

# Exploring Residents' Attitudes Towards Participation in Urban Renewal: A Case Study in the Xiaopenghu Area in Chiayi, Taiwan

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## 1 ABSTRACT

Urban renewal not only transforms the spatial structure of a city but also impacts its social, cultural, and economic structures. Many factors shape residents' attitudes toward urban renewal, influencing their acceptance and willingness to participate throughout the long process. This paper aims to investigate the followings: 1) whether and how residents' attitudes toward urban renewal change over time, 2) the differences in residents' awareness of urban renewal, and 3) the key factor that influences residents' attitude toward urban renewal. This examination is based on interview data regarding residents' reactions to urban renewal in the Xiaopenghu Area in Chiayi, Taiwan, where renewal has been under discussion for a long time. Several things are concluded below. First, residents' attitudes evolve over time, at first, they may support urban renewal, but as they gain more information, they often become more doubtful, further influencing their willingness to participate in the urban renewal. Second, residents' awareness of urban renewal varies depending on property ownership. Landowners knew more details about two plans, while non-landowners often only have limited knowledge, mainly about resettlement measures in the second plan. Third, attitudes toward urban renewal are primarily influenced by resettlement measures. Fourth, expressed support in surveys does not always reflect residents' true attitudes. This paper highlights the need for planners to focus more on residents' actual needs, particularly securing adequate housing. It is also crucial to ensure transparency of urban renewal information, allowing all residents to access information equally and participate in the decision making process. Furthermore, more comprehensive methods should be adopted to better capture the complexity of residents' attitudes and improve policy effectiveness.

Keywords: urban renewal, residents' attitudes, public participation, Xiaopenghu Area, Taiwan

## 2 INTRODUCTION

Urban renewal in Taiwan aims to redevelop urban land, revitalize urban functions, and improve living environments and landscapes for the public interests. The implementation of urban renewal in Taiwan, however, often focuses more on real estate interests rather than the diverse and heterogeneous voices of residents. It tends to simplify the complex socio-cultural and residents' rights into a singular narrative dominated by property owners or implementers (Wang, C. H., 2012). Urban renewal brings significant transformations to an area. McKercher et al. (2015) argue that when the spatial environment changes, residents' attitudes toward these changes evolve over time based on their perceptions of impact, satisfaction, expectations, and place attachment (Bonaiuto et al., 2002; Younis et al., 2018). Frequent policy changes further shape residents' attitudes, influencing their willingness to participate. Moreover, residents' attitudes differ from person to person, which may lead to conflicts and contradictions, or foster communication and discussion. This situation ultimately affects the outcome of urban renewal.

This study focuses on the Xiaopenghu Area in the West District of Chiayi, Taiwan, where urban renewal has been under discussion for years. We aim to explore whether and how their attitudes change over time, examine the differences in residents' awareness of urban renewal, and identify the key factor that influences their attitude toward urban renewal. By understanding these changes, we can help planners integrate diverse perspectives, improve communication, and adjust plans to promote more inclusive and sustainable urban development.

## 3 LITERATURE REVIEW

### 3.1 Urban renewal

Urban renewal policies have evolved around the world, especially in the U.S. and the U.K. In the U.S., urban reconstruction began in the 1930s to improve living conditions and eliminate slums. The concept of "urban renewal" was officially introduced in the 1950s, which included redevelopment, rehabilitation and

conservation (Wedge, 1958). However, because it focused too much on demolition and rebuilding while neglecting social issues, it led to problems such as class segregation and racial discrimination. By the 1960s, policies shifted toward community development, historic preservation, and the creation of more human centered environments. By the 1980s, sustainability became a key focus (Wang, C. K., 2021). In the U.K., large scale slum clearance began in the 1930s, and by the 1960s, attention turned to addressing social issues. In the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher's government promoted market-driven urban regeneration (Furbey, 1999), but by the late 1990s, the focus shifted to "urban renaissance," which prioritized planning and sustainability (Lees, 2003).

