

Reshaping Citizenship: A Study on Inclusive Regeneration and Governance in Megacities Based on Beijing's Practices

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Abstract

This paper discusses the inclusive urban regeneration models in Chinese megacities. Traditional urban regeneration practices often lead to social tensions, a inclusive way to integrate the civic engagement into the urban regeneration process is needed. This study examines the strategies and challenges of inclusive governance in Beijing, and proposes a shared governance among stakeholders approach.

The main findings suggest a comprehensive framework for co-operation that includes constructing co-operative relationships, facilitating participation in decision-making, and ensuring benefit for different groups. The study identifies major challenges such as inadequate communication between local governments and the public, the participation of social capital is supposed to be improved. In addition, the article highlights the key role of fostering civic identity and trust as prerequisites for genuine public participation and which could increase public participation in urban regeneration efforts. The study contributes to research on sustainable urban development and provides practical insights for policymakers aiming to create more inclusive urban environments.

Keywords

Urban Renewal; Inclusive Approach; Public Participation; Citizen Empowerment; Planning innovation

1. Introduction

1.1. Study background

Traditional models of urban regeneration tend to exacerbate social tensions such as the over-commercialisation and limited housing support for low-income groups (Mehdipanah *et al.*, 2018). Since economic growth is prioritized over social equity, the unequal distribution of benefits leads to these tensions. Marginalized groups often feel excluded from urban renewal, leading to mistrust and long-term instability. Such outcomes highlight the need for inclusive renewal models that emphasize shared decision-making and equitable resource allocation to reduce conflicts and foster sustainable growth (Xie *et al.*, 2024).

There is a significant shift in urban development regarding to the inclusive governance. The inclusive development is more and more importance around the world. One of the *United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* is about inclusive cities for sustainable development (SDG 11-Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable). This goal emphasizes cities should ensure equal opportunities and resources for different groups from diverse social, economic, or cultural backgrounds. China has also paid attention to the necessity of transforming the growth patterns of its

megacities into inclusive development approach. Nationally, China has embraced the principle of cities. *Report to the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China* addressed that establishing policies that foster inclusive urban growth. This people-centered approach guides improvements in urban planning, construction, and governance and accelerates the transformation of super-large and megacity development models.

Beijing provides a context for examining how megacities manage rapid growth through inclusive urban regeneration. On one hand, Beijing has a large population of 21.858 million and a vast area of 16,410 square kilometers create significant spatial and demographic challenges and abundant urban spaces requiring renewal. On the other hand, recent years Beijing have seen substantial progress in urban renewal initiatives which offering valuable insights and models for inclusive urban regeneration.

1.2. Research Objective and Central Questions

This paper reviews the strategies, challenges, and improvement recommendations for inclusive urban regeneration governance in megacities, focusing on the integration of urban renewal and social governance. It employs a structured approach to analyze key strategies for multi-stakeholder co-governance in urban renewal, with a specific application to Beijing's strategies, challenges, and policy responses.

The study addresses three main questions:

1. It examines the background, connotations, and underlying logic of inclusive urban governance in megacities, identifying its key characteristics and challenges.
2. Through a structured analysis, the paper evaluates the main strategies of multi-stakeholder co-governance in urban renewal, proposing an integrative framework and applying it to assess Beijing's strategies, challenges, and policy responses.
3. The paper explores the levels of public participation within the Chinese context, analyzing how inclusive regeneration promotes and strengthens civic identity and public engagement.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Inclusive regeneration

Inclusive regeneration focuses on social equity and community involvement. Seoul's Citizen-led Regeneration Policy is regard as a model for Sustainable Development Goal 11, applying a people-centered approach that revitalizes urban spaces while preserving cultural heritage. Key outcomes include mitigating gentrification, supporting local businesses, and fostering community initiatives, leading to neighborhoods that balance development with social inclusion and cultural preservation(Urban agenda platform, no date).

South Korea strengthens participatory governance for inclusive urban renewal through living labs and intermediary organizations. Living labs empower citizens, fostering community ownership and enhancing collaboration among government, businesses, and citizens (Park and Fujii, 2023). Moreover, intermediary organizations—state or self-funded entities—bridge communication between citizens and the government, highlighting the growth of citizen participation in Korea's "post-developmental urbanization." The Urban Regeneration (UR) Act further institutionalizes this framework by establishing local urban regeneration support centers (local URCs), which actively involve citizens in urban regeneration projects(Kim, Križnik and Kamvasinou, 2021).

