

Article

Governance Design Innovation in Urban Regeneration: An Alternative Experience from Hsinchu City

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Abstract

Urban regeneration increasingly depends on the governance mechanism that makes design-intensive change administratively possible. This paper examines a semi-formal coordination forum established in Hsinchu, Taiwan, during the mayoralty of Chih-Chien Lin (2014–2022). Utilizing elite interviews and documentary sources, the research reconstructs how the forum convened bureau heads, external consultants, designers, and other stakeholders to coordinate a portfolio of regeneration projects. The findings indicate that the forum functioned as a cross-boundary governance interface. Rather than replacing formal procedures, it operated upstream and in parallel to clarify responsibilities, mediate design judgment, enhance procurement credibility, and expedite implementation through iterative review. Furthermore, the analysis demonstrates that the forum cannot be classified within established governance design categories such as steering committee, task force, project office, or design review panel. Instead, it represents a hybrid model that integrates diverse characteristics, with its value derived from a complex micro-organization of actors and routines over time.

Keywords: urban regeneration; design governance; governance design; cross-boundary governance arrangement; public administration creativity; coordination forum; Hsinchu

1. Introduction

Regeneration represents an increasingly important pathway of urban development in many mature cities worldwide. Within these, the focus is often on retrofitting existing urban settings, upgrading infrastructure, reprogramming public spaces, and improving natural features [1–4]. Unfortunately, conditions of ecological pressure, infrastructure deterioration, demographic change, and socio-economic instability make conventional solutions or physical renewal alone insufficient [5,6]. More often than not, regeneration requires innovation across several dimensions of urban development, including the involvement of diverse stakeholders [7–9]. The challenge at stake, thus, concerns not only the definition of adequate development targets but also the governance of innovation amid urgency and socio-political complexity [6,10].

This is frequently articulated as a dilemma. Sometimes, public administrations seek to expedite projects by centralization, but this diminishes transparency, participation, or procedural confidence [11–13]. Conversely, efforts to increase stakeholders' engagement result in slower implementation, weaker alignment of projects, and a tendency towards risk-averse solutions [14–16]. Notably, if the dilemma intensifies in design-intensive, portfolio-based regeneration—a relatively common scenario nowadays—it rarely results from a lack of administrative commitment. Much more often, it arises from the coordination of political



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intent, administrative responsibility, technical expertise, as well as stakeholders' scrutiny into prompt, effective outcomes [17–19].

Anyhow, in practice, administrations do not stall before this; nor do they resolve to prioritize speed or stakeholders engagement. Rather, they try to strike a balance, often tinkering with existing administrative structures and establishing hybrid *cross-boundary governance mechanisms* [20–23]. These do not replace existing institutional bodies; instead, they attempt to compensate for structural limitations and to provide opportunities for experimentation, mediation, or coordination on a case-by-case basis [24–26]. Such mechanisms can be found in diverse global contexts, yet they vary significantly. However, they are often semi-formal in character and play a recurring role in facilitating regeneration [27,28].

In light of the current transformations in urban development, they warrant research and theorization, especially as the accelerating urban polycrisis will likely increase their presence [5,6]. Because of this, it is important to avoid rendering alternative experiences of this kind analytically invisible, as specific knowledge can contribute to enhanced adaptability of governance globally [29].

This paper, therefore, does not ask whether regeneration should be participatory, rapid, or any other specific approach. Instead, it seeks to contribute to the research on these arrangements by adopting a perspective that goes beyond established Western experiences, as the current debates on postcolonialism also remind us to take into account [30]. To this end, the paper examines recent developments in Hsinchu, Taiwan, where a *coordination forum* was established to gather experts and stakeholders in relation to a design-intensive, portfolio-based regeneration initiative.

1.1. Literature Review

Over the decades, urban governance research has progressively moved away from viewing public administrations as unified actors [31–33]. Nowadays, these are understood as complex systems involving diverse actors. Such a perspective permeates studies of how public administrations operate in networks, adopt specific management techniques, form partnerships, etc, and it helps to show how administrative coordination is not a natural given [34–36].

Collaborative governance research has further clarified how coordination depends on procedural design, facilitation, as well as trust-building [37]. System approaches to public service delivery similarly emphasize that public issues may well be produced by interactions among agencies, rules, resources, and feedback loops, rather than any isolated organizational failure [38]. On the other hand, public value research has emphasized that administrations produce public value through collaborative effort [39], while participatory debates have promoted collaborative inclusion as a development goal, but have pointed out how this can be challenging in political-administrative terms [40].

That said, due to their semi-formal character, governance mechanisms also link to informality research. In this context, various scholars have shown that informality could support governance in settings with several disconnected stakeholders, though at a risk of discretionary practices [20–23,27]. Anyhow, these studies focus on marginalization and thus offer few tools to examine how semi-formal practice might help coordination in formalized settings.

A decolonial sensibility is finally relevant. Research on governance reform in East Asia has suggested that Western benchmarks for good governance can be adopted only symbolically by the local public administrations [41–43]. Then, effective reforms rely on semi-formal collaborative arrangements that rework imported models, a condition that suggests how formality might be better understood as a variable rather than a benchmark of governance quality [44–47].

With respect to urban regeneration per se, urban design governance studies offer a framework for analyzing how public authorities and other stakeholders shape the built environment through design processes [48–50]. This includes not only formal tools—such as regulation and planning control—but also informal tools—such as soft powers, design reviews, design leadership—as well as other governance mechanisms that influence how design is framed, assessed, revised, legitimized, and finally implemented [51–53].

This tool-based perspective helps to clarify that design quality is not explained by professional authorship alone. It also depends on how administrations structure intermediate moments when design is defined, tested, and negotiated [50–56]. In this respect, design review and advisory systems are central. However, recent studies have shown that these are not neutral but driven by formal policy instruments as much as everyday practices of interpretation, mediation, assessment, and adjustment [55,57]. Moreover, if the studies point to the importance of design leadership—suggesting that it should be understood as a dimension of urban design governance—they have also shown how design governance cannot be understood apart from the local planning, administrative, and management cultures [58,59].

All of this points toward a very practical layer of regeneration governance that is often under-theorized, i.e., the routines by which the public administrations transform design ambition into deliverable projects [60,61]. Contributing to this argument, regeneration research has shown how integrative regeneration strategies require public-sector actors to transform strategic concepts into concrete actions despite conflicting demands. It also highlights the importance of conflict resolution when projects impact daily urban life and underscores the role of municipal officials in concluding public-led regeneration projects while balancing participation, constraints, and implementation pressures [62].