Taiwan's urban renewal policies emerged in the 1990s, with the "Urban Renewal Act" enacted in 1998. However, Taiwan adopted an approach similar to the U.S. model from the 1940s to 1960s, which focused mainly on demolition and rebuilding rather than community development and sustainability (Wang, C. K., 2021). As a result, early urban renewal in Taiwan primarily focused on land and building redevelopment while overlooking environmental, social, and economic benefits, which led to many controversies in the urban renewal process. Although Taiwan has gradually adjusted its urban renewal policies in recent years, emphasizing government leadership, social equity, and community participation (Wang, C. K., 2021). Nevertheless, several challenges remain, including information asymmetry among stakeholders, difficulties in property integration, and conflicts of interest. Additionally, urban renewal is often viewed as a real estate investment tool by implementer, neglecting public interests and making social inequality worse. Consequently, residents remain skeptical about the effectiveness of urban renewal, which affects their willingness to participate. These challenges end up complicating the renewal process and causing delays.

### 3.2 The theory of attitude

Attitude is a response to external stimuli and a key determinant of behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). It comprises three components: cognition, affect, and conation, which interact to shape individual reactions (Kwon & Vogt, 2010). Cognition refers to what a person knows or thinks about something, based on their experiences or external information. Affect involves emotional responses toward an object, such as joy, satisfaction, fear, or unease. Conation refers to the behavioral intentions rather than actual behavior, which shows the direction and likelihood of future behavior (Trafimow, 2004). Since attitude is a crucial factor influencing behavior, understanding people's attitudes can help us predict their actions (Trafimow, 2004).

Spatial settings themselves may serve as attitude objects (Jorgensen & Stedman, 2001). During periods of spatial change, such as urban renewal, residents' attitudes evolve over time, continuously shaped by their perceptions of these changes (McKercher et al., 2015). Various factors influence residents' attitudes toward environmental changes, including community satisfaction, expectations for the future environment, the extent of their involvement in the change process (Younis et al., 2018), perceptions and evaluations of the impacts of change, attachment to place (Bonaiuto et al., 2002), and socio-economic characteristics (Bonaiuto et al., 2002; Lewis & Albrecht, 1977; Younis et al., 2018). These factors not only show how residents directly react to changes but also reveal the deeper psychological reasons behind their reactions. Since residents' attitudes toward changes are not fixed and influenced by multiple interacting factors, fully understanding them requires considering these multiple factors. This approach helps us grasp residents' responses to urban renewal and develop more effective planning strategies.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

### 4.1 Case study area

The Xiaopenghu Area is located near Chiayi Railway Station. Chiayi City is a regional urban area located in the south of Taiwan, and the Xiaopenghu Area is relatively more crowded with a higher population density. It is also one of the city's early developed zones and is now primarily a residential area. However, the district faces several challenges, including a lack of proper planning, a large number of unsafe and aging buildings, insufficient public facilities, and narrow alleys. These issues have negatively impacted living conditions and urban development, causing problems such as public safety, limited emergency access, and transportation challenges. To address these problems and revitalize the area around the station, the city government has designated the Xiaopenghu Area as a priority for urban renewal.

	Area (ha)	Population (people)	Population density (people per hectare)
Chiayi City	6,002.56	262,153	43.67
The Xiaopenghu Area	0.9452	410	92.78

Table 1: Area and population statistics table for Chiayi City and the Xiaopenghu Area

