Exploration and reflection on the practice mode of the responsible planner system in Beijing Core Area from the perspective of urban renewal

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Abstract. Based on the clear positioning of Beijing core areas in the new urban planning of Beijing, Dongcheng District and Xicheng District have carried out a series of urban renewal work of “Environmental Remediation of hundreds of streets and allies” and “Rearrangement Planning of Blocks”. Both districts explored and established the responsibility planner system in 2017, aiming to achieve refined construction and management in the process of organic renewal, and ensure the implementation of the plan and public participation. This paper, combined with the visiting and investigational results of the urban renewal project in Beijing core areas, sorts out the duties and roles of the responsibility planners in each step, explores the establishment and promotion of the responsibility planner system, analyzes the optimization space of current system and proposes several advices on the follow-up system.

1. Introduction
The concept of “Urban Renewal” was initially proposed in the late 1950s. It means that the people living in the city impose certain demands on the repair and renovation of their houses and the improvement of the environment such as streets, parks, green spaces and poor residential areas, in order to form comfortable living environment and beautiful cityscape [1]. Urban Renewal aims to make long-term and continuous improvement and enhancement of urban areas in change through various aspects of urban economic, social and physical environment et al [2]. In China, “Urban Renewal” began in the early 1980s [3]. As the ancient capital of the five Dynasties, Beijing carries China's long-standing traditional material culture and unique characteristics. Its urban development faces the problems of urban renewal especially severe old city reconstruction.

As of 2017, China’s urbanization level has reached 58.53% and the development model has gradually changed from extension to connotation [4]. The “Beijing Urban Master Plan (2016-2035)” requires that the urban and rural construction land in the central urban areas be gradually reduced, and the planned total building scale be dynamically zero-growth. It promotes the protection and organic renewal of historical and cultural blocks, features coordinating areas and other traditional bungalow areas. In the process of reducing and refining Beijing core areas, the protection and extension of traditional Beijing culture and urban texture, as well as the mobilization and stimulation of regional vitality, are the focus of attention. The effective expression of public opinions is more conducive to the improvement of the living conditions of the local residents, which can be realized through the establishment and implementation of the responsibility planner system.
2. Responsibility Planner

The community planning which made its first appearance in France in the early 20th century included two dimensions: “city” and “block”. Critical community researches directly led to block residents’ resistance to urban renewal, which further led to adding public opinion surveys and public participation since the 1980s [5].

In the United States, community planners have different origins. They may work in government, non-profit organizations or some private companies. After investigating housing conditions, these people help communities implement planning, promote cooperation among communities, governments and developers, and upgrade facilities to improve security, in order to “help communities achieve the great blueprint”. Those of non-governmental organizations representing public interest undertake various service work for implementing community development planning and play an extremely important role in community development [6].

The “Regional Environmental Rehabilitation Plan” promoted in Taipei in the late 1990s was initiated by the civic groups. They proposed the projects, participated in the improvement of the living environment actively. Then they promoted the construction of “Community Planner System” to guide more professionals to integrate with the community, who can provide the community with professional consultation and service to better implement grassroots construction [7]. With the gradual refinement of planning implementation and the increasing demands in public participation, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Chengdu and other cities began to experiment with the community planner system, and continuously explored the role, function and tasks of community planners through practice. Modes such as “Community Planner” and “Responsibility Planner”, although different in name, have the same effects in the work purpose. At present, responsibility planners of China not only exist in urban areas such as streets, but also play an important role in rural revival. Based on the needs of ancient city protection, environmental upgrading, and urban renewal, the model of responsibility planners has been practiced and explored in Beijing core areas.

3. Exploration of the Practice Mode of Responsibility Planners in Beijing Core Areas

Mode of responsibility planner was piloted in Chaoyangmen Street of Dongcheng District in Beijing as early as 2007. In April 2017, Dongcheng District started the “Environmental Renovation of hundreds of streets and alleys”. In the same year, Xicheng District launched “Street District Planning” after renovating “opening walls and drilling holes” and illegal construction. Till then, urban governance action had been fully rolled out in the core areas, and responsibility planners had been hired for each street. In the organic renewal stage of core areas, planning and designs made by experts were applied into streets, alleys and these grass-roots units. These measures establish responsibility planner system and achieve an overall improvement in the living environment and urban quality.

