



Difficulties, Causes, and Countermeasures in the Implementation of Old Residential Area Renovation Policies

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Abstract. As China's cities enter the stage of stock renewal, the transformation of old residential areas has become a key policy to improve the level of urban governance and improve the well-being of the people's livelihood. However, in policy practice, the implementation dilemma of "easy project construction, difficult consensus, and difficult effect" is more prominent. Based on the pressure-type system, fuzzy-conflict model, and participatory governance theory, this study constructs an analytical framework of responsibility pressure transmission, grassroots execution selection, multi-agent game-performance output, and conducts a systematic analysis with typical cases. The study found that policy implementation faces five core dilemmas: target layer coding, mismatch between grassroots pressure and ability, formalization of residents' participation, single financial mechanism, and imbalance of performance evaluation. The underlying causes are the imbalance of the responsibility transmission mechanism, the lack of participation mechanism, the asymmetry of information between policy and residents' needs, and the complexity of technology and governance. Accordingly, this paper proposes to optimize the allocation of responsibilities, strengthen the consultation mechanism, build a diversified financing system, and introduce multi-dimensional performance evaluation. This study provides an integrated framework for understanding the implementation mechanism of the old community renovation policy, and provides a theoretical and practical reference for promoting the transformation from "project-oriented" to "governance-oriented".

Keywords: Old Residential Area Renovation, Policy Implementation, Responsibility Pressure, Participatory Governance, Urban Renewal.

1 Introduction

China's city growth has moved from fast building to making old places better. City renewal is one main way to improve management. Fixing old neighborhoods is a big part of this work. It changes how people live. Many old neighborhoods built before the year 2000 have the same problems. Their pipes and wires are old. There is not enough open space. City facilities and public services are not good [1]. Right now, spaces and buildings are not fit for old people [2]. The central government has made

rules. The local work still has problems. One problem is getting resources together. Another problem is hard management [3]. Fixing old neighborhoods is hard work. On the top side, many levels of government talk to each other. This may lead to “additional goals above the goal” [4]. Many people are involved, such as residents and the government. They often want different things [5]. Also, residents’ wish to join in depends on many things [6]. If only buildings and pipes are repaired, long-term management goals cannot be achieved [7]. Existing studies often focus on construction techniques or single-case analysis. However, comprehensive research from a public policy perspective remains insufficient. This paper addresses three main questions: What are the major problems in policy implementation? What are the underlying causes? How can the system be reformed to achieve better outcomes?

2 Theoretical Basis and Analytical Framework

2.1 Theoretical Basis

The pressure-based system was proposed by Rong Jingben and others. The system’s core idea is this: in China’s administrative system, higher-level governments break down tasks. They use performance checks and being held responsible to pass responsibilities down. A vertical pressure mechanism is made. Each level adds more pressure. Under this system, local governments have two limits: the “political performance tournament” and the “risk of being held responsible.” The way policies are put in place directly affects officials’ performance checks and promotion chances [4]. Grassroots governments are the “last mile” of putting policies in place. They bear many pressures so that they want to avoid being held responsible and get an advantage in checks, and often use ways that go beyond the policy’s first requirements.

The ambiguity-conflict model was proposed by Matland. It uses two dimensions: “policy goal ambiguity” and “level of interest conflict”. Then it divides policy implementation into four types. The core idea is that implementation effectiveness depends on the capacity of implementing actors and also on the clarity of policy goals and the degree of interest conflict in the implementation environment. If a policy has vague standards and unclear divisions of responsibility, and faces intense interest conflicts among many stakeholders, implementation is most likely to go wrong.

Participatory governance theory comes from the growth of democratic rule. It says that making and doing public policy should not just depend on the government. However, residents, social organizations, and enterprises should participate in it. Many people and groups use planned conversations, joint efforts, and joint efforts to meet their needs and share their responsibilities. This theory says that residents get good things directly and feel the effects of policies. Their real participation is key to making more people agree with the policy, less pushback when doing policy, and better results. The core of participatory governance is to make a fair and open talk platform. This platform gives participants the right to know, speak, and choose.

2.2 Theoretical Fit and Analytical Framework

The old area renovation policy has three main features: many levels, many different sides, and big fights over interests. These three theories work together to make a way to explain things. The pressure system explains how duties and pressure move down through levels. The unclear and conflict model fits the fights over interests between different sides. It also fits the wrong carry out caused by unclear policy goals. People take part in running things; theory gives the main need for people to take part and talk. These three theories have an inner link of pressure from above, fights between sides, and a way to manage. Using these theories, this paper makes a four-in-one approach to look at things: ‘pressure from duties — local choices — different sides play games — results’. Upper governments send duties and pressure to local places with checks and reviews. With limited money and power, local governments make smart choices. The fight for interests between different sides then decides how well the policy is carried out and people’s happiness.

