the logic and rationality of the integration of soft cities with hard cities and resilient cities, thereby laying a foundation for achieving the research objectives of this article.

Through the comparative analysis of typical public art cases in different countries around the world, this method aims to demonstrate the value and significance of public art as the spiritual carrier of the soft city. In conducting this research project, the researcher primarily employed the comparative research method. Firstly, with a clear comparative objective in mind, the researcher selected typical cases as the focus of this study. These cases originate from diverse countries and regions, representing distinct cultures.

The purpose of the comparison is multifaceted: to uncover the commonalities and differences among these public art pieces, evaluate the effectiveness of different design or implementation strategies, explore the adaptability of public art in varying environments, and delve into their roles in the development of soft cities. Based on practical considerations, the researcher identifies the comparative dimensions or criteria. These encompass artistic form, creative concept, social impact, audience interaction, funding investment, geographical location, and cultural background, among others.

For each selected public art case, the researcher gathers relevant data and information to facilitate subsequent comparative analysis. This data encompasses artist profiles, work descriptions, implementation processes, audience feedback, media coverage, and social impact assessments. The researcher then proceeds to organise and analyse these public art cases. This involves quantitatively or qualitatively assessing each case's performance across the selected dimensions and employing appropriate statistical methods or theoretical frameworks to compare the differences and similarities among different cases.

In the results presentation and discussion phase, the researcher conveys the outcomes of the comparative analysis in written form and engages in an in-depth examination and interpretation of the findings. During the inference process, given the specificity of the research objects, the researcher refers to expert opinions and literature reviews to enhance the reliability and persuasiveness of the conclusions. By further contrasting the research outcomes with existing research achievements, the researcher validates and deepens the conclusions, analysing the reasons behind the differences among cases, elucidating the position of public art in soft cities, and exploring the significance of soft city development for contemporary urbanisation.

ANALYSIS

The birth of "Soft city".

In April 1919, the Bauhaus School was founded in Weimar, Germany. Despite its short existence of only 14 years due to various reasons such as war and politics, the core philosophy of Bauhaus has continued to influence architecture until today. The "internationalism" architectural design concept and style of Bauhaus have gained worldwide popularity, directly impacting the process of global urbanisation.

In 1937, the first and third directors of the Bauhaus School, Hannes Meyer and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, respectively, visited the United States and introduced the Bauhaus architectural design principles. Subsequently, these ideas spread worldwide. In particular, Mies van der Rohe's promotion of the Chicago skyscraper model marked a new beginning in urban planning in the United States, which was later emulated by many countries around the world. Additionally, Bauhaus students also played a significant role in promoting Bauhaus-style architecture worldwide. For example, the establishment of the White City in Tel Aviv, Israel in the 1930s was influenced by a group of Bauhaus graduates who visited Israel and spread the Bauhaus architectural style in Tel Aviv. Among them were students of Hans Meyer, Le Corbusier, and Erich Mendelsohn. Not only that, but this Bauhaus architectural model and style have also influenced Asian countries such as South Korea, Japan, Singapore and the cities in China such as Shanghai, Beijing and Hong Kong.

As the modernist architectural complexes continue to be constructed, new postmodernist architecture is emerging in rebellion. The process of global urbanisation is accelerating at an even faster pace in the 21st century. While humans are constructing physical and hard spaces in cities, developed countries such as the United States and some European countries are facing the dilemma of "urban malaise," such as gentrification and hollowing out of cities. Of course, such problems also exist in cities in Asia, the Americas, and Africa. In this historical period, soft cities have emerged as a remedy for various problems in contemporary urban development. In other words, the birth of soft cities is a product of the highly developed global urbanisation in the 21st century.

