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<https://doi.org/10.34737/vz99q>

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Wellbeing and Urban Regeneration in China:
Towards a People-Centred Urban Agenda

Sabina Cioboata

This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements of the University of Westminster
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2022

Abstract

Following four decades of reform, China has lifted millions out of poverty. Nevertheless, the social costs of the country's growth-oriented agenda have long been scrutinised, with phenomena such as rapid urbanisation being one of the most transformative forces in this process. Under the umbrella of urban regeneration and quality of life improvements, state-led projects have been criticised for their primary focus on selective physical upgrading, large-scale demolition, and relocation, incurring significant social costs. However, recent paradigm and policy shifts are pointing towards increased governmental interest in promoting wellbeing-oriented urban development: a response aligned with global efforts to define new directions for evaluating human progress, beyond indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP). This has led to growing scholarship on the topic of wellbeing and urbanisation in China, albeit theorisations remaining narrow.

The present, exploratory research project therefore identifies that it is necessary to carry out further inquiries into current urban regeneration approaches in China. It also addresses the need for constructing new assessment frameworks, tailored to the political, socio-economic and cultural specificities of the country. In this sense, the thesis explores how the concept of wellbeing is understood and integrated in the context of current urban regeneration schemes in China.

Towards this aim, the research employs qualitative methods such as systematised literature reviews, interviews and observation. It begins by constructing a theoretical framework for wellbeing in urban transformation, where wellbeing lies at the nexus of both processes and socio-spatial outcomes of regeneration. The framework is contextualised by analysing political and intellectual engagements with the concept of wellbeing in China, revealing a complex picture of urban China in transition - one where wellbeing lies at the convergence between the legacy of collectivism, and the rise of individualism. This is followed by a review of Chinese urban regeneration mechanisms in the last three decades, focusing on three case studies from Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou in order to scrutinise the un-linear and complex path towards more people-centred regeneration approaches. Finally, the study explores the ways in which practitioner understandings of wellbeing are being materialised into current practices, revealing the emergence of new actors, innovative governance mechanisms and place-based solutions.

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Glossary of Chinese Terms

Bǎo 保	Preservation
Chāi 拆	Demolition
Chéngshì 城市	City
Chéngzhōngcūn 城中村	Urban village: former rural village which has been incorporated into a city following urban development, often located in peri-urban areas
Chuàngxīn 创新	Innovation
Dānwèi 单位	Work unit: developed during China's socialist planning system, consisting of integrated, mixed-use compounds that included work places, housing and social infrastructure
Dīngzi hù 钉子户	Nail household: term coined to refer to residents' refusal to move out despite coercive pressure from government and developer bodies
Fēngbì guǎnlǐ 封闭管理	Enclosed management: private services and amenities characteristic of commodity housing estates
Fēngshuǐ 风水	Chinese geomancy
Guānxì 关系	Relationships, social network
Hào shēnghuó 好生活	Good life
Hùkǒu 户口	Household registration system, granting rural or urban residency based on one's place of birth and determining a range of social benefits and services.
Hútòng 胡同	Alley: typology of narrow street, mostly associated with northern Chinese cities such as Beijing
Jiēdào bàn 街道办	Street office: sub-district administrative agency
Jiēdào 街道	Sub-district / street
Jūwěihuì 居委会	Residents' committee: neighbourhood-level administrative unit distributing welfare benefits, carrying out political education and providing neighbourhood services
Lǐlóng 里弄	Shanghai narrow lanes with houses built in the 19 th and 20 th Century

Mǎnyì 满意	Satisfaction
Pénghùqū 棚户区	Shantytown
Pénghùqū gǎizào 棚户区改造	Shantytown redevelopment
Pénghùqū qīnglǐ 棚户区清理	Shantytown clearance
Qū 区	District
Rénzhèng 仁政	Benevolent politics: concept developed by the Chinese philosopher Mencius, referring to governance that maintains the interest of the people above all
Sān jiù gǎizào 三旧改造	Three Old Renewals: policy innovation introduced in Guangdong province aimed at introducing new land governance measures and urban regeneration mechanisms
Shāngpǐnfáng 商品房	Commodity housing estate
Shèqū 社区	Neighbourhood community: concept introduced following the fall of the <i>danwei</i> system to refer to a geographically-based conglomeration of residents
Shèqū guīhuà shī 社区规划师	Community planner
Shèqū jiànshè 社区建设	Community building
Shíkùmén 石库门	Shanghai historic townhouses dating back to the 19 th Century, combining architectural styles from China and the West
Sìhéyuàn 四合院	Courtyard housing typical of Beijing
Wēifáng gǎizào 危房改造	Unsafe building reconstruction
Wéi gēngxīn 微更新	Micro-scale urban regeneration: new model of urban regeneration targeting dilapidated residential units
Wéiquán yùndòng 维权运动	Rights defending movements
Xìngfú 幸福	Happiness
Xiǎokāng shèhuì 小康社会	Moderately prosperous society: political goal rooted in ideas of ensuring poverty reduction and social equity
Xiǎoqū 小区	Micro-district: compact, high-density residential unit with apartment buildings, open space for recreation and public service buildings.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this doctoral thesis would not have been possible without the support of a series of individuals and institutions whom I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge through these means.

First and foremost, I wish to thank my thesis advisers, Dr. Giulio Verdini and Professor Johan Woltjer. Their expertise and academic input were invaluable in the development and completion of this research. What is more, their unreserved support, reassurance and mentorship have constituted and remain a continued source of inspiration and strength in critical moments.

I also owe gratitude to the experts who agreed to offer their generous time and insights during interviews conducted in China.

I am additionally thankful for feedback received from reviewers at the University of Westminster at different phases of this research. These include Professor Andrew Smith and Professor Gerda Wielander.

I am ever grateful to the University of Westminster for offering me the opportunity to undertake this research project, by means of the Quintin Hogg studentship awarded to me in 2017.

Importantly, I would like to extend thanks and gratitude to my dissertation examiners, Professor Gerda Wielander and Professor Fulong Wu, who took their time to meticulously review my thesis, as well as offer positive feedback and kind encouragements during the most enjoyable and thought-provoking Viva Voce that I could have ever envisaged.

Last but not least, I am fortunate to have been unconditionally supported and motivated by my loving family, partner and friends, who believed in me every step of this academic journey.

I declare that all the material contained in this thesis is my own work.

1

INTRODUCTION

The following thesis investigates how the concept of wellbeing is understood and integrated in the context of current urban regeneration schemes in China. This is particularly relevant given that in recent years, policy and paradigm shifts are pointing towards increased governmental interest in promoting wellbeing-oriented development in China: a response aligned with global efforts to define new directions for evaluating human progress, beyond Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The rationale informing this research lies primarily at the convergence of two principal discussions which have been highlighted internationally and are increasingly being incorporated in Chinese agendas on urbanisation. Firstly, the crucial importance of positioning local communities, their wellbeing and their quality of life at the centre of local development initiatives in order to achieve more sustainable and human-centred settlements. Secondly, as a step towards achieving this goal, the importance of re-conceptualising and operationalising the notions of wellbeing and quality of life, often used interchangeably, with a view of utilising them as more holistic and contextually-specific alternatives to evaluating development beyond monetary indicators such as GDP.

Political and academic discourse has defined and integrated, from multidisciplinary perspectives (primarily economics and psychology), the concepts of wellbeing and quality of life into wider discussions on sustainable development. Despite a lack of ubiquitous definitions or frameworks, converging theorisations have also applied the notions within discussions on urban development, with urbanisation being one of the most transformative forces of the current century. In contexts undergoing rapid socio-economic transformations, such as China, the relationship between urban processes and human welfare has been particularly difficult to evaluate given the economic imperative of the country's largely scrutinised development agenda (Fang & Zhang 2003, Ye 2011, Zhang, LeGates & Zhao 2016). Under the umbrellas of 'progress' and 'modernisation', state-led projects during three decades of reform have contributed to environmental decline and unjust socio-spatial outcomes (He & Wu 2007, He & Wu 2009). Nevertheless, paradigm shifts in the country are pointing towards an increased governmental interest in addressing some of the shortcomings of the past and promoting quality-oriented development, making this a momentous period for reflecting on issues of wellbeing and urban development in China. This is manifested in a multitude of dimensions that the dissertation will consider, including discourse, policy and practice.

1.1. BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

1.1.1. Wellbeing and Development

This research is based on observations around ideas of wellbeing promulgated in relation to urbanisation in China: an echo of global discussions on more holistic ways of understanding and evaluating development. It therefore features an analysis of the various political and academic engagements with the notions of wellbeing and quality of life – revealing a breadth of diverse conceptualisations in terms of scale and scope.

With regards to terminology, some of the first origins of wellbeing emerging from institutional discourse date back more than half a century ago, to 1948, when the World Health Organization framed the definition of health not only in terms of an absence of disease and disability but also in terms of the presence of “physical, mental and social well-being” (*Createquity* 2015). In this sense, some scholars point out a tendency to still utilise wellbeing as a synonym for health (particularly mental health), both in research and policy (Atkinson et al. 2017). Later institutional discourse utilised the terms wellbeing and quality of life interchangeably as part of political efforts to define a new direction for human progress (Glatzer 2015). This was translated into the emergence of wellbeing and as a governing policy concept rooted in the argument that economic growth is not to be seen anymore as the sole indicator of a ‘good life’ (Atkinson et al. 2017).¹ This argument was constructed and evidenced through movements related to concerns such as those addressing wider development goals (Nussbaum & Sen 1993, Sen 1985, Sen 2013), and the attention to individualised, psychological states of happiness (Diener 1984, Seligman 2011).

Meanwhile, research has confirmed the profound impacts that the built environment has on people’s physical, mental and socio-economic wellbeing. Embodying complex relationships of power, places and spaces, as well as the processes leading to their creation, built environments can enable or disable human flourishing as well as shape and dictate human actions and behaviour (Pacione 2003). It is intuitive that a people-oriented built environment can have a huge influence on people’s positive functioning. Decades of debate and theorisation on urbanisation and sustainable development have also highlighted that the success of cities and their liveability can no longer be exclusively evaluated through GDP, but that social and human considerations are paramount: cities must be for the people and of the people, continuously shaped and reshaped to

¹ National accounting systems have been one of the most prominent forms of measuring economic and social progress globally, encompassing economic accounting systems which calculate macroeconomics (Faik 2015). Including concepts such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP), Gross National Income (GNI) or Real

meet their needs and expectations for survival and development (De Palma & Guimard 2015). Within this discussion, the ultimate goal of urban interventions should be “man and the good life” (Li 2010, p. 136). This discussion is concomitant with a realisation that the complex dynamics shaping urban development have placed city dwellers’ needs (physical, economic, social, intellectual, cultural, spiritual, etc.) in the foreground, leading to a widespread phenomenon of urban de-vitalisation encountered in housing complexes, public space, infrastructure and other urban experiences. It has also been pointed out that urban governance has seldom been able to cope with worsening urban trends, and that institutional failure is often one of the main causes for a declining urban quality of life (Leitman 2000). What is more, decision makers continue to prioritise growth over place-making, people’s wellbeing, and environmental sustainability, leading to global crises such as inequality, climate change and chronic disease. “Can today’s unsustainable and health-threatening cities be transformed into settlements that nurture people’s wellbeing in the future?” ask concerned scholars (Ng 2016, p. 3).

In this sense, urban quality of life has constituted for decades the core of numerous international agendas and political discourse. Policy-recommendation documents such as the 2016 New Urban Agenda of the United Nations’ Human Settlements Programme (UN HABITAT III) call for increased efforts to improve the quality of life in our cities and human settlements, highlighting the social, economic, political, cultural and environmental challenges and opportunities posed by 21st Century urbanisation. Operating within the framework of achieving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in general, and Goal 11 in particular (centred on making settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), the agenda envisages a future for cities where people are central to all initiatives and collective public interest is prioritised, inhabitants are empowered and granted equal rights and opportunities, quality of life is ensured beyond infrastructure and services, and cultural diversity, social cohesion, safety, and civic engagement are paramount (New Urban Agenda 2016, UN Habitat III).

1.1.2. Emergence of the Chinese ‘Glocal’ Wellbeing Agenda

As the concept of wellbeing is continuously being streamlined as an alternative way of thinking about human development issues, nation states across the globe have increasingly been contributing to the conversation and engaging in ways of incorporating it at discourse and policy level. China represents, amongst these, a unique example, having experienced since the 1980s rapid growth not only economically but also in terms of its Human Development Index. One of the principal results of these socio-economic changes has been a dramatic rise of the country’s quality of life, with millions lifted out of poverty, mortality rates decreased, infrastructure development transformed both urban and rural areas, and other transformative shifts. China is currently the

most populous country in the world and its market and institutional reforms have turned it into one of the largest economies on the globe (Cheng et al. 2016). Nevertheless, the costs of rapid development have been nothing short of striking. These costs include environmental degradation, increased inequality, a reduction of state welfare, increased stress and insecurity, as well as opting for securing central control of individual civil rights and freedoms – a phenomenon that has been increasingly more prevalent under the current regime (Appleton & Song 2008, Smyth & Qian 2008, UN News 2020). Concomitantly, rapid transformations have brought about growing tensions between the state and society, widespread internalisation of consumerism and an arguable rise of individualism over the previously collectivist-oriented social fabric (Han 2015).

