

A Study of Urban Village Transformation Programs in Shenzhen Through Field Research

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Abstract: Shenzhen, as one of the cities with a larger number of urban villages in China, has put the comprehensive transformation of urban villages on the agenda. Urban villages are one of the witnesses to the development of Shenzhen due to their development reasons and history. However, due to their more complex living environment and larger population, they have always been a safety hazard in the city. As the incremental demand for urban space decreases and the city begins to pursue the path of comprehensive efficiency and high-quality development, it is necessary to increase the cultural and cognitive diversity of urban villages. By combining demolition and renovation, the transformation of urban villages ensures the normal housing needs of current residents while optimizing infrastructure and living environments, reducing residential risks, and establishing a diverse community culture. This paper analyzes and studies the situation of urban villages in Shenzhen by means of field research and overview, and explores the advantages and importance of urban village transformation based on policy analysis.

Keywords: Urban Village, Shenzhen, Field Research, Rehabilitation of urban villages.

1. Introduction

In a narrow sense, an urban village is a rural village that has lost or basically lost its arable land within the built-up area of a city in the process of urbanization, but which still practises villagers' self-governance and rural collective ownership. Or, because all or most of the arable land has been expropriated, farmers who have become residents continue to live in their original villages and have evolved into residential agglomerations. Urban villages are also known as “villages in the city” [1]. In a broader sense, an urban village is a residential area that lags behind the pace of the times, is outside of modern urban management, and has a low standard of living during the process of rapid urban development. Urban villages have been the focus of local policies to transform in urban construction due to a large number of safety issues and hidden dangers. A large number of urban villages exist in rapidly developing Chinese super-tier cities and first-tier cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Chengdu and Chongqing. According to data released by the China (Shenzhen) Institute of Comprehensive Development Research in September 2023, by the end of 2022, there were a total of 2,042 urban village units in the city of Shenzhen, with a total of about 319,000 buildings, a total of about 5,913,000 suites (rooms), and a total floor area of about 220 million square meters, which accounted for more than 40% of the city's total building stock [2]. Among them,

Longgang District, Bao'an District and Longhua District have the most urban villages. The residential population accounts for about 60% of the city's real population, which means that 60% of Shenzhen's population currently lives in urban villages. With 40% of the buildings housing 60% of the population, the environment and safety of urban villages have numerous problems, such as lighting, drainage, fire protection, privacy, etc. The transformation of urban villages is a major task for the government. The transformation and construction of urban villages is a major restructuring of the interests of the people concerned, which will inevitably result in contradictions and conflicts among various stakeholders. In the transformation, the government needs to establish and improve the coordination mechanism of the urban village transformation work, and all relevant departments, urban areas and construction units to strengthen the coordination and communication to form an overall synergy [3].

Therefore, the research objective of this paper is to analyze the necessity of urban village transformation based on the current situation of urban villages in Shenzhen, and the related measures of urban village transformation. By means of overview and field research, the problems existing at the present stage of urban villages are analyzed, and the necessity of urban village transformation is emphasized in combination with the transformation measures of the Shenzhen Municipal Government. The transformation of urban villages can improve the living standards and living conditions of the people living there, and the analysis of this paper can increase the acceptance of the transformation policy and the awareness of the necessity of transformation among the residents, so that they can actively participate in and cooperate with the government's transformation work.

2. History of Urban Village Development in Shenzhen

In 1980, the city of Shenzhen was designated as a special economic zone and the Chinese government decided to experiment with market capitalism in China to boost the economy. As a result, the government began to purchase most of the land, mainly agricultural land, from local villagers in Shenzhen for the construction of industrial zones and urban planning [1]. The villagers sold their farmland to the state and were left with no arable land for farming, but the villages were left intact for residential purposes, thus securing the villagers' livelihoods. As the state subsidized and supported the technology and manufacturing industries, the related industries boomed and thousands of people flocked to the industrial areas of Shenzhen in search of work opportunities. Against this backdrop, in order to make it easier for workers in the industrial areas to reduce their commuting time, some rural landowners began to maximize the use of their village land to build houses for rent to the workers and bring in revenue at the same time. The result is a dense arrangement of towers and buildings clustered like islands in the commercial landscape, quickly constructed without any planning or considerations, and subdivided interior units that form the backbone of Shenzhen's affordable housing market [4].

