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Community-based redevelopment of socially disadvantaged communities in megacities.
Experiences of micro-interventionism in Lilong neighborhoods in Shanghai.

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Abstract

In recent decades rapid urbanization has led to surging numbers of megacities (cities with more than 10 million inhabitants), mostly in the Global South. To overcome the challenges posed by rapid population growth, megacities have seen significant efforts toward urban renewal. However, the often-employed property-based approaches have contributed to spatial and economic inequalities. Therefore community-based approaches have gained prominence in recent years by promising more sustainable urban redevelopment. In Shanghai, one of the largest cities in the world, urban renewal is mainly focused on Lilong neighborhoods, a unique typology with roots in the city's colonial past and today largely dilapidated. The socially disadvantaged communities living there are usually displaced because of redevelopment. New community-based efforts undertaken by the city government while successfully involving residents in the redevelopment process can only partially alleviate the pressure these communities face and are ultimately limited in their impacts on long-term sustainable development.

Zusammenfassung

In den letzten Jahrzehnten hat die rasche Urbanisierung zu einem sprunghaften Anstieg der Zahl der Megastädte (über 10 Millionen Einwohnern) geführt, hauptsächlich im globalen Süden. Um die steigenden Herausforderungen durch das rasche Bevölkerungswachstum zu bewältigen, ist Stadterneuerung (bzw. Redevelopment) zum Fokus urbaner Strategien geworden. Die häufig immobilien-fokussierten Projekte haben jedoch zu räumlichen und wirtschaftlichen Ungleichheiten beigetragen; Ansätze, die soziale und gemeinschaftliche Aspekte in den Vordergrund stellen, werden daher zunehmend populärer und versprechen eine nachhaltigere Stadterneuerung. In Shanghai, einer der größten Megastädte der Welt, konzentriert sich urbane Erneuerung vor allem auf die Lilong-Viertel, eine Typologie, die ihre Wurzeln in der kolonialen Vergangenheit der Stadt hat, heute jedoch weitgehend verfallen ist. Die dort lebenden und großteils sozial benachteiligten Bevölkerungsgruppen werden im Zuge der Sanierung meistens vertrieben. Die untersuchten, von der Stadtverwaltung forcierten, neuen Redevelopment-Ansätze mit Fokus auf die Nachbarschaft haben zwar zu einer erfolgreicheren Integration der betroffenen Bewohner in den Sanierungsprozess geführt, können dem Veränderungsdruck, dem Lilong-Viertel ausgesetzt sind, allerdings nur teilweise abmildern und haben letztlich nur begrenzte Auswirkungen auf die nachhaltige Entwicklung der Areale.

Table of Contents

Introduction

Megacities and their development

The City of Shanghai

Case Studies

Conclusion

Appendix

Introduction

I. Topic Overview

We live in the "century of urbanity": Never before were urban agglomerations as big as the 21st-century megacity; in 2015, for the first time ever, the urban population outweighed its rural counterpart and urbanization is still rapidly rising (UN 2018). This trend, however, challenges urban structures to cope with the influx of new residents, especially in the fast-growing cities of the Global South, where urban development struggles to keep up with the rapid surge in population.

While cities expand and often form increasingly significant urban agglomerations, a different process takes place in the urban heart: Usually called urban redevelopment, rejuvenation, or regeneration, existing neighborhoods are transformed to increase their density and to improve living conditions. By far, the most common form of urban redevelopment employed today is based on the regime of *property-led redevelopment* (He & Wu 2005), whose roots are in a strong pro-growth coalition between private investors and state actors. For economic reasons, property-led redevelopment projects often demolish existing neighborhoods to make room for new structures. A host of examples worldwide show that this usually has devastating effects on residents and communities whose neighborhoods are redeveloped (Indorewala 2018; Shao 2013; Turok 1992). While these negative impacts could be significantly lessened by proper governmental control, research shows that due to a power imbalance, state actors over-rely on private funds and plans for redevelopment projects (He & Wu 2005; Heeg 2008; Ng 2002).

In recent years, urban governments have therefore experimented with other forms of urban redevelopment, including the community-focused approach of *micro-interventions*. These small-scale, quick, cheap, and potentially temporary public space interventions promise a gentler redevelopment by acting as a spark for a slow but extensive upgradation of an area without displacing residents or destroying local communities.

This thesis will take a closer look at these claims and compares this new approach to the widely employed regime of property-led redevelopment.

II.   Research design

Research questions and methodology

Megacities have seen significant interest from the scientific community. Much of this research investigates specific cities, but cross-referencing the insights of different agglomerations to find patterns describing the global phenomenon of the megacity has become increasingly popular (e.g., Bolay, Chenal & Pedrazzini 2016a; Sorensen & Okata 2011). As one of the most influential megacities worldwide, Shanghai often features prominently in these investigations, and the research into the city is comprehensive. Specifically, the developments in the urban fabric in the last three decades (since the opening of the Chinese economy) have attracted heightened interest: Apart from general overviews of the city's development (Denison & Ren 2006; Gu, Logan & Wu 2021; He 2010; Wu & Ma 2005; Zhang 2002; Zhang, Cong & Chakraborty 2022) the related topics of housing affordability (Cao & Xu 2017; Huang 2000; Tomlinson 2012; Zhu & Qian 2002) and urban renewal (He et al. 2019; He & Wu 2009; Ho 2013; Shao 2013; Weinstein & Ren 2009; Zhang, Cong & Chakraborty 2022) gained attention.

Additionally, extensive research is already available on Lilong communities, their unique urban structure, and their current disappearance. However, most of this research focuses either on a handful of particular redevelopment projects (Bracken 2020b; Ding & Zhong 2020; González Martínez 2019; He & Wu 2005; Liang 2008a; Yang & Chang 2007; Zhong & Chen 2017) or investigates Lilong's historical significance (Arkaraprasertkul 2010; Bracken 2017, 2020a; Guan 1996; Morris 1994; Zhao 2004). Recently, the protection of both built (Shi et al. 2019; Yan 2013; Zhong & Chen 2017) and communal (Arkaraprasertkul & Williams 2015; Ho 2013; Shao 2013; Tianshu & Zhijun 2011; Zhou & Cheng 2019) structure of Lilong neighborhoods has gained heightened attention. At the same time, new approaches to urban redevelopment with a greater emphasis on community inclusion, specifically micro-interventionism, grew in importance internationally and in Shanghai (Hoogduyn 2014; Lerner 2014; Zhu 2023a). At the same time, new approaches to urban redevelopment with a greater emphasis on community inclusion, specifically micro-interventionism, grew in importance internationally and in Shanghai (Hoogduyn 2014; Lerner 2014; Zhu 2023a).

However, the link between the different redevelopment regimes and community empowerment in Shanghai is not thoroughly explored. Here this thesis aims to contribute to the scientific discourse by taking established knowledge on citizen participation, applying it both to the extensively investigated Xintiandi project (property-led) as well as the yet unexplored Guizhou Rd projects (micro-intervention) and comparing the findings on citizen empowerment in the two redevelopment processes.

The aim of this thesis is, therefore, to answer the following two questions:

- What constitutes **citizen empowerment** in the context of redevelopment of socially disadvantaged communities in the megacity of Shanghai?
- What is the role of citizen empowerment in the two redevelopment regimes of **property-led development** and **micro-interventions** in Shanghai?

To answer these questions, a qualitative approach was chosen. Quantitative data of adequate quality and spatial precision is often unavailable and, based on the above-stated research focus, is not likely to reveal suitable insights. Instead, this thesis combines knowledge from three qualitative sources: field observations in Lilong (including Xintiandi and Guizhou Road), extensive literature exploration (including maps and images), and several expert interviews.
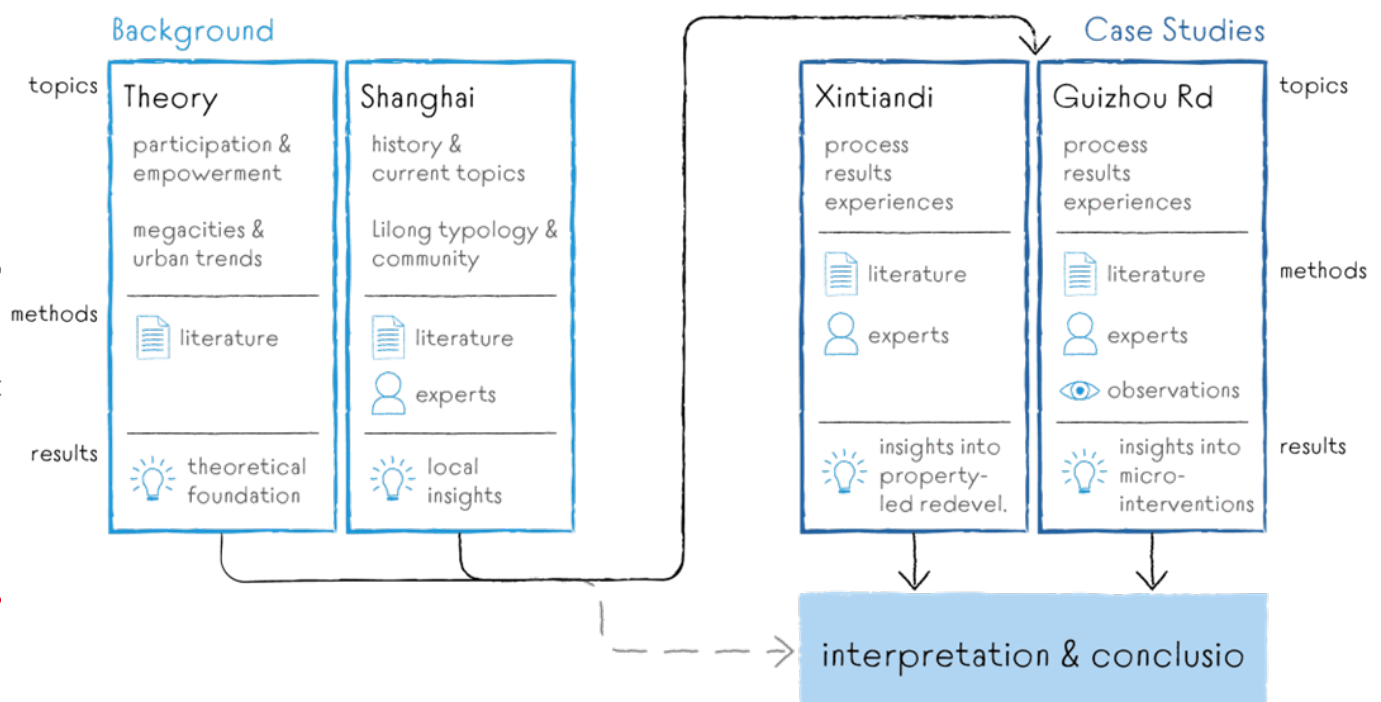

Figure 1: Research structure (own drawing)

Interview partners were chosen best to reflect different viewpoints and stakeholders in redevelopment processes, including local and international researchers and those involved in the projects. Unfortunately, city officials and affected residents remained inaccessible to interview requests due to the language barrier and Covid19 related restrictions.

Interviews were conducted with the following experts:

- **TONG Ming** is a professor of architectural and urban design at *Southeast University* in Nanjing, focusing on urban design, urban regeneration, and urban policy analysis. He is also head of the Shanghai-based architecture firm *TM Studio* and the *Urban Network Office* responsible for the *Encounter Guizhou Road* project.

- **Gregory Bracken** is an Assistant Professor at *TU Delft,* where he teaches and researches urban environments in East and Southeast Asia. He has written a book and several papers and articles on the Lilong typology and its role in contemporary Shanghai.

- **BAI Xueyan** is an architect at TM Studio. She was directly involved in the project for the *physical Lilong upgradation* project at Guizhou Road as well as other similar projects in Shanghai.

Additional knowledge came from **LI Qing**, Associate Professor for urban planning and design at *Tongji University Shanghai* and an expert on community participation in Shanghai.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured manner and focused on personal experiences. Therefore, the results are naturally heavily biased by the individual's background and role and were cross-referenced with each other and insights gained from the other investigations methods listed above.

Expected outcomes and limitations

This thesis aims to develop a better understanding of the following:

- The current community structures of Lilong neighborhoods
- What tools and approaches towards citizen empowerment are used in the redevelopment of their neighborhoods, and if and how they differ between the two redevelopment regimes investigated here
- Which stakeholders are involved, and what challenges arose during the redevelopment process?

Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing restrictions to entering China, extensive field research was not possible and was limited to pre-pandemic observations. Additionally, as stated below, as a European researcher, (unknown) pre-conceptions and an incomplete grasp of language and culture may influence the evaluation, despite best efforts. It is, therefore, not feasible to make well-founded assessments on the impacts of and communal views towards this thesis's two redevelopment case studies. Subsequently, this investigation is limited to the approach employed and the stated experiences of those responsible or observing the process.

III. Structure

This thesis consists of four main parts, each building on the foundation laid by the previous chapters.

The **Introduction** serves as the preface of this thesis and establishes the scientific foundation by outlining the methodology employed and working towards a common understanding of critical elements and terms used in the following chapters.

Megacities and their development

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of the megacity and highlights its importance in urban planning today by investigating the reasons for the current rise of megacities and the challenges this urban phenomenon brings.

Chapter 2 focuses on renewal processes in megacities and the special attention needed towards the residents when redeveloping existing neighborhoods. In addition, two redevelopment regimes will be explored: *property-led redevelopment* and community-based *micro-interventions.*

The City of Shanghai

Chapter 3 explores the city of Shanghai from a spatial-historic viewpoint and then dives deeper into the current trends and topics in the city's urban development.

Chapter 4 discusses a housing typology unique to Shanghai: the Lilong. Its particular spatial layout and the social ties it creates are explored, and the challenges and prospects the Lilong has are highlighted.

Case Studies

Chapter 5 takes a closer look at Xintiandi, one of the most famous examples of converting a traditional Lilong community through property-led redevelopment.

Chapter 6 then focuses on two other interconnected redevelopment projects in the Guizhou Rd Lilong. In contrast to Xintiandi, these projects focus on community-based micro-interventions.

Lastly, the **Conclusion** aims to interpret the findings on these two different redevelopment processes and analyze citizen empowerment in their context. Additionally, an outlook is given.

IV. Towards a common scientific foundation

IV.I. The European perspective

For many centuries, European rulers, armies, and traders have interacted with the rest of the globe patronizing and exploitatively. With them, European scientists and researchers came and investigated, analyzed, and judged local cultures, people, and phenomena through their heavily biased lens with little interest in meaningful interaction with and knowledge of local communities. While these times have mostly passed, the inequality between the Global South and the Global North[1] remains, in economic terms, cultural reach, and research. There has been severe criticism lately towards researchers from the Global North investigating phenomena in the South for being too Western-centric (e.g., Giwa 2015; Haelewaters, Hofmann & Romero-Olivares 2021; Walsh, Brugha & Byrne 2016). However, this is not to say that this kind of research is not feasible from a moral or scientific point of view. Instead, it is essential to recognize and highlight that the author of this thesis was socialized in a European context and does not speak Chinese (the language spoken in this thesis' case study Shanghai) and subsequently may come to different, somewhat biased conclusions. Equally important is mitigating this inherent bias as best as possible by including local sources and researchers and their intrinsic knowledge in the creation of this thesis.

IV.II. Language matters

Even in scientific research where high academic standards mandate the largest possible objectivity and neutrality, it is essential to recognize the implicit understanding the use of particular language evokes. Therefore, this chapter examines four somewhat sensitive and debated terms and their use in this thesis.

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[1] These terms will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

11

From Slum to Informal settlement and back²

The term "slum" emerged in early 19th century Britain, during industrialization, and was initially intended to disparage the newly developed working-class settlements in industrial areas considered inferior to the "proper" cities of the middle and upper classes. As the British Empire expanded, the term spread globally and continued to be utilized to distinguish between the living conditions of colonizers and local elites versus those of the general population. Because of this past and the deliberate charging of the term with negative connotations, "slum" immediately invokes images of self-built shanty towns with rampant poverty, complete lack of services, and miserable quality of life. To avoid these strong derogative associations, researchers, activists, and the "slum dwellers" themselves often avoid the term slum and usually use "informal settlements" instead.

While this reasoning is certainly quite sensible, it misses two crucial intertwined aspects: Informal settlements, while often precarious due to the illegal land occupation and the subsequent threat of eviction, in many instances develop over time into well-built neighborhoods with adequate social and technical infrastructure and as a result average to good quality of life, not fitting into the commonly accepted connotation of a slum. This is not to say that there are no problems or need for improvement but crucially offer **better** living conditions as some accommodation in the formal housing sector, which leads to the second aspect; not all "slums" are of informal nature.

What sounds simple has wide-reaching policy implications. In many major cities in the Global South, slum eradication was and is one of the primary goals of urban governance, including the often-practiced demolition of informal "slum areas" and the relocation of its inhabitants into state-regulated housing projects. While the details of this process vary drastically from city to city and project to project, advocates of displaced residents argue that it often results in worse living conditions. The displaced are confronted with cheaply built accommodation which is

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² For a closer look on this topic and a better understanding on the reasoning below see (among others): Gilbert 2019, Huchzermeyer 2014, Indorewala 2018 and Weinstein 2014.

usually located on less desirable land (e.g., on the outskirts) and does not provide the same opportunities to earn their livelihood. This, in turn, raises questions on the supposed elimination of the slum and the claimed improvement in living quality through these programs.

Due to this ambiguity and following contemporary research on this topic, the term "slum" will be used in this thesis as an umbrella term for a wide-reaching array of inadequate housing arrangements regardless of their age, legal status, or built environment. This is also consistent with the slum definition by UN-Habitat (2003) and the research topic, which focuses on the process and context of redevelopment projects rather than the physical implementations and implications thereof.

Global North and South – How to divide the world

Similar to the term "slum" discussed above, which was born to distinguish between the Haves and Have-nots in a city, the need arose to do the same worldwide with growing global interaction. As colonial empires fell and with it the distinction between (European) mother country and colony, the term "Third World" emerged, implying that there would be a (better?) First World. Later, the world was once again divided into developed and developing countries by political and scientific discourse, but also in people's minds. Today, the same division is usually expressed with the Global North and the Global South, whereby the North is considered more prosperous, developed, and, potentially, powerful. The concept of a distinct "Global South" is hardly without criticism. In the most common reading (e.g., used by the United Nations), the division between North and South runs along national borders[3] , which regards each country as a distinct and unified entity and disregards internal inequalities and realities that transect nation borders. It is also troublesome and somewhat arbitrary to place countries North or South of an imaginary line – especially in the case of newly emerging "Global Powers" like China and the

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[3] Usual categorization: Countries in North America & Europe, Australia/New Zealand, and Australia (Global North); Countries in Africa, Asia (excluding Japan), Latin America, the Caribbean, Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia (Global South)

other BRICS nations – which is reflected in the fact that (apart from Japan) the Global North only consists of "Western" countries.

Despite other interpretations of these terms,[4] the usage of Global South and Global North in this thesis will follow the commonly accepted reading outlined above, partly due to the lack of adequate alternative terminology.

Redevelopment

As cities grow, age, and change, the urban landscape constantly evolves. Shifting economic, social, and natural circumstances demand constant urban development, be it through institutionalized projects or organic and informal ventures. In today's cities, most urban development occurs on already occupied land; subsequently, it is called **re-development.**

Urban redevelopment, although it is widely used today, is a contested term. For some, it is inherently linked to the destruction of the previous structure and the development of something new (e.g., Smith 1982; Urban Design lab 2022) and - as later described in detail - that is the most common approach employed today. This thesis, however, argues that urban redevelopment can hardly be limited to this narrow definition and, instead, must be understood as an umbrella term for all kinds of (destructive and non-destructive) measures taken to alter the urban landscape physically. These can range from brownfield (old industrial areas) or greenfield (e.g., parks) development, housing upgradation, or improvements to public spaces and also encompasses related terms such as urban renewal, urban regeneration, or adaptive reuse.

Socially disadvantaged communities

Globally, all cities face some level of inequality (Burdett 2016). These inequalities concern income (van Ham et al. 2021), health (Pearce et al. 2007), housing (Ahmad 2012), access to green spaces (Xiao et al. 2021), and a host of other topics, with many of them linked and interdependent. There is also evidence that inequality leads to increasing socio-economic

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[4] Most noteworthy, the concept of **subalterns -** a global collection of "human beings disadvantaged by neoliberal policies who are socially, politically, and intellectually disempowered" (Schneider 2017, p. 22).

segregation of urban settlements (van Ham et al. 2021), especially in cities in the Global South (Burdett 2016). This is also true for Chinese cities, including Shanghai, where inequality has spatialized significantly between the fifth and sixth censuses (2000-2010)[5] (Shen & Xiao 2020).

One of the most intriguing aspects of inequality is income, as it is both the cause and the result of disparity. The lack of financial means limits a person's ability to afford more suitable housing, better health care, and greater mobility to reach green spaces (to stick with the example topics used above), in turn affecting income. Therefore, *poverty* should not only be considered as low income but rather in "terms of poor living" (Sen 2000, p. 3), characterized by deprivation of capabilities. This capability deprivation is often highly individual and consists of a complex web of interrelated factors but potentially excludes the deprived of various aspects of social interaction[6] (ibid.).

Therefore, French researchers coined the term *social exclusion* connected to the phenomenon of capability deprivation in the 1970s. It has since spread worldwide, heavily used by supra-governmental organizations like the United Nations. They argue that social exclusion encompasses inequality in terms of outcome (deprival of capabilities) and the underlying social and political processes responsible, where those socially excluded are often marginalized and lack power (UNECE 2022). There exists no proper definition of social exclusion (Dean 2016) as it must be considered a "broad and popular concept describing complex, systematic disadvantages" (UNECE 2022, p. 4). Interpretations of this are often somewhat conflicting, and its relation to poverty is debated (ibid.).

This is even more true for the here employed concept of *socially disadvantaged communities (SDC)* and therefore requires explanation: In its essence, *social disadvantages* (as understood here) is a very similar but somewhat milder form of *social exclusion*, rather than being entirely or partly excluded from goods, services or stakes in public processes those disadvantaged have to exert

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[5] Unfortunately, data from the 7th census in 2020 has not been analyzed as of writing

[6] E.g., without the necessary transport capability one is unable to get to the job site or social gathering on the other side of the city

considerable more effort (in terms of relative capabilities) to fully participate in the economic, social and political life of their city, region or country. Due to the widespread spatial segregation mentioned above, localized socially disadvantaged neighborhoods and communities emerged in many urban areas whose unique position in the urban and social fabric is the focus of this thesis.

Lilong communities and their link to SDC will be discussed in chapter 4.2.3.

Megacities and their development

1   The megacity

Humans have been a rural agricultural species for more than ten millennia since our ancestors began to erect permanent settlements. While there have been large cities throughout history[7], they only housed a tiny fraction of the world's population. However, urban agglomerations have been the focal point of human civilization and its history. Today in the 21st century, this is truer than ever as in the last few decades, cities have become larger and larger and house more people for the first time in history than rural areas. As cities grew and began to merge with other nearby settlements to form metropolitan areas and these metro areas merged to form a megalopolis (or city cluster), the discussion around city classification grew. One term stemming from this discussion is the megacity. These expansive urban centers pulse with economic and cultural activity and are shaping the global landscape but come with their own unique set of challenges. This thesis will delve deeper into the concept of the megacity and will highlight pressing issues surrounding urban regeneration and development.

