Research on the Spatial Renovation Design of the 798 Art District and Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art Guided by Gordon Cullen's Methodology

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Abstract. This research analyzes the spatial renovation of Beijing's 798 Art District and the Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art (UCCA), using Gordon Cullen's urban design principles. It examines the transition of the 798 District from an industrial complex to an art hub, highlighting its alignment with Cullen's concepts like 'serial vision' and 'sense of place'. This transformation blends industrial heritage with contemporary art to create a dynamic environment. The study also looks at how UCCA's spatial redesigns have enhanced its sense of place and visitor experience, in line with Cullen's principles. A comparative analysis between the 798 District and UCCA shows the synergy of old industrial elements with modern artistic interventions, respecting historical context. The study discusses how design elements in these spaces align with Cullen's vision, emphasizing the importance of these methodologies in urban redevelopment and cultural heritage preservation. This paper contributes to understanding sustainable urban redevelopment and the application of urban design theories.

1 Introduction

This research examines the spatial renovation of Beijing's 798 Art District and UCCA, using Gordon Cullen's urban design methods. Cullen's work in 'Townscape' focused on the visual and experiential aspects of urban spaces, advocating for designs that connect with people. The study explores the application of Cullen's principles to the transformation of industrial spaces into cultural hubs. The 798 Art District, formerly industrial, now symbolizes artistic revival, while UCCA has become a centre for contemporary art.

This study aims to explore how their redesign aligns with Cullen's ideas, like 'serial vision'—the experience of moving through a space, and 'sense of place'—creating distinct environments. The study analyses the architectural evolution of these spaces, considering how each phase has changed both the physical and experiential aspects. It aims to contribute to the discourse on sustainable urban design, offering insights and perspectives that are pertinent to architects, urban planners, and cultural curators engaged in the dynamic field of urban redevelopment.

2 Literature Review

We can construct a narrative that seamlessly connects Gordon Cullen's methodology with the specific case studies of the 798 Art District and Ullens Centre, while also incorporating various scholarly perspectives:

Miller's 'Urban Composition' (2018) delves into how 'serial vision' has been implemented in modern city planning, emphasizing sensory experiences. In contrast, Zhang (2020) critically evaluates Cullen's methodologies from the standpoint of modern Asian cities, suggesting necessary adaptations for high-density urban environments. This dialogue between theory and practice is further enriched by comparative studies like those of Borea (2023), who examine the transformation of Madrid's Matadero art district, revealing strategies pertinent to the 798 District, particularly in merging historical architecture with modern art. Similarly, Albannaa's (2019) research assesses the socio-economic impacts of such transformations, using London's Tate Modern as a benchmark. These global perspectives provide a framework for understanding the application of Cullen's principles in spaces like the 798 Art District, as seen in Thompson’s (2022) analysis of New York's High Line, which highlights how urban redevelopment can alter visitor experiences. Additionally, Liu (2023) addresses the specific challenges of applying these principles within the rapidly evolving urban landscape of Beijing, with a focus on the 798 Art District, underlining the complex interplay between urban design, cultural heritage, and contemporary art.

This review synthesizes these diverse viewpoints, underscoring the adaptability of Cullen's principles to different cultural contexts, and identifies a significant gap in applying these methodologies to non-Western urban environments. The insights gathered suggest a nuanced approach to applying Cullen's principles in spaces like the
798 Art District and Ullens Centre, emphasizing contextually sensitive design, crucial for urban planners and cultural policymakers in revitalizing contemporary art spaces.

3 Retrospective Study

3.1 History of 798 Art District

The 798 Art District, located in the Dashanzi area of Jiuxianqiao Street, Chaoyang District, Beijing, also known as the Dashanzi Art District, is situated on the premises of the former state-owned 798 Factory and other old electronics industry factories. As shown in Fig.1 and Fig.2, the joint factory exhibits a quintessential Bauhaus style, epitomizing the perfect fusion of practicality and simplicity.

