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# Research on the Transformation Strategy of Teaching System for Environmental Design Major in Universities Oriented Toward the Experience Economy

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**Abstract:** With the upgrading of consumption and the increasing prominence of scenario-based demands, the experience economy, centered on user perception, emotional resonance, and scenario value, has comprehensively reshaped the evaluation criteria and industrial logic of environmental design, becoming the core force driving industry transformation and determining design competitiveness. Against the dual backdrop of a single assessment system and the rapid penetration of artificial intelligence technology, environmental design education in universities has exposed prominent issues such as overemphasis on techniques at the expense of thinking, overemphasis on software operation at the expense of comprehensive literacy, overemphasis on results at the expense of process, and insufficient cultivation of innovation and experience design capabilities, making it difficult to meet the industry's demand for composite experience design talents. Taking the experience economy as the background, this paper analyzes five influencing factors—policy, industry, technology, students, and international trends—expounds on the significance of teaching system reconstruction in terms of employment alignment, capability restructuring, and professional value demonstration, explores three professional development directions: emotional design, art healing, and experience design, and proposes reconstruction strategies from four aspects: educational philosophy, teaching resources, faculty team, and assessment scheme. The research shows that the reconstructed teaching system can achieve dual values of professional education and psychological healing, improving the quality of talent cultivation and professional competitiveness.

**Keywords:** Experience Economy; Environmental Design; Professional Transformation; Emotional Design

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## 1. Introduction

In 1999, American scholars Pine and Gilmore proposed in “The Experience Economy” that the experience economy represents the fourth major economic form following agriculture, industry, and service economies, marking the global economy's entry into a new stage characterized by emotional resonance, spiritual value, and personalized experiences. Under these circumstances, consumer demand has shifted from functional satisfaction to comprehensive needs encompassing emotion, culture, healing, and sense of participation. Consequently, the core of design has transformed

from primarily optimizing form and function to conveying emotions, narrating culture, creating scenarios, and delivering healing experiences.

Currently, against the backdrop of rapid AI popularization, most university environmental design programs still focus on software skills instruction combined with traditional project-based training, resulting in relatively outdated teaching models. The widespread use of AI has led to aesthetic homogenization in student design works and excessive reliance on AI generation. Meanwhile, instructors lack scientific guidance on AI application in teaching, causing a disconnect between technical drawing and humanistic spirit or emotional needs, making it difficult to evoke spiritual resonance. Furthermore, curriculum systems generally lack cutting-edge content such as emotional design, healing spaces, and immersive experiences. Slow updates to teaching resources, insufficient interdisciplinary capabilities among faculty, and existing assessment methods that fail to effectively evaluate experiential value and emotional connotation have become core bottlenecks constraining high-quality professional development. Therefore, reconstructing the environmental design teaching system oriented toward the experience economy is not only an inevitable requirement of the times but also a practical necessity for industrial upgrading and improving the quality of talent cultivation and professional core competitiveness.

## **2. Influencing Factors**

The reconstruction of the environmental design teaching system oriented toward the experience economy is not merely a simple curriculum adjustment. It is a systematic change driven by the interplay of multiple factors including macro policies, industrial demands, technological evolution, student characteristics, and international trends. These five factors collectively serve as the external driving force and internal basis for teaching reform.

### **2.1. Macro Policy Orientation**

National-level strategic planning has provided clear direction for the integration of the experience economy with design education. The 2025 Cultural Industry Plan proposes advancing the integrated development of culture, technology, and experience, fostering new business models such as immersive cultural tourism, digital experiences, and cultural creativity. The Ministry of Culture and Tourism has continuously introduced relevant policies encouraging the development of new formats including immersive experience projects, digital cultural tourism scenarios, and healing and wellness spaces. Industries related to the experience economy have already been incorporated into the national strategic framework for cultural industries and digital economic development<sup>[1]</sup>. Policy orientation explicitly requires design education to develop toward experientialization, emotionalization, digitalization, and culturalization, providing both direction and policy support for teaching reform in university environmental design programs.

### **2.2. Industrial Demand Transformation**

Industry changes are the driving force behind the reconstruction of teaching systems. According to the 2024 China Design Industry Talent Demand Report, there is a shortage of composite design talents with capabilities in emotional design, user experience research, healing space design, immersive scenario design, and intangible cultural heritage experience transformation. The talent gap has increased by 32% compared to the previous year. Enterprise requirements for environmental design graduates have shifted from “technical executors” to “experience creators.” Key evaluation dimensions have transformed from drawing skills and modeling capabilities to user demand insight, emotional value creation, cultural connotation expression, and spatial experience planning. These industry demands are compelling universities to break away from traditional teaching frameworks and reconstruct talent cultivation systems.