Firstly, it is essential to pose a seemingly simple question: What constitutes a megacity?

According to the United Nations, a city must only meet one criterion to be classified as a megacity – a population of more than 10 million inhabitants (UN-Habitat 2016). While straightforward and easily understandable, this threshold seems relatively arbitrary and faces practical limitations; census data is rarely comparable across the world due to varying spatial and political delimitations of cities and their citizens and imprecise data collection, especially in the case of informal settlements where population estimations often differ immensely (Chen, Guo & Wu 2011; Saluja et al. 2017). Despite these issues, this classification is widely recognized in the literature. Subsequently, empirical data in this thesis is also based on it.

A more holistic approach to megacities is needed when looking beyond empirical evidence. Sorensen & Okata (2011) make the convincing argument that there cannot be a definitive answer

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[7] Most notably the early cities in ancient Mesopotamia, Rome at the height of its empire, or Kaifeng and Beijing in Imperial China

to what constitutes a megacity as too many factors shape an urban agglomeration. Political and institutional systems, historical and geographical influences, socioeconomic and cultural circumstances, and many more play an important role. Instead, they argue that while every megacity is unique and hard to compare, they are all characterized by the same *pattern* of traits and challenges – some more, some less- not found in other, smaller cities. The following chapters closely examine these characteristics and challenges and establish a common understanding of the megacity.

1.1   An emerging typology

Throughout history, cities always have been at the core of human civilization. From powerful city-states to whole empires named after their capital city, they were - and still are today - the centers of economic activity, political power, and cultural importance in their region or country. This is even more remarkable considering that until recently, only a fraction of the population lived in urban areas. In recent centuries though, the world witnessed a global migration from rural areas to urban centers, a massive wave of urbanization.

Whereas cities in 1950 only housed 0.8 billion people, this skyrocketed to an estimated 4.2 billion urban dwellers in 2018, raising the population share of urban areas from 30% to 55%. In 2015, urban populations outweighed their rural counterparts for the first time in history (UN 2018). As a result, a new type of urban agglomeration has spread around the globe: *the megacity*. While in 1950, only Tokyo and New York could be classified as such, by 2018, this number soared to 33 cities worldwide and will likely continue to grow throughout the 21st century, albeit at a somewhat slower rate (ibid.).

However, urbanization and the rise of megacities are not equally exerting their often-uncontrollable force in all parts of the world. This is especially obvious when looking at the speed and scope of urbanization in the Global North and the Global South: Both 1950s megacities were part of the former, whereas the Global South was very much rural-based. Since then, though, urban growth overwhelmingly took place in the Global South, and of today's 33 megacities, 27 are now located here (ibid.; UN-Habitat 2016). The newly emerged megacities of the Global

South also differ in another crucial aspect: the age of their inhabitants. While more developed countries face the problem of a rapidly aging population, (mega)cities in the Global South, especially in Africa and South America, are confronted with a *youth bulge*, an immense increase in their young population. In 2015 there were 1,8 billion people in the youth bulge age bracket (15-24 years); 88% resided in developing countries, mostly in urban areas.

To better understand the reasons behind this development, examining the concept of urbanization, its basic premises, and how it differs from urban population growth is essential. While the latter describes the absolute growth of urban population (i.e., the number of people living in a given city or in urban agglomerations of a given region is rising), urbanization represents the growth of urban population in proportion to its rural counterpart (i.e., the number of people living in urban agglomerations of a given region is rising faster/declining slower than the number of people living in rural areas of the same region). Urban population growth is therefore not inherently linked to urbanization; if urban and rural populations grow at the same rate, urbanization is not happening; likewise, urbanization can, in theory, occur without urban growth, e.g., if the urban population remains stable while rural populations diminish (Tacoli, McGranahan & Satterthwaite 2015).

In practice, though, urbanization is one of the most significant factors in urban population growth worldwide. As urban fertility rates are usually substantially lower (Poston & Bouvier 2010), urbanization is virtually only driven by migration, specifically rural-urban net migration (Siegel 2019). Rural-urban migration is an umbrella term for the complex network of migratory movements between urban and rural areas, usually resulting in an urban population surplus. The 20th century saw a massive wave of these migratory movements all over the world (Poston & Bouvier 2010), and it is evident that this contributed significantly to urban growth: Between 2000 and 2010, around half of the urban growth worldwide can be attributed to migration; however, this share varies considerably in different regions of the world ranging from 60% in Asia to just one third in sub-Saharan Africa (Tacoli, McGranahan & Satterthwaite 2015) and the rest mainly as a result of high urban birth rates.

As said above, rural-urban migration consists of people moving from rural regions to urban agglomerations and vice versa; empirical data usually denominates the net migration, i.e., the difference between people moving to and from cities. While this number is fundamental to urban growth, it is essential to recognize that when accounting for outward migration, cities must cope with a potentially much larger number of new immigrants than net migration statistics might show (Tacoli, McGranahan & Satterthwaite 2015).

Reasons as to why so many rural inhabitants decide to move to an urban agglomeration are manifold but economic considerations probably are the most significant contributors: Cities usually provide better employment opportunities, higher living standards, and (more affordable) access to basic services (Riffat, Powell & Aydin 2017; Tacoli, McGranahan & Satterthwaite 2015). At the same time, rural communities not only have to increasingly deal with climate-change-induced natural hazards like floods, droughts, and extreme weather phenomena but are also undergoing considerable changes to their agriculture-based economic fabric through the consolidation of farmland into large-scale labor-extensive agriculture (Henderson 2003; Tacoli, McGranahan & Satterthwaite 2015; UN-Habitat 2003). As a result, to protect their livelihood rural population is pushed towards urban agglomerations (Ooi & Phua 2007).

To a lesser extent, political will is also responsible for this rural-to-urban migration wave. In a globalizing economy, big cities grew immensely influential over the last decades and often became cornerstones of a country's economic power. This is especially true in Asia, where the region's economy is almost entirely based around a handful of urban agglomerations (UN-Habitat 2016). In addition, urbanization rate and GDP growth seem tightly linked worldwide (Henderson 2003; Tacoli, McGranahan & Satterthwaite 2015). Subsequently, many national governments promoted rapid urbanization to modernize their rural agriculture-based economy, raise their GDP and increase living standards (Marshall 2003). An exceptional example of this is China which witnessed the largest internal migration movement in history (Chan 2013) in the last decades, mainly towards the coastal urban agglomerations like the Pearl River Delta (Guangzhou, Shenzhen, Hongkong, and others) or the Yangtze River Delta (Shanghai, Nanjing, and others). They, in turn, have become two of the world's largest and most economically powerful metropolitan areas(Florczyk et al. 2019).

However, when researching the link between urbanization and GDP growth Henderson (2003) found that while there seems to be a correlation between the two, the level of *urban concentration* has a much more substantial impact on economic growth. This suggests that consolidating urban resources in one or a few central cities instead of spreading them out over multiple cities is beneficial for economic development (ibid.). This, of course, is a possible explanation for why the 20th century witnessed a tremendous concentration of people, businesses, and power in a few megacities worldwide.

1.2 Sustainable urban growth and the housing crisis

As cities grow, so do their challenges, especially when developing as fast as they did in the last few decades. Rising population numbers and their demand for adequate living conditions strain housing stocks, urban infrastructures, and public services, sometimes until they break down. The results are the formation of informal settlements, communities lacking access to basic infrastructure like water and power supply, and overwhelmed medical, education, and social security systems. As these are urgent and significant problems, extensive literature on this topic already exists. Rather than deep diving into them now, their manifestation in Shanghai will be discussed later in this thesis. Instead, this chapter aims to highlight the unsustainable urban patterns created by the immense growth and then focus on one key issue: the housing crisis.

1.2.1 The quest for sustainability

The term *sustainability* is widely used today. From energy generation to consumer products and transportation: almost every product or service can be declared sustainable. In many cases, the label sustainability is a marketing tool aimed at consumers increasingly conscious of their environmental and social impact. Sustainability has also found its way into polity and governance: While the United Nations' *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)* advocate the concept on the international level, countless national, regional, and local activities by private and public actors call for bolstering sustainability.

The question remains: What is sustainability? Probably the most recognized definition (see Haughton & Hunter 1994; Purvis, Mao & Robinson 2019; Sorensen & Okata 2011) emerged in the

late 1980s in the *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development* to the United Nations General Assembly. This so-called Brundtland Commission – after her chairwoman Gro Harlem Brundtland – defines sustainable development as follows:

"Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." (WCED 1987, p. 54)

It is important to note that *development*, in this case, is not limited to spatial or urban development but rather a "transformation of economy and society" (ibid., p. 54). Consequently, the report determines that **economy** and **society** are two of the three pillars of sustainability, with the **environment** completing the model. While not without criticism, it has since become the primary reading of sustainability in the scientific discourse (Purvis, Mao & Robinson 2019).
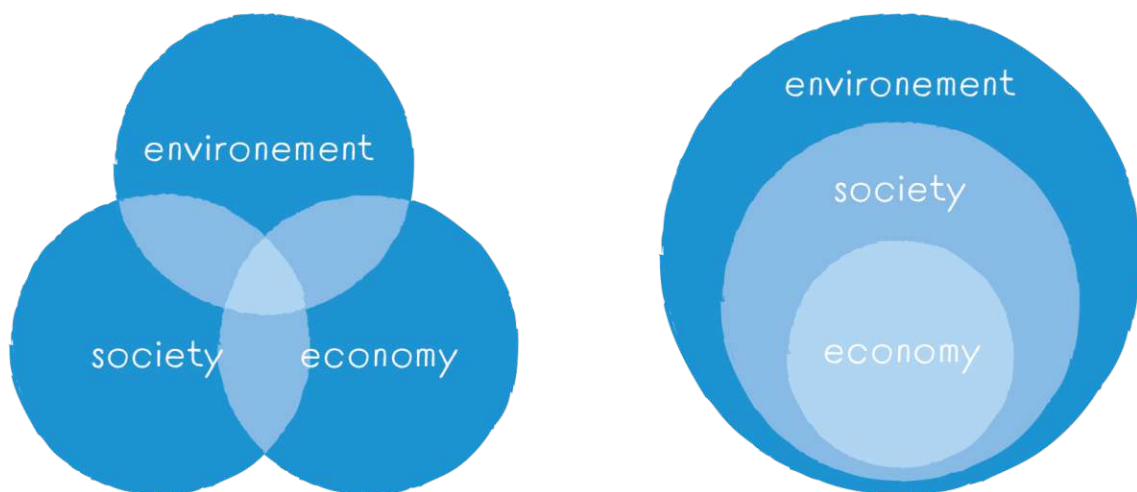

Figure 2: Competing models of sustainability. (own illustration)

However, the relationship between the three pillars is highly debated. As shown in Figure 1, there are two competing interpretations. In the first model, the three pillars are equal; a scenario where higher economic sustainability at the expense of the environment or social equity may result in an overall more sustainable development is therefore possible. Whereas supporters of the right model argue that economic activity can only be sustainable if it does not hinder social or environmental sustainability, similarly, social sustainability is limited by the environment.

This gives a hierarchy to the three pillars, with environmental health being the most important factor in determining sustainability (Gibson 2006; Purvis, Mao & Robinson 2019). ¨

Regardless of the model, though, it is undisputed that long-term economic, social, and environmental viability is also at the heart of *urban* sustainability. Whereas (sustainable) economic development and social justice have been on the agenda of city governments for centuries, environmental concerns are relatively new topics in urban governance. With rising public interest in the protection of the natural environment, the reduction of waste and pollution, and, recently, the changing climate, the importance of environmental sustainability has risen to the forefront of urban sustainability, as witnessed both in the literature as well as prestigious "sustainable cities" being developed around the world focusing primarily on ecological aspects[8].

A green city, though, is not necessarily a sustainable one (Sodiq et al. 2019). What defines a sustainable city is (often deliberately) vague, but, derived from the Brundtland commission's findings, a sustainable city consumes resources[9] only as fast or slower than they can be replenished (Goldman & Gorham 2006; Sodiq et al. 2019).

Despite the claims of urban sustainability, cities – especially megacities – are highly dependent on the inflow of goods (including basic amenities like water and energy) from the outside and the discharge of waste and pollution and an inherently unsustainable (Sorensen & Okata 2011). This is especially problematic as megacities often have a global impact on sustainability (Haughton & Hunter 1994) and thus should be at the forefront of sustainability efforts. Many city governments have recognized their responsibility and, with full urban sustainability being unobtainable in the near future, have implemented (varyingly ambitious) strategies to *reduce* their negative impact and to *improve* their sustainable development (Goldman & Gorham 2006).

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[8] E.g. *The Sustainable City*, UAE (Diamond Developers 2019), *Tianjin Eco-City*, China (Government of Singapore 2019) or *Amaravati*, India (Lo 2018).

[9] Resources in all its forms, including but not limited to human, financial, natural, social, cultural resources.

However, reality often differs from well-intentioned policy schemes, and the results of these sustainability efforts are mixed due to political opposition, economic arguments, and different priorities.

Again, a North-South divide is visible, with cities in more developed regions generally achieving better success than their counterparts in the Global South. While there surely are economic and institutional factors, the dominant reason for this is the speed of urban growth cities are facing. Whereas cities in Europe, North America, Australia, and Japan (Global North) grew much earlier and slower and therefore, firstly, had more time to deal with the problems stemming from population growth but were also able to address new, emerging challenges like environmental protection and climate change after (largely) solving other issues like housing and public infrastructure. In other parts of the world, though, cities are not only growing more rapidly but also have to tackle all these issues at the same time, often overwhelming their financial, institutional, and political capacity and leading to inequalities and injustices (Marcotullio 2007; Marshall 2003; Sorensen & Okata 2011).

1.2.2   A housing crisis

Probably one of the most pressing and most visible inequalities in megacities is found in housing. As urban populations are growing at an unprecedented pace, so are the demands on the housing stock resulting in skyrocketing accommodation costs. In some cities, this has pushed people into ever tinier living arrangements, like Hong Kong's famous cage homes, little coffin-like boxes to live and sleep in that often measure less than 2m^2 (Stacke 2017), but in most cities, the lack of affordable housing has led to the immense growth of *slums* and *informal settlements* (Han et al. 2017; Ooi & Phua 2007).

Informal settlements/slums commonly emerge on undesirable land, like wetlands, hazardous terrain, and polluted parcels, or on city outskirts and, although often quite diverse, share similar attributes such as limited access to public services and amenities like water, power, and sewage, poor living conditions and constant threats of eviction (Han et al. 2017; Karn, Shikura & Harada 2003; UN-Habitat 2003). Slum formation is not a newly emerging issue; in Mumbai, informal settlements have been an integral part of urban reality since the city's inception under the

25

British in the 19th and early 20th centuries (Spate & Learmonth 1972). Neither are slums an issue exclusive to the Global South: although mostly replaced or upgraded now not long ago, slum-type settlements were widespread across Europe and North America (Gilbert 2019) and saw a small reemergence amidst the refugee crisis in 2015.

Today, informal settlements are at the forefront of urban development efforts. There are three key reasons for this: Most importantly, the topic of slums, informal settlements, and strategies on how to improve the conditions of their inhabitants has gained much attention recently among urban policymakers, especially in the wake of the *Cities without slums* initiative by the World Bank and UN-Habitat in the late 1990s and the subsequent UN-Habitat report *The challenge of slums*. This not only put pressure on local governments to find better solutions in the handling of slums but also popularized the topic on the international stage and encouraged more funding for slum redevelopment, chiefly by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (UN-Habitat 2003; Weinstein 2014).

As some researchers argue, though, these grants (World Bank) and funding conditions (IMF) surrounding housing and the real estate market might have had the adversary effect in promoting informal accommodation arrangements: The hereby imposed deregulation in an effort to modernize national and local economies did not only push a wave of farmers into the city but also eroded the urban industrial base that could have somewhat absorbed some of these displaced farmers. Instead, with a subsequent deregulation of the housing market and the selling of public housing projects, they found themselves with no housing opportunities in the formal sector (Davis 2006; Graham & Marvin 2001; UN-Habitat 2003). It is important to note, though, that these are highly complex and not fully understood interdependencies, and therefore, the here-described effects of the involvement of World Bank and IMF are contested among researchers (Weinstein 2014).

Furthermore, these settlements are one of the critical challenges for sustainability in emerging megacities. This is partly due to the sheer size of the problem; around one billion people, a third of the urban population worldwide, live in these precarious conditions, overwhelmingly in the Global South (Bolay, Chenal & Pedrazzini 2016b). In the last 50 years, slum growth outpaced

overall city growth (Davis 2006), meaning that even many established city dwellers are pushed into these informal settlements. Additionally, these settlements are "the antithesis of sustainable, balanced urban development" (Bolay, Chenal & Pedrazzini 2016b, p. 3). Not only are they the epitome of social and legal injustices as their inhabitants often face discrimination and usually have fewer public rights despite being an integral part of urban life (Huchzermeyer 2010; Valuenza-Aguilera 2011), slums are also hotbeds of urban poverty.

While poverty is still primarily a rural phenomenon with rapid urbanization, it is increasing in urban areas, too (Bolay, Chenal & Pedrazzini 2016b). Ooi & Phua (2007) imply an urbanization of poverty. In fact, it is remarkable that rural-to-urban migration was unaffected even when employment opportunities in cities diminished, urban poverty rose, and an overall worsening of the urban economy was witnessed in many regions worldwide in the 1990s and 2000s (Davis 2006).

There exists a tight connection between urban poverty and informality or living in a slum: While linked, they do not come hand in hand, and UN-Habitat (2003) found that in many cities more of the urban poor are actually living outside of slums than within these settlements but that the concentration of poverty in a slum makes it much more noticeable than the hidden poor in other parts of the city. Poverty is also directly correlated with inadequate housing, which is, of course, due to the financial inability of the poor to afford better housing arrangements but, not to be overlooked, also due to inadequate housing promoting the poverty of its residents. It is a vicious cycle that many slum dwellers cannot escape(ibid.).

That is despite the often booming slum economy: In most cities, informal settlements are a vital part of the city's economic growth, especially in Africa, where informal economic activity accounts for most of GDP growth and provide crucial employment opportunities for a vast number of city dwellers (Davis 2006; Tacoli, McGranahan & Satterthwaite 2015; UN-Habitat 2003). While this makes it possible for those who found employment in the informal sector to earn their livelihood, the informality and lack of regulation also allow for ruthless local markets and criminal activity, often resulting in hard, unhealthy work with little pay (Davis 2006).

It is difficult to properly characterize slums, their inhabitants, and the living realities within; not only is each slum and each informal settlement unique and often quite distinctly based on local circumstances[10] , but also as there are few topics as debated as the handling of those areas. While most policymakers and researchers agree that something needs to be done to better the situation of the slum dwellers, their assessments of the situation and their approaches differ wildly (e.g., Bolay, Chenal & Pedrazzini 2016b; Davis 2006; Han et al. 2017) and need closer examination.

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[10] E.g., natural elements like rivers or marshes, location within the city or economic factors like railway terminals or big factories with many employment opportunities

2   Redeveloping a megacity

Unsustainable city development, unmanageable informality in housing and business, and the hike in urban poverty: It is evident that policymakers struggle to cope with the immense pressures that the rapid population growth exerts on urban agglomerations, due to various hurdles like financial limitations, institutional burdens, or conflicting interests. Furthermore, even if all these issues can be resolved, the big question as to what and how remains.

Since the formation of the first urban settlements, cities have always had to find a way to adapt to evolving circumstances. Sometimes change happens in a burst, e.g., in rebuilding after a disaster or through quick and widescale alterations of the urban fabric to adhere to a newly emerged ideal, and sometimes change is more gradual, transforming the urban landscape almost invisible over time until its unrecognizable. Over time countless strategies have evolved to control, steer and even pause this change, and this thesis looks at two of them in the context of transforming a megacity: One, *property-led redevelopment*, has very much shaped cities in the last centuries with its project-based burst-like transformations. The other is the newly emerging strategy of step-by-step renewal through *micro-interventions* that represents a more community-based approach.

Before diving deeper into these two strategies, it is essential to lay a theoretical foundation to build on later. The next chapter will therefore look at the basics and reasoning behind including the respective communities in redeveloping their neighborhoods, especially in the context of *socially disadvantaged communitie*s in megacities.

2.1   Citizen Power

2.1.1   Participation and Empowerment

First, let us look at participation in urban development as one of the "most overused, but least understood concepts" (Botes & van Rensburg 2000, p. 41). As this idea permeates modern urban planning, some form of participation is implemented in virtually all publicly backed development projects worldwide, no matter the size of the proposal, its political context, or intended impact. Participation in an urban planning context bears the promise of "better" urban development through, among other things, the inclusion of residents, shop owners, and other community stakeholders in the planning process. What constitutes *better* development is naturally disputed between stakeholders and varies along the individual interests in a planning process. However, it arguably correlates with the principles of sustainability discussed above, i.e., the more sustainable, the better an urban development is.

As the use of the term participation is so widespread and often vague and ambiguous (Cornwall & Brock 2005; Mansuri & Rao 2012), ranging from a tool to ensure the efficient allocation of funds and resources (especially by the World Bank) to political and social inclusion (Craig & Mayo 1995; Paul 1987), it is neither feasible nor necessary to define the concept as a whole properly. Instead, drawing from the extensive theory discussion on participation, the following will outline this thesis' understanding of *community participation*, the focus of the projects discussed in chapter 6.

Community participation is primarily based on the simple idea of allowing local community stakeholders to participate in planning processes and influence local urban development. This notion is rooted in both practice, through the common failure of non-inclusive planning in providing a sustainable urban fabric (Sampson 2017)[11], and in theory, especially in Healey's approach to *communicative planning* and, by extent, the Habermasian ideal of rational, i.e., "good", actions through non-hierarchical communication (Harris 2002; Healey 1997). At its core,

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[11] Although, as discussed later, the track record of participatory planning is only somewhat better.

community participation is a tool of "self-help" (Choguill 1996, p. 431), a way to enable primarily socially disadvantaged communities to better their living standards. One part of this is the physical upgradation of their surroundings (which is already happening in many informal settlements worldwide). However, the second part is to secure these changes through the active involvement of communities in the political arena and the necessary changes in governmental procedures to allow for this (which is often lacking).

While quite flexible and versatile, there are some fundamentals to community participation (Paul 1987): Firstly, as the name suggests, it primarily aims to include not developers or city officials (that are usually already involved in a planning process) but the local community at large or rather the actors and stakeholders therein, these can be unorganized, individual residents and local entrepreneurs or more institutionalized actors like neighborhood councils or community advocates (religious communities, local business associations, and others). Secondly, community participation always refers to participation in a specific development project or process in lieu of an ongoing, overarching participation process like political involvement (voting, running for office, …). Nonetheless, community participation does not stop after a specific development process. Instead, it must consider the project's long-term effects and prevent situations where, at first, the community or specific community stakeholders involved in the participation process benefit from the development but lose these benefits again. This renders the participation process not only redundant and directly inhibits sustainability. Lastly, and this is probably the most controversial aspect, both in practice as well as in scientific debate, community participation should allow for meaningful influence of communal stakeholders on the outcome of the planning process. Naturally, what constitutes meaningful influence is heavily debated between urban governments and institutionalized developers, which usually lean more towards less participation on one side and, on the other side, communal stakeholders and community activists generally demanding more involvement. The same dispute is carried out among urban researchers, with proponents of strong participation arguing that it is a vital tool to empower citizens, with others raising concerns that too much participation may actually hurt communities more than they benefit (Roberts 2015; Turnhout et al. 2020).

