

# ***Analysis of Urban Planning Methods for Urban Villages: A Case Study of Liede Village in Guangzhou***

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**Abstract:** Urban sprawl in China has become a common trend in urban history, thus, urban villages form during the process which contains both urban and rural characteristics. Among all the urban village management cases in China, Liede Village, Guangzhou, seems to be typically outstanding. It experienced regeneration from a poor urban village with chaos to a prosperous financial and retailing center in Pearl River New Town. The government followed ne-ol liberal urbanism by decentralizing the central power and letting the market determine the urban plans. Public, private firms, and the village committee all played an important role in decision-making, helping Liede Village to build a new success in the 21st century. However, these approaches also had disadvantages in terms of tokenism of public participation and postponing information from mainstream media. Overall, some parts of the urban village management methods are acceptable, but they can never be copied without further consideration.

**Keywords:** urban planning, urban village, Liede Village

## **1. Introduction**

Chinese urbanization had already been sprawled out rapidly to the fringes of the cities, turning the neighboring countryside into parts of the urban area. Although the government carried out policies aimed at suburbanization, these reformed villages still contain both rural and urban characteristics. In other words, this situation is regarded as semi-urbanization [1], and these areas were known as urban villages or village-in-city, dispersing in the cities and changing the demarcation of rurality and urbanity [2]. Particularly in sizable, economically developed cities like Guangzhou, typical Chinese urban villages are flanked by tall office towers and residences. In Liede Village, Guangzhou, this phenomenon also existed. To solve the problem of chaos in urban villages, the government took action to transform Liede Village into a modern and prosperous urban region with the help of roles of public, and private firms, and so on.

In terms of managing an urban village, this paper seeks to examine Liede Village's urban planning strategies. First of all, to demonstrate the efficacy of the policies and strategies, a brief analysis of the development process and the current situation is made by offering pictures of urban planning and concluding the impacts on the former Liede Village nowadays. The discussion section is focused on the features of Liede Village's urban village management, which includes infrastructure construction, public participation, and media. The benefits and drawbacks of implementing these policies in Liede Village and other cities are then examined, and an assessment is provided to identify the unique

characteristics of Liede Village that aid in its regeneration. The remainder of this paper offers an overview of how urban villages are managed in typical Chinese cities in the future.

## 2. Case Review

Guangzhou is the capital of Guangdong province and the largest metropolis in South China, because of its rapid urban expansion, in 2009, 138 urban villages were on record officially, and Liede Village was the first regenerated one in Guangzhou city [3], which provided an opportunity for the future planners to discover the methods of urban village redevelopment. Liede Village is a typical example of an urban village in Guangzhou. It is located in the Pearl River New Town on the north river bank of Pearl River, surrounded by other urban villages. (See Figure. 1).

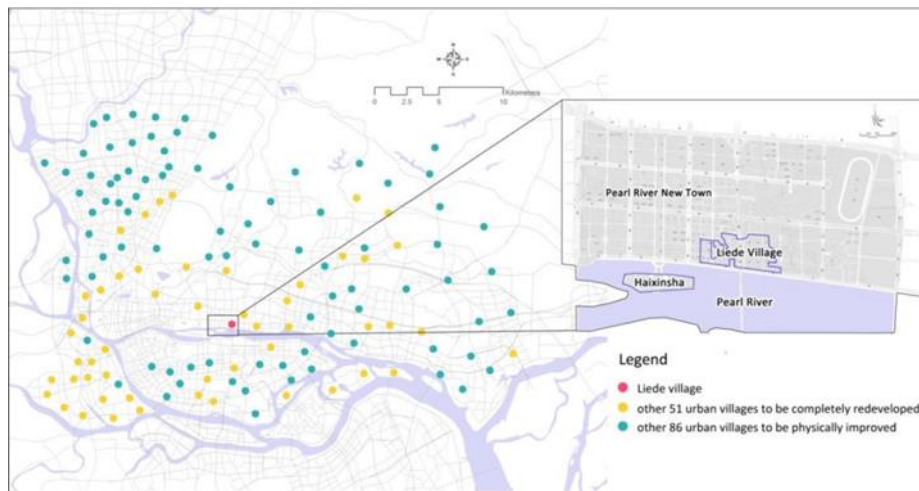


Figure 1: The location of Liede Village in Pearl River New Town and Guangzhou city [3].

Around the 1990s, the Guangzhou government proposed to transform the rural settlements into urban communities, but due to some policy reasons, it was not until 2007 that the reconstruction plan of Liede Village was finalized [4]. Apart from the government's issue that impedes the redevelopment of these areas, there were also other concerns and difficulties for the authority to intervene. More specifically, the identities of the urban villagers were complex, especially in those in the central city like Liede Village. The local dwellers were usually the elderly, and these seniors were more likely to follow the policies of their village committee than the municipal councils due to distrust and unfamiliarity [5]. Regarding the tenants, they were mainly migrant workers with relatively lower income levels. Despite the low rents, the property income might still be a major part of the income for the landlords [5,6], so the landowners could be against the management and renewal for the sake of their stable income. Therefore, urban village regeneration seemed to be difficult.

