

From “Passing By” to “Stopping to Stay”: A Study on the Cultural Decoding Mechanism and Emotional Awakening Path in Urban Micro-Tourism

Wei Wu¹, Xiaorui Liu², Fei Wang¹, Yi He³, Junrong Liu¹

¹Center for Sichuan Tourism Development Research, Leshan Normal University, Leshan 614000, Sichuan, China;

²Leshan Vocational and Technical College, Leshan 614000, Sichuan, China;

³Research Center for the Westward Relocation of Wuhan University, Leshan 614000, Sichuan, China

Corresponding author: Junrong Liu (e-mail: 32190198@qq.com)

ABSTRACT Against the backdrop of increasingly fragmented and digitalized urban life, urban micro-tourism has emerged as a cultural and tourism model emphasizing proximity and immersive cultural experiences, providing an effective approach to reconstructing emotional connections between people and places. Meanwhile, the rapid development of smart cities supported by electromagnetic information transmission, wireless sensing technologies, and digital communication infrastructures has created new opportunities for enhancing cultural interpretation and visitor interaction in urban spaces. From the perspectives of developmental psychology and environmental psychology, this study systematically investigates the differentiated psychological effects of urban micro-tourism across four age groups—children and adolescents, young adults, middle-aged adults, and elderly adults—through the dual mechanisms of cultural decoding and emotional awakening. The results demonstrate that micro-tourism provides children and adolescents with embodied contexts for identity formation and cultural recognition, offers young and middle-aged adults restorative environments for stress relief and meaning reconstruction, and enables elderly adults to integrate life memories while strengthening social participation. Based on the cultural heritage resources of Leshan, the study further explores how spatial environments, cultural assets, and community participation jointly construct a multi-level emotional resonance field and proposes an age-inclusive, demand-oriented micro-tourism product system. The findings suggest that urban micro-tourism not only represents an innovative model of culture–tourism integration but also serves as a comprehensive social practice that promotes psychological well-being, revitalizes community life, and facilitates human–city symbiosis, providing theoretical references for intelligent cultural space design and digitally enabled urban management.

INDEX TERMS urban micro-tourism, cultural decoding, emotional awakening, smart cultural space, electromagnetic information transmission

I. INTRODUCTION: THE RISE AND CULTURAL RECONSTRUCTION OF URBAN MICRO-TOURISM

AGAINST the backdrop of the increasing fragmentation and digitalization of contemporary urban life, the sense of alienation between people and urban culture has been intensifying. Being the new type of cultural tourism, which centers on the surrounding area and puts more stress on the detailed emotions people have, urban micro-tourism is becoming an essential tool in restoring the emotional connection between people and cities. It is not sightseeing in the classical meaning of this word but a place-based rambling through cultural perception and underlines the active discovery of the urban texture, historical memory, and life aesthetics [1].

Its fundamental principle is in the cultural decoding and emotional awakening. The term “cultural decoding” describes the process of identification and reconstruction of symbols and stories within the urban environment: deteriorated brick walls, corroded railway lines, and dialect hawking are all cultural texts that hold history. The efficient decoding is based on the variety of tools of translation. They are the sound map in Laomen East, Nanjing; the AR-guided tour in Yongqing Fang, Guangzhou; and the local tour guides of White Pagoda Temple, Beijing [2]. These tools externalize implicit memories. On the basis of decoding, emotional awakening triggers psychological resonance. When tourists immerse themselves in Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) handicraft making, neighborhood

tea gatherings or light and shadow exhibitions, their multi-sensory perceptions are activated. This kind of activation creates the feelings of nostalgia, surprise, belonging memory, belonging, or empathy, and the cultural cognition is elevated to emotional identification.

Urban micro-tourism is not similar to urban walking and daily leisure. The practice of walking is concerned with physical movement, and leisure is organized in terms of time, and both do not involve significant interaction with culture, as well as have few psychological effects. In contrast, micro-tourism takes cultural interaction as its core. It subverts physical movement by making it a cultural practice, under a strategy of low-threshold, high-flexibility scenario design, that brings about a transition of spatial consumption to meaning production. Its psychological impacts exhibit three levels of empowerment: cognitive, emotional, and behavioral. Embodied practice will cognitively rebuild the city as a cultural field and remove existential anxiety. Interactive interaction, which forms genuine relationships and prevents alienation and nihilism, is also emotionally active. Behaviorally, participatory design endows individuals with the identity of “cultural intermediaries”, enhancing a sense of control and strengthening family belonging and identity.

Finally, urban micro-tourism alters the disjuncture of “space-time-behavior” and makes the city available, participatory, and inherently a “living entity”, so that people could achieve psychological transcendence and nourishment in everyday life.

