

Institutional Construction of Urban–Rural Community Planners under the Context of Urban Regeneration

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Abstract: This paper aims to conduct an in-depth study on the institutional construction of urban–rural community planners within the process of urban regeneration, and to explore their critical role in promoting sustainable urban development. Through a comprehensive analysis of theoretical frameworks, legal and regulatory systems, public participation mechanisms, professional competencies, and technological support, this study seeks to provide valuable insights and policy implications for urban planning and governance. Focusing on the practical experiences of community regeneration and planner systems in Taiwan, Shanghai, and Beijing, the research summarizes their achievements, challenges, and existing problems. On this basis, it further explores the design of a localized institutional framework for community planners that aligns with the characteristics of Chinese urban–rural communities, aiming to advance modernized community governance under the background of urban regeneration.

Keywords: Urban regeneration; Urban–rural community planner; Institutional construction; Sustainable development; Public participation

I. Introduction

With the continuous advancement of urbanization, urban regeneration has become a crucial approach to improving urban quality and addressing emerging urban challenges. Urban–rural community planners play a key role in the decision-making, design, and coordination processes of urban regeneration, and the institutional construction of this role is essential for achieving sustainable urban development. As China’s urbanization enters a stable and mature stage, urban development is gradually shifting from incremental expansion to stock renewal. Cities are transitioning into an era of refined, comprehensive renewal, where both urban development and social governance are evolving from “existence” to “excellence” and from “coarse” to “meticulous.” In recent years, as

community development, community planning, and community governance have received increasing attention, many scholars have called for integrating community planning into the urban planning system and establishing a systematic community planner institution.

II. Theoretical Framework for the Institutional Construction of Urban–Rural Community Planners under Urban Regeneration

Urban regeneration refers to the process of re-planning and transforming existing urban spaces and buildings to enhance urban functionality, living environments, and economic vitality. In this process, urban–rural community planners play a critical role by designing and planning urban spaces to ensure that regeneration projects can achieve

sustainable development in social, economic, and environmental dimensions.

The construction of an urban–rural community planner system requires ensuring that planners possess solid professional knowledge, including urban planning, land use management, environmental protection, and sociology. Planners should be knowledgeable about the latest concepts, policies, and technologies related to urban regeneration to better respond to emerging urban challenges. Institutional construction should also involve the formulation and refinement of relevant laws and regulations that define the duties, rights, and responsibilities of urban–rural community planners. A sound legal framework can help standardize the urban regeneration process, safeguard public interests, and prevent improper practices.

Moreover, the institutional framework must ensure that planners play a meaningful role in decision-making during urban regeneration. This includes their participation in the early stages of project demand analysis and community surveys, as well as effective communication and coordination with government agencies, developers, and residents throughout the planning and design process. Considering that urban regeneration often involves residents' interests and livelihoods, establishing a robust mechanism for public participation is indispensable. Planners should actively engage with community members, listen to their opinions and suggestions, and ensure that regeneration projects reflect public expectations.

In addition, the institutional construction of the community planner system should provide the necessary technical support for planners, including Geographic Information Systems (GIS), urban modeling, and sustainability assessment tools. These technologies can assist planners in conducting more

scientific, integrated, and evidence-based urban regeneration planning.

In summary, the institutional construction of urban–rural community planners under the context of urban regeneration should comprehensively integrate multiple dimensions—professional competence, legal and regulatory frameworks, participatory decision-making, social engagement, and technological support—to ensure the realization of economic, social, and environmental sustainability throughout the urban regeneration process.

III. Institutional Construction of Urban–Rural Community Planners within the Legal and Regulatory Framework

The legal and regulatory framework plays a fundamental role in shaping the institutional construction of urban–rural community planners, providing the foundation for its legitimacy, standardization, and sustainability. First and foremost, it is essential to establish a clear legal status for the urban–rural community planner system. This can be achieved through explicit legal provisions that define the statutory framework regarding their duties, powers, and qualification requirements. A professional qualification certification system for urban–rural community planners should be established to clarify entry criteria, training requirements, and professional standards. This certification system may be administered by national urban and rural planning authorities or relevant professional associations.

The regulations should also delineate the scope of responsibilities, authority, and accountability of urban–rural community planners to ensure their legally recognized roles in urban and rural planning, land use management, and community regeneration. Furthermore, planners should be granted statutory

rights to participate in urban and rural planning decision-making processes, including the proposal, assessment, and revision of planning schemes, thereby ensuring their effective engagement in planning practice.

