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# The practice of Leshan pocket park: a collaborative and participatory approach adopted by Xuhui District

Region	Asia and the Pacific
Award Scheme	Shanghai Manual
Themes	Public Space Regeneration
Sustainable Development Goals	Goal 11 - Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable

## Summary

Leshan Pocket Park, located in Xuhui District of Shanghai, is a model of urban green space development that focuses on the integration of ecological restoration, community needs, and participatory design.

## Background and Objective

Xuhui District, located in the core of Shanghai, is one of the city's most densely populated areas, with a population exceeding 1.1 million people across just 54.93 km<sup>2</sup>. The district faces considerable pressure due to rapid urbanization and climate change, which has highlighted the need for more public green spaces to enhance ecological sustainability and the quality of urban life. Shanghai's commitment to constructing 300 pocket parks during the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) has positioned Xuhui District at the forefront of this initiative. The goal was to create small, accessible parks that cater to the recreational needs of local communities while contributing to urban greening and climate resilience. Leshan Pocket Park was selected as a key site for transformation, aiming to rejuvenate the public space, improve its functionality, and serve as a model for other projects in the district.

## Actions and Implementation

The renovation of Leshan Pocket Park, originally established in the 1980s, focused on several critical aspects. The park had fallen into disrepair, with degraded plants, outdated facilities, and limited seating for the public. To address these issues, Xuhui District engaged in a comprehensive participatory design process. Residents and visitors provided feedback through surveys and on-site research, resulting in a design that reflected the community's desires. The focus was on creating eco-friendly, age-appropriate facilities while avoiding excessive commercialism. The design process involved various stakeholders, including local officials, resident representatives, and design units, fostering a sense of ownership and collaboration.



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Youth played a pivotal role in the project, with many young people actively contributing as innovators, organizers, and green advocates. The park also adopted sustainable design principles, incorporating permeable materials, rain gardens, and water collection devices as part of the “sponge city” concept. These features aimed to improve water management and enhance the park’s environmental performance. Additionally, the park’s renovation took into account the practical needs of the community, especially seniors, by adding shaded seating areas and ensuring that the park’s design was both functional and aesthetically pleasing.

### Outcomes and Impacts

The park’s transformation has had a profound impact on the community. The park has become one of the most visited green spaces in Shanghai, attracting residents of all ages. The participatory design process has increased public satisfaction, with residents feeling more connected to the space and engaged in its upkeep. The park’s ecological improvements have also contributed to better urban resilience, mitigating the urban heat island effect and improving air quality. Moreover, the park has become a hub for various community activities, fostering social cohesion and providing a venue for nature education, gardening classes, and local events.

The project has been recognized for its proactive approach to involving the community, particularly youth, in the planning process. The creation of pedestrian-friendly facilities has reduced traffic congestion and encouraged walking, aligning with the city’s goals of reducing carbon emissions and promoting sustainable living. The integration of ecological infrastructure and smart technology to monitor water levels and weather conditions ensures that the community is well-prepared for extreme weather events, further enhancing its resilience to climate change.

### Sustainability and Scalability

The sustainable design of Leshan Pocket Park emphasizes long-term ecological health through the use of low-carbon, green infrastructure. The park’s integration of permeable surfaces, water management systems, and biodiversity protection aligns with broader environmental goals, particularly Shanghai’s focus on carbon neutrality. The success of this project has demonstrated the viability of small-scale green spaces in enhancing urban sustainability. As a model, the park’s participatory design process, youth involvement, and ecological features have set a precedent for other pocket parks in Xuhui District and beyond, making it scalable for future green space developments across Shanghai.

### Gender and Social Inclusivity



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Leshan Pocket Park has been designed with inclusivity in mind, addressing the diverse needs of the community. The design incorporates facilities for all ages, particularly for senior citizens, who make up a significant portion of the park's visitors. Accessible seating, shaded areas, and varying seating heights ensure that the park is comfortable and safe for people with different physical abilities. Furthermore, the participatory design process empowered local residents, regardless of gender, to contribute ideas and feedback. The park's transformation is a clear example of how urban spaces can be made more inclusive, fostering a sense of belonging among all community members.

### **Innovative Initiative**

Leshan Pocket Park is a prime example of innovative urban planning that combines ecological sustainability with community-driven development. The use of the “sponge city” concept in the park's design, with its permeable paving and rainwater management systems, is a forward-thinking approach to addressing climate change. Moreover, the emphasis on youth involvement, from design to maintenance, injects fresh ideas and energy into the project, making it a dynamic, evolving space. The practice of co-designing the park with local residents and continuously refining the park based on feedback is another innovative aspect, ensuring that the space truly meets the needs of the community.

### **Resources devoted to delivery**

The successful transformation of Leshan Pocket Park was made possible through significant investment in both financial and human resources. The district allocated funds for the park's renovation, which included the construction of new eco-friendly features and facilities. Additionally, substantial effort was put into public engagement, with numerous surveys, consultations, and meetings held to ensure that the park reflected the needs of its users. Youth involvement, particularly from those born after 1985 and 1995, played a key role in the park's development, contributing both ideas and labour. The collaborative approach to design, construction, and management, as well as ongoing community involvement, highlights the resources dedicated to ensuring the park's success and sustainability.

### **Conclusion**

The initiative serves as a successful example of how urban spaces can be revitalized through a collaborative, participatory approach. By integrating ecological principles, engaging the local community, and fostering youth leadership, the park has not only improved the quality of life for urban residents but also contributed to Shanghai's broader goals on environmental sustainability and climate resilience. The success of the project offers valuable lessons for urban planners and communities looking to create more sustainable, inclusive, and liveable public spaces in dense urban environments.