

Public Opinion-Driven Collaborative Symbiosis: Public-Relations Governance Mechanisms in the Renovation of Older Residential Communities

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Abstract

Older residential community renovation combines spatial upgrading with the governance of fragmented stakeholders, differentiated demands, and weak community trust. Viewing public-relations governance as relational communication and trust-building rather than publicity, this paper examines the links among public opinion expression, governmental attention and response, and multi-actor coordination. Public attention helps local governments identify needs, but its translation into renewal outcomes depends on issue translation, consultation, interest balancing, and post-renovation maintenance. Public-relations governance should therefore shift from one-way publicity to process-wide communication, moving renovation from project delivery to the reconstruction of community relations.

Keywords

Older residential community renovation; public-relations governance; public attention; collaborative governance; urban renewal.

1. Introduction

China's urban development has moved from land-based expansion to the qualitative improvement of existing urban spaces. Urban renewal has therefore become a major pathway for high-quality urban development. In this context, urban renewal should not be understood merely as demolition, reconstruction, or physical upgrading. It involves public interest, resource allocation, community relations, and governance capacity [1]. From the perspective of shared social development, urban renewal is also a process of reorganizing, repairing, and enhancing social relations rather than simply improving physical space or economic value [2]. Older residential community renovation combines tangible projects—including pipeline replacement, road repair, parking management, age-friendly improvement, and public-space upgrading—with issues involving residents' property and use rights, daily routines, and neighborhood relations. Government response patterns, residents' willingness to participate, community self-organization, and policy instrument selection influence renovation outcomes [3][4][5][6]. Treating renovation merely as engineering neglects its relational and political dimensions: conflicts often arise not from opposition to improvement, but from distrust of plan-making, benefit distribution, cost sharing, and long-term maintenance.

This article treats public relations as a governance mechanism in older residential community renovation, rather than policy publicity, image packaging, or public-opinion control. It denotes an institutionalized process of issue formation, resident communication, governmental response, interest coordination, and trust reconstruction. The analysis examines how resident opinions become public issues, governmental attention becomes enforceable arrangements, and short-term participation becomes sustained co-governance—the processes through which public attention is converted into collaborative renewal capacity.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

2.1. Older residential community renovation as relational governance

Older residential community renovation reorganizes existing community relations. Complex property structures, aging populations, weak property management, and ambiguous public-space boundaries create competing interests. Elevator installation changes the cost-benefit structure between upper- and lower-floor residents; parking adjustment redistributes public space; and age-friendly renovation raises questions of resource prioritization. Community self-organization affects residents' capacity for collective action [5], while emotional embeddedness and interest coordination can reduce opposition to controversial projects such as elevator installation [7].

Renovation therefore requires communication among residents, grassroots organizations, government departments, design and construction units, property service providers, and social organizations. Research suggests that urban renewal should adopt a systemic perspective on interactions among institutions, markets, communities, and social structures [2]. Its core is not simply project completion but the reorganization of relationships, a function served by public-relations governance.

2.2. Public attention, governmental attention, and response quality

Public attention is an important signal in older residential community renovation, expressed through online searches, comments, complaints, discussions, as well as offline deliberation and collective feedback. Text-mining research shows that such attention mainly concerns policy understanding, concrete demands, construction impacts, and daily convenience [8]. Rather than being treated as disturbance, public attention should be understood as an entry point for identifying governance needs.

Governmental attention is the key channel through which public attention enters the policy process. Since local governments' attention allocation in policy texts and agendas can influence resource distribution and implementation direction [9], sustained public attention may prompt more frequent responses in work reports, project arrangements, and grassroots governance practices. However, governmental attention does not necessarily mean high-quality responsiveness: the appearance of an issue in policy texts only indicates administrative recognition, not substantive incorporation of residents' demands.

Therefore, renovation governance requires responses that are specific, transparent, trackable, and explainable. Research on online governmental response shows that perceived response quality affects fairness perception, complaint-handling satisfaction, political trust, and continuous e-participation [10]. Similarly, studies on public environmental attention and corporate ESG performance suggest that external attention works through both external pressure and internal organizational attention [11]. In older residential community renovation, public attention can generate governance effects only when it is transformed into internal attention and concrete action by governments, communities, and implementation actors.

2.3. Collaborative governance and public-relations governance

Collaborative governance coordinates multiple actors through common problems, institutional rules, and interaction. Older residential community renovation requires governments, residents, community organizations, professional institutions, social organizations, and post-renovation maintenance actors [12][13]. International experience further shows that relationships among institutions, roles, and actions shape renewal pathways; in the United States, these pathways reflect changing responsibilities among government, market, and society [14].