Government efforts to address these challenges have not lagged behind. Following years of debates marked by the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Chinese Communist Party National Congresses (2002 and 2007, respectively), the new core of Chinese governance efforts was introduced as “Building a Harmonious Society”, a new ideology which declares a shift of focus from economic growth to social harmony and which encompasses ideas about quality of life, increased democracy, social justice, social equity and therefore social welfare/wellbeing. Such ideas have recently also been reinforced by President Xi Jinping’s re-appropriation of the phrase *xiaokang shehui* (moderately prosperous society)² as part of political goals related to the “China Dream”. Ideas behind *xiaokang* are rooted in an explicit dichotomy between poverty reduction/economic growth goals and social equity and equality goals – pointing towards intentions to ensure a more egalitarian distribution of wealth and resources (State Council 2021). Further discourse analysis can reveal additional insights into the wellbeing-related lexicon employed to communicate and expand upon China’s most recent governance ambitions. *Xingfu* is a particularly relevant one. *Xingfu*, ad litteram translated as happiness, has clearly been presented as constituting a government target. Between 2000 and 2016, almost 400 articles with *xingfu* in their title were identified in *Renmin Ribao* (*People’s Daily* newspaper group) (Wielander & Hird 2018). In his report delivered at the 19th Party Congress in 2017, President Xi Jinping declared that it was the Chinese Communist Party’s mission to seek happiness for the Chinese people (Wielander 2018). Premier Li Keqiang, at the opening meeting of the annual parliamentary session in 2018, highlighted that “Our aim is to help people feel more satisfied, happier, and more secure” (Liang 2018). Hu An’gang, one of China’s leading economists, predicts that by 2030 China will be one of the happiest countries in the world, arguing that the Bhutanese concept of Gross National Happiness (GNH) can provide new directions for a more balanced development in China (Wielander 2018).³

² *Xiaokang* is a term originally borrowed by Deng Xiaoping from Confucian philosophy, following the launch of his 1978 economic reforms.

³ The 2018 World Happiness Report currently places it 86th out of 156 countries surveyed (Helliwell et al. 2018). Update this to the more recent survey (2021)

Such ideological articulations seek to reassure the people that the party-state is actively responsive to the numerous issues arising with rapid growth, whilst at the same time reminding them of the fact that their prosperity and wellbeing come as a direct result of state efforts and actions (Smyth et al. 2011, Wielander & Hird 2018). It could be argued that this discourse adopts the language of benevolent politics (*ren zheng*), where the rhetoric on happiness is part of efforts to create consensus on a set of shared norms, values and understandings of what it means to be Chinese, and to place an emphasis on the common good in order to facilitate acceptance, tranquillity, collaboration and social stability (Hsu, Zhang & Kim 2017). As the global concept of wellbeing is engaged with, adapted and re-appropriated within the unique political, cultural and socio-economic context of China, a 'glocal wellbeing' agenda is formulated and incorporated in discourse and governance efforts.

In parallel, Xi Jinping has also adopted and reiterated the national development target of building an "Ecological Civilisation", first introduced by Hu Jintao in 2007 as an explicit goal of the CCP (Li & Shapiro 2020). Beside being included in China's 13th Five Year Plan in 2016, "Ecological Civilisation" became an official policy target through the *Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Further Promoting the Development of Ecological Civilisation* document (State Council 2015).⁴ Amongst other provisions, the document commits to eliminating economic growth as the sole criterion for the evaluation of governance performance, shifting instead to issues such as public participation, environmental information disclosure, and safeguarding the environmental rights and interests of the public (State Council 2015). Alongside ambitions to turn China into a "Moderately Prosperous Society", the "Ecological Civilisation" approach is therefore intended to support the central government's promise of putting people first, by offering possibilities for a better quality of life, harmony and prosperity, while living within ecological boundaries. In this sense it has been widely interpreted as China's effort to resolve tensions between economic development and environmental sustainability, based on philosophies and concrete initiatives surrounding the harmony between humans and nature (Li & Shapiro 2020). As a political philosophy, "Ecological Civilisation" is based on two Western schools of thought: Ecological Marxism, which emphasises the environmentally unsustainable and destructive characteristics of Capitalism, and Constructive Postmodernism, a philosophy adopted in China as a way of merging Western models of 'modernity' while integrating and turning to more 'traditional' worldviews and wisdom (such as those supporting more relational ways of seeing the

⁴ *Opinions on...* are key state government documents which are not legally binding on their own, but which lead to subsequent policy development (Geall & Ely 2018).

world, for example through an emphasis on the interdependence between man and nature) (Geall & Ely 2018, Li & Shapiro 2020).

The Chinese “Ecological Civilisation” discourse and intellectual debate has been examined from a series of different angles, and contextualised using various socio-historical and political tools. Some scholars bring to attention that the roots of the movement are traced back to Ye Qianji, an agricultural economist who in 1987 launched a call for the harmonious development of eco-civilisation, which should be the direction of the twenty-first century (Marinelli 2018). This implied that humanity can benefit from protecting nature and maintaining a balanced relationship with it, a radically different ethical foundation as opposed to the utilitarian, profit driven focus of the industrial civilisation period that was coming to an end.

In order to understand how they may play out in practice, it is important to also situate articulations on wellbeing in China within a context of emerging intellectual debate and pluralism with regards to the country’s political system and governance mechanisms. One of the most broadly circulated debates is that on good governance, which has gained momentum across different intellectual groups within China, including liberals and New Leftists. Liberals in China advocate for complete and unequivocal reform towards replacing China’s one-party rule and authoritarianism with liberal democracy and the rule of law (Li 2020). They believe that this is imperative if the country is seeking to deliver better, fairer and more effective governance, despite their critics and the Party-state sustaining that liberal, electoral democracy is only suitable for Western political systems and would not be feasible in the differing context of China. Although liberal intellectuals played a crucial role in catalysing and supporting China’s market reforms four decades ago, they seem to hold little power in influencing policy and change nowadays. Instead, the State Government favours the rising philosophies on good governance of the China’s New Leftists, who support the development of state capacity against the ills of global capitalism, as a defence against growing inequality and corruption. They emphasise that the core values of democracy are not to be found in Western-style democratic systems, but instead refer to the state being able to reflect the will of the people and ensure harmony, collective welfare and a good life for all (Zhao 2010). Importantly, these views hold that the Chinese context is fundamentally different from the Western one in that the former puts emphasis on collectivism and the greater good, as opposed to individualism (Li 2020). Despite having different weights in their influence, these tensions and intellectual debates are felt within policy-making, reform and innovation at all levels in China. This will appear evident throughout the thesis.

Beyond complex propaganda mechanisms and official discourse, however, there is increased action towards addressing some of the inconsistencies the country is experiencing in order to promote quality, wellbeing-oriented development. Among relevant strategies are those addressing inequality, inequity and injustice (particularly linked to the rural/urban household registration system, *hukou*), employment, education, healthcare, housing and urban regeneration issues, civil society involvement, as well as setting up indices for measuring wellbeing as an indicator for social development (UNDP 2016). In this sense, despite a continuation of tight central control (UN News 2020), in relative terms economic and social reforms have encouraged more personal freedom to travel, to move, to pursue educational goals, to choose lifestyles and to participate in economic, social and political affairs (Abbott et al. 2016, UNDP 2016). A US-based consulting group, the Boston Consulting Group (BCG), in its most recent Sustainable Economic Development Assessment (SEDA 2018) of over 152 countries, which assesses wellbeing over 10 dimensions (including income, economic stability, employment, civil society, equality, governance, education, health, environment and infrastructure), places China at the global forefront in its efforts to improve wellbeing indicators and translate economic growth into wellbeing (BCG 2018).

At the convergence between discourse, policy and practice, it is important to remember that the “China Dream” is an urban dream (Taylor 2015). In fact, given the global impacts and mechanisms of urbanisation, it is surprising that of the twenty-four international Human Development Reports compiled by the UNDP, none have so far placed the topic of cities or urban living as its central theme; the same is the case with the national human development reports. One exception is the 2013 National Human Development Report compiled by China, which focuses on urban issues from a human development perspective and is titled *Sustainable and Liveable Cities: Towards Ecological Civilisation* (UNDP 2013). The report presents a roadmap to liveable cities for human development which is comprised of multiple dimensions which include equity and social integration, adequate infrastructure for all, resource efficiency and sustainability, urban form for quality of life, institutions for technological change, and governance innovation (UNDP 2013). Particular emphasis is placed on equity measures, especially with regards to the rights of rural migrants: “To reduce the destabilising impacts of economic disparities, cities need to move from social polarisation to social integration. In particular, the unjust treatment of migrant workers should end, starting with their full integration in the social security system, equal rights to education for their children, and laws and regulations to protect their rights and interests.” (UNDP 2013, p. 84). The report, in this sense, places justice and equity as top priorities of the human development agenda in China, and recognises the centrality of urban issues in this endeavour.

In consistency with this new national ideology and agenda, enhancing the role of urban planning in social development is a key challenge currently being explored. With the State (the Party) being defined as the spearhead of social justice, planning, as its direct satellite, is assumed to advance the public good and follow the principles of social justice. In this sense, discussions have been fuelled about how urban planning decision-making can be made more transparent, democratic, and just (Abramson 2006). Despite there still being a long way to go, Chinese urban policy and planning seem to have progressed in these directions. For example, policies to ensure greater protection of individual property rights have been enacted (CPGPRC 2007). In 2014, the Chinese central government launched the *New Type Urbanisation Plan* (NUP 2014-2020), which advocates a gradual shift from land-centred urbanisation to people-oriented urbanisation, including a) addressing the injustices and inequality attributed to the *hukou* household registration system (i.e. supporting migrants to acquire urban citizenship and improving their living standards and access to welfare); b) ensuring a more coordinated development between urban and rural areas (including tackling the development of the countryside and ensuring a better distributions of resources and services); c) addressing land development and entrepreneurial urban governance (involving mechanisms for slowing down urban growth and developing more equitable rural land expropriation compensation systems); and d) shifting from ‘quantity-oriented’ city development to ‘quality-oriented’, addressing some of the design and liveability challenges existing in Chinese cities at present. Despite some of the persisting inconsistencies/un-feasibilities of the new plan (Verdini & Zhang 2020), this agenda has been the catalyst for a series of pilot innovations at different levels,⁵ making the period when this research was conducted a relevant one for reflecting on issues of wellbeing and urban development in China.

1.1.3. Urban Regeneration and the Chinese Context

This thesis views urban regeneration as a multifaceted process of socio-spatial transformation which can result in positive societal outcomes (such as addressing urban decline, improvements in quality of life, city liveability or community development), but which can simultaneously also veil complex dynamics of marginalisation, exclusion and injustice. These dynamics are particularly relevant in contexts where rapid urban redevelopment, often under the discourse umbrella of regeneration, is pursued at the expense of local resident rights, livelihoods and wellbeing.

Reflecting on what urban regeneration could and should be, Leary and McCarthy (2013), in their pivotal work on the topic, propose the concept of aspirational regeneration. In this sense they

⁵ These include policies to promote migrants’ stabilisation in Anhui Province (Chen et al. 2019), efforts to devolve power to local communities and to ensure a more equitable distribution of financial resources in Guangdong (Li & Liu 2018), or practices of citizen participation in neighbourhood revitalisation in Shanghai (Shanghai Municipal Government 2015).

propose the following definition: “Urban regeneration is area-based intervention which is public sector initiated, funded, supported, or inspired, aimed at producing significant sustainable improvements in the conditions of local people, communities and places suffering from aspects of deprivation, often multiple in nature” (p. 9).⁶ Nevertheless, since the 1960s, neo-liberal urban regeneration approaches and their social costs have become the central focus of numerous scholars, especially in works concerned with urban justice. Critiques originated from the Global North. Concepts linked to power structures, such as ‘public-private growth coalitions’ and ‘urban regimes’ originated in the USA, given the structural dependency of American cities on the private sector (Le Galès 2000, Mollenkopf 1983, Stone 1989). Authors started to highlight the negative social effects that state-led redevelopment and infrastructure programmes, under the umbrella of regeneration, were having. These effects included community displacement, marginalisation and exclusion from decision-making processes. Scholars like Jane Jacobs (1961), Herbert Gans (1962), Alan Altshuler (1965), Parkinson, Foley and Judd (1988) documented and reported urban redevelopment projects, particularly in the UK and US, characterised by demolition, involuntary displacement and community uprooting for the development of commercial structures or high-end property. The more recent *Routledge Companion to Urban Regeneration* (Leary & McCarthy 2013) also features critiques of property-led regeneration in the Global South, with case studies from Ghana, Turkey, India, Singapore or Taiwan. Later, scholars such as Susan Fainstein (2014) shifted the focus to the ways in which existing economic development approaches subsidised private property developers, while others centred on socio-spatial transformations due to gentrification processes (Lees, Slater & Wyly 2008, Smith & Williams 1986).

In line with discussions on rapid urbanisation since market reforms, urban regeneration processes in China have similarly been under scrutiny. Scholars have highlighted that political and economic gratification priorities have incurred high social costs (Fang & Zhang 2003, Shin 2010, Wu 2015, Ye 2011). The origins of Chinese inner-city urban regeneration during the 1980s can be traced back to urban decline and China’s drastic reforms (Ye 2011). These included critical institutional changes such as land reform, housing reform and the decentralisation of state power, leading to a rise in entrepreneurial urban governments and growth coalitions (Fang & Zhang 2003, Ren 2008, Zhang, LeGates & Zhao 2016). Academic work since the late 1990s has significantly focused on the impacts of policies such as demolition, relocation and compensation characterising many large-scale projects across China, especially in the 2000s (Ye 2011). Regeneration was often driven by influxes of foreign investment and was part of city strategies to become national multifunctional centres and globally competitive mega-cities. Similar to Western counterparts, urban regeneration

⁶ Leary and McCarthy (2013) note that their definition does not disregard the significant role of the private sector, the third sector, and communities.

was linked to mega events, flagship projects, and the upgrade of dilapidated housing stock (often resulting in high-end property development). It has been argued that these processes led to the marginalisation of the rights and roles of particularly vulnerable communities (Wu 2015, Yang & Chang 2007). These include the urban poor, such as workers laid-off in the reform period, or urban migrants.

Following a period of intense growth, efforts to transition towards more people-centred urbanisation in China (see 1.1.2) have also meant finding different directions for urban regeneration. Shifts in policy and practice now ensure relatively more transparency and a better protection of residents' right and interests in the regeneration process. At policy and discourse level, improving urban living conditions is a "major livelihood and development project" (Qiu 2020), and urban interventions are declared to enhance a "sense of gain, happiness and security" (Qiu 2020). Nevertheless, complex structural mechanisms and institutional barriers in the Chinese context may mean that despite efforts to integrate more wellbeing-centred urban regeneration practices, shortcomings remain. This makes important the task of understanding to what extent, and in what way, the status quo is really challenged in urban projects on the ground.

