

# Towards Socially Integrative Urban Regeneration—Comparative Perspectives from China and Europe

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## 1. Introduction

Reflecting the growing urbanization rates in light of global sustainability development goals (SDGs), the increasing land take for settlement processes, the increasing need for natural resources for building activities and infrastructure provision, the growing inequality and spatial disparities call for a re-think of urbanization strategies. The regeneration of existing, but maybe deprived, urban stock seems crucial in order to limit consumption of land and resources by parallel strengthening social cohesion and equal opportunities for urban inhabitants overall, ensuring economic strengths and competitiveness of cities (Zheng et al. 2014). Consequently, urban regeneration is a central strategy of sustainable urban development in both China and Europe (EU Ministers Responsible for Urban Matters 2016; Central Committee of the Communist Party of China 2020).

Collectively, the nations of Europe can look back on a long history in urban renewal or, as it is often called, urban regeneration. Historically, urban development has undergone a process of renewal in the wake of fundamental economic transitions. In this article, we only refer to modern approaches that arose after the economic restructuring of 1970/1980 as well as the reaction to the growing awareness of environmental challenges and social inequalities in cities. In particular, many European Union (EU) and national policies/programmes have been introduced in support of urban regeneration, whether through strategies or funding, along with discussions about sustainable urban development. In China, we can observe a large variety of approaches to urban renewal and urban regeneration, addressing the respective political goals, city strategies and societal challenges of the individual periods and different stages of urban development but also the competing roles of stakeholders in urban renewal and urban regeneration (Yi et al. 2020; Wang 2020); yet, as in Europe, China is currently striving to ensure a form of urban development that is socially integrative.

Due to the longstanding tradition of urban regeneration in both China and Europe, it could be valuable to exchange ideas and manifold experiences in order to learn from each other, to up-scale good practices, but also to raise awareness for fundamental differences and limits of replication. This article aims to take stock of

urban regeneration pathways and frameworks in Europe and China in a comparative way as a basis to reflect challenges of socially integrative urban regeneration.<sup>1,2</sup>

In Section 2, the terms and definitions of urban regeneration in Europe and China as well as the drivers and the various modes of regeneration found in practice are discussed. The specific challenges of urban regeneration in China and Europe are discussed in Section 3 from the perspective of social integration. Finally, some conclusions for future efforts of urban regeneration both in China and Europe are drawn in Section 4.

## **2. Taking Stock: Urban Regeneration and Renewal in Europe and China**

### *2.1. Terms and Definitions*

In both China and Europe, a range of terms is used to describe the concept of urban renewal: “Urban renewal, urban regeneration, urban redevelopment, and urban rehabilitation share similar meanings, but are used in different countries or regions” (Zheng et al. 2014). While these terms are certainly comparable, they can also be seen as highlighting different aspects of urban renewal: “Urban regeneration comes by a variety of names, including ‘urban renewal’, ‘urban refurbishment’ and ‘urban retrofit’ and can take many forms” (URBACT 2014). Thus, although the various terms have a similar basic meaning, there may be some variation in the extent, scale and scope of application (Zheng et al. 2014).

In the European context, the most common terms are urban renewal and urban regeneration, which may be used synonymously (Couch et al. 2011). However, renewal more explicitly addresses physical aspects, while regeneration is associated with “a comprehensive and integrated vision and action to resolve the multi-faceted problems of urban areas and to improve the economic, physical, social and environmental conditions” (Ercan 2011). In order to link the spatial/physical/building/infrastructure perspectives of urban renewal with social and economic aspects, EU bodies commonly use the term urban regeneration in their documents (URBACT 2014). Nevertheless, different approaches of renewal and regeneration share a comprehensive and integrative perspective, including on governance (Colantonio and Dixon 2009). Regarding sustainability, notions to environmental aspects to regeneration can also be identified: “[ ... ] we understand

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<sup>1</sup> The chapter is a result of a research and innovation action funded from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement no. 770141. Contents are based on parts of a report that was submitted by the authors after the first year of the project as a deliverable project (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2019b). This chapter refers to Sections 2.1.2, 2.2.3 and 3.1 of the report, which were exclusively elaborated and written by the authors.

<sup>2</sup> For the conceptual background of socially integrative cities, see Chapter 2 in this book and (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2019a).

sustainable urban regeneration as regeneration policies and processes within a city which seek to address interrelated problems in order to consider, reduce and mitigate their environmental impact” (URBACT 2014). Although there seems to be a common understanding of regeneration, the different origins and initiating drivers behind this concept need to be understood and reflected on: “The definition of the ‘urban’ being ‘regenerated’ and, indeed, the understanding of ‘regeneration’ have varied according to the initiative being pursued, even if this has rarely been acknowledged by those making or implementing the policies” (Cochrane 2007).

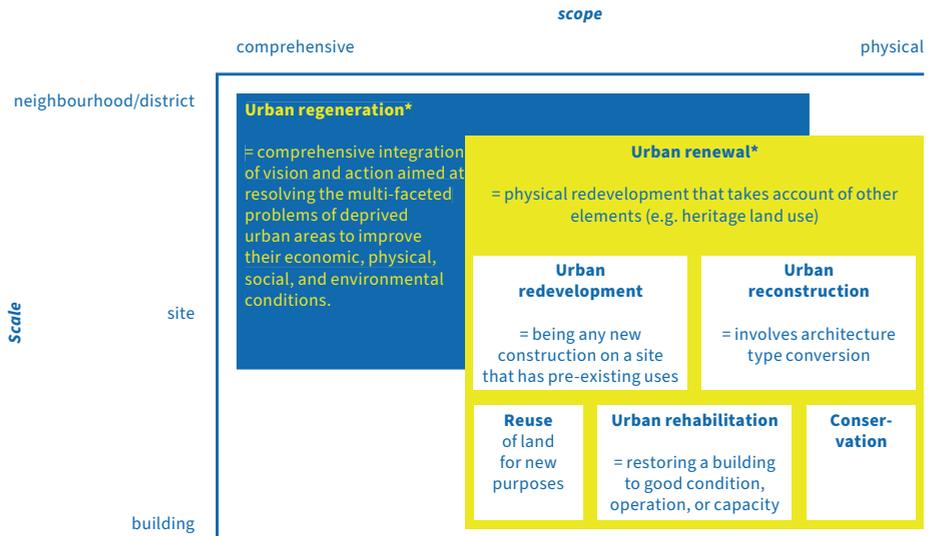
The terms and definitions of urban renewal in China are different from those in Europe. The scientific definition of various concepts related to this process is still evolving and under discussion. In particular, although the term urban renewal has been directly borrowed from the European context (translated in Chinese as *cheng shi geng xin*), it is understood in several different ways. Employed generically, the term urban renewal was firstly introduced by Wu (Wu 1999) together with urban regeneration, urban redevelopment, rehabilitation and conservation. Table 1 summarizes the various interpretations and practices of urban redevelopment, urban rehabilitation and urban renewal in China. While these three terms refer to similar practices, there are differences in the historical background, scale, time, drivers and objectives.

