

The Newness of New Planning: New Propositions, New Connotations, and New Practices: An Academic Discussion

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Abstract: Editor's note: At the disciplinary development forum held at the end of 2025, the framework of New Planning was formally proposed. This concept responds to the transformation of development models, demographic restructuring, technological paradigm shifts, climate change, and heightened uncertainty. Traditional planning paradigms have become insufficient for increasingly complex urban problems and development demands. To respond to this reality, this academic discussion invites experts from planning research, design, education, and practice to examine what New Planning should address, how it differs from traditional planning in objects, values, technologies, and methods, and what types of practice it should generate. The discussion focuses on four dimensions: reshaping planning values and discourse, expanding planning objects and fields, developing dynamic response and flexible logic, and renewing education, capacity, and technology.

Keywords: New Planning; planning paradigm; spatial governance; planning education; digital intelligence; resilience

Editor's Note

Urban development today faces multiple challenges: the transformation of development modes, shifts in demographic structure, technological transitions, intensified climate change, and highly uncertain risks. Traditional planning paradigms find it increasingly difficult to respond to these complex conditions. New Planning therefore calls for a return to planning's essential task of dealing with uncertainty, while promoting systematic renewal of the discipline.

The contributions in this discussion converge around four issues. First, planning values and discourse must be reconstructed. Second, the objects and fields of planning have expanded from cities to rural areas, metropolitan regions, coastal zones, low-altitude spaces, and multilayered composite spaces. Third, planning must develop dynamic response and flexible logic so that it can shift from passive pressure-bearing to active evolution under changing social and technological conditions. Fourth, planning education, professional capacity, and technical systems require integrated renewal so that planning can create value and respond to society under uncertainty.

1 Building a more inclusive, resilient and implementation-oriented planning paradigm

SUN Shiwen and CHENG Tianran

Planning is a public affair concerning urban and rural development. The newness of New Planning should be understood in relation to the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity. It should promote a shift from command-control planning toward consultative and cooperative planning that adapts to governance needs. This transformation requires institutional mechanisms through which sectors, industries, and social groups participate in discussion, consultation, and collaborative decision making. It also requires a planning paradigm that is more inclusive, more resilient, and more attentive to implementation effects.

First, New Planning should implement the idea that people's cities are built by the people and for the people. The former means that people should participate in the process of urban construction and planning; the latter means that people's aspirations should be reflected in urban construction and development. New Planning should be planning for the people, not planning only by government departments or by planners. In a modern

society with diverse values, lifestyles, and social relationships, planning must start from concrete groups and their needs, accommodate and realize their aspirations, coordinate the relations among these needs, continuously adjust the allocation of spatial resources, and strengthen the sense of gain, satisfaction, and well-being among different groups.

Second, New Planning should improve the degree to which planning adapts to change while consolidating rigid elements and bottom-line requirements. Global climate change, accelerating technological revolutions, industrial-chain restructuring, demographic and social shifts, and public-safety risks all increase uncertainty. Planning must therefore combine rigid control over bottom-line elements such as ecological security, food security, and cultural inheritance with a wider adjustable range for responding to change. Management and decision-making authority for adaptive change should move as far as possible toward practical operating levels, supported by clear functions, responsibilities, and institutional construction.

Third, New Planning requires a layered, measurable, real-time and effective evaluation system. Planning should place greater emphasis on problem orientation and process management. For each level of planning control, ecological-efficiency evaluation and sustainable-development evaluation should provide a basis for decisions in plan-making and implementation. Only with clear and socially recognized evaluation criteria can multiple actors better coordinate their intentions and actions. The focus of planning should shift from managing the preparation of plans and their formal outputs to managing planning implementation, continuous learning, feedback, and problem response.

Fourth, New Planning should enhance coordination and benefit-allocation capacity. If planning takes spatial governance as its mission, it must understand the social and economic meanings carried by spatial resources and spatial relations. It should use fiscal, taxation, and benefit-adjustment tools, as well as methods of control-regulation and demand-response, to resolve spatial contradictions and adapt spatial relations in real-time scenarios. In this sense, the resilience of New Planning is not merely compatible land use or the engineering ability to resist disasters; it is the capacity of the whole planning system to accommodate unforeseen change, correct its own content, and keep operating effectively.