### **2.3. Technological Evolution Impact**

The widespread application of intelligent technologies has fundamentally transformed the basic philosophy of design

education. With the extensive use of AIGC tools, traditional skills such as drafting, modeling, and rendering are no longer core competencies for environmental design majors. The lowering of technical barriers means teaching can no longer remain at the level of technique training but should return to reflecting on the essence of design. When AI can rapidly generate forms and express effects, human core value manifests in capabilities that cannot be replaced by technology, such as emotional insight, cultural understanding, empathetic creation, and experience planning. Technological development has repositioned the goals of design education, shifting from cultivating “skill-oriented talents” to fostering “innovative, experiential, and humanistic design talents”<sup>[2]</sup>.

## **2.4. Student Subject Changes**

Contemporary college students are digital natives, and their psychological characteristics and learning needs provide the internal basis for teaching reform. Living in an era of widespread internet and smart devices, today’s students commonly face psychological issues such as learning burnout, mobile phone dependence, internet addiction, and poor emotional regulation. Traditional unidirectional teaching models dominated by lectures and practical training struggle to stimulate their deep learning motivation and creative passion. Students require teaching content and methods that offer a sense of participation, interactivity, emotional connection, and self-healing functions. Experience-oriented teaching models can align with students’ learning characteristics, playing a role in psychological guidance and self-growth during professional studies, thereby meeting their needs for comprehensive development.

## **2.5. International Education Trends**

Explorations by top international design institutions provide paradigms for domestic teaching reform. World-class design schools such as the Royal College of Art in the UK, Rhode Island School of Design in the US, Politecnico di Milano in Italy, and Aalto University in Finland have already incorporated emotional design, healing environments, experience design, and service design into their core curricula. They have established interdisciplinary, experience-focused, and practice-intensive teaching models, forming comprehensive curriculum frameworks and talent cultivation mechanisms. Domestic universities are still in the initial exploratory stage of experience design education, with significant gaps compared to world-class standards. Drawing on international experience while integrating local characteristics for innovation has become a critical pathway for reshaping teaching systems.

# **3. Functions and Significance**

The reconstruction of the teaching system is not merely an internal reform of the major; it also involves the alignment between talent cultivation and industrial transformation. Its functions and significance are manifested in three aspects.

## **3.1. Aligning with Employment Transformation and Clarifying Future Career Directions**

The experience economy has put forward entirely new requirements for the environmental design industry, centering on user emotion, physical and mental experience, scenario immersion, and cultural resonance. It emphasizes that design must shift from functional satisfaction to experiential value-added, and from spatial creation to emotional value creation, driving the industry toward deep transformation in emotionalization, healing, immersion, digitalization, and cultural revitalization. Against this backdrop, the market has seen the emergence of new positions such as emotional experience designer, healing environment planner, immersive experience designer, and intangible cultural heritage experience transformation designer. These positions impose higher demands on practitioners: they must possess capabilities in emotional atmosphere creation, healing environment design, immersive spatial integration, and intangible heritage activation and experience transformation. They need to conduct systematic design work in fields such as elderly care and rehabilitation, psychological healing, youth emotional health, digital interactive experiences, and modern expression of traditional culture—areas that traditional environmental design teaching struggles to cover. By reconstructing the teaching system, offering targeted courses, and strengthening specialized capability cultivation, we can clarify career development paths for

students, promote precise alignment between professional learning and market job requirements, and significantly enhance graduates' employment adaptability and long-term career competitiveness.

### **3.2. Reconstructing Capability Structure and Clarifying Core Skill Systems**

Under the experience economy, environmental design talents must transcend traditional skill boundaries to form comprehensive capabilities centered on experience. Teaching reform focuses on cultivating five main competencies: insight capabilities to accurately grasp user emotions and psychology, experience design capabilities using professional tools for full-process design, cultural translation capabilities to transform cultural resources into spatial language, cross-media expression capabilities to integrate multiple media for creating immersive experiences, and healing design capabilities to achieve spatial healing effects through environmental psychology<sup>[3]</sup>. The synergy of these five capabilities forms the foundation for developing core competitiveness in the new era.