In addition, it is necessary to ensure that urban–rural community planners bear corresponding legal responsibilities and obligations while performing their duties, supported by mechanisms for accountability in cases of professional misconduct. The regulations should stipulate the professional codes of conduct and ethical standards that planners must adhere to, safeguarding the integrity and ethical compliance of their professional behavior.

Moreover, a robust supervision and evaluation mechanism should be established to ensure that the practice of urban–rural community planners continually complies with legal and regulatory requirements, while also providing guidance and support for their professional development. Legal instruments should also guarantee community participation, stipulating that urban–rural community planners safeguard residents' rights to information and participation, thereby enhancing the fairness and democratic nature of the planning process.

At the same time, the regulations should establish a system of professional training and continuing education for urban–rural community planners to ensure the ongoing enhancement of their professional competence and expertise.

Finally, incentive mechanisms—such as remuneration systems, professional title evaluations, and honorary awards—should be introduced to attract and retain highly qualified professionals in the field of urban–rural community planning.

Overall, a sound legal and regulatory framework provides a solid institutional foundation for the legitimacy and standardization of the

urban–rural community planner system. It not only promotes the professional development of planners but also facilitates the scientific and systematic practice of urban and rural planning in the context of sustainable urban regeneration.

IV. The Institutional Development of Community Planner Systems at Home and Abroad

Research on the system of urban–rural community planners focuses on how planners effectively communicate with community residents and facilitate their participation in urban regeneration decision-making processes. It also explores how planners ensure transparency in urban regeneration decisions to enhance public trust in such projects. The key to modern urban governance lies in establishing multiple governance entities—comprising government, society, and market actors—and stimulating their participation, communication, negotiation, and cooperation in addressing urban public issues. This collaborative framework contributes to improving public services and integrating collective interests.

Through community regeneration practices, a community planner system has been created to position professionals between governments and citizens, serving as intermediaries who bridge the gap between administrative authorities and the public. By embedding themselves within communities, community planners utilize their professional expertise to investigate local needs, coordinate multiple interests, guide public participation, implement community renewal projects, and enhance community governance.

By constructing a collaborative and multi-actor working model, integrating governments, experts, investors, and citizens, the system not only enhances spatial quality and promotes

socio-economic development but also advances community regeneration and the establishment of modern urban governance characterized by *co-governance, co-management, co-construction, and co-sharing*. Moreover, by extending the role of community planners from cities to rural areas, the system achieves urban–rural integration and reduces disparities between them. Through the strategies of *Party-led governance, cultural identity, professional empowerment, digital platforms, and characteristic activities*, the initiative aims to enhance residents’ sense of acquisition, happiness, and security, thereby contributing to the modernization of social governance in the Suzhou metropolitan region.

As China’s urbanization reaches a stable and mature stage, urban development is gradually shifting from incremental expansion to stock renewal. Cities are entering an era of refined, comprehensive regeneration, where both development and governance are transitioning from “existence” to “excellence” and from “rough” to “refined.” In recent years, as community development, planning, and governance have received growing attention, numerous scholars have advocated for integrating community planning into the formal urban planning system and institutionalizing the role of community planners.

A. Current Situation of Community Planner Systems at Home and Abroad

The community planner system originated in Europe and the United States, emerging in the 1960s and maturing by the 1990s. By the late twentieth century, Taiwan introduced the concept—known as *community planners* or *community architects*—transforming traditional spatial planning into a form of integrated community governance. Through the coordination of physical environments, cultural preservation, and socio-economic development, this system fostered bottom-up community regeneration

and facilitated a shift in community governance.

As an innovative institutional mechanism for community governance, cities such as Shanghai, Beijing, Shenzhen, Xiamen, Wuhan, and Chengdu have undertaken diverse community renewal practices. These cities experimented with institutional models such as community planners, responsible planners, advisory planners, and rural planners, in an effort to reconstruct relationships between communities and planning authorities.

From the perspective of China’s recent community regeneration practices and the establishment of community planner systems, the nature of the activities and teams varies depending on the initiators and local contexts. Nonetheless, community planners—acting as professional intermediaries—consistently assume a coordinating role, emphasizing participatory regeneration planning that balances the interests of multiple stakeholders. Across different cities and regions, the titles, formats, target communities, working methods, and primary responsibilities of community planners differ, reflecting the diversity of local governance contexts.