2 Rooted in fundamentals and renewed day by day: connotation extension and paradigm innovation

ZENG Peng

Contemporary Chinese urban development raises new questions and challenges. Western planning theories are increasingly difficult to translate into local contexts, while traditional planning paradigms cannot fully respond to the diversity and complexity of current demands. Planning theory, methods, and tools must therefore be renewed under the framework of New Planning. This renewal is both the foundation of planning education and practice and a necessary path for extending Chinese local planning theory and constructing a Chinese planning discourse.

2.1 Reconstructing planning discourse from local foundations

During rapid urbanization, the localization of Western theory provided useful instruments for practice. As China enters a new stage of urban development, existing systems no longer fully meet the theoretical needs of Chinese modernization. Local planning theory and discourse should be understood as systematic tools of thought expression and value transmission. They are more than form and technique; they are cognitive frameworks and modes of expression formed through long practice.

Chinese philosophy has long emphasized the unity of heaven and humanity and the principle of following nature. The ideas that all things form an integrated whole and that balance requires continuous adjustment provide a deep basis for systems thinking and dynamic thinking. Traditional philosophy also places human beings

at the center of governance and emphasizes the harmonious coexistence of heaven, earth, people, and cities. Systems thinking, dynamic thinking, and human-centered thinking are therefore roots of local philosophy and important intellectual foundations for modern people's-city planning. They are also values that New Planning should reconstruct.

2.2 A New Planning paradigm supported by intelligent symbiosis and dynamic deduction

Traditional planning often aims to complete a desirable blueprint within a specific time-space scope and then use it to organize implementation. Its logic depends on determinate outcomes and tends to exclude process dynamics. In practice, this may produce path preference and target deviation. In the traditional triadic relationship of government, planner, and public, the public is often in a weak position; public participation may satisfy bottom-line concern but lacks constructive effectiveness.

New Planning should clearly establish human-centered values and build a theoretical, methodological, and technical system of intelligent symbiosis between people and cities based on smart infrastructure and artificial intelligence. Through smart perception, digital twins, machine learning, and scenario simulation, a smart urban environment integrating physical space, digital-twin space, and social space can be formed. People's real needs can be collected, evaluated, and fed back in a timely manner; urban services and products can be diversified and updated according to those needs; and people and cities can form a bidirectional mechanism of feedback, co-learning, and symbiosis through multidimensional digital-twin platforms.

2.3 Future-scenario-driven technology for diversified integration

Urban planning is an interdisciplinary field with strong practical orientation. Since its birth, it has absorbed theories and knowledge from multiple disciplines and used integrated technologies to address complex urban problems. Historically, changes in energy supply, transportation modes, and urban risk prevention have all reshaped the use of urban space and stimulated the evolution of planning technologies.

Today, innovation in urban space, urban services, and urban products is faster than ever. New energy vehicles reshape transportation environments; charging-station layouts influence travel and public space; energy infrastructure is moving from the backstage to the foreground of the city; low-altitude airspace may transform mobility and living patterns; blue energy and the marine economy create new momentum for coastal cities; and cascading risks require planning technologies that go beyond engineering resilience toward system resilience. These scenarios are already emerging in planning practice. New Planning must respond prospectively by integrating new methods and technologies and by pursuing systematic innovation driven by actual scenarios.

3 Practicing New Planning: technical responses and optimization in metropolitan territorial spatial planning

SHAN Zhuoran and HUANG Yaping

Under the complex background of urban development transformation, technological revolution, and global industrial-chain restructuring, New Planning emphasizes a return to planning's essence of managing uncertainty and promotes a shift from static scheme drawing toward dynamic, adaptive and integrated process design. This shift is particularly urgent for metropolitan territorial spatial planning.

In the new era, metropolitan areas are key spatial units through which China participates in global competition and promotes domestic regional coordination. They serve as nodes of internal circulation and as important carriers of deep intra-city integration. Yet they face three practical tests. Since 2019, many national metropolitan areas have prepared development plans, but relatively few have conducted territorial spatial planning, and theoretical methods remain weak. Chinese metropolitan areas also have large scale, nested structures, high-density populations, and constrained land use, often forming strong-core, belt-ring spatial structures. Finally,

digital technology has only been shallowly applied in metropolitan planning preparation, monitoring, and dynamic optimization.

3.1 Further innovating methods for preparing metropolitan territorial spatial planning

Metropolitan territorial spatial planning should construct a technical framework of spatial-governance objectives, spatial-development patterns, and spatial-element control. It should be guided by ecological-security baselines, integrated spatial models, optimization of three types of space, and facility-element linkages. It should shape spatial patterns according to productivity distribution and regional balance and propose planning techniques for coordination across baselines, pattern construction, zoning coordination, element connection, and action alignment.

