

## Article

# The Formation of Government-Oriented Creative Community and Its Driving Mechanisms: A Case Study of the 39° Space Art Creative Community in Foshan, China

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**Abstract:** With the arrival of the era of the creative economy, the “creative community”, a joint product of the regional/community revival movement and the localization of cultural and creative industries, has become a new goal of sustainable urban development. Creative communities can be government-oriented (top-down), or they can involve a sequence of autogenic developments (bottom-up) depending on the initial motivating force behind their formation. This paper provides a case study of the government-oriented Foshan 39° Space Art Creative Community (hereinafter, the 39° Community), though questionnaires, interviews, field observations, and other methods, to obtain a better understanding of how government-oriented creative communities formed. The paper discusses the mechanisms driving such communities in Chinese cities by constructing a driving mechanism model. The results show that policy decisions, under a special policy and industrial background jointly provided by the Foshan municipal government and the Nanhai District government together, is the initial impetus for the emergence of the 39° Community. The community has a concise and flexible organizational structure, creative community members, reasonable community function partitioning, a vibrant and innovative environment, and a variety of creative elements. Finally, the key to the sustainable development of the government-oriented creative community lies in the combined effect of endogenous and exogenous motivations that include a strong support from the local government, market demand, a favorable location, high-quality community services, and creative spirit. High-quality community service is a critical factor in the interaction between exogenous forces and endogenous factors because it can create bridges among governments, enterprises, employees, and the community.

**Keywords:** government-oriented creative community; community structure; driving mechanisms; 39° creative community; urban area

## 1. Introduction

Chinese urban development strategies in recent years have placed increasing importance on art and culture, reflecting a visible paradigm shift from industrial expansion to development based on an accumulation of talent and human capital [1]. Since the concept of the “Creative Economy”, the inner logic of which is the connection among originality, culture, and the economy [2] was first proposed by the British government, the creative nation or creative-based economic development model has been adopted by several developed countries and regions as a new development strategy. Accordingly, the

question of how to revive urban culture, neighborhoods, and economies has become a burning one for many developed countries and regions [3]. In an era that advocates creative development, it is difficult to satisfy demands for cultural and economic development demand at the local level by relying solely on the spatial agglomeration of creative industries, as it is precisely in a world that is becoming increasingly more integrated when cities or districts must lean more and more heavily on their distinctive local characteristics. It is those characteristics that can determine where a city excels and how it can distinguish itself in competition with other cities in the worldwide knowledge economy [4]. As a result, some western cities are trying to promote the growth of local creative economies by developing creative communities that are rich in knowledge and creativity. Cities are pursuing this goal through the integration of creative industries and local/community culture [5]. A typical representative of these efforts is Australia's "Queensland model", an educational-scientific-research-enterprise-consulting cross-linked creative industry development model. In this case, formed in such a circumstance that the policies from three levels (nation, state, and urban) served as the guidelines for local development. Positive responses from creative industries at different regional levels, as well as the interaction between government and creative industries were also essential, and the development was co-planned and invested in by the Queensland Government and Queensland University of Science and Technology [6,7]. At the same time, western countries and regions have carried out a large number of urban space reconstruction campaigns, such as the Garden City and Community Renewal project, in order to provide an effective solution to the problem of contaminated environments, traffic congestion, massive unemployment, and the disappearance of neighborhoods caused by war and urban expansion after World War II. Hence, the creative community has logically become a vital product of the continuous advancement of the community/regional renewal movement and the localized development of creative industries.

Undoubtedly, the creative community standpoint has its iconic communities, such as Kelvin Grove Urban Village (KGUV) in Queensland, Australia, SoHo in New York [8] and Heyri Art Village in Korea [1]. In accordance with the crucial impetus for their initial formation, creative communities can be categorized into two types [9]. First, there are creative clusters or areas predominantly established by local members (local residents and the creative class) as autogenic (bottom-up) creative communities, such as New York's SoHo [8,10] and Dafen Art Community in Shenzhen [11]. Second, there are local communities creatively established and developed by the government as government-oriented (top-down) creative communities, in which government departments play the leading role through their policies, funds, and even land tenure. The KGUV that is located in the inner northern suburb of Brisbane—the capital of Queensland—is a typical government-oriented creative community [6,12]. To some extent, autogenic creative communities generally share a similar process, "artist-led" gentrification [11]. In contrast, government-oriented creative communities may have a more attractive process due to the difference in political environment, social economy, and other factors. Such communities have thus become a research focus for exploring the relationship between policies and cultural development, such as case studies of Singapore [13] and USA [14].

China has now entered an era of mass entrepreneurship and innovation, during which creative industry development needs new creative space with the community as a solid force that can promote the development of the cultural industry, as the public support is the main carrier of social innovation [8]. A creative community is, therefore, not simply an inevitable requirement for realizing the interaction of community culture and the creative industry; rather, it is the reflection of the city's innovation function and creative ability at the community level. In general, research into creative communities is more systematic and comprehensive outside mainland China, where practical activities and achievements are more typical. However, what makes something a success in one country or city does not necessarily make it successful in other places. Hence, creative communities territorialized in Chinese cities involved should not uncritically adopt the theories and practices of creative communities from the West. Further empirical research on creative communities is necessary to China's pursuit of "new pattern urbanization" and "mass entrepreneurship and innovation". However, although

quite a few studies have been conducted, with one conceptual and other related issues [9,15,16] being made, and considerable results being obtained, systematic theoretical research into China's creative communities is still limited. Such communities have just begun to develop, and we lack a detailed description of a specific creative community, a description that could inform us exactly what these communities are and how they have evolved. A government-oriented creative community will be contextualized in terms of China's policy background, which provides a territorialized implementation process, making creative communities in China potentially different from those abroad. Therefore, based on literature review and a case study, this paper attempts to answer the following three questions:

- (1) In China, how does the government promote the formation of a creative community?
- (2) What does such a community consist of?
- (3) What mechanisms drive the formation and development of a government-oriented creative community in China?

Following this introduction, this paper reviews the literature in greater detail to provide background on creative communities, and on that basis, in Section 2, this paper discusses the relevant concepts and content in Chinese context. Section 3 explains the relevant methodologies and sources employed, and the case involved, in the research. Section 4 presents the social background and creative development in Foshan and the case area. Next, Section 5 reveals the specific characteristics of the constituent elements that make up the creative community. Section 6 discusses the driving mechanisms at work. In the conclusion the key findings are highlighted together with their theoretical value to local creative development studies of China, in general.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. *The Creative Community and Creativity therein*

The creative community—the concept of a geographical location where creative workers, creative agencies and cultural organizations are concentrated—was initially presented at the New England Council in 2000 [17]. John M. Eger, a professor of the University of California, San Diego, then defined the term ‘creative community’ in his book *The Creative Community* [18] as a social space that, closely connected with the arts, culture and business, is readying to welcome the rapid development of the post-industrial era and the knowledge-based socio-economy by consciously investing human and financial resources.

