

Exploration and Practice of the Pre-Operational Urban Organic Renewal 3.0 Model: A Case Study of Baotou Hongjie Renewal and Renovation

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Abstract

China's urban development has entered a stage of stock renewal, transitioning from extensive outward expansion to intensive intrinsic development in line with the overarching goals of "high-quality development" and "new quality productivity." This paper uses the redevelopment of the historical and cultural district of Baotou Red Street as a case study.

From the perspective of pre-operational planning, it examines the current issues faced in China's urban organic renewal. The study explores market-oriented strategies and innovative practice models for urban organic renewal from various dimensions, including spatial characteristics, renewal ideas, business pattern creation, and operational strategies.

Keywords: Urban Organic Renewal; Pre-Operational Planning; New Quality

Productivity; High-Quality Development

1. INTRODUCTION

The implementation of urban renewal action is a systematic project aimed at promoting the transformation of urban development and construction through improved urban governance (Matthews & Gadaloff, 2022). It serves as an effective way to shift urban functions from rough extension to intensive and connotative development, and is a top priority for enhancing the human environment and urban quality (Pan & Du, 2021). In 2013, the "Opinions on Accelerating Shantytown Renovation" proposed, for the first time, to comprehensively promote the renovation of various types of shantytowns, accelerate the comprehensive renovation of old residential areas in cities and towns, strengthen the comprehensive renovation of the environment, and the maintenance and reconstruction of houses, thereby improving the use of functions and supporting facilities.

In 2020, the "Guiding Opinions on Comprehensively Promoting the Transformation of Old Urban Districts" set a goal that by the end of the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan period, regions should strive to basically complete the transformation of old urban districts built by the end of 2000 that need renovation. In the same year, the Ministry of Housing and Construction's official website published an article entitled "Implementing Urban Renewal Actions," which initiated the nationwide implementation of urban renewal actions (Dilmurodovich, 2023; Hong, Liu, & Song, 2022).

By 2021, the "Proposals of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on the Formulation of the Fourteenth Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Visionary Targets for the 2035 Long-Range Objectives" explicitly proposed the implementation of urban renewal actions. This included promoting the optimization of the spatial structure of cities and improving urban quality, thus elevating urban renewal to a national strategy. Operational capability has become a key factor in determining the feasibility of urban renewal projects. Through refined management and operation, and by leveraging spatial benefits, cities can achieve sustainable development and long-term returns (Shrestha, Small, & Kay, 2020; Zhou, Li, Ozturk, & Ullah, 2022).

2. CONCEPTS AND CURRENT DEVELOPMENT STATUS OF PRE-OPERATIONAL URBAN ORGANIC RENEWAL

2.1 Relevant Concepts

2.1.1 Urban Organic Renewal

Urban organic renewal is a comprehensive activity that respects the intrinsic urban fabric and involves the transformation, upgrading, and revitalization of existing buildings or spaces. This is achieved through various methods such as demolition and reconstruction, comprehensive renovation, functional changes, and historical preservation. The goal is to promote the renewal of the physical urban space, upgrade functional business patterns, optimize the living environment, and preserve historical context (Nair, Mondal, & Weichgrebe, 2020). Urban construction needs to follow the inherent logic and patterns of the city, align with its natural rhythms, and carefully balance the relationship between current and future needs by choosing an appropriate scale and reasonable scope based on the specific content and requirements of the transformation (Hu et al., 2022).

2.1.2 Urban Operation

According to the research report "Urbanization Development and Urban Operation" by the Central Party School, "Urban operation refers to the process by which governments and enterprises, fully recognizing urban resources, use policy, market, and legal means to integrate, optimize, and innovate urban resources to achieve resource appreciation and maximize urban development." In the context of new urbanization transitioning from "incremental development" to "stock renewal," urban operation has become a market-oriented comprehensive development and construction operation concept that combines urban economics, new public management theory, and urban competitiveness thinking (Ademi, Ackerman, Zomer, & Liew, 2021; Yan, Dong, Li, Amin, & Wu, 2021).