The planning approach should follow the spatial model of strong core, axial belt, and ring layer. It should identify priority areas for coordination, including shared ecological and resilient security baselines, integrated spatial development patterns, differentiated cross-regional coordination, element linkages across fields, and leading intra-city development in conditional areas. It should formulate embedded strategies that focus on key element areas, functional network organization, corridor and boundary-zone spatial support, unified markets, and income distribution mechanisms.

3.2 Strengthening digital infrastructure and platform construction

Extending digital planning technologies from megacity scale to metropolitan scale requires a platform covering the full process of intelligent diagnosis, simulation deduction, and optimization decision making. Existing platforms should integrate multi-source datasets, including population mobility, commuting, ecological baseline, industrial chains, public service accessibility, and infrastructure networks. They should support continuous monitoring and collaborative decision making across administrative boundaries.

At the application level, such platforms can identify functional connections, ecological risks, spatial mismatches, and development opportunities. They can simulate the effects of policy options and infrastructure investment, evaluate their impacts on population, land, transport, ecology, and public services, and support dynamic updating. In this sense, metropolitan planning under New Planning should become a continuous technical process that combines strategic judgment with adaptive optimization.

4 From control tool to allocation platform: renewal of detailed planning

WANG Xinmin

Detailed planning is no longer only a regulatory tool for controlling construction intensity and land use. In the stock-renewal stage, it should become an integrated allocation platform that coordinates resources and organizes high-quality development. It must respond to the actual operation of parcels, blocks, public services, ecological spaces, and infrastructure, and it must connect statutory control with implementation mechanisms. The renewal of detailed planning lies in translating rigid control into implementable governance. On the one hand, it must protect public interests, ecological baselines, safety requirements, and basic public-service standards. On the other hand, it must retain adequate flexibility for diversified urban renewal, mixed functions, public-private cooperation, and staged implementation. The key is to build a planning mechanism that can identify specific problems, coordinate interests, and adjust controls according to implementation feedback.

5 Coastal integrated governance as new practice

ZHU Lifang

The super coastal belt offers a vivid example of New Planning in practice. Coastal zones integrate ecological systems, port and shipping functions, industrial platforms, public spaces, tourism, and everyday urban life.

Planning for these areas can no longer be limited to sectoral shoreline control or isolated functional zoning. It must coordinate ecological protection, functional organization, safety resilience, and citizens' experience. The new practice of coastal governance requires land-sea coordination and cross-domain integration. It should connect blue economy, coastal public space, transportation hubs, ecological restoration, cultural landscape, and risk prevention. It should also transform strategic orientation into concrete spatial value, using implementation projects to build continuous public coastlines, resilient ecological buffers, and integrated functional corridors. This is a shift from planning as spatial arrangement to planning as the organization of complex value chains.

6 Flexible urban logic under new technologies

NIU Qiang and ZHANG Hao

With the penetration of intelligent agents, remote work, smart delivery, low-altitude transportation, and other technologies, the organizational logic of cities is becoming more fluid. Planning must respond by reconstructing systems of functional compoundness, network elasticity, and human-machine collaboration. The city is increasingly a dynamic system of services, data, flows, and physical places.

New Planning should therefore enhance its capacity for flexible response. It should consider how work, consumption, mobility, logistics, and public services reorganize under technological change. It should treat infrastructure, digital networks, public space, and community life as interacting systems and should develop tools for real-time perception, scenario deduction, and iterative adjustment.

7 Public service facilities planning in the stock era

DING Liang

In the stock era, public service facility planning must shift from uniform standards and total-quantity control toward differentiated adaptation and local empowerment. Traditional per-capita indexes and service-radius standards may produce mismatches between supply and demand, resulting in both facility shortages and idle resources. Planning should therefore deepen the precision of index control to township or street levels and avoid one-size-fits-all allocation.

Dynamic monitoring through territorial spatial planning implementation networks can track population structure and changes in demand, providing data support for index optimization. In areas with insufficient total demand, service-radius standards may be moderately relaxed, facility concentration encouraged, and resources integrated to improve operating efficiency and sustainability. Only by adjusting planning content according to departmental authority, improving layout methods according to actual scenarios, and optimizing standards around real demand can public service planning meet high-quality needs in the stock era.

