

# The Paradigm of Urban Village Renewal in Hefei

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## Abstract

**In the renewal of urban villages in Hefei, there was a contradiction of the right to choose the design direction. In the renewal process, the residents almost could not participate in the design process, and the whole design was completed by the architects, which determined that the design ignored the special needs of the actual users. In addition, it was the government planners who evaluate the renewal scheme. This makes the renewal of the urban village become the decision maker's personal aesthetic evaluation to a certain extent. The original richness of urban villages and the elasticity of their functions are reduced, and the attribute of the original paradigm of urban village has changed from spontaneous construction to superior planning.**

## Keywords

Urban village; Renewal; Planning; Paradigm; Hefei.

## 1. Introduction

Hefei is the capital of Anhui Province, located in the east of China. In the process of urbanization, many villages in the built-up areas of the city have lost their arable, but the system of villager autonomy is still practiced. The original villages, where the peasants still lived in, evolved into residential areas and finally became urban villages. These urban villages cannot fit in with the new urban buildings, and the living condition inside is harsh [1].

At present, in Hefei, a large number of old urban villages have been demolished or ready to be demolished, some of which have been expropriated by the government, and a considerable number of urban villages have been rebuilt and turned into unified new residential areas. In the original urban villages, there are a large number of constructions built by residents spontaneously [2]. These constructions come from the needs of life, such as drying, cooking and entertainment, and they are full of diversity. Compared with the urban village without complete reconstruction, the urban village community rebuilt after systematic planning is very different [3]. The unified architectural form and materials make it look like a newly built urban community. The diversified construction that appeared in the original urban village has disappeared. For the most part, the renewed urban villages resemble simplified versions of the commercial housing communities which are common in cities.

## 2. Renewal Methods of Urban Villages in Hefei

### 2.1. Three Renewal Methods

The renewal of urban villages in Hefei started around 2006. There are three main ways to carry out the renewal in this study. The first is to expropriate the whole urban village, give new housing and economic subsidies to residents and take back the land to the government [4]. In this case, the original village in the city will completely disappear. This way of completely clearing the urban village directly transforms the problem of urban village into a planning problem, which has lost the basis of comparison and discussion with the urban village. The

second is that the land is taken back by the village's collective for new planning, and then redistributed to the original residents. In this way, the original urban villages will also be completely demolished, and the new villages will be reconstructed in a limited number of types. The third renewal method is to carry out the overall facade and environment renovation on the basis of the original urban village [5]. In the second and third kinds of renewal methods, there is a common tendency to transform the original urban village style into a unified rule.

## 2.2. Renewal of Urban Villages By Design Institutes

In the last two kinds of renewal methods, the main authority of design was transferred from the villagers to the design institutes. Residents lose the autonomy to choose the forms of construction, which are determined by the designers and individual village representatives. The designer divides the urban village into residential areas, greening, road streamline, business areas and public services areas [2]. These two renewal methods are more similar to the functional thinking mode adopted by the current urban planning.

Modian village, located in the northeast of Hefei, is an urban village renewed in the second way. The original Modian village is a large rural area. In the process of urban expansion, Modian village is just at the intersection of the new planned road network. On this basis, Modian village has been rebuilt in batches on the original land. From 2006 to 2012, Modian village was divided into four new residential areas, and the original high-density residents were arranged to new urban communities. The original various forms of self-built houses have been replaced by the unified form of new dwellings, while a large number of self-built constructions have been completely cleaned. In the newly planned urban village, new business form is planned, and a large number of original internal service businesses are placed in the newly built commercial buildings on the edge of the village. The pattern of the residential buildings has changed. The third and fourth floors of the residential buildings are uniformly arranged as rental rooms. The landlord and the guests have independent circulation lines to enter the house. At the same time, the community has carried out the diverse systems of people and vehicles. It is different from the road network system formed spontaneously in urban villages. There are also plenty of artificial green spaces within the community. A circle of commercial buildings set outside the village has been separated from the internal service function of Modian village. This kind of service has been oriented to the surrounding areas of Modian village, which also shows that the current planning and design of urban villages is not only for the urban villages themselves, but also for the supplement of urban functions with the urban villages. This phenomenon has been also reflected in the renewal of other urban villages in Hefei, especially in Leijie village.



**Figure 1.** Comparison of Modian village's external commercial street and internal living areas

In the renewal design of Leijie village, instead of renewing the whole village, the government renewed the buildings to complement the commercial functions in that region. This is the third renewal method. First of all, for the layout of the buildings, the designer only updated two commercial areas along the street, while the layout of the buildings inside the village was

almost not updated. Therefore, the new design did not activate the new commercial and public recreational spaces within the urban village. At the same time, the renewal of the architectural appearance of Leijie village is not satisfactory to the residents. In the new design, a large number of old buildings were renewed in a way that follows the old architectural style. But between the new and old buildings, there still exists stark contrast. New buildings have lost the original architectural features of the old village, and the difference of elevation between the two buildings made the internal landscape of the village became worse. At the same time, the designer added some modern architectural elements to the buildings inside the village, which is completely inconsistent with the overall architectural features of the village, forming a kind of chaos.