As Florida [19] explains, a real creative community that can survive, flourish and proceed its development, is one that can revitalize a city with innovations in the new era and provide an ecological working and living place in which all kind of creative elements of lifestyles, amenities, economic, activities, members and cultures for instance and free ambience can be found. In China, it is generally accepted that creative communities are based on local culture as a form of staple community development resource and that such communities develop in humanistic spaces in which community residents, creative talents, cultural institutions, and government agencies are concentrated [9,15]. In China's unique cultural and institutional context, the concept of the creative community needs to be interpreted in more detail in terms of the definition of community. According to the theory of Tennes [20] and Fei Xiaotong [21], a ‘community’ can be regarded as a group of members who live or work together in a geographically local area; the group may be small in scale, but the members network with other communities and have formed social attachment to the area, which means they have formed strong and weak interpersonal relationships inside and outside the community in order to work towards generally considered goals and visions. The community may be small in scale, but network with other communities. In addition, since the reform of the community system (shequ zhi) in the 1990s, this description has also been contained in Chinese Central Government documents describing the community residents' committee and its current scale of jurisdiction [22]. Every creative community, of course, has its own geographical characteristics and cultural background, and they have

more or fewer commonalities depending on their particular background. Studies show that the creative class and creative industries—also equally known as the cultural and creative industries or content industries for the purpose of this paper—are the essential components of the creative community [9,17]. They also have a strong convenience orientation and urban selectivity; especially preferring large cities with a good creative environment [23–25]. Therefore, it is reasonable to consider the creative community as a new type of urban community. In China’s unique context, the creative community:

- is a new form of urban community that exists within the jurisdiction of the community residents’ committee;
- is a gathering of creative entities such as local residents, the creative class, training or educational institutions and creative enterprises, with a creative atmosphere (science and art, local culture, the natural environment and creative education) and service groups that include government departments, literary and artistic organizations, sanitation, and security;
- and focuses on the creation of a community atmosphere to promote the integration of daily life, creative work, and community activities, and to form distinctive creative industries dominated by local culture.

Creativity is the core force driving creative community development. To some extent, creativity is the ability to create, involving the use of the imagination to produce new ideas, make things, etc., Most researchers around the globe have now settled on the idea that creativity is the bringing into being of novel things that are valued in at least one social setting [26,27]. Currently, in the process of community planning and development, creativity is generally regarded as the practice of art, because the involvement of artistic practice can help to construct art spaces as a channel to unite community residents. However, in a creative community, ‘creativity’, which means the creative capacity and production capacity of the community space that is a combination of culture, art, science and technology, knowledge spillover, etc., transcends the general sense of art production and involves all aspects of community growth, such that creative management methods are used to promote community belonging.

## 2.2. Government-Oriented Creative Community, a Sustainable Community-Based Cultural Program

In the creative economy era, the emergence of a government-oriented creative community, the result of cultural planning and spatial planning at the community level, is seen to be a shift in the scale of the use of creative city discourse by government agencies.

To alleviate the economic problems caused by deindustrialization, which has appeared since the 1960s due to the rapid development of modern science and technology and the environmental pollution caused by industry, and to cater to changes in urban lifestyles and consumption [28], city governments across western developed countries have, since the 1990s, become more focused on cultural development strategies and have established cultural policies to encourage economic growth and enrich people’s lives, and even attempted to make them as a center of creativity and innovation on a regional or global scale. In other words, culture is almost the core focus of current international competition and interurban competition, as a good cultural environment has a great magnetic pull on talent, elites, and advanced enterprises, and it strengthens a city’s reputation, whether we are speaking of a traditional cultural capital of the world, such as New York or Paris, or a place without a profound cultural heritage, such as Newark, New Jersey or Bilbao, Spain. All have witnessed the widespread use of cultural activities and facilities to enhance a city’s image, attract tourism, and promote economic development, because this approach can enhance their competitiveness and resilience in the international competition or financial crisis [29]. Combined with the role of propaganda, urban cultural development strategies have set off a wave of cultural construction on a global scale, and the creative city model focusing on cultural and creative economic development is widely accepted.

However, over the last decade, since the financial crisis of 2008, there has been a quiet turn in the creative city discourse. The language of the creative city has been replaced by creative placemaking [30], and then the new discourse is used by local governments at all levels for a sustainable local-based cultural strategy—government-oriented creative community—to fund a range of projects from public art and cultural facilities to creative entrepreneurship programs and live/work spaces for the creative class [31]. This approach is the opposite of what occurred in SoHo [11], which was “naturally occurring” rather than a state-planned creative community. One of the main reasons for this change is that the prosperity of the creative economy has caused local development to enter into a period of significant change, and although this change is still undefined and emerging, government creativity projects can provide local communities or organizations with challenging opportunities to explore new ways of working with creativity, innovation, and collaboration to help themselves through specific periods. Consequently, during the development of a government-oriented creative community, the local council or government agency may fruitfully draw on a key characteristic or cultural connotation, for instance, of the community in which it is located and, thus, supplement its approach to working in and for that community to ensure that it is well recognized for its culture [4]. Additionally, government-oriented creative community development, as a combination of sustainable community-based cultural planning and creative placemaking, is more likely to go beyond purely economic motivations and pursue multi-dimensional benefits ranging from culture to social-economic gains. Moreover, it is advantageous that a series of creative actions that can bring considerable benefits would be recorded in documents from which some approaches may be studied and adopted by other communities, whether local or not, wishing to operate in a more creative and innovative way.

### *2.3. Constituent Elements of Moving from an Urban Community to a Creative Community*

In contrast with the research on the classical constituent elements of urban communities, the constituent elements of the creative communities in China's cities have received little attention to date. Although some necessary factors, such as cultural organization, creative industries, and creative workers, are mentioned in the academic literature [15,20,21], there is still a lack of a systematic general introduction to creative communities or even a description of a particular one, which has led to a lack of clarity of the creative community concept in general. As a form of urban community, the creative community necessarily possesses the basic characteristics of the urban community, that is, the basic elements of the urban community should be present in the creative community. G. A. Hillery Jr. [32], for example, defines community from a sociological perspective and believes that community relations, common bonds and geographical location are the basic elements of community, while Sutton [33] later proposes the four elements of community construction to be POET (population, organization, environment, and technology). More recently, according to the actual situation of urban community development in China, the elements of urban community have been classified as territory, membership, common consciousness, space, and organizational structure [34].

As a principal component of the era of the creative economy, the creative community is naturally different from the common urban community and needs to be differentiated based on compliance with the general principle behind the constituent elements of a community. Combined with the above definition of the creative community and the elements of urban communities and taking the unique characteristics of the creative community into consideration (creative cluster, good humanitarian ecological environment, strong cultural and economic vitality, etc.), the constituent elements of the creative community are defined here as the following five points: (i) organizational structure; (ii) community members; (iii) spatial structure; (iv) physical and mental environment; and (v) creative elements that are scattered among the whole community and can be extracted and examined individually to distinguish the creative community from the general urban community.