8 Digital-intelligence diagnosis and regulation for rural functional transformation in metropolitan areas

CHEN Chen

After more than forty years of rapid industrialization, urbanization, and modernization, developed coastal regions and the peripheries of large cities in eastern China have begun to experience rural territorial functional transformation. Rural areas are moving from agriculture-led productivist villages toward multifunctional villages led by leisure tourism, cultural experience, ecological conservation, and other functions. Metropolitan regions, as growth poles and economic nodes, strongly shape the direction and level of surrounding rural development.

8.1 New understanding: complexity of rural functional transformation and limits of traditional planning

From the perspective of real demand, rural functional transformation in metropolitan regions faces at least three challenges. First, rural areas in metropolitan regions are often assumed to be highly developed, yet some

still show late-development or peripheral-depression problems. Second, the release of rural development momentum is insufficient, and functional transformation has not fully shown the expected pioneering and diversified character. Third, the complexity of transformation conflicts with relatively single governance tools, producing administrative barriers, policy constraints, spatial mismatch, and land-use restrictions. The future transformation of rural areas in metropolitan regions will be multidimensional. Industrially, they will shift from traditional agriculture to integration among primary, secondary, and tertiary industries. Spatially, they will be continuously restructured by accelerated flows between urban and rural factors. Socially, they will face aging and cultural hollowing. Traditional planning, which relies heavily on static statistics and qualitative analysis, struggles to capture these dynamic laws and often lags behind real change.

8.2 New practice: disruptive innovation through digital platforms

In recent years, many metropolitan rural areas have seen digital platforms entering rural development. These practices include local branding and cultural revival, digital dissemination and livelihood promotion by rural influencers, platform-based local connectivity, and knowledge-economy spaces. They show the adaptability and creativity of rural society in the digital-intelligence era.

Local branding links ethnic culture, sports events, agricultural products, and offline commerce, enhancing identity and belonging. Rural online creators present scenes of cooking, beekeeping, fishing, and other forms of natural livelihood, satisfying urban audiences' symbolic consumption of authenticity and locality. Platform-based local connectors such as community group leaders use social-media tools to build local networks based on socioeconomic relations. Digital platforms can also become knowledge, consensus, and innovation spaces, supporting interaction among creators, industries, governments, and villagers and improving rural resilience.

8.3 New methods: digital-intelligence technologies as a path for rural development

Existing rural studies often rely on case analysis of typical villages. Although such studies are in-depth, they lack overall explanatory power at the level of typological systems and spatial patterns. Rural areas have long been treated as data deserts, and traditional statistical data, with long update cycles and low spatial precision, cannot capture dynamic micro-spatial activity. A digital-intelligence research framework can build a closed loop of data, diagnosis, law discovery, and intervention.

At the data level, remote sensing, mobile signaling, POI data, social media, location data, and government ledgers can be integrated into a new rural digital base. At the diagnosis level, machine learning can identify and classify rural functional types. At the law-discovery level, complex-network analysis can reveal transmission pathways and key nodes of functional transformation. At the intervention level, a diagnosis-simulation-decision mechanism can dynamically optimize planning responses. This shift from experience-driven to data-driven research indicates that rural planning and policy in metropolitan regions are entering a more precise era.

8.4 New exploration: an innovation chain of diagnosis, law discovery and planning regulation

Digital-intelligence diagnosis should identify the functional types of rural territories, the pathways of functional transformation, and the spatial patterns of functional evolution. Rural functions may differentiate, compound, strengthen, or decline over time. Their spatial evolution may take the form of core-periphery structures, administrative-boundary effects, corridor-driven development, or random spatial distribution.

Law discovery can be organized through a dual framework of metropolitan driving mechanisms and localized response mechanisms. Metropolitanization promotes the integrated allocation of urban-rural factors, rescaling of spatial governance, and ring-corridor functional differentiation. Local response mechanisms involve the restructuring of population, land, industry, ecology, and culture, often linked to distinctive resources, local policy innovation, and governance culture. Planning regulation should therefore combine problem-oriented and goal-

oriented interventions at regional and local levels. Regionally, it should guide cross-regional factor allocation, spatial-governance restructuring, and corridor differentiation; locally, it should design differentiated planning interventions according to resources, policies, and governance cultures.

Taken together, the discussion shows that New Planning is both a conceptual renewal and a systemic reform of planning capacity, education, and technology. It requires planners to understand complex systems, use digital-intelligence tools to discover laws and support dynamic regulation, and maintain planning's human-centered value orientation. Its purpose is to improve the overall adaptability and refinement of urban and rural spatial governance under uncertainty.

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