2.2 Current Status and Challenges of Urban Renewal Implementation

2.2.1 Domestic Development Status

Since the Chinese government proposed the "implementation of urban renewal actions" in 2021, various entities at all levels have been actively advancing these initiatives. Efforts have focused on areas such as investment and financing, industrial collaboration, and green financial assets. Urban organic renewal has become a crucial tool for high-quality urban construction and the development of new quality productivity (Hong et al., 2022).

From 2021 to 2023, approximately 154,000 urban renewal projects were implemented nationwide. This significant investment reflects the government's commitment to transforming

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urban areas and upgrading the existing infrastructure. The scale of these projects highlights the extensive efforts to modernize cities and improve living conditions for residents (Hu et al., 2022).

Governments and enterprises have been particularly active in promoting the transformation of urban villages in mega and super-large cities. The "Guiding Opinions on Actively and Steadily Promoting Urban Village Transformation in Mega and Super-large Cities," issued on July 21, 2023, underscores the importance of urban village transformation as a critical component of the next phase of urban renewal actions (J. Li, Sun, & Li, 2021). This initiative aims to address the challenges posed by urban villages, such as inadequate infrastructure and substandard living conditions, by integrating them into the broader urban fabric.

Urban renewal projects increasingly favor the "central-local cooperation" model. This approach involves strategic partnerships between central enterprises and local urban investment companies (Valamede & Akkari, 2020). On one hand, central enterprises bring substantial financial resources and expertise to the table. On the other hand, local municipal or district-level state-owned enterprises facilitate the implementation of these projects by leveraging their local knowledge and networks. This collaborative approach ensures that urban renewal projects are well-funded, expertly managed, and effectively executed.

Moreover, a comprehensive financial support system has been developed to facilitate urban renewal projects. Urban renewal funds have been established to provide essential capital during the initial stages of projects. These funds are crucial for kick-starting large-scale redevelopment efforts and ensuring that projects have the necessary financial backing from the outset. Various forms of credit support, including bank loans, trust loans, and policy financial loans, are available to sustain projects through the renewal phase. This support helps manage cash flow and ensures that projects can continue to progress without financial interruptions. Also, financial tools such as Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs), Commercial Mortgage-Backed Securities (CMBS), and Asset-Backed Securities (ABS) are employed to secure funding during the operational phase of urban renewal projects. These instruments provide a steady stream of income and enhance the financial viability of long-term urban redevelopment efforts (Parker & Khanyile, 2024; H. Wang & Li, 2021).

The concerted efforts to promote urban renewal in China have resulted in substantial progress and innovation in the field. The increased investment in urban renewal projects, active transformation of urban villages, strategic central-local cooperation, and enhanced financial support policies collectively contribute to the sustainable development of urban areas. These initiatives not only improve the physical infrastructure and living conditions within cities but also foster economic growth and social well-being (Shrestha et al., 2020; Xu, Tong, Chen,

Rollo, & Zhang, 2023). As China continues to advance its urban renewal agenda, these strategies will play a pivotal role in shaping the future of urban development and ensuring the long-term sustainability of its cities.

2.2.2 Main Existing Problems

China's urban renewal initiatives face several significant challenges:

Firstly, urban renewal projects require the involvement of multiple departments, including land management, urban planning, housing construction, and development and reform. However, there is a lack of efficient cross-departmental coordination mechanisms. This misalignment makes it challenging for cities to integrate urban renewal efforts with existing land and space planning systems and adopt diverse spatial governance models, severely impeding the implementation process.

Secondly, urban renewal projects involve prolonged negotiations among governments, enterprises, and residents. Harmonizing the diverse interests of these stakeholders is often difficult, leading to delays and complications in the orderly progress of urban renewal initiatives.

Thirdly, striking a balance between retaining and demolishing buildings presents a significant challenge. Effective urban renewal governance requires preserving historical buildings while simultaneously promoting modernization. This delicate balance is difficult to achieve, often resulting in the loss of valuable urban cultural heritage.

Fourthly, ensuring a balance between project returns and financing is a major challenge in urban renewal projects. The financial complexities make it difficult to secure and manage the necessary funding, thereby hindering the effective advancement of these projects.