On the other hand, this practical layer warrants attention because research indicates that, if specialized routines can enhance spatial quality, they can also influence professional judgment and aesthetic standards, ultimately limiting decision-making [12,13]. Justice-oriented critiques caution that the pursuit of “good design” may also result in exclusionary or unjust outcomes if design governance does not address distributive consequences, user needs, affordability, displacement, or participation [63,64]. Moreover, studies on experimental urban governance demonstrate that innovation-driven informal municipal practices may prioritize visible outputs and rapid implementation, but neglect democratic procedures and public-good justification [65,66].

Within this framework, participation must be positioned carefully. Recent research on citizen participation and deliberative governance shows that participation can improve decision-making only if meaningfully designed, institutionally embedded, and connected to actual decisions [14–16]. Collaboration and boundary work matter most if they enable stakeholders to share information, negotiate, and influence project framing, rather than merely react to pre-established proposals [67,68].

In response to the question of governance design and the micro-organization of administrative routines, this body of literature can be analyzed in relation to the diverse case studies it draws on, which represent a wide range of governance mechanisms. Using the metrics commonly applied within, several categories and tentative families are identified, particularly when synonymous terms are consolidated, as demonstrated in Table 1.

Table 1. Cross-boundary governance mechanisms as in the literature (families by the author).

Typical Actors	Function/Temporal Frame	Typical Outputs	Authority/Formality	Literature of Reference
Family 1: Executive-coordination governance mechanism				
1.1. Steering committee/group: Senior recurring body that sets direction and arbitrates escalated issues				
political principals, bureau heads, sponsors, consultants	strategic guidance, arbitration/medium-long	priorities, sign-offs, escalations	coordinating, decisive/medium	Karlsen 2021 [69]; Müller et al. 2016 [70]
1.2. Interdepartmental coordination committee: Cross-bureau body aligning mandates, budgets, sequencing, and regulations				
multiple departments, finance, legal, utilities	horizontal integration/medium-long, standing	shared positions, sequencing plans	coordinating/medium-high	Aoki et al. 2024 [18]; Syarien & Samarah 2023 [19]
1.3. Task force/team: Time-bounded group assembled for a specific urgent problem				
small mixed membership	rapid problem-solving/short	action plans, unblock decisions	operative, recommending/low-medium	Aoki et al. 2024 [18]; Syarien & Samarah 2023 [19]
1.4. Working group: Specialist group preparing options and resolving detailed issues				
officers, engineers, planners, consultants	technical preparation/short-medium	options papers, technical notes	advisory, preparatory/low-medium	Aoki et al. 2024 [18]; Syarien & Samarah 2023 [19]
1.5. Project/programme board: Oversight body for one or a set of projects				
sponsors, PMs, senior officials	governance, risk, resource alignment/medium-long	stage approvals, risk decisions	mixed/medium	Karlsen 2020 [69]; Müller et al. 2016 [70]
1.6. Project/programme office: Dedicated unit coordinating schedules, dependencies, reporting, documentation				
PM staff, analysts, liaisons	integration and monitoring/medium-long	dashboards, minutes, issue logs	soft/medium-high	Müller et al. 2016 [70]; GTAC 2016 [71]
1.7. Delivery/implementation unit: Executive unit focused on follow-up and bottleneck removal				
executive staff, analysts, bureau liaisons	acceleration and accountability/medium	delivery reviews, escalation memos	escalator, operative/medium-high	Mansoor & Williams 2024 [38]; Lafuente et al. 2018 [72]
1.8. Lead/hub organization: Appointed organization acting as central broker for the administrative network				
dominant bureau or agency plus partners	centralized coordination/variable	convening, resource control, joint strategy	coordinating, operative/medium-high	Provan & Kenis 2008 [28]
1.9. Network administrative organization/backbone support unit: Separate entity created to coordinate network activities				
dedicated staff, sometimes a board	convening, administration, measurement/medium-long	agendas, reports, aligned activities	coordinating/medium-high, high	Kania & Kramer 2011 [73]; Provan & Kenis 2008 [28]
1.10. Partnership board/regeneration partnership: Cross-sector board pooling public, private, and civic resources around a programme				
government, developers, NGOs, community reps	shared vision, resource mobilization/medium-long	MoUs, joint programmes, investment alignment	mixed/medium	UN-Habitat 2022 [3]; Kort et al. 2011 [35]
1.11. Special purpose vehicle/development corporation: Legal vehicle created to finance and deliver redevelopment				
appointed board, executive staff	land, finance, delivery/long	acquisitions, development packages, contracts	decisive, operative/high	Mitchell 2024 [74]; Praharaj 2018 [75]

Table 1. Cont.

Typical Actors	Function/Temporal Frame	Typical Outputs	Authority/Formality	Literature of Reference
Family 2: Advisory-deliberative governance mechanism				
2.1. Design review/expert panel: Independent panel offering peer review before or alongside formal approval				
external architects, urban designers, planners	design scrutiny/ recurring, episodic	review reports, recommendations	advisory/ medium	Urban Maestro 2020 [51]; Design Council 2019 [52]
2.2. Design advisory committee/design commission: Semi-standing expert group accompanying a project iteratively				
experts plus officers	ongoing design guidance/ medium-long	iterative feedback, design principles	advisory/ medium	Urban Maestro 2020 [51]; Design Council 2019 [52]
2.3. City architect/state architect/design champion office: Design leadership office advocating quality across the administration				
small expert team	leadership, persuasion, crossbureau advice/long	guidance, advocacy, curated processes	soft/ medium	Bento 2022 [53]
2.4. Stakeholder/coordination forum: Recurring platform for organized interests to exchange information and negotiate				
bureaus, utilities, NGOs, business, residents	dialogue, trust-building, bargaining/ medium-long	shared positions, issue maps	advisory, coordinating/ low-medium	Follador et al. 2021 [37]; Ansell & Gash 2008 [24]
2.5. Citizen advisory committee/community advisory board: Resident-facing body giving place-based advice				
residents, local associations, sometimes officers	local legitimacy and feedback/ medium-long	comments, priorities, monitoring input	advisory/ medium	Stout 2014 [76]
2.6. Collaborative workshop: Facilitated multi-stakeholder sessions for joint problem framing and negotiation				
residents, officials, planners, NGOs	co-definition, consultation, consensus/ short, repeated	jointly shaped proposals, consensus points	advisory, preparatory/ low-medium	Wang et al. 2024 [62]; Li et al. 2020 [68]
2.7. Design charrette: Intensive, design-led workshop rapidly generating spatial options				
community members, designers, officials	rapid co-design/ very short, intensive	sketches, scenarios, principles	advisory/ low	Lennertz & L. 2006 [77]
2.8. Citizens' jury/mini-public jury: Small deliberative body of selected citizens hearing evidence on one question				
randomly selected citizens, facilitators, experts	deliberative legitimacy/ short/intensive	verdicts, recommendations	advisory, agenda-setting/ medium	OECD 2020 [40]
2.9. Citizens' assembly: Larger, longer mini-public designed for learning, deliberation, and collective proposals				
selected citizens, facilitators, experts	broad deliberation/ medium	proposals, voting outcomes, reports	advisory, agenda-setting/ medium	OECD 2020 [40]
2.10. Planning cell/consensus conference: Structured mini-public combining citizen learning, expert interrogation, and collective judgement				
selected citizens, facilitators, experts	public reasoning on technical or contested issues/ medium	citizen report, recommendations	advisory/ medium	OECD 2020 [40]