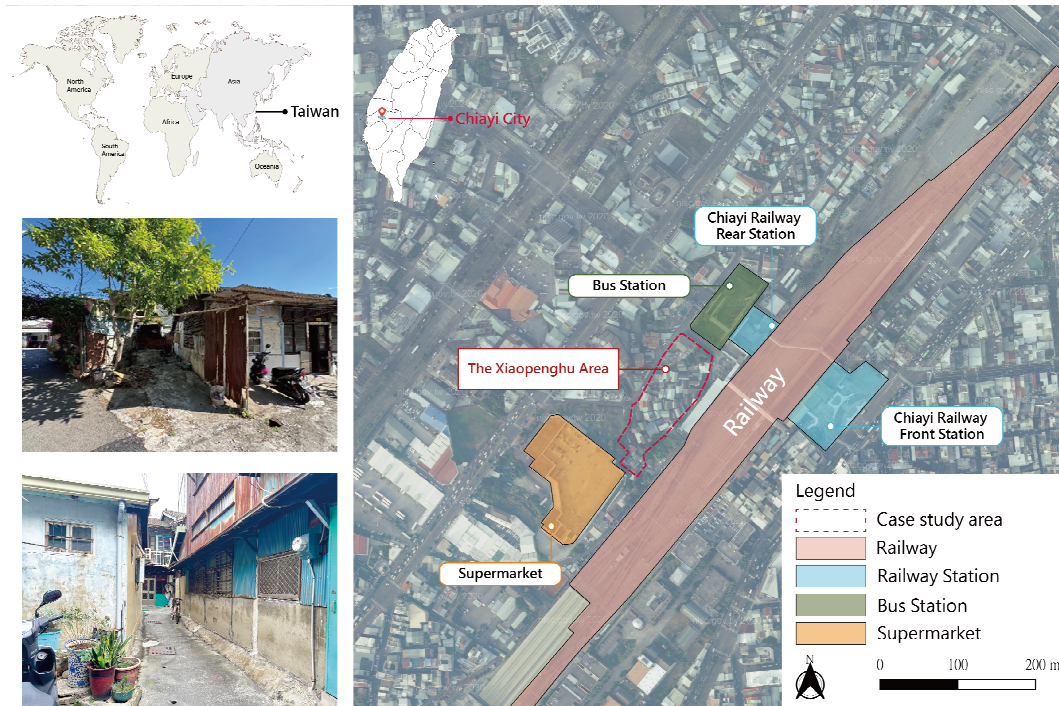


Fig. 1: Map of the location and current condition photos of the study area

## 4.2 Materials and methods

This study adopts a conceptual model based on three components of attitude – cognition, affect, and conation – to analyze how residents' attitudes form in response to triggering events during the urban renewal process. It employs two primary methods for data collection: textual analysis and in-depth interviews.

(1) Textual Analysis: This study reviews materials related to urban renewal in the Xiaopenghu Area, including policy documents and planning reports, and use textual analysis to outline the development context and dynamics of urban renewal in the area. The analysis highlights how urban renewal initially caught residents' attention and raised their awareness.

(2) In-depth interviews: Since the first urban renewal plan was proposed in 2009, 15 years have passed. Therefore, residents who have lived in the Xiaopenghu Area for at least 15 years and are aged 35 or older were selected as interviewees. The interviews focus on residents' perceptions and attitudes toward urban renewal at different stages of the process, as well as the underlying factors that influenced changes in their attitudes over time.

## 4.3 Interviewees

A total of seven residents participated in this study. Among them, four are both land and building owners, one is solely a landowner, one is solely a building owner, and one is a tenant.

Serial number	Sex	Period of residence (years)	Property ownership
01	Female	22	Landowners/Buildingowners
02	Female	40	Landowners/Buildingowners
03	Female	52	Tenant
04	Female	63	Landowners/Buildingowners
05	Male	73	Landowners
06	Male	50	Landowners/Buildingowners
07	Male	77	Building owner

Table 2: Interviewee information summary table

## 5 RESULTS

### 5.1 The development of urban renewal plan in the Xiaopenghu Area

The first urban renewal plan was proposed in 2009 to address living environment issues such as a large number of aging buildings, insufficient public facilities, and public safety concerns. However, it was put on hold due to the elevated railway project. The government considered that urban renewal in this area should be discussed alongside the railway elevation, therefore, the urban renewal plan was terminated in 2014. After the elevated railway project was approved, the government introduced the second urban renewal plan in 2023 to promote the redevelopment of land around the station and improve the urban landscape. To understand residents' willingness to participate and discuss future planning with them, the government held three information sessions between 2023 and 2024 and conducted interviews with residents in February 2024.

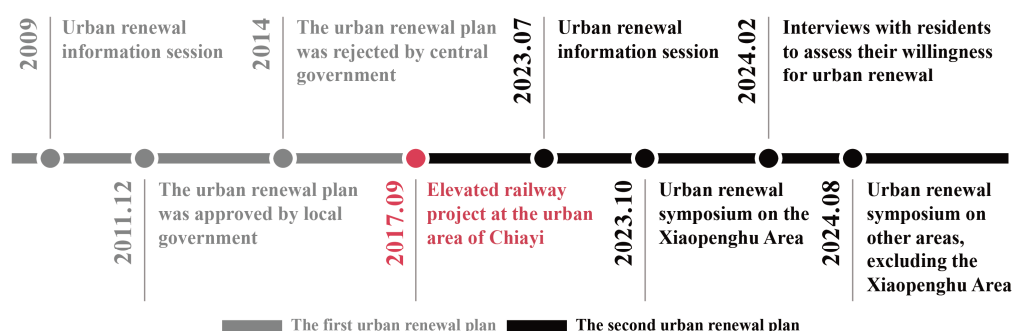


Fig. 2: Timing of objective triggering events in the two urban renewal plans

### 5.2 Residents' attitudes toward urban renewal

First, we explore when residents became aware of triggering events for urban renewal. Next, we examine residents' attitudes toward the first and second urban renewal plans separately. This includes their understanding of the plan's content, their assessment of their impact, and their emotional and behavioral responses based on different perceptions.