In summary, urban regeneration and urban renewal are the most widely used terms and approaches in China and the EU (see Figure 1). While related terms, such as urban redevelopment, urban reconstruction, reuse, urban rehabilitation and conservation can be found, these can be understood as particular forms of urban renewal, addressing different scopes and scales (see Figure 1).

**Table 1.** Terms and their meaning in China. Source: Table by authors, first published in TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA (2019b, p. 23).

<i>Description</i>	<b>Jiu Cheng (Old City) Zheng Zhi</b>	<b>Jiu Cheng (Old City) Gai Zao</b>	<b>Cheng Shi (City) Geng Xin</b>
<i>Corresponding English term</i>	Urban rehabilitation	Urban redevelopment	Urban renewal (regeneration)
<i>Rationale related to European context</i>	In China, the old city refers to urban built-up areas before the foundation of the PRC. Thus, Zheng Zhi means rehabilitation but also implies management	Gai Zao means to fundamentally change the old things into new things, adapt to the new circumstances and needs	Geng Xin expand the target to both old and new cities. This is like a metabolism system which imperceptibly replaces the old with the new.
<i>First use in China</i>	In the 1950s, soon after the foundation of the PRC	In the 1980s, following the country's reform and opening up	In 1992, after a seminar on urban renewal in Beijing
<i>Scale</i>	Small-scale, specific targets	Large-scale, wide-ranging	Large-scale, generally with multi-objectives
<i>Historical background</i>	Post-war recovery, limited resources, political decisions to fully use the existed urban assets to build new cities	Rapid economic growth and urban development, increasing land values, former city functions needed adjusting, services and quality of life needed upgrading	A decline in urban centres, rising unemployment, economic depression, deteriorating social security and living conditions
<i>Drivers</i>	Policy-led social improvement	Economic-oriented and socio-oriented processes	Mixed and comprehensive orientation
<i>Main target</i>	To modify and reuse existing buildings and infrastructure in old cities in order to improve the living standards of local residents.	To redevelop the old city, based on urban planning adapted to the new economic situation by exploiting the advantage of old cities' location to attract fresh development. In practice, ushered in large-scale demolition, reconstruction and relocation.	To revitalize the city centre and urban nodes, thereby boosting the urban economy; to stabilize society and encourage the middle- and upper-middle class to return to formerly run-down urban areas.

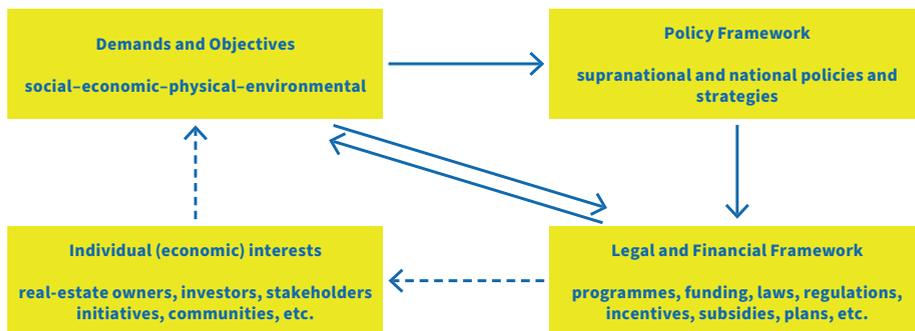
In the following, the term urban regeneration is used to refer to the overall approach.



**Figure 1.** Terms and definitions. Source: Graphic by authors, first published in TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA (2019b, p. 22), after (Colantonio and Dixon 2009; Couch et al. 2011; Wu 1999; Xue et al. 2015; Zheng et al. 2014). \*Some authors/sources do not differentiate these two approaches.

## 2.2. Drivers of Urban Regeneration

Urban regeneration is influenced by several drivers, which can be classified by various categories or dimensions (see Figure 2).

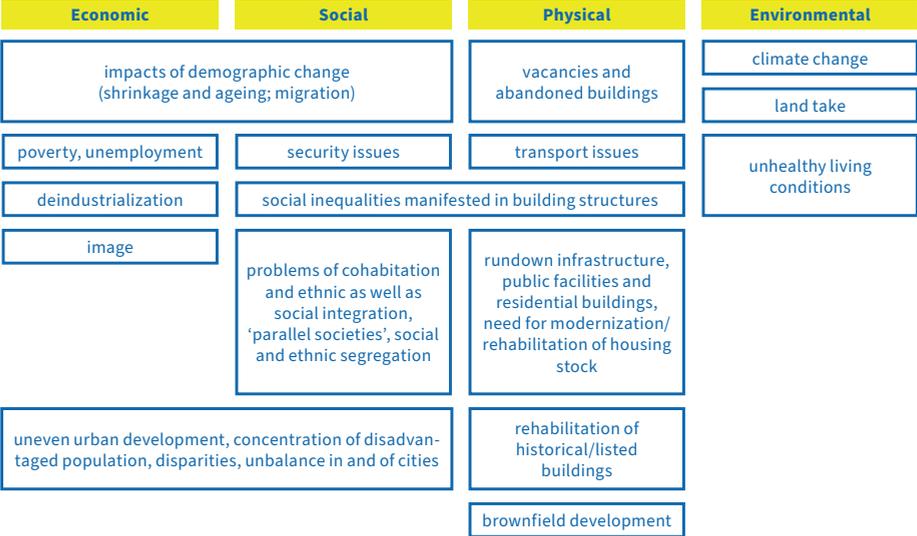


**Figure 2.** Framework of drivers for processes of urban regeneration. Source: Graphic by authors, first published in TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA (2019b, p. 29).