Table 1. *Cont.*

Typical Actors	Function/Temporal Frame	Typical Outputs	Authority/Formality	Literature of Reference
Family 3: Experimental intermediary governance mechanism				
3.1. Urban living lab/city lab/field lab/test-bed: Real-world-like experimental platform for testing and co-creation				
public-private-people partnerships	experimentation and learning/medium	pilots, prototypes, evaluations	experimental, advisory/variable	Chronéer et al. 2019 [78]; Voytenko et al. 2016 [79]
3.2. Urban transition arena/community arena: Network of stakeholders shaping longer-term transformation agendas				
innovators, officials, experts, civic actors	agenda setting, visioning/medium-long	transition agendas, coalitions	advisory, strategic/low-medium	Loorbach 2010 [80]
3.3. Neighbourhood transition lab/policy lab/innovation lab: Bounded setting for prototyping interventions or governance tools				
interdisciplinary teams, agencies, community actors	prototyping, iteration/short-medium	small-scale trials, lessons	experimental/low-medium	McGann et al. 2018 [66]; Scholl & Kemp 2016 [81]
3.4. Urban regeneration station/neighborhood hub: Place-based initiative combining communication, participation, and experimental action				
municipal staff, community groups, visitors	activation, mediation, local interface/medium-long	events, exhibitions, workshops, local networks	mixed/medium	Chiu et al. 2019 [82]; Park et al. 2023 [83]; Wang 2019 [84]; Lin et al. 2019 [85]
3.5. Intermediary/broker organization: Appointed organization that translates, brokers, negotiates, and builds capacity across boundaries				
NGOs, universities, quasi-public bodies	mediation, translation, capacity building/variable	partnerships, knowledge transfer, negotiation	soft/variable	Kivimaa et al. 2019 [86]; Kim et al. 2021 [87]; Kania & Kramer 2011 [73]

The breadth of this tentative repertoire suggests that cross-boundary governance mechanisms are not marginal anomalies but a relevant site of governance design. Yet, knowledge gaps emerge. First, even though urban design governance studies have developed strong accounts of soft powers, design review, and design leadership, there is a demand for theory regarding the routinization through which administrations transform design ambitions into projects. That is, governance mechanisms are more and more documented, but they remain weakly theorized as administrative interfaces in their own right.

Second, the field is marked by some comparative asymmetries. If East Asian cases show that design governance and regeneration governance are often mediated through locally specific arrangements that cannot be fully understood through Anglo-American or European categories alone, governance arrangements are rarely documented at equivalent empirical depth across contexts. This is especially relevant for non-Western experiences, which often enter the literature through area-specific debates. That is, the issue is not their absence, but the lack of comparative studies that enable information-rich non-Western cases to contribute to conceptual refinement of established knowledge, instead of being considered exotic deviations.

As a consequence, it is often unclear whether newly observed mechanisms could be best understood as a variant of known categories or as configurations that merit ad-hoc conceptualization.

1.2. Contribution and Structure of the Paper

In response to this, however, the paper does not attempt a symmetrical multi-case comparison, at risk of diluting analytical focus. Rather, it presents a structured, focused,

and literature-based conceptual comparison centered on a defined non-Western case study. Through this, the study offers a set of interrelated contributions:

- Empirically, it reconstructs emergence, development, and the later operations of a hybrid cross-boundary governance arrangement within urban regeneration;
- Conceptually, it checks analytical categories for describing hybrid cross-boundary governance arrangements in the context of urban regeneration;
- Epistemically, it brings a non-Western experience in dialogue with the scholarship on governance design and urban regeneration.

To achieve these contributions, the remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 outlines research design, empirical materials, and methodological approach. Section 3 examines the governance arrangement at stake in the case study. Then, the coda of the paper situates the research results within the comparative framework and concludes by discussing specificities and analytical safeguards.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design and Focus

Within the case study, the paper focuses on the weekly mayor-led coordination forum that emerged as part of the design-intensive, portfolio-based urban regeneration agenda (Figure 1) developed during the double-term mayoralty of Chih-Chien Lin in Hsinchu (December 2014–July 2022). On the other hand, the research behind the paper adopts a qualitative, theory-building, single-case design, and understands the coordination forum as an information-rich non-Western focal case of hybrid *cross-boundary governance mechanisms* not yet documented by the international urban governance scholarship.