#### 5.2.1 The urban renewal triggering events perceived by residents

All interviewees were aware of the urban renewal plan in the Xiaopenghu Area, but they learned about it at different times. Some residents knew about it when the government first proposed the plan in 2009, while all were aware of the second plan. During the first urban renewal plan, a resident who is a tenant said he/she had never received any relevant notifications about the plan and felt he/she had no right to participate, so he/she didn't pay much attention until the government conducted household interviews in February 2024. One resident, who only owns the building realized the urban renewal later than other residents. He/She mentioned that about 10 years ago, a landowner attempted to reclaim land to rebuild houses. Additionally, a resident recalled that discussions about urban renewal could be traced back more than 20 years, when landowners launched a petition to collaborate with a construction company on redeveloping the community.

*"(Q: Did you attend any information sessions?) No. (Q: Why not?) Because this house doesn't belong to us, it wouldn't matter if I went to the session. (Q: Weren't you curious?) I wasn't curious. But after the session, two people came to ask me. I'm not sure if they were from the local government. (Q: Did they come for a household interview?) Yes, they asked if the house we live in gets demolished, how many rooms we would need for a new house?..... Like, if we were to rent, how many rooms would we need to live comfortably?" (Interviewee's serial number: 03)*

*"(Q: You said you didn't attend any information sessions. Did you receive any notification about it, like a letter?) No! They only came to the temple.....to say the house would be demolished. I didn't go" (Interviewee's serial number: 03)*

*"About twenty years ago, someone launched a petition to invite residents to participate in urban renewal and tried to invite a construction company to reconstruct the area. Then, about ten years ago, another resident got a few others involved. They also discussed urban renewal and tried to invite a construction company to reconstruct the area, but in the end, the plan went nowhere." (Interviewee's serial number: 04)*



*“It was probably more than ten years ago. A landowner came back then, but it wasn’t about urban renewal. The landowner wanted to reclaim the land and even brought a construction company along to rebuild houses.” (Interviewee’s serial number: 07)*