B. The Responsible Planner System in Beijing

Beijing’s *Responsible Planner System* has evolved through three distinct phases: the early pilot stage (before 2015), the expansion stage (2015–2018), and the institutionalization stage (since 2019). The system embodies an integrated governance mechanism that promotes grassroots spatial innovation, featuring government-led institutionalization, systematic policy support, and diversified embedded practices.

The concept of responsible planners was first proposed in Beijing in 2004. In 2008, several subdistrict offices established *Community Planning Public Participation Platforms*, followed by the *Planning into Communities* pilot in the Juer Hutong

neighborhood of Dongcheng District in 2009. In 2014, Chaoyangmen Subdistrict launched a co-governance model driven by planners, fostering cooperation among subdistricts, communities, and professionals. By 2017, planners were actively engaging with residents to guide the preparation and implementation of local plans.

In 2018, Haidian District launched six subdistrict-level responsible planner pilots, and by December of the same year, Xicheng District extended the system across its jurisdiction. Article 66(3) of the *Beijing City Master Plan (2016–2035)* formally mandated the establishment of *responsible planner* and *responsible architect systems*. In May 2019, the Interim Measures for the *Implementation of the Beijing Responsible Planner System* were issued, and by the end of 2019, 195 responsible planners or teams had been appointed across eight districts and 179 subdistricts and townships.

Building on the citywide framework, each district has developed its own distinctive model, pairing responsible planners or teams with specific administrative units. Examples include Haidian's "1+1+N" model, Fengtai's "1+24+N" model, and Chaoyang's *Chinese–foreign joint team* model. These multi-tiered, multi-role arrangements have become vital mechanisms for integrating professional expertise into grassroots governance, ensuring continuous collaboration among planners, local governments, and residents in shaping Beijing's sustainable urban renewal.

C. The Community Planner System in Shanghai

Through sustained experimentation, Shanghai's districts have developed distinctive models for implementing the community planner system. In 2008, Xuhui District pioneered the appointment of *community advisory planners*. By 2018, districts such as Yangpu, Xuhui, and Pudong New Area had further institutionalized the system through multiple

pilot projects and regulatory reforms.

Anchored in the goals of modernized governance and collaborative community regeneration, Shanghai's model integrates governments, enterprises, and residents into a multi-stakeholder framework, forming a *government-led, multi-actor participatory platform* to explore new opportunities for community development.

For instance, Yangpu, Hongkou, Putuo, and Xuhui districts have adopted *expert consultant–based* community planner systems, embedding professional planning and design teams within communities to conduct long-term participatory research and provide full-process guidance for renewal projects. Jing'an District, through initiatives such as *Beautiful Home* and *Beautiful City*, established an *administrative coordination–based* model featuring an "N-to-1" planning support structure, supplemented by government-funded professional design services. Pudong New Area implemented a *comprehensive coordination model* characterized by a "1+2" mentorship and technical guidance structure, combining mentorship, planning management, and design services to support regeneration projects.

Across districts, Shanghai encourages context-specific community planner mechanisms tailored to local neighborhood characteristics. Through diverse collaborations among government departments, planners, social organizations, and residents, the system seeks to advance community renewal through the most effective and adaptive means possible.

D. The Community Planner System in Taiwan

Taiwan's community planner system developed in the 1990s as part of the 1994 *Community Empowerment Program*. Taipei City first implemented the system in 1999, and it was expanded island-wide in 2001. Over two

decades, the system evolved through three stages: *planning for residents*, *planning with residents*, and ultimately *planning by residents*, signifying a gradual transformation of community governance.

In its early stages, community planner teams not only provided professional technical support in spatial design but also required multidisciplinary expertise in architecture, history, art, and culture. While balancing diverse community interests and engaging in public communication, these teams formulated feasible spatial improvement strategies tailored to local development needs, effectively bridging communication between governments and communities.

To further promote community building and public participation, the *Community Development Center Pilot Program* was implemented from 2004 to 2006, followed by the establishment of permanent *Community Development Centers* in 2008. These centers functioned as service platforms connecting professionals, community residents, and administrative staff, thereby enabling the joint realization of community planning goals.

In pursuit of genuine community autonomy and self-governance, Taiwan's community planning gradually shifted its focus from physical environmental improvement to cultural heritage enhancement and community vitality building. Civic-led initiatives were encouraged to stimulate bottom-up engagement and participatory governance. Consequently, the government's role evolved from *provider* to *facilitator* and ultimately to *observer* of community development activities.