#### 2.4. The Main Factors Influencing the Formation of a Creative Community

Compared to the quantity of studies on the development of traditional communities and cultural industry, the formation and development of creative communities has received little attention. In some cosmopolitan cities, however, creative communities are becoming major attractions for local cities, such as Song Zhuang in Beijing, Tianzifang in Shanghai, Dafen village in Shenzhen, KGUV in Brisbane, and SoHo in New York. On the other hand, because the creative community is composed of creative industries, creative talents and other elements, the formation and development of a creative community needs to involve the combined action of multiple-factors, such as the awakening of local culture, the agglomeration and transformation of industry, and the cultivation and introduction of inter-disciplinary talents. For example, Florida [19] argues that culture is a new cohesive force in the era of postmodern geography and that the ‘creative class’ is very keen to live and work in a place with an extensive cultural atmosphere that will guide the further development of cities and communities and make them more competitive. How to unearth and cultivate the essence of local culture is, of course, inseparable from the participation of creativity-related entities, such as the creative class and creative enterprises, because those entities can provide a strong competitive edge for rejuvenating regional prosperity [35]. In view of this, the creation and sustainable development of a government-oriented creative community needs to involve the combined action of multi-factors, both exogenous and endogenous, rather than simply relying solely on the government support. This need is driven by the following:

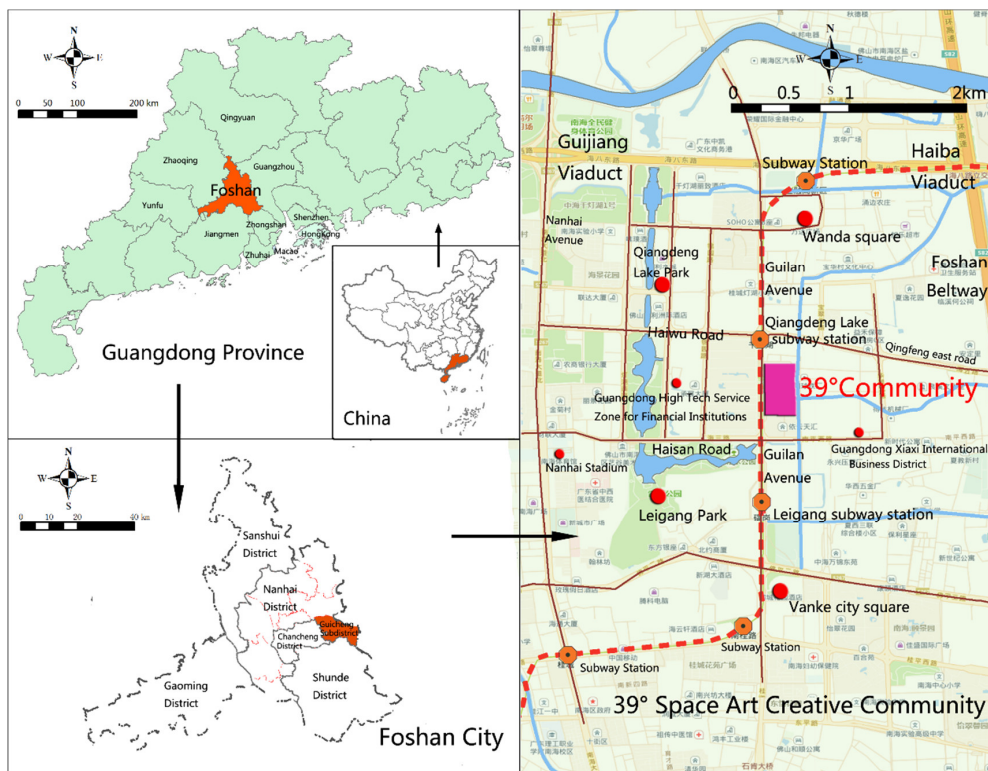
- (1) China’s special political environment—a centralized system, for example, can largely determine the direction and substance of local development, so that the policy support [13,36] has a positive influence on the rise of China’s creative communities;
- (2) Economic benefits are major pursuit of enterprise development [37], although they are not necessarily the ultimate goal, while the size of the market demand for the cultural industry—as an important performance of economic benefit—largely determines the necessity of developing the creative community as a new type of development that combines culture, life, and industry;
- (3) Locational advantage, including traffic convenience and surroundings [12,24,38], for instance, is not only an important factor in attracting talents, investment and many other aspects, but also an important advantage in the long-term development of a creative community;
- (4) High-quality services [39–41] are also related to the sustainable development of a community’s creativity because good services help to create a good working and living environment, both physically and emotionally. This environment helps to increase community members’ sense of belonging, which is often considered to be one of the main driving forces behind the sustainable development of a community, especially in the government-oriented creative community development process;
- (5) The spirit of creativity (e.g., the spirit of adventure, initiative and innovation and will to persevere, and the active participation of arts organizations and residents [42]) is also reshaping the average urban community into a diversified creative society.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Case Study

The case study involves the 39° Space Art Creative Community (hereinafter, the 39° Community) in Nanhai District of Foshan City, a national advanced manufacturing base of China, (Figure 1). The community has a total land area of 6.2 hectares, an overall floorage of 34,000 m<sup>2</sup> and 50% greening rate. The 39° Community is located in the core area of the Guangdong High Tech Service Zone for Financial Institutions in the east of the Nanhai District of Foshan metropolitan area, at the intersection of Guilin Avenue, Haiwu Road, and Haisan Road; it is five minutes walking distance from two subway stations, Qiandeng Lake and Leigang. There are 44 creative enterprises and approximately 450 community members included in this study. The 39° Community was built at the end of 2011 to facilitate the

development of the cultural industry in Foshan and even provide creative community development model for other places in Guangdong province. This major project not only involved constructing a “comprehensive experimental area of cultural reform and development of Guangdong Province”, but also became the first key cultural creative effort of the Nanhai district government under the circumstance of the “government-dominant marketing operational model”. It, therefore, is reasonable to choose the 39° Community as a typical case study, as it has reference value for other Chinese cities.



**Figure 1.** Location of the 39° Community. Source: compiled by the authors.

### 3.2. Research Methods

Primary data were first solicited from a full sample questionnaire survey, a visit to the community exhibition hall and stratified interviews from November 2016 and January 2017. Of the 44 questionnaires distributed to the community’s creative enterprises, 42 valid returns were obtained. The 21 employees of these 42 creative enterprises were then interviewed for a period of 10–15 min at their enterprises or at the open space of the 39° Community. Two managers of 39° Community management were interviewed for a period of 1.5 h in their offices. The information collected with the questionnaire is mainly related to the types of enterprises, the number of employees and their academic qualifications, the convenience provided by the community and community activities, etc. Interview information includes the origin of the community, development experience, community orientation, and business philosophy.