One of the most influential inputs to the debate surrounding levels of participation was given by Arnstein in her 1969 paper "A Ladder Of Citizen Participation". Here, she strongly argues for more citizen participation in public decision-making and outlines, as the title of her paper suggests, the model of a ladder (see Figure 2). Each of the eight steps on the ladder represents a distinct level of public participation, starting at "Manipulation" and reaching "Citizen control" at the top. From these two terms alone, one can deduce her underlying sentiment; the higher up a given participation process is located, the better. And in fact, she subsequently argues that the two bottom steps are "non-participation" and that their only purpose is to keep the illusion of participation with little intent to enact a meaningful participatory process. Steps 3 through 5 are described as "tokenism", where powerholders allow for limited citizen input but without giving up decision power, and finally, at the top, decision power is (partially) transferred to the citizens in the participation process, including the ability to force the outcomes of the process even against resistance from the traditional powerholders, i.e., "citizen power".
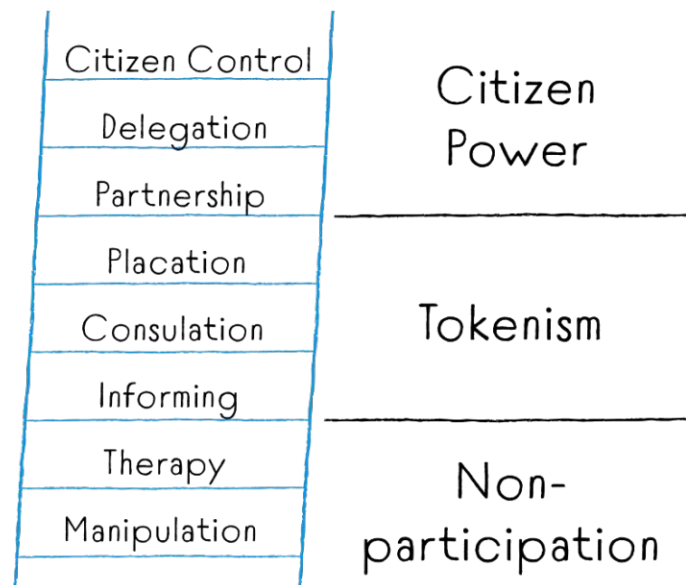

Figure 3: Arnstein's Ladder of Citizen Participation
(own drawing, based on Arnstein 1969)

This simplified model does, in fact, help to cut through the often-nontransparent participation processes in urban development and the usually stark contrast between participation on paper and in reality. Similarly, offering a concise and easy-to-understand system highlights the hidden

power struggles behind participatory processes and urban development in general. However, while there is merit in Arnstein's concept, and it indisputably was immensely influential to the scientific discussion surrounding participation and empowerment, it has rightly been criticized, too, especially for the notion that the goal should be to reach the top of the ladder and that failure to do so results in a flawed participation process (Collins & Ison 2009). In contrast, community stakeholders can push through their agenda and, subsequently, may be content even at the lower levels of the ladder. This is especially true in the context of SDCs with inadequate housing conditions: Here, citizens may not want to take part in the power struggle inherent to Arnstein's model as more citizen power is only part of their needs, more pressing are other issues related to their housing conditions that often supersede the desire for more power (Choguill 1996).

Secondly, models are always abstract and simplified reproductions of reality. However, Arnstein may have oversimplified the complex relationships and processes within participation to a point where the model's usefulness is in question: On the one hand, there is the stark distinction between "haves" and "have-nots" and the power struggle between them, but in reality, stakeholders on both sides do not usually define themselves in relation to their inherent power but rather the interest(s) they have in the specific project. This may very well result in "haves" and "have-nots" with similar interests being on the same side of a conflict, upending Arnstein's core proposition of the power struggle. In addition, even the symbol of the ladder and its inherent linearity is under scrutiny as along the participatory processes, not only the level of participation and the power dynamic might be changing, but the core policy issue might be transforming as well, and with it the actors and their individual approaches resulting in not only one participation process but several related distinct subprocesses with varying power dynamics (Collins & Ison 2009; Tritter & McCallum 2006).

Underlying Arnstein's model, there is another interesting assumption though, namely what she describes as "Citizen Participation is Citizen Power" (Arnstein 1969, p. 216): Fundamental to her logic is the notion that (proper) participation is an instrument of power redistribution towards citizens and communities, i.e., that citizens gain power *through* participation. This certainly seems compelling in the context of socially disadvantaged communities, which are distinct in

33

their lack of rights and power. Nevertheless, there is also the reverse reading of her statement mentioned above; citizen power is a fundamental prerequisite of citizen participation, i.e., participation is only possible for those with political or economic power, which excludes socially disadvantaged communities from influencing local urban development.

While these two readings are by no means mutually exclusive and are rather two sides of the same coin, it is important to note that to improve participation, in the sense of shaping urban change, better, more elaborate, and inclusive participation processes are not necessarily required. Instead, this can also be done through empowering residents in other ways, most notably by improving and upholding their civil rights (a non-negligible component of power, especially in migratory, undocumented, or otherwise power-starved communities) and respecting property ownership (even if not codified, e.g., in an informal fringe settlement), which is a demand that is almost unanimously voiced by the scientific community, slum dweller activists and community representatives alike (Karn, Shikura & Harada 2003; UN-Habitat 2003). The upcoming chapter will delve into the latter of these demands.

Before that, however, we must question the relationship between *power* and *participation* altogether. While Arnstein, Habermas, and Healy all subscribe to the idea that (truthful) communication and participation in urban planning leads to a more equal and just planning process where power imbalances are (at least partly) abolished, others argue that, in fact, the opposite may be true. Authors like Miraftab (2009), Purcell (2009), and Westin (2022) detail a much more complex and relational power model in urban planning. In their view, participatory actions may, at best, reinforce existing power dynamics: By trying to reach shared consent, it ignores that "every seeming agreement or consensus is really always a temporary hegemony of some interests over others" (Purcell 2009, p. 152), and takes the ability of socially disadvantaged communities to disagree away in order to find common ground. At worst, participatory actions are used to deliberately exert seemingly legitimate power over those powerless by invoking an illusion of inclusion and limiting political involvement to artificial participation processes (Miraftab 2009). Similarly, Westin (2022) argues for the recognition that power can hardly be shared consensually (i.e., through deliberate inclusion) but rather evolves from relational

antagonism between different actors and can result in, for planning decisions important, *legitimate power over*.

2.1.2   Domicide and the Right to stay put

There's no place like home! However big or small, luxurious or barren, permanent or makeshift, the space one calls home has a special connotation. It is a place where daily life happens, memories and feelings are experienced, and, in some cases, where one can earn a livelihood. It offers security, plays a crucial part in forming personal identity, and is instrumental to our social and communal connections. In short, home is central to almost any part of our life.

Nevertheless, the most prominent threat slum dwellers face is **domicide**, the "deliberate destruction of home against the will of the home dweller" (Porteous & Smith 2001, p. 3). Severe interruptions to individual settlements or groups thereof (i.e., regions, countries or continents) through wars, colonization [12] or forced resettlements – usually resulting in large-scale destruction of homes, displacement of residents, and devastation to social connections – are aptly dubbed **extreme domicide** and often gain significant attention. However, another small-scale and regular-occurring form of domicide, i.e., **everyday domicide**, is happening in virtually every major town or city around the world. Contrary to its *extreme* sibling, it is usually overlooked, partly due to its legitimization under the umbrella of urban development. As this form of home destruction is in the "public interest", it is far less scrutinized (Shao 2013). Additionally, its victims are often those who, due to them being part of socially disadvantaged communities, have little strength in the public debate (Porteous & Smith 2001). Domicide is, therefore, always the expression of a power imbalance in urban planning and redevelopment regimes.

While **everyday domicide** is happening worldwide in all manners and sizes of settlements, it is ubiquitous in megacities, notably those in the Global South. This has two underlying reasons already touched upon above: The increasing global urban competition that creates the desire

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[12] Although the large colonization efforts by (largely) European and later Western powers are mostly over their effects are still felt today and less obvious types of colonization are still happening at an alarming rate (e.g., the economic exploitation of rainforests and the subsequent disruption to indigenous populations)

among urban officials for upgradation of the cityscape to improve their global position. Upgradation, in this sense, includes both large and prestigious public infrastructure displacing residents of the land needed for them (e.g., the new sports facilities erected in Rio de Janeiro for the 2016 Olympic Games[13]) and the practice of *slum clearance.*

In its essence, slum clearance describes the (temporary) removal of slum residents and the destruction of their settlements, though there have been (and still are) countless different names and methods for this process. In its most basic form, it is just the act of (sometimes violently) pushing unwanted dwellers out of sight by destroying their homes and preventing their return. This happens most commonly when these dwellers are either perceived as a threat to the established surrounding neighborhoods (e.g., under British rule, many informal settlements in Mumbai's city center were razed under the pretext of health concerns) or when they are considered unsightly (i.e., visible from prominent places in the city). One example of the latter is the implicit banishment of people experiencing homelessness in many modern cities[14]. Central to this form is the lack of alternatives the displacer provides to the displaced. Subsequently, similar settlement structures are erected on less prominent land.

However, as public opinion has changed in recent decades, more thought by city officials and developers is put towards the fate of those experiencing domicide. In many cases, they are provided with alternative means of housing, financial aid (e.g., relocation fees), and, sometimes, even a new dwelling in their newly redeveloped neighborhood. For many of the displaced, this is, however, of little consolidation, frequently the compensation is (financially) not sufficient, or the provided new housing is far away and of lesser quality, making it difficult to rebuild their home to their accustomed way of life (Indorewala 2018), and the psychological and social implications of uprooting one's life remain unanswered for (Shao 2013).

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[13] Reportedly more than 20.000 favela families were evicted and their homes destroyed to create space for arenas and the Olympic village (Cuadros 2016).

[14] Despite the name, homeless people do indeed often have a home, e.g., a mobile tent, that is increasingly under threat due to growing urban space designed to prevent them from living there (see *hostile architecture*)

In light of these experiences, Chester Hartman, a US-based urban planner, put forth a compelling proposition in 1984: After witnessing large-scale residential displacement in the US[15] and investigating the effects, these displacements had on local social and economic networks, he concluded that apart from very few examples communal damages far outweighed public benefits. He argued that involuntary relocations not only gravely disadvantage the displaced[16] but also negatively influence the whole community. Depending on the type (i.e., displacement and replacement of individual tenants, the (partly) destruction of the physical neighborhood, or any combination of the two) and the level of displacement exhibited in a community, the long-built-up social and spatial coherence of a neighborhood is threatened (Hartman 1984). However, it is essential to note that some changes, especially if voluntary, to a community's social and physical makeup benefit the neighborhood and improve its resiliency. It is the scale of displacement Hartman observed that overwhelmed communal adaptivity and led him to propose the concept of the **Right to stay put**, which in essence, is the right of residents to resist involuntary displacement from their homes.

This basic premise has simple but far-reaching implications: Urban governance and urban development should put existing residents at the center of their efforts rather than financial interests or broader public benefits (Swanstrom & Kerstein 1989). While this seems hostile towards any renewal (as this often will include at least some displacement), one must not forget that those who are to be displaced are not the powerful and wealthy but the disadvantaged and poor. Equally essential is to acknowledge that for most informal communities, the hardest-fought struggle is not about better living conditions but the future existence of their community (Hartman 1984; Weinstein 2014).

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[15] First by the government in the 50s and 60s in the wake of interstate highway construction and urban renewal programs; later as (parts of) cities became increasingly gentrified by private actors

[16] An overview of several studies in the US shows that the displaced end up in worse living condition with higher accommodation costs and usually try to stay as close as possible to where they have been evicted from in an attempt to preserve the social and economic ties they have built there (Hartman 1984).

37

In the ongoing conflict between those endangered by displacement and those aspiring to displace [17], the **Right to stay** put could therefore be understood as an empowerment of the former, at odds with other, more codified rights like the property rights of landowners or, in some cases, the sovereign powers of municipal governments. Thus, the **Right to stay put** should purposely not be understood as a legal instrument but rather as a guideline for future urban development, despite Hartman outlining the practical and legal implications of this right in the context of US property law in his essay.

This is akin to Lefebvre's **Right to the city,** which, comparably, has gained much more attention and has been picked up by NGOs and activists worldwide and supranational organizations like UN-Habitat in the context of informal settlements (Brown & Kristiansen 2009). While there surely are numerous valuable insights and lessons to be gained from the scientific debate on the **Right to the city** within the context of this thesis, Hartman's much narrower approach is favored as it perfectly highlights the most significant challenge when redeveloping slums: the often-likely displacement of their inhabitants, the demolition of their built environment and the subsequent disruption of economic and social ties.

Furthermore, there is one more reason why the right to stay put should garner more attention, especially from developers and urban governments looking to redevelop socially disadvantaged communities. Whereas in the past, displacing inhabitants and splintering communities often came with little ramifications due to the stark power imbalance, today, the playing field is much more even. Better legal protection for residents, a public that is more sensitive to this issue, and governments trying to promote more citizen collaboration in urban development helped to negate this imbalance partly. As seen in countless cities and informal settlements worldwide, e.g., Dharavi in Mumbai, where all recent, substantial redevelopment efforts met heavy resistance over the possible displacement or rehousing of residents and subsequently failed, the right to stay put cannot be overlooked when considering redevelopment plans.

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[17] Who should not be demonized per se as there are arguably valid grounds for displacement.

2.2 Redevelopment regimes

Urban development, and by extent redevelopment, is the driving force behind the (re)generation of urban landscapes. As time passes and cities grow or shrink, buildings deteriorate, and changing lifestyles and external circumstances (technology, climate, and others) alter the requirements for human settlements. The urban fabric must constantly adjust and rejuvenate itself, be it through changing land and building uses, new constructions, or transformations to urban networks.

Owing to every city and neighborhood having different spatial, socio-economic, legal, and institutional circumstances, there are countless approaches to urban development worldwide. Due to their drastically varying and often fluctuating nature, it is difficult to characterize them properly. Nonetheless, when looking at a wide range of (re)development projects, there are some broader trends discernable: One possible way to characterize these approaches is to look at the main focus of the project; usually, this is either the built environment (i.e., **property**) or the socioeconomic ties of the residents (i.e., **community**)[18]. It is important to note that even though the former is often associated with big-scale development projects by institutionalized investors and developers, and the latter often appears to be linked with bottom-up processes, this distinction between property and community gives no indication to the actors involved in such a project, be it state actors, private investors, community stakeholders or simply individual residents.

2.2.1 Property-led redevelopment

Recent decades saw the rise of an international real estate market and the subsequent emphasis on urban regeneration through real estate projects. These approaches have been adeptly dubbed *property-led (re)development*.

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[18] To what extent these two are connected or mutually exclusive is somewhat disputed: While linked some scholars argue that due to conflicts of interest they are rarely thought of as integrated with each other (Ng 2002; Heeg 2008).

Before looking at the implications of this type of redevelopment on neighborhoods and the broader urban fabric, a deeper understanding of the basic premises of property development is necessary:

> "Property development can be defined as the assembly of finance, land, building materials, and labour to produce or improve buildings for occupation and investment purposes." (Turok 1992, p. 362)

While the prerequisites of property development – finance, land, building materials, and labor – bear little surprise (although especially the first two will become significant later in this chapter), much more interesting is a look at the reasons and motives as to why one might want to develop a property this definition gives: new or better buildings either to live/work in them or for financial profit. Until the middle of the 20th century, occupant-owners, i.e., those who own and occupy a building (or parts of the building while others are rented away), were much more common than their investor counterpart, who owned property with no intention of occupying it themselves. This meant that new construction (or improvements of existing buildings) was heavily focused on the occupants' needs as they were usually also the financiers of construction tasks. After World War 2, this changed: Investor-owned building activities quickly increased, and property ownership concentrated at private developers and institutionalized investors from the financial markets (Turok 1992).[19]

As examples in India show, though, this does not necessarily result in fewer individual property owners and a higher share of renters: In fact, in Mumbai, where real estate developers are dominating the property market, most inhabitants own their respective accommodation, the key difference however, is that they usually only own their apartment and therefore only a small share of the building and secondly, only obtain ownership after the construction or

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[19] These patterns are primarily based on UK and US data and are therefore probably not necessarily applicable to other regions. Nonetheless, studies from all over the world describe a steep rise in investor-led development suggesting that similar conclusions to those described here can be made in other real estate markets, too (Fisher & Lambie-Hanson 2012; Huang & Boateng 2013; Fawaz, Krijnen & El Samad 2018).

redevelopment project was completed by real estate developers giving them little to no influence over architectural qualities and urban integration (Rao 2012).

Corresponding to the shift of building activities from individual occupant-owners to big real estate developers, urban planning theory also changed: As cities began to increasingly compete globally with other urban agglomerations for power, importance, and key industries, quality and quantity of urban infrastructure became an essential competitive edge, and in many city governments the idea of a strong correlation between property development and urban economic growth prevailed, thus leading to a strong emphasis on upgrading and redeveloping existing property in the hopes that this not only attracts new capital but also, by extent, has broader beneficial implications for neighborhoods and the city as a whole, e.g., by creating new employment opportunities or by improving the housing stock, which became the central premise and promise of property-led redevelopment (Heeg 2008; Turok 1992).

While many cities had extensive land reserves for property development, they often lacked the funds to execute this strategy properly. Meanwhile, the self-perception of municipalities changed from *government* to *governance* amidst a global wave of neo-liberalism and the associated gradual disengagement of state actors in many urban arenas. In turn, the burden of urban development was put on private investors and developers. Emerging partnerships between public and private stakeholders consolidated municipal land and properties that were sold off aggressively with private funds to (re)develop them. Despite the extent of cooperation and the power balance of the two sides varying vastly in different countries and cities, this trend of property-led development, which originated in western countries, spread worldwide. (He & Wu 2005).

In his 1992 study on the effects of urban policy centering on property-led development, Turok attested this approach's initial success in its primary purpose of generating economic growth through inward investments, the creation of construction jobs and technological change and attributes improvements in living conditions and quality of life to property-led policies. Though his criticism is much more severe: He argues that property-led development favors short-term economic gains over long-term, more (financially) beneficial investments into fundamental

urban factors like infrastructure or human capital and even questions if property development can influence these factors at all (Turok 1992). He is not alone in this assessment as several other researchers (e.g., He & Wu 2005; Heeg 2008; Ng 2002) have criticized the overreliance of governmental decision-makers on development plans by private investors (which usually aim to maximize financial profit) and the hesitation of actively pushing the other goals of social and environmental sustainability during the planning process.

Recent years, however, have seen several politics and policy shifts to address these problems. As civil societies became increasingly demanding and the awareness of sustainable urban development in all its above-described expressions grew, urban renewal projects became progressively more integrative regarding stakeholder involvement and when considering the proposed goals (Tasan-Kok, Atkinson & Refinetti Martins 2019; Ye et al. 2021). However, this is a dynamic field of urban regeneration, and policy-makers' heightened accountability has led to a disjointed "complex regulatory landscape" (Tasan-Kok, Atkinson & Refinetti Martins 2019, p. 1059) that is often focused on individual projects[20].

2.2.2 Micro-interventions: Community-focused redevelopment

Other neighborhoods worldwide witness a wholly different form of redevelopment, one which rarely relies on big, singular projects or measures to change the built urban fabric, as described in the chapter above, and is frequently much less planned for or orchestrated by one entity but instead works through changing the public perception of the neighborhood. Transforming the image of an area or neighborhood is usually a gradual process that stems from an initial seed that, over time, influences the mental construct thereof. These seeds can be a wide variety of deliberate interventions (bottom-up and top-down) and accidental circumstances. Due to their diverse nature, several interrelated terms and concepts describe this development mode.

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[20] An increasingly common tool are development contracts between government and private investors; for an analysis of their impact on urban development and citizen participation see Stapper (2020).

A potpourri of related ideas

In the field of urban planning, and especially urban renewal, there are probably few theories as prominent as *gentrification*, "the transformation of a working-class or vacant area of the central city into middle-class residential or commercial use" (Lees, Wyly & Slater 2008, p. xv). The phenomenon of gentrification and the scientific (and public) discourse on this process emerged in the middle of the 20th century and, in the past six decades, have been associated with too many redevelopment concepts and theories to be described here in detail and scholars like Zukin (2010) criticize the term for oversimplifying complex and diverse space mechanisms in urban space production. Importantly though, at the core of most approaches is the rehabilitation of neighborhoods, perceived as in need of upgradation, through the influx of "higher-class" residents and businesses, i.e., the influx of *gentry* [21], which also coined the term (Smith 1982). In recent years, gentrification gained a bad reputation in the public perception as it is heavily criticized for contributing to the displacement of long-established residents, the destruction of their community and values, and increasing spatial inequalities (Lees, Wyly & Slater 2008; Sarmiento, Sims & Morales 2018). Like many other urban processes, though, gentrification is not inherently harmful, and many scholars argue for its benefits in rejuvenating the urban landscape, revitalizing neighborhoods, and promoting social mixing (Lees, Wyly & Slater 2008).

In the early 2010s, a plethora of new, mostly overlapping, concepts on small-scale urban interventions emerged that try to harvest the aforementioned positive effects of gentrification: *Guerilla urbanism, tactical urbanism, DIY urbanism*, and others aim at "improving the physical and social environment of local communities through temporary, quick, cheap and grassroots-based activities" (Fabian & Samson 2016, p. 167). These include the installation of art in the public space, the occupation and deliberate "misuse" of public infrastructure (most prominently parking spaces) for communal purposes (greenery, social interaction, …), and other similar interventions. These usually unauthorized projects contribute to an *aestheticization* of the city

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[21] While the term "gentry" describes an old British class of lower aristocracy (Merriam-Webster 2023) gentrification today is more associated with "middle class […] professionals" (Smith 1982, p. 140).

which is not without criticism for being somewhat artificial (Zukin 2010), forming new interactive urban arenas, and encouraging public discourse (Fabian & Samson 2016).

Similar ideas are the base for a development concept called *Urban Acupuncture*. The term popularized by Jaime Lerner[22], architect and long-time mayor of the Brazilian city Curitiba, translates the traditional Chinese healing technique of improving the whole by very pointed interventions (i.e., puncturing the patient's skin with needles at precise points to benefit overall well-being) to urban planning. According to Lerner (2014), the urban needles can be almost anything, from big projects and low-cost interventions to non-physical cultural activities and even inaction, as long as they are precise and quick. His work introduces two important new elements: the use of "acupunctural" interventions not as a replacement but rather a supplement to traditional lengthy planning processes, as well as their employment by traditional planning authorities like the municipality instead of actors from the civil society or community stakeholders. This (considering his long-time position as mayor maybe unsurprising) switch of perspective is crucial in understanding limited interventions as a productive and cooperative element of the urban planning toolkit. This contrasts the confrontational-by-design approach of grassroots-based *guerilla urbanism* or *DIY urbanism*, which, while an important tool in public expression, was often quickly removed by city officials.