Lastly, at the national level, there is a lack of top-level legislative guarantees and comprehensive guidelines to support urban renewal. At the local level, the absence of well-defined urban renewal planning systems and mechanisms further complicates the process. This lack of a systematic governance framework undermines the consistency and effectiveness of urban renewal efforts.

Urban construction should follow the intrinsic logic and natural flow of the city. It is essential to consider the specific content and needs of each transformation, carefully balancing present requirements with future prospects, and choosing a moderate and reasonable scale for development. This approach ensures that urban renewal activities are sustainable, culturally sensitive, and aligned with the long-term vision for the city's growth and development (Bolzonella et al., 2020; Valamede & Akkari, 2020; H. Wang & Li, 2021).

3. MARKET-ORIENTED STRATEGIES FOR PRE-OPERATION URBAN ORGANIC RENEWAL

Pre-operation refers to the integration of refined operational management into the urban renewal process from the planning, investment, financing, planning, and design stages, ensuring that every aspect of urban renewal is closely linked to operations (Hong et al., 2022). This approach enhances the sustainability of each stage of urban renewal, effectively promoting high-quality and healthy urban development.

3.1 Activating Idle Assets in Pre-Operation Urban Organic Renewal

Activating idle assets in pre-operation focuses on key areas, regions, and enterprises, utilizing various methods to effectively revitalize existing assets. As China transitions to a stage of high-quality development, there's a shift from extensive development emphasizing scale expansion to intensive development emphasizing refinement (Hu et al., 2022). This involves balancing existing and new assets to create a virtuous cycle of asset utilization. With China's infrastructure assets exceeding 100 trillion yuan, activating existing assets can mitigate stock pressures, expand social investment channels, reduce government debt risks, and lower corporate debt levels.

3.1.1 Directions for Activating Idle Assets in Pre-Operation

Under the pre-operation strategy, activating idle assets becomes crucial for improving the efficiency and quality of urban renewal. It's essential to prioritize large-scale idle assets, as their effective activation can significantly enhance benefits. Additionally, assets with good returns should not be overlooked, as even small-scale assets with high profitability can contribute substantially (Nair et al., 2020). Furthermore, assets with growth potential should be explored to lay a solid foundation for future development. Besides, integrating idle assets with renovation and expansion projects should be emphasized, optimizing asset allocation and utilization. Lastly, long-term idle projects with significant development potential should be given attention, as their transformation can stimulate new economic growth points.

3.1.2 Innovative Paths for Activating Idle Assets in Pre-Operation

Shifting from traditional incremental thinking, innovative strategies are needed to activate idle assets in urban renewal. Efforts should focus on areas with heavy tasks, strong investment

demands, large existing scales, and good asset quality, as well as regions with high government debt and fiscal pressure, aligning with national regional strategies (Pan & Du, 2021). Given the current economic situation, activating idle assets in pre-operation is vital for driving urban renewal and sustainable development. This requires breaking from conventional thinking and exploring more efficient and innovative paths for urban renewal.

3.2 Coordinated Value-Added Services for Urban Large Properties

Urban large properties integrate community services into the urban governance system, focusing on neighborhoods and streets as basic units. By forming a concept of large communities through integrating adjacent neighborhoods, the resources of large properties are shared (B. Li, Wang, Wang, Zhang, & Zhang, 2021). This model not only covers infrastructure and facilities maintenance but also breaks traditional neighborhood boundaries, incorporating urban public spaces into property management, fostering a borderless property management scenario.

3.2.1 Market Financing Advantages of Urban Large Properties

In the field of urban renewal, the scale of services and the completeness of value-added service systems are directly related. Combining services with practical market services, a complete ecosystem of "service + customers" and "service + assets" is constructed (Matthews & Gadaloff, 2022; Nair et al., 2020). This system aims to provide full-lifecycle services, meet individualized customer needs, especially through value-added services of urban large properties, creating "N+" community scene life services, covering areas such as value-added innovation, home services, community media, asset services, car services, and home decoration services, among others.