The Definition of Soft City

The concept of soft city was formally introduced by the Dutch firm, Van Gellecum in their publication titled *Soft City: Building Density for Everyday Life*, authored by renowned Danish urban planner David Sim and published on August 20, 2019. This book closely aligns with the subject matter of my research and describes how, in the context of rigid urban planning and prioritisation of physical space, the "soft" elements of soft cities can be utilised to enhance the well-being, quality of life, and future aspirations of urban residents (Sim, 2019). However at the 2016 Beijing International Design Week, Ma (2021) explained in Chinese cultural terms what "soft cities" and "hard cities" are through the project "Exploring the possibility of urban renewal and regeneration through the practice of Qinglong Hutong." Cities, being at the forefront and serving as living places for human civilization, not only bring joy to people but, more importantly, provide a sense of security. The two factors of 'safety and happiness' have been defined by Aristotle as the purpose and significance of city (Lefebvre, 2008).

Undoubtedly, soft cities are built upon the foundation of physical hard cities. The physical aspects of a city provide us with buildings, urban transportation systems, and more. Soft cities, on the other hand, encompass the cultural, historical, artistic, customs, traditions, and heritage elements. These elements are not abstract but exist in the form of urban activities, public art, and aesthetic education. They can provide much-needed spiritual comfort to urban residents navigating through high-rise buildings and crowded traffic.

Additionally, soft urban design has a strong artistic creation attribute, emphasising the integration of human sensory experiences to establish a city image and atmosphere that is structurally cohesive and easily recognizable (Guo & Qin, 2002).

The Spiritual Vehicles of Soft Cities

As mentioned earlier, the definition and characteristics of soft cities have been discussed. The value of soft cities is realised through their spiritual carriers, which serve as both the foundation and the soul of soft cities. These spiritual carriers can be materialised through urban public art or manifested in the form of process-driven urban activities. Wu (2018) believes that soft city culture integrates deep cultural exploration with the innovative expression of art, infiltrating urban construction and development from six aspects: art brand, art space, art facilities, art industry, art activities, and art policies. This approach aims to inherit urban memory, revitalise urban life, enhance the quality of the city, and elevate people's sense of happiness.

Urban Public Art

Strictly speaking, public art is not solely a product of urban civilization. It can also be found in many rural areas, wilderness, and deserts. However, in order to maximise its public nature, urban spaces serve as excellent vehicles for public art. In a broad sense, public art refers to the art that exists in public spaces and places, such as sculptures, murals, installations, and photography within these spaces.. Sun (2022), a renowned Chinese theorist and practitioner of public art, mentioned in his book *Concepts and Methods of Public Art* that, firstly, the premise of public art is civic society and public space, which emerged only after modern times. Secondly, public art is a contemporary cultural form, and its emergence is directly related to the rise of contemporary popular culture. Thirdly, the social function of public art is reflected in maximising public participation and interaction, which is highly consistent with the changes in contemporary cultural and artistic values. Lastly, from the perspective of the art system, due to its close relationship with society and the public, public art can be considered an institutionalised art form .

As a spiritual embodiment of the soft city, how can public art in the city realise its value? In his book *The Third Way: The Renewal of Social Democracy*, British sociologist Giddens (1998) stated, "The overall goal of the politics of the Third Way should aim to assist citizens in navigating the major transformations of our time, including globalisation, the transformation of personal life, and our relationship with nature."

In conclusion, urban public art is not just about beautifying and decorating urban spaces but serves as a medium that enhances the individual value of urban residents in the context of contemporary culture and integrates their individual worth with the places they live. With this mindset and approach, public art becomes a beacon that illuminates urban life, bringing brightness and hope to urban spaces, and fostering the vitality and sustainable development of the city .

Analysis of Sculptural Urban Public Art Case Studies

‘Cloud Gate’

Cloud Gate is a public art sculpture located in Millennium Park in Chicago, USA. It was designed by British-Indian artist Anish Kapoor and is named "Cloud Gate" because its shape resembles a bean, symbolising the gateway to Chicago.

