

Revealing the Potential Social Dimensions of Community and Community Planning

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Abstract. Since “community” was established in China in the 1980s as an administrative concept and a practical policy instrument, planning scholarship has paid insufficient attention to the concept’s socio-spatial and temporal relationships, while community planning and community action have remained strongly oriented toward remedying material deficits. Combining theoretical and empirical analysis, this article examines the social dimensions of community and community planning. It clarifies the conceptual relationship between community and society; unpacks the social meanings of community as a collectivity; critiques quantitative, standards-based assessments of community conditions; and extends both social-pathology and social time-space approaches to community analysis. By shifting between societal and community perspectives, it also explores community-based responses to social problems. The article then identifies potential social issues embedded in community planning and argues for incorporating forward-looking social analysis and innovative exploration of social questions into the planning process, thereby overcoming technical difficulties that are, in fact, rooted in social problems.

Keywords: community; community planning; social dimension; community life circle; social pathology; social time-space perspective.

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Since the Ministry of Civil Affairs began promoting the concept of “community” in 1986, China has spent nearly four decades exploring urban community development. Practice has now entered a broadly standardized and systematic stage. Yet many community initiatives remain heavily oriented toward filling material shortfalls. This reflects China’s economic foundations and stage of development, but it is also closely related to the limited depth and scope of academic research on the social dimensions of community and community planning.

1 Conceptualizing Community and Identifying Its Social Dimensions

Although social and community life associated with institutions, economic relations, and ideology has never ceased, the modern concepts of community and society both entered China as translations. The term society began to circulate after 1865, when Henry Wheaton’s *Elements of International Law* was introduced in Chinese as *Wanguo Gongfa*. After a period of linguistic refinement, it stabilized as the now-familiar Chinese term *shehui* [1]. Community entered China through the 1903 translation of Herbert Spencer’s *Study of Sociology* (1873), titled *Qunxue Yiyen*. Its circulation was more circuitous, and the

Chinese term shequ was not firmly established until the 1930s [2]. Both concepts therefore underwent processes of selection and adaptation as translated terms; “community” also experienced a later process of rediscovery.

1.1 The Relationship between Community and Society

The Cambridge Dictionary defines society as a large group of people who live together in an organized way, make decisions about how to act, and share the work that must be done; all the people in a country, or in several similar countries, may be described as a society [3]. American sociologist Robert Park and his colleagues [4] treated community as a qualified designation of society or a social group: when the individuals and institutions that compose a society or social group are considered in terms of their geographical distribution, that society or group is called a community. Park’s explicit statement that “Community is not society” was intended to distinguish the two, yet it also confirms their close relationship.

Their fundamental difference lies in the fact that society is structurally abstract, whereas community includes a concrete geographical, territorial, and spatial delimitation. In 1935, Wu Wenzao, then chair of the Sociology Department at Yenching University, proposed “observing society and understanding society from the standpoint of community.” Society, he argued, is an abstract concept describing collective life and the totality of complex social relations, whereas community is the concrete expression of the actual life of people in a particular place: it has a material basis and can be observed. He further distinguished model surveys - static community research for understanding social structure - from variation surveys - dynamic community research for understanding social processes - while also advocating the combined study of both to grasp social organization and change as a whole [5]. This line of community research was interrupted in the early 1950s when sociology as a discipline and profession was abolished in China. Although the concept of community revived with the restoration of sociology in the late 1970s, it did not regain broad attention until “community” emerged as an administrative concept in the 1980s.

In contemporary China, the Ministry of Civil Affairs’ Opinions on Advancing Urban Community Development Nationwide (November 2000) generally defines the urban community as the jurisdiction of a residents’ committee after its scale has been adjusted through reform of the community system. This applies to most Chinese cities. With the Ministry’s approval, however, Shanghai defines the community at the level of the subdistrict, one administrative tier above the residents’ committee (Figure 1). This difference in administrative definition does not necessarily alter the substantive organizational functions of a community, but it has significant effects on organizational efficiency and community planning.

In Shanghai, community planning has a clearly defined object: the subdistrict community. The recently promoted 15-minute community life circle is further delineated within subdistrict or town communities that are unusually large or spatially distinctive. This explains why Shanghai has 215 subdistrict and town communities but around 1,600 community life circles. In other cities, a community may consist of one or several residents’ committees and is therefore smaller. When community-related planning is undertaken, defining an appropriate planning area becomes the first step, which has generated extensive discussion of how community life circles should be delineated and spatially optimized.