### 2.2.1. Demands and Objectives of Urban Regeneration

A wide variety of demands and objectives can be linked to the need for regeneration. In Figure 3, the main demands, categorized as economic, social,

physical and environmental, to be addressed by regeneration activities are shown.<sup>3</sup> There are also some cross-cutting and overall issues to be addressed, for example, social disparities or the unbalanced development of cities.



**Figure 3.** Overview of local demands which might be addressed by urban regeneration. Source: Graphic by authors, first published in TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA (2019b, p. 27).

For Europe, the following objectives of urban renewal activities can be identified: To improve living conditions, foster sustainable development and pursue strategies of growth, achieve economic stabilization and finally create not only competitive cities in a globalized world but those that can serve as engines of growth. From a dedicated urban perspective, the factors underlying the adoption of urban regeneration policies and projects include “pressures from major short- or long-term economic problems, deindustrialisation, demographic changes, underinvestment, infrastructural obsolescence, structural or cyclical employment issues, political disenfranchisement, racial or social tensions, physical deterioration, and physical changes to urban areas” (URBACT 2014, p. 6). In regard to environmentally sustainable urban regeneration in European cities today, three thematic clusters of challenges have been identified (URBACT 2014): The physical perspective encompasses climate change, carbon emissions and resource use; the socio-economic perspective highlights social justice, inequality and health, also related to ageing,

<sup>3</sup> Physical demands also cover the issue of the preservation and rehabilitation of architectural heritage. This issue is addressed in detail in Section 2 of the book.

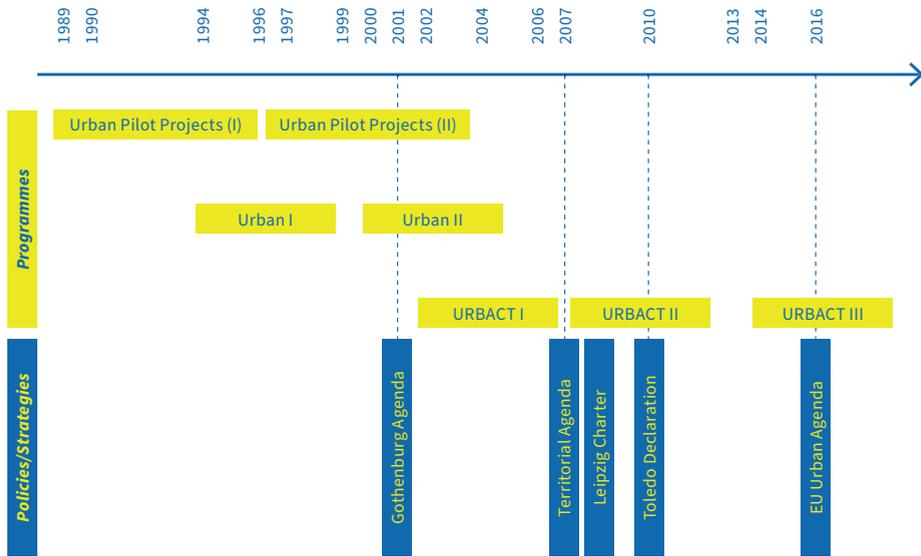
diversification, socio-spatial segregation and socio-economic inequalities; finally, the geo-institutional perspective deals with issues of governance and geographical disparities (climatic, institutional, historical, etc.). “In the last three decades urban renewal policies have grown in complexity due to the multi-dimensional character of urban problems such as deteriorating housing quality, poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, segregation, low quality of public space, etc.” (Kleinhans 2004).

The original motivation for urban regeneration in China was to replace and upgrade ageing urban infrastructure, for example, by demolishing dilapidated buildings and improving living conditions through better public facilities. Today, urban regeneration is driven by China’s profound social and economic changes as well as the population’s increasingly sophisticated demands on infrastructure (Xue et al. 2015). In this regeneration process, the Chinese government is dealing with five related demands, namely, (1) deindustrialization and tertiarization in large industrialized cities; (2) suburbanization and gentrification in central cities; (3) the development of urban communities and the provision of jobs; (4) the protection and maintenance of the country’s cultural (physical) heritage; (5) institutional reforms of urban planning and management (Zhang 2004a).

### 2.2.2. Urban Regeneration Policy Framework

On the one hand, the policy framework is influenced by local demands and the level of societal awareness. On the other hand, global debates and general trends (above all, sustainability) are reflected and transferred into national or supra-national goals. Following the evolution of various general and dedicated urban policies, in terms of strategy papers, funding programmes and initiatives is summarized to represent the political framework of urban regeneration activities.

From around 1990, European urban policies have been continuously developed to complement already established national strategies, programmes and approaches. These have set the normative framework for urban regeneration, while also supporting pilot projects and concrete approaches by providing funding and additional incentives in terms of networks and awards. Figure 4 gives an overview of the main European policies and programmes that explicitly address urban regeneration (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2019b).



**Figure 4.** Overview of European policies, strategies and programmes. Source: Graphic by authors, first published in TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA (2019b, p. 7).

Launched in 1989, the Urban Pilot Projects funded small-scale actions to support innovation in urban regeneration, thereby fostering economic and social cohesion in the old EU member states. Experiences gained with these Urban Pilot Projects were subsequently consolidated in the specific (funding) programmes URBAN I and II. These took an integrated approach to tackling the prevalence of social, environmental and economic problems in extremely deprived neighbourhoods, which suffer from high unemployment, poor housing conditions, a run-down urban fabric, a lack of social amenities as well as the isolation, poverty and social exclusion of local residents. The funding measures supported projects that combined the upgrading of infrastructure and housing with economic and employment measures, complemented by activities to combat social exclusion and improve environmental quality. Three major areas of intervention were pursued to achieve social and economic regeneration: physical and environmental regeneration, the fight against social exclusion and the promotion of enterprise and employment.

