



Design & Public Space

The Block | desert INK

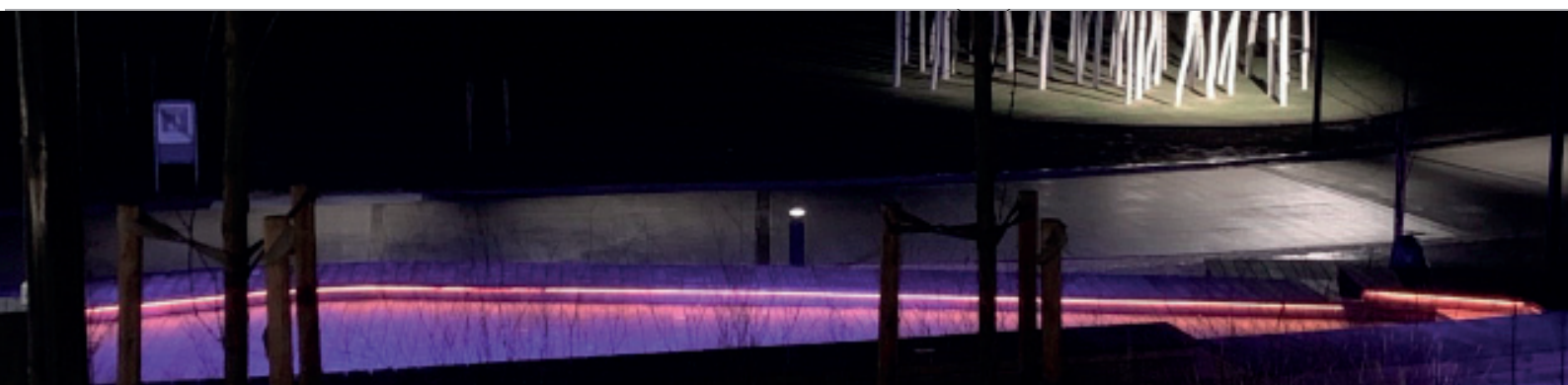
South Bank | B/D landscape arch

Micro Comm Park | crossboundaries

Manitoboggan | Public City arch

Tornhøj Kickstart | Levinsen/Vandkunsten

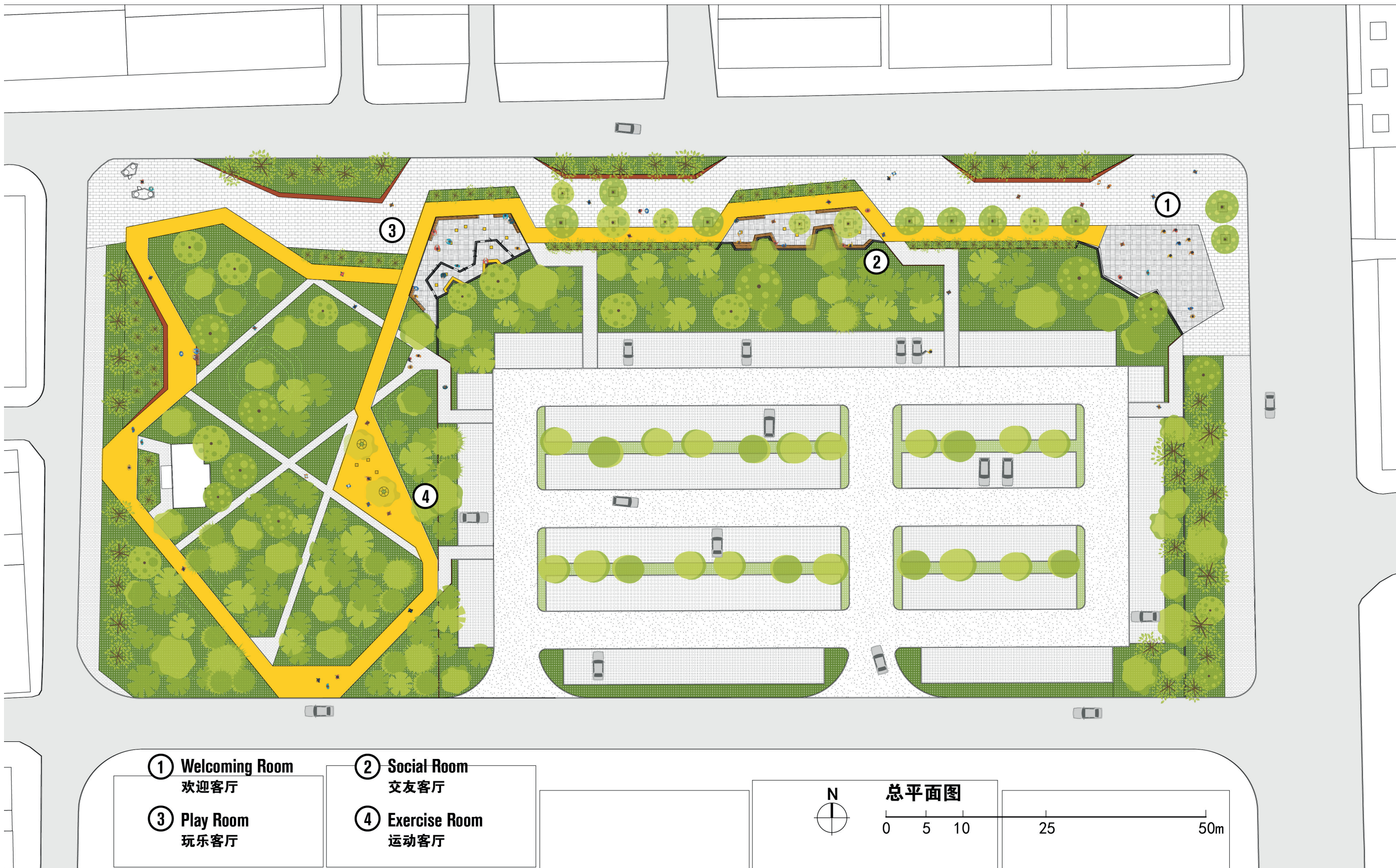
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Micro Community Park Songzhuang | Beijing | China Crossboundaries