1.2. AIMS AND RESEARCH STRUCTURE

1.2.1. Research Hypothesis, Aims, Questions and Objectives

Building upon the rationale developed above, this thesis aims to understand the multifaceted materialisations of wellbeing in urban regeneration projects in China.

The study also recognises the need for constructing new assessment frameworks, which take into account the political, socio-economic, and cultural specificities of China, thereby moving beyond Eurocentric thinking or assumptions. This move is crucial for constructing a more meaningful, comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the Chinese context. This research also has the ambition to contribute to a rich body of growing scholarship which aims to address problematic power imbalances embedded in processes of knowledge construction. Such dynamics have meant a long history of examining predominantly Global North contexts, especially when seeking examples of urban best practice and innovation; and of utilising Western, Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies to examine the Global South – an exercise leading to reductionist theory, analysis, and conclusions that often get translated into unsuitable policy and practice solutions. It is hoped that a more context-specific understanding of Chinese urban dynamics and wellbeing can therefore challenge assumptions, and lead to more fruitful conversations and processes of knowledge exchange.

Given this set of considerations, it is possible to formulate the following **research hypothesis** that lies at the basis of this study:

Following the growth-oriented mechanisms that have guided urban regeneration in China in the last three decades, a recent shift in paradigms and discourse may, to some extent, be materialising into a more wellbeing-oriented urban regeneration agenda, at policy and practice level.

This can further be elaborated upon in a number of **sub-hypotheses**:

1. Rapid socio-economic shifts since market reforms have rendered a multifaceted and complex understanding of wellbeing in China, fundamentally different from that encountered in Western contexts.
2. Ideas of wellbeing have been mobilised in relation to urban regeneration agendas in China, often veiling processes of socio-spatial injustice. Nevertheless, a scrutiny of recent policy and

practice shifts may reveal a more complex picture, characterised by a non-linear path towards wellbeing-centred practices.

3. Influenced by varying sets of agendas, backgrounds and institutional frameworks, urban practitioner understandings of wellbeing in urban regeneration are multifaceted and heterogeneous. This is bound to result in a series of urban regeneration solutions characterised by diverse processes and socio-spatial outcomes which combine innovation with business-as-usual.

In this sense, the project has three broad **research aims**, as follows:

1. To construct a more comprehensive and contextually-specific framework of wellbeing in China, informed by complex shifts since market reforms.
2. To scrutinise how ideas of wellbeing have been deployed and materialised in relation to shifting urban regeneration agendas in China, often veiling complex processes of socio-spatial injustice.
3. To reveal if recent shifting paradigms and agendas, as well as practitioner understandings of wellbeing, are being materialised into new solutions for urban regeneration in Chinese cities.

These aims are captured by three corresponding sets of **research questions** that will be addressed in this study:

1. How is the concept of wellbeing understood and mobilised in China's development agenda more generally and urbanisation agenda more specifically? What are the primary wellbeing determinants, and dimensions for Chinese urban development, and how is wellbeing planned for, achieved and negotiated within a context of rapid socio-economic transition?
2. Has the Chinese urban regeneration agenda shifted in the last three decades, and how is this situated within a broader context of urban reform? To what extent does the use of 'wellbeing' as a discourse and policy tool truly translate into people-centred urban regeneration outcomes?
3. How is the concept of wellbeing interpreted by practitioners working on urban regeneration in China, and how do they operate within existing institutional frameworks? What kind of projects is this vision materialising into, and to what extent are more innovative practices being interwoven with business-as-usual mechanisms?

It is envisaged that through exploring and addressing the questions enumerated above, this project will cover a series of respective **research objectives**, as follows:

- 1.1. Highlighting nuances in the political and intellectual interpretation and use of the wellbeing concept in China, especially in relation to the country's most recent development and urbanisation agenda (with particular focus on urban regeneration agenda) - with the ultimate goal of understanding how these are translated into urbanisation solutions.

1.2. Identifying and systematising urban wellbeing determinants in the rapidly changing context of China, as revealed by relevant studies, with the ultimate goal of highlighting that the country's definition of wellbeing lies at the transition between collectivism and rising individualism.

2.1. Critically examining Chinese urban regeneration in the last three decades, in order to highlight key shortcomings in the implementation of a genuine wellbeing-oriented agenda.

2.2. Identifying and examining comparable urban regeneration case studies from different regions in China, in order to question whether or not policy and paradigm shifts point towards more people-centred urbanisation.

3.1. Revealing urban practitioners' own understanding of wellbeing, based on them operating within a specific disciplinary background, system of values, agenda and institutional position.

3.2. Describing the processes, institutional mechanisms and outcomes of the current urban regeneration projects identified, in order to:

3.2.1. Examine how wellbeing is planned for and negotiated at local level, and whether this results in narrow materialisations when it comes to practice;

3.2.2. Understand what this reveals about the state of innovation in urban projects, at present.

1.2.2. Structure and Methodological Considerations

Guided by this set of objectives and questions, the research is structured into three interrelated albeit separate studies. These self-contained case-study chapters (Chapters 3, 4, 5) all incorporate their own introductions, methodologies, discussions, and conclusion points, amounting to three self-standing, albeit interrelated, papers. Overall, the studies are framed by an introduction chapter and a theory chapter (Chapters 1 and 2), and are brought together in a concluding chapter (Chapter 6). It was considered that this could be an effective and more pragmatic way of reconciling the issue of different scales and dimensions of analysis that characterise this project. The research was conceived of as an inverted pyramid with three sections, signifying a process of gradually zooming in and concentrating the scale of analysis, as reflected in the research aims and questions (Figure 1). It starts from a broader exploration of overarching structural issues that result in a series of urban wellbeing discourses, determinants and dimensions specific to the socio-cultural and economic context of China, and their manifestation in urban policy. This transitions into the second, more focused study section, which explores a specific dimension of urban development: urban regeneration, the focal point of this research. This section engages with an analysis of urban regeneration in China starting from the 1990s, providing an understanding of the principal processes, mechanisms, policies and practices which have shaped projects until recently. This is crucial in order to contextualise urban regeneration, a complex phenomenon whose discussion needs to reflect the local and temporal circumstances which define it. Finally, the

bottom tip of the pyramid is constituted of zooming in on the context of Shanghai and highlighting how various dimensions of wellbeing are understood by practitioners on the ground and materialised in current urban regeneration interventions.



Figure 1. Schematisation of research and thesis structure (author).

This research project aims to cover three principal layers and dimensions of analysis, namely discourse, policy and practice, and takes into consideration the complex ways in which they influence one another in the Chinese context. It is not uncommon for Chinese studies to reflect on political and intellectual discourse, especially when this is linked to complex, top-down narratives on future directions for the country. Scholars have analysed the ways in which, with the use of meticulously devised narratives informed by key lexicons and ideas, the party-state consolidates its position and legitimacy, manages China's recent, complex socio-political challenges, and also lays out blueprints for future development directions (Klimeš & Marinelli 2018). In this sense, discourses and narratives tend to not only be descriptive, but they have normative significance, playing an important role in enabling and reinforcing certain directions or pathways for dealing with pressing issues such as sustainable development, rising inequality, or climate change. In this sense, it is argued that it is crucial to engage in critical analysis of political discourse in order to better understand the use and operationalisation, in policy and practice, of terms used in narratives surrounding future directions for sustainable development. The discursive power of such terms, including ideas on "wellbeing", "moderately prosperous society", "ecological civilisation" or "new type urbanisation", is critical for creating a more nuanced understanding of policy and practice shifts, and for highlighting the connection between political goals and policy

instruments. The analysis of discourse in this research draws from a breadth of sources including news outlets, scholarly work, grey literature, and first hand interviews conducted with academics and practitioners in China, in 2019.

This initial layer of analysis, focusing on discourse and declared political goals with regards to new urban development directions, is followed by an evaluation of policy shifts in the last three decades (post-1990s). This evaluation is aimed at investigating whether or not policy changes, particularly in better developed regions such as the Yangtze or Pearl River Deltas, or the Beijing region, are increasingly pointing towards new, people-centred directions for urbanisation in general, and urban regeneration in particular. In this sense the exercise looks at policy reform and shifts, analysing and predicting significance and consequences. It takes into consideration broader state policy and its links to political goals and discourse, and goes on to investigate how this is adopted and translated into municipal and district level policy solutions that respond to context-specific needs and local targets. Finally, this analysis leads to a study of urbanisation practices, aiming to understand how policy reforms get materialised into new strategies and mechanisms for urban regeneration that take into account wellbeing. The study looks at three significant, recent case studies in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Beijing, and finally focuses on a series of on-going projects identified through fieldwork in Shanghai.

It is important to note that throughout this process of discourse, policy and practice review, the author is particularly concerned with the notion of innovation in the Chinese context. In a broader sense, innovation (*chuangxin*) can be defined as generating, spreading and putting into practice new ideas, but the concept has been extensively used in order to refer to China's policy experimentation and reform – particularly when it comes to government or local government innovation. While generally referring to processes of developing and implementing solutions that address a changing world, considering innovation in the Chinese context requires an understanding that 'newness' is relative, and shifts are not to be assessed in a vacuum (Husain 2015) – in this sense, it can also be conceived as a marker of policy and practices that are considered, in some ways, more desirable than pre-existing ones, avoiding the reduction of the notion to a question of absolute 'newness'. In this case, judgements on desirability must be contextual but can refer in general terms to managing change and adapting, responding to emerging challenges, and generally supporting reform and development. This study is also particularly interested in innovation on the ground or at local government level, and relies on scholarship which highlights that, contrary to common beliefs, lower levels of government are encouraged to not adopt a one size fits all approach, instead being given space to exercise initiative, implement pilot policies and projects, and experiment in order to respond to local

conditions – while merely guided by the spirit of central policy (Husain 2015). With this in mind, the present research aims to shed some light into urban regeneration policy and practice innovation at various levels.

The analysis of the discourse, policy and practice of wellbeing in urban regeneration permeates, in varying degrees, all three studies in this thesis (see Figure 1). As previously mentioned, the structure of this research includes the present introduction (Chapter 1), a theory chapter (Chapter 2), three content chapters (Chapter 3, 4, 5), and a conclusion (Chapter 6). The following section provides an overview of Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Chapter 2: Wellbeing and Urban Development. Theoretical Overview

This chapter frames the thesis through a theoretical exploration of the main concept utilised in the thesis: that of wellbeing in the context of urban development. This section builds on the Introduction (Chapter 1) in order to uncover the intellectual origins of the wellbeing concept and the multifaceted and contested ways in which it has been operationalised for theoretical and political purposes. It looks at how wellbeing has been defined across multiple disciplines, in an effort to move beyond paradigms and measurements of human development which only take into consideration economic factors. This endeavour is particularly informed by an analysis of wellbeing as pertaining to scholarship and applications advanced within the development field, where it is discussed in relation to issues such as poverty alleviation, and tackling inequality and injustice. Importantly, this chapter also develops a critique of the wellbeing concept due to its failure, at times, to encompass a diversity of ontological and epistemic positions that could make it more relevant to contexts beyond Western liberal democracies. This chapter goes on to present a brief overview of wellbeing definitions as adopted in relation to cities, where some of the more common conceptualisations take the form of discussions about urban liveability and quality of life. Finally, Chapter 2 revisits a series of theoretical frameworks that the author considers can support a holistic and integrated conceptualisation of wellbeing, which is then integrated with critical urban perspectives which make moral claims about justice and ideas of ‘leaving no one behind’. This results in the construction of a novel theoretical framework of wellbeing for socio-spatial transformation. In its initial development phase within this chapter, the framework is brief and acts as a foundation to be built upon at a later stage, conferring it more relevance to the context of China – a context in which the understanding of wellbeing is multifaceted, and where the path towards a wellbeing-oriented urban agenda is non-linear and complex. The framework was therefore conceived to capture these tensions and complexity during analysis. What is more, the framework is not only prescriptive and used for analysis, but is also put forward as a contribution to theory.

Chapter 3: Wellbeing and Urban China. A Systematic Literature Review of Determinants, Discourses and Urban Development

Following a discussion on wellbeing-oriented theoretical frameworks derived from international scholarship, this chapter aims to construct a more nuanced and contextually-specific understanding of urban wellbeing in China. Towards this goal, this chapter systematically reviews a substantial body of emerging English-language literature on wellbeing in China generally, and urban development in China more specifically. The review accomplishes a series of aims. Firstly, it presents a state-of-the-art conceptualisation of wellbeing as extracted from discourse on China. This reveals a series of linguistic nuances rooted in philosophical, socio-cultural and historical conditions, justifying choices, adoptions and reinterpretations within state discourse focusing on ideas of the common good, prosperity and social harmony. The chapter also aims to identify primary wellbeing priorities in the context of rapid urban and social transition in China, including determinants and dimensions of wellbeing at a variety of scales including national, regional, city and neighbourhood. This reveals a socio-cultural, economic and political tableau where the understanding of wellbeing lies at the convergence between traditional, collectivistic values and the emergence of individualistic ones resulting from rapid economic growth, rising inequality, changing social structures and globalisation – with interesting policy and practice implications when considering state-society relationships towards achieving wellbeing-oriented development. The chapter also identifies gaps in the literature which could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the concept of wellbeing in China, particularly with regards to urban development processes. For example, the review reveals that within academic work, wellbeing is largely conceptualised as *manyi* (satisfaction) with studies measuring residential satisfaction, a post-factum approach placing emphasis on outcomes of urban interventions, with limited consideration for the processes leading to these outcomes. Finally, these findings are used to build upon the previously developed framework and construct a more context-specific wellbeing framework for China, taking into account its institutional and societal specificities.