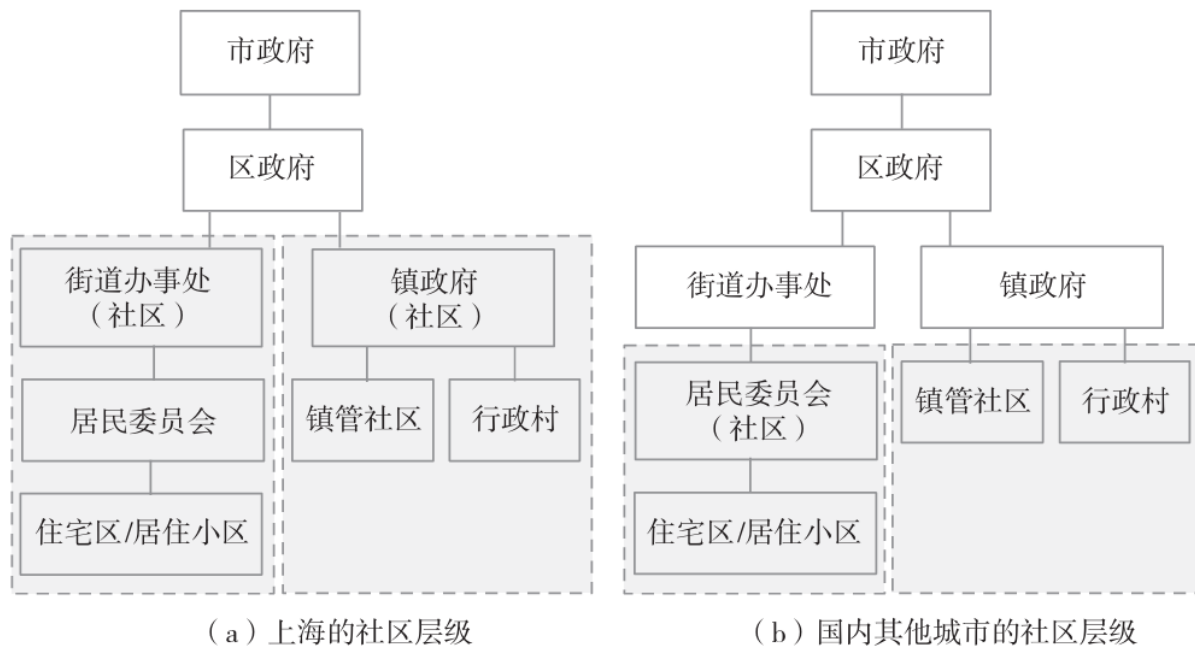


Figure 1. Differences in the hierarchy and scope of urban communities in China

In sum, community and society each provide an intellectual resource and a conceptual tool. In community research and community planning, however, the social constitutes a particularly important dimension.

1.2 Layers of Meaning in Community as a Social Collectivity

Although contemporary urban communities in China are administratively designated, the Ministry's 2000 Opinions first adopted the conventional academic definition: a community is a social collectivity composed of people living within a defined territorial area. Among the many academic definitions, this is close to that of Japanese sociologist Yasuo Yokoyama [6], who described community as “a comprehensive life collectivity with a defined spatial territory.” What, then, does this collectivity contain? In contemporary China, it should be understood as an assemblage of administrative, economic, cultural, and other forms of identification.

1.2.1 An Assemblage of Administrative Identification

Most Chinese urban communities today are administratively designated rather than spontaneously formed. Although such designations often build on historical foundations, those foundations are gradually dissolving. Self-built neighborhoods formed in earlier periods are disappearing through urban renewal, while many work-unit communities have experienced substantial residential turnover since the reform of the welfare-housing system. Administratively defined communities may also be adjusted in response to urban and regional socioeconomic development or to the needs of political organization and mobilization.

Overall, urban communities retain a strong administrative character, which itself constitutes a widely shared form of social identification. In recent years, grassroots Party organizations in some cities have used small community gardens as physical platforms to guide and mobilize resident volunteers, local work units, and enterprises in jointly addressing environmental and sanitation problems. These

initiatives have been welcomed by residents. They represent a form of Party-led community co-construction, co-governance, and sharing, and offer a possible pathway through which political and administrative identification can be transformed into a substantive element of community collectivity.