### **3.3. Responding to the Proposition of the Times and Demonstrating Professional Social Value**

In contemporary society, emotional needs and spiritual healing have become increasingly urgent, making emotionally caring spaces a necessity. Integrating emotional design, healing design, and experience design into teaching can not only significantly enhance students' employment competitiveness but also demonstrate the humanistic value of environmental design. By cultivating design talents who understand experience and possess warmth, and by creating public, wellness, and educational spaces with emotional and cultural connotations, we can effectively alleviate social emotions, enhance public well-being, and elevate environmental design from spatial beautification to a force that serves society and comforts people's hearts.

## **4. Core Content**

### **4.1. Exploration of Future Development Directions in Professional Fields**

Based on surveys of environmental design programs at 28 domestic universities and statistical analysis of courses and projects in fields such as the experience economy, emotional design, art healing, and intangible cultural heritage healing, three main development directions have emerged for environmental design majors, serving as the primary basis for reconstructing the teaching system.

Emotional design and affective design represent the primary directions for environmental design under the experience economy, as well as the main trends in global design education. Among the top 50 universities in the QS World University Rankings for Art and Design, 34 have established courses or research directions related to emotional design and empathetic spaces. The Royal College of Art has created an Emotional Design Laboratory, while Politecnico di Milano has established an Empathetic Space Studio, forming complete teaching, research, and practice systems. Domestic universities have also developed rapidly. Leading institutions such as the Academy of Arts & Design at Tsinghua University, Tongji University College of Design and Innovation, and China Academy of Art have pioneered emotional spatial design education. Tongji University, in collaboration with the Shanghai Mental Health Center, has launched healing environment design workshops, integrating mental health expertise with spatial design teaching to explore industry-academia-research collaborative teaching models, providing localized operational examples for emotional design education.

The direction of art healing and intangible cultural heritage healing Art healing belongs to the interdisciplinary field of design, psychology, and medicine, representing a new growth point for environmental design majors. In 2022, the Central Academy of Fine Arts established the Art Healing Research Center to carry out interdisciplinary teaching and practical research. The Guangzhou Academy of Fine Arts collaborated with Guangdong Provincial Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine to create a Lingnan Intangible Cultural Heritage Healing Space Design course, integrating traditional Chinese medicine culture, intangible heritage techniques, and spatial design to explore localized healing design pathways<sup>[4]</sup>. Internationally, New York University's Arts and Public Health program and Goldsmiths, University of London's MA in

Art Psychotherapy and Design have formed mature educational systems integrating design and mental health, providing reference for domestic professional development.

Experience economy-oriented professional specialization directions European and American design institutions treat experience design as an independent professional direction. Aalto University's Creative Sustainability program combines user experience with social value, while Eindhoven Design Academy's Contextual Design direction focuses primarily on spatial narrative and emotional experience. Domestic universities are actively pursuing localized transformation: Jiangnan University School of Design has established Experience and Service Design directions, and Hunan University has launched Sustainable Experience Design courses. Under the macro-environment of the experience economy, explorations in spatial renewal, service shaping, and user participation are gradually forming systematic frameworks.

## **4.2. Practical Strategies for Teaching System Reconstruction**

Based on the three development pathways, a "philosophy-resources-faculty-assessment" integrated teaching system reconstruction strategy is established to create a comprehensive and systematic reform framework.

**Updating Educational Philosophy:** Shifting from function-centered to experience-centered approaches, making experiential value the core pursuit of teaching. This transformation guides students from focusing on spatial functionality and formal aesthetics to emphasizing the psychological, emotional, and perceptual impacts of spaces on people. The introduction to the major includes foundational modules on the experience economy and emotional design, helping students establish an understanding of experience design. User experience, emotional value, and humanistic care are treated as independent dimensions of design evaluation, replacing singular assessments of form and function. Cutting-edge concepts such as mindful design, empathetic design, and caring design are introduced to cultivate user-centered, emotion-core design thinking.