Micro-Interventions, as understood in this thesis

The research into **micro-interventionism** is yet to come up with a proper definition of this term. As seen in the two readings above, with similar ideas and intentions but rather different implementations, it is essential for comprehensibility to outline the understanding of micro-interventions employed in this thesis. By drawing on and combining *DIY urbanism* with *Urban acupuncture*, probably the most critical element lies in implementing little changes with the aim of an extensive transformation of the site and the urban fabric at large – or put more poetic, transformation through "a spark that sets off a current that begins to spread" (Lerner 2014,

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[22] Other important fathers of *Urban Acupuncture* include Spanish architect Manuel de Solà-Morales and Finish architect Marco Casagrande (Hoogduyn 2014).

pp. 2–3). However, Lerner gives a vast range of possible projects that he considers Urban acupuncture – in fact, there are no limitations at all. For the investigative purposes of this thesis, his definition is too vague. Subsequently, micro-interventions (as the name suggests) should be understood with limitations to their size: projects that are low-cost, small-scale, and limited in time.

Additionally, as this thesis views micro-interventions as a distinct redevelopment regime (especially in contrast to property-led redevelopment), another essential characteristic of micro-interventionism (as understood here) must be the scalability of these approaches. Methods like *DIY urbanism* that build upon unauthorized interventions (i.e., in conscious confrontation with local laws and officials) are problematic in this perspective as local governments have little (direct) influence over the scale on which these interventions are carried out and the topics that they concern. Micro-interventions as a redevelopment regime have, therefore, to be on some level connected to local officials, be it through initiating, supporting, or even just recognizing the project.

The City of

Shanghai

3   The City

When looking at Shanghai today with its glistening skyscrapers, among them one of the highest buildings in the world, its bustling streets filled with people from around the world, and the seemingly endless stretching cityscape, it is easy to understand why Shanghai is one of the most important and influential megacities worldwide. It is China's commercial and industrial capital, features the biggest seaport in the world (World Shipping Council 2021), and is among the top three cities worldwide in population (UN 2018). Undoubtedly, Shanghai has pushed hard to reach the forefront of global urban competition. Nevertheless, as in many other megacities, the city's urban fabric struggles to adapt and keep up with these fast and profound developments. Skyrocketing accommodation prices, inadequate living conditions, and social exclusion are the consequences. To better assess these problems today, it is mandatory to look at the (comparably) short but unique history of the city, which despite efforts by local and state governments to detach the city from its past, is still heavily influencing today's urban structure.

Figure 4: Shanghai on a Map of China
(own drawing)

3.1   Treaty port and the emergence of Lilong

From its origins as a small fishing village to the metropolis today, Shanghai always relied on its strategic position on the mouth of Asia's largest river, the Yangtze, and the associated trade potentials. Thanks to this asset, the city emerged during the Ming dynasty (1368–1644) as a large, prosperous harbor town, and by the early 19th century city and port had developed to be an essential node in Asian trade (Liu 2014; Zhao 2004). This trend escalated when China was forced to agree to the treaty of Nanking in 1842 after losing the *First Opium War* to the British Empire. One of the main goals of the British was to protect and enhance their trade with the, until then, very isolationist Chinese Empire. As part of the treaty, several port cities, including Shanghai, were opened up to western traders. For Shanghai, this resulted in an explosion in trade activity, pushing the city's harbor from a regional hub to the busiest and most important Chinese trade port in a couple of years. Amidst the development of trade activity, the city changed too: Demographic changes not only included a stark rise of inhabitants but also resulted in a diversification of the very homogeneous demographic makeup of Shanghai when migrants from all over China moved to the city. For centuries, migrants comprised around 80% of the population, creating a melting pot of different ethnicities and cultures (Lu 1999).

Nevertheless, the city became increasingly segregated with the mass arrival of European and American settlers in the mid-19th century: Although the old *Canton System,* which confined foreign nationals into separate zones, was abolished with the treaty of Nanking, its practice carried on, and the subsequent setting up of designated foreign settlements was met with high approval both among western settlers as well as Chinese officials (Huang 2000; Lu 1999). These settlements, consisting of the 1849 *French concession,* the *1845 British settlement,* and the *1948 American settlement* (of which the latter two later merged into the *International settlement*), were located north and west of the Chinese urban core. Severe restrictions meant that Chinese were not allowed to rent or own property in the settlements and, in some cases, were not even allowed to enter, limitations that vice versa applied to foreigners in the Chinese part of the city. Chinese residents who lived in the newly erected settlements were relocated to the Chinese city. From relatively small beginnings, the foreign settlements were enlarged several times, restricting the growth of the Chinese urban core and reaching twelve times its size (Lu 1999; Zhao 2004).
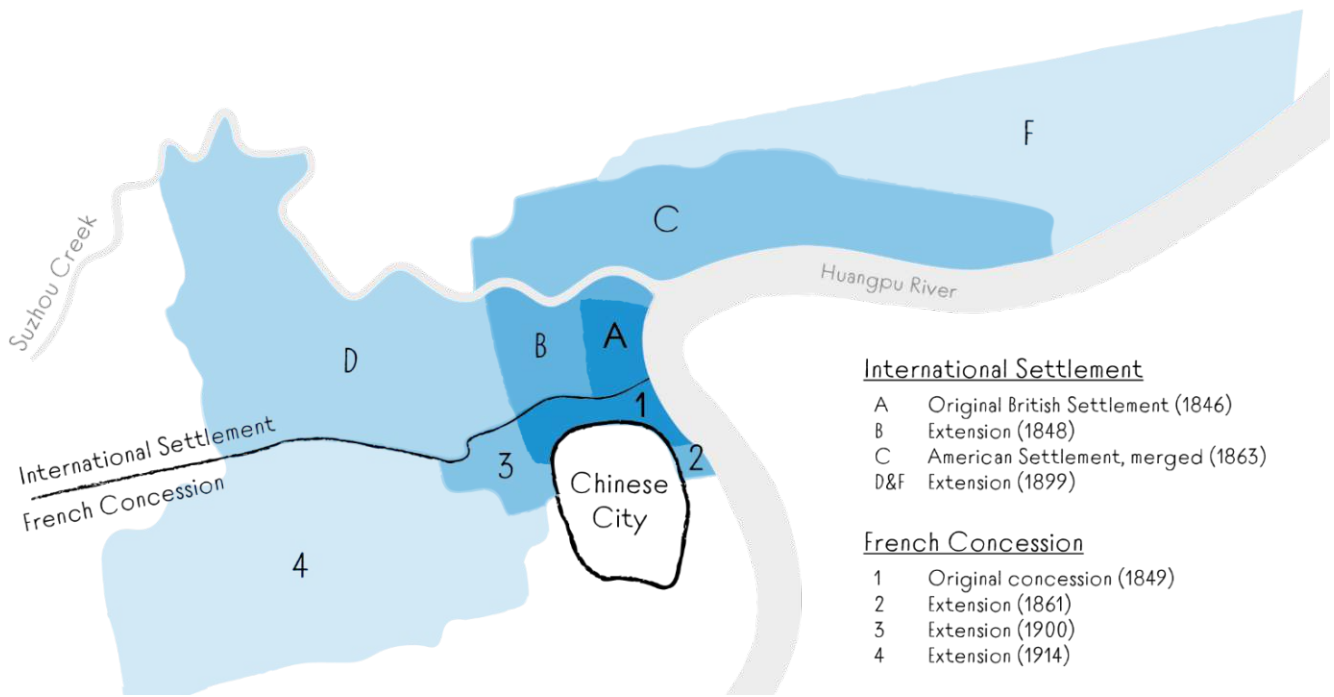
Figure 5: Development stages of Foreign Settlements 1846-1914.
(own visualization, based on Lu 1999)

The strict segregation, however, was quickly abandoned when only a few years later, in 1853, a violent uprising erupted in the region, and Shanghai was besieged twice in seventeen months. Thousands of Chinese refugees sought shelter in the Western settlements that the rebels did not attack. There they were met with mixed reactions: Many of the foreign settlements' residents regarded the refugees with suspicion and considered them threats to public order and safety. Accordingly, the demolition of shacks erected by the Chinese and threats of eviction were common, leading to further tensions. Only the business and merchant community believed in immense profits if the refugees were allowed to stay. A letter by a British merchant to the British consul in Shanghai openly describes the attitude that many Westerns had toward the city:

> It is my business to make a fortune with the least possible loss of time, by
>
> letting my land to Chinese, and building for them at thirty or forty
>
> percent interest, if that is the best thing I can do with my money. In two
>
> or three years at farthest, I hope to realize a fortune and get away; and
>
> what can it matter to me if all Shanghae [Shanghai] disappear afterward in
>
> fire or flood? You must not expect men in my situation to condemn

themselves to years of prolonged exile in an unhealthy climate for the benefit of posterity. We are money-making, practical men. Our business is to make money, as much and as fast as we can; and for this end, all modes and means are good which the law permits. (Lu 1999, p. 34)

Western officials eventually yielded to these demands, and a wave of makeshift homes for the Chinese swept through the foreign settlements. This decision effectively abolished segregationist policies and established mixed Foreign-Chinese neighborhoods in Shanghai. The city's economic opportunities, lenient Western-influenced laws, and improved political stability attracted a diverse population and contributed to the rapid growth of Shanghai as a cosmopolitan city, a previously unimaginable development in imperial China. (Huang 2000; Lu 1999).

Architecture and urban structure also evolved as a fusion of Western and Chinese principles. When early foreign settlers tried to recreate their familiar style of architecture, they quickly ran into problems as Chinese artisans were unaccustomed to the techniques and designs of Western architecture and planning. Subsequently, a mixed urban structure emerged, combining Chinese techniques and building materials with Western urban layouts and floor plans (Huang 2000). This integration and the massive demand for new housing after the end of segregation laid the foundation for the **Lilong**, a housing typology mixing English row houses and Chinese walled neighborhoods that shapes Shanghai's urban structure until today, which will be discussed in detail in the following chapter.

Lilong started out as cheap wooden dwellings built by Western landowners aimed at providing cheap and dreadful housing to the Chinese refugees at exorbitant rents. As fears over fire and other safety hazards grew in the settlements, new regulations were enacted that led to the emergence of the first typical Lilongs, similarly inexpensive but built out of stone and of better quality. As the Chinese were still excluded from buying or owning property, Lilong were exclusively built by European and American developers and investors who rented them to the Chinese, further cementing the colonial hierarchy (Morris 1994).

Figure 6: Aerial view of Shanghai in 1937. Apart from the Bund area (waterfront)
and the racecourse, the urban landscape is dominated by Lilong. (Tang 1937)

The Lilong proved to be the perfect combination of low costs and, therefore, high returns for Western developers with adequate to good living standards for their Chinese tenants and were popular on both sides. From the late 1860s, when Lilong-style neighborhoods first emerged, they became the almost exclusively built form of accommodation in Shanghai, housing 80-90% of the city's residents by 1945 (Bracken 2017). Over the 80 years of Lilong construction, their typology changed very little, except for getting denser as the city grew exponentially and housing pressure grew. The "housing for the masses" (Arkaraprasertkul 2009, p. 13) was primarily aimed at working-class people but quickly attracted wealthier middle-class residents as well. After World War I, when foreign interest in the city peaked again, Lilong were also sought after by Chinese and foreign elites (Arkaraprasertkul 2009; Huang 2000; Morris 1994).

On the other hand, an apartment in a Lilong remained unachievable for the urban poor. In the wake of the violent political turmoil that engulfed China after the collapse of the Qing dynasty in 1911, thousands of poor migrants and refugees poured into the city. Soon, slums spread throughout the city, substantially worsening living conditions in Shanghai (Lu 1999).

51

3.2 Urban history after 1945

World War II and the Chinese Civil War drastically changed the city and its urban structure. When Japanese troops won control over the city in 1937, the foreign settlements were left unoccupied and largely independent from Japanese rule. As a result, these save heavens experienced an economic boom and had to deal with a large influx of refugees seeking safety. Life continued with mostly regular activity even after the attack on Pearl Harbor, which brought Japan into war with the United States and the subsequent annexation of the international settlement by Japanese troops and the incarceration of its British and American inhabitants. In these conditions, Lilong's attractiveness and, therefore, construction faded as overcrowding and the lack of modern amenities became a major concern.

In 1946 the French, as the last foreign power, ceded their concession ending a century of colonial rule in Shanghai and the rise of the city from a small port city to China's economic and cultural capital. A further turning point was the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, which put Shanghai, a "paragon of capitalist accumulation" (Bracken 2017, p. 207), under communist rule. This had wide-reaching consequences for the city, its inhabitants, and its urban structure. One of the first measures taken by the new government was the expropriation of landowners, splitting housing units into several smaller ones, and redistributing those housing units, predominantly in Lilong, towards the poor (Morris 1994). For Lilong residents, that meant immense overcrowding as houses built for one family now had to house several families, often only divided by curtains or paper dividers. Subsequently, the *Living Area Per Capita* dropped from 3.9 m² in 1949 to 3.1 m² in a decade (ibid.). To combat the lack of housing, especially as equal access to housing was core to Sino-communist policies, some standardized multistorey residential units, heavily influenced by soviet concrete block buildings, were built around the city (Denison & Ren 2006; Huang 2000; Morris 1994).

Like many other Chinese cities, though, Shanghai continued to suffer from overcrowded housing and a lack of investment in urban development (He & Wu 2005). Shanghai was hit especially hard as political turmoil and ideological fights led to a standstill in urban planning efforts. By the end of China's *Great Proletarian Culture Revolution* in the early 1970s, Shanghai's built-up

environment seemed stuck since 1949. No new constructions, a severe lack of maintenance of existing buildings, and years of looting and destruction scarred the urban landscape (Denison & Ren 2006). Nowhere was this more visible than in the Lilong, where overcrowding and overuse contributed heavily towards their deterioration, and which was at the same time neglected by city officials due to their colonial past (Bracken 2017; He & Wu 2005; Morris 1994).

It was only with the slow opening of the Chinese economy starting in the early 1980s. While not elected for the first wave of *economic zones* in 1979, which instead were designated in the Chinese South and, with the ensuing economic boom, dethroned Shanghai as the economic capital of the country, a significant blow to the city (Denison & Ren 2006), the city saw the first time since 1949 a positive economic development when it along with 13 other cities were opened to foreign investments (ibid.). The economic uptick skyrocketed in the 1990s as Pudong, a long-neglected area on the other side of the Yangtze River, was designated as a *special economic zone* and immense economic and urban development started there, completely transforming Pudong from a low-density industrial landscape to a skyscraper-laden boom town in just 20 years.

Figure 7: Pudong 1990 vs 2010.
(Business Insider 2010)

While internationally renowned architects and urban planners debated on a new masterplan for Pudong, the old city also underwent an enormous metamorphosis. A complete renewal of the city's infrastructure commenced with the construction of the first metro line and a new airport, new telecommunication infrastructure, and an overhaul of the water systems and, more crucially, construction activity was at an all-time high as the city sold off many of its real estate holdings and foreign investors quickly swept into the city. Although this regeneration of the

53

dilapidated building stock was much needed, little attention was given to the historically grown urban structure as thousands of new high-rise buildings were erected, and new highways were carved through the city, not only leading to a severe traffic deadlock and bad air quality but the destruction of Shanghai's Lilong-dominated landscape (Bracken 2017; Denison & Ren 2006).

3.3   Contemporary urban planning

3.3.1   Administrative and institutional framework

As China's largest and most commercially important city, Shanghai has a unique role in the country's political and administrative system. Along with only three other major cities (Beijing, Tianjin, and Chongqing), Shanghai has the special designation of *direct-administered municipality* 直辖市, which elevates these four urban areas to the provincial level, the highest tier of subdivisions in China. Therefore, the Shanghai Municipal Government has far-reaching autonomy and is only accountable to the Central government rather than a superordinate provincial government.

Shanghai is subdivided into two political (municipal and district) and three administrative (municipal, district, subdistrict) levels. As expected, the Municipal Government and administration are responsible for citywide, macro-level infrastructure and urban planning tasks, such as setting urban development goals, conceptualizing overarching strategies (including the Shanghai Masterplan), and managing citywide public infrastructure. It is also responsible for approving land use plans (such as Taipingqiao discussed in chapter 5).

The 16 districts of Shanghai are, arguably, the main actor of urban development in the city, as they not only have moderate autonomy in their fulfilling of the development targets set by the Municipal Government (i.e., designating areas for development, engaging with stakeholders and communities, construction, ...) but also serve as the link between real estate developers and the Municipal Government. The districts are further divided into subdistricts (213 in total) which have no governmental roles but are instead tasked with local administrative functions; nonetheless, they do play a role in initiating and coordinating small-scale urban planning activities, such as the project at Guizhou Road, one of the case studies of this thesis.
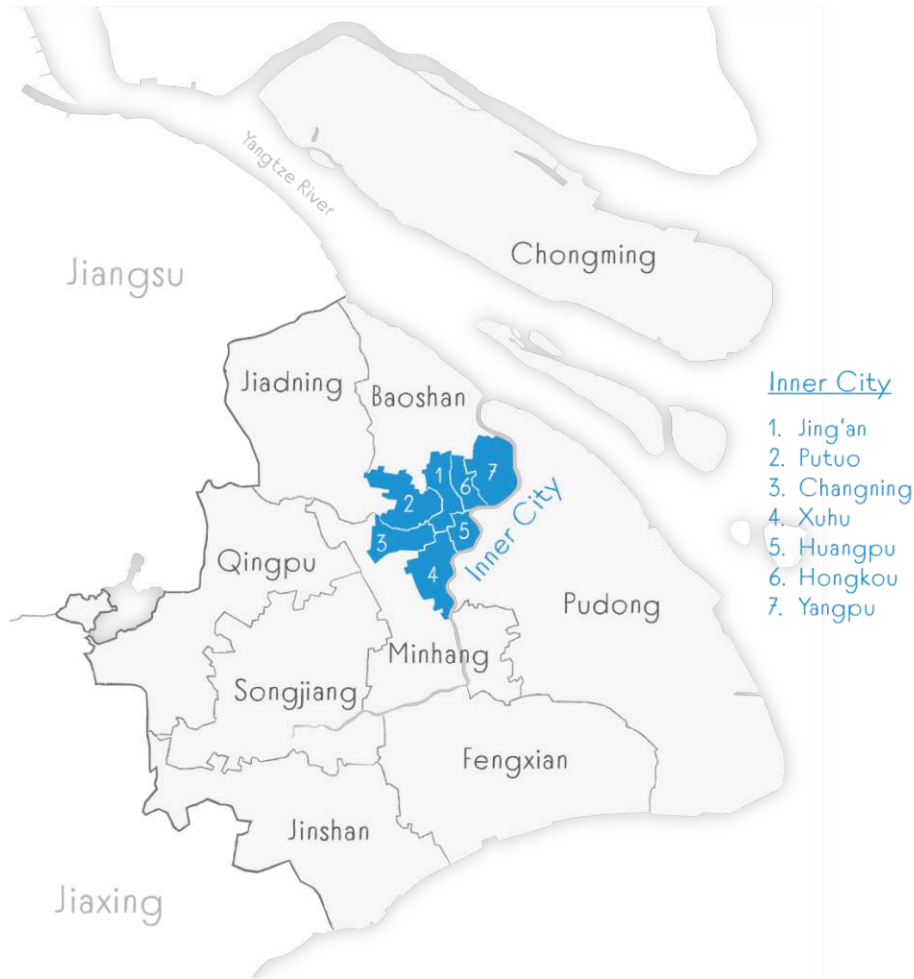
Figure 8: Districts of Shanghai
(own drawing)

A critical feature of the urban planning framework of the city are the strong incentives for urban development rooted in China's political and fiscal system: Both districts and the municipality stand to profit immensely from urban development. Extensive redevelopment projects not only improve tax revenues (of which only a portion remains in the city) but, more importantly, directly improve the respective public coffers as private real estate developers are charged reoccurring land lease fees by the municipal government and must (over)compensate district governments for relocation and demolishment costs (Cheval 2018; Zhang 2002). At the same time, the successful management of a political entity (i.e., districts and municipality), and therefore the possibility of individual decision-makers being promoted, used to be heavily assessed by GDP growth to which the real estate industry is a significant contributor in China (He & Wu 2005)

3.3.2   Current topics in urban development

Since the first official census in 1953, Shanghai has grown immensely, and resident numbers have nearly tripled. Strikingly, this growth happened almost exclusively outside the already built-up central district. Contrary to many other (Western) cities, though, where the latter half of the 20th century saw a big wave of suburbanization, this was not an expression thereof but rather the symptom of extensive reforms of China's political and economic system from 1978 onwards (He 2010).

Central to these transformations was restructuring the economic model to include market-based elements and the transfer of power from the central government in Beijing to lower-level state bodies (i.e., local governments), both in legislative responsibilities and financial capabilities. A new fiscal system brought more tax revenue to local budgets, effectively decentralizing the country (He & Wu 2009; Wu & Ma 2005). With the 1989 *City Planning Act,* local governments, including the Shanghai Municipal Government, gained much autonomy in urban planning and development. Together with the integration of private actors into the real estate market and the financial incentives of local tax generation, this created a boom in urban development (He & Wu 2009). A massive wave of rural-to-urban migration stemming from the loosening of the *Hukou* system [23] and (from 2000 onwards) heightened efforts to promote economic growth through urbanization brought around an influx of roughly 150 million primarily young migrants to Chinese cities by 2010 and further fueled the urban expansion (He 2010; Hu 2012).

As Shanghai grew outwards, the inner city, with its many crumbling Lilong communities, also received new attention in the form of much-needed plans for urban renewal. When the lease of urban, state-owned land to private developers was legalized in 1992 and quickly proved to be

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[23] A nationwide system of household registration established by the central government to restrict population movement and to prevent rural-urban migration (Chan 2013).

hugely lucrative for the municipal administration (Zhang 2002), a *private-public growth coalition*[24] quickly emerged to transform inner-city neighborhoods through property-led redevelopment projects; one example of this, *Xintiandi,* will be discussed in depth later in this thesis. The same year, the Shanghai Municipal Government launched the 365 scheme to redevelop 365 acres of dilapidated housing by 2000, completed one year ahead of time in 1999 (Ye 2018). Around 5 million sqm of housing were demolished and 100 million sqm (including the outer districts) built in this time, and living space per capita and access to private kitchen and sanitary infrastructure doubled, but the program also resulted in large-scale destruction of historic neighborhoods (Zhu & Qian 2002).

	1954		1983		2000		2020	
Inner City	5.28	**59%**	5.89	**50%**	6.68	**43%**	6.87	**28%**
Outer districts	3.70	**41%**	5.87	**50%**	8.89	**57%**	17.41	**72%**
Total	**8.98**		**11.86**		**15.57**		**24.28**	

Table 1: Population development and distribution in Shanghai 1954-2020 (in Millions) Source: He 2010; Shanghai Statistics Bureau 2020

Struggles over the management of dilapidated (Lilong) neighborhoods and the conflict therein continued in the 21st century: Historic conservation has become of growing importance in recent years, and several policies (starting with *The 11th Five-Year Plan* in 2000 and increasingly restricting the demolishment of historic buildings, including Lilong), as well as institutional changes (including the creation of the Municipal Bureau of Cultural Relics in 2010 to coordinate these efforts), have been implemented to protect the cities heritage (Zhong & Chen 2017). At the same time, though, large-scale destruction of historic neighborhoods continues until today in the name of modernization and international prestige, and historic conservation is sometimes understood very loosely, as seen in the Xintiandi project described later. One good example

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[24] A term in urban regime theory describing a mutually beneficial alliance between public and private actors in urban development with the goal of promoting real estate development; for a more in-depth look see Zhang (2002).

highlighting this dichotomy is the 2010 Shanghai World Expo: In the run-up to this for China and Shanghai significant event, the Lilong's customs of living were placed on the cultural heritage list, first in Shanghai and then nationally, giving it heightened prominence and protection, meanwhile, large swaths of Lilong housing (considered unsightly and out-of-fashion) in Shanghai were redeveloped in efforts to beautify the cityscape (Ye 2018; Zhong & Chen 2017). It seems like governmental decision-makers are fond of the idea and history of the Lilong while at the same time rejecting the physical form that produced the Lilong character.