In 2002, the URBACT programme was established as part of the URBAN II community initiative to support exchange and learning activities in and between cities that were active in URBAN I and II as well as in Urban Pilot Projects. It introduced local support groups and local action plans along with a strengthened approach to capacity building and capitalization. URBACT was run in three phases: 2002–2006, 2007–2013 and 2014–2020. With the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities of 2007, the focus of European urban policies turned to deprived neighbourhoods in order to boost social cohesion and integration. The Toledo Declaration of 2010

highlighted the strategic role of integrated urban regeneration in the future of urban development, in particular by addressing different perspectives, namely, the environmental perspective; the social perspective; urban planning, architectural and cultural viewpoints; and finally, the governance perspective. This approach also aims to optimize, preserve or revalue existing urban capital (i.e., social capital, the built environment and physical heritage) in contrast to other forms of intervention that only prioritize the value of land.

Currently, there is no explicit EU funding programme for concrete urban renewal projects. Nevertheless, urban issues are covered by the European Regional Development Funds (ERDF) and realized through INTERREG-programmes<sup>4</sup>; the Urban Innovative Actions; European research programmes as well as specific programmes, such as LIFE, which is the EU's financial instrument supporting environmental, nature conservation and climate action projects. In terms of the mainstreaming of urban issues through structural funds (ERDF), this means that national states are required to define their own urban priorities (European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN 2011)).

In addition to the EU framework for urban regeneration, different pathways and also “path dependencies” must be considered within national states (Couch et al. 2011). “The content and implementation of urban renewal policies differs greatly between countries, depending on, for example, the welfare system and political forces as well as physical, social and economic structures of urban areas. There are, however, also similarities [orientation to the housing stock of urban residential areas, great importance to housing diversification and social mix in neighbourhoods] between national renewal policies” (Kleinmans 2004). The individual urban regeneration policies have developed at different speeds and taken different trajectories (Couch et al. 2011). For example, some states with a long history of urban regeneration, for example, the UK and Germany, have influenced the course of European policy. On the other hand, the newer member states of Eastern Europe, for example, Poland, only started their urban regeneration activities around 2000, so that their approaches are strongly shaped by existing EU urban policies and programmes.

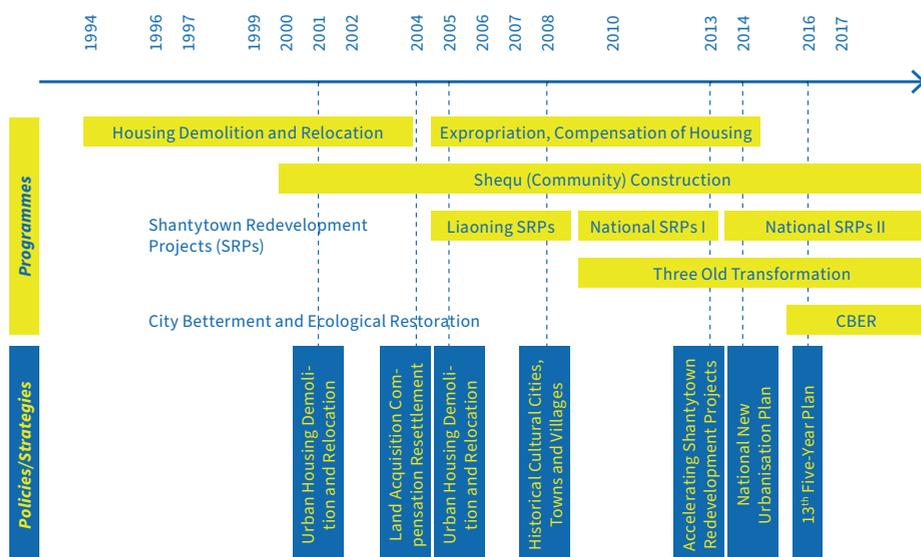
For more than three decades, China has experienced breakneck urbanization, i.e., expanding settlement areas and urban populations. At the same time, many historic urban areas have suffered in this period from a poorly maintained physical environment and infrastructure as well as declining industrial or commercial bases and, consequently, a loosening of social networks. In danger of losing essential amenities and thus their level of attractiveness, most cities, particular the large cities

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<sup>4</sup> INTERREG is a set of programmes to stimulate cooperation between regions in the European Union. Introduced in 1989, it is funded by the European Regional Development Fund ([www.interregeurope.eu](http://www.interregeurope.eu)).

that were encouraged to be transferred from consumptive cities into productive ones in the socialism planning period, were becoming socially isolated and economically distressed within the wider process of dynamic urbanization (e.g., cities in the northeast provinces Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang, being the country's largest declining areas since the 1980s). To address these issues, China began implementing its pilot urban renewal projects in the early 1990s. In the initial stages, however, when tracts of public housing (built and managed then mainly by state owned enterprises) and the less competitive industrial sites, both in economic performance and urban life with dull physical environment, were crying out for sensitive urban redevelopment, these projects largely took the form of the widespread demolition of workers villages/communities buildings in urban industry areas or historic neighbourhoods in downtown areas, with inhabitants relocated to distant locations either to new industrial zones or urban fringe residential areas (Hui 2013).

The main Chinese policy strands on urban renewal are shown in Figure 5. It should be noted that many of these policies and programmes were originally initiated by either provincial or city governments (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2019b).



**Figure 5.** Overview of urban policies and programmes to foster urban renewal in China. Source: Graphic by authors, first published in TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA (2019b, p. 17).