3.1 Deepening basic research and participating in planning

The responsibility planner should have research foundation to some extent in the responsible blocks. They keep accumulating and paying attention to the development and status of the block. Developing history is the foundation and root of the block. What’s more, the accumulation of dynamic development of real-time updates will directly feedback the updating accurate requirements of the block. Both of them are indispensable. Long-term research accumulation can focus more accurately on the actual needs of responsible neighborhoods. In-depth, solid and continuous basic research and the accurate grasp of the actual needs of the street have become important guarantees to help the implementation of the plan.

Humanistic memory is important treasure of streets and communities. The protection and inheritance of multiple cultures such as history and architecture culture are of great significance. In the Fuchengmen Inner Street of Xicheng District, according to the “FuCheng Plum Blossom is an Indicator of Warm Spring”, “Plum Blossom” element is used on the manhole cover, the car block stone, the shadow wall and the guardrail to demonstrate fully the street culture. With a long history, the BaiYi An is the focus of Hutong cultural protection and inheritance. After reconnaissance and
consultation of the responsibility planners and communication with local residents, the remediation plan of local shaving recovery history remains was formulated and real historical traces were presented.

3.2 Checking project inspection and guiding planning implementation
All kinds of planning and architectural design teams are introduced into the block. When they are engaged in design work of the area, the responsibility planners should participate in checking the design project and doing planning implementation as the expert who has the most say and most authority in the responsible block.

After responsibility planner in Qianmen East District fully considers the actual living needs of local residents, the Dongcheng District changes the toilets without partitions into single rooms to improve sanitary conditions and protect residents' privacy. The responsibility planner of Dongsi South Cultural Street District of Dongcheng District took the platform of the Landscape Protection Association into the street, implemented the “one policy for one yard, one design for one household” in the vacated space after the demolition of illegal construction. In the process of project review and plan implementation guidance, the responsibility planner will realize the optimization and improvement of the function space of the block as much as possible according to the feedback of actual demand.

3.3 Focusing on planning implementation and Participating in implementation assessment
In the planning implementation stage, the responsibility planners should supervise the whole process, pay attention to the real-time situation, regularly dispatch personnel to cooperate with the street for organizing supervision meeting, hold lectures, raise the awareness of each team, guide the design team and construction team to land construction according to the planning requirements. On this basis, the responsibility planner should evaluate the plan landing of the finished project to ensure that the planning requirements be met and there will be no bad consequences for the lack of profession of the constructor after construction. In addition, the responsibility planner should regularly visit the street to evaluate the infrastructure and public service facilities such as parking space and toilets from a professional perspective and residents’ feedback to determine whether it is reasonable and convenient.

In the “Environmental Renovation of hundreds of streets and alleys” project in Dongcheng District, the management committee needs the seal of the responsibility planner for the project that has been completed so the project achievements will be recognized. The purpose is to ensure the urban renewal follow general rules and the requirements of the control regulations and connect residents’ needs in the blocks from the process level, effectively ensuring the implementation of the planning requirements.

3.4 Strengthening public participation and helping build communities
As the link between the government and the public, the responsibility planner needs to deeply interpret the planning achievements, guide more public to participate in the block updating, collect and screen public opinions to answer questions or further research and extract the valuable parts. The establishment of a diversified co-management mechanism is a key step to achieving effective public participation. In the implementation process, the diversified co-management platform consists of street leaders, planning and design teams, team of responsibility planners and community residents.