The development of Shenzhen's urban villages can be divided into three phases. The first is the initial phase from 1980-1990, when the SAR was established in 1980, the boundaries of the new villages were delineated in 1982, and the first wave of urban village housing construction took place in 1989. The second phase was the rapid development phase, which lasted from 1991-2004. During this period, the construction intensity was the highest, and the villagers started to rush to build, laying down the spatial pattern of urban villages nowadays. 2005-present is the stabilization phase, in May 2005, Shenzhen City carried out directional blasting of 16 high-rise buildings in the Fishermen's Village, which kicked off the renewal of urban villages and at the same time began to strictly investigate illegal self-buildings, a measure that led to a sudden drop in the intensity of the construction of the urban villages [3].

3. Problems of urban villages

3.1. Field research - Shanghe Village, Bao'an District, Shenzhen

The authors conducted field visits and research in Shanghe Village, Bao'an District, Shenzhen, China. A total of six residents were interviewed during the survey. Questions asked included personal information, transportation, infrastructure and living environment, and whether they knew about the government's renovation program for urban villages. The results of the interviews are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Interview results

| Interviewee | Personal Information | Transportation | Infrastructure and Environment | Whether knowing the renovation program |
|-------------|--|--------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Over 60 years old; Retired; Families with children | More electric vehicles; traffic jams | Narrow spacing between floors; Poorly insulated; Clogged and smelly drains | NO |
| 2 | 25-30 years old; Restaurant waiter; Single | Acceptable | Acceptable | NO |
| 3 | 35-40 years old | Acceptable | Narrow spacing between floors; Problems with light in the house; Leaking gutters | NO |
| 4 | 25-30 years old; Supermarket sales; Couple | Acceptable | Narrow spacing between floors; Poor signal; Poorly insulated; Sewer Odor; Leaking gutters | NO |
| 5 | 30-35 years old; | More electric vehicles; traffic jams | Acceptable | NO |
| 6 | Urban Village Housing Owners | | No elevator | NO |

3.2. Issues

With the development of the city, more and more foreigners are flocking to Shenzhen in search of work, and the overall demand for housing is at a constant increase, especially the demand for relatively low-priced rental housing. Although the housing in urban villages is relatively low-priced, it cannot meet the diversified needs of the housing market in terms of household type, area, supporting facilities, etc. The overall presentation, with too small a housing area, outdated internal facilities, lack of modern living with to the facilities as well as drainage, sewage and other aging infrastructure, is prone to cause flooding and environmental pollution and other problems [5].

In addition, due to the lack of planning for the construction of urban villages, mainly villagers build their own, land and space utilization is more chaotic. Because of the high population density,

the overall living space is too narrow, and the living environment is relatively poor, such as building spacing, lighting, sound insulation and other issues. As well as the serious lack of public activity space such as parks, squares, green areas, etc., residents lack places for leisure and recreation, and it is difficult to carry out community activities, which affects the quality of life of residents and community cohesion. And some of the land and housing have been left idle or inefficiently utilized, including old buildings and abandoned sites, etc., which cannot be timely renovated and renewed and effectively developed and utilized, resulting in a waste of resources.

Residents in urban villages travel mostly by electric vehicles, resulting in a large number of electric vehicles, but the parking spaces were not planned when they were built, resulting in a lack of parking spaces and a lack of charging facilities, leading to haphazard parking of vehicles and a lack of charging facilities, resulting in a lack of parking and a lack of charging facilities [6]. This results in the lack of parking spaces and charging facilities, which in turn leads to indiscriminate parking of vehicles, blocking the passageway, and the phenomenon of residents privately pulling wires for charging is common, and these phenomena pose a greater security risk to the building. In addition, the utilization of space and road blockage in urban villages cannot satisfy the installation of fire-fighting facilities, and the overall fire escape is narrow, with a higher risk of fire. The law and order defense and control system cannot fully cover the urban village areas with complex terrain and buildings, so the probability of law and order problems is higher compared to other areas, which in turn increases the risk of living.