II. URBAN MICRO-TOURISM EVOKES EMOTIONAL RESONANCE ACROSS AGE GROUPS

Urban micro-tourism, an emerging leisure trend that emphasizes immersive cultural experiences, is quietly reshaping the relationship between people and urban spaces. It represents a cognitive restructuring, emotional awakening, and social connection rebuilding. From the perspectives of developmental psychology and environmental psychology, this paper systematically analyzes the distinct psychological effects it exerts on four demographic groups: children, adolescents, young adults, and seniors.

A. CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS: AN ENLIGHTENING FIELD FOR IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION AND CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION

Individuals aged 6–17 years are in the critical stage of “ego identity” formation as described by Erikson [3]. They urgently need to anchor “who I am” within a broad social and cultural landscape. Urban micro-tourism provides an embodied and highly interactive field for such cultural practice.

Feeling ancient brick walls that are weathered and worn and kneeling and rubbing a stone inscription with your own hands—these appear to be very basic acts, but these are the very acts that clearly illustrate the constructing of understanding through action by Piaget in his theory of

cognitive development [4]. In immersive activities such as intangible cultural heritage handicraft making and old street exploration, children and adolescents convert abstract local culture into perceptible, tangible, and reflective experience, gradually establishing initial cognitive schemas of local culture.

This is a process that goes miles beyond knowledge transmission; this is a process that feeds the emotions as well. Embodied learning does not only trigger the endogenous drive of cultural inheritance, but also offers significant underpinning of the cultivation of psychological resilience, identity, and physical and mental well-being in children and adolescents.

B. YOUNG ADULTS: A THERAPEUTIC SPACE FOR STRESS RELIEF AND MEANING RECONSTRUCTION

Young adults aged 18–35 years are often trapped by job burnout, emotional exhaustion, and a lack of meaning. The features of its “short-term nature, close location, and depth” provide urban micro-tourism with a gradual channel of sensory involvement to mental reconstruction, which is a powerful antidote to psychological rejuvenation in recent times [5]. With gradual spatial discovery and cultural exposure, the visitors slowly build up perceptions and an understanding of the local detailing. Eventually, there tend to be probabilistic “epiphanies” moments in people in which they are aroused by the same smells, sounds, or architectural features.

High-intensity work has emptied directed attention, which is well relieved by sensory environments and free choice to explore things independently. Such common olfactions, sounds, or even architectural features often trigger memories, stimulating pleasant thoughts about the past life and thereby leading to existential reflection and re-establishing the interrupted self-continuity. In the meantime, even “light social interactions” in micro-tourism, like solving the puzzles on ancient maps together and producing handicrafts together, will fulfill the need to experience authentic relations in an environment free of pressure; it will silently overturn loneliness and alienation caused by modernity.

C. MIDDLE-AGED ADULTS: A BALANCING FULCRUM BETWEEN ROLE ADJUSTMENT AND SELF-RENEWAL

The middle-aged age group of adults aged between 36–55 years undergoes two tensions of Erikson’s “midlife crisis” and “generativity” [3]. On the one hand, they are pressurized by career bottlenecks and family concerns as well as deteriorating physical functioning. On the other hand, they are trying to maintain self-worth by passing on and as well as giving back to society. The characteristics of urban micro-tourism, such as “low-threshold, high-flexibility”, offer a psychological buffer zone of critical importance to this group.

In micro-tourism scenarios, middle-aged adults can achieve psychological adjustment through two pathways. To begin with, personal life paths are linked with urban

evolution by such activities as walking through historical areas and reading local histories, which recreates the system of self-meaning through “dialogue across time and space”. Second, by leading children in cultural practice or sharing city memories with young people, they complete the role transformation from “implementer” to “inheritor”. This kind of intergenerational interaction helps them a lot in their perception of control over their lives and belonging to a family.

D. ELDERLY ADULTS: NARRATIVES OF LIFE CONTINUITY THROUGH MEMORY INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION

Adults older than 56 years old are subjected to the major tasks of the late life stage of Erikson: integration of life memories, avoiding social marginalization, and giving life a coherent meaning [2]. Urban micro-tourism uses very

specific contextualized cultural objects to evoke the dormant memory networks very accurately. It creates a new path of resocialization of the aged and makes them not “passive consumers of care”, but active “narrators” and “heirs” of the community culture. The change in their position greatly enhances their subjective well-being and life satisfaction.

To recap it all, the effects of urban micro-tourism on the intergenerational groups have peculiar age-specific features. It is a school of cultural recognition of children and adolescents, a refuge from stress for young and middle-aged adults, and a place of social engagement among the elderly. Future design of micro-tourism should adhere to the “age-friendly” principle, accurately respond to the developmental tasks and psychological needs of each group, and jointly build an inclusive, healing, and vibrant urban psychological ecological space (see Table 1).