Chaoyangmen Street and its responsibility planners set up soft means like “Hutong teahouse” residents council and others to guide community residents to participate in co-management and jointly build the city's first street level governance innovation platform. The “Proposal Room” is set up in JingShan Street to achieve public participation under the guidance of professionals. In the DongSi South Cultural Street Block, community residents discussed and formed the small yard convention, elected small yard housekeepers, established a small yard public maintenance fund and built a long-term self-made mechanism. In the organic integration process between the residents’ actual needs and planning implementation from the one-level implementation of the top-level plan, responsibility planners play a vital role in setting up multi-channels public participation model and integrating the residents’ actual needs into the environmental construction.
3.5 Establishment of relevant systems and perfection of exploration models

The relevant systems of responsibility planners in core area are gradually optimizing in the continuous exploration and update. Since 2017, combining with the “hundreds of Streets and Alleys” environment improvement work, Dongcheng Planning Branch has compiled the guides such as “Environmental Remediation Design Guidelines” and “Ten Elements of Environmental Enhancement Design Guidelines”. In 2018, the “Administration Methods for Responsibility Planners in Dongcheng District Blocks” and “Implementation Opinions on the Work of Responsibility Planners in Dongcheng District” were issued. Responsibilities of the responsibility planners and the assessment criteria were clarified and long-term working mechanism was established. In 2019, “Design Guidelines for the Protection and Renewal of Beijing’s Historical and Cultural Blocks Features” was issued, which clarified the combination of landscape protection and social co-government, established a comprehensive management system such as responsibility planners and public participation. Xicheng District promoted the renovation of blocks with the “blocks arrangement planning” as a starting point and formulated a number of systems such as the “Xicheng District Responsibility Planner System Work Plan” to promote the implementation of the responsibility planner system.

After extensively soliciting opinions from relevant units, “Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Work of Responsibility Planners in Beijing Core Areas” has been formulated by the Beijing Municipal Commission of Planning and Natural Resources, initially raising the responsibility planner system to the height of the planning approval process since 2018. In May 2019, they issued the “Implementation Measures for the Beijing Responsibility Planner System (Trial)”, which put forward content requirements from the level of hiring, funding, and job responsibilities. The “Beijing Urban and Rural Planning Regulations” was officially implemented on April 28th. This regulation integrated the “responsibility planner” into the general rules. For further implementation, the Municipal Commission of Planning and Natural Resources will continue to strengthen the establishment of a sound responsibility planner system, strengthen the planning of the “bottom-up” public participation mechanism and achieve multiple participation. Responsibility planners in Beijing core areas gradually nurtured renewal and improvement of the system based on practice and exploration.

4. Reflections on the Mode of Responsibility planner in Beijing core areas

4.1 Deep-Ploughing Responsible Blocks and Refining Development Needs

With characteristics of different ages of reconstruction and different residents structure for streets in the Dongcheng and Xicheng districts covered by Beijing core areas, the updating content is quite different. It is not applicable to the blindly “one size fits all” of the work content and workload. All districts and every street should fully dig into the historical memory, strengthen the business advantages of the boutique areas in the jurisdiction, clarify the needs, and carry out differentiated development. Responsibility planners need to make the main content of the update at different stages clear for blocks, and help blocks sort out the specific contents of “combing, organizing, proposing”. As the “outside brain” of the street, the responsibility planner should have in-depth accumulation and research on the historical evolution and cultural accumulation of the block. In addition, they should be able to provide important opinions and support for various renovation projects in responsible blocks. The role of the responsibility planner is critical when the design team lacks sufficient knowledge of the project context. For the deep accumulation and research of the development background of the block, the meticulous combing of the development needs of the block is the fundamental guarantee for ensuring the implementation of the plan.

4.2 Clarifying the role positioning and Rationalizing work content

Since 2017, the two districts of Dongcheng and Xicheng have their own explorations for the selection of the team of responsibility planners. The Dongcheng District Government has assigned team of responsibility planners to each street through the layered screening of the planner experts database. Xicheng District directly appoints the planning and design teams who are responsible for the project
renovation design as the responsibility planners of the streets. According to the requirements of the “Implementation Measures for Beijing Responsibility Planner System (Trial)”, the responsibility planners generally do not undertake the design tasks of planning, design and construction projects within the scope of responsibility. In this case, the establishment of a “five-in-one” team of planners, government agencies, streets, residents, and responsibility planners is required in conjunction with the project. Each of them performs their duties: the planner team conducts a survey of the project sites and summarizes the data for planning and designing; government agencies will ensure the accuracy of the planning materials and financial guarantees; the street office will set the work content and coordinate the organization and communication platform; residents and the various groups within the community will respond positively and realize the public participation. Responsibility planners should become the bridge between the public and the government. On the one hand, as the external brain of street decision-making, they sort out the work content, provide advice and suggestions, and control the planning results; on the other hand, as the link between the street and the residents, they grasp the needs of the residents, interpret the planning achievements and play as a good communicator.