Current research focuses on strategies for inclusive urban regeneration within specific projects. For instance, the URBiNAT project explores a consortium that activates Living Labs and establishes a Community of Practice (CoP), wherein municipalities, universities, businesses, and citizens collaborate to share knowledge in co-creating the Healthy Corridor. The CoP is a collaborative framework that empowers participants (Moniz *et al.*, 2022). In Japan, the machizukuri model exemplifies a citizen-centred, self-organising approach that enables communities to lead redevelopment. These practices show a flexible governance approach which promotes local empowerment and leads to an inclusive neighbourhood transformation (Nakajima and Murayama, 2024). In Italy, the ICT-enabled processes (such as real-time data analysis) are used to enhance participatory urban decision-making and which creates an active community engagement (Pontrandolfi and Scorza, 2016). In Liverpool, homebased enterprises utilise technology, new products and skills development to promote community regeneration (Duarte Alonso *et al.*, 2020).

Collaborative frameworks in urban regeneration require interaction between power structures and strategies (Andres, 2013). Some scholars integrate nature-based (NbS) and society-based solutions (SbS) to create a theoretical model combines spatial planning with social strategies (Xiang, Yang and Li, 2020). However, the comprehensive frameworks for inclusive regeneration are still not sufficiently studied (Xiang, Yang and Li, 2020). The structural frameworks for inclusive governance in urban renewal needs to be discuss.

2.2. A Ladder of Citizen Participation

Arnstein's "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" shows different levels in citizen involvement in decision-making. The model outlines eight levels of engagement, divided into three categories: nonparticipation, tokenism, and citizen power (Figure 1). In the nonparticipation category, levels such as "manipulation" and "therapy" show that authorities may seem to include citizens while restricting their real influence. The tokenism stages—informing, consultation, and placation—allow citizens to receive information and provide input, but without genuine decision-making authority. At the top, the citizen power category includes partnership, delegated power, and citizen control, where citizens actively share or take ownership of decision-making (Arnstein, 1969).

Arnstein's model, though influential, has been criticized for oversimplifying complex power relations and failing to account for diverse forms of knowledge and expertise (Tritter and McCallum, 2006a). This critique highlights the need for a multidimensional power assessment that transcends mere authority levels. Purdy (2012) suggest a more nuanced approach to power evaluation, which involves examining authority, resources, and discursive legitimacy as key power sources, as well as analyzing power dynamics across various arenas, including participant roles, process design, and content within collaborative governance. Such an approach allows for a deeper understanding of power interactions in participatory frameworks. Some scholars contend that the concept of "public participation" lacks clarity. Rowe and Frewer (2005) distinguishes public participation from public communication and public consultation and emphasized that these distinctions are shaped by the mechanisms of participation.

Scholars have identified three key variables that influence the effectiveness of civic engagement: environmental factors, such as the attitudes of public officials; organisational arrangements, such as community participate process design; and management models, involving group collaboration quality. They recommended internalising decision-making into organisational processes and promoting continuous interaction between government agencies and stakeholders to enhance participatory governance (Ianniello *et al.*, 2019).

In response to recent socio-political shifts, scholars have refined existing models by expanding actor categorization and interaction levels. This revised model includes disorder, non-participation, symbolism, awakening, civic power, civil disobedience and rebellious action (Kotus and Sowada, 2017).

Many scholars contend that China is currently situated at a lower level of this ladder, where public participation in urban governance tends to be symbolic, with limited real impact (Hu, 2013) and public concerns (Liu *et al.*, 2022). Therefore, it's important to study how to increase citizen influence to achieve a more inclusive urban renewal process.

3. Methodology

Data is sourced from practical work and ongoing projects. The collection process includes: (1) Gathering feedback from government bodies, developers, and the public during the local legislation drafting period from August 2021 to November 2022. (2) Collecting details of the “Typical Urban Renewal Projects of Beijing” annually through internal project report, field research, and online resources. Qualitative analysis methods are employed in this study, including case analysis of practical projects, policy analysis of implemented regulations, and content analysis of textual data from various interviews. These methods collectively facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the inclusive regeneration in Beijing.

The article is organized into five main sections (Figure 1). In the findings section, it presents an analytical framework for inclusive regeneration governance while addressing the current challenges faced in this area and offering corresponding recommendations. Finally, it discusses the relationship between inclusive regeneration and public participation from the perspective of civic identity.