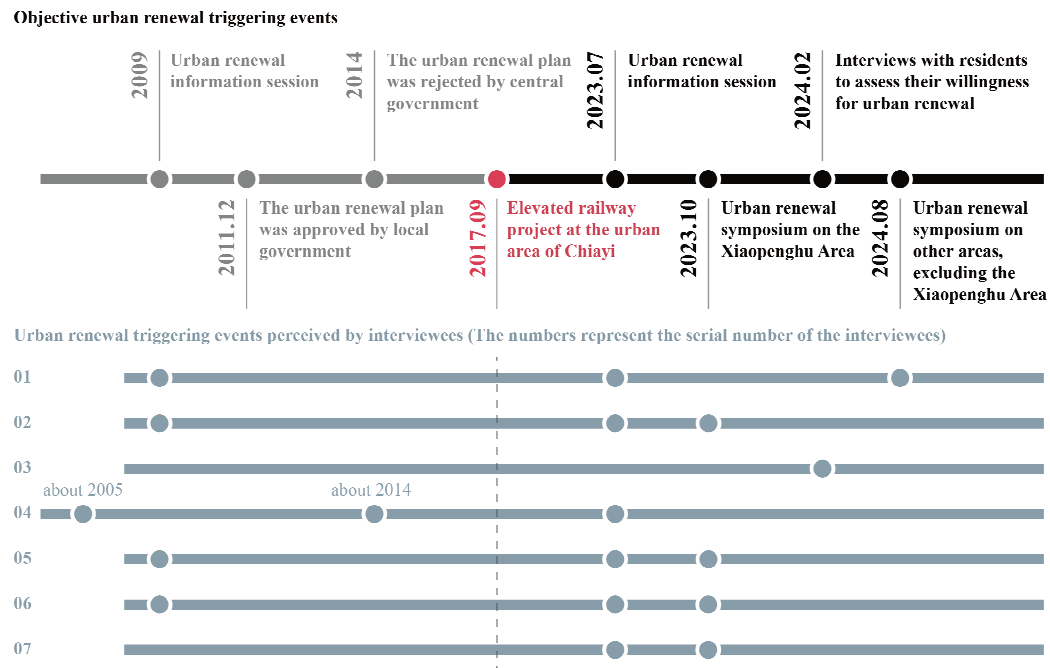


Fig. 3: The time each resident became aware of urban renewal

The timing of when residents became aware of urban renewal reveals a clear inequality in access to information. During the first urban renewal plan, only those who own both land and building knew about it, while tenants and residents who only own building were mostly left uninformed. It wasn’t until the second urban renewal plan that they became aware of the triggering events. This shows that, in Taiwan’s urban renewal system, landowners are often given priority, while tenants and residents who don’t own land are less valued. This results in an information gap and unequal participation.

### 5.2.2 Residents’ attitude toward the first urban renewal plan

In terms of conation, among the five residents who were aware of the first plan, most thought the plan was only about demolishing and rebuilding houses, and didn’t know the details of the plan. Only one resident mentioned that the plan also included building new roads. One resident thought that urban renewal might make them homeless and force them to move away from their neighbors, while others felt it was just a political tool used by the government during elections.

*“My father got involved in the first plan, so I didn’t really know much about it. There were information sessions, and he went to listen. (Q: Didn’t you go?) No! My father agreed, but a lot of our neighbors didn’t agree” (Interviewee’s serial number: 05)*

*“I thought, well, if they demolish the houses, that’s fine. But, on the other hand, I also thought that if they demolish them, all my neighbors and friends will be separated.” (Interviewee’s serial number: 02)*

*“Before, they used to say... demolish the houses! But where are we supposed to live? It’s a big impact. They said they would demolish them and give us money. But still, where would we stay?” (Interviewee’s serial number: 02)*

*“Rumour has it that the government was going to demolish the houses. At that time, they came to measure and said they would construct new roads. That was over ten years ago, but nothing has happened” (Interviewee’s serial number: 06)*

*“When he/she was running for mayor, he/she asked us if we are interested in urban renewal, and he/she would propose it in the Legislative Yuan (Q: Do you think the urban renewal plan at that time would affect your life or bring any changes to this area?) No, because it was just empty talk. How could it bring about any change? He/She only proposed this plan for the elections.” (Interviewee’s serial number: 01)*

*"I think urban renewal will definitely make this place better since it's in a great location." (Interviewee's serial number: 04)*

Even though residents lacked a clear understanding of the details of the first plan, they still had different emotional reactions based on their own perceptions. Some thought urban renewal would promote local development, so they had high expectations for it. In terms of conation, due to their positive outlook, these residents expressed a willingness to participate in the urban renewal plan or even signed the petition.

*"(Q: What was your opinion when you first heard about the urban renewal plan?) Of course, I was willing. If it could be conducted quickly, that would be even better." (Interviewee's serial number: 01)*

*"When I first heard about the urban renewal plan, I was looking forward to it. I thought that the area was going to develop." (Interviewee's serial number: 06)*

*"Actually, I was glad to see the outcome." (Interviewee's serial number: 04)*

*"(Q: Did you take any action to express your support or opposition to urban renewal? Like filling out the willingness questionnaire? Did you?) Yes, I did. I also signed a petition." (Interviewee's serial number: 04)*

In addition to the positive emotional reactions, one resident also felt concerned. This resident was worried about not having a place to live and being separated from neighbors and friends. During the interview, the resident mentioned the importance of neighborhood relationships, and this concern may be linked to the emotional reactions he/she had. These concerns led to conflicting feelings about the plan. As a result, the resident couldn't clearly express his/her willingness and oscillated between support and opposition.

*"My opinion is... don't demolish the houses." (Interviewee's serial number: 02)*

*"I thought, well, if they demolish the houses, that's fine. But, on the other hand, I also thought that if they demolish them, all my neighbors and friends will be separated." (Interviewee's serial number: 02)*

*"On one hand, it's okay if they demolish the houses, but on the other hand, it's also fine if they don't demolish them." (Interviewee's serial number: 02)*

*"People who live here greet each other, take care of each another, and share things with each other. (Q: So, do you like this kind of relationship?) Yes, I do." (Interviewee's serial number: 02)*

Residents' attitudes toward the first urban renewal plan varied based on their cognition, affect, and conation. Some residents were hopeful for the development and supported it. Others were worried about being displaced and losing their community, which made it hard for them to decide whether to support or oppose the plan. It shows that attitudes were shaped by factors such as expectations for the future, attachment to the area, and satisfaction with their current environment.