**Updating Teaching Resources:** Creating an experience design course cluster to meet the capability requirements of experience economy talents, reconstructing a modular curriculum system, and establishing a stratified and categorized experience design course cluster. The foundational module offers environmental psychology courses, teaching theories and methods of spatial factors and emotional regulation. The core module offers emotional spatial design courses, focusing on emotional insight and experience creation. The expansion module offers healing environment design courses, emphasizing psychological spatial design in medical, wellness, and educational scenarios. The interdisciplinary module offers intangible cultural heritage experience design courses, transforming traditional culture into modern experiential formats. The cutting-edge module offers immersive experience design courses, integrating digital technology with physical spatial creation. Through the construction of this course cluster, comprehensive coverage of knowledge and skills in experience design is achieved.

**Faculty Team Development:** Addressing the challenge of insufficient interdisciplinary capabilities among faculty through cross-boundary integration and professional enhancement, creating a diversified teaching team. Organize specialized training for professional teachers in emotional design, environmental psychology, art healing, and other related fields to improve their expertise. Recruit faculty with interdisciplinary backgrounds in psychology, sociology, art therapy, and digital media to enrich the teaching team structure. Establish collaborative teaching and research mechanisms with medical institutions, cultural venues, and design enterprises, inviting industry experts and professionals to join the teaching team. Encourage faculty to engage in applied research in emotional design, healing design, and experience design, with research outcomes feeding back into teaching.

**Assessment Scheme Reform:** Adapting to the impact of AIization and emotional deficiency on student work, establishing a process-oriented and diversified assessment system. Increase the proportion of process evaluation to 60%, primarily assessing the entire design process including user research, emotional insight, scheme iteration, and experience optimization. Adopt experience prototype evaluation methods, requiring students to create interactive and perceivable spatial experience models instead of single renderings. Add user feedback sessions, inviting target users to evaluate works and incorporating real experiential data into scoring criteria. Establish specialized scoring items for emotional expression,

primarily assessing the work's emotional appeal, humanistic care, and user adaptability, compelling students to return to the essence of design.

### **4.3. Vocational Education Expansion: Dual Value of Learning While Healing**

The experience-oriented teaching model possesses dual value of “professional education” and “self-healing.” While learning courses such as emotional design and healing space design, students can acquire professional knowledge and skills while achieving self-emotional regulation and psychological growth through the processes of user emotion research, emotional expression training, and healing space creation. Among 73 students who completed the emotional design course, emotional burnout index decreased by 41%, self-assessed mobile phone use reduced by 3%, professional identity increased by 52%, and self-emotional regulation ability improved significantly. This practice demonstrates that experience design teaching can encourage students to consider their own psychological conditions while caring about others' emotional experiences, alleviating study pressure and psychological issues, thereby forming a virtuous cycle of “learning while healing”<sup>[5]</sup>. It also provides new pathways for university mental health education, promoting deep integration between environmental design and mental health education, and expanding the educational scope and social significance of professional education.

## **5. Conclusion**

The reconstruction of the teaching system for environmental design majors in universities against the backdrop of the experience economy is an inevitable choice for adapting to era changes, aligning with industrial demands, resolving development dilemmas, and improving talent cultivation quality. Through surveys of domestic and international universities, industry data statistics, and analysis of practical cases, this paper draws four conclusions: First, the experience economy has given rise to new professional directions such as emotional design, healing design, intangible cultural heritage experience transformation, and immersive design, pointing the way for the transformation and upgrading of environmental design majors. Second, teaching system reconstruction should be led by philosophy renewal, based on resource construction, supported by faculty development, and guaranteed by assessment reform, with these four dimensions promoting each other to form a closed-loop reform system. Third, emotional design and experiential education possess dual value of professional education and self-healing, which can cultivate students' future core competitiveness while alleviating learning burnout and psychological anxiety, achieving integration between professional education and mental health education. Fourth, universities should strengthen interdisciplinary cooperation in promoting teaching reform, establish collaborative education mechanisms with psychology, medicine, cultural industries, and design enterprises, develop characteristic courses based on local cultural resources, and create localized and distinctive experience design education models.

The experience economy will continue to deepen, with new technologies such as artificial intelligence, digital technology, and the metaverse constantly penetrating into design. Environmental design majors will also encounter new opportunities and challenges. Only by maintaining an open and innovative stance, continuously improving teaching systems, updating teaching content, innovating teaching methods, and strengthening practical education can university environmental design programs keep pace with the times. They must cultivate high-quality design talents with emotional insight, cultural translation ability, experiential creativity, and humanistic care, enabling environmental design majors to achieve high-quality development in the experience economy era and create more warm, emotional, and valuable spatial works for society.

## **Disclosure statement**

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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