However, Liede Village was redeveloped efficiently within three years from 2007 to 2010, and the key to success is public participation in promoting neoliberal urbanism, which means the village committee and estate developers as well as the residents play an important role in urban planning [7]. Nowadays, Liede Village becomes one of the most prosperous parts of the central business district in Guangzhou. The original area of Liede Village was transformed into the most important part of Pearl River New Town's central business district (CBD), which was responsible for the financial and retailing sectors in the city. The whole area was divided into 3 parts for different purposes, including residential use, financial and business services (offices buildings, and shopping malls), and spatial land for auction (See Figure 2). [4]. According to Pan and Tian, apart from these basic modern renewals, Liede Village also stood out for its preservation of historical inheritance and traditional lifestyles. Combining the local culture and commercial use, a commercial street was built along the

river with an ancient style derived from architecture in the period of the late Qing Dynasty and the Republic of China. For the original residents, the ancestral temple of their family was refurbished with a near dragon boat lake for celebration and competitions [8]. Therefore, Liede Village had been completely transformed into a new settlement that is commercially viable while preserving the locals' way of life.



Figure 2: The plan for Liede Village. Source: GuangDong Architectural Design & Research Institute Corporation.

### 3. Discussion

#### 3.1. Characteristics of Urban Planning Method in Liede Village

The urban planning methods combined traditional and creative approaches to achieve the success of the project. These actions were taken mainly based on their urban targets which are the current success of the city and improved living quality of their residents. Apart from economic growth and higher rankings of the city itself, livability seemed to be the most significant since it is directly related to the citizen's quality of life. More precisely, Liede Village needed to change the population structure and reduce chaos within the village. This was because the urban villages are affordable and run-down, which created a hotbed for illegal migrant workers and criminals, and the hygiene facility and public services were also not available for all dwellers [8].

Like other urbanized areas, the village had actively built many public facilities and infrastructure, such as roads and bridges to provide convenient access for the commuters to travel between home and working places to attract young people to stay in the village. Green space and technology were introduced to improve the living standards of locals. It was also built to meet the demand of tourists, which made the village more attractive and accessible for all people to visit and live in [9]. What is different from other urban village regeneration is that Liede Village emphasized the role of the public during policymaking and management of resettlements. Public participation was based on the cohesion nature and special community tie in an urban village due to its proximity and close relationship between residents [10]. To connect with the planners and estate developers, the villagers founded a corporation. The normal villagers also joined social media groups to voice their worries and thoughts about the renovation and give input to the village committee so they could take part in decision-making in a logical way. Both the representative company and the village committee were mostly made up of villagers, and they both represented the community's local state authority, which oversaw the inhabitants' profits. Furthermore, the media took part in management as well. It provided a forum for the villages to interact with one another, and the mainstream media served as a kind of

supervisor connecting the populace with the government and monitoring development based on public opinion. Therefore, the media helped relate the residents to the planner and even to the government, which was a bond from the top to the bottom.

### 3.2. Advantage of this Approach

According to the neoliberal urbanism principle, Liede Village, the authority over rebuilding projects came first, followed by the market mechanism [11]. The city becomes more motivated and competitive due to the rising demand for scarce lands by decentralizing the power and letting the market determine the price and administration of the land. The government received enough money from the land auction to build the residential area's infrastructure, ensuring steady tax revenue from future real estate ventures. Also, political expenditures are lower than usual since the government spends less time interacting with citizens and businesses, which helps to preserve its good name.

The public actively participated in the initiative by contributing ideas and fighting for rewards to suit consumer demand. By encouraging them to vote, file charges, or parade legally and acceptably, the internet assisted villagers in promoting structural reforms in the regeneration process. Social media's informal participation gave regular villagers a chance to discuss and exchange ideas with other participants to give the village committee and estate developers a more logical perspective on how to make it happen. Apart from social media, mainstream media also contributed to the spread of information to normal villagers, especially the young and the elderly. While the social media platform reversed the process from bottom to top, the Chinese mainstream media, like People's Daily and CCTV, provided information about Liede Village's redevelopment from top to bottom [12]. This led to information exchange between the public and the government. As a result, the knowledge system of Chinese urban villages has discoursed. In addition, the community built ancestral temples and insisted on maintaining religious customs like dragon boat races, which helped to preserve traditional culture. Although urban and rural growth proved to be compatible, the rural culture and traditional ways of life were preserved at the same time [13], exhibiting the diversity of culture in Liede Village.

### 3.3. Disadvantages of this Approach

Table 1: Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation level (1969) [14].