Cloud Gate is made up of 168 stainless steel plates that are assembled, welded, and polished to create a seamless, smooth surface. The craftsmanship is nearly perfect, giving the sculpture the appearance of a misplaced extraterrestrial bean or a transparent water droplet. Standing at 9 metres tall, the sculpture features an arched entrance that allows visitors to walk into it. As they approach the sculpture, they can also appreciate the artwork in its entirety, as its perfect form, craftsmanship, and design have garnered international acclaim.

However, the uniqueness of Cloud Gate extends beyond its form and craftsmanship. The entire public art piece resembles a three-dimensional funhouse mirror, reflecting both the urban landscape and the greenery of the park on its curved stainless-steel surface. Three-quarters of its exterior reflects the sky, while also reflecting the skyscrapers of Chicago and the figures of visitors. When people stand in the appropriate position in front of Cloud Gate, their reflections overlap and appear to flow like liquid, adding vitality and energy to the entire park plaza.



Figure 1. Cloud Gate Public Art

(Source: https://www.sohu.com/a/162294264_743985,2017)

‘1.8’ at Oxford Circus in London

If Anish Kapoor's *Cloud Gate* public art piece represents the fusion of humans, cities, and nature, the American public artist Janet Echelman creates a new space in the sky above cities. She creates a paradise that belongs to humanity, where the sky, clouds, and the city come together. As the artist herself said, "The sky of nature is the canvas of my artwork, because my art is born and exists outdoors, breathing the fresh air like we do (Echelman, 2017). Especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, it provides a place for people to share authentic experiences while staying safe."

Janet Echelman's public art creations primarily use fishing nets as the main material, along with lighting equipment, cables, and other auxiliary materials. Her creative team consists of a diverse group of experts, including artists, scientists, software engineers, textile developers, landscape lighting designers, urban planners, architects, structural engineers, aerospace engineers, and data computing engineers.

In 2016, Janet Echelman's team created the famous public art piece "1.8" at Oxford Circus in London. This artwork not only emphasises the relationship between the city and nature in a novel way, but also offers the public the opportunity to interact with it. People can use their smartphones to select colours and patterns for the artwork and even create mesmerising ripples by sliding their fingers. This remarkable piece of art allows local residents and visitors to open their hearts and freely and joyfully spend time in the city square, enjoying rare comfort and happiness.



Figure 2. Public art named 1.8
(Source: <https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/33923000>, 2018)

A Day in the Life of Shenzhen People

In Shenzhen, China, there is a famous public art case worth exploring and analysing, and this public art piece is called *A Day of Shenzhen People*. It was planned, designed, and created by the Shenzhen Sculpture Academy. The sculpture group and relief wall are located in the southern residential area of the Yuanling Community in Shenzhen, China. It is enclosed by Hongli Road, Yuanling San Road, and Yuanling East Road, covering an area of 6487 square metres. Holding significant influence not only within China but also in the global public art community.

This public art installation showcases the social life and events related to the social life of various industries and social classes in the city of Shenzhen on November 29, 1999. The artwork consists of a group of realistic statues and graphic reliefs that vividly depict the diverse range of individuals in the city, including high school students, job seekers, bank employees, elderly people doing morning exercises, janitors, insurance agents, public servants, stock investors, doctors, children, women holding dogs, and foreign software engineers.

Each sculpture is a replica of a real person who served as a model, and they are made of bronze, meticulously crafted to be lifelike. Beside each statue, there is a plaque that displays the person's real name, age, occupation, place of origin, and when they arrived in Shenzhen, providing personal information about each individual. The background of the group sculpture consists of several differently sized black polished granite reliefs, which were computer-carved and duplicated. The reliefs mainly depict the life details of "that day," such as the layout of the Shenzhen Special Zone Daily newspaper, the weather forecast, air quality report, stock market trends, prices of agricultural and sideline products, TV

program schedule, Chinese football league results, foreign exchange rates, as well as a map of Shenzhen, etc. This is the second part of the content of the main sculpture of "A Day in the Life of Shenzhen People." The theme of this sculpture strongly aligns with the goal of public art—serving the masses in civic society. The sculpture of each ordinary citizen enables the residents to search for their own reflections in the artwork, filling the modern metropolis with warmth. Through the artwork itself, the behaviour, language, and art of the city are preserved, giving it the function of recording urban history.