3.2.2 The Implementation Path of Urban Large Property Value-Added Benefits

For a long time, urban governance in China has been government-led, resulting in issues like extensive management and high costs due to a lack of market mechanisms and professional talents. With rapid urbanization, traditional public service models face challenges, providing opportunities for property service companies to participate in urban governance (Parker & Khanyile, 2024; Shrestha et al., 2020). The introduction of property service companies can improve urban management efficiency, optimize resource allocation, and reduce management costs. Under the participation of property service companies, urban management's economic benefits can be improved, maximizing the value conversion rate and enhancing citizens'

satisfaction and happiness.

4. REDESIGNING STRATEGY FOR ORGANIC RENEWAL OF BAOTOU HONG STREET

4.1 Spatial Characteristics Before the Transformation of Baotou Hong Street

Baotou Hong Street, situated in the eastern sector of Baotou City within the Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, stands as a testament to historical and cultural significance, stemming from the establishment of the Wang Ruofei Memorial Hall. However, before its transformation, the district exhibited several notable characteristics: Firstly, there was a conspicuous lack of architectural distinctiveness, primarily featuring modern styles that failed to harmonize with the Beiyang architectural legacy from the Republican era associated with Wang Ruofei, thus failing to captivate the interest of visitors. Secondly, the area suffered from disorganized traffic flow, exacerbated by inadequate planning and management, resulting in parking chaos along the streets, disrupting traffic and detracting from the area's aesthetic appeal while inconveniencing pedestrians (Valamede & Akkari, 2020).

Moreover, the existing formats within the district were primarily low-grade, with Tongshun Commercial City in particular predominantly comprising small commodity markets lacking in cohesive planning and development, thereby impacting the area's vibrancy. Furthermore, the district's construction lacked cohesive cultural integration, failing to reflect the rich cultural heritage of Baotou, Donghe, or the iconic "Wang Ruofei" culture in various elements such as signage, seating arrangements, and open space landscapes (H. Wang & Li, 2021). This deficiency hindered the creation of a compelling ambiance befitting a historical and cultural district, thereby limiting its allure to tourists and locals alike.

4.2 Operation-Oriented Renewal Approach

The operation approach should adhere to demand-driven principles, supplemented by the upgrading and supplementation of localized formats, especially highlighting the crucial role of core leading formats. Specifically, implementing this approach involves three steps:

1. Clarify the operational entities: The government should take the lead, extensively involving investors in area operations. Ensuring continuous investment in infrastructure construction through effective returns, promoting a virtuous cycle of regional development, and ultimately achieving the established goals of area operation.

2. Emphasize attracting enterprises with investment and operational capabilities. By

constructing a reasonable social operational mechanism, not only can market participation and operational efficiency be enhanced, but the "power of capital" can also be obtained through operations, providing stable financial support for area operation. This will help move away from traditional unstable, high-cost funding acquisition models, providing strong financial support for area operation.

3. Enhance interaction and cooperation among participants. Building on the broad participation of investors and financial institutions, the government should further strengthen cooperation and communication with other participants, promoting deeper involvement in area operations. This will not only improve the overall efficiency of operations but also ensure the smooth implementation of operational strategies, facilitating the smooth progress of urban renewal processes.

Operational management in urban renewal is crucial for deepening cultural experiences, increasing internet celebrity participation, and activating fashion dynamics (Xu et al., 2023). Here are the three main steps to achieve this goal:

1. Explore urban themes and deepen cultural experiences. By delving into the city's characteristic elements, the overall value of the district can be effectively enhanced. Utilizing the city's red resources and historical cultural resources not only preserves the city's cultural heritage but also promotes its connotative and high-quality development. Such strategies help create districts with unique cultural charm, attracting more tourists and residents.

2. Implement operational-oriented district construction strategies. By guiding industry content planning and district construction work with operations in mind, unnecessary duplicate construction can be avoided. Creating people-friendly municipal facilities and cultural leisure spaces, transforming the streetscape and architectural form of core areas to create a commercial cultural experience space with a Republican-era style. These measures help form a commercial model of a historical and cultural district with an old city's new look, further enhancing the district's attractiveness and competitiveness.

3. Focus on industrial cultivation and development. Industrial cultivation is the core driving force behind district operation and development. During district operation, emphasis should be placed on industrial cultivation and the construction of an industrial reservoir, timely clearing out industries and formats that do not meet district operation requirements, and supplementing emerging industries with development potential. Through such a survival of the fittest mechanism, the district's industrial structure can be continuously optimized, promoting its sustainable development.