## 4. Policy Background and Creative Development in Foshan and the 39° Community

### 4.1. Foshan

As an important step in implementing the Outline Program of Reform and Development of the Pearl River Delta Region (2008–2020) and as part of the historical mission given by the Provincial Party Committee and the Government of Guangdong Province to Guangzhou, Foshan, and Zhaoqing, the Development Plan of the Guangzhou-Foshan-Zhaoqing Economic Circle (2010–2020) was produced to advance the economic integration of the Pearl River Delta Region. As a result, beginning in

2009, Foshan city took the lead in launching the Three Old Transformation (old towns, old factory buildings, and old villages) and at the beginning of 2010, it entered a rapid development phase as a model for other cities in China. In this context, the Foshan municipal government and Nanhai district government advocated accelerating the development of local cultural industries. Thus, Nanhai District has successfully identified as the first comprehensive experimental area for cultural reform and development of Guangdong Province, and the Guangdong High Tech Service Zone for Financial Institutions Project was also launched synchronously.

By the end of 2013, the cultural industry in Nanhai had produced RMB 35.82 billion in revenue, a year-on-year average increase of RMB 12 billion that almost doubled the revenue of 2007; this accounted for 5.52% of total GDP that exceeded the world average level—for cultural contributions to GDP. Moreover, according to the Nanhai Bureau of Culture and Sports, Nanhai's cultural industry output at the end of 2020 will be quadruple that of 2013 and more than 8% of total GDP.

#### 4.2. The 39° Community

To reflect local characteristics and maintain the context of the cultural space, the municipal and district government decided to develop the cultural industry on a piece of spare land, the former owner of which was the Foshan Nanhai Technician Institute, which was founded in 1963, and had occupied the space from the beginning of the 1980s and then relocated to Shishan Town of Nanhai District in the middle of 2010. The 39° Community, as a major project of the “comprehensive experimental area for cultural reform and development of Guangdong Province”, subsequently came into being, operated by the Foshan Nanhai 39° Art Space Investment Development Co., Ltd. (hereinafter the 39° Company), a subordinate enterprise of the Nanhai Public Property Management Office that has become the operator and manager of the 39° Community. At the beginning, the 39° Community was given a number of development goals related to local characteristics, such as integrated development of culture, science, technology, and finance; first-class public service platform of the cultural industry; being the gathering area for advertising media, new media, animation, and the production of online games, animation, films, and television; and being the center of cultural life of the Guangdong High Tech Service Zone for Financial Institutions. Those goals were set by the Nanhai Public Property Management Office and 39° Company separately from the municipal and provincial level governments.

By the end of 2011, the 39° Community had formally settled on this land. Meanwhile, a series of effective measures was implemented to guarantee the healthy and stable development of the 39° Community. Initially, “service and innovation” was established as the company's tenet, and the members actively communicated with government departments to provide effective help for enterprise development and attract potential cultural enterprises. Later, a Community Forum was held to ensure the provision of space for the creative class to communicate and learn, and start-up incubators were established to serve entrepreneurs more comprehensively. Some municipal activities and district activities were also undertaken to further expand the influence of the 39° Community and enrich the daily lives of community members, for instance, the Pearl River Delta leisure Festival and the 39° Space Creative Cartoon Carnival. To further facilitate the development of the community culture industry, many large enterprises and projects were introduced into the community, including the Guangdong Smart Home Institute, National animation base and Microdream Media. Some service platforms similar to the Nanhai District Cultural Entrepreneurship Camp and “Think, Share and Collect” were also established to promote the growth of community enterprises, shape the community culture, and create a community brand.

### 5. Constituent Elements of the 39° Community

#### 5.1. Community Organization: Concise and Flexible

As a community with a simple internal organizational relationship, the 39° Company and community creative enterprises formed the main structural system of the 39° Community. Under



the direct leadership of the Nanhai Public Property Management Office, enterprises with problems were provided with effective solutions, such as enterprise exchange symposiums, by departments such as the 39° Entrepreneurship Camp and Property Management Office, created by the 39° Company. At the same time, cooperative relationships were formed between enterprises and the 39° Company. As with the Foshan Association of Designers, Foshan Intellectual Property Association, and Foshan Information Industry Association, some enterprises have joined associations to manage and standardize their behavior to some extent and provide more opportunities for business cooperation (Figure 2). In addition, the office of the Foshan Association of Designers is located in the 39° Community, which also provides a close connection between the associations and the 39° Community.

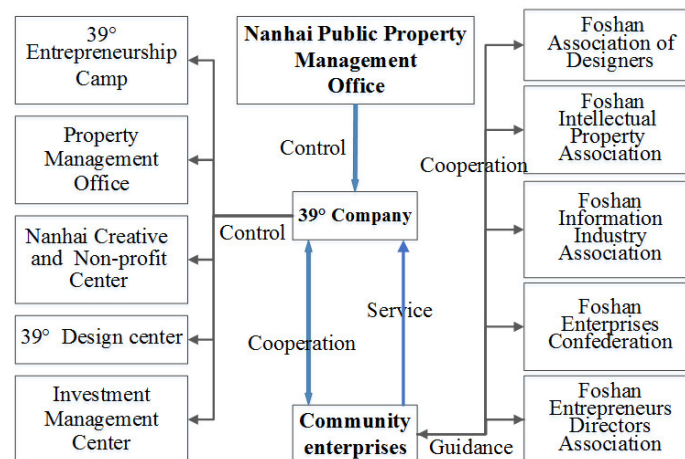


Figure 2. Community organizational structure.

By January 2017, the occupancy rate of the 39° Community reached 97%; there were 44 cultural creative enterprises, including six relating to leisure, four to intellectual property, 10 to internet technologies, 22 to advertising designs, and two to new media (Figure 3). The community also includes the Li Chunhua sculpture studio, one of five studios and a famous sculpture studio in Guangdong Province. Interestingly, a new trend for industrial upgrading has emerged in the 39° Community, and the types of creative enterprises are changing from advertising and design to new media, Internet applications, and other related industries because of the rapid demand for up-to-date cultural industries in urban development.