TABLE 1. Psychological Needs of Different Age Groups

Age Group	Psychosocial Development Stage	Rudimentary Emotional and Psychological Needs	Psychological Effects of Micro-Tourism
Children and Adolescents (6–17 years)	Establishing a sense of identity concerning “who I am” and “where I belong”	A need to be identified, belong to a culture, and express subjectively.	Developing identity, better place identity, and psychological resilience
Young Adults (18–35 years)	Assuming work and family responsibilities while suffering from job burnout, information overload, and interpersonal alienation	Stress relief, attention restoration, meaning reconstruction, and real social interaction demand.	Psychological recovery, rediscovery of existential meaning, satisfaction of a sense of belonging, and emotional healing
Middle-Aged Adults (36–55 years)	As a balancing fulcrum of role adjustment and self-renewal.	Inclined to deal with combined pressures of career bottlenecks, family and physical loss; inclined to maintain self-value by means of inheritance and social contribution; inclined to reduce two anxieties caused by role overload and value crisis.	Reconstruction of self-meaning through dialogic across time and space through connecting individual life paths with urban development through activities like walking in the historical districts; empowering through role transformation: changing an implementer to an inheritor by teaching the children cultural practices or reminiscing about the city memories, thereby increasing a sense of control of life in the city; and belonging with the family.
Elderly Adults (56 years and above)	Reviewing life, endowing life with coherent meaning, and countering loneliness	Memory integration needs, social participation, value reaffirmation, and marginalization protection.	Better sense of life meaning, slower cognitive impairment, better well-being, and lower risk of depression.

III. URBAN RESOURCES UNDERPIN THE EMOTIONAL SPHERE OF URBAN MICRO-TOURISM

Urban micro-tourism is not a consumption behavior that exists in isolation but a systematically triggered cultural behavior. It is rooted in the existing material and intangible resources of a city. With the synergistic effect of institutional support and social participation, it transforms “daily spaces” into “meaningful spheres” full of emotional tension. It is deeply valuable in that it makes the sensitive and enduring emotional connections between persons and places and encourages in-depth resonance by the organic combination of spatial narrative, cultural translation, a city that is caring, translation, and human communication.

A. SPATIAL RESOURCES: WALKABILITY AND NARRATIVE POTENTIAL AT THE MICRO SCALE

Micro-tourism takes walkability or cyclability as the basic premise. It highly relies on high-density, highly mixed, and “readable” micro-urban units, such as historical blocks, industrial heritage sites, community courtyards, and waterfront trails. These places do not have any dramatic scenic locations but have some traces of life as well as collective memories. They thereby become the warmest fragments in the urban texture. The key lies in transforming them into immersive experience paths through elaborate design, so as to realize the symbiosis of “utility” and “aesthetics”.

It should be noted that the emotional arousal effect of micro-tourism does not occur naturally but is premised on the effective management of spatial quality. The ‘pertinent’ stressful factors in urban settings, including noise disruption,

overcrowding, decayed facilities, and lack of signage, can have a tremendous effect on reducing the immersive experience and the possibility of emotional arousal among individuals. Thus, micro-tourism spaces must be equally created both in terms of ‘positive provision’ and ‘negative avoidance’ [6]. A ‘disturbance-free’ basic environment of cultural decoding and emotional resonance is offered through the optimization of walking comfort, visitor density control, rest node organization, and enhanced way-finding systems [7]. It is only through the integration of the management of stressors into designs that micro-tourism can be changed from a perfect idea into a real-world one.

B. CULTURAL RESOURCES: FROM STATIC HERITAGE TO TANGIBLE LIVED EXPERIENCES

The heart of micro-tourism is the cultural resources. They include material and intangible cultural heritage, as well as the community life wisdom accumulated in streets and alleys. However, being on display all the time is not very likely to make people resonate [8]. These resources can only be rejuvenated through a creative transformation chain; that is, through decoding, translation, creative translation, and experience [9].

First, local unique cultural symbols, historical events, and oral traditions are systematically sorted out. Then, they are converted into participatory and perceptible experience modules. Divided resources are even further interwoven into a systematic meaning network through themed routes. These paths help the tourists to change their passive position of a viewer into an active position of a participant and a one-way position of a recipient of a translation into a two-way position of an empathizer. Eventually, in the dual immersion of body and mind, tourists complete the identification and internalization of local culture.

C. HUMAN RESOURCES: EMPOWERING RESIDENTS TO BE CULTURAL NARRATORS AND CO-CREATORS

The key peculiarity that differentiates between mass and micro-tourism is the in-depth involvement of the local. People not only use spaces, but they are also alive bearers of cultural memories. The culture bears authenticity and human warmth that cannot be copied because of their personal experience and their narratives that are based on dialects.

This type of involvement offers the economic gains and social awareness to the residents, achieving the realization of “cultural empowerment”. Therefore, it is necessary to establish systematic training mechanisms, reasonable incentive systems, and collaboration platforms. These steps will drive residents to not be “spectators” but to be “co-creators”. The resonance among tourists will be established when the transmission of culture ceases to be a one-way output, but a two-way emotional communication of empathy.