The first local directive regulating the expropriation and removal of housing on state-owned land was the Ningbo collectively-owned land requisitioned house demolition for urban construction administrative methods of 1996 (URBAN

ZHEJIANG 2003; Xu 2006). In 2004, the State Council of the People's Republic of China (PRC) issued its decision on deepening reform and strict land management control. This document merely established the framework for reforming land acquisition practices without providing operational details. In November 2004, the Ministry of Land Resources issued an Instructive Opinion on improving the system of land acquisition compensation and resettlement, offering further guidelines for implementing the requirements of the previous decision (Chan 2006). In order to cope with the legislative demands posed by the new situation, China's State Council made amendments to the Administrative Regulations on Urban Housing Demolition and Relocation (State Council 2011). This was seen as providing the main legal basis for expropriation and compensation. Finally, in January 2011, the State Council promulgated its Regulations on Expropriation and Compensation of Housing on State-owned land (Jun and Haiting 2011).

In 2005, Liaoning Province launched its Shantytown Redevelopment Project (SRP, Peng-hu-qu Gaizao) (LNJST 2008).<sup>5</sup> In 2008, in parallel with residential redevelopment projects by local governments, the central government initiated the first round of national SRPs. The aim was to improve the living conditions of low-income residents and to stimulate the depressed housing market. In 2013, the central government triggered a second round of SRPs aimed particularly at improving the living conditions of vulnerable residents in undesirable small-scale urban areas. Meanwhile, the State Council published the first national-level policy "Several opinions on accelerating shantytown redevelopment projects" (State Council of the People's Republic of China 2013).

In 1999, under the National shequ (neighbourhood community) construction experimentation work realization plan, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) chose 26 urban districts that had built a tested infrastructural foundation for community services to be pilots for shequ construction.<sup>6</sup> In 2000, the Central Committee and State Council endorsed the first formal document concerning shequ construction,<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> In China, the term shantytown (*peng-hu-qu*) is widely used in government policies. It refers to dilapidated housing or illegally constructed shanties in historic inner cities, business zones or rundown villages in (sub)urban and rural areas (Li et al. 2018).

<sup>6</sup> An administrative area under the jurisdiction of a residents' committee is referred to as a *shequ* or "neighbourhood community". The *shequ* policy obeys the principle that residents' committees can and should play an important role in urban governance, in particular to help resolve the unprecedented social challenges accompanying the country's transition to a market economy (Shieh 2011).

<sup>7</sup> *Shequ* construction is more than a form of grassroots governance to replace the former *Danwei* and guarantee local self-management and self-organization, it also concerns the large-scale development of gated housing communities. *Shequ* construction is "a national movement launched by the PRC government to resolve growing social problems in shequ level", to build "a service network and operational mechanism whose primary goal is to satisfy residents' various social service needs", and to create "a new local governance system" to reduce the pressures on the local government (Tang and Sun 2017).

the Memorandum from the Ministry of Civil Affairs on promoting urban shequ construction throughout the nation. Two years later, the MCA selected 27 cities and 148 districts from the national programme as demonstration sites for shequ construction (Kojima and Kokubun 2002).

The initiative Redevelopment of the Three Old (*san jiu gai zao*),<sup>8</sup> which ran from 2010 to 2015, aimed to shape early practices by increasing urban land values. This was achieved by protecting the property and redevelopment rights and heritages of the original residents (Wang 2016).

The code of conservation planning for historic cities, issued in 2005, strives to protect the historic appearance and spatial layout of cities. In particular, the planning of historical urban area protection should serve to improve the living conditions of local residents and maintain the vitality of communities (Wang 2012). According to the Regulation for protecting historical urban areas issued by the Ministry of Construction and State Administration of Cultural Heritage, measures should be taken to protect the authenticity, integrity and functional continuity of historic urban areas. Moreover, the government should play a leading role in improving the local infrastructure and living environment, with the participation of the local residents (Wang 2012).

In 2016, China promoted “Chengshi Shuangxiu” (literally: “urban weaving/networking and rehabilitation”, but more generally translated by China Daily as “city betterment”, CBER) as well as ecological restoration programmes on a nationwide scale to “accelerate transformation of urban development to ensure quality upgrades and sustainability” (Ma 2016). To this end, 58 pilot cities were selected by various provinces to conduct the three-stage “city betterment” programme (Ministry of Housing and Urban–Rural Development (MOHURD 2017).

### 2.2.3. Legal and Financial Framework

In order to implement policies and strategies, a set of public steering approaches is required to set the legal framework and provide financial support.

In the European context, basic steering approaches are provided and developed from the general EU (see Section on “Policy framework”) and national policy frameworks while taking account of the particular challenges to be addressed in relevant neighbourhoods. The identified policy objectives are implemented by means of programmes, funding measures, legal regulations, etc., which empower local stakeholders, offer incentives to real-estate owners and investors to act in the affected neighbourhoods as well as trigger state-funded measures to regenerate

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<sup>8</sup> The expression “three old”, first introduced in Guangzhou in 2008, refers to “the old town, the old village and the old factory” (Guangzhou Municipal People’s Government 2009).

public spaces or infrastructure. Funding can come from different arenas and scales: European (co-)funding programmes, national funding and on occasion additional regional/federal funding programmes. To ensure that implementation is aligned with other private, societal and general aims of urban development, the individual national states issued a set of legal regulations, e.g., within the national building code. In this way, private and public interests are safeguarded as well as fair and balanced regeneration activities. A legal framework and funding pathways, integrated urban development concepts, masterplans or similar concepts are developed in order to coordinate urban regeneration issues and to prepare and implement the regeneration activities (Aalbers and Van Beckhoven 2010).

In the Chinese context, there are three major implementation approaches employed by the central government to promote urban renewal: (1) establishing pilot models for nationwide replication; (2) building up a system of awards and incentives to encourage local governments to obey proposed standards and criteria; and (3) the promotion of general/comprehensive objectives, which can, however, be achieved through different local approaches (Zhang et al. 2018). This mechanism can be described as “from decentralized experimentation to centrally imposed model emulation”, combined with “ad hoc central interference” (Heilmann 2008). Due to “the devolution of power to local bodies”, local governments always take responsibility for comprehensive land development as well as individual projects under these three approaches (Acharya 2005). They can promulgate supplementary local regulations and rules in order to implement policy objectives. Regarding the funding of urban regeneration projects, the principle is that those parts intended for commercial use shall be financed by the market, whereas those belonging to the state shall be publicly funded.

