

Park City — a new paradigm for living in harmony with nature

Chengdu Practice

Located at the foot of the Xiling Snow Mountain, Chengdu ranks as China's fourth megacity, with a resident population of over 20 million and GDP of over RMB 2 trillion. Managing sustainable, ecological well-being, cultural heritage and the provision of leisure during rapid urbanization is a huge challenge for overcoming the city's industrial legacy.

Park City¹ is an urban revolution initiated by Chengdu to overcome the bottleneck of industrial urbanization. Its core ethic is to re-establish public ownership of the city and redefine people's role at its centre; to restore the harmonious coexistence between man and nature through integrating parks into urban spaces for a sharing environmental wellness; to reshape the city's structural, functional configuration through integrating multiple parks into one and to stimulate urban vitality through allocating resources efficiently with an intelligently managed market mechanism. The completion of "A Park City under Snow Mountain and happy Chengdu in hustle and bustle" has provided a new paradigm for creating an urban community, where humanity and nature are in harmony. It also explores reproducible strategies and paths for the development of megacities.

Chengdu advocates equal access to basic, people-oriented urban services, coordinated development of regional urban

and rural areas, and people's participation in co-construction and co-governance as well as the sharing of well-being.

Dwelling

During the 14th Five-Year-Plan (2021–2025), Chengdu has increased its supply of affordable houses to 250,000, with a focus on addressing the housing needs of new citizens, young adults, and low-income groups. The goal is not only to provide shelter but also to ensure comfortable, safe, and convenient living conditions for people of all ages, occupations, and social classes.

Transportation

To prioritize safe walking, Chengdu is upgrading its people-centred transportation system to meet the leisure and lifestyle needs of citizens, which accounts for over 60 per cent of non-commuting trips. Distribution spaces, urban accessibility, and transportation connections are designed to gradually shift travel from vehicle-based to low carbon modes.

Public services

The municipal government of Chengdu has created a 15-minute living circle, which gathers multiple types of community services within a 15-minute walking distance, satisfying residents' daily needs quickly and easily. The city



Image: Shen Jun

The main stadium of the 31st World University Games foregrounding Mount Siguniang's Yaomei Peak



Image: Zhang Sheng

Taikoo Li, situated in the commercial district of Chengdu, where the thousand-year-old Daci Temple coexists with the International Finance Centre

is promoting urban renewal and upgrading its infrastructure to decrease spatial differentiation and increase the accessibility of public services for the elderly and children, creating “all-age-friendly” communities. These efforts will promote the transformation of Chengdu into a suitable place for office workers, the elderly, the young, and the disabled.

Social governance

The municipal government of Chengdu has built a network of government, private enterprise, society and individuals. Smart Rongcheng, an online public service platform has been established to achieve one network for all public affairs, one linkage for risk prevention and control, one-click response to social demands, one screen for data of all kinds and from all sources, and one code for all residents to access basic public services. Park City governance demonstrates the spirit of the new era such that everyone shares responsibility and welfare.

Regional collaboration

Chengdu strives to break the traditional boundaries of regional rights and responsibilities and to promote the transformation from exclusive resources to resource sharing. By accelerating the urban integration development of Chengdu and its neighbouring cities, including Deyang, Meishan, and Ziyang, the municipal government of Chengdu aims at building a Chengdu Metropolitan Area, and then integrating it to

the Chengdu-Chongqing twin city economic circle to create a new paradigm of regional coordinated development.

Park City’s paradigm of innovation is to harmoniously reshape the urban space of humans and nature through the construction of parks, so that the relationship between humans and nature shifts from nature depletion in the industrial age to adding value to nature in the new era. In terms of space construction, it eliminates municipal boundaries divided by social and industrial functions and shapes the urban area into an organic complex of ecological parks, living-circles, industrial parks, business districts, cultural and educational venues, and transportation hubs.

Chengdu uses the logic of building the environment > gathering people > operating the city > promoting industry in order to innovatively lead the development of the city through up-front investment in parks, green ways, public service facilities and infrastructure. It attracts talent by facilitating a desirable environment and improving ancillary facilities. It also promotes a transformation from a production-dominated industrial city to a life-oriented Park City with an ethos of “parks before cities; life before production.”

General governance

Chengdu has issued guidelines for the design of Park City, formulated construction guiding standards tailored to different types of spatial characteristics, and refined urban



Image: Zhu Jianguo

Danjing Terrace is situated at the highest point of the Danjing Mountain ridge on Longquan Mountain. Its design is inspired by the thousand-year-old Bashu culture, symbolized by the mythical Sun Bird

spatial management through classified guidance and hierarchical management. All have increased urban safety resilience, enhanced residential aesthetic experience, and created diversified aspects of a safe, resilient, and beautiful city. Since Chengdu's transformation into a Park City, the per capita negative environmental impact has continuously decreased, the concentration of particulate matter (PM2.5) has decreased by 58 per cent over the past decade, water quality in urban areas has increased from 71.1 per cent to 100 per cent, and the forest coverage rate has reached 40.2 per cent. Urban safety resilience has been improved and an infrastructure network has been preliminarily established, enhancing the defence and capability of recovery from risks in megacities. Green lifestyle in the city is gaining popularity and the transformation to low-carbon lifestyle is accelerating, with the construction of green buildings, the integration of railways, buses, and sidewalks, efficient linkage of various means of transport, and the wide employment of a WeChat mini program — Low-Carbon Benefits Tianfu — that deploys a green consumption incentive mechanism.