To conclude, the liveliness of the urban micro-tourism is the simultaneous echo of three significant resources: the space is the carrier, the culture is the core, and the human resource is the guarantee of the authenticity of the tourism. The three elements combine to form a multi-level/multi-sensory and very interactive emotional resonance sphere. This sphere enables people to perceive the “extraordinary” hidden in the seemingly ordinary “daily life”.

The urban development in the future should not be related to the comprehensive/large-scale thinking of demolition and construction or the isolated scenic spot model. Rather, it must revolve around the cultivated recognition, strategic integration, and innovative transformation of the available resources. Only by taking emotional resonance as the starting point can micro-tourism be truly elevated to a modern lifestyle integrating cultural identification, psychological healing, and community regeneration (see Table 2).

TABLE 2. Resource Supply and Psychological Demand Response Framework for Urban Micro-Tourism

Material Carriers (Supply Side)	Spiritual Experience and Psychological Value (Demand Side)	Core Psychological Needs Satisfied
• Historical blocks, industrial heritage sites, community courtyards • Waterfront trails, street-corner parks, ordinary alleys • Story plaques, ground signage, art installations	• “Soft fascination” environmental experience • Natural restoration of attention • Emotional transition from hustle and bustle to tranquility	• Relaxation, security, immersion • Alleviating cognitive fatigue and improving emotional stability (consistent with Attention Restoration Theory)
• Ancient buildings, stone inscriptions, old objects (material intangible cultural heritage) • Dialects, festivals, handicrafts (intangible cultural heritage) • Community tea culture, etiquette, and other life wisdom	• Cultural identity and sense of belonging • Emotional resonance and sense of meaning • Understanding and connection with “local stories”	• Self-identity, cultural belonging, existential meaning • Satisfying the desire for authentic, in-depth, and warm experiences
• Community residents (the elderly, craftsmen, adolescents) • Local oral history narrators, skill instructors, tour guides	• Authenticity and human warmth • Sense of being heard and respected • A sense of accomplishment from participation and co-creation	• Belonging needs, social connection, self-efficacy • Enhancing interpersonal trust and community cohesion

IV. IN-DEPTH INTERACTION BETWEEN HUMANS AND CITIES

Urban micro-tourism is a new form of practice centered on cultural perception. Its in-depth value lies in reconstructing emotional bonds and meaning resonance between humans and cities, presenting a symbiotic cycle where “humans integrate into cities and cities nurture humans”.

A. COGNITIVE INTERACTION: RECONSTRUCTING URBAN MEANING THROUGH CULTURAL DECODING

At the cognitive level, tourists achieve cultural decoding through embodied experiences such as interpreting silent cultural symbols in the city, touching weathered ancient brick walls, and receiving cultural interpretation. The central theme below the message is that the city is not a mere backdrop anymore but an entity that is alive and can communicate and empathize. Through “learning-in-exploration”, tourists integrate external information into their personal cognition and reconstruct the meaning of the city, thereby laying a foundation for emotional resonance.

B. EMOTIONAL INTERACTION: MULTI-SENSORY IMMERSION AWAKENS SPIRITUAL ECHOES

When cognitive accumulation is converted into emotional investment, tourists enter a deeper emotional sphere. Micro-tourism activates complex emotions such as nostalgia, surprise and even a sense of belonging by elaborately creating multi-sensory scenarios involving sight, hearing, touch and smell. Urban spaces thus accurately respond to the desire of

modern people for emotional comfort, achieving two-way emotional supply: they not only soothe people’s minds, but also inject new emotional connotations into cities.

C. SOCIAL INTERACTION: CO-BUILDING CULTURAL COMMUNITIES THROUGH AUTHENTIC COMMUNICATION

The social value of micro-tourism is rooted in sincere interactions between tourists and local residents. Encouraging residents to participate in content co-creation as “cultural narrators” breaks the anonymous barriers in traditional tourism, and constructs low-pressure, high-authenticity “light social” relationships. Through this, cities mobilize the latent human capital in the communities, which, besides enhancing the sense of value among residents of the localities, fosters social inclusion.

In short, urban micro-tourism is a multi-level, multi-agent interaction network between human beings and cities: cognitive knowledge, emotional appeal, the sense of appeal, and social belonging are symbiotic and self-affirming and create a positive cycle. It not only transcends the fragmented logic of “host-guest dichotomy” in traditional tourism, but also moves towards an inclusive, participatory and sustainable symbiotic relationship. In the future, only by continuously deepening such in-depth interaction can micro-tourism truly become a cultural practice that inherits urban cultural context, heals modern souls and activates community vitality, ultimately realizing the ideal vision of “humans traveling in cities, and souls resonating with culture” (see Table 3).