3 Problems in the Implementation of Old Residential Area Renovation Policies

3.1 Layered Expansion of Policy Goals and Deviation from the Original Livelihood-Oriented Implementation Intention

In real work, the problem of “adding targets at each level” is big. Its core is that grassroots governments choose to avoid risk under a strict duty system [4]. To do well in assessments, some local governments add more basic renovations (like roof waterproofing and pipe fixing) into “full” renovations that have landscape lights and smart communities. So renovation costs go up a lot. For one, a county-level city told all residential areas to install face recognition systems and build standard landscape squares. So project investments became much higher than the first plan. Another prefecture-level city got clear orders from the central government to focus on basic renovations, but it added more jobs like wall insulation and entrance hall rebuilding. So a big money gap appeared. To make the budget work, grassroots governments often have to drop key jobs like pipe fixing. Then pipe clogs still happen a lot after renovation.

3.2 Grassroots Implementation Pressure, Capacity Constraints, and Governance Difficulties

As the “last mile” of policy implementation, the grass-roots government is facing a double dilemma. On the one hand, higher-level governments have set high renovation targets, urgent deadlines, and an emphasis on progress and quantity assessment. The grass-roots government has no choice but to adopt “election-style implementation” [4]. For example, a province requires 80% of its old residential areas to be renovated by the end of 2025. The tasks of some counties and regions have doubled. In order to meet the deadline, they simplified the approval process, which caused a quality risk. On the other hand, county-level cities often face problems such as insufficient funds,

lack of technical expertise, and poor coordination [8]. For example, the Housing and Urban-Rural Development Bureau of a county-level city has only three non-professional staff members in charge of this task [1]. They find it difficult to deal with complicated problems. Cross-departmental coordination is also difficult. In a residential area, pipeline renovation was delayed for two months due to conflicts between the power and natural gas departments. This has led to complaints from many residents.

3.3 Insufficient Participation of Residents and Weak Consultation Mechanism, and Poor Channels for Expression of Demand

Residents' participation is the core of decoration. However, in practice, participation is not enough, and consultation is often formalistic [8]. According to a survey of the Yinchuan X community, only 23% of residents participated in the plan discussion. 67% of residents only received letters of opinion and had no actual right to participate [5]. In a residential area in Beijing, a central service station for the elderly was built without sufficient consultation. However, 80% of elderly residents prefer mobile services [6]. This leads to a low utilization rate. The lack of a consultation mechanism also makes it difficult to resolve conflicts of interest among residents. In a residential area, the installation of elevators was stalled for half a year due to conflicts between upper and lower residents.

3.4 Insufficient Financing Mechanisms and Sustainability, with Prominent Financial and Operational Pressures

Money help is very important. There is a problem with the current method: there is only one source of funds, and the money will not last long. Most money comes from government money, and social money does not contribute much. The money risk is very big in county-level cities. For example, in 2025, a county-level city required 120 million yuan to renovate 20 residential communities, but funding from the central and provincial governments amounted to only 48 million yuan, and local funding added just 22 million yuan, leaving a shortfall of 50 million yuan, or 41.7% of the total required investment [8]. The participation of social capital faces obstacles such as long return cycles, low returns, and high risks, while effective incentive policies remain lacking. For example, a PPP project launched by a provincial capital city received no enterprise bids because its expected annual return rate of only 3.2% fell below the average market expectation [9]. At the same time, some projects neglect follow-up operation and maintenance funding. In one residential community, elevators installed as part of a renovation project began to experience frequent failures after three years of operation due to inadequate maintenance funds, resulting in a cumulative service suspension of four months within a single year [7].

3.5 An Overly Simplistic Performance Evaluation System and the Problem of Prioritizing Quantity over Quality

The performance evaluation system has big problems. It cares too much about the quantity and speed of construction, but not the quality of governance and the happiness of residents. In some places, figures such as the number of fixed units and the completion rate are used as the main inspection criteria. They do not pay enough

attention to fixed quality and residents' happiness. A study by Chen Xiaoxiao and others shows that one number cannot show all the results. In a living area, the restoration work was completed on time, but only 45% of the residents are happy; in another area, the project was delayed for a month, but the happiness reached 89%, as the restoration met the needs of the residents [10].