The other struggle visible in urban planning in Shanghai in the last 20 years is the question of power balance and stakeholder involvement. The municipal government has a long-standing approach of planning decentralization, i.e., giving district governments considerable autonomy in matters of urban development while retaining the power to veto projects through planning permissions. Therefore, in the 1990s, a strong coalition was formed between district governments and private developers that heavily shaped the city through redevelopment projects. Only in the late 2000s did the affected communities' concerns start to gain attention. Despite efforts and procedure guidelines to strengthen the position of community stakeholders in the planning processes, they remain pretty power-starved, and even when they are heavily included in a planning process, there is little guarantee that these results will be of longevity, as visible at Guizhou Road which will be discussed later.

According to Zhang, Cong & Chakraborty (2022), these struggles can be summarized into one main issue; the strong orientation of the institutional framework and the tools used in urban planning toward traditional redevelopment through demolition and rebuilding. It seems that while there is considerable effort and political capital put into changing and modernizing the urban planning system of the city, and there undoubtedly have been significant steps in this direction over the last two decades, Shanghai's political and administrative planning structure has still some way to go to fulfill their own goals set in the current masterplan.

Aid in this transition came from an unlikely source: the renaissance of communities during the recent COVID-19 pandemic. Before 2020, the growing consensus among researchers was that, despite a long tradition of tightly knitted communal arrangements in Chinese society, the

market-based reforms of the 1990s, the rise of digital technology, and overall societal modernization have severely weakened communal ties and, in turn, strengthened individualistic tendencies (Xie & Shao 2022). Covid-19 changed that: The communal system (based on the work unit or *danwei* established in the 1950s) that had lost much of its importance in recent decades - despite several reworks - suddenly proved essential in China's response to the pandemic. Access to each (often gated) neighborhood (*Xiaoqu*) could be closely monitored and, if need be, restricted, welfare and support could be organized through the neighborhood committees, and as each *xiaoqu* is usually treated as a unit (e.g., even a single case of COVID-19 may lead to the lockdown of the whole neighborhood) stronger communal connections formed (Hartog 2020).
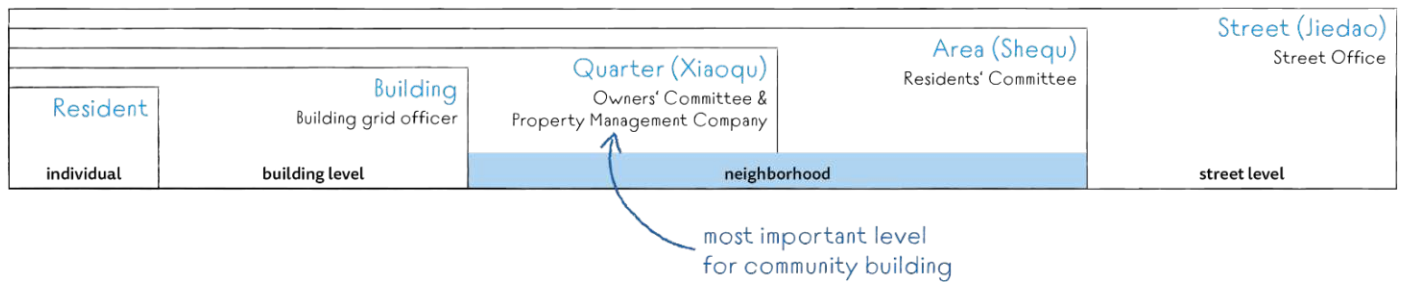
Figure 9: Structure of community governance in Shanghai
(own drawing, based on Xie & Shao 2022)

Additionally, countless spontaneous civil society groups formed to address specific needs and interests surrounding the pandemic. Although they usually were limited in thematic scope, inter-connectivity, and time (i.e., they usually disbanded as quickly as they were formed), they played a crucial role in supporting the government's response to the outbreak(s) of COVID-19. It is still unclear, however, if these activities will have a lasting impact after the measures and difficulties stemming from the pandemic have faded (ibid.). Overall, the strong emphasis on building communities and community resilience employed in Shanghai seems to have proven a valuable tool in combating COVID-19 (Zhang 2022).

Nonetheless, following China's Zero Covid policy, the city underwent a strict lockdown which lasted over two months, from 14 March until 1 June 2022 and caused severe economic and social disruptions, still felt months after the end of the lockdown (Bloomberg 2022).

59

4   The Lilong

If there is one thing that is synonymous with Shanghai's urban identity, it is not the record-breaking skyscrapers in Pudong that are visible from almost everywhere in the city; it is not the masses of high-rise condos that have sprung up in the thousands in the last two decades and not even the tourist-attracting, and nostalgia-evoking old-fashioned colonial architecture along the Bund reaches this status. It is the Lilong: the housing typology that once swept through the city and became the almost exclusively built urban structure for the better part of a century and even today, despite being neglected and increasingly destroyed or replaced, can be found everywhere in the city where it offers its residents surprisingly good living quality considering its age and dilapidated conditions.

The key to Lilong's success is its ability to fuse two pairs of opposing values: one being the marriage of European and Chinese influences and the other lying in the clever combination of outside and inside (or rather public and private) spaces. Understanding traditional Chinese urban organization is the first step in exploring and explaining this fusion.

4.1   The neighborhood and the alley

4.1.1   Combining East and West

Early Chinese urban development differed greatly from other urban development around the world. Cities were not built up organically as demand and natural surroundings allowed but were built as pre-planned rectangular and symmetrical entities embodying societal hierarchies. They featured a strict north-south oriented street grid with one or more palaces at the outskirts and several distinct neighborhoods for different crafts, economic activities, and governmental tasks separated by high walls. Additionally, each neighborhood or city block was itself contained and walled off from its surroundings. Streets were lined with windowless walls on both sides with periodic gates to access individual neighborhoods. This resulted in minimal social interaction between neighborhoods, which the authorities saw as beneficial to avoid social unrest (Jin 1993).

While a wave of urbanization in the Song dynasty (960-1275) quickly overwhelmed the pre-planned, organized style of urban development and irregular and less segregated cities developed along physical features or transportation systems, the idea of self-sustaining, inward-facing neighborhoods prevailed and to a lesser extent is still visible today. One crucial factor in this was the lack of public spaces present in almost all Chinese cities at the time, and that helped to popularize so-called *courtyard houses,* which despite the name, consisted of an agglomeration of several houses and would better be described as neighborhoods. Courtyard houses offered their residents one or several semi-public spaces, emphasizing inward activities rather than opening up to the city. Hence, these neighborhoods were typically walled off and offered only limited access to outsiders (Jin 1993). These secluded courtyards were also used to expand the small living spaces available to each household and therefore became common spaces shared by all residents. This created a transitional system of public, but not lived-in, streets, semi-public and very much lived-in shared courtyards, and private individual housing units, each strongly separated from each other with walls and gates.

On the other side of the world, a very different housing model had developed in Britain: *row houses* or *terraced houses.* Originally introduced to London in the 17th century from Italy as luxurious self-contained houses for the upper class and their servants, they quickly developed to become popular among the lower and middle classes in Britain in the 18th century. These individual houses we built in semi-structured rows wall-to-wall all over the country. When in the wake of the industrial revolution, a population boom brought immense growth to British cities and towns, these row houses proved to be a viable solution to combat the overcrowding as they were easily standardized, which allowed construction to transition from "craft to industry" (Muthesius 1990, p. 27) lowering build time and costs. Although ridden with the same problems they were built to solve, especially overcrowding of the small housing units, they significantly helped soften the situation (ibid.).

In the late 19th century, when British developers and investors were looking for a new housing typology to accommodate the influx of Chinese migrants to their settlement, they picked up the familiar structure of the row house and, to make it more attractive to the Chinese, incorporated it into the traditional Chinese neighborhood structure: The Lilong was born.

61

4.1.2 Li & Long

In Chinese, the name Lilong 里弄 is composed of the two characters li 里 and long 弄. Li 里 has quite a diverse history and describes a group of people, a human settlement, and a certain distance or area. Today, li 里 could be understood as the "idea of an inhabited urban area, with references to length, size and space" (Cheval 2018, p. 99), or, in other words, a neighborhood. In contrast, the word long 弄 is much simpler, translating to lane or alley (ibid.). The Lilong, literally translated to neighborhood alley, therefore carries its most distinctive feature, its lived-in alleys, as will be discussed in the following paragraphs, directly in its name. This becomes even clearer when dissecting Lilong's colloquial Shanghainese name, longtang 弄堂, again using the character long 弄 (alley) but now combined with tang 堂 which roughly translates to main or living room, further emphasizing the importance of the Lilong alleyways (ibid.).

4.1.3 Lilong's fishbone structure

Lilong continued the Chinese tradition of inward-facing neighborhoods. Like their predecessors, they are walled off from the surrounding streets with only a few gates giving access to the neighborhood, creating semi-private inner public spaces reserved for the community's residents. Usually, Lilong communities have two main gates on opposing ends of the neighborhood (commonly at the North and South edges), with a main neighborhood street connecting them. Smaller alleyways run off perpendicular to give access to the entrances of houses, which contrary to English row, are not built back-to-back but always have their main entrance facing south. This seems to conform quite well with the traditional Chinese urban form based on *Fengshui* discussed above, but as Cheval (2018) points out, foreign developers chiefly optimized this layout for best (i.e., most economical) space use, adaptability to varying plot shapes, and high occupancy rates.

Connecting the Lilong to its surroundings, the main gates not only provide a barrier between the outside and the inside but, as they are usually heavily decorated, are also an essential expression of the Lilong's communal identity and sometimes house communal services like public toilets (Tong 2021). In many communities, they also limit vehicular access to the neighborhood. Additional secondary gates are located throughout the neighborhood though they are often

locked all or parts of the day. The outside edges of a Lilong neighborhood, i.e., their interface with the public, are designated for commercial activity, with shops lining the urban streets to provide services and goods for the residents as well as job opportunities and income for the community.
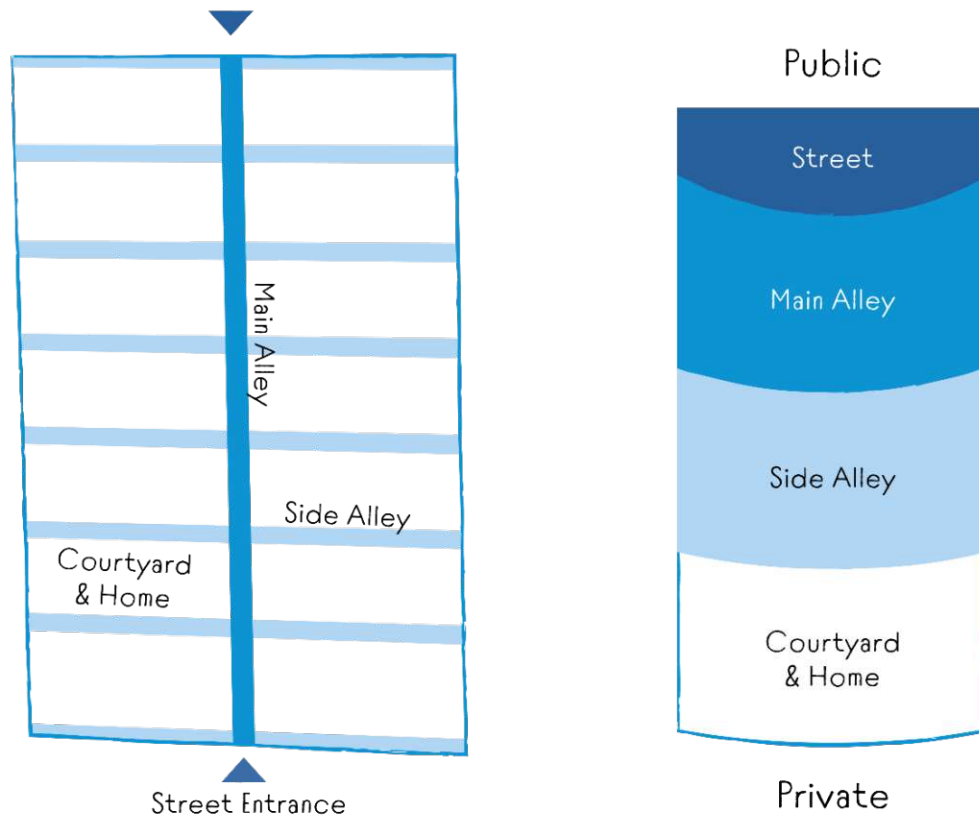
Figure 10: Lilong fishbone structure and the gradual transition from public to private spaces (own drawing)

Inside, the main street and the perpendicular alleys create the famous *fishbone* structure of the Lilong, as seen in Figure 9. This structure is one of the most influential features of the Lilong and one reason why, despite their bad condition, living in a Lilong is still quite popular today: As living space got increasingly scarce and housing units were small and overcrowded, residents were forced to expand their living area first to the shared courtyards but also to the alley itself where it overlapped with the living areas of their neighbors rendering the alley a communal area rather than merely a space for transport and accessibility. As also shown in the figure above, this creates a much more gradual transition from public to private spaces than in most modern architectural and spatial patterns in Shanghai. Paired with the small size of each housing unit,

63

numbers

The most characteristic change was the integration of large stone entryways called *Shikumen*. These often heavily decorated arches that lined the alleyways acted as the door to each housing unit and were relatively uniform in size, structure, and design throughout each neighborhood, giving little indication of the size and splendor of what lay behind. The two or three-story houses usually consisted of several rooms arranged around a small inner courtyard, akin to the traditional courtyard houses, and, initially, were home to a multi-generational middle-class family (Huang 2000). The Shikumen became later synonymous with this style of Lilong, today known as *Shikumen Lilong* or sometimes *Old Shikumen Lilong*.

Figure 12: 19th century row house layout in Bristol (top) and typical Lilong structure (bottom). (Ordnance Survey 1881 and Henriot & Durand 2011)

Old Shikumen Lilong usually consisted of a main two-story building where living and sleeping quarters are located and, separated by a small skywell, a secondary building housing auxiliary uses like cooking and storage. The unit could be accessed from the main entrance in front and the service entrance at the back, allowing for activities like children playing or cooking to extend into the alley. Sticking to traditional Chinese building structures, these Shikumen Lilong usually consisted of one *Jiang*, a representative main room on the central axis of the building, and two additional rooms to each side, known as *Shang* (Guan 1996). The small courtyard each house had was vital to the Shikumen typology: Not only did it provide, in conjunction with the skywells at the back, daylight and good ventilation to the house for better sanitary conditions, but it was also the meeting room for the family, and potential visitors acting as a buffer between the outside and the inner private rooms. It became one of the main reasons for the relatively high living conditions the Lilong offered despite their density (Arkaraprasertkul 2009).

The early 20th century brought significant changes to the Lilong: With the fall of the last Chinese imperial dynasty in 1911 and the outbreak of World War I in Europe, which severely reduced colonial interests in Shanghai, societal transformation swept the city. As the housing demand of the poor rose drastically due to mass rural-urban migration and living in large multi-generational family units fell out of fashion in favor of nuclear families consisting only of parents and immediate children, the inhabitant structure of the Lilong also underwent drastic changes (Huang 2000; Lu 1999). Shikumen Lilong houses were split into two or three units to accommodate the new space requirements and the lower financial means of the new resident groups. Despite this change being minimal on an architectural level and instead constituting a socio-economic shift, these Lilongs are categorized as **New Shikumen Lilong** (Cheval 2018). Gone was the traditional concept of Jiang and Shang (main and auxiliary rooms), as the houses were rarely wide enough to accommodate these. Instead, a small courtyard in the front led directly into the living room with bedrooms on the second floor. As a consequence of the now much denser living arrangements, the alleyways of the Lilong grew in importance in daily life: While activities like household chores (such as cooking and laundry), leisure, and social interactions already extended into the alleys in front and back of the house, the intensity of

activities in the streets grew immensely, the alleys became the "main stage of citizens' everyday life" (Ding & Zhong 2020, p. 142).

Architectural decisions facilitated this transition; in many Lilong, archways separated the back alleys *longtang* from the backbone *long*. These often unobtrusively designed portals created a small threshold to each *longtang*, creating somewhat courtyard-like spaces that facilitated communal connections while maintaining openness to the rest of the neighborhood (Liang 2008b). In addition, the two-story tall buildings allowed for an open view of the street over each housing units courtyard and shikumen, which gave the opportunity for tight social control and security (Morris 1994) and an environment where "every one could see and be seen by others, as if the city were one busy street" (Liang 2008b, p. 493).

Before diving deeper into street activity and communal organization of the Lilong, it would be remiss not to mention two other forms of Lilong that got predominantly built in the 1930s and 40s: the **Garden Lilong** and the **Apartment Lilong**.

Both are a departure from the typical urban fabric of the Shikumen Lilong and are much less common than their older counterparts. As the name implies, the **Garden Lilong** features ornate gardens in front and on one or both sides of each house, ditching the row house typology by creating semi-detached or sometimes completely detached units (Guan 1996). This accommodation was primarily geared towards wealthier households and was designed to represent status and prosperity (Denison & Ren 2006). Conversely, the **Apartment Lilong** was a more modern take on high-density housing arrangements for less wealthy tenants, with several household units combined in a three to six-story building, somewhat resembling present-day apartment buildings (ibid.; Guan 1996). Due to their drastic architectural and organizational alterations, both typologies lost the unique spatial and social fabric Shikumen Lilong possessed. While there are arguably some similarities between a traditional Lilong and the Garden Lilong, this is, despite its name, hardly valid for the Apartment Lilong. As both typologies were only built in small quantities, they are much less relevant in today's cityscape and will not be touched upon in later chapters of this thesis.

4.2.2   Communal ties?

Living arrangements in Shikumen Lilong became smaller and more densely populated over time. A study by Morris (1994) in a typical Lilong in Central Shanghai[25] reveals this in great detail: Interviews with residents show that existing houses were subdivided with makeshift walls or curtains to accommodate more households resulting in facilities like kitchens designed for one family now being shared by multiple. Courtyards initially designed as meeting rooms and for ventilation and natural light were encroached upon by household chores like cooking and laundry, significantly reducing privacy and increasing noise and odor levels. Despite the worsening living conditions and increasing overcrowding of each housing unit, the study mentioned above also suggests that conflicts could be largely mitigated by informal communal agreements regarding time slots for kitchen use, which activities were permitted in which area[26], and other similar compromises. These arrangements often developed implicitly over time giving new residents little power to negotiate for their needs and awarding longstanding inhabitants much more authority over shared spaces.

Daily life centered around these communal agreements. Paired with the gradual transition in space and activities from private to public which created a "protected flexible environment where activities and social networks developed" (ibid., p. 42), this resulted in a unique socio-spatial framework that is widely regarded as one of the main contributing factors to the ongoing success and popularity of the Lilong (Arkaraprasertkul 2009; Bracken 2017; Castañeda 2018).

When asking current or former Lilong residents (e.g., Arkaraprasertkul 2010; Morris 1994; Tong 2021), they largely agree on a sense of comradery and community in the neighborhood. From children playing together under the supervision of other community members to mutual assistance in case of problems, many functions of daily life were (and to some extent still are) carried out in the context of a tightly connected neighborhood. This flourishing socio-spatial

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[25] The examined Lilong was situated around Wan Zhu Street in the Xiao Beimen Neighbourhood and has since been redeveloped drastically and does not resemble a typical Lilong anymore

[26] E.g. cooking was deemed a personal activity which was to be carried out in the housing units whereas laundry was seen as a communal chore and therefore often happened in the public lanes (Morris 1994).

structure was greatly promoted by the "healthy and mutually beneficial system of street surveillance" (Bracken 2013, p. 102) by and for the neighborhood inherent to the urban and architectural composition of the Lilong, as mentioned above.

Among residents, opinions on this matter vary, though; some highly value this social structure based around communal "harmony" and attribute to it their ability to live a decent life in the Lilong despite the worsening circumstances, i.e., increasingly dilapidated housing stock, economic and political pressure to redevelop. Others are less approving, highlighting the immense lack of privacy in (semi)public areas and inside their private housing units due to tiny rooms, overcrowding, and the overall bad structural quality of the houses (Arkaraprasertkul 2010).

This is, however, primarily a critique of the poor state Lilong neighborhoods find themselves in, a century after they were built in haste and on the cheap. When considering the social structure, the Lilong typology not only allowed for but encouraged there seems to be a consistent feeling among both (former) residents and outside observers (e.g., researchers and public stakeholders) that precious and somewhat unique communal connections were forged in the Lilong.

Still, one must avoid the trap of romanticizing this: As discussed above, the Lilong, while immensely popular, was never without flaws, and the drastic social, political, and demographic shifts since its inception have left deep scratches on the shiny image of this typology, which raises questions about the fate of the Lilong and its way of living.

4.2.3   The Lilong as a socially disadvantaged community

Shanghai is increasingly affected by inequality and segregation (Shen & Xiao 2020). However, the city shows an interesting pattern of segregation: As most neighborhoods are closed off in some form or another (i.e., gated communities), interaction is limited (Su 2000, cited in Miao 2003) and subsequently, the phenomenon of "adjacent segregation" (Zhou & Cheng 2019, p. 166) is widespread in the city. Adjacent segregation is marked by two or more distinct population groups (in this case primarily based on socio-economic status) living in close proximity to each other but – and in opposition to mixed habitation – being functionally and socially divided from each other. Images like the figure below are seen all over the city and visualize this contrast

69

between the modern (and often quite expensive) high-rise apartment buildings and the traditional Lilong typology.

Figure 13: Adjacent segregation between modern high-rise housing and Lilong

communities (De Architect 2014)

In a study in a similar neighborhood in the Hongkou district, Zhou & Cheng (2019) found that more than 2/3 of the questioned residents seldom venture into the other residential communities, and communication is minimal and not even considered desirable. This is especially true for Lilong communities (lane neighborhoods) that are lowly regarded by the other side:

"It is worth mentioning that we are different from them.

People from nearby neighborhoods (especially residents in the lane

neighborhood) are of poor quality."

- a resident (female, 46 years old) from the newly-built commercial housing (ibid., p. 176)

While these are, of course, only anecdotal insights, additional data support this notion of Lilong inhabitants being socially disadvantaged: Figures from a 2008 investigation (Su, cited after Fan

2022) show that 70% of Lilong inhabitants have a below-average income, living arrangements are crammed with an average floor area per capita of just 5.8m² and an aging native population with a considerable part of young, poorly educated migrants.

There is little evidence that recent societal and economic changes in China and Shanghai changed these circumstances (Tianshu & Zhijun 2011), and newer data from specific Lilong neighborhoods support this claim (Zhou & Cheng 2019). It is, therefore, quite reasonable to argue that *unupgraded* Lilong communities can be broadly described as **socially disadvantaged communities**, especially when considering other (circumstantial) clues like the shoddy sanitary situation before the project at Guizhou Road (described below) and the poor state of the built structures in Lilong (Zhong & Chen 2017).

However, it is also essential to recognize that some Lilong neighborhoods have been heavily renovated or remodeled in the last decade and are now inhabited by more affluent residents (Bracken 2023), creating segregation and inequality even inside the Lilong typology.