#### 2.2.4. Individual (Economic) Interests

The actual implementation of urban regeneration is dictated by the individual (economic) interests of different stakeholders, which also influence possible partnership modes (Zheng et al. 2014). Local residents, stakeholder initiatives and communities formulate their specific demands, objectives and expectations for urban regeneration. Real-estate owners (some of whom are local residents) and potential investors have particular interests, which may in fact be primarily economic interests. These interests can be addressed by tailoring the legal and financial framework to empower and enable single stakeholders to act while ensuring that individual economic interests are nonetheless subordinated to community interests.

In Europe, the building stock and land are mainly owned by private people or housing companies or associations (Schmid et al. 2005). Urban regeneration, therefore, only can be realized by considering and addressing their (economic) interests (Cruz and de Brito 2015). While the refurbishment of buildings might be supported

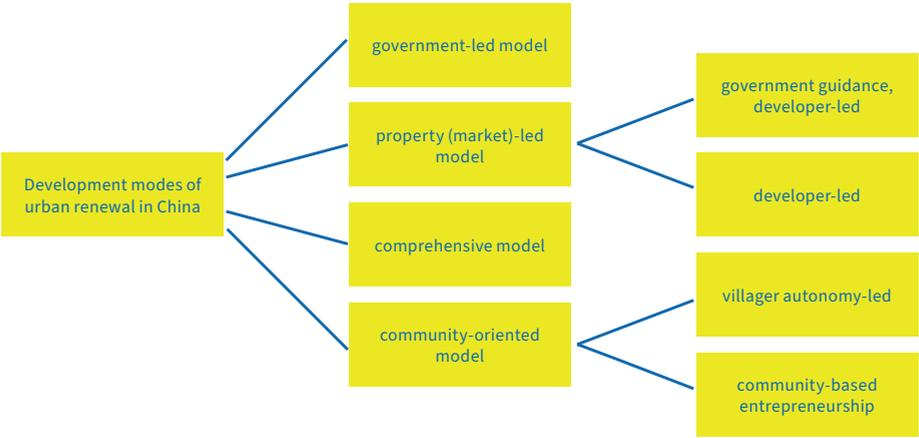
by state funding programmes, such as direct financing, tax relief or professional advice, the main effort has to be taken by the individual owners pursuing their own economic interest, i.e., to avoid vacancies and extract rent (Cruz and de Brito 2015). The inflation in rents following upgrading activities can lead to the process of gentrification, whereby the original residents can no longer meet rental payments and are replaced by wealthier tenants (Breckner 2010; Bailey and Robertson 1997). Various instruments, such as rent controls or mandatory proportions of social housing in designated districts are employed to avoid this (Altes 2016). In contrast, the refurbishment of public spaces, streets, green spaces and infrastructural facilities, which are mainly owned and managed by the municipalities, is usually publicly financed through municipal or national budgets or indeed EU co-funding programmes. Some attempts are made by municipalities to claw back part of the financial benefits enjoyed by private owners from public improvement measures in their neighbourhoods. Due to the huge efforts of the public sector, regeneration processes are steered and planned by municipal authorities, supported by legal regulations and funding schemes. As regeneration cannot be implemented without private investment or the acceptance and support of local stakeholders, upgrading measures are carefully discussed and planned with affected communities in each city case by case (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2019a). In fact, regeneration projects and processes can be initiated by either local residents or local authorities. Yet the implementation is usually a joint process, primarily led by the government (Zheng et al. 2014). The governance pattern of urban regeneration is strongly influenced by the relationship between central and local governments as well as the degree of “top-down” or “bottom-up” control (Couch et al. 2011).

Various models are applied in China for the implementation of urban regeneration (see Figure 6). While government-led urban regeneration is still dominant in most cities, in some large metropolitan areas, such as Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Wuhan, other stakeholders—in particular, major real estate developers—are playing increasingly important roles in urban regeneration. In these property-led models, the involvement of private developers has often sped up urban gentrification due to their demand for a return on investment. This implies that the issue of finance is becoming increasingly central to the general practice of urban regeneration. Popular in the early years of urban regeneration, the comprehensive model is today rather neglected. The main feature of this approach is described as “public-private-community three-way partnership-based, multi-objective-oriented urban regeneration” (Zhang 2004b). The emergence of the “urban village” problem placed a spotlight on the community-oriented model.<sup>9</sup> In some areas where villagers

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<sup>9</sup> “Urban villages”, a unique phenomenon in China, are former rural settlements under the organization of clan authorities that still retain a certain level of autonomy (Lin et al. 2012). Due to rapid urbanization,

have considerable autonomy (mainly in urban fringe areas by incrementally urban growth or left behind urban areas encroached by fast urban expansion), urban regeneration projects are managed by the village collective with the local government merely providing some policy support and relevant guidance during the process. In contrast to the top-down government-led model, this can be described as bottom-up implementation (Wang 2013). Refining the general approaches and drawing on the practice of urban renewal in Shenzhen, Zhou (2014) identified five different modes to reflect the main actors and characteristics of the implementation. These are (1) the government-led mode with market operation; (2) the developer-led mode with government guidance; (3) the village autonomy-led mode; (4) the comprehensive improvement mode with government investment, market operation and residents' participation; and (5) the coordination mode of the whole village and community, which is government-led and community based.



**Figure 6.** Urban renewal in China classified by development mode. Source: Graphic by authors.

### 3. Challenges of Socially Integrative Urban Regeneration in China and Europe

Social inclusion has become a focus of the urban regeneration debate, in particular, issues of community involvement and public participation (Zheng et al. 2014). Undoubtedly, the efforts and successes of urban regeneration both in Europe and China need to be acknowledged. However, reflecting their results against the objective of fostering socially integrative urban regeneration, some differentiated perspectives must be considered.

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they have been swallowed up by nearby settlements. Today, urban villages are found on both the outskirts and central areas of major Chinese cities and are administered by the village collective (Zeng 2016).