TABLE 3. Comprehensive Framework for Human-City Bilateral Interaction in Urban Micro-Tourism

Age Group	Core Psychological Needs	Physical/Cultural/Human/Digital Elements of Urban Supply	Typical Interaction Forms	Implementation Effects (Humans Integrate into the City; the City Nurtures Humans)
Children and Adolescents (6–17 years)	Recognition of identity, cultural affiliation, and subjective manifestation.	- Community courtyards, historical areas, and art installations. - Intangible cultural heritage handicrafts and local festivals. - Youth instructional leaders and community-based co-creation programs.	- Participating in ICH experiences such as facial makeup painting and pottery. - Hearing tales in the streets and alleys. - Micro-travel vlogging on social media.	- Humans integrate into the city by constructing place identity through “learning-by-traveling”. - The city becomes a place where identity can be tested and psychological strength and cultural self-esteem can be boosted.
Young Adults (18–35 years)	Relaxation, behavior, urban rebuilding, including real socialization.	- Waterfront trails and corner parks. - Tea culture and street storytelling. - Narrators, community elders, and craftspeople.	- Walking in peaceful streets between bustle and calmness. - Participating in neighborhood tea discussions and hearing elders tell stories of life 60 years ago. - Going on low-pressure “light social” micro-tours with partners or friends.	- Humans integrate into the city as part of the everyday city pattern by the means of transport and conversation. - The city nurtures humans by providing a psychological restoration environment to heal job burnout and interpersonal alienation.
Middle-Aged Adults (36–55 years)	Professional breakthrough of crisis, balance of responsibility in the family, and continuation of self-value.	- Physical: renovated cultural block cultural heritage parks. - Cultural: local histories, family history, industrial culture. - Human: cultural volunteers who are middle-aged and are the inheritors of ICH.	- Planning parent-child journey paths and guiding children through urban memory. - Attending local “urban archaeology” groups to arrange local urban history.	- Humans integrate into the city by communication and cultural tradition, strengthening family belonging and attaching their own life paths to the city’s cultural veins. - The city nurtures humans by endowing the identity of “cultural intermediary”, enhancing social control, and alleviating midlife crisis and sense of value nihilism.
Elderly Adults (56 years and above)	Integrating memory, social engagement, roles, and reaffirming values.	- Memoirs of old times in old streets and lanes. - Ancient avenues, built bridges, and industrial monuments in the memories. - Dialects, antiques, classical festivals, and customs. - Oral history storytellers and representatives of skill in the elderly.	- Narrating own stories of the streets to tourists. - Being part of the community micro-tourism councils.	- Humans integrate into the city by returning to public space as “cultural holders”. - Social respect and roles are provided, cognitive deterioration is retarded, and well-being is enhanced.

V. CONSTRUCTION OF A LESHAN CULTURAL RELIC-THEMED MICRO-TOURISM PRODUCT SYSTEM BASED ON THE LOGIC OF “HUMAN-CITY SYMBIOSIS”

The charm of urban micro-tourism lies in its ability to transform abstract urban cultural context into perceptible, partic-

ipatory and resonant embodied experiences. As mentioned earlier, successful micro-tourism products must be based on the two-way interaction concept of “humans integrate into the city and the city nurtures humans”, and accurately align with the psychological needs of different age groups. As a national historical and cultural city, Leshan not only boasts a world cultural and natural dual heritage, but its downtown area also gathers abundant cultural relic sites such as the Confucian Temple, Laoxiao Ding (Old Sky Top), Dragon God Shrine and ancient city walls, providing an ideal practical platform for this theory [1]. This paper puts the above theoretical framework into practice and proposes a logically rigorous, age-inclusive and supply-demand matched Leshan cultural relic-themed micro-tourism product system.

A. FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS: CONSTRUCTING “IDENTITY EXPLORATION” RESEARCH-ORIENTED PRODUCTS TO EMPOWER CULTURAL IDENTIFICATION

The teens are in a serious stage of self-identification and belonging to a culture, and they are keen to answer the questions of who I am and where I belong by actively doing so. This is best done using the ancient architectural relics and mythological legends of Leshan, which are a rich source of teaching material. The traditional model of one-way indoctrination-based product design should be replaced with immersive learning experiences.

1) “Mythical Beast Planet”—Leshan Confucian Temple Aesthetics Exploration Course

The symbols of the mythical beasts, such as chiwen, qilin, dragon, and phoenix, on the roof ridges in Leshan Confucian Temple are redesigned into the character of a planet using this course as its central hub. It leads students between 9 and 12 years old to understand the underlying ideas of Confucian rituals and architecture in a four-step approach: preliminary exploration of sculptures, counting mythical beasts, recording events with knotted cords, and a mythical beast lecture. The abstract aesthetic ideas taking the shape of personal expression in the activity are sown in the form of the mythical beast imitating the show and creating a painting session, which is beneficial in allowing the adolescents to internalize the abstract aesthetic ideas.