1.2.2 An Assemblage of Economic Identification

Since the commercialization of housing in the 1980s and the reform of welfare housing in the 1990s, the community has increasingly become an assemblage of households, institutions, and enterprises shaped by micro- and meso-scale location, property values, and hierarchically differentiated public facilities and services. Community economic identification is jointly formed by material-economic indicators - housing conditions, facility provision, and service supply - and socioeconomic indicators, such as the consumption capacity supporting local facilities and the status of community members or households. A central feature of this identification is the match between providers' capacity and consumers' capacity.

The frequently invoked category of the "old urban community" is both temporal and economic. It often carries an implicit identification with the working-class residents of systematic public housing built in a particular historical period. In communities dominated by high-end commodity housing, as in large subsidized-housing estates, residents tacitly construct internal identification around socioeconomic status. At the city scale, outsiders evaluate a community positively or negatively through its location and housing prices. This economic identification, grounded in property and the residential environment, may also develop over time into a fuller sense of community.

1.2.3 An Assemblage of Cultural Identification

Spontaneous or organized cultural activities among some residents - such as dance, painting, and reading - can promote social interaction and rebuild acquaintance networks through shared interests. Yet these activities are not equivalent to, and may have no direct relation to, the cultural identification of the community as a whole. Community cultural identity is formed more directly through commemorative collective activities, rituals, performances and their places, together with practices connected to kinship, ethnicity, religion, and other social factors. The celebration of festivals creates and sustains a distinctive community consciousness, group characteristics, and cultural symbols. Like vivid non-textual scripts, these practices shape an imagined community collectivity.

Cultural identification also involves the forms and methods of land use within the community, an aspect that has been seriously neglected. Two examples are charitable fields in traditional Chinese communities and the commons in communities abroad. Historically, charitable fields in rural China were established specifically to support clan members or impoverished people. They could derive from private donations - "a gentleman's private land made common to the clan"^① - or from government allocation. Before the founding of the People's Republic, the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region Government promoted charitable fields, calling for the encouragement of charitable-field and public-granary movements as a foundation for social relief^②.

The commons abroad were broadly similar. They first appeared as common land in rural communities or villages, as in the influential notion of the "tragedy of the commons." Urban communities also possess commons. At the absolute center of Boston, for example, a 48-acre (approximately 19.42 ha) area comprising a park, burial grounds, and the historic urban center has never been developed and has remained dedicated to non-economic use. In Walter Firey's study of Boston

land use [7], the park, cemetery, and common were assigned profound meanings of sentiment and symbolism and treated as ecological variables shaping urban spatial development.

Whether charitable fields serving economic relief or commons embodying ecological and emotional value, both have played important roles in community cultural identification. Through land as a distinctive material carrier, they condense and reinforce emotion, shared values, cultural symbols, and moral order, thereby contributing to a cooperative form of community collectivity.

1.2.4 The Multiplicity of Community Identification

The degree to which multiple forms of identification overlap and interweave determines how fully a community collectivity is formed. Ethnic, racial, migrant, and local identities may also be important. International communities often combine economic and cultural identification, while cosmopolitan groups tend to choose urban neighborhoods capable of satisfying both their cultural-psychological expectations and their material needs.

Multiplicity does not mean that every identity is equally important. “Identity is composed of traits at different levels, and individuals, as interpreters, judge their order of priority” [8]. Community identification fundamentally embeds individuals in a particular social time-space environment. It can anchor physical and mental security and provide a spiritual order, enabling community values to counteract uncertainty and instability beyond the community. This is one reason contemporary society has rediscovered the value of community.

Contemporary urban communities in China already possess an institutional basis for administrative identity and a material basis for economic identity. Their more important goal is to develop cultural identity over time; only then can they become communities in the fullest sense.

2 Methods of Community Analysis and the Social Dimension

Current community development, community action, and community planning pay considerable attention to the visible “standards” of physical space. This work is foundational, but research on the underlying social attributes remains inadequate. Community problems are therefore often treated in a fragmented manner - addressing symptoms separately - or in ways that alleviate symptoms without resolving root causes. An expanded social-pathology approach and a social time-space method can strengthen the available analytical toolkit.