In the process of development of urban villages, mainly based on the social demand for housing, villagers are not sufficiently aware of their own unique history and culture, traditional customs and other cultural values, which in turn has led to the loss of many national specialties and the lack of a sense of cultural identity among residents. The utilization of cultural resources is more frequent in urban village areas, and thus it is impossible to rely on cultural resources to promote community development and enhance the cultural literacy of residents. To summarize, urban villages greatly affect the stability and safety of cities, and need to be demolished or transformed.

4. Rehabilitation process

On January 4, 2024, the Shenzhen Municipal Government publicly solicited opinions on the transformation of urban villages. The opinion draft pointed out that the object of urban village transformation is to take the original rural collective economic organizations within the city of Shenzhen in the unit and the original villagers actually occupy and use the status quo residential land mainly in the area [7]. Four types of urban village areas will be prioritized for inclusion in the new scope of demolition and relocation, including those located within the scope of key functional areas and hub areas for national economic and social development, within the scope of the implementation of major livelihood projects at the national, provincial and municipal levels, within the scope of major industrial projects, and in areas where there exists a high level of safety risks and hazards that are assessed by the relevant departments as requiring urgent implementation of renovation [8].

The transformation of urban villages in Shenzhen is mainly divided into three steps. Firstly, the government takes the lead and introduces relevant service providers in the form of public tenders in the pre-project stage. Secondly, each district government is responsible for the relocation of residents, compensation and subsequent resettlement. In addition, the district government can select the pre-project service provider in accordance with the principle of public tender and on the basis of merit, and the pre-project service provider will assist the district government to carry out the work of residents' relocation and compensation, resettlement housing construction, land clearance and so on [7].

In the first phase, the government determined the basis and conditions of the project, and at the same time planned various types of renovation methods to set up a preliminary framework for renewal

management. The second phase focuses on the renewal governance of demolition and redevelopment of urban villages, and on the comprehensive governance to ensure the safety and hygiene of urban villages; the third phase focuses on comprehensive remediation and organic renewal, and establishes comprehensive remediation and renewal units for urban villages, to enhance the connotation and value of urban villages, and to govern in a more detailed and diversified manner [8].

Shenzhen's urban village renovation program follows the urban village renovation programs of Guangzhou and Shanghai, using the successful experiences of other cities to ensure the successful implementation of the renovation program. In the first round of urban village transformation, the leading party was a government agency, and the service providers, usually real estate developers, introduced by public tender, were the facilitators of policy implementation. The government's involvement in the demolition and renovation process can significantly reduce the pull or conflict in the urban village renovation, which in turn accelerates the urban village renovation process project [9].

After the completion of the demolition tasks of the projects to be demolished in the urban village renovation project, the scope of building construction for resettlement of residents is planned, and the rest of the land is expropriated by the government, and then the Municipal Bureau of Planning and Natural Resources will, in accordance with the law, adopt the public methods such as comprehensive evaluation of the granting of the land or the granting of the land with the design plan to determine the land transferee, who will be responsible for the subsequent development and construction of the task and implement it. By acquiring the land first and then offering it for sale, the government can use it to supplement local finances by obtaining the difference in land prices, which in turn maintains the price of commercial housing in the city. There are three options provided by the government for the transformation of urban villages, demolition and reconstruction, no demolition + in-situ upgrading, and partial demolition + partial upgrading. Because the overall volume of urban village transformation in Shenzhen is too large, it is impossible to implement the first total demolition program, although the government prioritizes the use of land acquisition before granting. The three modes will be used in parallel in the renovation work according to local conditions [10].

5. Conclusion

From the policy point of view back to Shenzhen urban village renewal governance road, the first stage of the government to determine the basis for transformation and the conditions of the project, while planning all kinds of transformation to build a preliminary renewal governance framework. The second stage focuses on the renewal of urban villages for demolition and reconstruction, and on the comprehensive management of safety and hygiene in urban villages. The third phase focuses on comprehensive rehabilitation, and through the establishment of comprehensive rehabilitation units for urban villages, the content of urban villages will be upgraded, and community governance will become more diversified. In actual construction, the renewal mode of urban villages has transitioned from a “demolition-oriented” mode to a “combination of demolition, reorganization and retention” mode of comprehensive renovation. As the demand for incremental urban space diminishes, cities begin to seek comprehensive benefits and high-quality development paths, so it is necessary to increase the cultural and cognitive diversity of urban villages.

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