Similarly, the composition of community planner teams evolved—from early professional expert groups to mixed teams of government officials, designers, and residents, and finally to resident-led teams. Training programs also developed progressively, transitioning from *Young*

Community Planner Training to *Reserve Planner Training* and *Taipei City Community Development Talent Training*. This evolution enabled long-term, service-oriented community planners to provide not only technical and design support but also to foster dialogue among citizens, civil society, and urban authorities—ultimately promoting autonomous and sustainable community development across Taiwan.

V. Professional Competence of Urban–Rural Community Planners

The establishment of a community planner system within the context of urban regeneration aims to achieve multiple objectives, ensuring sustainable development, social equity, and resident participation throughout the urban renewal process. A core goal of this system is to guide urban regeneration projects toward sustainability across economic, social, and environmental dimensions. By promoting rational land use, resource management, and environmental protection, community planners help ensure that the long-term impacts of urban regeneration are positive and resilient.

Another key objective is the promotion of social equity. This entails that urban regeneration projects should address the needs of all social strata, rather than focusing solely on affluent populations, thereby reducing social disparities and enhancing the overall quality of life for urban residents.

The system also aims to foster extensive community participation. This involves conducting effective community surveys, consultations, and feedback mechanisms during the early stages of planning, so that residents' needs and opinions are integrated into decision-making processes. Furthermore, the community planner system contributes to the protection and preservation of

cultural heritage. By carefully planning the retention of historic buildings and cultural landscapes, the system safeguards the distinctiveness and identity of urban communities.

Flexibility and adaptability constitute another essential goal. The institutional framework must be capable of responding to emerging urban challenges and uncertainties, ensuring the long-term effectiveness and relevance of planning strategies.

In terms of professional competence, the system seeks to enhance the overall level of planning expertise. Community planners are expected to possess comprehensive knowledge and skills that enable them to effectively address the multifaceted challenges of urban regeneration. The system also ensures that urban regeneration projects align with public interest, protect residents' fundamental rights, and prevent potential harm to vulnerable groups.

Moreover, the community planner system encourages the effective integration of modern technologies—such as Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and smart city technologies—into the planning process, thereby increasing scientific rigor, efficiency, and evidence-based decision-making.

Overall, the objective of constructing a community planner system is to establish an institutional framework that promotes sustainable urban regeneration, ensures social equity, enhances community participation, protects cultural heritage, and strengthens professional planning capabilities. Such a system is designed to balance multiple stakeholder interests and achieve long-term social, economic, and environmental sustainability throughout the urban renewal process.

VI. Conclusions and Prospects

This study aims to integrate the experiences of

community planner systems in Taiwan, Shanghai, and Beijing to develop a model suitable for Suzhou. The proposed system follows a phased, capacity-building approach:

First, under government leadership, the system mobilizes university faculty and students, research institutions, and professional designers, while also engaging local community talents to establish *Community Planner 1.0*. This initial team, characterized by volunteer service, operates over a three-year period to conduct foundational community research. Activities include exploring local culture, analyzing community demographics and spatial characteristics, and optimizing community living circles.

Next, the government or community formally appoints university faculty, research institution personnel, and professional designers as professional community planners, forming *Community Planner 2.0*. These planners participate in physical community renewal while simultaneously mentoring local youth to become community planners. The five-year plan focuses on updating community physical spaces, renovating public areas, optimizing living circles, upgrading community infrastructure, and revitalizing local culture.

Finally, external community planners gradually withdraw or assume advisory roles, while locally trained planners take primary responsibility for ongoing community renewal and governance, forming *Community Planner 3.0*. This five-year phase aims to cultivate a sufficient number of locally rooted planners, ultimately achieving community self-governance and modernized community management.

Through the progressive development from Community Planner 1.0 to 3.0, this model integrates urban and rural communities, implements people-

centered urban regeneration, empowers local stakeholders, and fosters autonomous, sustainable community governance.

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Funding

This research was supported by Jiangsu Higher Education Informatization Research Project (Project ID: 2025JSETKT181), Jiangsu Higher Education Philosophy and Social Sciences Research Project (Project ID: 2023SJYB1631), Suzhou Centennial College Online Boutique Course Project (Project ID: 2022SCCOC010).

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