2.1 Quantitative, Standards-Based Judgments of Community Problems

From an operational perspective, indicators and quantitative pass-or-fail standards make it easier to apply a uniform procedure at national or municipal scale. Yet such standards presuppose that local judgment is weak or absent. If local analytical capacity is not improved through other means, one-size-fits-all standards will still generate new problems when applied to complex social and community conditions.

In 2023, Shanghai began comprehensively preparing action blueprints for 15-minute community life circles. Administrative service facilities can be assigned relatively easily within life circles delineated by administrative boundaries. Non-administrative services are more complicated: such delineation may disrupt latent but real communities formed through economic and cultural identification. In evaluating the physical facilities associated with the five objectives of livability, employment, recreation, learning, and care, the chosen “circle” and boundary significantly affect whether facilities are judged to meet standards and, consequently, where supplementary facilities and places are proposed.

Under the unified evaluation standards, for example, the numbers of kindergartens, primary schools, and middle schools in the Changbai Xincun Subdistrict community of Yangpu District all appeared insufficient, although actual demand was fully met. The mismatch between the community's "assigned" indicator demand and its real service supply arose from the historical splitting and merging of administrative areas. Mechanical assessment and rigid benchmarking would therefore undermine accurate diagnosis and manufacture false demand. Without attention to the social dimension, the initial definition of circles and boundaries and the use of quantitative indicators may conflict with the continuity of social life in urban communities.

2.2 The Social-Pathology Approach

Many cities have recently undertaken forms of urban diagnosis, but these focus mainly on problems in physical systems. Nearly a century ago, urban sociology had already developed social pathology as a diagnostic method for everyday life, beginning from people's most immediate lived experience. Its most representative application was the Chicago social-survey movement of the 1920s, in which Robert Park and other members of the Chicago School treated the city as a social laboratory or clinical setting [9].

These empirical analyses generally began with community-based surveys and then extended their conclusions to urban social processes. Social problems that trouble individuals, together with structural social factors, are partly expressed as community "symptoms." A century later, some structural problems remain while new ones have emerged. Although the Chicago School's social-pathology approach was criticized for its negative orientation, today's period of rapid social transformation, global instability, and recurring conflict makes it worth revisiting and extending. Applied to communities, it can reveal the forms of everyday social life in the technological era, social conflict, and generational, gender, and status differences, thereby illuminating the historical trajectories of social pathologies and possible community futures.

2.3 The Social Time-Space Approach

Under conditions of highly advanced technology, social time and space have acquired new characteristics. The convergence of capital, power, and technology digitizes and mechanizes urban life, drains human energy and attention, and penetrates community life to varying degrees. A social time-space perspective can interpret complex social phenomena and operations and reveal new community conditions and problems. As an indispensable analytical tool, it provides a powerful explanation of social time-space behavior in urban communities.

The fit between urban social time and space is grounded in individual tolerance. Residents of megacities and very large cities display greater tolerance of temporal and spatial scales, including longer commute times, longer travel distances, and more crowded commuting environments. To balance the energy consumed in the daily time-space processes of large cities, individuals economize on social processes. This helps explain why social relations in large-city communities are comparatively weak: reducing unnecessary interaction becomes a form of energy conservation and self-preservation.

Yet as more older residents cease commuting and gain more "life time," "free time," and "personal time," their energy can and must be released within the community to maintain physical and psychological health. Emotional exchange and social connection thus become essential needs. Lewis Mumford's hope that "urban citizens might recover the ancient, free, and warm relations of neighborhood" [10] may therefore become possible in today's urban communities.

From this perspective, China's 15-minute community life circles and the 15-minute city models being actively implemented in Paris, Brussels, Melbourne, and elsewhere are not merely technical pathways toward low-carbon urbanism; they are also social choices for aging societies. Combining quantitative and qualitative social time-space analysis to understand and express the social-temporal-spatial dimensions of community as a whole can support deeper community research and more integrated community planning.

3 Community-Based Solutions to Social Problems

The distinctive relationship between society and community allows the analytical perspective to shift repeatedly between the two. Some social “ailments” can be treated through community action, and some social issues can be met with community responses: social problems can be addressed within and through communities. The social character of community is fundamentally determined by the people, groups, and population of a particular territory. Social sustainability is expressed through a balanced population structure, while sustainable community development depends on balancing people with resources and the environment.