5. SPECIFIC STRATEGIES FOR ORGANIC RENEWAL OF BAOTOU HONG STREET

Baotou Hong Street's core area, spanning from Tongshun Commercial City in the east to Donghe Quanye City in the west and from Tongshun West Street in the north to Huan Cheng Road in the south, covers a total area of approximately 39.28 acres. The renewal of the core area of Baotou Hong Street is based on the theme of "Republic of China style", adhering to the philosophy of "cultural heritage preservation is the core, environmental improvement is the prerequisite, organic renewal is the compliance, improvement of people's livelihood is the focus, and ecological enhancement is the key" (Hong et al., 2022; Liu, Ding, & Wang, 2022; Pan & Du, 2021). Following the approach of "micro-transformation, creating boutique", the overall transformation of the surrounding environment is emphasized to highlight the "one vertical and two horizontal" street layout, integrating and reflecting historical memories, revolutionary sites, and social functions.

5.1 Business Format Development Strategy for Baotou Hong Street

The development of business formats on Baotou Hong Street is a process that requires continuous dynamic adjustments and optimizations. Given the rapid changes in the consumption market and the matching degree of supply and demand, tourist leisure districts must promptly respond and adapt to consumer diversification [10,11]. Baotou Hong Street should comprehensively and systematically consider and accommodate diverse demands such as "culture, consumption, and redness" to achieve comprehensive development integrating tourism, leisure, cultural experiences, and public services (Hu et al., 2022). Additionally, deep integration of core formats like sightseeing, dining, entertainment, and leisure should be undertaken, with active exploration into expanding formats like shopping and accommodation to enrich the district's layout and meet diverse consumer needs. As a deeply integrated hub of culture, tourism, and commerce, Baotou Hong Street not only bears the important mission of inheriting historical culture but also serves as a vital force driving the future development of the city (J. Li et al., 2021).

In terms of format planning, it is essential to ensure that returns cover the government's construction costs to achieve the coordinated development of economic and social benefits. Simultaneously, diverse needs of local residents and out-of-town visitors should be fully considered and met by providing age-appropriate, round-the-clock, and specialized formats and products throughout the year to create a historically charming and attractive cultural district (Matthews & Gadaloff, 2022).

Firstly, Baotou Hong Street, as a district gathering high-quality and high research-value cultural heritage resources, with its unique architectural heritage, historical spatial layout, and rich historical and cultural atmosphere, is an essential element not to be overlooked in urban renewal. In driving the sustainable development of Baotou Hong Street tourism, it is imperative to adhere to the core of cultural heritage protection and achieve an organic combination of protection and benign development. Low-level development patterns should be strictly avoided for the cultural value of Baotou Hong Street, focusing instead on branding and upscale development to fully demonstrate its profound cultural connotations and unique historical charm (Nair et al., 2020).

Secondly, while Wang Ruofei's red district boasts a long history and strong traditional atmosphere, its cultural characteristics currently lack specific material carriers, resulting in low-grade tourism resources in reality. Therefore, in the tourism development model, emphasis should be placed on the restoration and reconstruction of historical culture. This includes restoring the most representative cultural elements of the district, the most valuable historical periods for restoration, and reconstructing historical buildings, landscapes, folk culture, and festivals. By finding material carriers for historical culture, the core attractiveness of the district can be effectively constructed, enhancing the quality and value of tourism resources (Parker & Khanyile, 2024).

Thirdly, in the process of urban renewal, it is necessary to delve into the red-themed culture of Wang Ruofei's red district, leveraging its unique temporal appeal to create a new highlight on Baotou's red map (Bai et al., 2020). By centering around this influential red culture theme, a new tourism craze can be led, attracting more tourists to experience, perceive, and inherit the unique charm of the red district.

5.2 Operation Strategy for Baotou Hong Street

The organic renewal of Baotou Hong Street has been systematically carried out under the strategic guidance of the Donghe District Government of Baotou City. In this process, the district-owned state-owned urban renewal platform company has played a core role in implementing various renewal activities comprehensively, ensuring the government's leading position in urban renewal, and effectively promoting the organic renewal process of Baotou Hong Street (Nair et al., 2020; S. Wang, Lu, & Yin, 2021).