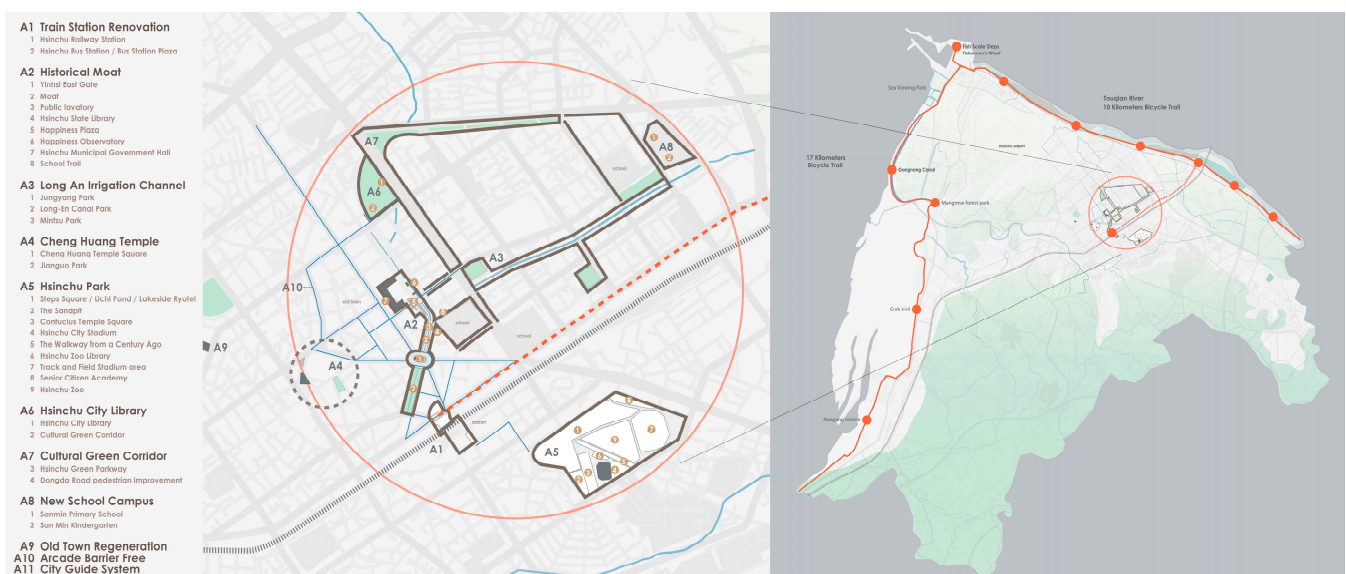


Figure 1. Infographics of Hsinchu major regeneration projects during Lin's mayoralty, developed by the city government and later redrawn by the author. On the left, the city area with project list; on the right, the hinterland with indications of regenerated landscape sites and novel waterfront bikeways. Original image publicly available, gathered during fieldwork.

The temporal boundary of the case study is substantive rather than merely archival. The bound period from December 2014 to July 2022 corresponds to the political cycle in which the forum emerged, stabilized, and operated under a single mayoral leadership. Regardless of the forum being dismantled afterward, this temporal boundary enables reconstruction of the arrangement's trajectory from emergence to routinization without

conflating it with political restructuring. Although empirical materials collected through June 2023 also provide information about retrospective interpretations and later urban developments, the focus remains on the forum as developed during Lin’s mayoralty.

The unit of analysis is the forum itself, conceptualized as a governance mechanism that integrates routine municipal administration, executive arbitration, and professional design expertise. Within this, the study traces several embedded sub-units, including emergence, routines, roles in project initiation, contributions to cross-bureau coordination, and vulnerabilities associated with the semi-formal status.

As the study adopts a single-case design, comparative leverage is achieved at a later moment through literature-based comparison rather than symmetrical reconstruction of additional cases. Thus, the analysis focuses on analytical generalization and mechanism reconstruction rather than econometric impact estimation or statistical generalization.

2.2. Research Questions

In particular, the study is structured around three research questions:

- What factors led to the emergence of the forum, and under which conditions did it become a recurring interface among planning, design, and implementation?
- Which practices enabled the forum to coordinate bureaus, structure design review, and finally support design-intensive, portfolio-based urban regeneration?
- To what extent can the forum be characterized using literature-based categories of governance mechanisms? And, which features warrant specific conceptualization?

Collectively, these questions frame urban regeneration not only as an issue of policy agenda or project portfolio, but also the micro-organization of governance routines.

2.3. Empirical Materials

The empirical materials include semi-structured elite interviews accompanied by a documentary corpus, as shown by Table 2.

Table 2. Overview of empirical materials and their contribution.

Materials	n.	Selection	Contribution
Executives interviews	3	Actors with direct authority over the forum or over the regeneration agenda	Origins of the forum, executive arbitration, mandate, inter-bureau coordination
External consultants interviews	2	Standing advisors involved in review, mediation, or jury/procurement support	Hybrid advisory role, design review routines, credibility effects, interface work
Design professionals interviews	5	Architects and landscape architects engaged through projects shaped by the forum	Project initiation, briefs, review experience, implementation support, perceived gains or risks
Documentary corpus	-	Municipal publications, award submissions, exhibition materials, shared on fieldwork	Project identification, actor mapping, claims corroboration, public framing of regeneration

In particular, ten in-person interviews were conducted between May 2021 and June 2023 by the author and one native Chinese-speaking research assistant—for linguistic support and contextual clarification. These interviews involved diverse actors occupying different positions in the forum: leadership and senior administration, external consultants, and design professionals involved in commissioned projects. This composition aimed to

capture perspectives from those who convened, mediated, and experienced the forum from different institutional locations.

Interviewees were first selected through purposive, role-based sampling, with some reputational and snowball sampling added later. The initial contact list was compiled from public sources related to Hsinchu City's regeneration, including releases by the generalist press, municipal publications, and project publications. This sampling aimed to cover the widest range of institutional roles, not demographic diversity, because the study focused on governance structures rather than distribution of opinions.

Since the elite network studied was small and politically sensitive, confidentiality was prioritized. For each interview, the research log noted the person's role, connection to the forum, interview date, and settings. Personal details like age or education were not reported, since they were not central to the analysis and increased the risk of identification. Identification was allowed only if the interviewee role and actions were already public before the interview.

The ten interviews elaborated on a shared semi-structured protocol that allowed for comparison while also enabling role-specific probing. This protocol addressed ten core themes, i.e., (1) respondent's role and access into the regeneration process of Hsinchu; (2) perceived public works governance challenges prior to the forum; (3) forum's origins; (4) forum membership, frequency, and meeting routines; (5) project initiation, briefing, and programming in relation to the forum; (6) procurement credibility; (7) interdepartmental coordination in relation to the forum; (8) relations between internal coordination, public scrutiny, and stakeholder involvement; (9) conflicts and bottlenecks; and (10) perceived achievements, limitations, and transferability. Additional questions were tailored to each interviewee role in the forum but were generally prompted to reconstruct specific episodes, decisions, and procedural sequences.

All interviews were audio- or audio-video-recorded with informed consent and subsequently transcribed for later analysis, resulting in a final archive of approximately 12 h of transcribed interview time. The interviews were conducted in settings that enabled clear audio recording and could be conducive to extended conversations, e.g., City Hall offices, university offices, designers' offices, and reserved meeting locations.

The documentary corpus was assembled to structure the research and complement the interviews, including municipal publications, project portfolios, award-submission materials, exhibition and communication documents, publicly circulated infographics, and project documents obtained during fieldwork. Among the others, the Hsinchu City publication "Transforming City by Foot" [88] and materials from the monograph exhibition on Hsinchu regeneration, "Architecture in Social Dialogue", by the Architekturmuseum of Munich Technical University, Germany, were used to establish chronology, identify projects, verify their sequencing, and assess interview narratives against documentary evidence. However, these were treated as corroborating material rather than as archival records of the forum.