### 5.2.3 Residents' attitude toward the second urban renewal plan

After the second plan was proposed, all interviewees were aware of it and believed it would lead to the demolition and reconstruction of their houses. Every resident participated in triggering events, such as information sessions and household interviews, which helped them gain a deeper understanding of the plan. Based on the interviews, residents' perceptions can be categorized into three aspects: the connection to the elevated railway project, resettlement measures, and the perception of the inevitability of the plan. We will explore these perceptions, along with the emotional and behavioral responses.

#### (1) The connection to the elevated railway project

Six residents understood that this plan was related to the elevated railway project. Since the elevated railway project is already being implemented, some of them believed that urban renewal was inevitable. Although they had no emotional response to it, their conation showed active engagement. To better understand the plan details, they actively participated in information sessions, discussed it with their neighbors, and even contacted city council members to inquire about more details.

*"Like I said, I can't rush the urban renewal because it's not just an issue for the developers: it's more closely related to the government. Everything is interconnected with the elevated railway, so there's no way to speed it up." (Interviewee's serial number: 01)*

*"Since the elevated railway is already being implemented, it feels like urban renewal here is inevitable." (Interviewee's serial number: 04)*

*“Because of the construction of the elevated railway, the area will be renovated to improve the appearance of the city. In this way, the overall look of our city will be better” (Interviewee’s serial number: 05)*

*“(Q: If the government holds another information session in the future, would you want to go?) If they present a concrete plan, I’d probably go to listen. After all, with the railway elevated, there will be big changes here, so I’d want to hear how they plan to handle it.” (Interviewee’s serial number: 04)*

*“I asked the city council member about this area then, asking what the plans were for it after the railway will have been elevated.” (Interviewee’s serial number: 04)*

Based on the residents' conations, their main goal was to gather information. Although they recognized that urban renewal is closely linked to the elevated railway project, they have not developed further emotional responses yet, as they did not fully understanding the impact of the elevated railway project.

## (2) Resettlement measures

Five residents mentioned that the government proposed possible measures for resident resettlement, but they understood the details differently. Some thought the resettlement options were only available to landowners or low-income households, while others believed that all indigenous residents of the Xiaopenghu Area would have priority for resettlement.

*“They’re going to build social rented housing for us to live in..... Landowners can be assigned to live in, but those who don’t own land have no chance. The government will only offer them some compensation, since they don’t own land.” (Interviewee’s serial number: 02)*

*“Yeah, they will arrange a place for us to live. They said they would build social rented housing, and the people here would have priority, which is what we hope for.” (Interviewee’s serial number: 03)*

*“Before, I didn’t hear clearly if they would arrange for us to live temporarily in the social rented housing being built in front of the supermarket. I’m not sure.” (Interviewee’s serial number: 05)*

*“At that time, they mentioned that the social rented housing is being built across from the supermarket, but there are certain restrictions for who can live there.” (Interviewee’s serial number: 06)*

*“I asked for priority for the social rented housing here. I heard that they might give priority to low-income households or something like that.” (Interviewee’s serial number: 07)*

After learning about the resettlement options, some residents had emotional reactions and intentions to act. Emotionally, some were worried they wouldn’t meet the requirements for resettlement, so they adopted a wait-and-see attitude toward the urban renewal. A few even contacted the city council members to ask for details or express their concerns, hoping to get more information about the resettlement.

*“I’m more worried about not having a place to live. Because there isn’t a clear plan, it’s hard to say whether I completely support it or oppose it.” (Interviewee’s serial number: 07)*

*“I called the city council members and asked them to help us get priority for the social rented housing, especially for those who are being relocated due to demolition.” (Interviewee’s serial number: 07)*

From the interviews, we found that emotions strongly influence how people act. When residents feel more worried about the resettlement measures, they are more likely to actively seek additional information or guarantees. Additionally, one resident expressed that if the government fails to properly plan the resettlement measures in the future, they would be unwilling to participate in the urban renewal.

*“I’m willing to participate now, but if the government doesn’t present reasonable resettlement options, then I think... I might consider not participating.” (Interviewee’s serial number: 06)*

In fact, there is a gap between residents’ understanding of the resettlement measures and what the government actually stated in the information session. According to the presentation provided by the government, it mentioned that a resettlement measurement would be provided in the future and that social rented housing would be an option. However, the government did not clarify the eligibility or whether there would be a priority order. This lack of clarity has led to different interpretations among residents, influencing their attitudes toward the urban renewal plan.