Chapter 4: Urban Regeneration in China. Overview, Issues and Practices

This chapter shifts its focus from broader issues of wellbeing and urban development in China to developing a summary and analysis of urban regeneration processes and practices that have shaped the Chinese urban landscape in the last three decades following the end of the 1980s. The chapter draws from a different body of literature including sources such as primary, secondary literature, policy documents, and media reports, in order to question whether or not policy and governance mechanisms have materialised into different urban regeneration practice. Using the previously developed framework on wellbeing, it aims to understand the correlations between

shifting discourse and evidence in policy and practice. In order to do this, the review takes into consideration:

- Discourse on urban regeneration and wellbeing as prevalent in media reports and key state documents that inform policymaking (such as *Opinions on...* documents);
- Urban policy on urbanisation in general and urban regeneration in particular, at district and municipal level – with a focus on Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou;
- A series of recent urban regeneration case studies from Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou.

The review focuses primarily on shifts occurring in the period following China's market reforms (after the end of the 1980s) – a period when the country became an interesting context for witnessing a unique path of urban development and regeneration within a relatively short period of time. This period was chosen due to being characterised by intense urban regeneration activity, with numerous fluctuations in policy, strategy and mechanisms. The choice of Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou as case studies is explained by a series of considerations. Firstly, they share converging development paths in the post-reform era, with all three capitalising on influxes of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in order to become global city regions (Zhang, LeGates & Zhao 2016). This entailed a series of arguably similar approaches to urban regeneration, characterised by financial growth, slum clearance and place branding agendas – all with significant social costs. What is more, the three have been testing grounds for a series of institutional and planning reforms. In this sense, using the previously developed analytical framework on wellbeing to analyse case studies in Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou could highlight some of the existing tensions on the path to more human-centred urbanisation in China.

Chapter 5: Wellbeing in Chinese Neighbourhood Revitalisation. New Actors and Approaches

Following from the previous chapter's focus on the Yangtze and Pearl River Deltas, and Beijing, this chapter delves deeper in exploring whether Shanghai is experimenting with new, wellbeing-oriented urban regeneration strategies. Continuing a utilisation of the wellbeing conceptualisation developed in this research project, Chapter 5 aims to question a potential transition from projects characterised mainly by socially unjust processes, towards more place-based, people-centred and bottom-up regeneration practices. This is done primarily through analysing the perspectives, approaches and positions of practitioners (planners, academics, designers) guiding present projects. The chapter draws from fieldwork conducted in China in 2019, involving primarily interviews with a group of key experts from Shanghai and Suzhou, holding hybrid roles as academics and practitioners. Often acting as the intermediary between policy-makers and local communities, whilst at the same time operating within their own system of values, formative background and agendas, their perspective is critical given their close involvement with project

design and implementation. The formal and informal capacity of this group to guide and shape future directions is the primary rationale for the author's choice to interview them for this project. Discussions centred on the interviewees' current regeneration projects, their understanding of wellbeing priorities and dimensions, and the ways in which they are attempting to place people at the heart of urban interventions. A series of pilot typologies of projects and programmes are revealed, including micro-scale urban regeneration (*weigengxin*) targeting older, dilapidated residential neighbourhoods, and community gardens. Taking an Interpretivist approach and the wellbeing framework previously developed, the chapter finally analyses these initiatives in order to highlight a series of emergent practices and phenomena including community participation and community building, educational agendas, place-based solutions for regeneration, grassroots governance mechanisms and a shifting role of the practitioner – but also continuing shortcomings, challenges and tensions at practice level.

As previously mentioned, the thesis is closed by Chapter 6, a Conclusion chapter, which brings together findings, key discussion points and conclusions aggregated from the three study chapters presented here, putting forward a set of recommendations and proposing a research agenda for the future.

2

WELLBEING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Theoretical Overview

2.1. CONCEPTUALISING AND DEFINING WELLBEING

2.1.1. Directions for Evaluating Human Progress Beyond GDP

As briefly touched upon in the Introduction, the concepts of quality of life and wellbeing have been given increased political and institutional attention internationally, in the last two decades. Prominent reflections of this attention include: international organisation (such as United Nations, UNESCO, European Union, Council of Europe etc.) discourses on sustainability and progress; newly emerging and developing movements such as that of the New Economy, which promotes the idea that current economic models should be restructured to prioritise human wellbeing and quality of life, rather than solely economic growth (New Economics Foundation 2012); documents such as the 2009 Stiglitz-Sen-Fitoussi report produced by an inquiry of the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress; alternative governing models such as Bhutan's Gross National Happiness index, an indigenous index containing multidimensional measurements which reflect the country's ideologies (Uchida, Ogihara & Fukushima 2015); or various forms of standardised indexes utilising the concepts of wellbeing and quality of life as alternatives to GDP, in order to assess progress.

Commissioned by the French Government in 2008, the *Report by the Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress* is considered one of the major international breakthroughs in terms of mainstreaming and discussing the concept of wellbeing (Stiglitz, Sen & Fitoussi 2009). Focusing on highlighting that Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is arguably a limited indicator of social progress, the report proposed eight indicators taking into account subjective and objective dimensions of well-being: material living standards, health, education, personal activities, political work and governance, social connections and relationships, environment and security (both physical and economic). Previously and ever since, the key thinkers involved in the development of the report – economists Amartya Sen, Joseph Stiglitz and Jean-Paul Fitoussi – have been refining and promoting new metrics and paradigms for moving

beyond GDP and towards wellbeing, and “measuring what counts” (Stiglitz, Fitoussi & Durand 2018).

One of the most prominent underpinnings of this institutional framework was developed by economist Amartya Sen, which since came to be referred to as the capability approach (Sen 1985, 2013). In simple terms, the capability approach is a broad normative framework developed as a critique of utilitarian and income – or resource – based theories of development and wellbeing. Due to its broad and comprehensive scope, and its nature as a framework of thought (a paradigm), it has been extensively written upon and operationalised from numerous, inter-related perspectives: as a measure of poverty and inequality, as an alternative to traditional utilitarian cost-benefit analyses, as a formula for making comparisons of welfare or wellbeing, and even as a constituent for a theory of justice – important, however, not to be confused with a theory of wellbeing or a theory of justice per se (Robeyns 2003, 2017). Overall, the core characteristic of the capability approach represents its critique of an exclusive emphasis on income or consumption-led evaluation methods, shifting focus more broadly to people’s ability and freedom to achieve the things they value for the life they value (Frediani 2007).⁷ Some of its empirical applications (for example, Sen’s 1985 evaluation of public policy in China, Sri Lanka, India, Mexico and Brazil, or Sabina Alkire’s evaluation of NGO-led poverty reduction projects in Pakistan) have led to very different and enlightening normative conclusions than those in standard economic assessments (Alkire 2002, Sen 1985a). Similar kinds of quantitative applications based on aggregated data have become pervasive especially in development studies, and the deriving concept of human development now lies at the theoretical basis of a number of indices covering domains such as life expectancy, education, basic human needs, personal rights, freedoms, and opportunity, health, income and others. Amongst the most prominent could be enumerated: Human Development Index (HDI) (UNDP 1990), Human Freedom Index (UNDP 1991), Human Poverty Index (UNDP 1997), Social Progress Index (Harvard and MIT 2017), Better Life Index (OECD 2011), Happy Planet Index (New Economics Foundation 2006).

Also acknowledging that GDP measurements do not reflect people’s happiness and wellbeing, recent United Nations discourses and resolutions have declared the two as fundamental human rights and attempted to highlight their crucial nature in the sustainable development discourse. In this sense, the UN General Assembly Resolution A/67/697 adopted on 16 January 2013, titled *Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development* calls for an elaboration of additional measures that better capture the importance of the pursuit of wellbeing in development, with a

⁷ The capability approach as a paradigm for thinking about wellbeing will be further discussed and expanded upon at a later stages in this chapter (see Section 2.2).

view to guiding public policies. The resolution also highlighted that this is particularly relevant since the pursuit of happiness (here used as an interchangeable term with *wellbeing*) is already a stated objective in many national constitutions, and the creation of an enabling environment for improving people's wellbeing is a development goal in itself (UN Resolution A/67/697, 2013).

Simultaneously, numerous approaches aimed at measuring the human experience of wellbeing were developed stemming from the field of psychology, and can be incorporated within the wider umbrella of measurements for subjective wellbeing (concept which will be further discussed in the following section) (De Jong 2015). Amongst some of the most prominent examples of this strand of measurements are the following:

1. Affect Balance Scale: Developed in the early 1960s for use as an instrument to measure hedonic (pleasure-based) wellbeing, this scale focuses on the interplay between everyday experiences and personal and social wellbeing (Bradburn 2015).
2. Personal Wellbeing Index: Developed by the International Wellbeing Group at Deakin University in Australia (2002), the index assesses personal satisfaction with life (concept devised by Ruut Veenhoven in the 1960s as post-materialistic values were becoming an increasing topic of interest) by inquiring how satisfied one is with their: standard of living, health, achievements in life, relationships, safety, community connectedness, future security and spirituality/religion (Cummins & Weinberg 2015, Veenhoven 1996).
3. Multi-Item Measurements of Subjective Wellbeing: Model proposed through a collaboration of various researchers and institutions, offering a review of 31 multi-item scales primarily utilising psychological criteria and measurements derived from the Personal Wellbeing Index (Cummins & Weinberg 2015).
4. The Gallup Wellbeing Index: The *Gallup-Sharecare Wellbeing Index* utilises a methodology developed by the US Gallup Group, aimed at measuring Americans' perceptions of their lives and daily experiences, capturing elements they defined as composing wellbeing, including: a sense of purpose, social relationships, financial security, relationships to the community or physical health (Gallup 2018).
5. World Happiness Report: Global survey on the state of happiness functioning based on creating global rankings and utilising pooled results from Gallup World Poll surveys. The survey utilises six variables identified as being key to supporting wellbeing: income, healthy life expectancy, social support, freedom, trust and generosity (*World Happiness Report* 2018).

2.1.2. Cross-Disciplinary Overview

As is becoming evident throughout the discussion centring on increased political and institutional interest in defining new paradigms for attaining human progress, wellbeing is gaining prominence as not only a development goal but also a conceptual domain to be explored and unpacked. But what is wellbeing, and have theoretical endeavours resulted in any unified definition, one that could be applied universally?

There is currently extensive literature on defining wellbeing, where emphasis has been placed on the overlap with a series of affiliated concepts such as quality of life, satisfaction or happiness. There has been extensive argument for agreeing on shared, fixed definitions of wellbeing, following the logic that variation leads to not only conceptual confusion but also conflict across policy sectors (Ereaut & Whiting 2008). A scrutiny of different conceptualisations reveals that, despite numerous overlaps and similar starting points, a common unified definition has not been reached. Albeit overlapping, the numerous ways in which wellbeing and quality of life have been conceptualised in academic and political discourse still make it difficult to identify a clear agreement regarding definitions and constituting elements.

Wellbeing Definitions and Constituents

Analysing its links with the sustainability discourse, wellbeing is seen from an anthropocentric perspective, wherein the definitions of sustainable development in terms of wellbeing are ultimately focusing on people. In a two-decade old engagement with the concepts, Chambers describes wellbeing in general terms as “the experience of a good quality of life”, recognising obligations to all others, both alive and future generations, and acknowledging that the concept is open to a broad range of human experiences: social and spiritual as well as material (Chambers 1998, p. 120). In order to complement this and highlight some of the normative consensus regarding the aim of putting people first, he additionally introduces the concepts of *livelihood* (defined as gaining a secure living), *capability* (defined as what people are capable of doing and what they know), *equity* (referring to issues on human rights, intergenerational and gender equality etc.) and *sustainability* (referring to the necessity to ensure that initiatives towards positive change are sustainable) (Chambers 1998). In *Pursuing Sustainability: A Guide to the Science and Practice*, Matson, Clark and Andersson (2016) utilise a discussion on capital assets to present a framework that links sustainability goals to their determinants, arguing that the ultimate aim of sustainable development should be focused on human wellbeing. The definition of wellbeing given here is “the state of being comfortable, healthy, and secure because of having basic needs met as well as having access to health, education, community and opportunity. The

core of the human experience of wellbeing rests in a combination of material, social and personal fulfilment.” (Matson, Clark & Andersson 2016, p. 200-201).

As previously mentioned, most wellbeing conceptualisations have found their expression in primarily psychological and economic fields, with the former being traced back to competing philosophies of *hedonic* (happiness or pleasure-based) and *eudemonic* (satisfaction or meaning-based) wellbeing, and the latter emerging, as evidenced in the previous section, from a critical engagement with policy for development interventions (Atkinson et al. 2017). Overall, wellbeing has been so far conceptualised utilising primarily two principal categories:

1. *Subjective Wellbeing*: present primarily within discussions in psychology or sociology, has been referred to as an umbrella term for the different perceptions and evaluations that people have and make regarding their lives: how they experience the quality of their lives (Diener 1984, Seligman 2011, Veenhoven 2000). It has been widely agreed, within this definition, that subjective wellbeing is constituted of two components: cognitive (retrospective evaluation of satisfaction with one’s life) and affective (affective responses to individual’s life events) (Maggino 2015). Other scholars, such as Wolfgang Zapf (1975, 1985), also introduce within this dimension the more objective, verifiable notion of living conditions (standards of living, material resources, health, status etc.), which are then subjectively evaluated by individuals (Maggino 2015, p. 806). This type of conceptualisation has constituted the basis of subjective wellbeing studies or satisfaction studies which assess aggregate levels of people’s satisfaction: more generally (e.g. life satisfaction) or in relation to specific life domains (e.g. residential satisfaction).

2. *Objective Wellbeing*: generally refers to aspects of reality which are defined and recognized by scientific experts to contribute to wellbeing and quality of life (Glatzer 2015). Objective approaches have been at the forefront of measuring and analysing wellbeing across aspects of reality defined and recognized to contribute to wellbeing and quality of life time and space, although it is important to note that numerous measurement endeavours have often engaged with both subjective and objective assessments, covering a combination of material, relational, cognitive, affective and creative dimensions (Atkinson, Fuller & Painter 2016).