2.4. Methodological Approach

The analysis followed an abductive approach in three progressive stages. Initially, empirical materials were used to reconstruct the chronology of the regeneration process together with the forum's emergence, development, and operation. The interviews were then coded for internally recurring themes, i.e., administrative fragmentation, executive arbitration, consultant mediation, design review, procurement process, public scrutiny, and institutional risk. These themes were later organized into higher-order analytical dimensions, i.e., conditions of emergence, operating mechanisms, organizational effects, safeguards.

The inferential strategy adopted was mechanism-centered. Rather than evaluating whether the forum caused certain regeneration outcomes in a statistical sense, the study examined how the forum reconfigured the interface among political direction, administrative responsibility, and design expertise. Empirical claims were retained when supported by triangulation, while claims based on a single perspective were reported as perceptions.

A last analytical step involved the structured, focused, literature-based conceptual comparison. Rather than comparing the case study with an external sample of equally reconstructed cases, this was used to assess whether it could be adequately classified within existing categories, as synthesized in Table 1. The comparison was asymmetrical by design: the case study was information-rich and reconstructed from primary material; adjacent cases were drawn from available studies as comparator types. It is important to note that from the repertoire, cases adjacent to the case study were selected on the basis of resemblance, and thus included the likes of executive-coordination bodies, task forces, stakeholder forums, design review advisory panels, collaborative workshops, and project offices. These were retained not as equivalent external cases, but as plausible rival classifications.

The comparison was first structured around a set of metrics commonly used in the literature. As presented in Table 1, these included membership, primary function, temporal frame and meeting cadence, typical outputs, and degree of authority and formality. Additional criteria following the case study analysis were incorporated at a second moment, including the scope of coordination, mode of expert involvement, and relation to formal administrative procedures. These were added due to the frequent discussion in the interviews. As a note, if the literature did not provide enough evidence regarding these in relation to a comparator type, these were classified as indeterminate.

2.5. Research Bias Mitigation

The study encountered typical challenges associated with elite interview research, including retrospective rationalization, selective memory, and the propensity for official narratives to exaggerate coherence or success. To address these, the research design incorporated role diversity within the interview sample—in this respect, the inclusion of professionals and external consultants, in addition to public officials, aimed to minimize dependence on a single institutional perspective—then systematic cross-checking of the accounts, attention to the disagreements and asymmetries, and distinction of descriptive evidence, interpretive inference, and normative claims.

2.6. Research Limitations

As mentioned above, the study adopted a single-case, theory-building approach. Its primary contribution is analytical specification rather than statistical representativeness. The case study is pertinent to design-intensive, portfolio-based urban regeneration where interdepartmental coordination, executive sponsorship, and professional intermediation are central. The comparative analysis must thus be interpreted as conceptual positioning rather than comprehensive empirical benchmarking.

Also, the case study is reconstructed from primary interviews and documentary sources, while comparator types are derived from published accounts of varying levels of detail. Consequently, the comparison facilitates category refinement and a bounded analytical generalization, rather than asserting exhaustive equivalence across contexts.

A further limitation relates to the boundaries of available evidence. As the study elaborates on elite interviews and uneven documentary sources, it is more appropriate for reconstructing governance mechanisms than evaluating any distributive, social, or economic effects. Specifically, the study does not estimate the causal impact of the forum on

urban regeneration, nor does it provide comprehensive post-2022 institutional evaluation of the case study.

3. Results

This section builds upon the study by presenting the research results, focusing on the emergence, stabilization, and operation of the forum. In particular, it also examines the organizational effects of the forum's establishment, focusing on how it reconfigured relations among political direction, administrative responsibility, and design expertise.

3.1. Before the Forum

The interviews describe the average public administration in the context of the case study as structurally uncoordinated, but not incompetent. Bureaus focus on legal duties, but interdepartmental projects—especially those involving public space, landscape, and regeneration—fall into unclear jurisdictions. Due to this, interdepartmental barriers and poor communication tend to cause procedural bottlenecks.

This deficit is compounded by the civil service system's stability. One interview noted that mayors can make only minor personnel changes upon taking office, partly because the system has fixed positions that cannot be reassigned without previous vacancies.

Expanding on these challenges, another interview described the situation more starkly: poor coordination makes the bureaus act like "separate governments". So, coordination is "forced up" in the governance chain to a small executive group, which often becomes overwhelmed by the tasks.

Also, the interviews highlight a second cluster of constraints: procurement routines tend to privilege procedural defensibility over innovation. An interviewee argued about the need for system-level reforms, including revision to the bidding practices. He pointed to "moving away from a choice for the lowest bid to the most advantageous one," adding that talented architects and engineers avoid public sector commissions because they are treated "like vendors". Further complicating the situation, interviews emphasized that procurement routines descend from national legal frameworks that local administrations cannot directly adjust.

According to another interviewee, procurement challenges also reflect reputational issues. Wrong composition of the public bid juries raises concerns about bids' credibility. Finally, administrations do not provide time, resources, or constructive feedback during project development, nor do they provide support during construction management, thereby deterring the recruitment of professional talent.

Finally, the interviews indicate chronic deficits during early-stage programming, including the scoping of projects, feasibility studies, stakeholder coordination, and brief stabilization. Programming time is structurally limited, most often compressed by electoral timelines. Elaborating on this, an interviewee highlighted that, since budgets are set without proper early-stage programming, they are often "too little" or "too much". Consequently, average mayors—motivated to finish projects within their term—tend to prefer procedural defensibility over innovation to avoid political-legal risks.

3.2. Enter the Forum

According to the interviews, the forum was born as a deliberate response to a specific issue, i.e., the difficulty of executing interdepartmental projects. That is, it was first intended to integrate bureaus and allow the mayor to assign responsibilities.

At a later stage, the semi-institutionalization of the forum became tied to the issue of recruiting professional talent in the design field. Indeed, since an improved jury system

was needed to address reputational issues, the interviews indicate that the mayor sought respected consultants, knowing that, without them on board, “talents will not bid”.

These consultants required a weekly meeting with the mayor as a condition to help. In particular, their agreement depended upon the mayor personally chairing it as public works review, and this finally became integrated within the forum. Then, progressively, the forum became a cross-boundary decision-making arena, gathering stakeholders for the regeneration portfolio review with regularity.

If we look at the core characteristics that have consolidated in the forum, we can say that, first, it brought together the executive leaders and bureau heads, but also gathered consultants, designers, and, when needed, construction teams.

Second, it turned the consultants into a standing advisory group, rather than using them as occasional opinionists. Even though “outside the system”, these well-regarded experts had the chance to stand between government and the designers, offering credibility to the former and support to the latter.