### *3.1. Challenges of Socially Integrative Urban Regeneration in Europe*

Although a number of similarities can be observed across the European states, the disparate contexts, political preferences and policy conventions lead to different approaches and forms of urban renewal (Couch et al. 2011). The context is strongly influenced by patterns of urbanization, housing types, tenure types as well as forms of governance, defined by the administrative system and institutional structures (ibid.). While recognizing these differences, some common challenges for socially integrative urban renewal can be observed: nearly all urban regeneration strategies and approaches in Europe aim to address the relevant features of a “socially integrative city”. At the same time, not all of the initial objectives can be reached. In particular, the following challenges need to be highlighted:

#### Lack of Involvement of Local Communities

Research on Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs) has revealed important territorial disparities to Western European states. In particular, there is still poor involvement of local communities in regeneration projects. It has also been found that “the regeneration projects in post-communist cities are not resolved comprehensively, i.e., that the structures, which are subject to regeneration, are addressed individually with weak relation to community needs and to the surrounding areas of a city” (Hlaváček et al. 2016). Unfortunately, there is still little awareness of the vital links between regeneration interventions, group processes and community-based identification (Heath et al. 2017).

Approaches in which “culture is seen as the main catalyst and engine of the regeneration” (Ferilli et al. 2017), termed culture-led urban transformation, can be essential to the revival of post-industrial urban areas. If culture is directly addressed in a programme of regeneration, this will have the effect of “renewing the image of the city and of its neighbourhoods, fostering the pride and sense of belonging of residents, attracting investments and tourism, improving the quality of life and social cohesion, creating new jobs in the cultural and creative sectors” (Ferilli et al. 2017). Yet, it is unclear to what extent this will impact issues of “social empowerment, social cohesion and capability building” (Ferilli et al. 2017) as crucial objectives of urban regeneration.

#### Risks of Gentrification

Successful regeneration that brings economic growth and improved living conditions often results in the gentrification and displacement of economically weak persons (Larsen and Hansen 2008). Although never intended, often state and market interact in a way that causes gentrification. The mechanisms of private property markets together with insufficient deflecting mechanism lead more or less

automatically to the replacement of vulnerable socio-economic groups (Larsen and Hansen 2008).

### Barriers for Integrated Approaches

In general, there is a widespread awareness of the necessity and potential of integrated approaches, i.e., those which address both physical and social interventions. This is also stressed by overall strategies and policies. Nevertheless, experiences gained in a number of areas have shown that such integrated approaches can face practical barriers, suggesting that the “term ‘integrated’ is more a policy-‘buzzword’ than a coherent and recognisable practice” (Aalbers and Van Beckhoven 2010).

### Private Interests vs. Public Efforts

Despite societal and political awareness of the advantages, potentials and needs of housing rehabilitation, particularly in historic city centres, the framework of liberalized markets to some extent hinders private interventions. Against this background, there is a continuously high need for public interventions to stimulate renewal activities (Cruz and de Brito 2015).

### Long-Term Support

A continuous challenge is dealing with the long-term maintenance costs, both for new public facilities as well as for any “soft” measures for capacity building, education, etc. Land management measures and the related funding schemes cover regularly only the financial efforts of land use change, but not the continuous costs of running public infrastructure, public green spaces, etc. (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2020).

### *3.2. Challenges of Socially Integrative Urban Regeneration in China*

From the perspective of fostering socially integrative cities (see relevant chapter in this book) and in response to current processes of urbanization, urban regeneration in China faces the following challenges.

### Growing Relevance of Urban Regeneration as an Urban Strategy

The economic slow-down in China is raising uncertainty about implementing the planned key infrastructure in old urban areas. Parallely, it is also depressing the number of interprovincial long-distance in-migrants from rural to urban areas (Zhu et al. 2016); this means that existing urban areas must be made more accessible to casual labourers, who generally are new migrants; as a consequence, the demand for urban renewal will rise. In addition, the so-called Millennials and Generation Z prefer to live in a more urban and cosmopolitan environment, further increasing the demand for urban renewal (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2019b).

## Increasing Costs and Efforts for Relocation

High density, poor environmental conditions, such as a lack of green spaces, rundown and narrow/less roads and inadequate urban facilities (e.g., an antiquated sewage system as well as rubbish storage and collection), in existing historic or downtown neighbourhoods make relocation increasingly difficult. Relocation costs are increasingly on the rise, prohibiting or delaying renewal measures in certain locations. While people-oriented relocation regulations (e.g., a project must be approved by 85 % of local residents in order to proceed) improved public participation, they tend to make urban renewal processes very time consuming (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2019b).

## Extensive Physical Renewal Demands.

The protection and preservation of cultural heritage in built-up areas could be contradictory to urban functional adjustment. If only a handful of buildings are worth preserving, this could fragment the renewal site and complicate the redevelopment process; it could also discourage private developers. Therefore, creative ways of conservation should be explored on a case by case basis. A less viable local environment and run-down conditions in old buildings in distressed areas make the physical upgrading more difficult and costly, particularly when the aim is to ensure the higher energy efficiency of buildings (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2019b).

## Ensuring an Efficient and Affordable Urban Transport

Essentially there are no specific policies to realize Transit Oriented Development (TOD) in the urban core; much human energy and time is wasted through poor connections to surrounding areas or buildings. There is little standardization in the practices of public-private partnership, particularly when State-Owned Enterprises (SOEs) assume the role of the private sector; this slows down the provision of much needed transportation infrastructures (Cheng et al. 2016; Cai et al. 2020). High levels of car ownership and limited parking spaces in old neighbourhoods cause dangerous situations when mixed flows of pedestrians, cyclists, courier tri-cyclists and cars utilize narrow streets; the situation is exacerbated by cars parking in narrow alleyways and on sidewalks, etc. Gated communities in most urban cores generate barriers to accessibility and hinder connectivity of the urban fabric.

## Ensuring Equal Access to Municipal Services

Most shantytowns and urban villages have poor infrastructure and sub-standard facilities due to their informal status; at the same time, they provide sleeping quarters to vulnerable groups due to the cheap living costs. The Hukou system creates an invisible wall preventing people without a permanent urban residential permit

(mainly rural migrants and young graduates) from accessing municipal services, in particular, schools, affordable housing, healthcare facilities as well as bank loans for housing.