4.3   The future of the Lilong

"Striving for the excellent Global City"; this is the slogan chosen by the municipal government for the current "Shanghai Master Plan 2017-2035" (or short "Shanghai 2035") (SUPLRAB 2018). As its headline implies, this masterplan focuses not only on the improvement of quality of life in the city, but its stated goals heavily emphasize the (existing and desired) importance of the city as a leader of innovation in a national and international context[27]. Despite the masterplan recognizing the importance of protecting historic urban culture, the dire state of Lilong, their public image of being dated and substandard housing, and the recent trends of Lilong demolishment, their future in the city seems more than uncertain.

In recent years there have, however, been several efforts to redevelop, rejuvenate and adapt Lilong settlements throughout the city. While their approaches and impacts differ quite a lot,

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[27] For a more detailed look at Shanghai 2035, see chapter 3.3 Contemporary urban planning

they can be broadly divided between more expansive remodeling, usually centered around institutional developers, and a comprehensive masterplan for the area on the one hand and slower, gradual, and often somewhat uncoordinated upgradation.

This chapter will look at both approaches broadly and at one example, respectively, more in-depth, to understand their inner workings, philosophy, and impacts. Nevertheless, it is vital to first lay a foundation for this analysis by investigating the position of Lilong neighborhoods in today's Shanghai.

4.3.1 The current state of Lilong

As described in chapter 3.2, the establishment of the communist People's Republic of China in 1949 brought drastic changes to Shanghai's urban fabric and especially the Lilong. The until now dominant housing typology in the city not only saw the expropriation of their landowners but also a redistribution of housing units along political and social criteria, giving many poorer households the ability to call a place their home but also leading to a general impoverishment and overcrowding of Lilong neighborhoods (Morris 1994). To further accomplish the socialist goal of equal and universal access to the housing market, new multistory apartment blocks were built all over the city, marking the first time since the inception of the Lilong in the late 19th century that other housing typologies were built on scale in Shanghai.

At the same time, Lilong neighborhoods faced a multitude of problems: Many of the houses were reaching the end of their lifetime, being built on the cheap centuries before, and in a completely different socio-economic setting. They featured an outdated space distribution, as their floor layout reflected traditional imperial housing values no longer sought after in modern Chinese society, and overcrowding burdened the rapidly dilapidating structures further (Arkaraprasertkul 2009). Public investment in the Lilong was also drying up as the Chinese economy and society evolved, and the Lilong lost municipal support, both politically due to their ties to a colonial past (Rowe 2005), as well as practically; to renovate the neighborhoods and to retrofit modern amenities the Lilong lacked (e.g., private bathrooms) was just not economically viable. A problem that persists today.
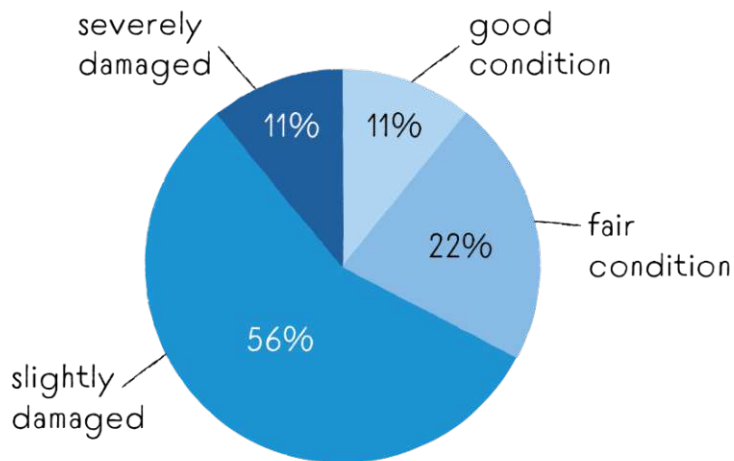
Figure 14: Conditions of Shikumen Lilong houses
(own drawing, based on Zhong & Chen 2017)

Today, the Lilong stock is in bad condition: An investigation by the Shanghai Municipal Housing Bureau in 2014 found that only a third of Lilong houses were in good or fair condition, with the rest in various states of disrepair (see figure above). In the years since, their condition likely deteriorated even more, as countless badly damaged and abandoned Lilong communities ready for demolishment can be observed throughout the city. Beginning in the late 1980s, a trend of relocating Lilong residents to more modern accommodations commenced. As their new homes were mainly on the city's outer edges or in the rapidly developing Pudong on the other side of the Huangpu River, this was initially quite unpopular. However, as these areas developed, transportation was significantly improved, and because it offered the possibility of "owning" your dwelling[28], relocation out of the Lilong became increasingly sought after (Cheval 2018).

4.3.2 Relocation: Gain and Loss

The processes and effects of relocation on Lilong residents are complex, diverse, and often conflicting and are worth a closer look. In Chinese urban areas, especially in Shanghai, relocation always goes hand-in-hand with demolition. Those two are so tightly linked that the process is often called **chiaqian** 拆迁, a compound of *chia* 拆 (demolishment), which was a frequently seen

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[28] Despite land is managed collectively and cannot be owned by an individual residents can own the "right of use" to a dwelling whereas renting was (and to some extent still is) common in the Lilong.

character painted on Lilong houses marked for demolition (Ho 2013), and *qian* 迁 (roughly translated to move) symbolizing the relocation process (Shao 2013).

It is essential to understand that in Shanghai's Lilong, residents have little power to decide if, when, and to where they are being relocated. This is at the complete discretion of the city and district governments and, to a lesser extent, potential private developers. According to state statistics, more than 80% of households offered the possibility of relocation out of a Lilong agreed to move, although critics argue that they have little choice but to accept, and there is very little evidence of long-lasting opposition to relocation plans (Cheval 2018; Ho 2013; Shao 2013). Those who tried (with a few exceptions) face growing pressure and, ultimately, some form of domicide[29].

For residents, relocation means losing their homes and all the attached familiarity. This often has a significant impact on the dweller's life. Moving out of their former neighborhoods not only means moving out of an accommodation where they and their (grand-)parents have built a life but also means leaving memories behind, jettisoning social connections, and, in the case of large family households where family members are relocated to different neighborhoods, having their relationship to relatives impeded. On top of that, new neighborhoods rarely offer the same level of community-building opportunities as the Lilong they moved out of. Therefore, due to the move, some relocated dwellers struggle with their social and communal life. (Cheval 2018)

That being said, for the vast majority of Lilong occupants, relocation is highly desirable. While much literature focuses on those trying to resist the *chiaqian* (e.g., Ho 2013; Shao 2013; Weinstein & Ren 2009) and the negative impacts this process has on the urban fabric, one must recognize that for many residents, the benefits immensely outweigh the cons of relocation. Relocated residents receive both financial compensation for their demolished old home and a replacement accommodation in a newer, bigger, and better-equipped apartment. As *chiaqian* usually happens in the context of a property-led redevelopment project in central and,

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[29] Involuntary relocation, see chapter 2.1.2 Domicide and the Right to stay put

therefore, highly valuable neighborhoods, especially as Shanghai real estate prices are among the highest in the world (CBRE 2020), developers can expect high profits and, in turn, are required to pay hefty compensation fees towards the residents. In addition, as large households often receive multiple dwellings for relocation, individuals, through marriage and inheritance, can end up with several pieces of property, which they then rent out (Cheval 2018).

Considering this financial benefit and the stability it grants, it is unsurprising that many residents welcome their *chiaqian* and sometimes even actively demand the redevelopment of their neighborhood (and therefore their relocation) (ibid.; Shao 2013). Especially considering that there are increasingly cases where those who live in the Lilong are not those who are being offered relocation homes; this is a result of the growing trend of subletting Lilong houses. The landlords receiving the relocation compensation have already moved out of the neighborhood and rent their lodging out and therefore face little of the negative impacts described above. This burden is carried by the often socially less advantaged renters who do not even benefit from their *chiaqian* (Cheval 2018).

4.3.3 Conservation and Redevelopment

Due to the ongoing efforts of *chiaqian,* the Lilong is rapidly vanishing from the city. In 1949 Lilong ownership was transferred to the state, which started efforts to renovate Lilong neighborhood in 1954, although they staggered from the beginning and only picked up in the 1980s[30] when, as part of the "renovation" program, several million square meters of Lilong were demolished and replaced by modern housing complexes (Zhong & Chen 2017). This trend of demolishment and replacement continued throughout the 1990s, and only in the late 2000s, when already more than 70% of the Lilong stock was eradicated (Shao 2013), the idea of protecting Lilong as a cultural heritage gained traction. Despite implementing several regulatory and institutional

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[30] Coinciding with the opening of the Chinese economy and therefore the introduction of private actors into the, until now, state controlled real estate market (see chapter 3.3 Contemporary urban planning for more information)

changes to promote heritage protection in Shanghai, the transition from demolishment to preservation is slow.

According to Shi et al. (2019), this is due to four key challenges they identified by talking to several stakeholders in these projects: Lack of funds, inadequate institutional setup, poor resident cooperation, and, lastly, a lack of stakeholder involvement. While all plausible, two of those seem to be worth a more in-depth look: the topics of funds and resident cooperation:

Redevelopment or upgradation of existing neighborhoods is expensive. While this may be a banal observation, it stops many well-intentioned, elaborate projects on their track. Especially when talking about socially disadvantaged communities, which today's Lilong usually are, the residents often lack funds to renovate, leaving two other primary capital sources: state institutions like the Shanghai municipality or district governments and private investors. While public preservation efforts in Shanghai are steadily increasing (Zhong & Chen 2017), both government officials and experts argue that public redevelopment budgets do not allow for a widespread upgradation of Lilong neighborhoods (Shi et al. 2019; Tong 2021). For many neighborhoods that are "less desirable", i.e., not considered worth conserving by the municipality and which are therefore under very little legal protection and do not receive the necessary public funds for renovation, this mainly leaves the option of upgradation through external investors, i.e., property-led redevelopment. As we will see in the next chapter, these are often (financially) unable or unwilling to preserve or re-ignite the traditional community-based and highly popular modus vivendi of the Lilong.

Secondly, there seems to be a lack of cooperation – or maybe understanding – from the residents. As described above, current policies provide a substantial financial benefit for those being relocated, and it is understandably hard for them to agree to a preservation project of their home when this bares them from receiving substantial compensation payments as well as more housing security (as the relocation homes are much safer from *chiaqian*). The state is trying to counter these concerns by making monthly funds available to residents to renovate and upgrade their homes as well as educating them on the process, goals, and impact of preservation programs on their houses (among other things, a guarantee not to be expropriated) and

neighborhood committees actively engaging with residents to evaluate their needs and desires (Shi et al. 2019). It is very problematic, though, that even after a preservation or upgradation project was carried out, the neighborhood is still not safe from *chiaqian*, as witnessed, for example, in Guizhou Road, which makes convincing dwellers to invest time and money into their homes difficult.

Yet another topic we have touched upon is the state's understanding of preservation. Drawing on the research of various observers, the results of several preservation and redevelopment projects, and the publicized statements of the municipal government, one must draw the conclusion that upgradation efforts usually focus on the streetscape and building facades and less on the living conditions inside the houses or the daily life of residents. As China increasingly opened up and Shanghai transitioned from a domestically leading city to a global hub, both in terms of economic significance and cultural impact (and therefore tourism), the need for a more stringent urban identity led to the growing importance of the city's heritage. While this slowed down the widespread demolishment of Lilong, heritage projects like Xintiandi, a hugely successful transformation of a Lilong into a commercial hub, or Tianzifang, another famous Lilong-turned-shopping-district (albeit through a more gradual, bottom-up process) emphasize their Lilong heritage as a business asset with little consideration for the preservation of the original inhabitants and their community or culture.

Case Studies

5 Property-led redevelopment in Xintiandi

Once hailed as the one model of how Lilong should be redeveloped, newer commentators have been less kind with the Lilong turned shopping complex in Xintiandi. Nonetheless, it is still the most prominent and highly regarded redevelopment project in a Lilong and has attracted countless scholars and visitors from China and worldwide. A project of this renown in the field of urban regeneration in Shanghai can hardly be omitted from this thesis and deserves a closer investigation.

5.1 The site

Located in the former French settlement, the area now called **Xintiandi** (新天地), roughly translated to "New Heaven and Earth" or "New World", was built up in the 1920s as a Lilong community by French developers (He & Wu 2005). Although less strictly adhering to the usual fishbone structure, the neighborhood was a typical Shikumen Lilong community. Even before Lilong areas suffered from severe overcrowding after the residential redistribution from 1949 onwards, the area had one of the highest population densities in the French concession (Echelle 1937).

Quick facts (for the whole of Taipingqiao)	
Location	West Huangpu
Size of project area	52 ha
Inhabitants (before project)	70.000
Lilong built in	1900 - 1930
Redeveloped in	1999 - ongoing
Redevelopment regime	property-led

Table 2: Quick facts on Taipingquiao project

In 1921, the newly built neighborhood was the initial site of the *1st National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party* which, after repression from French police, had to be relocated outside of Shanghai. Nonetheless, as the congress established the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which ultimately led to the founding of the *People's Republic of China* 28 years later, the site is of high

historical value. The two row houses that housed the first congress and three neighboring housing units were renovated and turned into a museum in the 1950s (Liang 2008a).

As usual for the Shanghai housing market, the rest of the neighborhood, like most Lilong communities, remained virtually unchanged until the end of the 20th century (Henriot & Durand 2011; Morris 1994) when overcrowding, inadequate maintenance, and the general aging of the building led to a dilapidated state of the area. By then, the larger area of **Taipingqiao** (太平桥), in which Xintiandi is located, was facing a downturn: While the surrounding neighborhoods (the Old City to the East, the shopping street Huaihai Road to the north and the French-built villas to the west) were rapidly gaining attention and investments Taipingqiao, home to primarily lower-class residents became known as a *Xiazhijiao* (Ren 2008). This term, literally translated to "Lower Corner", is typically used to describe a conceived rundown neighborhood. This is, however, not limited to the built structures (i.e., "shanties") but also its residents, dividing the population between *upper* and *lower* strata[31] (Tianshu & Zhijun 2011).

Figure 15: Urban context of Xintiandi
(own drawing)

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[31] This dichotomy is reminiscent of the distinction between *slum dwellers vs. (colonial) elites* and *Global North vs. Global South* that we have encountered before.

5.2   The project

As a site of historical importance and due to its striving surroundings, the redevelopment of Taipingqiao was a high priority for the municipal and district government. Therefore, in 1996 Luwan district government[32] announced a cooperation with Hong Kong-based real estate developer *Shui On Group* to redevelop the 52-hectare area, which housed around 70.000 inhabitants. The whole of Taipingqiao was to be reimagined and rebuilt in stages, financed and planned by Shui On Group, which received a 50-year lease on the redeveloped areas. Original plans of rebuilding the whole area within 15 years, primarily as luxury housing and offices, had to be adjusted as Shanghai's real estate market took a downturn in the wake of the Asian financial crisis in 1997 (He & Wu 2005).

To start the redevelopment process on a smaller scale, Vincent Lo, president of Shui On Group, who got active in the Shanghai real estate market early after the opening of the Chinese Economy in the 1980s and had since built good relationships with local politicians - which also helped to secure the development rights to Taipingqiao (Ren 2008) – presented plans to rebuilt Xintiandi as both a gift to the CCP (which was poised to celebrate their 80th anniversary in 2001) as well as an anchor promoting further development in the following years (He & Wu 2005). Between 1999 and 2001, the two Lilong blocks that formed Xintiandi were thoroughly redeveloped, with much of the old Shikumen houses being demolished to make space for several large-scale shopping complexes, similar to other, earlier *chiaqian* projects (ibid.).

However, what sets Xintiandi apart from these other neighborhoods and ultimately led to its immense success, is the embracement of its Lilong history: Aside from the Site of the National CCP Congress, which was already placed under a heritage protection scheme (Zhong & Chen 2017), several old Lilong houses were "preserved". However, the term "preservation" in this project was used very loosely, even when disregarding the most apparent and drastic shift from residential to commercial use. Depending on their structural state, most "preserved" houses

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[32] Until 2011 Taipingqiao was part of the Luwan district which has since been merged with the Huangpu district

were either wholly demolished and rebuilt (partly with the reclaimed original materials) or heavily renovated with only the original bricks remaining. This process resulted in "empty shells" (Bracken 2023), original-looking outsides of the Lilong units with a completely gutted inside, and floor plans redesigned to house high-end commercial businesses like shops and restaurants (Liang 2008a).
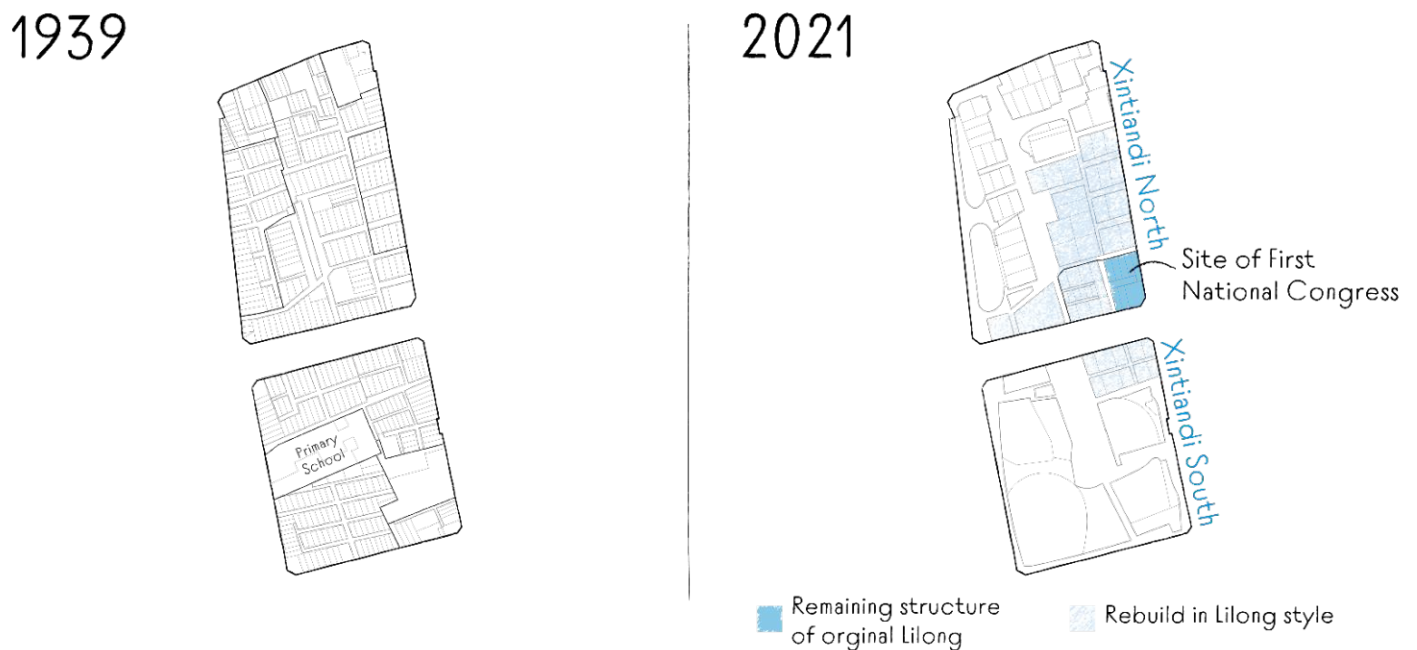
Figure 16: The area of Xintiandi in 1939 and 2021
(own drawing, based on Henriot & Durand 2011 and ESRI 2021)

From the roughly 30 Lilong lanes, with its 2000 households (Yang & Chang 2007), that were located in two blocks that now constitute Xintiandi, only a handful was treated this way though, mainly in the Northern block, whereas the South communities were completely destroyed, except for one lane as seen in Figure 14 (He & Wu 2005). For the two international architecture firms contracted[33] (both experienced in property-led urban renewal projects), de-densifying the neighborhoods was of prime importance to create a North-South running pedestrian area that not only connected the development but also embellished the refurbished Lilong houses in a

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[33] *Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill (SOM)* from Boston for the Taipingqiao masterplan and Chicago-based *Wood+Zapata* as the lead designers for Xintiandi itself (Ren 2008).

way that the old narrow lanes were not able to. Conceptually, Xintiandi was divided into five areas with supposedly different foci, e.g., *Xintiandi Plaza* as the "New Woman Social Destination" (Shui On Land 2022), but all of them focusing on high-end and mostly international fashion and leisure activities. To reiterate the area's history, the 1950s exhibition surrounding the *1st National Congress* was nearly doubled in size, and a Lilong history museum was created in one of the rebuilt Lilong houses (Liang 2008a).

Figure 17: Subsequent redevelopment of Taipinqiao after the Xintiandi Project
(own drawing)

After the immense success of Xintiandi (Bracken 2020b; Yang & Chang 2007), Shui On Group continued with the development of the rest of Taipingqiao and other adjacent areas, which is still continuing today. Main elements include the creation of *Taipingqiao Park* right next to Xintiandi (further celebrating the creation of the CCP and featuring an artificial lake), the high-end business district *Corporate Avenue*, the luxury residential project *Lakeville* and another business and commercial district called *CPIC Xintiandi Commercial Center* to the east of Taipingqiao Park. All of them were on land that used to be Lilong communities which were demolished, and residents relocated (Henriot & Durand 2011; Shui On Land 2022).

83

Xintiandi **before** redevelopment [1]

Xintiandi **after** redevelopment [2]

Street scene with modern architecture [3]

Street scene with Lilong-type facades [4]

Xintiandi Style Mall [5]

Xintiandi Main Plaza [6]

Figure 18: Impressions from Xintiandi

([1&2] Yang & Chang 2007; [3&5] SOM 2021; [4&6] West China Tour 2023)

5.3   Interpretation

Xintiandi (and, on a larger scale, Taipingqiao) was born from a perfect storm of property-led redevelopment-supporting circumstances: the political and economic opening of China in the 1980s and 90s, the (real estate) business opportunities associated with Shanghai's path to an "Excellent Global City" and, lastly, the growing awareness for the city's past, of which the Lilong was one of the most ubiquitous reminders. Based on own conclusions and the extensive scientific discourse on this project, this chapter will examine the expression of three key aspects of the redevelopment process in the Xintiandi project: the stakeholders, the process (especially the takeaways for future projects), and the overall impacts of this process.

5.3.1   Stakeholder involvement, community participation, and empowerment

The public-private pro-growth coalition that formed in the late 1980s and gained traction with the designation of Pudong as a *Special Economic Zone* quickly turned its eye on the older inner-city districts as well (Ren 2008; Zhong & Chen 2017). In the case of Taipingqiao, the main partners in this coalition were Shui On Group as the primary private investor and developer and the Luwan district government as the responsible political entity, the landowner, and a financial contributor.

With its excellent political connections, **Shui On Group** was (and still is) the driving actor behind the redevelopment of Taipingqiao and Xintiandi. The Shui On Group and its subsidiary Shui On Properties from Hong Kong (i.e., foreign, especially in 1995 when Hong Kong was still British) had been active in China's real estate market from 1985 onwards, primarily focusing on high-end developments in Shanghai and Beijing (He & Wu 2005). Consequently, Taipingqiao was to follow this line and two renowned American architecture firms (*SOM* and *Wood+Zapata*) were contracted to develop detailed plans according to Shui On Group's vision. Further consultants were the Singapore office of *Nikken Sekkei* and the *Department of Architecture and Urban Planning* from local Tongji University, making the latter the only Chinese-based partner in the process dominated by foreign urban designers (Ren 2008; Yang & Chang 2007).