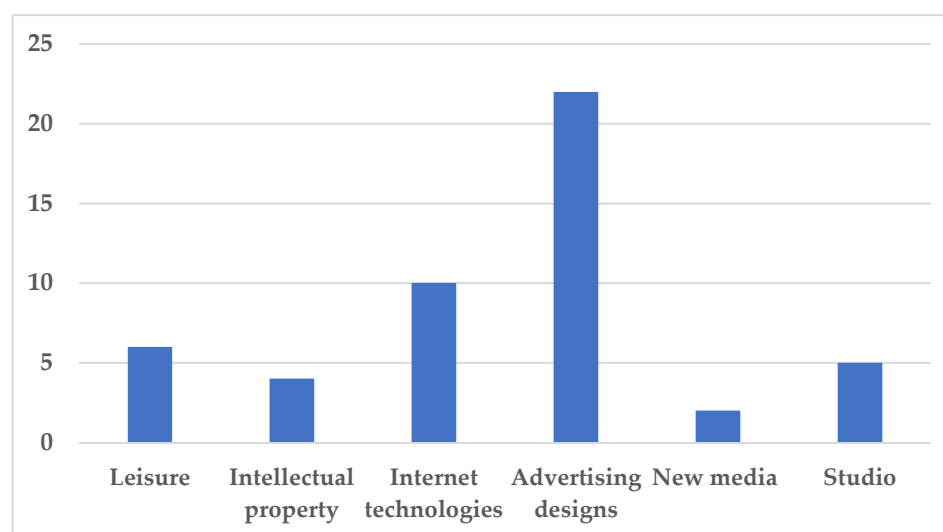


Figure 3. Community enterprise types and amount.

### 5.2. Community Members: Mostly the Creative Class

The number of members of the 39° Community may be relatively smaller than in other communities or other creative parks, but the majority are members of the creative class or are high-level and intermediate intellectuals. At present, the total membership of the 39° Community is approximately 450 people, comprising creative industry practitioners (nearly 400), 39° Company staffs (nearly 30), and service workers (nearly 20) that include property management personnel, security guards and sanitation workers; 90% of those workers have junior college or bachelor degrees and 5% have master degrees or above. Therefore, one of the significant characteristics of the 39° Community is its abundant intellectual resources. Moreover, more talented people will be attracted to the 39° Community following a hardware and software upgrade to be completed in the near future.

### 5.3. Community Space Structure: Creative Function Highlights

Overall, the community planning and design not only emphasized the spatial layout and functional structure of the creative community but also demonstrated respect for the spatial historical context and for the humanistic, artistic and ecological qualities of space in the creative economy era. As shown in Figures 4–6, the main entrance faces west, with the side door facing south, and the Sansheng River divides the community into three parts (south, middle, and north areas) with the surrounding environment and the east-west main road. The art studios, playground and science and technology enterprises represented by the Guangdong Smart Home Institute are concentrated in the North Area (inaccessible to the researchers due to renovation work to provide requisite hardware support for the next growth phase), which was planned to be built as a cultural and sports recreation area; that is, it is a comprehensive area that includes art, creative studio, sport, delicacy, and so on; the Middle Area is largely occupied by the leisure function zone as result of the refreshing environment, which includes a city river and green shade on both sides; the south area contains an integrated area of enterprise offices, community management, and living accommodations.

The south area, with an active atmosphere provided by enterprises and daily staff activities, is vibrant and is subdivided into four zones. A creative enterprise zone, where we witnessed a great deal of brainstorming, occupies the whole of the west of the south area. This transitions smoothly to an adjacent leisure activity zone located in the central part of the south area and touching the other three zones; and it was designed for the daily entertainment and communication of community members. The Comprehensive Service Zone is distributed on both sides of the northern and eastern zones of the south area and is connected with the southeast Talent Apartment. These two areas together provide a convenient, practical, and reliable set of services for the creative class and creative enterprises.



**Figure 4.** Spatial distribution of the 39° Community (before the visit). Source: compiled by the authors.

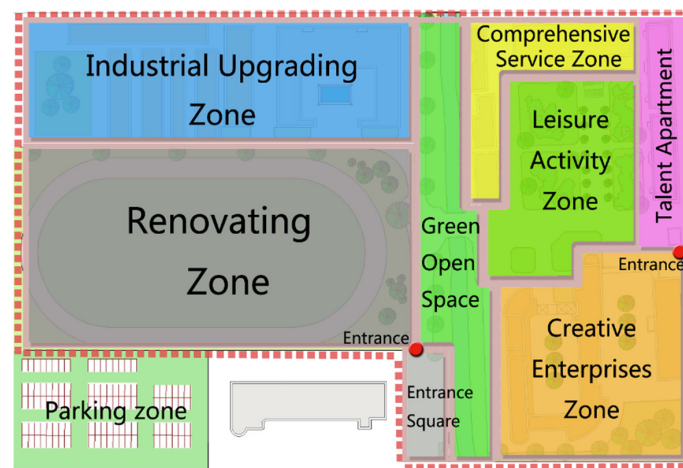


Figure 5. Functional partitioning (during the visit).



Figure 6. Picture of the north area.

#### 5.4. Community Environment: The Combination of an Energetic Physical Environment and Innovation Consciousness

As mentioned above, the 39° Community inherited the site of the old Foshan Nanhai Technician Institute, with more than a half century of history. The major campus is full of vitality and creativity; no effort has been spared to expand the community culture. There are also relatively good supporting facilities, including independent apartments, outdoor playing fields and studios, and a pleasant physical environment, such as office buildings conducive to learning and of historical significance; there is also a gently flowing river and a large amount of greenery (Figure 7).

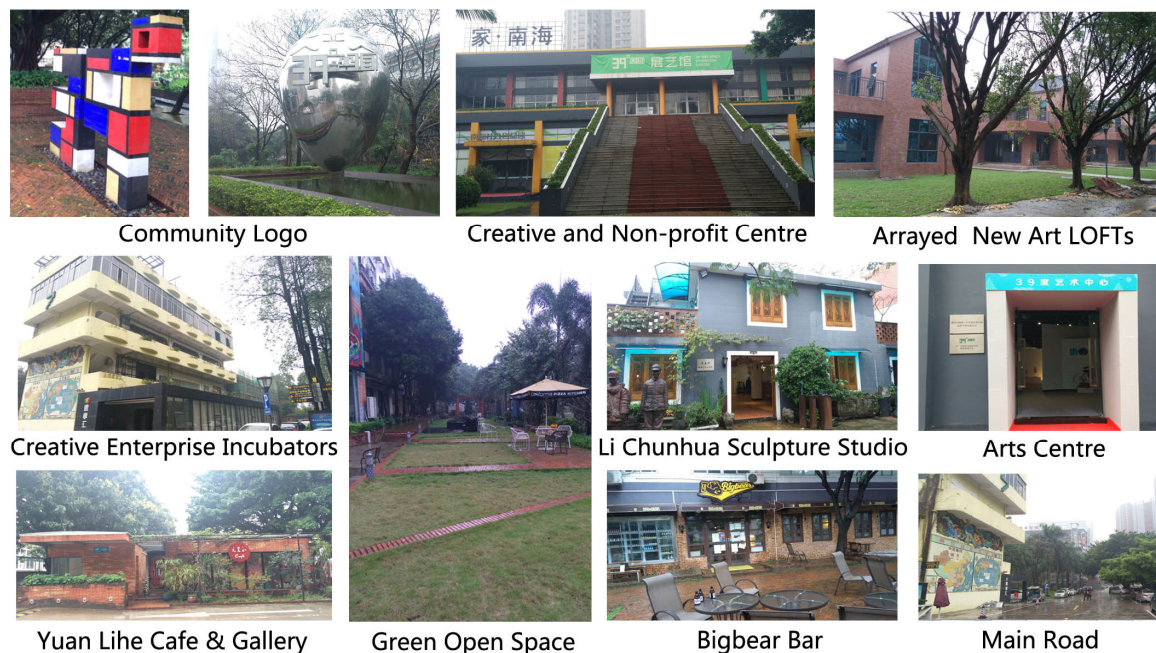


Figure 7. Community landscape and characteristic spaces.