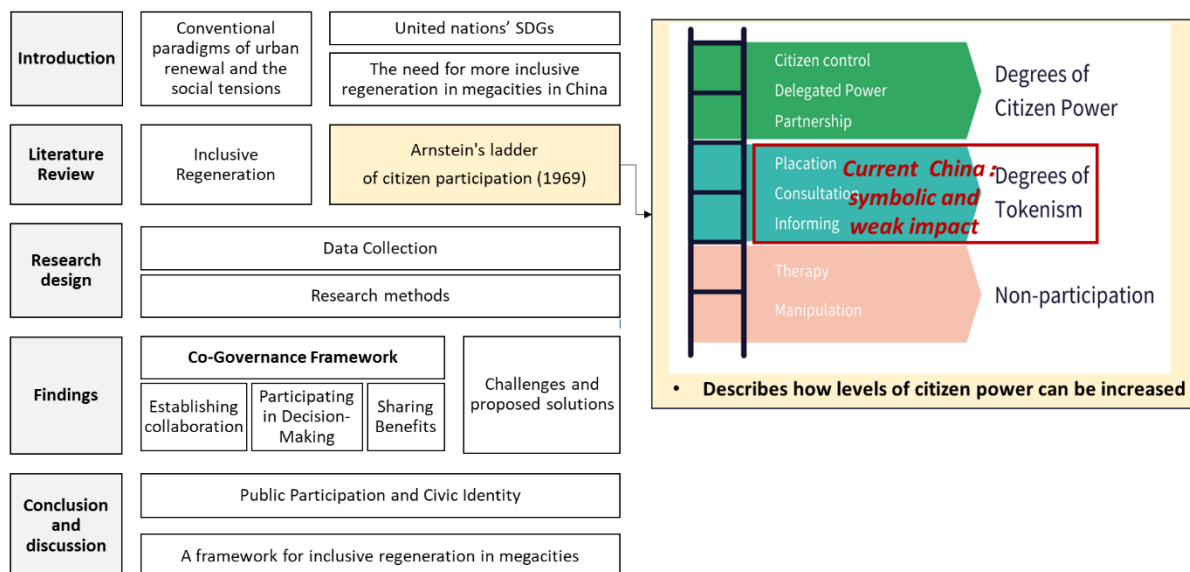


Figure 1. Research framework (Left) and Arnstein's "A Ladder of Citizen Participation" (Right). Source: Illustrated and revised by the author.

4. Findings

4.1. A framework of co-governance in urban regeneration

The paper suggests a co-governance framework involving multiple stakeholders, which includes '*Establishing Cooperation*,' '*Participating in Decision-Making*,' and '*Sharing Benefits*,' to analyze Beijing's approach to inclusive regeneration governance (Figure 2).

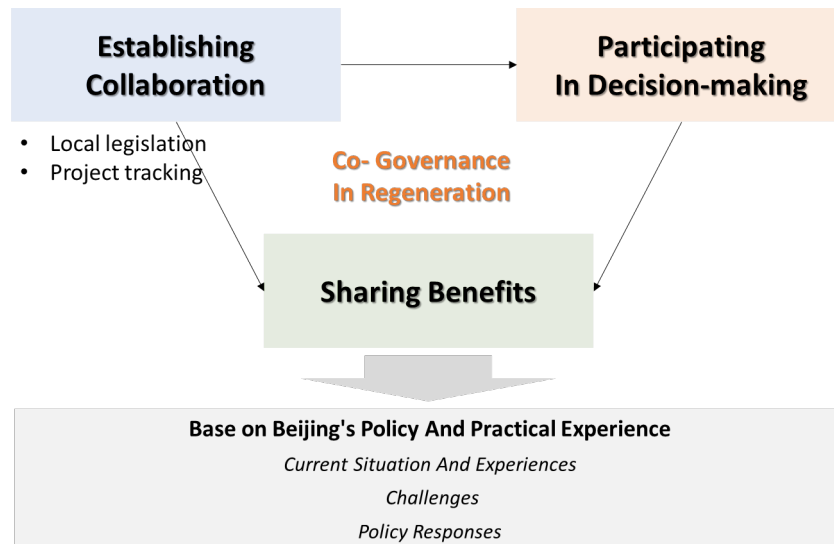


Figure 2. Co-governance framework of inclusive regeneration. Source: Illustrated by the author.

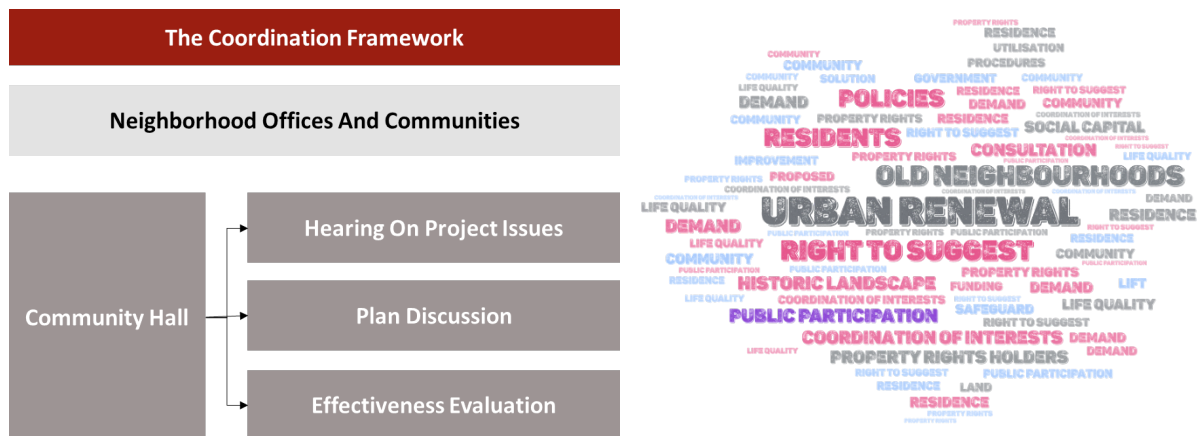
4.1.1 First stage: Establishing Cooperation

The initial step in this framework is to establish collaborative policies, which can be divided into two key components: policy and institutional design, and project implementation guidance.