Figure 3. Public Art of “A Day in the Life of Shenzhen People”
(Source: https://news.sohu.com/a/579260698_121123778, 2022)

Activity-based Urban Public Art Analysis

According to Liu et al. (2011) the concept of art cities is to improve human's ability to regulate, restore, maintain, and grow urban culture and civilization systems. This is done by integrating people, culture, environment, and art, and achieving mutual benefit and symbiosis. Art activities are one of the effective ways to make cities full of vitality

Comprehensive Category: Edinburgh International Arts Festival

The Edinburgh International Arts Festival was founded in 1947 and is the oldest and largest arts festival in the world. It invites top professionals and talented newcomers from various fields such as music, dance, and theatre to participate. The annual international arts festival takes place in Edinburgh, United Kingdom, in August. It is a comprehensive festival that encompasses music, theatre, dance, and visual arts. It attracts a large number of tourists and is considered one of the world's top five arts festivals. During this grand artistic event, Edinburgh not only benefits from an economic revenue of 20 million pounds but also provides 4,000 job opportunities for its residents. Additionally, cultural squares, the Scottish National Gallery, and the Scottish Royal Museum in Edinburgh showcase and accelerate updates of exhibitions during the festival to present a more vibrant city culture and exhibits to tourists. The author believes that public participation in art festivals has brought positive development to the city's economy, culture, activities, and the emotions of residents.



Figure 4. The Edinburgh International Arts Festival

(Source: <https://news.cri.cn/2022-09-06/2929f612-dee0-809a-730d-bfe0cd3cd08c.html>, 2022)

Art Category: "Infecting the City" Cape Town Public Art Festival, Münster Sculpture Festival

In the theme slogan of the Cape Town Public Art Festival, it is evident that the festival is closely connected to the city. Since its inception in 2007, the festival has adopted the slogan "Infecting the City" and has attracted numerous artists and the public. The festival showcases a wide range of creative and exhibition formats, including performance art, public art installations, and performing arts. The aim of the festival is to actively engage the public in public activities and often presents challenging, innovative perspectives on political, racial, and gender issues.

Although the theme of the Cape Town Public Art Festival is somewhat linked to current events, during the week-long event, various forms of art such as performances, music, dance, theatre, visual arts, installations, and other forms of art migrate from theatres and galleries to public spaces in the central business district of Cape Town. These artworks are displayed in squares, street corners, parks, and other locations, offering free displays for the citizens and striving to involve the widest range of people possible to share the inspiration and creativity that art brings. The Cape Town Public Art Festival not only fosters a sense of pride among Capetonians for their city but also prompts them to reflect on urban development and the concept of the "city of tomorrow."



Figure 5. Cape Town Public Art Festival

(Source: https://www.d-arts.cn/article/article_info/key/MTE5ODczNDczNDiEz4msr6mgcw.html, 2019)

The Münster Sculpture Festival and the Cape Town Public Art Festival have some differences. The Münster Sculpture Festival is solely dedicated to the dialogue between public sculpture works and the city. This art event, related to public art, started in 1977 and was founded by Kasper König, a German. It enjoys a worldwide reputation.

The theme of the exhibition, City Public Art Program, has been in use since its creation in 1977. Artists from around the world use the artistic language of contemporary sculpture to explore and analyse the impact of outdoor sculpture works on physical space. They also reflect on the connections between public art, the city, city residents, and nature. Moreover, the Münster Sculpture Festival also provides forward-thinking considerations for the city's development. Many artists participating in the sculpture festival envision future spaces and propose thoughts on future human life through their art.