Additionally, the 39° Community is not just a simple workplace; it also has living and recreational spaces (cafes and bars); promoting creative thinking in product development and community life. At the spiritual level then, there are many potentially creative people and enterprises to be seen in the community, they are the carriers of culture, and the source and external expression of the community's vitality. It is an intriguing and creative community environment derived from the thinking of the creative class, and it also defines the cultural meaning of space provided by community activities. These do not just simply enhance the activities of the community and contribute to the formation of an innovative spirit; they also drive the increased overall economic, social, and environmental strength of the community. In addition, the 39° Company also has a well-developed sense of service and service innovation.

### 5.5. Distinctive Creative Elements

The creative elements of the 39° Community can be summarized as physical elements (e.g., creative talent, enterprises, and space construction); culture elements (e.g., an inherited campus culture, local culture and enterprise cultures); service elements, formed by corporate services provided by the community, meaningful activities, preferential policies, etc.; and life elements (e.g., leisure, exchanges within bars and coffee shops, and spontaneous activities or non-profit actions). The creative elements of the 39° Community are expected to further expand following the upgrading of the Innovation Hub of CAS, which involves a large-scale Startup Launchpad, SOHO, and leisure sports venues in the north area and will bring a maker culture, sport and leisure, art and design, and science and technology to the location.

## 6. Discussion: The Driving Mechanisms of the 39° Community

In studying the formation of government-oriented creative communities in urban areas of China, it is important to pay attention to the dynamics and mechanisms involved. Figure 8 provides a model of the driving mechanisms the formation of the 39° Community. This involves exogenous motivation through policy support and market requirements, endogenous motivation in terms of local conditions, community service and a spirit of creativity, and the interactions between them. A more detailed discussion is presented below.



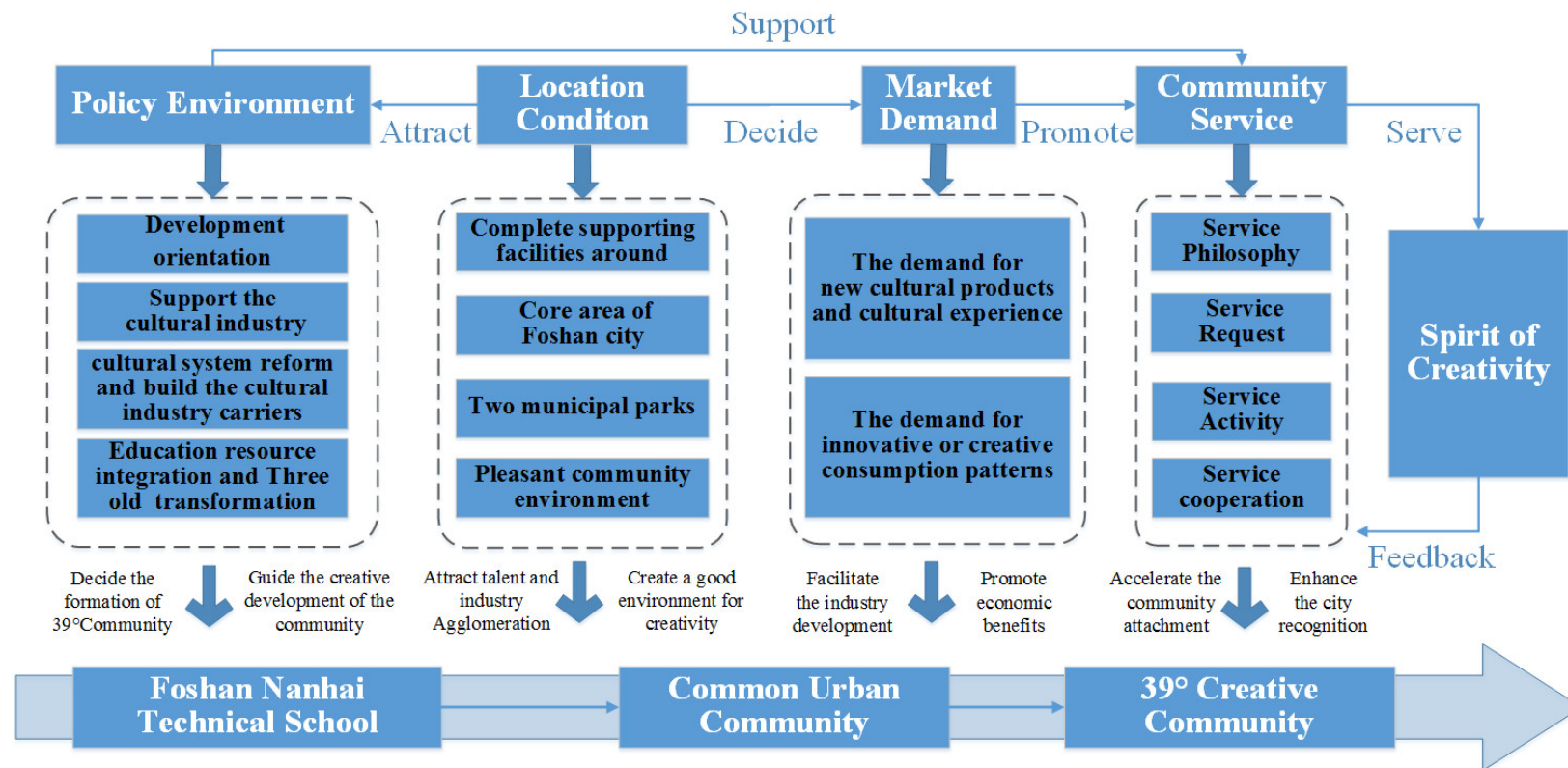


Figure 8. Dynamic model of the formation of the 39° Community. Source: compiled by the authors.