Cultural inheritance

Chengdu has integrated its ecological resources with its historical and cultural heritage. The municipal government is building a demonstration modal for the protection of giant pandas and of biodiversity in general, protecting and promoting the cultural heritage of Bashu, as demonstrated by the Jinsha Museum through immersive experience, scene crea-

tion, and other sensory experiences. The construction of Chengdu Park City pays special attention to preserving the local flavour and atmosphere of its traditional urban lifestyle. On the basis of the 135 reconstructed streets and alleys, the cultural charm of traditional street and alley life is reproduced, enabling an interaction between old landmarks and modern sensibilities.

Urban-rural development balance

Chengdu reshapes the regional economic and geographical patterns compatible with its natural resources and promotes balanced development between urban and rural areas. Respecting geographical features and differences in industrial structures, Chengdu aims at providing a more ecological and livable environment for indigenous people with distinctive architecture and rural sentiment, while revitalizing the characteristics of rural industrial resources, promoting ecological value transformation, and achieving a rural expression in the Park City.

Park City is a paradigm of innovation within an urban development model, that is, a fundamentally logical transformation from a traditional urban development model based on technology and economics to a nature-based solution. In the former model, ecological protection is contradictory to economic development in a zero-sum game; while in the latter, Park City can create, transform, and unify the value of ecological protection and economic development: economic growth contributes to ecological protection, and ecological value promotes economic

development in turn. Therefore, in the new paradigm of Park City, the role of the city is extended beyond its traditional sense to achieve multi-dimensional security, low-carbon, efficient, and sustainable development in industry, energy, infrastructure, social services, and other areas.

Industry

Chengdu has cultivated many application scenarios, provided new opportunities for industrial development, promoted the recreation of industrial chains; thus, forming an industrial matrix that supports the development of Park City. Priority has been given to support the development of the value-adding industries to nature, such as photovoltaic, energy storage, hydrogen energy, and new energy vehicles. During the 14th Five-Year Plan period, the municipal government of Chengdu aims at integrating and developing strategic emerging industrial clusters, with goals of increasing lithium battery production by 5.1 times, and production of new energy vehicles and urban rail vehicles by 47.2 per cent and 65.4 per cent, respectively. This will promote the construction of ecological value conversion mechanisms in advantageous industries and accumulate the driving forces for high-quality development of the Park City.

Energy

Chengdu is promoting low-carbon energy transformation with the goal of increasing the proportion of non-fossil energy consumption to more than 50 per cent by the end of the 14th Five-Year Plan period. Taking the carbon neutrality goals as an opportunity to build Park City's energy structure, Chengdu will improve energy utilization efficiency and vigorously develop green energy technology.

Infrastructure

Chengdu is reshaping its production methods and spatial layout, promoting the integration of the industrial and social city, and integrating the workplace and housing to improve the convenience of the daily commute. The city is also ensuring the density and quality of urban services such as transportation, architecture, education, and healthcare, improving urban livelihoods and upgrading urban functions, providing new opportunities for industrial development, and increasing the quality of city lives.

The market

The vitality of Park City comes from the market. A vibrant market will improve residents' income, the society's prosperity and openness, and barrier-free internal and external exchanges, creating a vivid, prosperous, and leisurely city. Chengdu's characterization of Park City is unique in terms of improving market efficiency. Firstly, it updates the market ecology, cultivates market drivers that adapt to the city, innovates with diversified public service investment mechanisms, and promotes the vitality and efficiency of a Park City through the establishment of a new market ecology, enabling the free flow of market factors. Secondly, it establishes an ecological market, where the value of ecological products and services are redeemed through market methods. It builds an ecological product trading centre and implements GEP accounting in

order to achieve ecological value conversion and appreciation, create a virtuous cycle for ecological value to feed back to Park City's construction, and effectively enhance the endogenous driving forces and sustainability of transformation and development. Thirdly, it innovatively integrates the design of the city with the foundation of a Smart City, and comprehensively utilizes modern technologies such as the Internet of Things, big data, and artificial intelligence to promote a technological leap, for example, building the urban brain and a "Smart Rongcheng" to drive the accelerated circulation and application of data resources and market elements, and to enable urban life to learn and evolve in both physical and virtual environments and urban activity, increasing hyperbolically. Finally, with laws and regulations, the municipal government of Chengdu promotes the formation of an efficient, standardized and fair competitive unified market so that the market and the rule of law, fairness and efficiency, are harmoniously unified.

Taking the commercial operation in community as an example, Chengdu encourages the participation of multiple market entities to build a government-society collaborative work mechanism of management committee + industrial bureau + street + platform company. Community operators apply commercial logic in daily operation, promote efficient conversion of ecological value, build an intelligent information-sharing platform for management, refine replicable models and form institutional standards based on the practical results of similar cases. Ultimately, a virtuous loop for continuously improving Park City community services and maintaining urban vitality will be formed.

Summary

Park City is a systematic introspection into industrial civilization reflected in cities. In a megacity such as Chengdu, with a history of 4,500 years of urban civilization, over 2,300 years of urban construction and a large population and economic output value, it is remarkable that a city has been built that balances production, livelihood, and environment, integrates environment and socio-economics and unifies human, urbanization, environment, and industries. Chengdu has become a replicable practice model for path exploration and the establishment of standards.



Image: Meng Bei

The Twin Towers of Chengdu's Financial Centre represent progress and ambition, reflecting the city's dynamic and vibrant spirit