Additionally, at various critical stages of district renewal and transformation, enterprises with investment and operational capabilities have been invited and absorbed. These enterprises cover various fields such as culture, tourism, catering, and entertainment. Their participation not only brings a rich mix of business formats and vibrant development vitality to the district

but also injects new impetus for the sustainable development of the district, greatly enhancing its comprehensive competitiveness (Matthews & Gadaloff, 2022). Moreover, to further improve the operational management level of the district, a professional company with strong operational capabilities has been introduced. This company is responsible for a series of important tasks such as property management, format planning, shop leasing, and promotional operations, playing a crucial role in enhancing the overall image of the district, optimizing the business environment, and enhancing the attractiveness of the district.

5.2.1 Building an Integrated District Operation Platform

The construction of an integrated district operation platform for Baotou Hong Street is crucial for coordinating key links such as property management, format planning, shop leasing, and promotional operations. Firstly, establishing a dynamic merchant database is the foundation of building an integrated operation platform. This database should comprehensively integrate high-quality merchant resources and centralize the management of merchant information (Dilmurodovich, 2023; Hong et al., 2022). By real-time monitoring the needs of the district's formats, the merchant content can be dynamically adjusted to ensure that the district's format layout remains highly compatible with market demand.

Secondly, implementing a merchant assessment mechanism is key to ensuring the quality of district operations. Different types of merchants should have personalized assessment criteria to objectively evaluate their business quality and performance (Dilmurodovich, 2023; Hu et al., 2022). Through a mechanism of survival of the fittest, merchants whose profits do not meet expectations should be promptly eliminated to inject new vitality into the district's continued development. At the same time, this can stimulate merchants' innovation and competition awareness, enhancing the overall service level of the district.

Finally, creating an aggregated payment system is an important means to achieve efficient fund management in the district. Through this system, unified management and monitoring of the district's operating funds can be achieved to ensure the security and liquidity of funds (Parker & Khanyile, 2024; Valamede & Akkari, 2020). Aggregated charging not only helps the district obtain more stable cash flow to provide financial support for its daily operations and future development but also helps improve the district's credit rating and financing capabilities, attracting more attention and support from financial institutions.

5.2.2 Building Baotou Hong Street IP

Baotou Hong Street effectively showcases brand differentiation characteristics through

meticulous planning and shaping of its IP image, accurately conveying the brand's unique connotations and values to the audience, and deepening the audience's perception of the brand's charm.

Baotou Hong Street fully utilizes the affinity of its IP image to strengthen emotional connections between the brand and the audience. By creating beloved IP images, it attracts audience attention and love, enhancing brand awareness and reputation. This strategy helps the brand stand out in competition, achieving long-term commercial benefits. Additionally, the application of IP images enhances audience trust in the brand.

6. CONCLUSION

Operation-oriented organic urban renewal is a comprehensive and long-term process aimed at meeting people's needs and achieving sustainable development. This approach prioritizes the involvement of various stakeholders and emphasizes the market's central role in resource allocation (Hong et al., 2022; J. Li et al., 2021). It aims to establish an operational ecosystem that spans the entire life cycle of urban renewal, from investment and financing to construction, management, and retirement, with the goal of optimizing resource allocation and maximizing benefits.

The scope of operation in urban renewal encompasses property management, commercial management, public welfare services, and community-centered social and cultural activities, among other diversified life scenes. To this end, this paper proposes market-oriented strategies for urban organic renewal. These strategies focus on activating idle assets, coordinating large urban properties, and adopting an approach to urban organic regeneration that prioritizes front-end operations (Liu et al., 2022; H. Wang & Li, 2021).

Specific strategies for urban organic renewal include creating diverse business formats, developing unique urban intellectual properties (IPs), and enhancing content operation. By implementing these strategies, the paper aims to further advance the in-depth development of urban organic renewal. Additionally, it seeks to better integrate urban renewal projects with industrial transformation, consumption upgrades, cultural heritage preservation, financial innovation, and community governance, thereby paving the way for a high-quality and sustainable urban renewal path.

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