Third, the interviews describe the forum as dynamic and cross-functional, but, most of all, an iterative process, ultimately making the government a trustworthy interlocutor through such iterative dimension. In this framework, projects could be contested by the government officials, as the consultants mediated, while the mayor’s presence enabled immediate decision-making. Despite being open to contestation, interviews confirm that the forum secured alignment between project and improved lateral problem-solving.

Finally, the forum’s actions were not limited to project monitoring; it also served as an upstream platform for project initiation. A consultant described how possible projects were first framed in the forum through stakeholders’ input, alternatives, and site-based assessment. Then, after clarifying funding, vision, and feasibility, the design commission proceeded. This helps explain why the forum had some leverage over implementation speed and project quality: it intervened at the “source interface” where political intent, bureaucratic routines, and professional expertise converge in the inception of project briefs.

If we look at the forum design, this is situated in-between a formal municipal body and an external advisory practice, blending organizational informality with institutional stability. The interviews frame this as a workaround. Since bureaus naturally tend to act as “separate governments”, the forum “helped” integration since it remained “an informal mechanism, not truly a formalized part of government.”

Then, the forum bridged the public–professional divide through hybrid advisory. Indeed, the consultants were neither internal public officials nor were they hired through a typical outsourcing arrangement. Interviews describe them as “not a part of the government”, but crucial intermediaries in the mayor’s decisions. Additionally, if some change was legally unattainable—such as for centrally controlled procurement rules—interviews stress that the consultants played a “patching” role by enhancing credibility, framing pre-planning, and offering real-time support, including revising designers’ contracts and helping to manage the budget flexibility as the projects evolved.

Finally, there was no extralegal governance in the forum but rather an “other place” for decision-making, where a range of stakeholders and mediators could be consistently assembled over time, as summarized in Table 3. The interviews identify quality gains in procurement credibility and pre-planning discipline. However, one interviewee also noted that the forum’s semi-formality posed legitimacy risks as it concentrated power, which made it politically fragile.

Table 3. Hsinchu’s coordination forum, as depicted through the structure of Table 1.

Typical Actors	Function/Temporal Frame	Typical Outputs	Authority/Formality
-Hsinchu Coordination Forum: Ongoing Decision Interface for Design-Intensive Portfolio-Based Regeneration			
mayor, bureau heads, standing external consultants, designers (contractors and other stakeholders, as needed)	coordination, arbitration, design review, project initiation, and implementation alignment/routinized, high-frequency (weekly) throughout the whole mayoral term	responsibility assignments, design revisions, project sequencing, procurement/jury support, implementation follow-up, shared design standards	endowed with pragmatic authority through executive convening power and repeated operations/medium (semi-formal)

3.3. Organizational Effects

The interviews suggest that the forum’s effect was mainly organizational. Rather than bypassing formal procedures, it altered the approach to addressing relevant issues. In particular, the interviews collectively point to changes in relation to departmental silo, project speed, a lack of coordination, and reluctance to pursue innovation.

First, the issue of departmental silos was addressed not through structural merger but through recurrent arbitration under conditions of shared visibility. By consistently convening bureau heads and requiring real-time clarification of issues under the mayor’s purview, the forum transformed ambiguously shared problems into work packages with defined responsibilities. This reduced the transaction costs of negotiations between bureaus.

Notably, one interviewee observed that the forum required two years to achieve effective coordination. Over time, repeated exposure to the forum reshaped tacit procedures and bureau heads learned that interdependencies would be identified and interface problems would no longer remain unaddressed.

Then, with respect to portfolio synchronization, the forum cadence created a shared rhythm and mitigated uneven pacing of fragmented project pipelines. Before, projects drifted due to bureaus applying different timing, varying readiness to act, and differing interpretations of project phasing. The forum addressed this by instituting predictable checkpoints at which projects were reviewed collectively under consistent executive and professional oversight.

Consequently, the forum facilitated cross-project trade-offs, preventing resolution through delays or informal priority rankings. Additionally, it promoted standardization across projects, as collective review fostered a shared understanding of project quality. This established a stable environment in which decisions could accumulate, rather than be repeatedly revisited.

A third effect pertained to development speed. The forum changed projects speed by shifting scrutiny to earlier stages of development and implementing an iterative process, rather than reducing oversight. Delays between interdependent approvals were replaced with high-frequency reviews. This also enhanced opportunities for evaluation, critique, and correction, which were accepted by the professionals since consultants contributed a sense of legitimacy and respectability.

Notably, in the interviews, reference to legal-political risk is used to explain why increased procedural speed did not lead to careless execution. Since forum participants recognized potential negative consequences, project acceleration was feasible only when accompanied by robust oversight, thus rendering expedited decision-making publicly defensible.

A fourth effect pertained to innovation. The interviews consistently indicate that public procurement incentivizes defensibility and risk aversion, usually discouraging innovation. Rather than attempting to change procurement law, the forum sought to alter the institutional conditions that influence whether ambitious design initiatives can progress through the pipeline.

First, the forum enhanced the public administration's programming capacity, which reduced subsequent rework and protected design intent from unforeseen administrative changes. Second, the forum improved procurement credibility, particularly through the consultants' legitimacy, directly influencing whether a professional could view the public commissions as worthwhile. Third, the forum maintained implementation control by ensuring executive oversight and consultant-led critique, thereby reducing compromise.

4. Discussion

The previous section reconstructed the forum as a governance mechanism through which the mayor, bureau heads, external consultants, designers, and other stakeholders repeatedly and collectively addressed the project portfolio. The present section uses this information to develop comparison as the means by which the case study becomes conceptually legible, while avoiding premature assimilation into established governance design categories.

4.1. Comparative Positioning

The comparator types referenced are those identified in the literature review and methods section. Each shares certain characteristics with the forum, yet the forum condenses the functions that are typically distributed across multiple organizational arrangements, as can be seen in Table 4.

In conclusion, the comparison does not reveal a missing category, but a compound configuration that integrates elements from several categories without being reducible to them. Consequently, first, the Hsinchu forum should not be understood as a deficit model. Then, its distinctiveness lies in a specific combination of authority, frequency, expertise, and procedural adjacency that enabled the forum to function within formal municipal government while addressing limitations that formal procedures alone could not resolve. For this reason, the forum cannot be adequately classified as a steering committee, a task force, a project office, a design review panel, etc., even though it partially resembles each of these.

In particular, the Hsinchu forum points to a peculiar form of institutional adjacency: it operated upstream of, and alongside, formal administrative procedures, without replacing procurement rules, statutory approvals, budgetary authorization, or bureau mandates. In this sense, it resembles a complementary or accommodating arrangement. Indeed, it helped formal structures function under conditions for which those structures were insufficiently equipped, but its legitimacy depended on remaining connected to formal authorization and public accountability. This clarifies its semi-formality and suggests that its quality derived less from opacity than from its intermediate positioning between bureaucratic routine and professional design expertise.