Level of participation	Type of Participation
8. Citizen Control	Citizen Power
7. Delegated Power	
6. Partnership	
5. Placation	Tokenism
4. Consultation	
3. Informing	
2. Therapy	Non-participation
1. Manipulation	

On the other hand, there are also arguments against the approach. Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation level in urban planning ranks the stages of participation of people from manipulation to complete citizen control, and they are classified into three types, which are non-participation, tokenism and citizen power. Among the 3 types of public participation, non-participation and tokenism are not actual citizen participation. Regarding Liede Village, the public participation level was limited, as most of the villagers were excluded from direct urban decision-making. The village committee and normal villagers were both public, but their power was completely different. The



participation mode of the village committee is mainly consultation, which influences final plans, but the participation mode of ordinary villagers is mainly notification and informing, which has limited influence on decision-making. Therefore, the local villagers are more passive in participating in the reconstruction, and they were mainly receiving the decision notice from the village committee. According to Arnstein's ladder of citizen participation, the public participation level in Liede Village is so limited and closed out that it can only be regarded in level 3 to level 4, which still stays in the degree of tokenism. In the local population structure, it is especially hard for the elderly to take part in since they did not have accessible social media or other communication tools to provide their opinions to the planners and estate developers. As for these residents, most of the information was provided mouth to mouth, through parades or leaflets sent by the villagers.

To deal with the problem of lack of information, the mainstream media took part in the development in terms of cable TV and radio. However, the mainstream media's information was not up to date. The inefficiency of information made it difficult for the villagers to protect their rights as the social problems had already happened, and most of the mainstream media only reported the positive news and advantages of the policies but ignored the aspects that local villagers were concerned about. The asymmetric information created information failure between the government and village committee, village committee, and local villagers. Also, the media offered information on the previous urban village management cases which were government centralized and strongly hurt the villagers' financial and social profits [12,15]. Thus, the villagers did not trust the government and village committee due to the situation of bureaucracy and corruption.

Other weakening of this particular planning system covers many aspects. The difference in position and demand between the government and villagers resulted in arguments and disputes. All participants, including firms and individuals, were promoted by profit maximization [16]. Property rights seemed to be important negotiating capital in the game of profit pursuers. Concerning the traditional cultural preservation in Liede Village, it was believed that the emotional factors were excluded and ignored by the planners [17], referring to the memory site in the village. The frequent parades and banners on the streets led to social unrest and affected the appearance of the cityscape.

### 3.4. Evaluation

The management of Liede Village was unique and it is impossible to duplicate to some extent. All of the urban village regeneration methods are based on the spatial land for auction to provide investment in other parts of the region. Liede Village is in the CBD of Pearl River New Town, which is one of the most prosperous areas in Guangzhou. The land there is in shortage and natural resources are limited, so the land price can be bidden up to a high price. Thus, if the land is not highly demanded by the firms, the whole approach will not be feasible due to a lack of capital and money inflow. Additionally, Liede Village is the trial site of the urban village management in Guangzhou as the first village to be redeveloped. In order to observe the results and set an example for every village in the city, the local government would like to provide the area with greater attention and funding than other regions [10]. It is challenging for the villages that do not receive as much attention to be rebuilt so successfully. Finally, the unique qualities of the city should be emphasized in urban planning. The introduction of planning techniques should take into account the position of the city and its capacity for implementation because not all cities can implement the same plans. It may depend on whether a city wants greater assurance or greater flexibility, more detailed or comprehensive planning. The city has to evaluate its priorities to achieve current success in the short run and urban future growth in the long run. Overall, although public participation and media have disadvantages and limitations, the innovation of Chinese urban village management is still remarkable in the urban planning history in China, especially for Liede Village regeneration, which is a significant success.

#### 4. Conclusion

Liede Village demonstrated a representative example of successful urban village redevelopment, following neoliberal urbanism. The whole area is divided into three parts, used for housing, commercial, and auction purposes respectively. The spatial land sold to private investors and firms accumulated capital and tax revenue for the government which represented a money source for urban village management. Apart from common urbanization methods like refurbishment and rebuilding of amenities, Liede Village management had typical use of public participation, which provided a platform for people and the government to exchange information by sharing and notifying current decisions and thoughts. Mainstream media contributed from top to bottom, giving information about the urban plans and government policies to the normal villagers, while social media offered the villagers a place of low cost to discuss and share their views to provide a rational response to the village committee. However, public information was often postponed, forming an information failure due to asymmetrical information issues. Public participation also only stayed at tokenism since most of the villagers cannot participate in decision-making and the people's opinion was monopolized by the village committee, so many people's views were ignored by the planners and government. In conclusion, whether these approaches can be implemented in other regions depends on the features of the city itself based on social and financial factors. What is emphasized about urban village management is that strategies used should consider the characteristics and positions of the city instead of duplicating other regions' policies.

This paper does not provide specific research data on Liede Village and other Guangzhou urban villages, based on secondhand evidence from other scholars. The online popularity of Liede Village decreased after the regeneration, so it lacks information on Liede Village and Pearl River New Town today. This has led to uncertainty about long-term development in the region. Future research may concentrate on the potential growth and blossom of Chinese urban villages through specific strategies.

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