On the one hand, external forces—through policy support and market requirements—have directly contributed to the emergence of the 39° Community. First, policy support [13,36] determined the emergence of the 39° Community and attracted enterprises and talent, which means that the 39° Community could not have come into being without policy support from the local government. As the first cultural industry cluster area in the form of a community, the 39° Community has been highly valued by both municipal and district governments, and regarded as an important cultural industry cooperation platform of the Pearl River Delta region. To achieve this, several goals such as developing a Cultural Industry Public Service Platform, Visual Arts and Maker Area, and Fashion Leisure and Cultural Life Area were formulated to clarify the aims and accelerate the development of the 39° Community within a controllable range. Since Nanhai was identified as the first Comprehensive Experimental Area for Cultural Reform and Development of Guangdong Province, more than ten policies have been issued by the Nanhai district committee and Nanhai People's government to promote the advancement of the local cultural industry. Of these, some have been specially prepared for the 39° Community; for instance, cultural enterprises located in the 39° Community are receiving rental subsidies, but rather than having to apply by themselves, the 39° Company applies on their behalf. The funds obtained in this way involve a fiscal transfer to the enterprises by the district government over a three-year period; RMB 15 per m<sup>2</sup> per month in the first year, RMB 13 in the second year, and RMB 10 in the third year. Furthermore, the rent of the 39° Community is only approximately half that of the surrounding office buildings, at almost RMB 80 per m<sup>2</sup> per month. However, unlike in Singapore [13], where the government generally provides space for mainstream creative industry while alternative spaces needed for small creative companies and start-ups has not been considered, the Foshan government has provided a low-rent and comfortable working environment, which is appropriate for both mainstream creative industries and start-ups, by renovating the old city area. This, to some extent, is due to differences in the political environment and the size of the territory. Due to such government policy support, the 39° Community has an obvious advantage in such aspects as rent, which may effectively prevent the 39° Community from becoming an area that is purely for cultural consumption or from pursuing non-creative activities that have purely economic interests that would disrupt the rich creative cultural environment [2]. This policy, therefore, helps to maintain the original intention of community culture and the nature of the creative community. However, unlike traditional centralized management models, the management of the 39° Community is more liberal and entrepreneurial, which gives the community plenty of room to develop freely.

In addition, market demand creates economic benefits for the further development of the community. As has been demonstrated by numerous studies, market demand is a vital external factor determining the development of the industry [39]. In the context of globalization, which generates the urban forms and land utilization patterns that tend to be similar in many cities today, cultural quality and identity are especially important for every big city if they aspire to be more globally competitive. Thus, culture has become a key aspect of transformation and innovation and the cultural industry has become the inevitable choice of many major cities. According to the World Bank, World Intellectual Property Organization(WIPO), and United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the growth rate of the world cultural industry was more than twice that of world GDP in 2013, and the global cultural industry's contribution to world GDP is increasing by an average of 0.7 to 0.8 percent per year. The cultural industry's output in Nanhai, moreover, had reached RMB 35.82 billion by the end of 2013, a year-on-year average increase of RMB 12 billion that almost doubled that of 2007, and it accounted for 5.52% of total GDP exceeding the world average level of 5.26%. According to the Nanhai Bureau of Culture and Sports, Nanhai's cultural industry output at the end of 2020 would be quadruple that of 2013 and would be more than 8% of total GDP, confirming its rapid development and the tremendous demand for it. Thus, there is a vast market for the cultural industry that is not limited to Foshan City.

On the other hand, endogenous qualities of the 39° Community fundamentally ensure that its development is creative, vibrant and sustainable. First and foremost, location, including convenient

transportation, the surrounding human and natural environment, and so on, is more likely the principal factor in the process of regional development from a geographic perspective. Hospers [43] also suggests that the urban hustle and bustle and other habitability factors are important in creating a conditional framework to promote the creative of cities and local places. At the regional level, the geographical circumstances of the 39° Community are satisfying, as it is located in the Nanhai District, which is the center of fashion and culture of the Guangzhou-Foshan metropolis and the core area of the Guangzhou-Foshan economic circle. This area provides a good ambiance for the development of creative enterprises and the creative class. Moreover, it is within a half-hour drive of the surrounding expressways and high-speed railway stations, and within an hour's drive of Baiyun International Airport. Meanwhile, at the city level, a large number of amenities are distributed around the community. The area is one of the beneficiaries of the influence of Leigang Park and Qiandeng Lake Park, two acclaimed city culture and leisure parks no more than one kilometer away from the 39° Community. These parks combine leisure, entertainment and culture to provide a favorable milieu for creative talent to have a leisurely life and increase the chances of the informal communication. In this case, the parks are seen as a source of inspiration for originality and innovation. Moreover, business services, culture and education, health care, and other amenities are also important factors affecting the creative class and creative enterprises' choice of where to work and live. For example, the places that the creative talents of the 39° Community might prioritize are commercial districts, educational institutions, medical institutions, and comfortable housing conditions; they have access to three city malls (Baihua Times Square, Vanke City Square, and Wanda Plaza), four kindergartens, seven primary schools, five middle schools and technical schools, three hospitals, and over ten middle- to high-level residential estates all within two kilometers of the 39° Community. Furthermore, these amenities were built for the purpose of constructing a city sub-center with a two-kilometer diameter in Nanhai district, and they provide an excellent working and living environment for the creative class and meet the basic needs of community members. With these advantages, the 39° Community has gradually become a creative gathering place in the Pearl River Delta that always provides convenient transportation, shopping, and resources for attracting creative enterprises and the creative class.

Furthermore, high-quality services promote the development of community attachment. As Ferdinand Tönnies proposes, the concept of community is both spatial and spiritual, neither of which can be disregarded. As the 39° Company is just a new government-oriented urban community, the community attachment of enterprises and the creative class was not strong in the early days. Nevertheless, the 39° Company played an important role that accelerated the strengthening of attachment through community service. On the one hand, through the continuous improvement of community service facilities as the operator of the community, the 39° Company created a harmonious and vibrant working and living environment in the community. This attracted more creative enterprises and talent, and a spatial community of creative talent and creative enterprises in a highly concentrated place has been achieved after only five years of hard work. On the other hand, to construct a spiritual community, the 39° Company has been working hard to provide good supporting services for the development of enterprises or individuals enabling them to grow in a good business environment and recognize and accept the benefits offered by the community.

In summary, the service approach of 39° Community can be divided into the four points. First is the Service Philosophy. As two managers of 39° Community said:

We recognize that our own values are not only to the lessor but also to focus on providing quality services, and we would like to serve not only the business and individuals in the community but also other cultural enterprises of Nanhai. (39° Company, Foshan, China, 2016)

Second are Service Requests. The object of service in the community must be the elites or potential creative enterprises, because only in this way can limited community resources be maximally utilized. The next is Service Activity, i.e., community activities, through which the community culture is conglomerated and the social network is strengthened. The Community holds shared sessions called "39 Talk", for example, for community enterprises to introduce themselves to the

other enterprises to share ideas or look for partners. At the same time, the 39° Company itself also actively cooperates with enterprises or helps them to find their points of conjunction with each other, in the same way as a patent application might be developed between an aeronautical enterprise and an intellectual property agency. Finally, service cooperation is needed, as cultural creative industries are knowledge-intensive industries, where it is important to have an abundance of creative talent that has received higher education and has extensive knowledge. Consequently, the 39° Community has established cooperative relationships with Jinan University, Southern China Normal University, the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and other universities or research institutions to create a better cooperative and entrepreneurial platform and introduce high-quality talent to the community.