Throughout its development, the Münster Sculpture Festival has not only used public art works to awaken people's attention to future life and future cities but the artworks themselves have also become a unique landscape of Münster. They have even become the city's symbols and distinctive geographic landmarks.



Figure 6. Münster Sculpture Festival

(Source: https://www.sohu.com/a/164070823_99928580, 2017)

Music Category: Primavera Sound Festival in Spain

The Primavera Sound Festival takes place every year at the end of May and beginning of June in Barcelona, the second-largest city in Spain. Many famous bands from around the world such as Lou Reed, Motorhead, The White Stripes, Neil Young, The Cure, and Jamiroquai participate in this music festival. The festival creates an atmosphere that permeates the entire city. It not only features melodic music, live performances by bands, energetic dancing, and enthusiastic activities by the audience but also brings about a sense of longing for a better life and anticipation for the future for the city's residents and spectators. Additionally, the lighting prepared for the festival allows the people in Barcelona to see their city and streets in a whole new way, sparking thoughts on the development, planning, and evolution of future spaces in the city.



Figure 7. Primavera Sound Festival

(Source: <https://www.smalloranges.net/primavera-sound-barcelona-2022/>, 2022)

FINDINGS

Through the analysis of public art and urban activities, which symbolise the carriers of the soft city spirit, it can be understood that a soft city increases urban vitality through art or artistic activities, shapes the city's brand, records the city's history, and encourages residents to actively care for their living space. This brings a sense of honour and pride to the city's residents. Moreover, the soft city also has a unique catalytic function.

The Chinese scholar Lu (2017) compared the role of the soft city system in the development process of the entire urban system to the "catfish effect." This term originally described how catfish, by agitating the environment for their smaller fish prey, also invigorate the survival instincts of these fish. Similarly, in the context of urban development, the catfish effect represents how the growth of soft cities both spurs and complements the advancement of "hard cities" and "resilient cities." The convergence of these three city types aims to foster a harmonious and stable urban ecological civilization.

Promoting the transformation of physical space planning and design in hard cities

In the preceding sections of the article, the author has discussed the concept and significance of hard cities. The physical space of hard cities provides residents with the necessary foundations for survival. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, human needs progress from basic physiological needs to self-actualization needs (Maslow, 1943). The development of human urban civilization has spanned a long period of time. Whether it be the ancient city of Memphis in Egypt, the cities of Mesopotamia in Iraq, or the ancient cities of the Shang Dynasty in the Yellow River Basin of China, all serve as witnesses to the dialogue and integration between humans and cities. In his book *London: The Biography*, British writer Peter Ackroyd (2016) writes, "London is a human body, a strange and remarkable form. This image can be traced back to the image of the city god, a mysterious body with the head of Jesus Christ and the rest made up of citizens. London is also imagined as a young man, stretching out his arms in a gesture of liberation. This image, though derived from a Roman bronze statue, vividly depicts a city with grand ambitions and an ever-present spirit of exploration and confidence. The phrase 'London's heart beats warmly' may find its validation here. The city's streets and alleys resemble tiny blood vessels, while its parks are like vital organs. In the autumn mist and rain, the stones and pebbles of the old streets glisten like blood flowing. While this passage metaphorically portrays the city as a living being, it emphasises that a truly warm-hearted city has both spirit and soul."

The development of a city is similar to the growth of a person. The spiritual well-being of individuals can enhance their physical immunity and promote overall health. In modern hard cities, the physical space is generally composed of existing buildings, transportation networks, as well as continuously updated and reconstructed structures and roadways. Almost every modern city is a reconstructed historical narrative. In the process of urban renewal and reconstruction, the core elements of a soft city play a determining role in shaping the city's spatial structure. Firstly, the core ideology of a soft city determines the scale and direction of physical space renewal. The historical and cultural aspects, as well as urban customs and habits, influence the construction of physical space in hard cities. Whether a city's physical space is entirely modernised or blends modern and traditional elements depends on the core elements of a soft city. Moreover, the creation of a city's skyline is closely related to these elements. Taking the ancient city of Xi'an in China as an example, thirteen dynasties had their capital there. Since the acceleration of urbanisation in China, Xi'an has been constructing high-rise buildings. The original low-rise buildings in the city, such as the Bell Tower and Drum Tower, city walls, and the Big Wild Goose Pagoda, are prominent features of the city's skyline and iconic landmarks. However, the construction of mid-rise and high-rise buildings has disrupted the traditional city skyline and obstructed visual corridors. From this perspective, the core elements of a soft city should guide and correct the creation of physical space in hard cities.