2) “Giant Buddha” Guardian STEAM Research Tour

The tour is oriented on middle school and university students and utilizes the materials of the Leshan Giant Buddha Museum, Exhibition Hall, and Mythical Hall, and carvings on the cliffs tomb to produce interdisciplinary assignments. To give an example, it is possible to perform on-site inspections of the drainage system of the Giant Buddha, to learn how to make the rubbing according to the Giant Buddha theme, and to recreate the shapes of the Han Dynasty figurines in order to replicate the scenes of life in the past. This model of Project-Based Learning (PBL) allows adolescents to better understand the importance of world heritage and

solve practical tasks and improve their literacy and social responsibility and responsibility in general.

B. FOR YOUNG AND MIDDLE-AGED ADULTS: ESTABLISHING “MENTAL HEALING” WANDERING PRODUCTS IN RESPONSE TO THE LONGING OF ACTING FOR MEANING

Work and family are the two forces that burden young and middle-aged adults, and they are in dire need of an urban oasis that would help them overcome anxiety and have something meaningful once again. The particularity of Leshan in the combination of “three rivers that meet, mountains and waters being close to each other”, and the urban life being slow-paced is intrinsically healing in its essence. To develop a relaxed and pleasant ambiance, the design of products should have an accent on “light social interaction” and multi-sensorial immersion.

1) “Jiazhou Poetic Flavor Wandering” Citywalk Route

This route links the cultural relic architecture and buildings like the Confucian Temple, Laoxiaoding, Dragon God Shrine, Ambiance Shrine, and the ancient walls in the city with the local delicacies such as Qiao Jiao Beef, sweet-skin duck, and Bobo Chicken. With ancient poems such as Lu You’s Ascending the Litchi Tower as clues, it weaves a poetic wandering corridor that is “visible, savorable and perceptible”. While wandering, tourists can not only listen to professional guides interpreting architectural history and flood control legends, but also taste intangible cultural heritage delicacies and learn the stories behind them. Considering spatial layout, the route is interchangeable from the hustle and bustle of East Main Street to the serenity of the Confucian Temple courtyard to the openness of viewing the confluence of three rivers by the ancient city walls and creates a well-timed emotional rhythm.

2) “Ancient City Trail-seeking” Light Social Interaction Check-in Activity

The interactive tasks of the cultural relic trail are the Mythical Beast Hunt fun quiz at the Confucian Temple and the Poetry Post Bar at the section of the ancient city wall. The participants will have the opportunity to discover on their own with hand-drawn maps and guidebooks and share moments of Jiazhou flavors and cultural context moments on social media. The strategy allows serving the needs of young and middle-aged adults in the quest to be unique and share their experiences with others, who can develop emotional attachment to the city in a casual setting.

C. FOR THE ELDERLY: DEVELOPING “MEMORY INHERITANCE” PARTICIPATORY PRODUCTS TO ACTIVATE SOCIAL VALUE

The fundamental needs of the older population cluster are the need to incorporate life memories, avoid social exclusion, and have self-esteem by participating. The street life and the community life of the ancient city in Leshan

bring along the collective memories of generations; it is the perfect medium to evoke the subjectivity of the elderly folks.

1) “River Rhythm of Jiazhou · Exploration of Urban Context” Oral History Project

The local elders wore traditional costumes during the popular science lesson with the theme of “Flood Control Wisdom of the Ancient City Wall”, so as to reenact the legends of flood-controlling, like Zhao Yu Slaying the Flood Dragon, and tell their personal stories about their past experience with floods. At the same time, teenagers and the elderly are arranged to learn together about replica archives of the westward relocation period of Wuhan University, which will provide the opportunity to have an inter-generational conversation. This not only provides tourists with warm historical narratives, but also enables the elderly to act as “knowledge contributors”, regaining social respect and self-efficacy through narration and inheritance.

2) “Silver-Haired Tour Guide” Volunteer Program

Retired residents interested in local history are hired as volunteers to narrate at cultural relic locations (behind the wall of the city) or introduce innovations to the sacrificial practices. This “person-to-person” authentic interaction enhances the emotional authenticity of micro-tourism. It also generates long-term social engagement opportunities for the elderly, which will successfully reverse loneliness, marginalization, and active aging.

The construction of Leshan’s cultural relic-themed micro-tourism product system is essentially a supply-demand matching initiative. Starting from the psychological needs of all age groups and relying on the city’s abundant cultural relic resources, it realizes a positive cycle of “humans integrate into the city and the city nurtures humans” through four core paths: cognitive decoding, emotional arousal, social participation, and technological empowerment. This is not only an innovative attempt at the adaptive reuse of cultural heritage, but also a beneficial practice to enhance national well-being and construct urban psychological ecology through the integration of culture and tourism.