4.1.1.1 Policy Design for Co-governance

The foundation of collaborative governance is highly relegated with institutional design. In 2023, Beijing announced the local urban renewal regulations (*Beijing Urban Renewal Regulations*). This regulation defines the rights and responsibilities of stakeholders and gives guidelines for public participation. With the legal framework, local governments are able to coordinate urban renewal efforts effectively. For example, the regulations specify *Community Hall* as channels for public engagement, where community meetings serve as platforms for public hearings, discussion of project proposals, and post-renewal evaluations (Figure 3). This approach supports the establishment of a democratic deliberation system for urban renewal, creating avenues for diverse stakeholder opinions and suggestions that are responsive to the project's specific needs.

Moreover, the legislative process itself was open to broad participation. During the three rounds of legislative review, over 10,000 public opinions were gathered and incorporated into the final regulations, which reflecting a commitment to transparency and responsiveness in policy-making (Figure 3).



4.1.1.2 Implanting system for collaboration

The systematic tracking of practical projects exemplifies a collaborative planning model aimed at comprehensively understanding and improving the progress of renewal projects. To facilitate this, a spatial database has been developed for all initiated renewal projects, supporting a more inclusive and holistic planning approach (Figure 4). By 2023, this database has documented information on 150 renewal projects, including data on location, implementation methods, ownership, funding sources, project characteristics, progress, encountered challenges, and overall effectiveness.

The logic underlying the database construction is to integrate top-down master planning with bottom-up project applications. On the one hand, Beijing's master plan provides guidance by conveying the objectives of optimizing urban spaces and enhancing city functions into concrete project implementations. On the other, continuous tracking of urban renewal projects is conducted to ensure effective oversight. Currently, a structured implementation system for urban renewal has been established, comprising the stages of *"expressing renewal intent, selecting an implementation entity, submitting project applications, initiating project development, and conducting scheme reviews."*

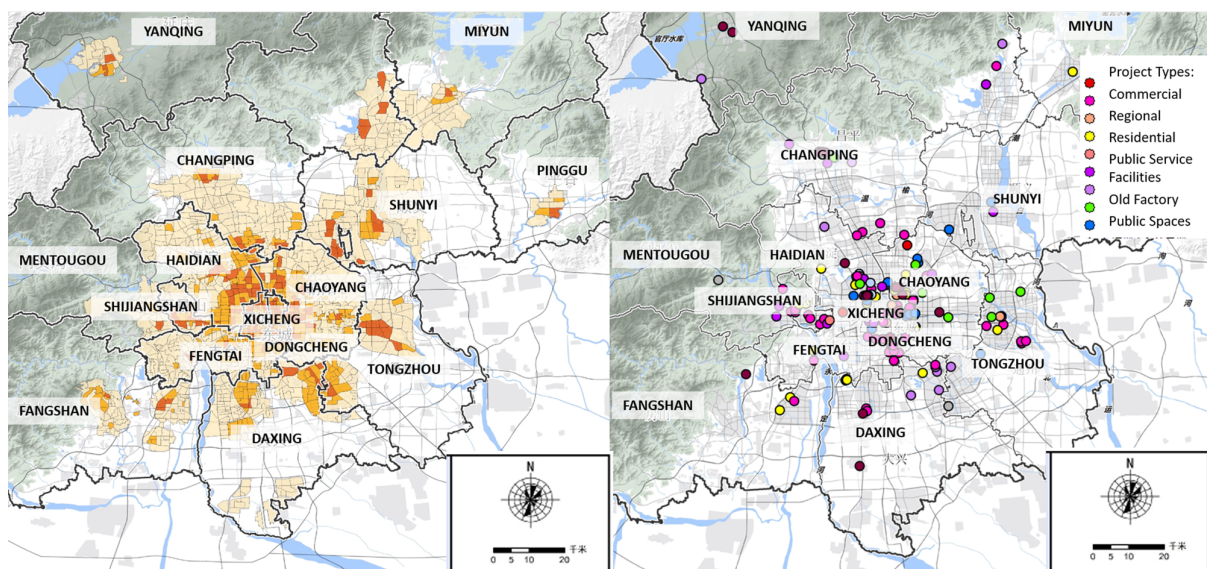


Figure 4. Spatial database for renewal projects(Left) guided by master plan and bottom-up project applications. Source: BMICPD.