## (3) Perception of the inevitability of the plan

Some residents thought that even if they disagree with the urban renewal, the government will go ahead and finish the urban renewal plan forcibly, and there is no way to change the outcome. Additionally, when most

residents agree, individual opposition does not have a significant impact. Therefore, despite some residents being reluctant or unsure, they still express their agreement to participate in the urban renewal during the willingness survey.

*"The government sent a letter asking if I agree to participate in the urban renewal, and I wrote 'agree'. I thought if I had written 'disagree', they'd still go ahead with the demolition. So I figured it was better to agree." (Interviewee's serial number: 02)*

*"I didn't oppose it, but I didn't really have an opinion either, because the house isn't ours... So if the government is going to demolish it, there's nothing we can do." (Interviewee's serial number: 03)*

*"(Q: Is there any reason for you to oppose the urban renewal?) No, we can't do anything about it. The government is going to enforce it, and there's nothing we can do." (Interviewee's serial number: 04)*

*"But if I disagree... honestly, I still can't resist it. If the government really want to demolish the houses, there's nothing I can do. If everyone agrees and I'm the only one who disagrees, it doesn't matter. I'll still be forced to participate. (Interviewee's serial number: 06)*

Since residents believed that urban renewal was inevitable and beyond their control, they felt helpless. Even though they had different emotions about it, in the end, they simply expressed support for the plan.

In the second plan, residents gained a deeper understanding through information sessions, recognizing its inevitability. Their growing awareness led to more complex emotional responses and actions. Many expressed concerns about resettlement measures, worrying about whether the government would provide sufficient security. These emotional reactions led some to adopt a wait-and-see attitude and take steps to secure their right to adequate housing. Overall, residents' affect and conation in the second plan showed more cautious and conditional attitudes toward urban renewal.

## 6 CONCLUSION

In this study, we explore the shifts in residents' attitudes toward urban renewal, examining how their cognition, affect, and conation evolved throughout the process. First, we integrate cognition, affect, and conation to analyze their variability in residents' response to urban renewal. Next, we discuss the cognitive aspects of residents' awareness. Finally, we critically evaluate the limitations in how the government understands residents' opinions and attitudes during their participation in the process.

First, as urban renewal plans progress, residents learn more about them, which brings out more complicated feelings and reactions. Initially, some residents supported the first plan based on positive expectations. However, during the second renewal plan, after learning more about its details, their attitudes became more cautious, and some even began to have doubts. The uncertainty of the information made residents uneasy, prompting them to actively seek more security and clearer explanations. Resettlement issues, in particular, triggered strong emotional reactions, with many residents concerned about whether the government would provide adequate resettlement plans. Some even took action to secure their housing rights. This suggests that, compared to the government's vision for future urban development, residents are more concerned about whether their housing needs will be properly addressed.

Second, we found that residents' awareness of urban renewal was influenced by their property ownership. Landowners knew more details about two plans, while non-landowners often only have limited knowledge, mainly about resettlement measures in the second plan. Non-landowners are often only considered during the compensation and resettlement stages, which limits their access to information and participation rights. This exclusion puts them at a disadvantage and often disregards their needs and concerns. Moreover, many residents still associate urban renewal primarily with "demolition and reconstruction," overlooking other approaches like rehabilitation and conservation, which have become more common. This information gap shows problems in how policies are communicated and highlights the need for more transparency and fair access to information in future urban renewal plans.

Finally, we critically examine the limitations in how the government understands residents' opinions and attitudes during the participation process. While willingness surveys indicate residents' support for urban renewal, this does not necessarily reflect full agreement with the plan. In fact, residents' attitudes toward urban renewal are shaped by multiple factors, including expectations for future development, satisfaction with their current environment, attachment to the place, access to complete information, and how the policy



affects different stakeholders. Therefore, relying solely on willingness surveys may fail to capture the complexity of residents' attitudes, impacting the accuracy and legitimacy of policy decisions.

Given these findings, this study emphasizes that urban renewal plans should focus more on what residents truly need, not just on what policymakers or planners think is best. Additionally, adopting more comprehensive methods to understand residents' attitudes can lead to policies that are both more inclusive and effective in addressing community issues, making urban renewal more widely accepted.

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