Public-relations governance is the relational conversion mechanism within collaborative governance, connecting loosely related or conflicting actors without replacing them. Research on urban grassroots governance communities identifies “integration—exchange—participation” as an important organizational logic [15]. Older residential community renovation also requires resource integration, information exchange, and resident participation to reduce coordination costs. The value of public-relations governance lies in transforming resident expression into public issues, governmental attention into deliberative arrangements, and temporary mobilization into sustained co-governance.

2.4. The auxiliary role and limits of digital governance

Digital technology expands participation through Digital Party building, technology-embedded governance, and grassroots platforms that support information integration, task assignment, and feedback processing [16][17]. Yet digitalization does not guarantee governance modernization. Unequal internet access may widen inequality [18]; digital tools may impose learning, compliance, and psychological burdens [19]; and excessive reliance on technology capital may cause power migration, blurred responsibility, and weakened public value [20].

Thus, digital participation cannot replace face-to-face communication, particularly in communities with many elderly residents and unequal digital capacities. Public-relations governance should combine online feedback and data monitoring with household visits, building meetings, resident representative meetings, and paper notices. Digital tools may improve efficiency, but trust still depends on visible, explainable, and sustained interaction.

3. Research Positioning and Analytical Approach

This article is a mechanism-oriented conceptual study rather than a full econometric analysis. Because the Guangdong-based urban renewal project discussed here is a team project, the author cannot independently disclose its complete database, model estimates, or regression outputs. For reasons of research ethics and data ownership, its observations are used only to identify the problem background and mechanism clues, not as independent empirical proof or a basis for causal claims.

The analysis draws on three types of material: literature on urban renewal, older residential community renovation, public participation, governmental responsiveness, collaborative governance, and digital governance; common renovation scenarios, including elevator installation, parking adjustment, public-space redistribution, age-friendly improvement, and post-renovation property management; and limited observations from the Guangdong team project. Using Baidu Index, government work reports, and urban renewal performance indicators, that project developed a framework linking public attention, governmental attention, and renewal performance. This paper uses only its core insight: public attention may influence governmental attention, but its translation into governance performance depends on intermediate institutional conversion mechanisms.

Four analytical propositions follow. First, public attention primarily signals problems rather than directly producing governance performance. Second, governmental attention brings public attention into the administrative process but does not guarantee response quality. Third, public-relations governance converts public attention into collaborative renewal capacity through public opinion identification, issue translation, response organization, interest balancing, and trust reconstruction. Fourth, digital technology can improve information processing but must be combined with offline communication to avoid digital exclusion and fatigue.

4. Mechanism Analysis of Public-Relations Governance

4.1. Public opinion identification

Resident opinions are fragmented: upper-floor residents may prioritize elevator installation, lower-floor residents lighting and compensation, car owners parking, and non-car owners public space and pedestrian safety. Elderly residents may emphasize age-friendly facilities and construction safety, while younger residents may focus on internet infrastructure and daily convenience. Public-relations governance must identify these opinions before plans are finalized.

Text-mining research shows that residents' concerns are problem-oriented [8]. Grassroots organizations should therefore identify demands before renovation through household visits, questionnaires, building meetings, online comments, hotline work orders, and community public-opinion observation. The aim is to identify high-frequency demands, potential conflicts, and vulnerable groups' needs rather than merely calculate approval rates.

4.2. Issue translation

Public attention does not always take rational, complete, or institutionalized forms; residents may express demands through complaints, opposition, suspicion, or emotional language. Treating such expressions merely as resistance obscures governance problems. The key function of public-relations governance is therefore issue translation: transforming emotional and fragmented expression into public issues that can be discussed, addressed, and negotiated. Opposition to elevator installation may reflect concerns about lighting, housing values, or cost sharing rather than opposition to age-friendly renovation; opposition to parking adjustment may reflect anxiety about lost convenience. Spatial renewal should therefore use adaptive policy instruments suited to different problem types [6]. Issue translation enables such adaptation by converting "disagreement," "dissatisfaction," and "incomprehension" into interest, procedural, informational, and trust-related problems.

4.3. Response organization

Public attention may increase governmental attention, but governmental attention must be converted into institutionalized response. Research on government response patterns in older residential community renovation shows that response modes are affected by spatial conditions, resident demands, governance resources, and grassroots organizational capacity [3]. Therefore, response organization should not remain at the level of verbal explanation or document transmission. It should be institutionalized through meeting systems, information disclosure, feedback loops, and responsibility allocation.