VI. CORE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN URBAN MICRO-TOURISM AND TRADITIONAL TOURISM: REINTERPRETATION DEPENDING ON HUMAN-CITY RELATIONSHIPS

Urban micro-tourism is a paradigm shift as opposed to traditional tourism that is characterized by macroscopic visual consumption and standard service delivery (see Table 4). Core differences between urban micro-tourism and traditional tourism are explained from six dimensions. Regarding human resources, it abandons the “scenic spot island” model and facilitates the metamorphosis of the residents who are mere spectators in the commercial services to living storytellers of the cultural memory, transforming the impersonal services into authentic interaction. In the utilization of cultural resources, it elevates static heritage to a perceptible living experience through the creative transformation of “decoding–translation–experience”. At the cognitive level, the tourists constructively decode the urban symbols in an embodied practice to reconstruct the landscapes they see into interactive subjects. Multi-sensory immersion on the emotional level provokes such intense emotions as nostalgia and belonging, reaching the transition of momentary pleasure into psychological curing. Finally, its emotional value system changes from the externalized process of portfolios to the introspective building of existential meaning in reaction to contemporary needs of citizens for psychological strength, social identification, and existential worth.

This comparing structure proves the main hypothesis of this research in a systematic way: The essence of urban micro-tourism is not spatial compression of traditional sightseeing, but a revolutionary tourism paradigm based on the logic of “human–city symbiosis”. It transforms the city of consumption with the topic of discussion and replaces the spectators with the participants. By the two processes of cultural decoding and emotional appeal, the psychological shift between “passing by” and “staying” is achieved, which offers a fresh channel through which the spiritual abode of contemporary people can be established.

TABLE 4. Core Differences Between Urban Micro-Tourism and Traditional Tourism

Comparison Dimensions	Urban Micro-Tourism	Traditional Tourism	Analysis of Core Differences
1. Spatial Resources	Micro-scale/story potential: bases itself on micro urban elements (e.g., historical districts, waterfront trails). Focuses on the spatial legibility and remnants of everyday living life, transforming everyday lanes into emotional areas.	Macro scenic location and landmark dependence: it is in big areas like landmarks, tourist attractions, and “big, comprehensive” resorts. Spaces are usually developed exclusively for tourism and separated from the daily life of local residents.	From “macroscopic” to “daily”: micro-tourism spaces take place in local life, meaning the city as a tourist site; conventional tourism is based on exotic scenic sites that are not dependent on day-to-day life.
2. Human Resources	Cultural narrators and co-creators: the local residents (elders, craftspeople, and adolescents) are the fundamental providers. They are not service providers but biological vessels of cultural memory, who provide human warmth in genuine interaction and achieve the effects of “cultural empowerment.”	Individuals as primary service providers: professional service providers such as tour guides, scenic spot employees, and hotel servers are the primary providers of services. Interactions are mostly standardized and process-based commercial services, while residents are often onlookers or disrupted parties.	From “commercial services” to “authentic communication”: in micro-tourism, residents and tourists form relationships of “teachers and students” or “co-creators”; in traditional tourism, the standard relationship is “server and served”.
3. Cultural Resources	Still heritage to perceivable experience: cultural resources (tangible and intangible heritage, living scenes) are changed with the help of the process of decoding-translation-experience, which focuses on revitalization, participation, and empathy. Dialects, festivals, and handicrafts are transformed into physical experiences.	Static display and “viewed heritage” consumption: cultural resources are in the form of static display and sightseeing use, which mostly includes museum exhibits, scenic performances, and tourist souvenirs. Tourists mainly engage in “viewing”; cultural experiences are often one-way, passive, and superficial.	From sightseeing to “participatory cultural text”: micro-tourism takes culture out of display windows into participatory histories and experiences; traditional tourism has a tendency of cementing culture into museums to be gazed upon.

TABLE 4. Core Differences Between Urban Micro-Tourism and Traditional Tourism (Continued)