4 Deep Causes of Implementation Difficulties in Old Residential Area Renovation Policies

4.1 Unbalanced Responsibility Transfer, Risk Avoidance Dominates at The Grass-Roots Level

There is a chain of responsibility, and there are many levels from top to bottom: Central government coordination, then provincial coordination, then city leaders, and then district. Execute, and then the community. In this chain, higher governments reduce pressure by breaking goals, checking, and blaming. Grassroots governments face two restrictions: "competitive performance" and "risk of being blamed". However, they "have responsibilities and pressure, but no power and resources" [4] in order to avoid - blame and get good scores in the inspection, they either "add goals at each level" by making too many changes that push basic living needs aside, or they do tasks that are difficult to check, such as people joining and quality inspection is just a form. The research of the X community of H Street in Yinchuan shows that the renovation of coal sheds only uses problem tables and public participation steps. The announcement does not set up a feedback or discussion system [5].

4.2 Lack of Institutionalized Participation Mechanisms and Blocked Channels for Interest Coordination

The lack of established participation rules keeps residents' participation at an empty level. Offline methods such as hearings, questionnaires, and interviews are only superficial. The Online platform is only used to publish notifications. They can not collect or talk. The rights of residents are not clearly protected. The key information has not been fully disclosed. There is no fixed way to get a response for reasonable requirements, and vulnerable groups such as the elderly and low-income residents are even more excluded [6]. Community organizations lack the ability and funds to establish a conversation platform. Among the population, there are different needs due to differences in age, income, etc.

4.3 Misalignment Between Policy Objectives and Residents' Needs, and Conflict Escalation Under Information Asymmetry

Policies are usually formulated based on the overall situation of urban development. They focus on improving roads and buildings to make the city look more beautiful. This is different from the small worries of residents, such as repair costs and daily ease. There is no way to share information and cooperate, which makes the information gap between the two sides wider. Policy rules are not clear on key issues, such as what is repaired and who pays. This gives local governments too many

choices, making it difficult for residents to know what they can ask for, which is easy to cause opposition [3]. Local governments do not have a conventional way to talk to residents. The old way of sharing news cannot ensure that the information can be spread well to people. Local governments choose not to talk about possible problems, such as building noise and short-term moving.

4.4 Weak Grassroots Implementation Capacity and Incomplete Collaborative Governance Mechanisms

The grass-roots government has many problems in terms of personnel, funds, and skills. They can not do the hard technical and management work for the renovation. The number of employees is very small. They have no professional background. They know little about project planning and quality supervision [1]. Money is tight. Higher-level special subsidies often come late or too little, so the financial pressure is increasing [8]. Decoration requires the joint efforts of many departments. However, there is no clear division of labor or regular meetings, so there is a lot of shirking of responsibilities and arguments in various departments. An example of early pipeline renovations being delayed due to strife between the power sector and the natural gas sector is a common case. The way of cooperation between the grass-roots government, property managers, and construction companies is not good. They do not know much about quality supervision and construction coordination.

4.5 Simplistic Financing Mechanisms and Biased Performance Evaluation

Most of the funds are government funds. Private funds are rarely added. In underdeveloped areas, capital pressure is great [8]. Private funds rarely want to join because of the long return time, high risk, and no good way to encourage or share risks. Performance evaluation focuses on numbers, such as how many units get fixed and completion rates. However, it does not look at the quality like fixed quality and residents' happiness. This one-sided approach makes local governments more concerned about speed and quantity than actual results [10]. In some areas, they are also more concerned about superficial repair than real upgrading. Most of the evaluations are carried out by the higher government alone. They do not have residents or external groups to join.

5 Optimization Paths for the Implementation of Old Residential Area Renovation Policies

5.1 Improvement of Responsibility Transfer Mechanisms and Reduction of Grassroots Work Pressure

There are problems in sharing work and avoiding low-level risks. Therefore, improvement is needed in three aspects: goal setting, performance evaluation, and resource support. Higher governments should set different renovation targets and check standards. They should look at the local money, how bad the building is, and the budget. This blocks a rule for everyone and adds more goals at each level. In addition, lower-level governments should have more freedom to formulate and make

rules. In work evaluation, less emphasis should be placed on quantitative indicators, such as the number of units repaired and the number completed. More attention should be paid to qualitative indicators, such as residents' satisfaction and the quality of renovation outcomes. External evaluation mechanisms should be introduced to ensure fairness and accuracy. Evaluation results should be linked to rewards and penalties, while also allowing room for error correction. To strengthen resource support, higher-level governments should increase fiscal input and provide additional transfer payments. Cross-departmental support teams should be established to assist implementation. More training should also be provided for grassroots staff to enhance their ability to explain policies, resolve conflicts, and manage projects effectively.