4.3 Organically Matching Team Components and Ordering Organization
The “Guiding Opinions on Promoting the Work of Responsibility Planners in Beijing Core Areas” states that the backbone of the responsibility planner team needs to have urban planning, urban design, architecture or related professional background, including but not limited to professional fields such as planning, design, architecture, structure, gardens, landscapes, geography, road traffic, art, history, society, and information technology. The diversified professional team plays a great role in promoting and implementing the planning and design projects. The team of responsibility planners, as an independent third party, works in the form of a team in the process of docking with the government, the street and the project. For the projects’ continuity and stability, external work should be handled as much as possible by a fixed person to establish a stable image of external service. In addition, the team of responsibility planners should help the street sort out the work lists as detailed as possible before the staffing to avoid the large and redundant professional configuration. To deploy the key disciplines required for the project in an orderly manner is the key to solving the core issues. The composition of the professional authority and long-term stable responsibility planner team are the basis for the responsibility planner to achieve mutual trust and consensus in the process of cooperation with the street. On this basis, related work can be powerfully impelled.

4.4 Two-way evaluation mechanism and Diversification of judging criteria
With the deepening of the work of the responsibility planners, the two-way evaluation mechanism should be realized through an objective and diverse perspective in the implementation process. Therefore, it is recommended to unite the responsible streets, local residents, land bureaus, and industry experts as the joint subjects, which would evaluate the work performance, the professional level of work results, and the degree of cooperation and communication with them for responsibility planners. After teasing the content, the appraisal should be judged from every category and each item. According to the reasonable weight of the opinions of all parties, and combined with the subjective and objective opinions, the joint subjects complete the qualitative and quantitative assessment. This evaluation report and the self-assessment reports completed by the main assessed responsibility planner and responsible street will be used as important criteria for further clarifying the street demands and judging the superiority of the responsibility planner team. Thus, the basic information can be provided for follow-up work, and the construction can be promoted through evaluations.

4.5 Accumulation of work results and Long-term Responsibility Exertion
Based on the experience of Dongcheng and Xicheng District in Beijing, the urban renewal and revitalization of the core areas is an urban growth mechanism that adapts to the actual living needs of the low-income or aging people with the needs of protection and renewal of the ancient city landscape. In the process of material space transformation and the human settlements environment revival, the
extension of the responsibility planner system is not only the institutional transformation and improvement, but also the sustainable growth of the system itself. In order to play the role more effectively in the long run, it is recommended that the responsibility planners summarize the results in stages, sub-topics, and sub-categories, gradually form a compilation of materials, and hand over to the streets, the Bureau of Land and Resources and other departments as the basis materials for follow-up work to ensure the sustainability of the work. In addition, because the responsibility planner's working hours in the responsible neighborhood is limited, some people need to be able to take root in the blocks, collecting the dynamics in time and communicating effectively with the responsibility planner as the liaison of the blocks. Therefore, it is recommended to set up a “community planner” who can stabilize in the resident area for a long time. After graduation from major of urban and rural planning, the liaison staff can work full-time in the district and feedback on various issues more directly and timely, which would form a supplement for responsibility planner system.

5. Conclusion
Under the requirements of urban organic renewal, a number of projects such as “combing, organizing, proposing” have been undertaken in Beijing core areas. In this process, the responsibility planners who originated from the “top-down” extension mechanism of urban planning played a great role. They established a “bottom-up” communication mechanism in the planning landing, which fully reflects the power of public participation. The establishment and improvement of the responsibility planner system will contribute more to the protection of the ancient city in the core areas and the people’s livelihood.

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