3.1 Demographic Change and Potential Problems in Shrinking Communities

In recent years, China has moved from advocating age-friendly communities to child-friendly, youth-friendly, and all-age-friendly communities, thereby extending concern to virtually every population group [11]. Viewed from another angle, this concern responds to underlying anxieties about population. China is now undergoing processes previously experienced by Europe, North America, Japan, and other developed societies in the 1990s: declining birth rates, pronounced low fertility, and population shrinkage in cities and communities. These trends contain serious risks for social development.

At community level, disputes have already arisen in Beijing and Shanghai over homes left without heirs. Such cases may become more common in communities with high proportions of unmarried and very old residents. Under the Civil Code, ownerless property reverts to the state or the collective. How local courts and civil-affairs departments should manage such homes - whether communities should establish custodial or trust arrangements to expand public benefit - is an unprecedented question. Once this social issue materializes at community level, institutional, social, economic, and legal mechanisms must be coordinated to address it.

3.2 Family Policy and Potential Tensions in Diversified Housing Supply

In response to aging and low fertility, China has actively adjusted its family-planning policy. The Guiding Opinions on Further Improving and Implementing Supportive Measures for Childbearing (National Health Commission Population Document [2022] No. 26) encourages couples to have three children. Housing supply and community functions must respond accordingly.

Before the 1970s, China's multi-child policy corresponded to a welfare-housing system and generally low housing standards. At today's moderately prosperous stage, larger households - including additional caregivers - require more floor space and more varied large units, chiefly with three and sometimes four bedrooms. Existing community housing, however, reflects the household structure formed under the one-child policy and cannot fully accommodate the new family structure encouraged by pronatalist policy.

The “70/90” housing policy introduced in 2006 will therefore undergo major change. Shenzhen has recently abolished related requirements for the proportion of unit types, while Shanghai has relaxed the

required share of small and medium-sized units in land-transfer conditions. The dynamic balance among housing type, housing price, and family structure will become a central community issue.

3.3 End-of-Life Questions and Their Potential Relationship to Home

Over the past half-century, China has experienced profound social, economic, and cultural change, and population policy has shifted from restriction to encouragement. Yet recent pronatalist measures have not achieved the expected effect. This is partly due to lagging psychological adaptation, but also to the disappearance from urban communities of historically stable people-land relationships, attachments to home, and strong family consciousness. Mobility, transience, and uncertainty have become conditions of urban life and of the uprooted psychological state of urban populations. Even older city residents may be unable to age in place.

Compared with institutional eldercare, older people tend to prefer home-based and nearby community care; compared with suburban care institutions far from family, they and their relatives prefer facilities embedded within communities. A deeper historical issue is that community identity once encompassed the individual both “before and after life.” In rural China, public cemeteries still exist at township or village level, and farmland and burial land may sometimes overlap. In European and North American cities, communities retain various burial grounds in addition to large municipal cemeteries - beside churches, within park cemeteries, or near university campuses.

Viewed across the *longue durée*, community burial grounds established emotional attachments to family, locality, and place. They symbolized communal feeling and anchored the spiritual home of urban residents. By the end of 2023, China’s urbanization rate had reached 66.1 percent, nearly ten percentage points above the global average. Many cities will gradually enter a stable, mature stage. The period when most urban residents were only a few generations removed from farming is passing, and more urban families may live, reproduce, and sustain their social position around a particular community.

As total urban populations shrink and community densities decline, introducing burial-related land or memorial spaces into urban communities - spaces capable of condensing aesthetic, historical, and familial emotions - may become one pathway toward stronger community identity, a renewed sense of home, and social sustainability.

4 Potential Social Issues in Community Planning

Community-based solutions to social problems have at times brought community planning into contact with social planning. From the 1960s to the 1980s, social planning was briefly influential in the West. As industry, science, and urban society became increasingly complex, the United States and other societies sought rational and deliberate methods appropriate to the scientific age for addressing persistent social problems. Yet the concept of social planning relied excessively on loosely defined terms. Although it activated deep subjective beliefs and values, it was rarely understood comprehensively. Its tasks were complex, its scale broad, its indicators highly integrated, and its plans could be prepared by government. As social planning declined, community planning gained wider application because its spatial scope is more manageable, its object more clearly defined, and its implementation more feasible.