Beijing's rapid economic transition, unique political atmosphere and immense urban growth have shaped the history of the prominence of art villages in its metropolitan region dating back to the 1900s. Their origins can be traced back to Yuanmingyuan, the grounds of the Old Summer Palace in the north-east of Beijing, where artists settled from all over China to celebrate a creative community and a period of intense artistic exploration. After this movement came to an end in 1994, many collective groups began to spring up around this urban fringe outside of the third ring, namely Factory 798, Caochandi and the Songzhuang Art District.





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This last area has seen the greatest expansion in recent years, with more than 5,000 artists living within its grounds, and 35 large and medium-sized fine art galleries, making it one of the largest gatherings of contemporary artists in China, if not the world. Centered in the village around Xiaopu, in the town of Songzhuang, in the Tongzhou District, the main factors influencing the development of this location included escaping the fast-paced city life and the pressures of modern society, while offering the opportunity to live side-by-side with the local population; this odd combination of art visitors and an aging population created an interesting dynamic, with each group having its own unique needs for public spaces.

The park is adapted to the environment of the site through an appropriate choice of materials and vegetation, combined with carefully designed spatial configuration, sequence and atmosphere. The main component of the structure is a perforated grey brick wall with integrated seating in designated areas, alternating with a double lower layer of perforated Corten steel. Behind it lies a green zone filled with Southern Chinese pine trees and low bushes, forming a natural buffer to the parking area that can be accessed through various hidden pathways.

On the street side, long planters framed with Corten steel edges contain Persian Silk trees, forming a natural separation from the busy road to the public area, and acknowledging the new addition to the site combined with the existing and preserved more mature trees (Chinese Locust trees) embedded within the reused paving stones.

The L-shaped plot features a series of outdoor 'rooms' that provide unrestricted usage and trigger a variety of activities along a linear loop track, which serves as a connecting element that meanders between the street-side pavement and the park in a pocket of the site. The yellow track physically connects the rooms to each other, while also forming a visual link between the different public areas. The path extends into and through the small park area, which depicts a more natural landscape, with London Plane and Ginkgo trees, in contrast to the organized promenade at the front. Linked by the yellow track, these rooms offer different levels of enclosure and delimitation along a sequence: from completely open, forming a prelude-like square, to a slightly more defined area with a semitransparent grey back wall, and an enclosed space that opens up to the sky. The final space is less strictly defined within the new park zone, and only the ground surface marks its extent.





A day in the life of the different spaces

Transforming the initial street corner into a small square, the first room opens up a semicircular space defined by angular brick walls and large mirrored surfaces. In the morning, it serves as a gathering place for tai chi and fan dance, while in the evening it attracts groups of rhythmic dancers. Dog owners can also be seen strolling with their beloved pets along the bright yellow asphalt loop that connects the rooms.

The second room is a place for quiet interactions: long benches along the stepped profiles of interspersed brick walls invite Chinese chess players and their audience; groups of elderly women chat in the shade of trees; grandparents interact tenderly with their grandchildren. On weekends, younger people pose for selfies in front of the grey brick and Corten steel backdrop, many consuming beverages from the café across the road.

On the corner of the extending park, the third room is dedicated to children's play: a bright yellow room within a room; layered brick walls with different sized openings for peek-a-boo and hide-and-seek; connected speaking tubes through which shouting and singing can be heard. In front of it, grandparents, parents and other caregivers can observe the children at play from a distance.

Inside the rectangle of the park, the yellow looping track itself extends up to the fourth room, increasing in size to become an open-air gym, an exercise space amidst green lawns. Between the sports equipment and circular seating, community members comfortably find their own spaces.

"The community park project has proven to be a great success in bringing together the district government's agenda and investment plans, presenting a way of life that strengthens its own authentic heritage as a place for collective art and influence," says Dong Hao, co-founder of Crossboundaries.

The streetscape responds to the needs of different people: the inclusive nature of the design, with its variety of inviting and bright spaces, colorfully accented, was instantly embraced as a true model of inclusivity that encourages interaction across all age groups.

In addition, Songzhuang Micro Community Park is helping to nurture China's largest gathering place for artists in a symbiotic relationship with the community.

"It is an important milestone in the development of the urban design of the Songzhuang Xiaopu Art Zone," says Binke Lenhardt, co-founder of Crossboundaries. "It is the first executed project of the masterplan, and a valuable example of quality public space for the purpose of well-being and social interaction."







technical data

project	SONGZHUANG MICRO COMMUNITY PARK
location	Songzhuang Tongzhou Beijing China
client	Beijing Songzhuang Investment Development Co., Ltd
authors	Crossboundaries, Beijing, China
partners in charge	Binke Lenhardt, DONG Hao
design team	GAO Yang, Silvia Campi, CHEN Pengyu, Marijana Simic, Sean Yu, YU Hongyu, Elena Gamez Miguelez
construction company	Beijing Songzhuang Xinjing Landscape Engineering Co., Ltd
date of project	May to October 2020
year of execution	October 2020 to June 2021
surface area	5,900 m2
photography	YANG Chaoying, BAI Yu
info	V2 com news wire