4.1.2 Second stage: Participating In Decision-Making

The core objective is to establish a diverse decision-making centre adaptable to various contexts. In different situations, distinct modes of participation should be employed. Table 1 illustrates Beijing's innovative approaches to fostering multi-stakeholder participation in decision-making within urban renewal projects.

A primary approach to enhancing public participation in urban planning is through digital platforms, which streamline and democratize involvement by leveraging technology(Figure 5). In older residential areas with a high percentage of elderly residents, mobility is a significant issue due to the lack of elevators in early-built housing. However, demand for elevators varies by floor level, age, and income, creating challenges in gathering and balancing diverse opinions. To address this, Beijing introduced the "Elevator Installation Map," an online platform where residents can register their interest in elevator installations. If two-thirds of residents in a building unit express support, the building is prioritized for installation, effectively simplifying the decision-making process and enabling more inclusive planning.

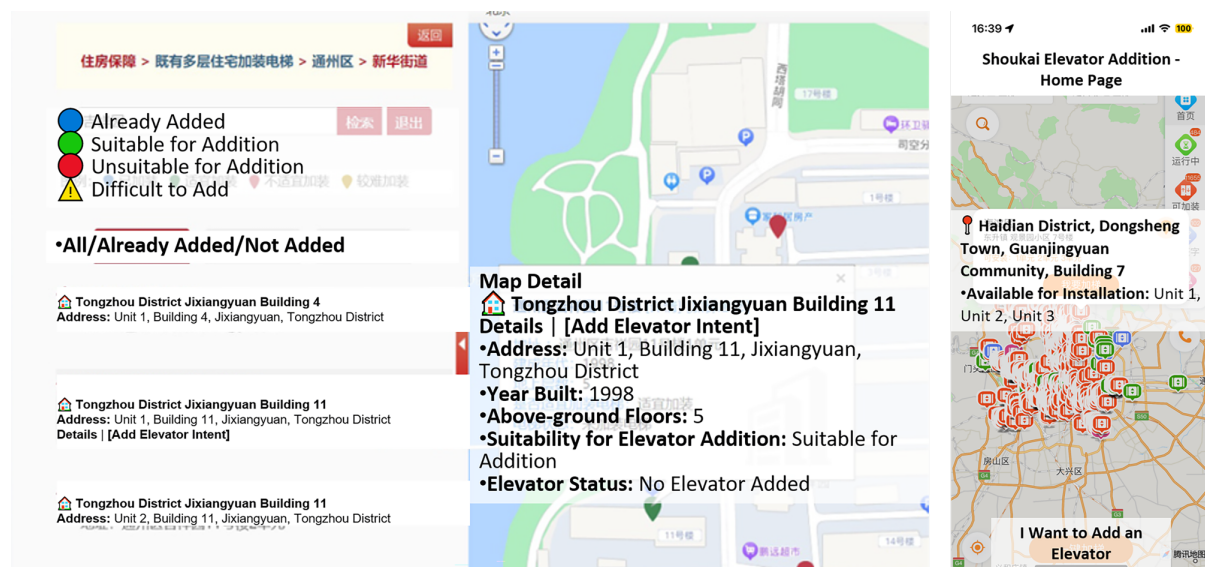


Figure 5. Beijing's "Elevator Installation Map". Source: Internet.

Another effective approach is to engage an influential opinion leader to mediate in complex urban renewal projects. For example, Vanke has served as a key coordinator, collaborating with local governments to design and implement comprehensive neighborhood renewal strategies. This case combines both government funding and private investment and shows the advantages of a multi-party approach. Vanke conducted surveys across different stakeholders, including over 200 questionnaires among 100 households, 87 merchants, and 33 enterprises. This method of multi-party engagement integrates the design and implementation of inclusive urban renewal efforts.

Public engagement across various levels significantly shapes the outcomes of renewal projects. At the neighborhood level, inviting residents to participate in design workshops enables community-scale involvement in spatial planning. Citizen's interest can also guide the preservation and adaptive reuse of historic districts. For example, the Fayuan Temple neighbourhood has hosted Beijing International Design Week for five years, drawing public attention to historic preservation and illustrating the importance of

local memory. This multi-layered public participation enhances the inclusiveness and effectiveness of urban renewal efforts.

In addition, spontaneous public participation is becoming a new way to engage in urban construction. Many people interested in community planning are increasingly involved in these volunteer activities. Their ideas might not always directly influence planning outcomes, while this trend indicates a rising awareness of public involvement and the diversification of participation channels. In Beijing, volunteer activities focusing on urban spaces have become increasingly common, which provides a platform for people to share observations, express needs in their daily lives and come up with ideas and suggestions for improving their neighbourhoods. This reflects a growing public enthusiasm to shape the urban development.

Table 1. Diverse Decision-Making Approaches for Different Types of Renewal Projects. Source: Illustrated by the author.