In urban and rural planning, the physical environment remains a basic concern of community planning. Yet embedding forward-looking social analysis and innovative exploration of social issues into the planning process can, in many cases, overcome technical difficulties that are actually generated by social problems.

4.1 The Scope of Community Collectivity and the Boundaries of Community Planning

As noted above, the formation and definition of community collectivity are closely related to territorial scope. Because urban social life is complex, temporally continuous, spatially integrated, and often organized through latent forms of community, the success of community planning likewise depends on how its boundaries are defined. Shanghai's 15-minute community life-circle action blueprint is one form of community planning and an action program for improving people's livelihoods.

As a concept, the life circle constructs a positive social-spatial image. In practice, however, planners must understand that "drawing circles" and "breaking circles" must proceed together; in many cases, it is necessary first to delineate a circle and then to transcend it. For historical reasons, residents' subjective satisfaction with services is shaped by multiple forms of community identification. Assessments of existing conditions and expectations of planning performance must therefore consider the different community scopes recognized by community administrators, facility operators and service providers, and residents.

When preparing life-circle action blueprints, planners must analyze the urban-social meaning of community life in depth, move from fragmented subdistrict thinking toward an integrated urban-area perspective, exploit the spillover effects of facilities and services, and improve overall service efficiency and social benefit. The "study area" should extend beyond the "planning area" or "action area" - often an administrative boundary - to include an influence zone of roughly one kilometer, representing the outward walking range of residents living near the boundary.

Community planning must also link immediate, short-term actions with long-term development objectives and coordinate them with goals at higher spatial levels. Communities should be examined dynamically within the larger context of district development [12], connecting individual communities to the history of urban society.

4.2 Incremental Improvement of Territorial Functions and Innovation in Land Arrangements

In response to changing community functions, community planning can anticipate future needs through functional land-use arrangements, gradually improve local services, and strengthen identity and collective consciousness. Communities in central Shanghai, for example, are establishing community horticultural centers as part of the objective of becoming suitable for care, while some communities containing municipal or district parks have already introduced dedicated areas and facilities for pets. Such additions address both residents' material needs and their everyday psychological and cultural life.

The level of facilities and services depends heavily on the relationship between people and land. Both basic guaranteed services and quality-enhancing services require adequate space, facilities, and places. The defining difference between an established community and a so-called "future community" - in practice, a newly built residential development - is that ownership patterns are historically inherited and fixed, while land-use functions are already determined or tightly controlled by higher-level plans such as unit plans and regulatory plans. The quantity of adjustable land is therefore extremely limited.

One example is the shortage of premises and land for eldercare. In the Jinyang Xincun Subdistrict community of Pudong New Area, one of the main contradictions is that existing eldercare facilities occupy less than one percent of total land despite acute local demand. At the same time, some Shanghai communities contain large amounts of industrial land awaiting transformation and operating at low efficiency or standing idle. With birth numbers visibly declining in certain cities and communities, kindergartens and primary schools may become partly redundant within the next one or two decades.

Community planning must therefore take a long-term view and propose ways to optimize unreasonable or inefficient land-use allocations through more intensive use, resource integration, spatial sharing, intelligent facilities, and health-oriented retrofitting. It should also feed actively into higher-level planning and promote adjustments to community land policy, thereby supporting functional improvement and providing a forward-looking basis for land transfer, reserve, and reuse. This is an important contemporary task.

4.3 Community Micropolitics and the Effectiveness of Community Planning

Community representation, control, organization, and capital - issues of micropolitics and microsociology tied to the social character of community - profoundly influence community governance, planning, and implementation.

4.3.1 Community Representation and the Balancing of Interests

Community planning is fundamentally a redistribution and reconfiguration of resources and interests, intended to promote fairness and balance. Existing power relations may nevertheless constrain that process. Representation reflects the composition and distribution of power. Subdistrict leaders exercise authority delegated through three levels of government, including both the execution of municipal and district directives and decision-making on local affairs. Residents' committee communities remain highly administrativized and mainly carry out tasks assigned by the subdistrict. Residents possess some voting rights but generally remain at a basic level of participation.

At the same time, the educational attainment and professional capacity of urban community workers have both risen^③. Integrated online-offline engagement, home visits, and digitally enabled public services are becoming common. Some communities have moved the "three meetings" - hearings, coordination meetings, and review meetings - to the cloud, forming an online-plus-offline model of democratic consultation. By overcoming temporal and spatial constraints, such arrangements enable young people and other groups, including local organizations and work units, to participate at any time and place. This broadens representation and helps community planning find a pragmatic balance among the social and spatial interests of different members.