Therefore, research on wellbeing has mostly dealt with the theoretical, normative nature of the concept by taking a components approach (breaking it down into constitutive elements, or dimensions of a good life) (Atkinson, Fuller & Painter 2016, Matson, Clark & Andersson 2016). In this sense, some scholars highlight that it is important to create a distinction between what can be defined as making life liveable (basic needs for food, water, shelter etc.) to good: access to health, education, nature, sense of belonging, or the capacity to shape one’s life (Matson, Clark &

Andersson 2016). Others differentiate dynamics of individual wellbeing from those of community wellbeing (Bagnall et al. 2018, Maggino 2016, Wiseman et al. 2008). This concept has been expanded upon and utilised in different ways, its theorisation shifting with different uses. Nevertheless, a definition which seems relatively holistic as it allows for contextual circumstances and priorities is given by Wiseman and Brasher, 2008: “Community wellbeing is the combination of social, economic, environmental, cultural, and political conditions identified by individuals and their communities as essential for them to flourish and fulfil their potential.” (Wiseman & Brasher, 2008, p. 358). There are multiple theoretical underpinnings to this straightforward definition (including definitions of the concept of community), and it is beyond the scope of this research to unpack them extensively. This definition implies ideas about the fact that community wellbeing may refer to living well together, at community scale, or the role that community aspects of living can have in facilitating individual wellbeing. Underpinning this distinction is whether wellbeing is always and only a property of the individual, or whether wellbeing may emerge from the relations between individuals, between individuals and place, individuals and cultural values etc. (Bagnall et al. 2018).

Overall, expanding from previous scholars’ attempts at summarising the ways in which wellbeing has been defined through the components approach (Atkinson, Fuller & Painter 2016), the following provides an overview of wellbeing components and their conceptual starting points:

1. Psychological, Subjective Hedonic / Eudemonic Components

Hedonic (Happiness/Pleasure-Based)		Eudemonic (Meaning-Based)	
Veenhoven 2000	Seligman 2011	Ryff 1986	Ziegler and Schwanen 2011
Liveability of environment Life-ability of individual External utility of life Inner appreciation of life	Positive emotion Engagement, interest Relationships Meaning Accomplishments	Self-acceptance Autonomy Personal growth Environmental mastery Purpose in life Positive relationships with others	Physical health Independence Mental health and emotional wellbeing Social relations Continuity of self and self-identity

*Table 1. Examples of psychological, subjective hedonic / eudemonic components of wellbeing
(based on Atkinson, Fuller & Painter 2016)*

2. Developmental, Objective/Subjective Components

Chambers 1998	Nussbaum 2000	Clarke 2006	Stiglitz et al. 2009	Maggino 2015	Matson et al. 2016
Living standards Access to basic services Security Health Good relations with others Peace of mind Choice Fulfilment Fun	Life Bodily health Bodily integrity Senses/imaginati on/thought Emotions Practical reason Affiliation Other species Place Control over one's environment	Basic: calorie intake/day, access to safe water Safety: infant mortality rate, life expectancy Self-esteem: adult literacy, employment	Material living standards Health Education Personal activities Political voice and governance Social connectedness and relationships Environment Security	Family Income Housing Health Transport Environment Leisure & culture Social security Crime & safety Education	Material needs Health Education Opportunity Community Security

*Table 2. Examples of developmental, objective / subjective components of wellbeing
(based on Atkinson, Fuller & Painter 2016)*

Ontological/Epistemic Diversity and Critique

One important layer of complexity to the discussion on defining wellbeing is constituted by scholarly observations that wellbeing perceptions and understandings are socio-culturally constructed, in that there are significant differences in how people define, perceive and pursue it across cultures, based on differing values, beliefs and ideologies (Brayford 2015, Uchida, Ogihara & Fukushima 2015, White 2010). Despite originating from the field of psychology –analyses of culture in explaining different psychological functions and behaviours – this discussion has been expanded to the domains of sociology, social sciences, political sciences and even economics. This discussion has been framed within the debate on individualism and collectivism, where studies have focused on contrasting individualistic (Western) and collectivistic (Eastern) cultures (Suh & Koo 2008). Departing from cultural differences in the construction of the idea of self, it is argued that, when discussing wellbeing/happiness, Western cultural members emphasise the significance of independent modes of being, while their Eastern counterparts affirm the importance of social ties and interconnectedness between the self and other members of society, tending to pursue wellbeing through supportive social relationships, joint efforts, being part of a group and social

harmony (Hsu, Zhang & Kim 2017, Luo & Jian 1997, Suh & Oishi 2004). These observations are particularly significant in light of the fact that most predominant wellbeing theorisations, as well as their operationalisation (such as the Human Development Index), are rooted primarily in Eurocentric liberal philosophies which tend to disregard ontological and epistemic positions that give more priority to community rather than the individual (Miller 2018). Examples of this, as will also be elaborated below, consist of scholarly attempts to develop, measure and compare pre-defined lists of wellbeing determinants/constituents which make quite strong universalistic claims. Not only can this prove conceptually unfruitful and invalid when studying those who experience and define the world from different perspectives, but it can also contribute to the reproduction of oppressive epistemic, political and economic systems, and a colonial impositions of values (Grosfoguel 2013). These critiques are particularly relevant to the present research, which studies the context of China.

Moreover, critiques of the *wellbeing* approach have stemmed from its mobilisation in more recent neoliberal political agendas which, arguably, have moved away from collective concerns related to the complex role of the state, and have deliberately shifted focus on the individual. As some have argued, Western contemporary forms of governance and neoliberalism have adopted, from the new field of positive psychology, the language of happiness or wellbeing in order to task individuals with self-care or self-help, relieving society and the state of responsibilities to address issues such as inequality or injustice. In this sense, a pertinently incisive critique has been directed at mobilisations of wellbeing which present it as an inherently liberal or individualistic concept, supporting ideas of victim-blaming and discouraging societal or governance action (White 2010). On a more fundamental, philosophical level, there are also ontological objections to the happiness or subjective wellbeing / satisfaction approach, in that there is more to human wellbeing (and even to being human), than feelings of happiness (Robeyns 2003).

From an empirical and policy making perspective, objections of the *happiness* or *satisfaction* approach draw attention to phenomena of adaptive preferences and social comparison. Robeyns (2003) provides an illustrative case of how people may overcome, psychologically, to a shifting life circumstance (for example disability following an accident): if focusing solely on subjective wellbeing, utilitarian policy-making governments would measure costs and limit themselves only to making provisions so that the affected person return to an acceptable level of life satisfaction, disregarding other important life domains. Concomitantly, studies have repeatedly shown how different groups of people, especially from vulnerable groups (such as ethnic minorities, exploited labourers, those living in poverty etc.), develop *adaptive preferences* and learn to endure their circumstances (Kahneman & Krueger 2006, Sen 1984). As a result, these groups can adjust their

expectations and aspirations, and report high levels of satisfaction or happiness despite living in conditions that are self-evidently damaging to their wellbeing or welfare. From governance and policy points of view, phenomena such as racism, poverty, or injustices of any form are clearly undesirable, even if their victims' subjective wellbeing or life satisfaction are not severely impacted. Another side of the coin is concerned with subjective wellbeing and social comparison, or *relative deprivation*. These phenomena have been particularly studied in relation to income and changes in reference norms coming with increased or decreased income levels. Utilitarian views would argue that due to similar phenomena of adaptation, people's positions in the distribution of income or health, for example, should preferably remain immobile (Burchardt 2006). However, this would seem to be a policy conclusion that goes against the principle that people should receive equal opportunities. In this sense, it is important to move towards a theorisation of wellbeing which goes beyond people's expressions of satisfaction, happiness or pleasure, whilst at the same time allowing for contextual adaptation and debate.

2.1.3. Defining Wellbeing for Cities

From an overview of general wellbeing conceptualisations, as well as a brief critique, the thesis will now turn towards the ways in which wellbeing has been defined and operationalised in relation to cities and urban development. Much like in the case of the broader debate on wellbeing definitions, one unequivocal conceptual framework for urban wellbeing has not yet been formulated either, but scholars have attempted to similarly develop theory-based indicators and tools to evaluate the multi-dimensional aspects of urban life (Marans 2015, Van Kamp et al. 2003).

As previously mentioned, concepts of urban quality of life and related terms such as urban wellbeing, liveability, urban environmental quality and sustainability have been enjoying increased popularity within research programmes, policy-making and urban development discourse (Van Kamp et al. 2003). Often used interchangeably but also often contrasted, *liveability*, *living quality*, *living environment*, *quality of place*, *residential perception and satisfaction*, *quality of life*, and *urban happiness* find their definitions strongly intertwined with social, environmental, economic and philosophical studies, definitions which are fluid and continuously changing as a result of paradigm shifts, different socio-cultural contexts, transformations of lifestyles, needs and habits.

In overarching lines, the concepts have generally been used to refer to the positive perception and experience of a place in which people live, a place which equitably meets everyone's physiological, social and psychological needs without, however, compromising the needs of generations to

come, and acknowledging that some of these needs are socio-economically variable and may transform in time (Antoniou & Picard 2015, Kashef 2016, Pacione 2003, Ruth & Franklin 2014, Smith, Nelischer & Perkins 1997, Van Kamp et al. 2003). Central to these issues are complex academic and practitioner questions regarding what makes a city liveable and what constitutes quality of life in a city, what are going to be the impacts of policies, measures and interventions on city dwellers, and what are the expected impacts or the contribution to quality of life of certain interventions.

Methodological and Conceptual Considerations

Reviewing relevant scientific literature highlights that the use and study of concepts of urban liveability, quality of life and wellbeing incurs a series of overarching conceptual and methodological issues which should be taken into account, also in resonance with wider discussions on the topic presented earlier in this paper. Firstly, there is consensus regarding the fact that any definition of urban quality of life, as well as all social indicators approaches, should include two elements: the psychological-physiological mechanism that produces a sense of gratification, and the objective, external phenomena, derived from urban dynamics, that engage that mechanism. In this sense, two types of social indicators are appropriate to be used: objective indicators describing the environments within which people live and work, and subjective indicators describing the ways in which people perceive and evaluate those conditions (Pacione 2003). Secondly, when conceptualising and/or measuring urban liveability and quality of life it is important to take into account the issue of scale, which can be defined both in geographical terms (street, neighbourhood, city and so forth) as well as in terms of social segments (based on characteristics such as age, education level, gender, and ethnicity, but also based on behaviour) (Pacione 2003, Van Kamp et al. 2003). Another issue to be considered is that of context dependency, wherein wellbeing is socio-culturally defined, as has been evidenced previously in this paper (Van Kamp et al. 2003).

One of the key methodological and conceptual matters regarding urban quality is measurement, with the lack of universally agreed measurement models weakening the concept's role in policy-making. Scholars report a series of principal approaches which have been used, particularly from the fields of sociology, economics and psychology, to examine quality of urban life, with little to no studies reportedly utilising more than one approach simultaneously (Pacione 2003). The first involves assessing quality of urban life through the use of a set of indicators over a set period of time, normally derived from aggregated spatial data using official sources (such as censuses), which are assumed to be related to perceived quality of life in the city. The second approach is generally associated with measuring satisfaction with urban life, and consists of utilising sample

surveys that measure people's subjective assessments of quality of life domains. Indicators utilised include both objective ones, with samples such as employment rates, educational attainment, per capital income, crime statistics, incidence of chronic diseases, air quality, residential density, housing vacancy rates, availability of grocery stores, and number of public commuters, as well as subjective indicators such as housing and neighbourhood satisfaction, desire to move, perceptions of crime, public services, and satisfaction with social aspects such as family, friends, job, and health (Marans 2015). Beyond such approaches being viewed as prescriptive (an additional critique of subjective wellbeing conceptualisations has been presented earlier in this chapter), they also arguably fail to provide insight into the quality of the place itself. Among economists, a popular approach has also been the hedonic price method, where people reveal their preferences for the bundle of attributes that characterize urban areas through their location decisions (Stanca 2015).

Domains and Components

One of the dominating approaches surrounding the conceptualisation of urban quality of life, liveability and wellbeing has consisted of multi-disciplinary attempts to define a series of domains and resulting components which could comprehensively reflect the complex person-environment relationship as well as other related dynamics. As previously observed, and generally stemming from the human ecology perspective, there is a general agreement within literature that physical, economic and social domains can be broken down to form the basis for defining urban quality of life (Van Kamp et al. 2003).