Approach	Features	Project	Target group	Primary project results
Engage online	Collect willingness through online methods	Beijing's "Elevator Installation Map"	residents	Use online approach to collect varying demands across different floors
Engage with an opinion leader	Coordinator Leading Multi-discipline Collaboration	Wangjing Walk & VANKE TIMES	Merchants /Tenants	Multi-party contribution involving government investment and private capital
Engage local users	Community Building of different scales	Jingdian NO.1 Pocket Space	Local community	Invite local users to participate in space design through the workshops
Engage Wider users	Community Building of different scales	Fayuan Temple Neighborhood, Xicheng district	Citizen and tourists	Attract citizens to pay attention to historical protection and local memories
Engage spontaneously and decentralized	More and more people are willing to contribute	Volunteer activities e.g. Jane's Walk	Public who interested in urban planning	Observation, discussion and connection

4.1.3 Third stage: Sharing Benefits

Inclusive urban regeneration is supposed to emphasize enhancing social welfare across diverse demographic groups to ensure equitable distribution of renewal benefits. Beijing's policy framework advances this goal by focusing on the "Seven Accesses" and "Five Expectations," which seek to address the needs of all groups, including workers and residents. The "Seven Accesses" prioritize access to access to childcare, education, employment, medical services, elderly care, housing, and social assistance. Complementing this, the "Five Expectations" focus on convenience, livability, diverse choices, fairness, and

safety in society. Together, these principles aim to create tangible, inclusive benefits, fostering a more balanced and supportive urban environment for all social groups.

Case analyses reveal an increasing attentiveness in urban renewal projects to the interests of diverse social groups (Table 2). A notable example is the transformation of “pocket spaces” into multifunctional public areas. One previously underutilized site was redeveloped into a “Mini-Disneyland,” offering relaxation spaces for workers, rest areas for community security guards, and recreational opportunities for children and young adults. These spaces foster interactions across different social groups, enhancing urban inclusivity. Following renovation, a once-vacant neighborhood area has become accessible to urban workers, exemplifying public recognition and support for improved public spaces.

Moreover, special attention has been directed toward marginalized groups, such as delivery workers, who often experience restricted access to public services and limited social connections. For example, Liu Village is a case that offering these workers a clean and safe living environment through the renewal. The new housing and communal spaces could foster a sense of belonging for them in the city. Prior to the renewal, this outskirts area is recognized as a poor living environment, attracting migrant workers due to low rent. The transformation into a “Delivery workers’ Residence” has added numerous public facilities, including shared spaces for communal laundry, kitchens, reading areas, parenting spaces, and meeting rooms, offering delivery workers high-quality living conditions that support their daily and social needs.



Figure 6. Project Liu Village Delivery Worker’s Home, before and after renovation.. Source: Internet.

Additionally, many renewal projects have introduced cultural and recreational spaces for the public. For example, urban space optimization and industrial transformation have left numerous industrial buildings vacant and inaccessible. Following their renovation, these spaces have become open to the public, significantly enhancing the area's vitality. For instance, in Langyuan vintage, residents in the surrounding areas can now enjoy a diverse range of activities, including dining, shared office spaces, social areas, and various cultural and entertainment events.

Table 2. Considerations for Different Social Groups in Renewal Projects Source: Illustrated by the author.

Target group	Features	Project	Primary project results
Multiple groups	"Mini-Disneyland" For All	Jingdian NO.1 Pocket Space, Chaoyang district	Transformed to provide a resting place A place for construction workers and delivery workers to rest Facilities for that both children and young adults like to use.
Elderly Care For Surroundings	Beyond local community's boundary	Fanghuali Community-based Elderly Care	Shared spaces: dining hall, theaters, tea rooms, art exhibitions Provide basic medical services and daily health management for residents
Underrepresents group	Delivery worker, a new working class expanding dramatically	Liu village delivery worker's home	Clean and tidy living spaces
From exclusive to public	Abandoned industrial buildings are prohibited from entering	Langyuan vintage	Open to public and businesses are introduced Offer a wide range of cultural and entertainment activities
From isolated to interactive	Beijing's seine	Liangma river	Activities like picnicking and paddleboarding
	Backyard Garden of CBD	Qingfeng Park	A Wall-less Park Connected to surrounding roads, with greenways for cycling to office buildings

4.2. Key challenges and strategies of Beijing's pluralistic co-governance

4.2.1 Key challenges

While there are many successful cases, challenges still exist. The main issue is a lack of effective communication between local authorities and the public. This challenge manifests in three main areas. First, there is limited involvement of private capital, with privately-led projects accounting for only 10% of urban renewal initiatives, and spontaneous market-driven renewal remains rare. Second, public participation channels are still inadequate, as existing methods for citizen involvement are limited, and proactive engagement remains underdeveloped. Finally, there is an immature mechanism for resolving conflicts of interest among diverse groups, making it difficult to build consensus on differing perspectives and needs.