Response organization requires clear responsibility, specific content, and trackable outcomes. Residents should know whether the subdistrict office, community committee, housing department, design or construction unit, or property service provider handles a problem. Responses should explain decision-making bases, schedules, and constraints rather than state that an issue will be "studied" or "coordinated." They should also show whether feedback changed the plan, which opinions were adopted, and why others were not. Online response quality affects political trust and continuous participation [10], and the same logic applies to renovation governance.

4.4. Deliberative coordination

Older residential community renovation requires multiple actors: government departments provide policy and financial support; subdistricts and communities coordinate; resident representatives communicate opinions; professional institutions explain technical plans; construction units implement projects; and maintenance actors manage long-term operation. Institutional design, facilitative leadership, and interaction shape community micro-renewal

performance [12]. Without stable deliberative platforms, renovation becomes temporary bargaining among government, construction units, and residents.

Public-relations governance should establish a normalized deliberative structure. Resident deliberation should represent different buildings, age groups, and interests; third-party professionals should explain plans, construction impacts, cost sharing, and safety risks; and interest-balancing mechanisms should specify beneficiaries, affected groups, costs, and compensation. Because interest coordination requires community emotion and shared belonging as well as rules [7], deliberative coordination combines procedural arrangement with relational repair.

4.5. Trust reconstruction

Many renovation problems emerge after completion: facilities may lack maintenance, parking disorder may return, public space may be reoccupied, and property fee disputes may continue. Without post-renovation maintenance mechanisms, renovation outcomes may erode and residents' trust in future governance may decline.

Public-relations governance should operate before, during, and after renovation through public opinion identification and risk assessment, information disclosure and conflict coordination, and maintenance responsibility and community co-management, respectively. Because stable communities emerge through integration, exchange, and participation [15], renovation should turn one-time engineering projects into opportunities to improve community governance capacity. Residents' experience in public deliberation, rule consciousness, and common maintenance enables the shift from spatial improvement to community building.

5. Discussion

Public-relations governance moves beyond the narrow understanding of public relations as publicity, image-building, or public-opinion management. In older residential community renovation, it is a relational coordination mechanism that connects actors, translates issues, organizes responses, and rebuilds trust amid fragmented stakeholders, differentiated resident demands, and weak community trust.

Theoretically, this article clarifies the intermediate mechanism between public attention and collaborative governance. Public attention does not automatically produce renovation performance. It first needs to enter governmental attention and then be transformed into institutional arrangements through issue translation, response organization, and deliberative coordination. Existing research on public environmental attention and corporate ESG performance suggests that external attention affects organizational behavior only when it passes through internal organizational attention [11]. In older residential community renovation, public-relations governance can be understood as a grassroots version of this transformation from external attention to internal attention and then to governance action.

This article also offers a cautious understanding of digital governance. Digital Party building and technology-embedded governance provide useful tools for grassroots governance [16][17], but digital platforms cannot replace community communication. Studies on the digital divide, digital fatigue, and technology capital erosion remind us that technology-embedded governance may generate new exclusion, burdens, and risks [18][19][20]. Therefore, digital tools in renovation should serve problem discovery, information disclosure, and feedback tracking, rather than replacing offline deliberation.

Several policy implications follow. First, public-relations governance should begin before renovation, with grassroots organizations identifying public opinion, classifying issues, and assessing potential conflicts. Second, stable mechanisms for issue translation and deliberation should clarify responsibilities among governments, communities, resident representatives,

professional institutions, construction units, property service providers, and social organizations. Third, interest-balancing and cost-sharing rules should address controversial issues such as elevator installation, parking adjustment, and public-space redistribution. Fourth, online and offline participation should be combined: digital platforms can improve information disclosure and feedback, while household visits, paper notices, building meetings, and face-to-face consultation remain necessary for elderly and digitally disadvantaged residents.

This article is limited by the inability to disclose the team project data and therefore provides no independent econometric testing. Its contribution lies in conceptual mechanism construction rather than causal identification. Future studies may, with appropriate authorization and ethical safeguards, examine the relationships among public attention, governmental attention, response quality, and renovation performance across cities, community types, and renovation models.

In sum, older residential community renovation should move from project delivery to relational governance and from spatial improvement to community building. Public-relations governance is not external packaging but a mechanism connecting public opinion identification, plan consultation, construction communication, and long-term maintenance. By converting public attention and governmental response into sustained multi-actor collaboration, it can make renovation a genuinely people-centered practice of urban renewal.

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