For many years, urban planners and designers have expressed diverging views about the environmental qualities and urban dynamics that contribute to liveability, quality of life and wellbeing in cities. The most prevalent views on the subject are concerned with the aesthetics and physical characteristics of cities, as well as their economic and social functions, identifying areas of interest such as: employment areas, centres, corridors, mixed use, mix of housing typologies, density, urban design, public realm, and the general public environment. Amongst early discussions in the field, renowned thinkers such as Jane Jacobs (1961) have suggested urban revitalisation guidelines for maintaining the quality of life in declining cities, with high density, mixed primary uses, mixed building typologies and ages and pedestrian connectivity amongst the principal recommendations. Starting with the 1960s, predominantly Western scholars have discussed and debated the socio-morphological attributes that contribute to urban quality of life and liveability. Some selected approaches focusing more generally on urban form are summarised below:

Lynch (1960)	Identified urban linkage, legibility elements and building typologies that impacted the daily lives of people (such as paths, nodes, landmarks, edges, districts), and later proposed a theorisation of 'good city form' including vitality, sense of place or identity, setting adaptability, access to people, activities, resources, places, information) and responsible control of the environment.
Hester (1975)	Checklist of user needs for neighbourhood design, including desired activities, appropriate activity settings, interaction with the natural environment, safety, aesthetic appeal, convenience, psychological / physical comfort, symbolic ownership, cost.
Appleyard (1981)	Quality of life in residential environments – with a particular focus on the impacts of traffic and transportation – concluding that they should strive to be safe from crime, clean and tidy, convenient, free of traffic congestions, suitable for children and having affordable housing.
Lennard (1987)	Elements contributing to sense of wellbeing and social life: Safe and comfortable pedestrian linkages, human scale urban spaces, sense of belonging, sensual enjoyment (natural elements, design etc.), variety to stimulate curiosity and exploration.
Jarvis (1993)	Proposes that a city's measure of success lies within how well a balance is achieved between opposing qualities of a place: convenience & separation, relatedness & identity, affordability & luxury, tradition & innovation, unity & variety, safety & excitement.
Lang (1994)	Utilises Maslow's hierarchy of needs (physiological, safety and security, affiliation, esteem and self-actualisation) as a starting point for constructing a framework on urban design.
Smith, Nelischer & Perkins (1997)	List of quality and needs principles for physical form: liveability (healthy environment, comfort, safety, security), character (sense of place), connection (fit between place and human behaviour), mobility (access, opportunities, legibility), personal freedom (privacy, economic affordability) diversity (variety, choice for diversity of lifestyle).
Kashef (2016)	Link between human wellbeing and ecosystems and biodiversity, calling for system planning – reducing the negative externalities emerging from incompatible uses, perfecting mobility within cities, and allowing agricultural lands, wetlands and woodlands to permeate urban development.
Sepe (2017)	Proposal of list of elements which contribute to happiness with specific urban interventions, with particular focus on design: place identity and intangible characteristics, uniqueness, harmony with surroundings, accessibility, mixed use, possibility to act freely in public area, balance between elements of space, state of cleanliness and good maintenance, sense of security and safety, sense of being able to contribute to space.

Table 3. Selected summary of urban quality of life attributes (author)

An overall analysis of relevant literature may lead to the conclusion that the history of numerous disciplines, particularly led by the social sciences, abounds with efforts to conceptualise and propose models for city liveability and quality of life. Nevertheless, missing are theoretically grounded models which can help decision-makers and planners to cope with the complexity and multiplicity of urban quality of life implications. Additionally, it is important to note that often conceptualisations and assessments have been detached not only from differing socio-cultural contexts – which often place entirely different emphasis on the ways in which liveability and quality of life can be achieved from the perspectives of economic efficiency, social welfare and urban infrastructure – but also from the acknowledgements that personal preferences, socioeconomic dynamics and environmental conditions are in constant transformation, calling for a constant re-evaluation of models and paradigms informing flexible urban systems and adaptive, participatory planning and policymaking.

2.2. WELLBEING FRAMEWORK FOR SOCIO-SPATIAL TRANSFORMATION

2.2.1. The Capability Approach Revisited

It is not difficult to understand why the task of conceptualising wellbeing as a new direction for thinking about human development, and as a concept to be operationalised to explore urban development, has been a challenging one. It is also important to remember what such conceptualisations might be used for, and that the breadth of existing definitions and theorisations is directly proportional to the multitude of ways in which it has been employed. Despite the complementarities, value, and different purposes of various approaches, some of their limitations have been briefly touched upon in the previous section: subjective wellbeing or utilitarian happiness approaches frequently fail to consider phenomena such as adaptive preferences and social comparisons, and have often been co-opted by neoliberal governance discourses that encourage individual self-help in and effort to relieve society and the state of its wellbeing/welfare provision obligations; in the objective, developmental fields, canonical lists of wellbeing determinants, or urban quality of life domains, have been criticised for their prescriptive nature, the non-participatory/democratic ways in which they have been developed, their lack of sensitivity to context-specific priorities, and the ways in which they have been employed to compare amongst wellbeing levels of different countries, regions, cities; this is further problematised by the Eurocentric starting points of some of these approaches, which fail to incorporate epistemological and ontological diversity about what constitutes wellbeing and how it should be pursued.

In some ways or another, many wellbeing theorisations, irrespective of their disciplinary background, are developed with an explicit or implicit final purpose of resulting in an evaluative or measurement tool. This, however, is beyond the scope of this research project. The theoretical efforts mobilised here have been primarily centred on constructing an interdisciplinary conceptual framework rooted in consolidated theoretical work but which can be adapted to studying urban phenomena in a specific socio-cultural, political and economic context: that of China.

In this sense, this section now turns to Amartya Sen's capability approach (see section 2.2.1.), which has often been discussed as a flexible, multi-purpose framework of thought - a paradigm - rather than a self-standing theory (Robeyns 2003). Albeit being closely related to notions of wellbeing and quality of life, the capability approach is not a theory of wellbeing, since it can be used for numerous purposes such as the construction of a theory of justice, poverty

measurement, policy evaluation, and others. It is particularly valuable in that it brings insights from several disciplines together, and gives scholars from several disciplines a common interdisciplinary language. The capability approach was developed for conceptual and normative purposes, and this research is concerned with its first application: it is a framework which does not explain wellbeing, but it can help to conceptualise the notion. At its core, the capability approach was developed as a broad normative framework for the evaluation of human wellbeing and social arrangements (including individual wellbeing, inequality or poverty), and as a critique or alternative to traditional utilitarian cost-benefit approaches and to philosophical approaches which concentrate only on people's happiness or desire-fulfilment - the approach critiques theories which rely exclusively on mental states (e.g. happiness or satisfaction), as well as welfarist approaches which rely exclusively on utility for moral judgments (Robeyns 2003). In academia, it has been discussed both in more philosophical, conceptual terms, as well as in empirical studies. It has also been operationalised to design and evaluate policies and practice, ranging from welfare state design to development projects implemented by governments and NGOs in developing countries.

The framework starts from a central moral question: "What kind of a life is she/he leading? What does she/he succeed in doing and in being?" (Sen 1985, p. 195). This has led to the central characteristic of the capability approach which is to de-stress the exclusive focus on income-led evaluation methods and focus more broadly on the ability that people have to achieve the things they value. Within this line of reasoning, wellbeing is assessed by looking at people's freedoms and choices to *be* or *do*, rather than their level of consumption or income (Frediani 2007). Policy design or any form of wellbeing-oriented development intervention should be primarily aimed at "removing obstacles in their [people's] lives so that they have more freedom to live the kind of life which, upon reflection, they find valuable" (Robeyns 2003, p. 6). This focus makes a profound difference and can lead to very different policies compared to neo-liberalism and utilitarian policy prescriptions.

Finally, from the perspective of the possible links of the capability approach with government intervention and public policy making, some have questioned whether the framework encourages paternalism and inappropriate government intervention (beyond its sphere). Although the capability approach does not propose any specific rules for redistribution, its claims on justice, equity and equality highlight that redistribution should indeed take place, in light of what matters for people's wellbeing (even though, as will be outlined later, the scope of the capability approach goes much beyond a discussion of financial redistribution) (Robeyns 2003).

Capabilities and Functionings

There are a couple of core concepts which lie at the foundation of the capability approach and its wellbeing assessment. Primarily, it is based on two concepts which here will only briefly be touched upon: *capabilities* and *functionings*. Capabilities are the freedoms that people have to achieve the lives that they have reason to value, while functionings are the specific states of doing/being, or achievements which people value (such as for example, being nourished). In this sense the approach offers a position to evaluate social arrangements and the extent to which they support people's freedom, agency and opportunity to achieve the functionings which are important to them (Alkire 2002). A social arrangement would be considered positive if it enables a person to achieve a set of valuable functionings (doings/beings).

In this sense, the capability approach to wellbeing and development evaluates policies and interventions according to their impact on people's capabilities. It inquires whether people are healthy or nourished, and whether they can access the resources necessary for this. It looks at whether people have access to high quality education, political participation or activities which help them to flourish. While for some of the functionings, the main input would still be financial resources and economic production, others could also constitute of protecting political participation, social or cultural practices, public goods etc. In this sense, the capability approach covers a holistic scope of human wellbeing and development, integrating all material, social, economic, political, cultural and spiritual dimensions of life (Robeyns 2003).

Agency

At the fundamental core of the distinction between capabilities and functionings lies the concept of *agency*. As defined by Sen (1985, p. 203), agency is the "pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important". The concept of agency can be understood through a simple example: two starving people may have the same level of functioning (in that they are under-nourished), but there is a difference in their levels of wellbeing if one is starving out of their personal choice (because they are fasting, for example), or out of a lack of access to adequate nutrition. There is a similar distinction between a family living in a certain neighbourhood out of genuine choice, or because they lack the ability to live elsewhere. Having the freedom to choose and act is here understood as a critical component of what it would mean to have wellbeing, and different choices do not always have to be underpinned by self-interest in order to constitute a valuable exercise of agency (Brayford 2015). In certain fields of study, such as for example those studying development projects, this conceptualisation has also been expanded upon to emphasise the fact that if given the opportunity and empowered, people can be much more than just passive recipients of development programs. Applied to any type of development intervention (this can

also be translated to urban projects), this view emphasises that the beneficiaries of various projects are also agents of the progress and change that brings it about (Frediani, Clark & Biggeri 2019).

Commodities, Functionings and Conversion Factors

Another distinction put forward by the capability approach is that between commodities, or goods, and functionings. The transformation of a commodity into a functioning is subject to *conversion factors*. A widely-cited example to illustrate this uses a bicycle as a commodity, and mobility as a functioning: in order for owning a bicycle to be converted into the mobility functioning, a series of conversion factors come into play, including personal characteristics (e.g. physical condition), social characteristics (e.g. social norms, public policies), and environmental characteristics (e.g. infrastructure) (Robeyns 2017). With this explicit role being assigned to personal and socio-environmental conversion factors of commodities into functionings, the approach accounts for diversity (both inter-personal and contextual).

Capability/Functionings Lists

Besides a set of basic capabilities (a subset of all others, refer to the freedom to do some basic things for survival), Sen does not provide nor endorse a specific list of capabilities and functionings. This has subjected the framework to critique, although Sen highlights the importance of leaving it up to public reasoning processes within specific socio-cultural settings to define and prioritise functionings and capabilities (Deneulin 2014, Frediani, Clark & Biggeri 2019). This acknowledgement and incorporation of contextual specificity, and a rejection of canonical lists of functionings, is a valuable one which allows the framework to be applied and contextualised at different scale, and in different geographical settings. Intuitively, a set of functionings valuable for an urban community in inner city Shanghai may be substantially different from those of a farming community in Guizhou Province – they might likely be different also from an urban community in London. Similarly, a list for evaluating a development project at micro scale (e.g. neighbourhood) cannot be the same as a national-scale assessment. Besides encouraging contextual-sensitivity, this also gives primordial importance to democratic, participatory processes for discovering and deliberating upon different functionings – a process which has value in itself, and can result in more inclusive and place-specific outcomes. This observation is not only valid for academic purposes, but should also be considered in the context of project implementation (for example, urban intervention). Other prominent capability scholars, however, have taken the approach in slightly different directions – Martha Nussbaum has used the framework as the basis of a partial theory of justice, where she develops and advances a list of central human capabilities with limited space for negotiation (Nussbaum 2011). Despite the list being prescriptive in nature, and

making strong universalistic claims, Nussbaum argues that due to being formulated at highly abstract level, the list can be adapted to specific contexts (Nussbaum 2000).

Wellbeing Achievements and Wellbeing Freedoms

As mentioned before, the capability approach is instrumental in offering a flexible and holistic account of wellbeing, and some of its most prominent theorists argue that it offers different accounts of wellbeing, which can be used for different purposes. Ingrid Robeyns (2017) pertinently distinguished between two inter-related but separate notions which are brought together in the capability approach: that of *achieved wellbeing* (functionings) and that of *wellbeing freedom*, or opportunities for wellbeing (one's capability set). While achieved wellbeing has predominantly been focused on in wellbeing literature, not the same can be said about wellbeing freedom. In Sen's own conceptualisation, wellbeing freedom was defined in terms of capabilities, as "whether one person did have the opportunity to achieving the functioning vector that another actually achieved. This involves comparisons of actual opportunities that different persons have." (Sen 1985, p. 201). Sen, by placing inter-person or even inter-group comparison at the core of his thinking about wellbeing freedom, invokes the language of justice and equity and gives them a central role in the approach, and therefore in conceptualising wellbeing.

Individualism and Collective Capabilities

While still emphasising the role of institutions in promoting wellbeing, the principal critique which has been applied to the capability approach is about it being too individualistic, as it limits the evaluation space to individual capabilities and does not pay much attention to communitarian or collectivistic values (Deneulin 2009, Ibrahim 2006). In order to unpack this critique, Robeyns (2003) distinguishes between ethical individualism (who and what should count, what is the unit of analysis) and ontological individualism (all social phenomena are to be explained wholly and exclusively in terms of individuals). She demonstrates how the capability approach commitment to ethical individualism (taking the individual as a unit of analysis, since the collective might hide inequalities) is not incompatible with an ontology that acknowledges the connections between people. In fact, the capability approach accounts for and emphasises people's social embedment, as well as the impacts of societal structures and institutions (Robeyns 2003). Nevertheless, capability approach scholars have attempted to contest some of these shortcomings by proposing complementary concepts such as *collective capabilities* or *relational capabilities* to describe the ways in which human wellbeing is generated in and through group membership – here, the relationship between group and individual freedoms is mutually reinforcing, in that access to a certain collective capability set can enhance what individuals are able to be and do, whilst building on individual capabilities may also, in turn, support more effective group, collective action

(Ibrahim 2006). Importantly, the discussion on collective capabilities as pertaining to a Western context has been strongly linked to group abilities for political mobilisation and collective action towards a shared goal (Deneulin 2009, Miller 2018). This will be revisited in the next section of this chapter.

2.2.2. Wellbeing and Critical Urban Perspectives

What does this discussion have to do with urban development and urban intervention, or with socio-spatial transformation? This section will attempt to address this by linking conceptualisations of wellbeing (and complementary concepts) constructed using the capability approach with discussions that can be found within certain strands of critical urban theory. The discussion below provides an overview of some of the most prominent strands of theory.