5.2 Improvement of Resident Participation Mechanisms and Protection of Substantive Participation Rights

In order to solve the problem of false resident participation, there is a need variety of participation methods, good protection rules, and strong community groups. The government should establish an "online and offline" participation platform. Online platforms such as WeChat groups and government applications can share information and obtain opinions. Offline activities such as regular discussion meetings and hearings should be set up. Personal services such as home visits and one-on-one conversations should be provided to vulnerable groups such as the elderly and low-income residents. Residents' participation should go through the whole renovation process. The policy document should clearly state the rights, obligations, and steps of participation of residents. An information sharing system should be established to fully share key information such as renovation costs, standards, and construction plans. A feedback and response system should be established with clear time limits and responsible people to ensure that every resident's concerns are answered. In addition, community groups should become stronger with the support of workers and funds. Community social organizations should be established.

5.3 Improvement of Policy Communication and Research, and Better Alignment Between Needs and Policies

The government believes that there is a gap between policies and residents' needs. People do not know some information either. Therefore, the government should do more research, find better ways to talk to people, and develop a way to change policies over time. Before formulating policies, the government should use surveys, home visits, and seminars. This helps them fully understand what the residents really want and what they have different needs. Then, they should make different renovation plans for different types of residential areas. The government should also find new ways to talk to people. For example, they can use short videos, cartoons, and public meetings to explain key matters, such as what will be repaired and how to share the cost. They can also assign policy experts to explain possible problems, such as construction work or noise from moving out for a period of time. This will help residents understand and support the plan. The government should check the completion of the work and get timely feedback. If there are problems such as unfair cost sharing or unclear renovation scope, the government should solve them as needed.

5.4 Enhancement of Grassroots Implementation Capacity and Improvement of Collaborative Governance Mechanisms

Weak grassroots power and bad coordination rules are problems. Work should focus on three parts: people, money, and rules. Governments should put more workers in grassroots housing departments and community offices. They should hire skilled people, such as for project management and interest coordination. Skilled people can come from public hiring and transfers from other departments. Local governments should put in more money. Fix-up money should be placed in yearly budgets. Money from many departments should be brought together and shared. Professional tools like pipe checking and quality testing tools should be given. The jobs of the housing, power, and water departments should be clearly set. A regular meeting system between departments should be set up. This system will handle issues between departments. Teamwork among local governments, property companies, and building units should be stronger. Each side's rights and duties should be clearly set. Good teamwork should be built into quality checking and building coordination. Social organizations and volunteers should be encouraged to join.

5.5 Diversified Funding Sources and Improvement of the Performance Evaluation System

There is only one way to get money. The current work check is unfair. A better inspection system is needed, too. To raise money, central and provincial governments should provide targeted aid. Poorer regions deserve greater assistance. Local governments must include repair funds in their annual budgets. The government can provide tax reductions and interest subsidies. Private capital can participate through partnerships and trusts. Some people benefit from repair. Those people should contribute economically. Residents must pay a fair share. Housing fund loans are another option. Work inspection takes multiple factors into account, including project quality, resident satisfaction, and facility functionality. Different housing types require different assessment priorities. Residents and external groups should join the inspection process. Residents' happiness must account for at least thirty percent of the score. It is crucial to learn from discovery. The inspection results should affect the policy, fund allocation, and leadership performance evaluation.

6 Conclusion

This article raises three main issues: what are the problems faced in the implementation of the old residential area restoration policy, what are the reasons, and how can they be improved? Using the pressure system, the ambiguity-conflict model, and participatory management theory, this study makes an analysis framework of "responsibility pressure sending — grassroots carrying-out choices — many side games — performance results", and it looks at example cases. The study finds that policy implementation has five main problems: more targets at each level, a gap between grassroots pressure and ability, fake resident participation, only one way to get money, and unfair performance checking. The main reasons come from many

factors working together. These are an unbalanced top-down responsibility sending system, no formal ways for residents to take part, an information gap between policies and what residents need, not enough grassroots ability to carry out, and unfair parts in the money and checking systems. For a theoretical contribution, this paper uses policy implementation theories in the specific management setting of city rebuilding. It puts together the pressure system, the ambiguity-conflict model, and participatory management theory into an added explanation framework. This helps the use of theory in public policy, carrying out research for the old housing area, and fixing it up. It gives a combined analysis framework of “top pressure — side conflict — management mechanism” for understanding hard policy carrying-out steps. For practical contribution, this study gives solutions like making better responsibility sharing, fixing resident participation ways, making stronger policy talks and needs checks, making better grassroots ability to carry out, and setting up different ways to get money and performance check systems. These give clear steps for local governments to make policy carrying out better, and to help change old housing areas from a “project-based” way to a “management-based” way.

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