Promoting the regeneration and sustainable development of resilient cities

It is important to ensure their adaptability and ability to withstand environmental changes, climate variations, natural disasters, and the spread of infectious diseases within an industrialised context. Chinese urban scholar Tai Jie (2016) believes that constructing an art city is significant because it allows for direct interaction between art and urban form. Art is not only a "non-standard" tool for improving the quality of urban space but also influences urban daily life behaviour, creating an urban art space system full of elasticity and variability. Resilient cities serve as the foundation for creating a sense of security for urban residents, which is a fundamental requirement for each individual. Simply constructing buildings and solidifying their foundations does not guarantee a sense of security for a city. It is a collective effort that involves various interconnected aspects of the urban system. Guided by the principles of a soft city, the values and humanistic ideas of a city will influence the planning processes, such as determining the city's scale, expansion progress, and rate. They will also impact the division of residential, commercial, and industrial areas, and even influence the construction of social and public healthcare buildings within the city. The global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 has served as a warning for the need to prioritise the construction of public healthcare facilities within urban development systems. Every resilient city, focused on health and sustainable development, should find answers within the core principle of a soft city - the concept of putting people first. This involves integrating public healthcare buildings with preventive and treatment functions into the physical planning of the city.

Promoting the integration and development of soft cities and hard cities

From the perspective of dialectical materialism, the world is a constantly evolving and changing whole, which is composed of contradictions and opposites. In the process of urban development, soft cities and hard cities are also a combination of opposites and unity. Hard cities encompass the physical aspects of cities such as buildings, public transportation, and infrastructure, which are purely material forms. On the other hand, soft cities consist of elements like history, culture, art, and philosophy. Soft cities are predominantly shaped by ideology, but they are not purely ideological. Within the soft city system, art, for example, is a material attribute, as seen in public art that includes architecture, sculptures, paintings, installations, and urban events. How to transform from a functional city to a humanistic one is a question that our urban builders should prioritise today (Wang, 2016, p.28). Through the analysis of samples from the world's urban development systems, it can be concluded that soft cities and hard cities are inseparable. The ideological aspect of soft cities changes with the development of the times, directly influencing the planning and implementation of hard city construction. This ideology promotes the formation of a combination of healthy, eco-friendly, and safe cities. As human civilization advances, the development of soft cities will exert a strong attraction, drawing hard cities towards them and forming a harmonious and intelligent city that modern civilization requires.

CONCLUSION

The development of cities hinges on urban design, which plays an essential role in constructing "rationality" and "legitimacy" for the behaviour of urban governments in their development efforts, ultimately contributing to the smooth operation of the development process (Yang, 2016). However, urban development is a comprehensive process. This article mentions the concept of the catfish effect, originally used to describe how catfish disturb their environment to enhance the survival skills of other fish. To some extent, this concept is not entirely appropriate when discussing soft cities. The development of soft cities does not create a sense of crisis for hard cities or resilient cities. Instead, it acts as a catalyst, organically integrating soft cities, hard cities, and resilient cities as a whole. Therefore, in the urban development process, it is crucial to prioritise and strengthen the development and renewal of the soft city system. A well-functioning soft city system can guide and lead the construction of hard cities and resilient cities, ensuring the continuous, healthy, and stable development of the entire urban system. Ultimately, this will create a healthy and intelligent city for human civilization.

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