Taking a step back and put in simple terms, people-friendly cities, where citizens are enabled to flourish and where wellbeing is prioritised, take us to the utopias feverishly advocated by critical urban thinkers such as Henri Lefebvre, David Harvey, Peter Marcuse, Edward Soja and others. In wellbeing-oriented cities, people will have equal and full right to enjoy and occupy cities in space and time (Lefebvre 1968). In such cities, “we will have a right to change ourselves by changing the city” (Harvey 2008, p. 23). Conceptualising wellbeing for these cities will inextricably have to engage with the spatiality of injustice, and try to address it (Soja 2010). These cities will be “for people, not for profit” (Brenner, Marcuse & Mayer 2009). Although it is beyond the scope of this research project to engage deeply with the conceptual underpinnings and intricacies of critical urban theory, it seems intuitive that a radical conceptualisation of wellbeing, to be mobilised for thinking about urban issues, should have a radical starting point linked to promoting alternative, socially just and sustainable forms of urbanism (Brenner, Marcuse & Mayer 2009).

In 1968, sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre put forward a manifesto, a moral cry, for liberating cities from the inequality, marginalisation and injustice generated by capitalism and the commodification of urban space (Lefebvre 1968). Shaped under the banner of “right to the city”, this intellectual field was consolidated by radical scholars from the left, such as Manuel Castells (1977) and David Harvey (1973). Despite their political, theoretical and methodological differences, they shared a common concern about the fact that capital accumulation was becoming the objective of urban planners, at the expense and neglect of people and their opportunities for decent living and hence, wellbeing. They argued that capitalism and “accumulation by dispossession” (Harvey 2008, p. 34) lead to marginalised and vulnerable groups

to be routinely displaced from the physical, social and structural urban spaces deemed desirable for growth and accumulation. Their work was dedicated to discussing how urban space under capitalism was shaped and reshaped through unrelenting clashes between the conflicting forces constituting dimensions of urban socio-spatial configurations.

Arguably contesting the dominance of positivism in urban studies and injecting a moral dimension into the discussion, the concept of “right to the city” made claims about a system which leaves no one behind. It also incorporates the idea of a complexity, or collectivity of rights (Marcuse 2009) – to public space, to services, to adequate housing, to governance transparency etc. Founded on moral claims, “right to the city” theorisations were employed to advocate the need for transformative urban political mobilisation and the reinvigoration of participatory urban civil societies (Marcuse 2009). This was not necessarily identical to formal participation in urban political governance, but a participation aimed at transforming the economic and social processes which had replaced the use value of urban space with its exchange value – essentially reclaiming a political space from which they had been excluded, regaining access to the city and the opportunities it brings, as well as a right to collectively shape the city (Deneulin 2014). This has often been referred to as fundamental right “to remake ourselves by creating a qualitatively different kind of urban sociality” (Harvey 2003, p. 939). Although it identified heterogeneous groups with different, albeit often converging interests and starting points (for example, Marcuse [2009, p. 192] distinguishes between the “deprived” – those immediately, exploited, impoverished, oppressed etc. – and the “discontented” – the disrespected, alienated etc.), the call is for collective, unified action.

These theoretical and intellectual foundations have since been elaborated on by a growing body of critical urban literature, with the following reported aims:

- “a) To analyse the systemic, yet historically specific, intersections between capitalism and urbanisation processes;
- b) To examine the changing balance of social forces, power relations, socio-spatial inequalities and political–institutional arrangements that shape, and are in turn shaped by, the evolution of capitalist urbanisation;
- c) To expose the marginalisation, exclusions and injustices (whether of class, ethnicity, race, gender, sexuality, nationality or otherwise) that are inscribed and naturalised within existing urban configurations;
- d) To decipher the contradictions, crisis tendencies and lines of potential or actual conflict within contemporary cities, and on this basis,

e) To demarcate and to politicise the strategically essential possibilities for more progressive, socially just, emancipatory and sustainable formations of urban life.” (Brenner, Marcuse & Mayer 2009, p. 179).

A tangential strand of discussions centred its focus on the issue of agency and in particular agents of change – embodied both by planners as well as urban residents. It was increasingly highlighted that planners must play multifaceted roles: that of advocates and supporters of marginalised or disadvantaged groups and also, according to Patsy Healey’s communicative rationality of collaborative approach, that of a mediator (rather than technocratic leader), facilitator of deliberative democratic processes (Healey 1993). Others examined the role of citizens and citizen groups in promoting more just cities (Altshuler 1917), while highlighting the systematic exclusion of communities, especially the vulnerable, from planning processes.

2.2.3. Towards a Conceptual Framework

A key argument here is that a theorisation of wellbeing utilising some of the concepts of the capability approach, and discussions within critical urban theory which emphasise ideas of “cities for people, not for profit” (Brenner, Marcuse & Mayer 2012), make similar normative claims about justice and equity, in broad terms. They both commit to principles of justice as evaluative standards applied to policy or any type of intervention. At macro scale, numerous parallels can be drawn, for instance, between a capability approach critique of utilitarianism and urban theory critiques to pro-growth agendas – Sen himself criticises the typical analysis used by cost-benefit approaches as they are used to justify capital programmes, which tend to exaggerate benefits, underestimate costs, ignore distributional outcomes and generally disadvantage already vulnerable groups (Fainstein 2014). Through its concern with people’s wellbeing, the capability approach can open a door towards conceptualising and thinking about how human development can flourish with spatial form, and through spatial transformation processes (Hansen 2015). A conceptualisation of urban wellbeing rooted in the capability approach has the potential for serving as a coherent, open and comprehensive framework which can be contextualised and concretised for looking at specific local dynamics and priorities when analysing urban intervention.

The conceptualisation developed here is aimed at addressing dynamics of urban renewal, understood here as complex processes of socio-spatial transformation. Involving and impacting broad ranges of stakeholders (especially when projects target areas inhabited by resident communities), renewal projects are often constituted by targeted, exogenous urban intervention with several, often inter-related socio-economic purposes: improvement of environmental or

residential quality; rectification of urban decay issues and urban devitalisation; promotion of land value; building community social capital; preserving urban heritage etc. In fact, there is a broad lexicon of terms which are often employed inter-changeably in literature: urban renewal, urban regeneration, urban rehabilitation, urban development (Zheng, Shen & Wang 2014). Nuances in their use often refer to the scale, nature and motivations of the intervention, which include processes of slum clearance, replacement of dilapidated buildings or housing stock, commercial redevelopment (e.g. property), structural reinforcement/renovation for buildings, revitalisation of public space, etc. (Couch, Sykes & Boerstinghaus 2011, De Sousa 2008). Comprehensive interventions which integrate vision and action aimed at resolving more multi-faceted problems of deprived areas (to improve their economic, social and environmental conditions) are often referred to as regeneration or renewal (Ercan 2011). With often over-lapping dynamics of (inter alia) decay / living improvement, demolition / preservation, relocation / resistance, marginalisation / inclusion, place-making/commodification, urban regeneration interventions are an intricate process of socio-spatial transformation where wellbeing issues are clearly embodied.

For a moment, here, let us return to section 2.2.1 of this chapter in order to be reminded of the comprehensive and multifaceted account of wellbeing that can be drawn from the capability approach: an account which distinguishes between wellbeing freedoms (capabilities, or opportunities to attain what one values) and wellbeing achievements (functionings, what one values). It is argued here that for the purposes of this research, this distinction can be instrumental for understanding wellbeing for socio-spatial transformation (i.e. urban regeneration), as encompassing two main dimensions: **process** and **outcome**.

In fact, socio-spatial relationships and process-outcome (product) linkages have often been discussed in relation to the meaning of space, particularly with regards to urban development praxis, conceptualised as manifesting itself at the core of an overlap between planning, design and architecture. Various scholars have found the capability approach instrumental to thinking about the relationships between process and product in urban design (Frediani & Boano 2012, Sood 2015). Their conceptualisations draw on urban studies discourse which understands urban design within the broader context of urban development praxis, acknowledging that it can operate at different scales and across different domains. This discourse breaks from the physical vs. social deterministic dichotomy of urban transformation, instead re-conceptualising it as a socio-spatial process, arguing for an approach rooted in understanding not only the morphological characteristics of space, but also the societal processes that shape it in everyday life, and that bring it about (Madanipour 2010). Within this context, people-centred urban intervention has been imagined through the lens of bottom-up, participatory processes for socio-spatial

transformation (Hansen 2015). Frediani and Boano (2012) develop a theorisation which links the capability approach to urban design by linking *process freedoms* with *product freedoms* in participatory design in order to advocate for processes for just products, or outcomes. They identify choice, ability and opportunity as three components of process freedoms which can help navigate through notions of marginality, recognition, solidarity and power relations – with special attention to the ability of groups to achieve valued functionings during urban transformation projects. (They specifically evaluate urban design within slum upgrade development projects.)

The Wellbeing Nexus

Drawing from this breadth of theorisations, the framework proposed here views urban regeneration as a process of comprehensive socio-spatial transformation. In order to understand the ways in which wellbeing is negotiated, achieved, impacted and understood in urban regeneration projects, it is important to take into account not only final outcomes, but also the processes through which they came about. The thesis proposes seeing the two as having an inter-related, self-enforcing and cyclical relationship which will help to understand the multifaceted and complex nature of wellbeing applied to examining urban areas that undergo change. The term *Wellbeing Nexus* is used to convey the conceptualisation of wellbeing suggested, as illustrated in the visualisation presented below.

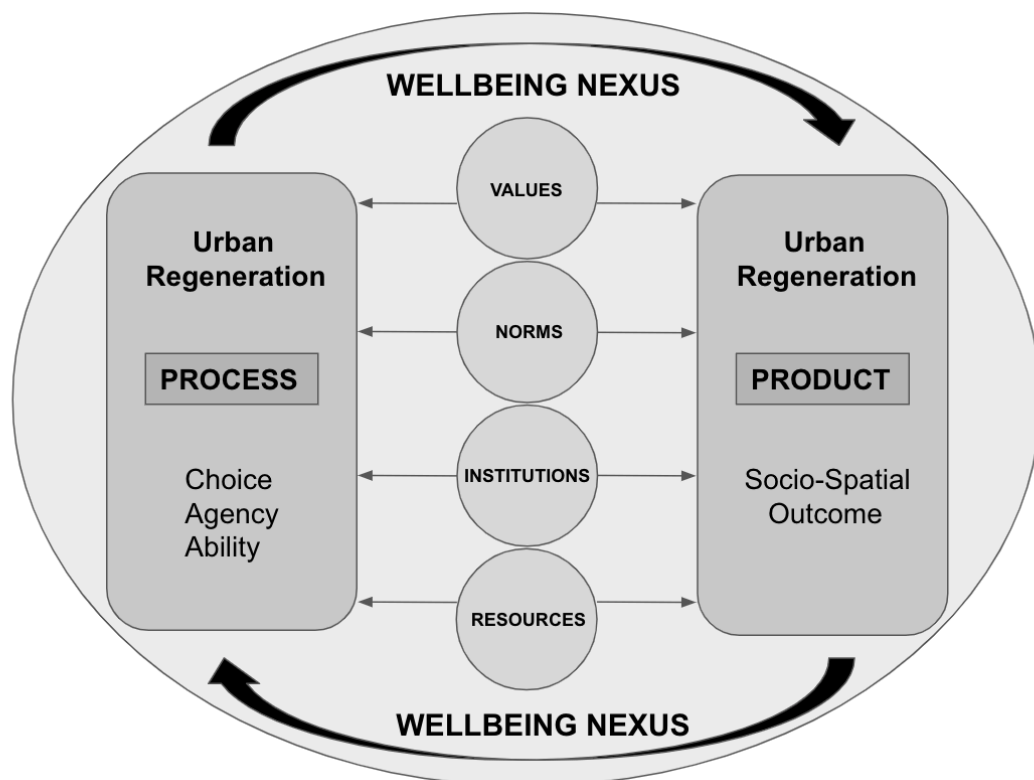


Figure 2. Wellbeing framework for socio-spatial transformation (author)

The **“Product”** dimension of the *Wellbeing Nexus* is a more self-explanatory referral to outcomes (or products) of urban regeneration projects which have direct or indirect, positive or negative impacts on the wellbeing of urban communities. The understanding of outcome here is broad, encompassing a variety of social and spatial dimensions including but not restricted to: changes in living conditions (housing, facilities, infrastructure, services, safety etc.), public space improvements, demolition and displacement, inclusion/exclusion, economic opportunity, accessibility, community building and community development, etc.

The **“Process”** component of the wellbeing framework is understood as containing three overlapping dimensions, conceptualised with the use of inter-related notions adapted from capability approach theorisations (Alkire 2002, Robeyns 2003, Sen 1985b) and from scholars who have worked on linking the capability approach with urban issues (Frediani & Boano 2012, Hansen 2015, Sood 2015).

“Choice” is understood in its more literal sense- what people can *be* or *do* in order to attain certain outcomes and a sense of wellbeing. The notion of choice can be relevant in a multitude of dimensions and at different scales: it can be represented by the possibility to choose amongst multiple options and scenarios during a relocation process, without the need to make unreasonable compromise; or having multiple options in terms of housing, public space, leisure space or leisure activity and so on; it could even include choices as part of participatory planning or design processes, such as choosing how to intervene, who should do it and when. It is important to note that this framework emphasises collective choice, while acknowledging but being less preoccupied with conflicting interests within groups, as individuals struggle to achieve personal functionings. Choice is bound to the notion of **“agency”**, which can be understood as an individual or group freedom to bring about valued changes or outcomes. The important implications of bringing this notion into discussion is to reflect upon the ways in which particularly vulnerable communities (often the subjects of urban regeneration schemes) are seen and incorporated in projects. This draws on capability approach and development studies agendas which strive to re-conceptualise such groups as agents rather than merely victims or passive beneficiaries (Brayford 2015). This can generate revealing discussions about not only the ways in which communities can be enabled, empowered and included, but also about formal and informal spaces of resistance, negotiation and collective action linked to urban transformation.⁸ Importantly, this dimension of analysis can also be translated into considering the ways in which experts involved in urban development projects operate within existing systems in order to shape,

⁸ As will become evident and will be further elaborated upon in the following chapter, the concept of ‘collective’, here, is not to be confused with ‘collectivism’ as pertaining to the Chinese context.

innovate and influence project outcomes. Last but not least, “**ability**” here refers to the capacity of converting available resources into desired outcomes. This relates not only to individual and group characteristics (levels of education, skills etc.), but also to group capacities such as the ability to generate joint action for reaching desired goals (for example improving the built environment or negotiating a more fruitful compensation package during relocation processes).