4.3.2 Community-Wide Mobilization and Plan Implementation

Community planning is not yet statutory planning. Whether it is prepared and how effectively it is implemented depend heavily on the city and the particular community. Government support and public participation are both crucial. At community level, outcomes are often strongly influenced by the relevant subdistrict leaders. Bottom-up community actions are usually small-scale and localized; they rarely develop directly into subdistrict-wide action and cannot by themselves produce systematic community planning.

Advancing community planning requires social integration at community scale - in administrative language, vertical-horizontal coordination and the formation of joint force - and comprehensive mobilization across institutional and organizational boundaries. Top-down promotion may appear path-dependent, but it has strong organizational and institutional advantages.

Shanghai's community life-circle action blueprints are promoted from the top down. The municipal Party committee and government issued the Guiding Opinions on Comprehensively Advancing 15-Minute Community Life-Circle Actions during the 14th Five-Year Plan Period (Shanghai Party Office Document [2022] No. 29). District Party committees and governments coordinate and supervise;

subdistricts advance implementation; and relevant commissions and bureaus fulfill sectoral indicators, provide professional guidance, and deliver proactive services.

Some district governments have also incorporated implementation results into the annual performance evaluation of subdistrict leaders. This has substantially strengthened implementation and, at a minimum, increased leaders' subjective attention to community planning. Mobilization within institutions and organizations thus provides strong impetus. Yet community-wide mobilization must also include extensive participation by residents and all other community members.

4.3.3 Embedding Planning in Governance and the Participation of Community Planners

Community planning can be understood as a process embedded in community governance, providing technical evidence and support. The planning process unifies goals and visions and builds consensus. Planners inevitably establish different forms of contact with community leaders, workers, and residents and attempt to understand and integrate their needs. These relationships are themselves outcomes of the planning process and become drivers that shape it.

Many cities have introduced community-planner systems. Because community planners have diverse professional backgrounds and are not all trained in planning, they need not all be able to prepare a full community plan. In most cases, however, whether community members and planners listen to one another is a useful indicator of both plan quality and implementation. Numerous microsocial and political factors are involved: the planner's professional reputation and approachability; the stage of the principal community leader's political career; balances of power within the leadership; and even individual styles of thought and communication. All can subtly affect formulation and implementation.

Ideally, community planners and leaders should form a mutually reinforcing relationship: planners provide high-level professional guidance, while managers actively absorb and translate that guidance into practice. Both sides require theoretical literacy and practical experience.

Many grassroots governance problems are systemic - involving, for example, citywide or district transport organization or changes in land-use function - and cannot be resolved at the subdistrict or town level alone. Planners must therefore use organizational mechanisms and available forums to transmit grassroots needs and recommendations to higher-level planning authorities, while community planning should actively feed back into higher-level plans so that they become more precise and reasonable. Community planners should participate as fully and systematically as possible in deliberation on community planning, development, and governance.

5 Conclusion

Community planning should respond to complex social change by identifying both fundamental social problems and specific community issues, making them central objects of analysis, and developing targeted proposals with adaptive expectations for multiple scenarios. This can give community planning a genuinely forward-looking imagination, encompassing physical practice, cultural production, and the creation of meaning, and can help produce communities with distinctive identity and a shared sense of belonging. That is the goal of good community planning.

Communities are highly diverse. Serious attention to their social dimensions can greatly expand the imagination of community planning: from improving physical space, to creating valuable community capital and meaningful social networks, and to supporting rapid, socially responsive adjustment of land and spatial policies.

Notes

- ① [Qing dynasty] YUN Jing. "Record of the Hu Family's Educational Fields," 1802.
- ② LIN Boqu. Annual Work Summary of the Shaanxi-Gansu-Ningxia Border Region Government, 1944.
- ③ Taking Yangpu District, Shanghai, as an example: the district has 2,210 residential-community workers, with an average age of 44; 89 percent hold a junior-college degree or above, and 24 percent hold professional social-worker certificates. Source: "What Makes Those Selected from among 2,210 People Outstanding?" Xinmin Evening News, February 1, 2024, p. 8.

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