However, the forum differs from institutional bricolage. It certainly recombined elements. However, its significance does not lie only in pragmatic recombination. What distinguishes it is a semi-stabilized governance routine.

Table 4. Comparison of selected governance mechanisms according to additional criteria.

Scope of Coordination	Expert Involvement	Formal Procedure Relation	Case Study Difference	Literature Addenda
-Hsinchu coordination forum				
regeneration portfolio	design-mediated deliberation; consultants act as mediators between government and designers; design tools and site-evidence as references	does not replace legal procedures; operates upstream and alongside them, feeding procurement, review, budget, and implementation	-	-
-Steering committee/group				
usually defined by mandate, sector, project, or issue of management	expertise may be represented, but is normally subordinated to committee mandate and procedure	embedded in formal administrative structures and recognized procedural channels	the forum appeared committee-like, but lacked fully codified status; and lacked formal mandate	-
-Task force				
usually bounded problem	expertise may be included, but is tied to solving the bounded problem; not necessarily design-mediated	works beside existing procedures to address a specific problem; is not a recurring interface	the forum was not temporary or single-problem oriented; it later became a recurring decision arena	-
-Project/programme office				
usually regeneration program or event-led transformation	design expertise may be institutionalized inside the office or linked to its mandate	operates as part of the formal administrative or quasi-administrative structure	the forum relied on leadership practice, convening stability, and external expert mediation, instead of formal mandate	García 2004 [89]; Marshall 2000 [90]; Essex and Chalkley 1998 [91]
-Design review/advisory panel				
usually single project, plan, or family of schemes; not usually a regeneration portfolio	design expertise is central; however, it is peer review or advice rather than mediation among stakeholders	operates before or with formal approval; may shape planning, but has no direct responsibility for, or governance over, implementation	the forum included design review, but exceeded the design-review-panel model in outcomes and responsibilities	Carmona 2019 [4]; Carmona 2017 [48]
-Stakeholder/coordination forum				
issue-based, area-based, or programme-based; usually broader than workshop but not portfolio-governing	expertise may contribute to discussion, but this is one element rather than the operating principle	may shape planning or policy, but procedural coupling is context-dependent, and, if not specified, indeterminate	the forum was an interface for executive-design decision rather than a deliberative arena for organized interests	Emerson et al. 2012 [25]; Innes & Booher 2010 [16]

Table 4. *Cont.*

Scope of Coordination	Expert Involvement	Formal Procedure Relation	Case Study Difference	Literature Addenda
-Collaborative workshop				
usually single project, site, local issue, or consultation	design may structure facilitation, but expertise is used to support participation instead of executive interface	usually external-facing and upstream of formal decisions; may inform later planning or design procedures	the forum involved external connection and participation, but was primarily internal decision infrastructure	-

The case can also be read through the lens of metagovernance. This refers to the steering of governance networks through framing, facilitation, institutional design, and management of interaction [92]. The forum adds a design-intensive specification to this. Design tools and practices such as site visits functioned as boundary objects. The consultants operated as boundary actors, translating between the administration and the professional design field. Yet, unlike a boundary organization in the formal sense [93], the forum was not a separate institution. Its function was maintained relationally through the forum and politically through the mayoral chair.

Notably, temporality represents the most distinctive aspect. The weekly cadence should be regarded as an intentional element of governance design rather than an incidental feature. The repetition of meetings altered the sequence of decision-making. Acceleration was achieved not by reducing reviews, but by shortening decision cycles, which ultimately became preventive and cumulative. However, this interpretation should remain bounded. While the forum enhanced the rhythm of internal coordination and professional scrutiny, it did not inherently ensure broader democratic inclusion or long-term social impact. Furthermore, the forum did not primarily serve as a civic deliberative arena and therefore does not constitute a case of collaborative planning or substantiate claims that public participation could be deepened or rendered more consequential.

4.2. *Impact Assessment, Transferability, and Implications*

4.2.1. *Impact Assessment*

As aforementioned, this study does not estimate the causal effect of the forum on socio-economic, environmental, or distributive outcomes. An econometric model is not employed, as the available material lacks a longitudinal counterfactual, comparable control cases, standardized project-level outcome indicators, and resident-level survey data. Therefore, the impacts discussed are limited to process and governance outcomes. These should not be interpreted as evidence of broader social benefit. Determining whether the forum improved environmental quality, social inclusion, distributive justice, citizen satisfaction, etc, requires further research, as showcased in Table 5.

4.2.2. *Transferability and Safeguards*

Transferability is significantly constrained, particularly given the study's limitations. Since the forum must be regarded as a mechanism rather than a template, its applicability depends on whether other cities encounter similar coordination challenges, including regeneration managed as a portfolio rather than as isolated projects, departmental jurisdictions fragmented or overlapping, design quality holding political significance but procurement practices prioritizing defensibility and risk aversion, implementation occurring within compressed political and budgetary cycles, and professional trust in public commissions being tenuous. In the absence of these, the forum may even be counterproductive. For

cities with established interdepartmental protocols and reliable procurement systems, introducing a semi-formal forum could lead to redundancy. Also, in contexts with weak legal frameworks, absent accountability systems, or unchecked executive authority, it may exacerbate opacity and power concentration.

Table 5. Impact assessment for the case study.

Impact Domain	Scope	Evidence	Untested Scope	Possible Future Research
Coordination capacity	whether the forum changed how bureaus interacted, allocated responsibility, and escalated problems	Interviews indicate that recurrent meetings reduced silo effects, and clarified responsibilities	whether coordination improved relative to comparable cities without such a forum	comparative inter-city study; issue-resolution timelines; network analysis of bureau interaction
Design-process quality	whether the forum protected design intent, review, procurement support, and implementation follow-up	interviews and documents suggest more programming, more credible juries, iterative review, and later support	whether resulting spaces were measurably higher quality for users	post-occupancy evaluation; design-quality audits; expert review panels; user satisfaction surveys
Implementation acceleration	whether the forum shortened decision cycles by moving scrutiny upstream and making review iterative	the cadence and portfolio review structure suggest faster problem identification and follow-up	whether total project delivery time was reduced compared with a counterfactual	project-level timeline dataset; before/after comparison; matched-case comparison
Accountability and scrutiny	whether semi-formal coordination remained adjacent to formal procedure rather than replacing it	formal procedures were not abolished; however, documentation of forum decisions appears limited	whether decision rationales were sufficiently traceable and contestable	decision logs; audit trails; publication of review rationales; accountability mapping
Public participation and inclusion	whether public concerns were meaningfully incorporated into decisions	evidence is insufficient to demonstrate the representativeness, or effects of public participation	whether the forum strengthened or weakened meaningful engagement	participation mapping; resident interviews; distributional analysis by district and social group
Long-term institutional effect	whether the forum became institutionalized or remained dependent on one political cycle	evidence suggests strong dependence on mayoral leadership and no persistence after the term	whether routines survived through other administrative forms	-