![Fig. 1. Aerial Sketch of 798 Art District](image1)

(a) Road Network  (b) Building Protection Grade

(c) Mainstream Line  (d) Public Space

![Fig. 2. Spatial analysis of 798 Art District](image2)

In the 798 Art District's regeneration strategy, the factory's original Bauhaus-style façade and spatial structure are preserved, while implementing a comprehensive interior planning strategy. As shown in Fig.3, take the core area of 798 Art District for example, the renovation of the factory buildings, while maintaining existing spatial functions, also incorporates historical elements, manifesting artistic heritage within these historical structures. The external treatment of each building is methodically organized through engaging flow lines, effectively leveraging the connections between various zones of the park and showcasing the distinctive style of 798, characterized by diverse industrial elements.

![Fig. 3. Renovation of Core Area of 798 Art District](image3)

3.2 History of Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art

The Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art (UCCA) in Beijing's 798 Art District is a prime example of adaptive reuse, transforming industrial heritage into a vibrant cultural space. Since opening in 2007, UCCA has seen three major renovations, each reflecting changes in art museum operations and the relationship between architecture and the urban setting. Initially the Big Kiln Workshop, designed by German architects, it transitioned from industrial use to an artistic hub.

This journey began with UCCA 1.0, under the dual leadership of Fei Dawei and Jérome Sans, where the space transformed into a 'white box' gallery, maintaining the integrity of its industrial architecture while fostering an immersive art experience. The subsequent phase, UCCA 2.0, led by Philip Tinar i, saw a redesign of the entrance and façade by Yung Ho Chang, symbolizing a more inclusive and public-facing approach. The most recent phase, UCCA 3.0, initiated after the departure of its founders and under the guidance of OMA Architectural Services, brought a comprehensive architectural overhaul. This phase reconfigured the spatial organization, emphasizing the public nature of the space and integrating it more seamlessly with the urban environment. Throughout these transformations, UCCA has not only maintained its historical essence but also evolved to meet contemporary artistic and cultural needs, establishing itself as a dynamic and influential model in the field of private museum operations and architectural innovation.

4 Analysis based on Gordon Cullen's research Methodology

4.1 Serial Vision

In the 798 Art Park, the embodiment of Gordon Cullen's 'serial vision' is vividly apparent, creating a rich tapestry of spatial experiences that guide visitors through a constantly evolving landscape. As one navigates through the park, each turn and corridor unfolds into a new visual narrative, adhering to Cullen's principle where the journey itself becomes a story. This experience is further enhanced by the striking contrast between the stark, linear forms of its industrial architecture and the organic, often whimsical elements of contemporary art. Such juxtapositions establish a rhythmic flow in the visitor's journey, quintessential to the concept of 'serial vision'. Moreover, as visitors traverse the park, they encounter layers of history, seamlessly transitioning from the site's industrial past to its current status as a vibrant art haven. Each section of the park narrates a different chapter of this historical and cultural evolution, demonstrating Cullen's principle in action. Additionally, the integration of art within this space is not merely about placement but about creating a symbiosis between art and environment. The installations interact with their surroundings, offering interactive moments that dynamically alter perceptions as one moves through the park, further exemplifying the
4.2 Sense of Place

The 'Sense of Place' in both the 798 Art District and the UCCA exemplifies a harmonious integration of historical preservation and contemporary adaptation, resonating with Gordon Cullen's urban design principles. In the 798 Park, the meticulous preservation of its industrial roots, evident through Bauhaus-style architecture, old factory buildings, and machinery, creates a sense of authenticity and historical continuity. This industrial heritage, blended with contemporary art in the form of galleries, studios, and installations, forms a unique aesthetic and cultural environment, symbolizing an artistic renaissance amidst industrial remnants. The park's transformation into a cultural hub mirrors Beijing's broader cultural evolution, with the addition of cafes, bookstores, and communal spaces enhancing its urban cultural oasis vibe. The spatial diversity within the park, ranging from tranquil tree-lined paths to vibrant areas bustling with public art, enriches its sense of place, embodying Cullen's vision of a multifaceted urban environment.