Comparison Dimensions	Urban Micro-Tourism	Traditional Tourism	Analysis of Core Differences
4. Cognitive Interaction	Cultural decoding: reconstruction of meaning based on embodied learning. Tourists learn by engaging in traveling that is based on both touch and hearing, e.g., touching old walls and listening to cultural explanations; they actively decode urban signs (e.g., old brick walls and dialectic hawking setups), incorporate external data into individual thought, and recreate the meaning of the city.	Information reception and landscape verification: the cognitive process entails the acquisition of information largely visually and verifying landscapes written in tour guides and travel strategies. Encounter is a one-way “seeing”, which does not presuppose active decoding and reconstruction of the meaning of the profundity of the urban symbolic system.	From “passive reception” to “active decoding”: micro-tourists are meaning explorers; the traditional tourists are the meaning consumers and verifiers of the landscape.
5. Emotional Interaction	Multi-sensory immersion through spiritual resonance: multi-sensory situations that involve sight, hearing, touch, and smell cause complex emotions such as nostalgia, wonder, and belonging. Tends to move towards emotional appeals and psychological healing, fulfilling the need for emotional satisfaction.	Visual stimulation and transient pleasure: emotions mainly derive from the visual impact of magnificent scenery and novel things, along with transient happiness from freshness. The emotional experience is not very deep or long-term and is comparatively simple.	From “visual pleasure” to “spiritual healing”: micro-tourism appeals to several senses to create strong emotions and seek emotional contact with them; traditional tourism is concerned with visual enjoyment and comparatively superficial emotional contact.
6. Emotional Value Mechanism	Psychological healing and existential meaning: the main process is that “cultural decoding” awakens “emotional identification”, thus offering profound emotional values to the individual, like psychological healing, meaning rediscovery, and identity creation. It addresses the universal human needs of belonging, existence, and psychological strength of modern people.	Relaxation and social capital accumulation: primarily offers emotional values such as relaxation of the physical, escape from daily pressure, and social capital accumulation by means of “check-in” (e.g., sharing through social media). The core is “leisure” and “conspicuous consumption”.	From “check-in and showing off” to “meaning and healing”: the emotional value of micro-tourism is introspective and existential; that of traditional tourism is often outward-looking and social.

VII. CONCLUSION: URBAN MICRO-TOURISM—A NEW TOURISM FORM FOR ALL CITIZENS’ PARTICIPATION

Starting from the intersection of psychology and urban human geography, this paper explores the differentiated impacts of urban micro-tourism on adolescents, young and middle-aged adults, and the elderly at cognitive, emotional, and social levels. It also reveals the mechanism of constructing in-depth human-city interaction through cognitive decoding, emotional resonance, and social interaction. The research shows that urban micro-tourism is not only an evolved form of traditional sightseeing, but also a new tourism model rooted in contemporary psychological needs, relying on endogenous urban resources, and promoting the physical and mental health of the whole population.

Firstly, this “newness” is reflected in the fundamental shift of value orientation: from visual consumption pursuing distant wonders to the rediscovery of meaning and emotional connection with nearby daily life. This rediscovery often centers on the tactile and aesthetic value of local culture [10]. It is no longer about “what to see”, as it is now more about “how to feel” and “how to be involved”. It reacts to the universal needs of the modern people to heal, belong, and have a meaning, becoming a routine in order to be healthy in the mind and develop psychological resilience.

Secondly, another aspect of this “newness” lies in the reshaping of supply-demand relations: urban spaces, cultural resources, and residents together constitute the supply side, while tourists are transformed into participants and co-creators. The two-way interaction model of “humans integrate into the city and the city nurtures humans” fosters a low-pressure, high-authenticity “light social interaction” community. It effectively alleviates interpersonal alienation and community atomization, realizing the sublimation of tourism’s social value.

In addition, this “newness” is also embodied in age-friendliness and inclusive sharing: with its low threshold, easy participation, and strong regional characteristics, micro-tourism can cover the entire life cycle—providing space for identity recognition for adolescents, through

hands-on cultural practices, creating an oasis for mental healing for young and middle-aged adults, and activating social value for the elderly. It fully reflects deep care for universal well-being, transcending the scope of economic industry and integrating into urban public services and governance innovation [11].

Urban micro-tourism is a comprehensive social practice guided by cultural perception, targeted at physical and mental health, linked by community participation, and set against the backdrop of urban renewal. It is not only an innovative achievement of culture-tourism integration, but also a contemporary solution to address modern social challenges, rebuild human-city relations, and enhance urban soft power and residents’ sense of well-being. Future development should abandon the mindset of “large-scale demolition and construction” or “isolated scenic spots”, cherish and activate “nearby” resources in the city. With elegant design and institutional assurances, micro-tourism can indeed be an interface between the past and the future, people and society, and body and mind. As an interface between the past and the future, the integration of cultural elements into urban micro-tourism finally achieving the perfect picture of “humans traveling in cities, and souls resonating with culture”.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Wei Wu formulated the overall theoretical framework and research design of the paper, led the introduction of perspectives from developmental psychology and environmental psychology, systematically interpreted the differential mechanisms of psychological effects of urban micro-tourism on different age groups, and wrote the introduction, core mechanism analysis, and conclusion sections. Fei Wang assisted with literature review and theoretical argumentation, and was responsible for data integration and visualization of Tables 1 to 4. Yi He constructed an age-inclusive micro-tourism product system based on Leshan cultural relic resources, and completed empirical design and specific pathway planning. Xiaorui Liu dealt with interdisciplinary theoretical incorporation and standardized reference processing.

As the corresponding author, Junrong Liu organized the direction of research, methodological support, and rational verification of the entire text, and did the final check of the academic value of innovative application of policies to the paper. Field research, data interpretation, and a multiset of revisions were carried out altogether by all authors, who are equally responsible for the authenticity and integrity of the research results.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors do not have any conflicts of interest.

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