**Figure 2.** Contrast between the new and old buildings in Leijie village

### 2.3. The Breaking Down of Spontaneous Construction

The design institutes currently hold a negative attitude towards the diversity and richness of construction in urban villages, because such diversity and richness will lead to operational complexity [6]. The unified renewal is the key of the engineering cost and design efficiency. This inevitably makes the existing spontaneous construction in the urban village be replaced uniformly. In addition, the unified design does not seem to have a clear connection with the original community. The unified form and facade adopted in the design are full of ambiguity in the architectural elements [7].

The design and thinking method of design institutes still took the form of functionalism as the leading factor in city planning [8]. They reconstruct the urban villages as a city, by planning the layout and road network. Finally they choose several building types, fill them in the zoning, and complete the greening and public space within the area [9]. This hierarchical urban planning model first ignores the fact that buildings are the main body of the original urban village, and the original formation of the road network is the result of adapting to architectural changes. It is opposite to transform the paradigm in a functionalist way. It also ignores the individual differences of the residents and their demands of living.

## 3. The Defect of Renewal Method

### 3.1. The Planning Intellection Based on Order

In the renewal of urban villages in Hefei, almost all the demands of design are pointing to the establishment of a kind of order. It can be found some consistency in the operation mode and guiding ideology at the level of paradigm. There are many similar characteristics in this consistency, from the planner's appeal, to the designer's operating mode, even to the practical construction [10]. First of all, the planner worries about the urgency of the work. They ascribe the problem of urban village to the spontaneous structures, put forward the problem of disorder, and think that changing this diversified state is the way to solve the problem of urban villages. The villagers' spontaneous construction is also seen as a backward feature by the

planner [11]. From this perspective, the planner did not pay attention to the architectural traditions that have always existed in urban villages. And their strategy is precisely anti-architecture. The contradiction between superior planning and residents' living habits leads to the results that the renewal can not maintain a long-term state, which can be seen in most urban villages in Hefei.

The consistency reflected in design is the pursuit of a sense of order. Instead of making too much research and reference to the site itself, it forcibly unifies the diversity and difference in the urban villages with a new order. In addition, the separation between the design and the site makes the design divorced from the real life of the renewal objects, which foreshadows the new spontaneous construction of the villagers in the future. The design institutes regard design efficiency as a very important standard [6]. Fast design and promotion also result in the lack of discussion on design. This phenomenon is directly reflected in the transformation of urban villages into commercial towns and the separation of new residential buildings from the original living habits.

### 3.2. The Disconnection Between the Renewal and Residents' Lives

From the perspective of planners, the current urban village renewal planners are all led by the government [11]. This makes this kind of design not only become the urban planning, but also become a government's action with political power. In this political cognition, the villages are regarded as a collectivity, rather than as a particular individual. This makes the planners regard urban villages' renewal as an collective activity from the beginning, so that such renewal can be analyzed and summarized in the way of city-level planning, and urban villages were integrated into the planning of the whole city. Since the appearance of the urban village, the attribute of the local self-growth control has completely disappeared under this kind of planning.

At the same time, the collective attribute of this operation weakens the right of individual residents in speaking in the renewal—residents have to make some concessions and compromises according to the collective requirements when necessary [12]. This is in contradiction with the residents' original right of spontaneous construction. In this case, the original richness of urban villages and the elasticity of their functions are reduced, and the attribute of the original paradigm of urban village has changed from spontaneous construction to superior planning.

The planner engaged in the renewal of urban villages are often some old design institutes. They will form relatively fixed ways and design habits in the operation that requires the transformation of the overall scope of the village. First from the field of information collection, design institutes are not specialized in construction mapping and detailed investigation. These works belong to professional surveying and mapping agencies and those agencies usually only focus on the physical data of buildings [13]. They have not experience the actual lives of the residents, nor do they analyse residents' specific needs. The lack of information determines that the renewal design will be divorced from the actual user's specific needs. In addition, the paradigm operation carried out by the design institutes has its own separation from the rural life in the city, which leads to their cognitive deviation of life. This deviation often reflects the designer's own experience of urban life.

## 4. The Paradigm of Urban Villages Renewal

Since the renewal of urban villages in Hefei began, a dominant urban village paradigm in the design appeared. In this paradigm, the renewal of urban villages is under the passive planning. This paradigm background is related to the new rural construction and urbanization in China. This kind of passive and instantly beneficial renovation design, from the beginning, ignored the



real subject—the residents on the original site [14]. Instead, it began to carry out design in a certain form with self-evaluation and it separated from the site to maximize efficiency.

The whole concept and mode of urban village's renewal constitute a paradigm of urban village's renewal design. The distinction between mechanical life and functional life in the city affects the complexity of the original life. The intrusion of simple and efficient ideas into life makes people's life become functionalized. Therefore, in the context of such a large social paradigm, the renewal design has become a way of operation to transfer the paradigm of urban life to the life in the urban village. It is the penetration and erosion of the urban lifestyle to the urban village's lifestyle. This paradigm operation deserves further discussion. Because once the differences between the urban areas and the urban villages disappear, it also means the collapse of the original culture in the urban village.

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