There is a lack of diverse formal education and training systems at the community or neighbourhood scale, while private systems are likely to be prohibitively expensive to most local residents in disadvantaged areas. Although the government encourages communities to strengthen or provide education and training services locally, the high cost of customized education or training is difficult to meet, particularly as neighbourhoods usually do not have their own budget (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2019b).

#### Weakening of Local Economy and Labour Markets

High-end urban redevelopments may lead to the loss of some labour-intensive industrial/manufacturing sectors and enterprises, therefore reducing job opportunities for local residents. Regulations prohibiting any kinds of business in residential apartments prevent the growth of start-ups which emit little pollution or noise. Urban renewal may also eliminate some small local businesses and reduce the diversity of job markets by driving out lower-skilled workers who can no longer afford to live there (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2019b).

#### Lack of Addressing Identity and Social Capital

There is insufficient awareness-raising and participation of multi-stakeholders, along with limited mobilization of additional players and a lack of related events and activities, to advertise/brand the local physical heritage and its multiple values. The place-making movement is relatively new in Chinese cities. In particular, there is lack of awareness and appropriate approaches to integrate local inhabitants in renewal processes. There is a dilemma of pursuing social integration objectives while effectively maintaining the affordability in redeveloped communities (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2019b).

#### **4. Conclusions**

While urban renewal in China is widespread and frequently large scale, practitioners still suffer from a lack of good reference and experience in practice, although at the national level, China learnt quickly from its own mistakes and lessons as well as from international good practices. The shift in recent decades from the widespread demolition of historic towns and traditional city centres to a more organic approach in urban renewal practice demonstrated that China is gradually recognizing the importance and the historic value of the existing urban fabric. In particular, more attention is being paid to cultural heritage, the effective capitalization of these assets through public participation, awareness raising, smart planning, careful

implementation, clearer regulations and proactive public–private partnerships in infrastructural improvement and urban redevelopment, etc. Nevertheless, there remain new challenges in the coming transitional period, specifically, the high costs of relocation, less desirable redevelopments which lack social inclusiveness as well as ensuring “organic” environmental improvements that can exploit the value of amenities embedded in the living culture to the benefit of redeveloped communities. It is expected that a more socially integrative approach to urban renewal will become common practice in China through the new urbanization pursuit which began in 2014, focusing on quality development for a more liveable and harmonious city. This promising trend is illustrated by various national regulations and local requirements for pilot and demonstration projects in community building and place-making that have been carried out in a number of Chinese cities. However, given the tremendous challenges identified in this article, greater efforts and careful implementation are still needed for exploring and carrying out a clear roadmap guiding urban renewal practice.

Regarding urban regeneration in European cities, there exists a more or less balanced system of both top-down and bottom-up approaches: national states define the main targets while providing funding and drawing up regulations; they are supported by European funding and research programmes; and in parallel, affected municipalities/communities strongly influence the implementation of regeneration measures by helping to choose the particular neighbourhoods for upgrading as well as defining the priority topics and measures to be undertaken. Considering the several European national funding programmes addressing urban renewal in municipalities (for example, “Kvarterløft” in Denmark, “New Deal” in the UK and “Urban Restructuring” in Germany, TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2020), two main components are found to be crucial. First, funding schemes initiate actions in neighbourhoods where private and public finances are lacking in order to address individual economic interests and socio-economic demands of communities. Second, to regulate the upgrading processes and avoid segregation or displacement, it is vital to draw up accompanying legal regulations for implementation. All recent approaches have shown a great awareness of the role of local communities, inhabitants and other stakeholders to implement successful and, in particular, socially integrative projects in urban renewal. Nevertheless, there remain some basic challenges for the future, specifically, the issue of gentrification and regeneration processes that are lacking in dynamism.

In order to learn from each other, specific frame conditions need to be acknowledged (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2020): First, the fundamental difference in land ownership and land administration needs to be named. This has major impacts in urban renewal processes. Second, some differences in national policies, pathways and attitudes towards renewal have to be stated. We see contradictory

perspectives on the instruments of relocation and displacement in urban renewal and their assessment in order to support socially integrative cities. For instance, the issue of gentrification is conceptualised in completely different ways: Chinese renewal uses this in terms of a strategy to attract skilled, high-income residents and competitive businesses. In Europe, it is seen as a negative social by-product of rising housing prices and values of real estate properties in the context of urban renewal which one tries to minimise (Liu et al. 2019). Third, the dynamics in renewal differs between China and Europe, being influenced by overall political and societal goals but also challenges. Thus, testing new instruments in pilot projects is a good practice lesson from China. However, its success is associated with the country size, the political system and the centralised structure: in China, once a project becomes a pilot initiative, it usually can be a successful one, as preferential policies and extra resources will be allocated to the project, including sending supporting experts. Therefore, failure factors could be eliminated in the early stage and in the implementation process. Only successful elements will be summarized as good practice and upscaled in other places.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization: S.R. and J.C. Investigation: S.R., J.C., J.L. and M.J. Writing—Original draft preparation: S.R., J.C., J.L. and M.J. Writing—Review and editing: S.R., J.C., J.L. and M.J.

**Funding:** This article has been elaborated within the project TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA (“Transition towards urban sustainability through socially integrative cities in the EU and in China”), funded by the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under Grant Agreement No. 770141.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Abbreviations

CBER	City betterment
CEECs	Central and Eastern European countries
ERDF	European Regional Development Funds
EU	European Union
EUKN	European Urban Knowledge Network
INTERREG	key instrument of the EU supporting cooperation across borders through project funding, funded by ERDF
LIFE	EU programme for the environment and climate action
LNJST	Department of Construction of Liaoning Province (China)
MCA	Ministry of Civil Affairs (China)
MOHURD	Ministry of Housing and Urban–Rural Development (China)
PRC	People’s Republic of China
SDGs	Sustainability Development Goals
SRP	Shantytown Redevelopment Project

SRP	Shantytown Redevelopment Project
SOEs	State Owned Enterprises
URBACT	European exchange and learning programme promoting sustainable urban development
URBAN	European Community Initiative for the economic and social regeneration of cities and neighbourhoods in crisis in order to promote sustainable urban development

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