The other main stakeholder in the Taipingqiao redevelopment was the **Luwan District Government** (now part of the Huangpu District Government), the primary cooperation and

85

negotiation partner for Shui On Group. Its primary role was planning and overseeing the *chiaqian* (demolition and relocation). However, it was also directly involved in the development through its subsidiary of *Fuxing Construction Company* which holds a 2% stake in the redevelopment project and gives the district government additional levers of influence (Yang & Chang 2007; Zhong & Chen 2017). The district government stood to immensely profit from the Taipingqiao redevelopment by fulfilling city-wide political goals of urban renewal and receiving the land acquisition fees paid by Shui On Group (Yang & Chang 2007). Additionally, it acted as the link between the foreign investors and the **Shanghai Municipal Government,** which was directly involved in the project due to the size and prominence of the proposal in granting planning permissions and land leases for the area and, on a broader scale, indirectly by outlining development goals for the city and its districts and overseen their development processes (He & Wu 2005; Yang & Chang 2007).

It is difficult to assess the power dynamic between the (local and municipal) government and the Shui On Group as the decision-making process was very complex and opaque. In the 1990s, Luwan district was considered to be in dire need of urban renewal (He & Wu 2005; Ren 2008), but due to the complex urban fabric of the area, it proved difficult to attract the necessary developers; this was especially true after the Asian Financial Crisis hit the real estate market in the late 1990s and investments were drastically reduced. According to the Luwan district government (albeit somewhat disputed), Shui On Group was the only investor interested in redeveloping the Taipingqiao neighborhoods (Yang & Chang 2007), giving the Group distinct leverage. In the tightly government-controlled China, they were given relatively large autonomy over the design of the project and, additionally, got legal assistance from the district government, which designated the area as a *Cultural Relic,* excluding it from the usually required public auction to be leased directly to Shui On Group (ibid.).

On the other hand, through the forced inclusion of the local, public-owned Fuxing Construction Development Ltd. Luwan district government secured itself a seat at the table throughout the whole process and control on Shui On Group was maintained by withholding the lease of each neighborhood until after appropriate advance investment in it was made. Furthermore, by extending the historic site of the First National Congress in Xintiandi and creating the associated

Taipingqiao Park as a gift for the 80th anniversary of the CCP, Shui On Group gave up a part of their potential revenue to please public decision-makers. As this, however, resulted in higher political priority to the project (visible, for example, in the considerable financial and administrative effort undertaken by the government in the relocation of residents) and attribution of public subsidies (He & Wu 2005), it is evident that a, for both sides beneficial, arrangement and tight public-private cooperation was pursued.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, **community stakeholders**, namely the residents living in the redeveloped Lilong neighborhoods, were not involved in the decision-making process (ibid.). Despite most property-led redevelopment projects in Shanghai claiming to improve the quality of life in the renewal area, residents usually only learn about this after the plans are finalized between investors and the government and their relocation has been decided. This also rings true for Xintiandi and the Taipingqiao area: While *chiaqian* may be beneficial for the relocated residents, as described in chapter 4.3.1, and Xintiandi residents profited from the heightened public attention to the project, which resulted in relatively high financial compensations, the inclusion of communal interests in the 1990s was minimal and most residents were relocated the outskirts of the city and Luwan district government may have earned substantial amounts of money through the relocation process as they charged Shui On Group about twice the relocation fee as they then paid to the relocated households (Yang & Chang 2007). In 2001, after the core project of Xintiandi was finished, a new law changed the relocation compensation calculation, which resulted in even lower amounts paid to residents in other parts of Taipingqiao, making them unable to afford a new property in the vicinity (He & Wu 2005; Yang & Chang 2007).

5.3.2 Challenges of approach and process

Xintiandi is arguably the best example in Shanghai of what a strong private-public coalition can achieve in urban renewal: In just under two years, two dilapidated Lilong neighborhoods in the city center could be structurally renewed and transformed into a project of worldwide renown that not only attracts countless visitors every year but also garnered the attention of scholars, planners, and city officials from around the world, all while being hugely profitable both for the developers as well as the municipal and district governments.

87

At least, that is the commonly taken angle on the project. Xintiandi, however, is far from the perfect redevelopment process, which its critics have been pointing out from the onset: Apart from the exclusion of the affected Lilong communities described above, two more aspects are worth taking a closer look at; the internationality of the private stakeholders and the intriguing understanding of *preservation* exhibited by the public-private coalition involved.

As highlighted in the last chapter, Tongji University – as a consulting institution – was the only non-governmental actor in the planning and design process of Taipingqiao and Xintiandi based in Shanghai (or even in the whole of China). Being a foreign developer with other international planning contractors may have advantages due to the breadth of experience and knowledge collaborators with mixed cultural backgrounds provide, but Taipingqiao also suffered quite dramatically from this aspect. When the Asian Financial Crisis hit the region in 1997, the Hong Kong-based Shui On Group and its regionwide investments were strongly affected, which in turn led to delays and downsizing of their Luwan project (Ren 2008; Yang & Chang 2007) despite the crisis manifesting itself much less in the still somewhat isolated economy of Mainland China (Lardy 2003). While only speculation, one could argue that a less internationalized investment structure could have partially alleviated these substantial impacts on Xintiandi.

In addition, whether the responsible American architects of Xintiandi thoroughly grasped the community-based culture found in Lilong neighborhoods that evolved from a unique fusion of traditional Chinese urban planning paradigms with Shanghai's colonial history is debatable. Lead architect Benjamin Wood is often reported to be fascinated every time he visited the Lilong alleyways by the daily life and the countless activities taking place therein but still proposed getting "rid of this human, telluric experience and replace it with a shopping mall masquerading as a historical neighbourhood" (Liang 2008a, p. 51). The plan of rebuilding Lilong-style houses is, no doubt, in large part due to the economic reasoning behind placemaking and creating unique shopping experiences, but it also fails to appreciate the fact that the "Lilong" is much less about the architecture but rather the specific communal life it facilitates (Arkaraprasertkul 2009).

"Cities are not buildings and streets, cities are people and their networks of interaction. It is not the buildings, no matter how superficially pretty they are, that are interesting, it is the way of life they engendered."

(Bracken 2017, p. 209)

It is therefore highly questionable that Xintiandi is celebrated as an example of *historic preservation* (González Martínez 2019) when the neighborhood was entirely transformed and – apart from some historic facades – has no connections to the Lilong neighborhoods that were found here before. The old buildings were largely demolished, residents were displaced to other parts of the city, the inner structure and logic of the alleys were broken up, and even the primary land use was altogether shifted away from housing provision. What remains, or rather was created by developer and government, is the artificial concept of the *Lilong* as part of a "Shanghai nostalgia" (Tianshu & Zhijun 2011, p. 56) reminiscent of the city's colonial past and its use as a selling point both for the commercial area and the city as a whole (Bracken 2020b).

Therefore, preservation in this context must be seen less as protection of the historic urban or social fabric but rather as the proliferation of a romanticized ideal of the Lilong.

5.3.3   Observable impacts

Nonetheless, it is undeniable that Xintiandi is a huge success story for the city and the developer (González Martínez 2019). Its stated goal of revitalizing the area and promoting growth and urban renewal in a central but underdeveloped district was unequivocally achieved: Aside from the Taipingqiao project by the same Shui On Group, of which Xintiandi was the nucleus development, a broader transformation of the surroundings was initiated as land values rose dramatically and attracted new investments (Li 2016). Additionally, the public perception of the former working-class neighborhood evolved to become a hotspot of internationality and urban elites (Liang 2008a; Yang & Chang 2007), which allows for higher returns of investment for the developers but also fits perfectly in Shanghai's goal of the "Excellent Global City".

More importantly though, Xintiandi paved the way for a new regime of redevelopment (González Martínez 2019; Zhong & Chen 2017). As one of the most prolific examples of an urban public-

private growth coalition in China, it garnered immense attention from other district governments in Shanghai and city officials in other major Chinese cities who wished to replicate the process and success Xintiandi had. The project's significance in this context can hardly be overestimated; one indication is the plethora of projects which directly (*Wuhan Tiandi, Foshan Tiandi, Chongqing Tiandi*)[34] or indirectly reference Xintiandi (He & Wu 2005).

As Yang & Chang (2007, p. 1824) point out, this new redevelopment scheme is "neither the corner of historical preservation the city officials imagined, nor the primitive blueprint sketched by the developers" but rather a highly individualized and localized urban renewal regime that focuses on historical elements as the public foundation for redevelopment projects with little regards to actual heritage.

Incidentally, the renown and popularity of Xintiandi made future similar projects in Shanghai more complex as it resulted in growing awareness of the city's past (Arkaraprasertkul 2017) and heightened attention to the fate of residents in chiaqian processes. In the years following the project, the municipal government introduced several measures to protect Lilong communities and their residents better, starting a trend of reevaluating urban preservation (Zhong & Chen 2017). While this cannot directly be linked to Xintiandi itself, there is little doubt that the experiences gathered from the redevelopment of Xintiandi – along with other similar redevelopment efforts – influenced the government in their decision-making to implement these stricter regulations (González Martínez 2019).

In a way, Xintiandi is the epitome of the transformative power the opening of the Chinese economy brought to Shanghai in renewing the long-dormant urban fabric, but it also serves as a reminder of the consequences this has on the local community and social structure.

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[34] All of them development projects in which Shui On Group is involved (Shui On Land 2022).

6 Micro-Interventionism at Guizhou Road

Lilong in Shanghai are under constant pressure of redevelopment. In the last chapter, we saw how this can completely change the neighborhood, from structural demolition and resident relocation to creating something entirely new, with only nominal connections to the original Lilong. This chapter will look at a different approach to the redevelopment of Lilong areas, namely the neighborhood around Guizhou Road in Central Shanghai, which from 2017 onwards, witnessed two different efforts of gently changing the narrative around this settlement. Again, the process and stakeholders involved, their experiences, and the results will be investigated, but first, the situation before the redevelopment project[35] must be examined.

6.1 The site

The 600m long Guizhou Road (贵州路) now lies at the heart of the city, but when it was established shortly after the founding of the English settlement (1846) under the name of *Quangse Road*, it lay at the very edge of the British Concession (or rather its first extension in 1848) and was yet mostly undeveloped (Shanghai Municipal Council 1866). Over the following decades, the area urbanized with the *British Goal* (prison) being established at the north end of the street and a bustling commercial and cultural district being developed to the south, which at its height in the 1920s and

Quick facts	
Location	North Huangpu
Size of project area	7 ha (only Lilong)
Inhabitants (before project)	350 houses, inhabitants unknown
Lilong built in	1929 - 1932
Redeveloped in	2017 – 2020
Redevelopment regime	Micro-interventions

Table 3: Quick facts on Guizhou Rd Lilong

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[35] The term redevelopment here must be understood in its most broad interpretation, as will be clear later on

91

30s produced many, at the time cutting-edge, large-scale buildings (French 2010; Mayne & Shanghai Municipal Council 1904; Urban Network Office & My Zero Point 2019). In the late 19th century, four Lilong communities were built between the Suzhou Creek and what is now Beijing West Road, surrounding the British prison. The four communities comprised roughly 350 old Shikumen Lilong houses, each housing multiple households. Land value assessments show that this area was still relatively affordable in the early 20th century – as opposed to the intersection of Guizhou Road with the bustling Nanjing (East) Road only a few hundred meters to the south (Henriot & Zhenyu 2013). In 1933 though, just 20 years later, the land values all along Guizhou Road had increased fivefold (Zhenyu 2013), showing the growing prominence of the area.
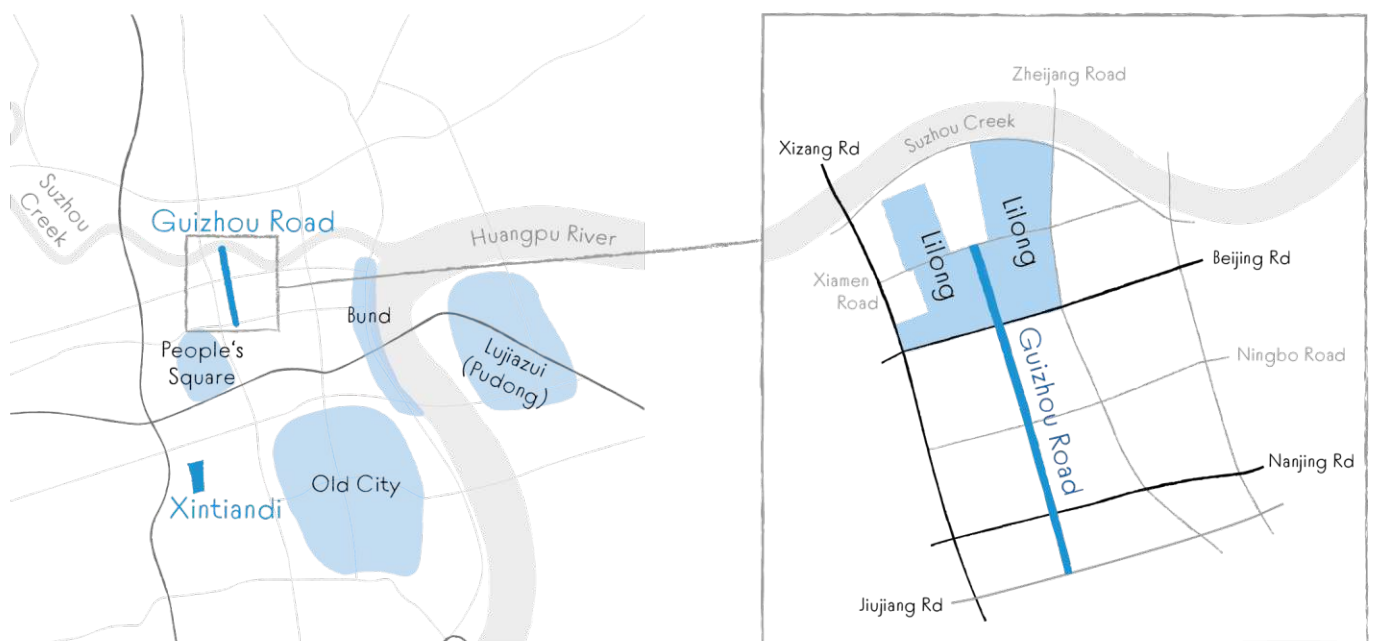
Figure 19: Urban context of Guizhou Road
(own drawing)

After the founding of the PCR in 1949, apart from the conversion of the British goal to an administrative function (today housing the *Shanghai Municipal Drainage Administration*), the area lay dormant (as seen in Figure 16) until the 1990s when in the wake of China's economic opening several development projects were carried out in the immediate vicinity of the Lilong neighborhoods: mainly the office complexes *Meixin Building* and *Meihua Building* in 1999, the 2008 multistory residential areas of *Riverside Pearl* and *Yishui Mansion* (2002 and 2008) and most recently in 2019 the conversion of an old English warehouse (built in 1929) along the Suzhou

Creek to a creative hub called *Bailian Group Fashion Center*, maintaining the historic facades (ArchDaily 2019). Especially the last project attracted attention to the area. However, it is essential to note that while all these developments do directly border the Lilong neighborhoods, they are completely detached from each other with various fences and walls (except for one gate leading to the fashion center), effectively dividing them spatially, functionally, and socially.
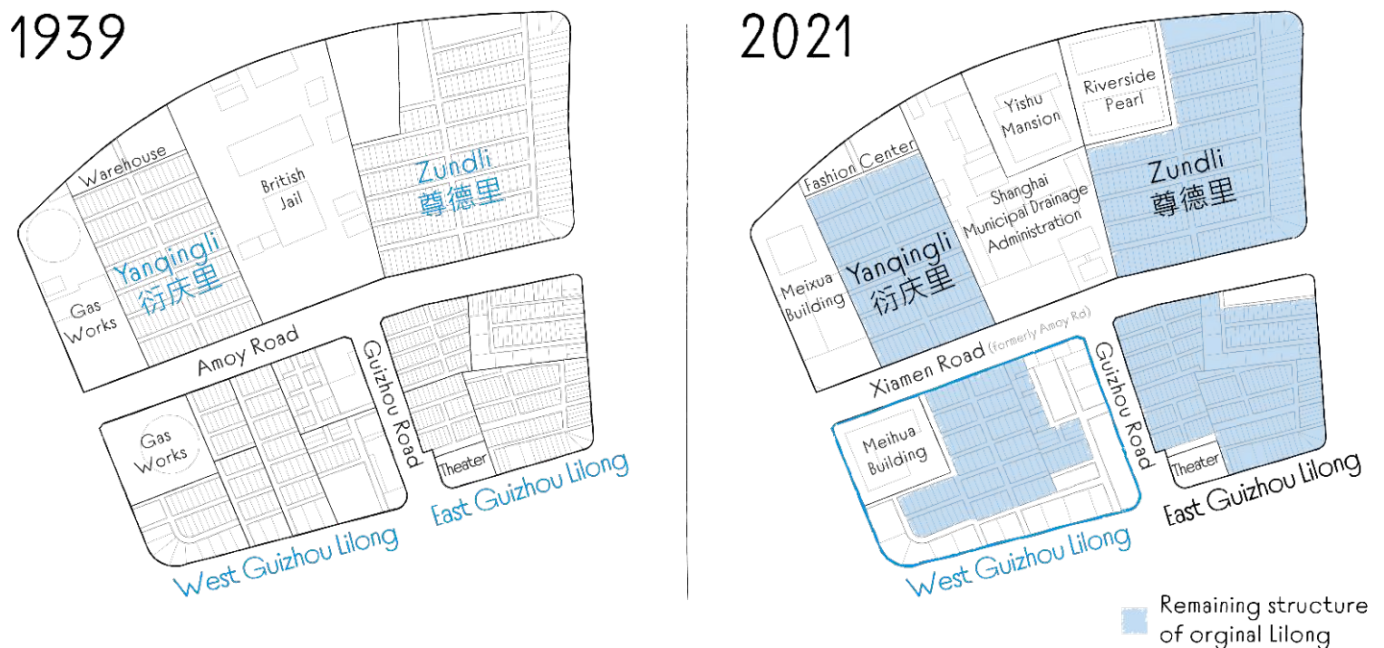
Figure 20: Lilong communities at Guizhou Road in 1939 and 2021
(own drawing, based on Henriot & Durand 2011 and ESRI 2021)

Nanjing (East) Road to the South was and is arguably the busiest and best-known shopping street in Shanghai, stretching from the famous Bund waterfront on the east towards People's Square – the seat of the municipal government, featuring several museums and a park, as well as an important transportation hub – and beyond westwards. Guizhou Road is, therefore, directly in the heart of Shanghai's economic and cultural center. Nevertheless, despite some activity spilling over from the pedestrian zone at Nanjing East Road (manifesting in a vibrant restaurant and food scene south of Ningbo Road), the street seems surprisingly dormant, which masks the immense redevelopment pressure the area faces (particularly due to the skyrocketing land values) (Huang et al. 2017; Tong 2021).

Main alley in West Guizhou Lilong

Planned vs. spontaneous seating arrangement in Lilong

Shop fronts along Xiamen Road

View north along Guizhou Road

View north along Yanqingli's main alley

Narrow and dark lane in West Guizhou Lilong

Figure 21: Impressions from Guizhou Road and adjacent Lilongs

(own pictures)

6.2   The project(s)

In recent years, Guizhou Road (and the adjacent Lilong neighborhoods) were the focus of two low-level urban interventions, a micro-improvement program of the Lilong public spaces in 2017 and, subsequently, an image and community building effort for the whole street in 2019 and 2020. Whereas the first project physically improved the neighborhood, the latter has a different approach of creating awareness of the uniqueness of the area and its communities through publicity work. Firstly, a closer look at the goals and outcomes of these projects, and afterward, their process, impact, and lessons learned will be discussed.

6.2.1   Upgradation of West Guizhou Lilong (2017)

As part of a program launched by the Shanghai municipal government called "Three Beautifuls" (Tong 2021) in 2016 to improve countryside, street landscape, and city blocks, the Lilong areas at Guizhou Road also became one of the sites chosen for upgradation. Initiated, funded, and supervised by the local government (i.e., the *Sub-district Office of East Nanjing Road* of Huangpu district), the goal was to start an overarching improvement process of the Lilong neighborhood (Bai 2022). As project funds were limited, the original aims of renovating and upgrading homes and building facades had to be discarded. Instead, according to Tong Ming (2021), the lead architect of TM Studio in charge of the upgradation, the approach shifted to implementing several small-scale projects at key points in the (semi-) public alleyways to improve shared spaces and, in turn, change the public perception of the area. Central to this approach is the underlying notion that additional neighborhood investments can be attracted or created by improving a community's image.

To achieve this goal, the team of TM Studio set out to engage with residents and to identify opportunities for micro-interventions.[36] The project focused on the 1.800 square meters large West Guizhou Lilong community, an amalgamation of three initially separated Lilong which

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[36] A closer assessment of this process will be discussed later, but it is important to clarify now that this can hardly be considered a bottom-up approach as despite residents being included in the planning process the decision power remained in the hands of the district government and the planning team it appointed.

have since merged (Henriot & Durand 2011). Here, as typical for Lilong, individual housing units are small and underequipped – only half of the residents have access to private toilets and kitchens (TM Studio 2019) – forcing activity to the outside. Due to a lack of investment and maintenance, the lanes and alleys of the neighborhood that used to host these daily activities have deteriorated to a point where it severely hindered community life. In addition, as the socio-economic structure of residents changed (due to aging and changing family ties), the limited financial means and the waning willingness to invest significantly restrict self-organized upgradation efforts (Bai 2022; Tong 2021).