4.2.2 Strategies and suggestions

Enhancing communication channels between local governments and the public can be achieved by establishing a *participatory planning system* and creating platforms for engagement. First, strengthening top-level design is essential. For instance, Shanghai has established a participatory community planning system, incorporating visits, meetings, resident proposals, and design comparisons into the community planning process. This systemized operational guide serves as a valuable reference for planners and

relevant government departments throughout the design and implementation stages. Second, it is crucial to encourage socialized management and market-oriented operations. Shanghai's Social Organization Service supply-demand platform, for example, publicly lists community renewal needs—such as space management, design proposals, and community governance projects—on an open platform, facilitating information access and enabling social organizations to provide relevant services and products efficiently.

5. Discussion and conclusion

5.1 Public Participation and Civic Identity

The research explores the relationship between public participation and civic identity. The main aim is to identify strategies that enhance citizen engagement and foster identity through regeneration projects. There is a fundamental question to be answered: *What constitutes a sustainable relationship between city and citizen?* Inclusive regeneration is essential for sustainable urban development, which requires a more robust government-society relationship. Given the contexts that the financial pressures are increasing the megacities and the complex public needs, urban governance faces rising challenges. Inclusive governance emphasizes self-organization and collective action, therefore it may offer the most effective and sustainable pathway to achieving long-term urban development goals.

Tritter and McCallum (2006b) argue that Arnstein's model oversimplifies power relations. This article expands the model by incorporating dimensions of trust and empowerment within the participation ladder. The concept of the "Ladder of Citizen Trust" (Figure 7) is introduced and which is expanding on Arnstein's "Ladder of Citizen Participation," to illustrate how a city can genuinely be built by and for its people. True citizen empowerment is rooted in trust: when local authorities trust their citizens, they are more likely to extend meaningful decision-making responsibilities. The stronger the public's perception of government support for collaborative governance, the more likely they are to actively participate in regeneration efforts and accept the corresponding policies (Kim, Kim and Woosnam, 2023). This trust-based approach is vital to fostering a truly inclusive governance model, particularly within the complex environment of a megacity. This also reflects the current lack of communication bridges between the public and the government in Beijing, which makes it difficult to establish trust.

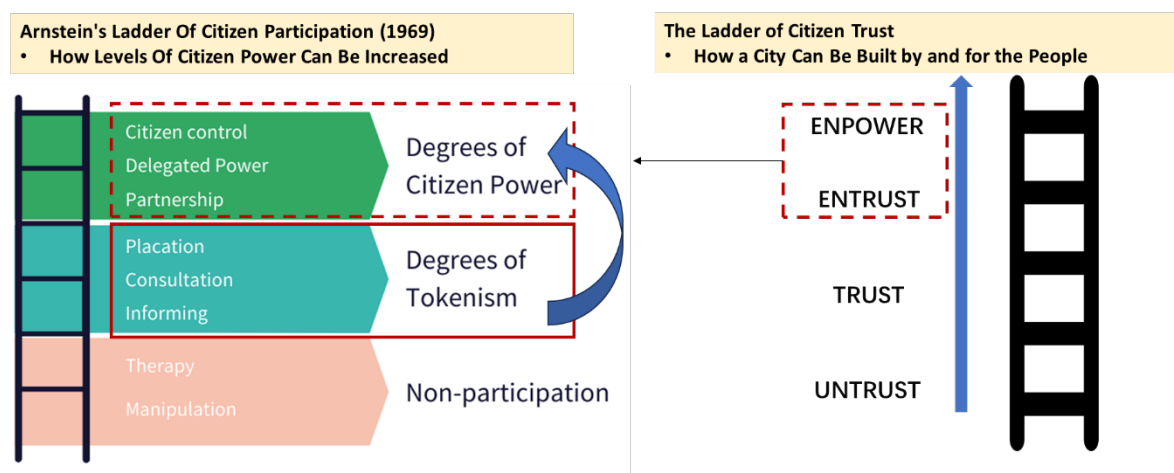


Figure 7. "Ladder of Citizen Trust". Source: Illustrated by the author.

The ultimate question is: *How can city residents feel like true citizens?* Their expectations are straightforward. They wish to feel welcomed, have their voices heard, and be active participants in shaping

the city's future. By achieving these needs, a civic identity could be fostered and residents could experience a genuine sense of belonging and ownership.

5.2 Support for related work and Suggestion for future

In supporting practical work, this research underscores the role of tracking urban renewal projects to advance digital public participation. A digital approach is explored through two key initiatives. First, broader public involvement is encouraged, as seen in the "Best Practices" award, which combines online public voting with expert evaluation. In 2023, ten "Best Practices" were selected from 151 submitted projects. Second, the launch of a demo WeChat "Comment Map" program allows the public to share their views and suggest renewal needs, highlighting areas for potential updates. Public feedback also offers valuable insights into whether completed projects meet societal expectations.