According to Mr. Zhang, the strategic development department manager of the 39° Company:

An Italian merchant has set up an enterprise within the community thanks to the convenience of the community services in his starting up process and, after the teamwork involved, developed a new product that has a good sale in Europe. This is now printed on the Foshan 39° Community's logo to show that it was designed in the Community, which is a good way to promote the community brand. (39° Company, Foshan, China, 2016)

From the perspective of community creative workers, according to the results of questionnaire surveys, and random interviews, nearly 90% of respondents came here or chose to stay here because of the good service and environment provided by the community. In regard to working and living in the same community, 80% of respondents who live in the community-provided talent apartments think it is good for them, as they can avoid paying high rents to live in apartments elsewhere, have more time to carry out their creative work, and are unaffected by a daily commute. This finding is in line with previous research results [11,44] showing that the innovation ability of the creative class can be enhanced by providing opportunities to combine living, working, and even learning spaces.

In addition, the spirit of creativity drives the progress of the whole community. Creativity is the precondition of innovation that, from an economic perspective, is behind the success of many products in the market. Creativity can be derived from knowledge, culture, art, and even experience, guiding creation and invention. Original ideas can also be attracted to each other and absorbed, from which new ideas are generated. The cultural industry, as the leading industry of the 39° Community, is potentially a driving force for the creative development of the community. As a relatively open, active, and free group, high sensitivity to originality and the acceptance and absorption of new things are also characteristics of the creative class. In this case, the 39° Community is a gathering place for elites with abilities such as strong original thinking and outstanding innovation capabilities, depending on their community development orientation, threshold, and cooperation with scientific research institutions, etc. It is also the case that the ultimate goal of all types of development is to satisfy many material interests and provide spiritual satisfaction, and not simply pursue creativity, per se; this set of goals is precisely what the 39° Community is trying to achieve. As Schumpeter [45] suggests, the most important driver of economic development is innovation, which relies on entrepreneurial "creative destruction". The development of a creative community, therefore, depends not only on some people or a few groups but also on the enterprise as the main driver. Within the community, there is a special and indispensable group of entrepreneurs with such invaluable qualities, such as a spirit of adventure, initiative-taking, and risk-taking. These qualities are seen not only in the pursuit of material wealth, but also at the spiritual level which, with a strong underlying sense of mission and dedication, is usually expressed as being proactive, dedicated, etc [46].

It is not negligible that there is a close interrelationship between exogenous and endogenous factors in this process. In a political and policy context above the city level, the 39° Community successfully obtained the policy support of local governments under the influence of its location advantages and the work of decision-makers. At the same time, the location advantage also provides a good market basis for the development of the cultural industry, which, in turn, promotes the enthusiasm and attitude of the community managers because of the considerable economic and

political benefits they obtain in the community. During the same period, the government's policy preferences for community remodeling also created momentum which sets the right direction for community development, and guides the behavioral norms of community managers to provide better services for community development, as community service makes a crucial contribution to forming and shaping the perception of affiliation and spirit in this creative community though building bridges between governments, enterprises, employees, and the community. Enterprises must also have a high degree of community identity to achieve a win-win situation for both the community and enterprises. Given the triple role of location, policy, and service, more and more high-quality talent, entrepreneurs, and even citizens are attracted to engage in cultural and creative activities or sports and leisure activities in the community. Therefore, the 39° Community has become a space with a good combination of industry, culture, and everyday life, which are urgently needed for both citizens and urban development.

## 7. Conclusions

In studying the cultural and creative space of contemporary China in an increasingly globalizing world, in which ideas, creativity, innovations, and best practice derived from the West have all affected China, especially in metropolitan areas, it is obviously important to have in-depth analysis of cases characterized by Chinese culture and institutional characteristics to reveal the veil of the territorialized creative community involved in Chinese cities. Therefore, on the basis of theoretical analysis, this paper takes the Foshan 39° Space Art Creative Community as a typical example to study the formation of a government-oriented creative community in China.

The creative community, the new carrier space of the creative economy in a modern city, is an inevitable requirement for the interaction of community culture and creative industry, and is a combination of sustainable community-based cultural planning and creative placemaking. Such a community is more likely to go beyond purely economic motivations and pursue multi-dimensional benefits ranging from culture to socio-economic gains, and represents a new stage of the development of urban community, which has a complete and special community structure that makes it different from other urban communities, embodies the result of sustainable cultural planning in the creative economy era, and shows the response of urban creativity at the community level.

Moreover, the formation of the 39° community is not a random process and creative communities are not ubiquitous ordinary urban communities. For these communities to exist, exogenous forces and endogenous factors will together push the government-oriented creative community: policy support attracts enterprises and talent, market demand creates economic benefits, locational conditions provide favorable conditions, such as convenient transportation and interesting surroundings, high-quality service promotes the construction of the community attachment, and the spirit of creativity and entrepreneurial spirit drive the progress of the whole community. In this process, even though local governments occupy the dominant position in the government-oriented creative community by controlling its development path and community processes, the realization of a creative community is not a result of unilateral action. Instead, it involves creative enterprises and the creative class undertaking the community's daily work, life, study, creation, and other functions, with the community operators playing the role of service provider as a bridge between the government, enterprises, employees, and the community, because underserved communities may show significantly less involvement in and consideration of community facilities and education programs, and little support for cultural production and innovation. In addition, in the development of creative communities, previous experience in developed countries and the results of the investigation in this study suggest that the participation of public, art, and education [42] cannot be ignored in the planning and practice of creative community, whether it is government-oriented or autogenic creative community, because they cannot only promote the quality of the existing creative class, but also become the fertile ground for nurturing locality-specific communities of creative workers, and creative community planners should

provide creative workers with such a space that integrates work, life, learning, and entertainment, because it can fit with the work-live-play styles [13] of some creative producers.

Although the 39° Community has not experienced many problems so far, one is that real estate developers and government sectors often use the symbolic capital of the “creativity” to push regional gentrification that accompanied by displacement and social exclusion [11,47,48], we still need to rethink the government-oriented creative community as a kind of sustainable cultural development program within a wider planning process, rather than as part of a catalytic process. This approach can improve the development role of creative community programs while more directly benefiting and growing local communities. In the creative community planning and development process, the prevalence of cultural activities in recent urban development programs may provide more lessons for creative community development, yet it is imperative for planners and policy-makers to tailor their plans to local conditions and understand how local cultural activities contribute to local economic development and how they affect the distribution of resources for social, cultural, and economic goals; the various needs for community space must also be addressed because a sustainable cultural development project may not necessarily adapt to each community or region. In this way, the government-oriented creative community may address associated problems, including its influence on those outside the circle of the cultural and creative economy.

The constituent elements and driving mechanisms for forming a creative community, especially a government-oriented creative community, have been revealed to some extent in this paper. However, the difficulties such a community may encounter, how to operate and manage it optimally, and how to achieve sustainable development are still questions and challenges that require more theoretical research and practical exploration.

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