UCCA's architectural transformation respects its industrial past while accommodating contemporary art exhibitions. The retention of high ceilings, open spaces, and industrial textures contributes to a unique environment that mirrors its historical and contemporary roles. The exhibitions often create a dialogue with the architectural elements, fostering an immersive visitor experience characterized by discovery and engagement. UCCA's integration into the 798 District, serving as a cultural anchor, further solidifies its sense of place, contributing to the district's identity as a contemporary art hub. Collectively, these elements in both the 798 Park and UCCA converge to create distinctive environments that are more than just spaces; they are destinations with their own unique, resonant atmospheres, epitomizing Cullen's 'Sense of Place' where the physical environment, its history, and its current usage coalesce.

4.3 Enclosure and Space Definition

In the 798 Industrial Art Park and UCCA, the concept of "Enclosure and Space Definition" is masterfully realized through the creative adaptation of industrial architecture. The 798 Park skillfully employs its industrial structures, such as towering factory walls and large gates, to craft a sense of enclosure. This creates a distinct separation from the urban environment, immersing visitors in an artistic realm. The park offers a variety of spatial experiences, from vast open areas for public events to intimate spaces for smaller exhibitions or reflection. Pathways and sightlines are strategically designed to guide visitors through a journey, enhanced by the fusion of architectural and artistic elements.

At UCCA, the use of its industrial space for enclosure and space definition is evident. The center retains the building’s original high ceilings and open layouts but cleverly divides the space to create different atmospheres for varying exhibitions. This showcases a respect for the building's history while accommodating contemporary art. Controlled lighting and interior design are key in defining these spaces, with varying lighting, textures, and colors.
delineating gallery transitions. UCCA also blurs indoor and outdoor boundaries, allowing art to be experienced in diverse environments, enriching the spatial experience.

5 Comparative Analysis —— New York’s High Line

In the context of Gordon Cullen’s urban design methodology, New York’s High Line Park and Beijing’s 798 Art District present intriguing adaptations of his principles in diverse urban settings. The High Line exemplifies Cullen’s ‘serial vision’ through its elevated linear park, offering visitors a sequential journey marked by varied landscapes, art installations, and changing cityscape views. This contrasts yet complements the experience in the 798 Art District, where a similar principle is applied within a more complex urban fabric, blending narrow alleys with open spaces, and industrial architecture with contemporary art. Both locations also align with Cullen’s concept of ‘sense of place’: the High Line as an urban oasis transforming an industrial relic into a vibrant green space, and the 798 District as a cultural hub marrying its industrial past with modern artistic expression. Furthermore, each space demonstrates Cullen’s integration of content and form – the High Line harmoniously combines landscaping with its historical rail structure, while the 798 District maintains its industrial form, now repurposed for artistic endeavours. Collectively, these examples showcase how Cullen’s methodologies can guide the transformation of industrial spaces into enriching urban experiences, each unique in its interpretation and execution but unified in their enhancement of urban life and culture.

6 Conclusions

The comprehensive analysis of the 798 Industrial Art Park and the UCCA through Gordon Cullen’s urban design principles reveals a profound embodiment of these principles in the transformation and spatial organization of these cultural landmarks. The application of concepts such as "Serial Vision," "Sense of Place," and "Enclosure and Space Definition" has significantly contributed to the unique character and experience of these spaces. In the 798 Park, the skillful preservation of industrial architecture juxtaposed with contemporary art has created a dynamic and engaging environment. The park not only preserves its historical roots but also celebrates its current role as a cultural hub, achieving a perfect balance between old and new. Similarly, UCCA’s transformation respects its industrial heritage while innovatively adapting to contemporary artistic needs, creating a space that is both historically significant and relevant to modern art discourse.

This study not only highlights the successful application of Cullen’s methodologies in a modern context but also provides valuable insights for future urban redevelopment projects. It emphasizes the significance of considering historical context, visitor interaction, and the integration of diverse elements to create spaces that are not just physically appealing but also rich in history, culture, and social significance. The 798 Industrial Art Park and UCCA stand as testaments to the enduring relevance of Cullen’s principles and the transformative power of urban design.

References