Therefore, providing adequate spaces for the residents in their daily life was identified as one of the critical tasks (TM Studio 2019). Two low-cost approaches were chosen to achieve this: improve the quality of public spaces and provide alternative spaces for human interaction. As visible in the figure below, four aspects became the focus of the project: the entrance gates, the natural environment, shared spaces, and sanitation.
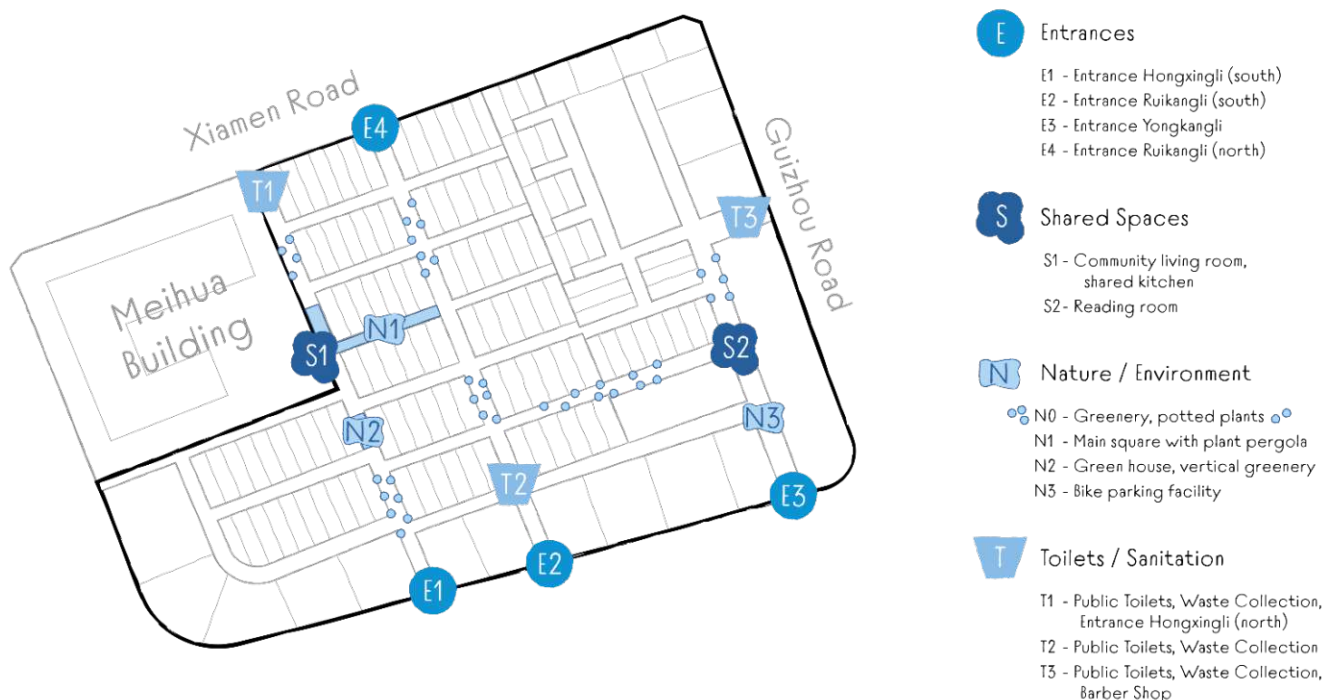
Figure 22: Physical interventions at West Guizhou Lilong
(own drawing, based on TM Studio 2019)

As the **entrance gates** are highly important to a Lilong community and are seen as a symbol of status and the neighborhood's unique identity, they are a natural intervention area. Of the six entrance gates to the community, four were embellished by giving them a new colorful paint coat, implementing community-engaging elements like an information board or a showcase for communal activities, and lastly, reusing existing rooms to house neighborhood services like a security station and a barbershop (TM Studio 2019; Tong 2021).

The remaining two gates and a third area inside the neighborhood focused on **sanitation infrastructure**, i.e., public toilets. In a neighborhood where 40% of inhabitants have no access to private toilets providing sanitary, safe, and pleasant public toilets was deemed a high priority for the community (Bai 2022). The reuse of three neglected spaces for public toilets and garbage collection aimed to improve the neighborhood's cleanliness and quality of life (TM Studio 2019).

Similarly, greenery was planted or enhanced throughout the Lilong, improving the **natural environment** (and, therefore, the quality of life) and providing welcoming public spaces for residents to interact (Bai 2022). This is especially the case at the main square, where a metal pergola not only allows for plants to rank and develop a green canopy but doubles as a place to dry clothes after laundry, an intrinsic social element of the Lilong. Another similar plant pergola nearby is geared towards establishing a space for relaxation (TM Studio 2019).

Lastly, the most extensive intervention was focused on providing two (indoor) **shared spaces**: a shared living room with a shared kitchen attached and an open reading room. For both, underused spaces were renovated and opened up to the neighborhood, with the living room being located right next to the main square (including a community stage in front) and the reading room tucked away on the first floor in a side lane. Residents can freely use these spaces to mingle with their neighbors, invite guests or relax, making them an important extension of their private homes which often cannot host these activities due to their lack of space (Tong 2021). In addition, as these rooms are indoors and sheltered, activities usually carried out in the alley can be relocated to some extent during bad weather.

All activities of the *Encounter Guizhou Road,* including the exhibition, were planned by *UNO,* which was the curator of the project, but were enabled and supported by a wide range of stakeholders: Most notably the two governmental bodies in charge of the project; the *Shanghai Urban Public Space Design Promotion Center,* a municipal institution which is seen as on the forefront of micro-interventions in Shanghai (Xing 2022), as well as the *Huangpu District Commerce Committee* (SDPCUS 2020; SUSAS 2019). In addition, several private stakeholders (among others, local businesses, a real estate developer, and cultural institutions) were also involved in the project by providing funds, materials, and knowledge.

After completing the project in early 2020, all physical evidence, like exhibition materials and signs, was taken down (Tong 2021).

Pergola at main square in West Guizhou Lilong [1]

View into Shared Living Room at West Guizhou Lilong [2]

Public Reading Room at West Guizhou Lilong [3]

Entrance with security station and information board [4]

Exhibition signs along Guizhou Road [5]

Guided neighborhood tour with Encounter Guizhou Rd [6]

Figure 24: Impressions from Guizhou Road and adjacent Lilongs

([1,2,3&5] own pictures; [4] TM Studio 2019; [6] Urban Network Office 2020)

6.3   Interpretation

After this brief description of these two projects at the Lilong neighborhoods in Guizhou Road, this chapter will focus on the less tangible, but nonetheless crucial, aspects like community and stakeholder involvement, experiences made and lessons learned, and finally, an outlook on the impacts on the redeveloped neighborhoods. A closer evaluation of whether the stated goals have been fully achieved and how the community assesses the changes and outcomes is undoubtedly worth a closer look but, unfortunately, outside of the scope of this thesis.

Although nominally two different projects, the spatial and temporal proximity of the two and the overlap in stakeholders and planning teams lend to a joint assessment wherever possible.

6.3.1   Stakeholder involvement, community participation, and empowerment

Despite this being a low-level, micro-interventionist approach focusing on the community and their daily life, one conclusion is easily made when looking at the stakeholder structure: these projects are not a community-driven, i.e., bottom-up, effort but rather an imposed process started by local and municipal governments and carried out by outside planers. Moreover, despite the responsible government branches giving much creative freedom to planners, finished plans had to be approved by them before funding was granted, which naturally puts some (mental) limits on the proposal. While this is not necessarily worth criticism, it marks a continuity, rather than a departure, from the more traditional property-led redevelopment seen at projects like Xintiandi.

Nonetheless, in both projects, community involvement is arguably much stronger, manifesting not only in participatory activities, like the involvement of residents and local businesses in workshops or the engagement with the Lilong community to determine their needs [37] but, maybe most importantly, the focus on highlighting and promoting established communal

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[37] TM Studio claims that despite the organization and financing of the project resembling a top-down process, due to the heavy inclusion of residents the actual design can be considered **bottom-up** (Bai 2022), a claim that arguably would not hold up to closer scrutiny.

processes. This marks a shift from the aim of **upgrading** to **supporting** Lilong communities and neighborhoods and is, therefore, a crucial paradigm change.

As this shift is detrimental to many micro-interventional approaches (arguably worldwide), it will be discussed later in more detail[38]; its impacts, though, are clearly visible at Guizhou Road. Although the Lilong there undeniably faces severe challenges and deficits, namely the dilapidated built structure and the lack of essential amenities, in both projects, the focus was not on improving these problems directly; perhaps budgetary constraints also played a significant role here. Instead, they aimed to emphasize existing habits, like communal cooking, laundry, and other shared activities, either by providing an adequate environment through physical improvements or by changing their mental perception through exhibition and education. Supporting (and somewhat enabling) their existing way of life is arguably an essential way of empowerment for these socially disadvantaged groups who otherwise are often forced to adapt to their surroundings' opportunities completely.

6.3.2 Challenges of approach and process

Both residents and those in charge, i.e., the governmental institutions and the executing planners, are reportedly pleased not only with the outcomes described in the next chapter but also with the procedures employed to achieve these outcomes. Perhaps unsurprisingly, there have been some hurdles along the way, not all of them could be overcome.

Most challenges encountered are somewhat familiar to any project in already developed neighborhoods: There were problems with diverse landownership and the partial refusal to open up private (unused) areas to the community (a shared garden could therefore not be realized), resistance from some residents to change and cases of NIMBYism[39]. However, according to Tong Ming and Bai Xueyan, one of the biggest problems was communicating with the residents, who

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[38] See chapter A7 Redeveloping vs. Upgrading vs. Supporting

[39] An acronym for "Not In My BackYard", describing the mentality of objecting to a spatial measure close to their home while equally wanting to profit from it if erected somewhere else (OED Online 2022), usually in conjunction with (social and technical) infrastructure

initially did not understand why their neighborhood should be redeveloped, what was planned for their community, and what the objectives of this process were. This is especially true for the physical alterations in the first project stage.

Tong Ming admits that they struggled with getting the community to cooperate when trying to explain the "public good" stemming from the project and only succeeded later due to their willingness to argue about every detail of their proposal and sticking to their design despite criticism.

From an academic standpoint, it is interesting to see the implications of the theoretical basis laid out above - namely on participation and citizen power, as well as the overarching situation in Shanghai – on real-life projects like this, both in the problems encountered and the solutions employed. TM Studio's difficulties when working with the community presumably stem from the specific situation Lilong residents find themselves in, where micro-intervention projects like these are rather unpopular as they seem to oppose property-led redevelopment and the financial benefits residents are likely to receive[40]. Additionally, a process like this, imposed on a neighborhood by the local government and in which the community has little advocacy, is naturally much harder to convey to the affected residents.

On the contrary, by letting the community participate but not majorly empowering them, a design deadlock (due to conflicting interests among the affected) could be prevented, and a successful project could be implemented, at least according to those in charge. This highlights the discussions and struggles around the appropriate level of community participation and empowerment in urban redevelopment projects that are also ongoing in the scientific discourse, as described in chapter 2.1.1 Participation and Empowerment.

6.3.3   Observable impacts

When entering West Guizhou Lilong as a visitor on a regular weekday, one immediately notices the difference in public space compared to other similar Lilong. While the latter often feels

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[40] See chapter 4.3 The future of the Lilong

rundown and somewhat cluttered, the reorganization of shared spaces at Guizhou Road makes them seem more modern and open. Including greenery and color further improve the friendliness of the public space, and by providing dedicated high-quality spaces for various activities, the neighborhood, or rather the neighborhood's alleys, feels coherent as one community. While difficult to assess by just visiting the area, the stated goal of sparking a comprehensive upgradation by improving public spaces seems to be fruitful as, during the visits, several renovation projects of private homes were underway.

Despite several visits, though, little communal interaction or activities could be observed; important neighborhood landmarks like the main square, the shared living room, and the reading room were, apart from some clothes drying in the sun on the main square pergola, empty and unused. However, Tong Ming, who was directly involved in the project and spent considerable time with the community, disagrees: For him, the project was largely a success, while some elements (like the reading room, which is rarely used due to being on the first floor) did not flourish as desired overall the project revitalized the public space of the neighborhood and promoted meaningful social interactions.

The second goal of changing the image of Lilong at large, and especially this Lilong, is challenging to measure and assess. Again, TM Studio and UNO feel confident that their work did contribute to achieving this to some extent: While not able to transform the prevailing mental connotation of the Lilong as a ground of poverty, the two projects gave hope to the residents of West Guizhou and improved the perception of their neighborhood. The small wave of gentrification in the neighborhood's storefronts, i.e., nicer and higher quality shops, could indicate that.

That being said, supporting communities as it was employed here usually can only alleviate some of the tension these neighborhoods face. Underlying problems and challenges, e.g., the immense (financial) pressure to redevelop the area or the bad housing conditions, are not tackled and are only pushed into the future. Even those involved in the project think that this can only extend the lifespan of an old Lilong neighborhood by about a decade before more extensive, i.e., more thorough and destructive, measures must be taken.

For West Guizhou Lilong, even this cautious prediction did not come to fruition as only a few months after the project was marked for *chiaqian* by the municipal government. The prime location of the Lilong results in maybe the highest relocation fees ever paid in China (Tong 2021), making it hugely profitable for residents. Detailed development plans for the neighborhood are yet to be announced, but considering the immense land value, it is doubtful that much of the comparably low-density Lilong structure will be preserved (Bai 2022).

Conclusion

7 Participation and redevelopment in mega-cities: Are they incompatible?

Sustainability has become one of the biggest challenges in megacities today. As cities, predominantly in the Global South, have expanded at an unprecedented pace, the pressure to cope with this growth mounted, too. Providing sufficient adequate housing seems to create the most tension, visible in the immense rise of **socially disadvantaged communities** living in (informal) sub-standard settlements and slums. Financially overwhelmed with the rapidly changing needs in infrastructure and services, city governments have grown increasingly reliant on public-private growth coalitions that combine public resources like legal authority and land with private funds. As a result, many megacities have seen a wave of **property-led redevelopment** of socially disadvantaged communities managed by private real estate developers.

The same is true for the megacity Shanghai: Here, **Lilong** neighborhoods that emerged during the city's colonial era around one century ago and quickly came to define the urban housing identity are now facing severe dilapidation. Most Lilong communities have vanished from the city in the last two decades, and those remaining can now be considered socially disadvantaged communities. As more and more Lilong got redeveloped under a property-led regime, problems with this type of regeneration gained attention: chiefly the growing awareness of the uniqueness of the typology in terms of community building and, subsequently, the communities occupying the demolished Lilong neighborhoods. Therefore, experimentation with other approaches to redevelopment is carried out throughout the city.

The two redevelopment cases studied in this thesis, Xintiandi/Taipingqiao and Guizhou Road, operated in very similar circumstances: Yes, there are almost 20 years between the two, and in the meantime, the city, the political situation, and the urban economics have shifted drastically. As the urban needs moved past growth-at-all-costs and public opinion changed, much more emphasis was put on residents' demands, and the power balance between the municipality and private developers dipped in favor of the former. On the other hand, as property values seem to

have no growth limits, developers can afford ever-increasing compensation payments to the government and communities, as seen in the current redevelopment at Guizhou Road.

Nonetheless, the basic premise of "dilapidated Lilong pockets" (Bracken 2023), located in prime central locations, inhabited by socially disadvantaged communities, and in dire need of some form of redevelopment applied to both projects investigated as well as others across the city. Answers to this predicament, however, vary widely. Apart from the traditional property-led redevelopment employed in **Xintiandi** and the micro-interventions at **Guizhou Road**, several different approaches and attempts were tried (or, in some cases, happened organically), including the following two famous examples:

The already mentioned **Tianzifang** is a Lilong community close to Xintiandi, which developed in a bottom-up process as a creative hub following the 1999 conversion of adjacent factories into an art center. It has since gained immense fame and, in 2008, was put under government management. Based on the experiences in Xintiandi, Luwan district government tried to emphasize resident involvement and retention of their living spaces. However, under constant development pressure and increasing visitor numbers, most residents have moved out, and the traditional architecture was heavily modified. Compared to Xintiandi, Tianzifang was redeveloped by many small-scale investors; however, the outcome for the community is very similar (Bracken 2023; Zhu 2023b).

Starting in the early 2000s, **Jing'an Villas**, a late and, therefore, comparably modern Lilong community in a similar central location, began to follow Tianzifangs footsteps in becoming a cosmopolitan creative hub in the city, with two crucial differences: As cafés, exhibition halls, and cultural spaces here were barely tolerated by local officials, these activities remained somewhat hidden; secondly, as the resident complaints in Tianzifang grew louder, the Jing'an community was increasingly wary about allowing too much commercial activity. Instead, artists and other creatives who operated their businesses in the neighborhood were encouraged to live there as well. However, despite their efforts, the rejuvenation of Jing'an Villas became increasingly burdensome for residents, and in the early 2010s, creative industries were forced to shut down.

Today, the Lilong as Jing'an Villas is slowly disappearing due to property-led redevelopment projects (Arkaraprasertkul & Williams 2015; Bracken 2017; Zhou 2015).

When looking at these two examples in conjunction with the two case studies of this thesis, we see different levels of community participation. Nevertheless, all these four Lilongs lost most of their residents and can hardly be seen as a sustainable redevelopment project from the community's perspective.

However, one could argue that when considering the individual household, the opposite is true: Did they not willingly give up their **right to stay put** (Hartman 1984) and were primarily excited by the prospect of being relocated to improved housing, a large relocation fee and a "better", more secure future? In fact, some communities outright demanded to be redeveloped. Is this not **citizen empowerment**?

Unfortunately, no: under closer scrutiny, this claim does not hold true. Firstly, not everybody is happy to be relocated, and, as described above, resistance to redevelopment is somewhat tricky. Additionally, it is arguable how much agency those agreeing to redevelopment have: Living conditions in Lilong communities are often mediocre. Considering the underprivileged inhabitant's limited political and financial capital, state-sponsored relocation is usually the only feasible way to better accommodation. Combined with the sometimes life-altering financial compensation, it would be at issue to label this process as empowering and voluntary.

This calls into question whether the traditional understanding of participation and involvement (e.g., Arnstein (1969) and Healey (1997) laid out above) is applicable under the circumstances found in megacities like Shanghai. The central predicament socially disadvantaged communities face here is that no redevelopment is, in many cases, worse than the destruction of their neighborhood and the relocation of residents. Despite having some power and influence

in the development process of their community, they are strongly incentivized to give up this power and not engage in the redevelopment process[41].

Therefore, new approaches (and possibly a new theoretical framework) to participation and citizen empowerment are needed. The municipal government of Shanghai has recognized this issue and is experimenting with new redevelopment regimes. The next chapter aims to categorize these according to their concept of participation.

[41] For case studies in other megacities see Sorensen & Okata (2011).

8   Redeveloping vs. Upgrading vs. Supporting

To recall the question of what constitutes **citizen empowerment** in redevelopment processes, as laid out above, it is difficult to argue that better participation fulfills this role (alone), contrary to Arnstein's prevalent theory of the participation ladder.

Instead, we have to look at the role that the government and, to a lesser extent, private developers take when interacting with these socially disadvantaged communities. As highlighted above, this can range from **redeveloping** to **upgradation** and **supporting**.

Xintiandi is the typical project for the public-private pro-growth coalition employing a **redeveloping** mindset. While not agnostic to existing residents, and in fact compensating them relatively well, they had little say in whether, how and to what extent their neighborhood (and with it their community) would be changed. Even if we keep in mind that redevelopment and subsequent relocation may be desired and beneficial to the relocated households, it still gives them no power to decide their fate to a meaningful extent.

Figure 25: Levels of citizen participation in selected projects (own drawing)

One step further towards citizen empowerment can be characterized by the idea of neighborhood **upgradation**. Upgradation encompasses typical participatory actions and, crucially, allows for citizen involvement in the change process. The (very successful) physical interventions at West Guizhou Lilong fall in this category. Citizens can voice their needs, opinions, ideas, and objections but are rarely in power to implement changes accordingly. Instead, external actors like governments, planners, and developers decide to balance overarching goals, finances, and conflicting community priorities.
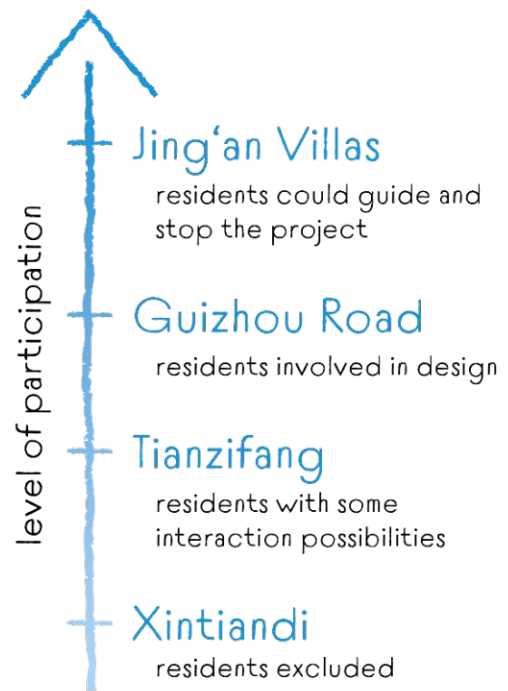
However, at Guizhou Road, another approach was implemented in the *Encounter Guizhou Road* project: giving the community parts or all of this decision power and **supporting** their existing social structures. *Encounter Guizhou Road* lies at the boundary of redevelopment and urban art, as it had no stated goal of directly changing the neighborhood in any way. Instead, the focus of supporting communities is highlighting communal networks, actors, and values and facilitating the connections inside the neighborhood and with external actors. Naturally, projects like *Encounter Guizhou Road* have an implicit goal of improving the community's living conditions and promoting upgradation (Tong 2021), but it is up to the residents to do it on their own. This gives the inhabitants heightened agency which may not always be successful and result in little progress until new redevelopment projects are designed that take away this agency, as happened in Guizhou Road.

	Redeveloping	Upgrading	Supporting
Example Project	Xintiandi	West Guizhou Lilong	Encounter Guizhou Road
Project agency	external	external	community
Community involvement	none	input (ideas, needs, …)	decision making
Citizen empowerment	none	limited	great

*Table 4: Comparison of Redeveloping, Upgrading, and Supporting*Looking at these three examples of different levels of **citizen empowerment**, it is difficult and probably meaningless to try to identify the best practice, especially as this is incredibly context-dependent. However, one element that seems to ring true for Xintiandi, Guizhou Road as well as other Lilong redevelopment processes, is the right and the power of citizens to influence where to live, i.e., to stay put in a neighborhood or to be relocated; an

arguably reasonable demand that is echoed by community activists, researchers, and other advocates in socially disadvantaged communities around the world that are threatened by redevelopment (e.g., Hartman 1984; Karn, Shikura & Harada 2003; UN-Habitat 2003).

As the number of Lilong communities in Shanghai is further diminishing and, at the same time, public interest in the preservation thereof is steadily increasing, the current approach of property-led demolition seems progressively outdated and at odds with the city's self-stated goals in the latest master plan. The transition from Redeveloping in Xintiandi to Supporting through Encounter Guizhou Rd may provide the key to solving this contradiction when taken seriously (i.e., not subverting by later reverting to Xintiandi-style demolition).

9 Outlook

While the insights gained in this thesis certainly are very intriguing several questions remain or have emerged during the research.

For one, when researching citizen empowerment, participation, and community involvement, it would be remiss not to let citizens and communities participate, i.e., talking to the affected residents of redevelopment projects would be of great interest. Unfortunately, this was not possible in the scope of this thesis but should definitely be considered in future similar studies.

Secondly, and much more intriguing, is an idea that popped up several times while researching: *rethinking the Lilong.* The Lilong housing typology is predominantly, as was done in this thesis, thought of as a built structure of historical significance to Shanghai and defining the city's dwelling identity for decades. However, what makes the Lilong unique is not the architectural marriage between East and West but the communal values and connections its layout created. In this vain, Arkaraprasertkul (2009) argues that instead of saving the aging and dilapidated structures, necessitating significant investments, proper and forward-thinking (i.e., sustainable) protection would include developing new LMRHD[42] building typologies that incorporate the core values of the Lilong in a modern and lasting built environment. This switch of perspective, echoed by (Bracken 2023), is a refreshing take on redevelopment and should be explored further. This approach could possibly become a way of forging a **public-private-community growth coalition** in order to redevelop socially disadvantaged communities more sustainably: By incorporating the third pillar of community and allowing current residents to stay in the neighborhood after the redevelopment, they would gain more agency and power without compromising the needs of private developers (profit) and public actors (urban renewal & taxes) too much.

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[42] LMRHD = **l**ow to **m**edium **r**ise but **h**igh **d**ensity; Lilong can be considered a LMRHD typology

Lastly, Shanghai is not alone in this predicament. Most megacities worldwide find themselves in similar situations and try to find solutions independently. E.g., slums like Dharavi in Mumbai have faced countless approaches to redevelopment, from *slum clearance* to *in-situ-upgradation*. Despite obvious political, economic, and social differences, it would be remiss not to try to learn from each other.

Appendix

I. List of Figures

II. List of Tables

III.   Publication bibliography

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