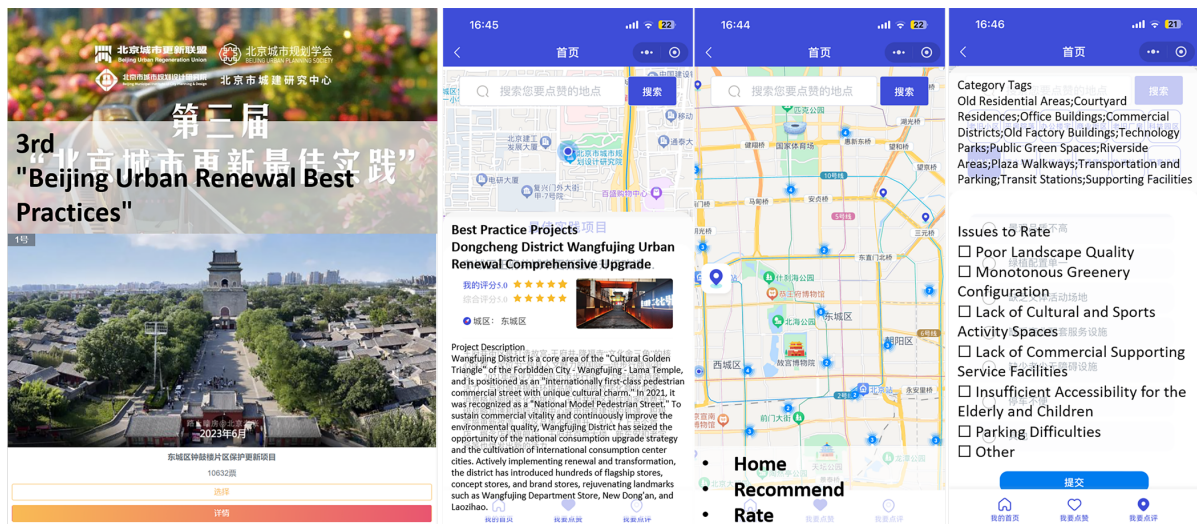


Figure 8. Best Practice Award (Left) and Demo of "Comment Map" (Right). Source: Internet and BMICPD.

In the future, urban planning must integrate the spatial concerns with multifaceted requirements. Inclusive regeneration should incorporate a wider range of stakeholder interests, including asset valuation, financial feasibility to support sustainable and inclusive urban development. For example, Shanghai has implemented a "Three Experts" collaboration model, where planners coordinate spatial and functional requirements, architects focus on specific renovation designs, and appraisers conduct asset analysis. This interdisciplinary system yields comprehensive renewal plans (Figure 9). Similarly, Beijing is exploring the integration of traditional spatial planning with investment and construction plans to create more operationally effective project strategies (Figure 9).

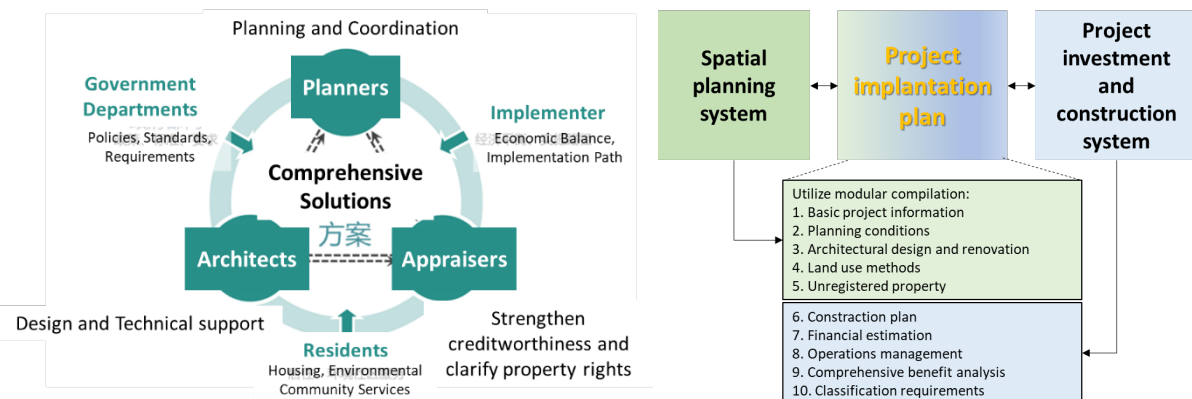


Figure 9. Shanghai explore “Three Experts” collaboration (Left) and Beijing explores the connection of spatial planning with financial and construction planning (Right). Source: Internet and Illustrated by the author.

6. Limitation and future search

This paper primarily investigates the strategies and outcomes of specific case studies in Beijing’s inclusive urban regeneration practices. However, it lacks a comparative analysis of approaches in other cities. Future research could prioritize examining policies and practical projects in inclusive urban regeneration across various cities.

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