In particular, five enabling capacities seem essential for effective forum operation. The first is the legitimate convening authority. In Hsinchu, this role was fulfilled by the mayor; in other contexts, it may be assigned to other officials. The critical requirement is the ability to convene bureau heads, mandate follow-up, and resolve conflicts that may not be addressed at lower administrative levels. The second capacity is credible expert intermediation. In Hsinchu, consultants were effective because they were trusted by the government and professionals; in other settings, this function may be performed by

different actors, but the key is the ability to mediate between administrative feasibility and design ambition without being coopted by either side. The third capacity is disciplined procedural adjacency. The forum can prepare, clarify, review, and synchronize decisions, but cannot substitute procurement law, statutory review, budgetary authorization, or public consultation, i.e., its legitimacy derives from enhancing formal decision quality rather than circumventing established procedures.

That said, several safeguards are crucial. Indeed, the features that contributed to the forum's effectiveness also present legitimacy risks, although these risks were relatively untouched in the interviews. Executive arbitration may become overly reliant on individual personalities. Dependence on external expertise can lead to informal gatekeeping. Regular attendance may privilege actors who are consistently present. Design reviews risk devolving into technocratic closure. Early-stage coordination may limit debate if design directions are perceived as predetermined.

In this respect, procedural traceability is a first important safeguard. Outputs must be integrated into formal procedures as structured inputs. Another is accountability, thus the need for a secretariat to document proceedings. A third concerns advisory boundaries. Indeed, while the Hsinchu case brilliantly illustrates the value of respected external consultants, hybrid advisory roles introduce the risk of conflicts of interest.

A fourth safeguard is participatory coupling. As previously noted, the forum does not operate as a participatory body and should therefore not be presented as one. In this respect, democratic legitimacy must be established through explicit integration with public participation. A fifth safeguard is portfolio equity. Because the forum operated across multiple projects, there is a risk of disproportionate focus on politically prominent or design-prestigious sites, which could unintentionally amplify existing inequalities.

A sixth and final safeguard concerns institutional continuity. The close association of the forum with a mayoral administration raises questions about sustainability after leadership transitions. Governance mechanisms that depend solely on political charisma may achieve short-term results but risk lacking institutional memory. Better mechanisms would include a succession strategy to preserve accumulated knowledge.

5. Conclusions

In summary, this paper addressed how a spectrum of governance mechanisms exists between formal bureaucratic routines and discretionary bypasses. These mechanisms deal with the reorganization of administrative issues, the coordination of responsibilities, the evaluation of design, and the advancement of projects through implementation, among others. Within this context, the principal contribution of the paper is to frame a non-Western governance mechanism that does not conform to established categories. This mechanism is distinguished by condensed coordination, design expertise, executive arbitration, and project follow-up within a recurring semi-formal routine. Its effectiveness is attributed to the regular cadence, convening authority, expert mediation, and the ability to connect upstream design reasoning with administrative follow-up. For regeneration scholarship, this case highlights how governance design should be examined as a micro-architecture and as the articulation of routines, as these features define the case's distinctiveness beyond the basic criteria typically used to characterize governance mechanisms.

A key finding is that this case complicates the understanding of temporality in the governance of design-intensive, portfolio-based regeneration. Notably, acceleration was not achieved by reducing or relaxing oversight. Rather, decision cycles were shortened because reviews occurred more frequently, took place earlier, and were cumulative. Nevertheless, this interpretation should remain strictly bounded.

Several limitations frame the argument. First, the study behind the paper utilizes a single-case, theory-building methodology, which supports analytical rather than statistical generalization. The selected case is valuable for its information-rich nature and its ability to reveal mechanisms that are not readily observable in aggregate data. However, the research design does not permit claims that similar arrangements would produce comparable effects in other contexts.

Second, the study relies primarily on elite interviews and documentary materials. Although this approach is appropriate for reconstructing a governance interface involving leadership, bureau coordination, consultant mediation, and professional design practice, it introduces risks such as elite bias, retrospective rationalization, and over-reliance on official narratives. Future studies should incorporate perspectives from residents, civic groups, lower-level officials, contractors, maintenance personnel, and critics of the regeneration process.

Third, the documentary record is uneven. The semi-formal nature of the forum led to incomplete agendas, minutes, decision logs, and follow-up records, which were not available for systematic analysis. This limitation restricts the ability to reconstruct all decisions, identify dissenting positions, and verify the forum's specific effects on each project. Future research would benefit from access to comprehensive administrative archives, meeting records, project timelines, procurement documents, and participation reports.

Fourth, the temporal boundary of the study corresponds to the political cycle during which the forum emerged, stabilized, and operated. While this boundary is suitable for reconstructing the forum as a governance arrangement, it does not permit a comprehensive evaluation of developments after 2022. Future research should examine changes following the forum's dismantling or transformation, including which routines persisted and which disappeared, and whether institutional learning continued after leadership change.

Fifth, the study does not assess long-term social, environmental, or economic outcomes. It cannot determine whether the regeneration portfolio improved social equity, housing affordability, ecological performance, maintenance quality, or citizen satisfaction. Future research could therefore integrate process tracing with outcome evaluation. Potential methodologies include comparative inter-city analysis, resident surveys, post-occupancy evaluations, and longitudinal tracking of maintenance and use, including satisfaction metrics that interact with demographic variables.

Collectively, these limitations indicate the possibility for a broader research agenda. Within this framework, comparative studies may assess whether similar governance interfaces exist in other East Asian cities, European regeneration programs, Latin American urban innovation contexts, or smaller municipalities undergoing design-intensive transformation. Furthermore, longitudinal research could determine whether semi-formal coordination arrangements become institutionalized, dissolve after leadership change, or evolve into formal design offices. Mixed-method approaches may evaluate whether enhanced coordination is linked to accelerated project delivery, improved design quality, increased participation, or more equitable investment distribution. Critical studies could address potential failure modes, such as consultant capture, opaque gatekeeping, concentration of executive power, reduced participation, uneven territorial focus, or public distrust resulting from perceived bypass.

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