Besides the core components of the *Wellbeing Nexus*, the framework acknowledges three key variables which support and impact the relationship between processes and products of urban transformation projects. They can be divided into subjective, structural and material dimensions, with four respective elements identified: values, norms, institutions and resources. “**Values**” (subjectivity), in turn a product of context-specific socio-cultural dynamics, have direct impacts on evaluations on what is perceived as being good, important, productive in life – not only in terms of specific outcomes but also how to go about obtaining it. Meanwhile, “**norms**” (structural dimension) refer to what is deemed acceptable or standard behaviour in a society, or in a group. These have a similar impact on explaining specific ways on going about obtaining specific desired outcomes. Also in the structural domain are “**institutions**”, which legitimise or illegitimise, and enable or disable particular modes of action and particular outcomes. Finally, “**resources**” (materiality) refer to various forms of capital (for instance material, social, cultural) which can be mobilised in order to achieve valued outcomes.

While at this stage the framework and its components are left open, the following chapters of this thesis will play an important role in expanding on the *Wellbeing Nexus*. Specifically, findings and discussions from the following chapters will be employed to confer context-specificity to the framework. In particular, the variables mentioned in the previous section, will gain more visibility and consideration as the institutional, socio-cultural, economic and political environment of China is unravelled. This will clarify the ways in which values, norms, resources and institutions unique to the Chinese context, shape the relationships between processes and products of urban regeneration.

The wellbeing framework aims to convey the cyclical correlation between the two dimensions, that of urban transformation processes and that of outcomes, which support and influence one another. This relationship also suggests that the process of evaluating and understanding wellbeing and urban regeneration must be a reiterative one which goes back and forth between different dimensions and interlinked aspects. The constituents of the process – the exercise of collective choice and agency, or the ability to influence urban regeneration outcomes towards shared visions – have wellbeing value in themselves. Similar intrinsic value is held by social and

spatial outcomes of regeneration, which have direct impacts on the kinds of lives that urban residents can live. Concomitantly, certain processes can be instrumental for resulting in more equitable, just and place-specific urban outcomes which can enable human flourishing and even lead to structural change. In turn – and completing the circle – such socio-spatial outcomes can contribute to the expansion of new collective capabilities and freedoms, empowering and equipping communities for future action. It is hoped that this framework can serve as an open, adaptable and comprehensive starting point for unpacking and understanding the multi-faceted nature of wellbeing in Chinese urban regeneration. It is also important to observe that the disciplinary, methodological and conceptual nature of this research will particularly engage with specific elements of the framework (such as, for example, urban regeneration processes including governance and planning mechanisms), whilst only briefly touching upon some observations on socio-spatial outcomes such as design.

The present work aims to deploy the framework at two tangential levels. Firstly, the *Wellbeing Nexus* framework is incorporated at macro level through the existence of three inter-related albeit different research chapters, which each perform a different role and engage with different elements of the framework. In this sense, Chapter 3, which provides a review of wellbeing in China, engages primarily with value systems and broad structural (normative) issues that enable the formation of a series of discourses, understandings, determinants and dimensions of wellbeing for China in general (inter-disciplinary focus on political and socio-cultural conditions), and urban development in China in particular (overview of what recent socio-economic transitions have meant for urban living and urban wellbeing). Chapter 4 is concerned with urban regeneration mechanisms and approaches in China, with a specific focus on institutions and different forms of capital (resources) that have shaped these in the last three decades. An analysis of these value and structural considerations is necessary for formulating a more comprehensive understanding of the conditions that enable or create certain urban development processes, in turn activating manifestations of wellbeing at different levels. This approach is also critical for building upon the framework and making it specifically tailored to the context of China.

On a second, micro level, the *Wellbeing Nexus* is used to frame an analysis of urban regeneration practice. In Chapter 4, this is achieved by employing it for discussing three urban regeneration case studies in Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou. The discussion is framed by unpacking a) different socio-spatial outcomes of the different projects (such as changing living conditions, socio-economic development as a result from spatial transformation, distribution of regeneration benefits amongst local communities etc.); and b) different processes which brought about the change, including different exercises of agency and capabilities by grassroots actors pushing for

better outcomes and more equitable processes. This approach not only permits the construction of a multifaceted understanding of wellbeing in urban regeneration practices, but also a way of conceptualising and considering the notion of shifting practices and what this means for wellbeing. Similarly, Chapter 5 also engages closely with processes and outcomes, by zooming in on current urban regeneration approaches in China and analysing them with the support of fieldwork data collected in Shanghai. Finally, it is important to note that the framework is also designed to have a certain degree of prescriptive value, acting as a contribution to theory on wellbeing and urban transformation.

3

WELLBEING IN URBAN CHINA

Discourses, Determinants and Urban Development

3.1. INTRODUCTION, AIMS AND METHODOLOGY

Chapter 2 has introduced the emergence of a Chinese ‘wellbeing agenda’ manifesting itself at discourse, policy and practice level, with regards to assessing socio-economic progress more generally, and urban development more specifically. Importantly, it also constructed a new framework for conceptualising wellbeing in socio-spatial transformation. As previously revealed, China’s dramatic socioeconomic and political transformations make it the perfect laboratory for studying wellbeing and quality of life, in terms of measurements and trends, in terms of identifying what determines the wellbeing of a shifting Chinese society and in terms of assessing how this is being addressed at policy level.

Resulting from such institutional interest and reform, the last decade has witnessed a dramatic surge of academic literature on wellbeing in China, building upon already existing numerous studies conducted in Western contexts. Importantly, these studies go beyond the fields of health and clinical research with which they were originally associated and are now prevalently found in the social sciences. Due to variations in the conceptualisation of what is vastly the same, broader topic, these have manifested themselves in a multitude of forms, addressing subjective and objective wellbeing, happiness, life satisfaction, quality of life, residential satisfaction etc.

The following chapter aims to collate, summarise and analyse the emerging body of both academic and grey English-language literature on wellbeing in China generally and urban China, specifically. The review aims to draw from and cover a growing body of literature pertaining originally to the fields of economics, sociology, psychology, and other social sciences, and as of recently being incorporated within urban studies, with the intention to attain the following goals:

- a) present a state-of-the-art understanding of the concept of wellbeing in academic discourse pertaining to China in general and Chinese urban development in particular;
- b) identify which are some of the primary wellbeing priorities for the context of China in a period of rapid socio-economic transition, including both determinants and dimensions of wellbeing at a variety of scales - national, regional, city, and neighbourhood;

- c) identify what may be some of the gaps in the literature which could contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the concept of wellbeing in China, particularly with regards to urban development processes;
- d) build upon the *Wellbeing Nexus* framework developed in Chapter 2, using a more context-specific understanding of wellbeing in China based on an identification of shifting values and norms.

For these purposes, and taking into account time and resource limitations, it was considered appropriate to conduct a systematic literature review (developed and derived from the field of clinical studies) (Grant & Booth 2009). The method incurred a comprehensive search and catalogue of studies, a quality assessment of the studies (appraisal phase) and a systematised coding and analysis process.

The present review is organised as follows. The first section outlines the methodology employed to carry out the systematised literature review hereby presented, centring around the employment of the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. This is followed by a summary of the review findings, incorporating both an overview of the conceptual explorations of wellbeing, happiness and quality of life as appearing in the literature, as well as a summary of included sources' characteristics, categorised by year, journal, methodology, sample, scale and topic. The proceeding section turns towards separately discussing the duality between collectivism and rising individualism in an age of rapid socio-economic transitions, and the effects that this might have on socio-economic, political and psychological wellbeing determinants in China – at broader, national scale. The final section (preceding the conclusion) zooms in on urban dynamics in order to present some of the effects of rapid reforms on both objective as well as subjective wellbeing and quality of life in China's cities. These findings and discussions are then used in order to build and reflect upon the *Wellbeing Nexus* theorisation developed in Chapter 2, in order to strengthen its relevance to the Chinese context. Finally, the chapter concludes by highlighting not only emerging research gaps and potential ways forward, but also some implications of the complex and multi-faceted relationship between determinants and dimensions of wellbeing, in China.

Search, Selection, Appraisal, Analysis

To address the key aims of the chapter, a comprehensive literature search was conducted on the topic of wellbeing in China and included a series of dimensions specifically relevant to this study. The main dimensions consisted of: (i) the understanding of the concepts of wellbeing, quality of life and happiness in China as stemming from academia and compared to their understanding in the Global North (where discussions on the concepts first originated); (ii) the measurement of

wellbeing, quality of life and happiness in China, with a particular focus on the methodologies and indicators used; (iii) the determinants of wellbeing in China as evidenced and reported by relevant studies; (iv) the discussion of wellbeing, quality of life and happiness in relation to spatial dynamics in urban China (different scales such as city or neighbourhood), as emerging from academia.

The investigation was initially directed at search engines such as Google Scholar and resources available in London such as public and university libraries. It was later extended to include databases such as Science Direct, Scopus, JStor, Springer and Mendeley, the latter also being utilised as a reference management software. Based on an evaluation of journals which were appearing as dominating the results with regards to the topic, the search also included an exhaustive screening of targeted journals: *Social Sciences Research*, *Journal of Happiness Studies*, *Social Sciences in China*, *China Quarterly*, *Habitat International*, *Urban Studies*, *Cities*, *Journal of Urban Regeneration and Renewal*. The search included the following terms: wellbeing in China, quality of life in China, happiness in China, life satisfaction in China, residential satisfaction in China. A series of related terms were also introduced alongside the term China using the Boolean operator 'AND': subjective wellbeing, objective wellbeing, urban wellbeing / quality of life / happiness / satisfaction, wellbeing / quality of life / happiness / satisfaction in urban space, wellbeing / quality of life / happiness / satisfaction in urbanisation, urban studies and wellbeing / quality of life / happiness / satisfaction, wellbeing / quality of life / happiness / satisfaction in cities, cultural construal of wellbeing, built environment and wellbeing / quality of life / happiness / satisfaction, urban renewal and wellbeing / quality of life / happiness / satisfaction, urban regeneration and wellbeing / quality of life / happiness / satisfaction.⁹

As the topic of wellbeing is a developing area of research and interest for Asia in general and China in particular, the article selection criteria was not restricted to any specific publication years. Articles were selected based on their geographic area of interest (China), linked to their general exploration of the topic of wellbeing, and specific exploration of the topic in relation to cities, urban life and, importantly, the built urban environment. Studies with a focus on remote areas and those assessing or discussing the wellbeing of very specific target groups, without any links to the urban dimension and the built environment, were largely omitted. Once database, library and targeted journal searches were concluded, the author also conducted a screening of selected articles' reference lists in order to identify further relevant titles. The two joint endeavours resulted in a final selection of 170 English language publications (including journal articles,

⁹ An initial evaluation of the search process and screening of the findings revealed that the terms *wellbeing*, *quality of life*, *happiness* and *satisfaction* were being used interchangeably throughout the literature, and it was deemed necessary to cover this in the search in order to highlight the nuanced differences in their use and understanding.

newspaper articles, books, book chapters, reports and discussion papers) and one documentary to be critically reviewed. It was considered here that a point of saturation had been reached, as further searches had ceased to reveal additional relevant material.

Quality check for all included journals was also carried out and confirmed that all were peer reviewed and distributed by notable publishers such as Elsevier (17 journals), Taylor and Francis (11), Springer (7), SAGE (5), Cambridge University Press (1) and Wiley Online Library (1). It is important to mention that a limitation of this exercise is constituted by the fact that only English-language publications were considered. However, the pool of outputs has also been primarily selected on the requirement that Chinese scholars had to be included at least as co-author, to ensure a suitable representation.

Each publication was analysed and managed using the software NVivo, which was instrumental for thematically coding and systematising the data. A Directed content analysis methodology was used, implying that codes were defined both before and during data analysis: key concepts were initially identified as coding categories and were later expanded upon after browsing through the data, but also after running initial word frequency queries on NVivo to identify key words. Coding the literature in NVivo was particularly instrumental for guiding the thematic structure of the paper, and for running matrix coding queries in order to identify relevant links between different topics. The data was coded on two distinct levels:

- a) by source, where each individual source was described based on year of publication, reference type (article, book chapter, report etc.), journal of publication (if relevant), methodology (qualitative, quantitative, mixed), sample targeted by study, scale of study (national, regional, city, neighbourhood etc.), main focus (topic) and nature of study;
- b) by content, where source content was coded based on topics, themes, theories, definitions, research gaps etc.

Below is the coding scheme utilised for this study (the terminology utilised for the titles in the tables below is specific to the software NVivo):

A. BY SOURCE		
ATTRIBUTES	VALUES	EXPLANATION
1. Year	1997 ... 2019	Which year the source was published in.
2. Period of Publication	1995 – 2000 ... 2015 – 2019	Years of publication grouped into categories of 5 years from 1995 to present.
3. Reference Type	Journal Article Book Book Chapter Report Policy Document Discussion Paper Newspaper Article PhD Thesis MA Thesis	Type of reference which was included.
4. Journal of Publication	<i>Journal of Happiness Studies</i> <i>Social Indicators Research</i> <i>Social Science Research</i> <i>World Development</i> <i>China Quarterly</i> <i>Quality of Life Research</i> <i>Habitat International</i> <i>Cities</i> <i>Urban Studies</i> ... Not Applicable	Which journal the article was published in, if applicable.
5. Methodology	Qualitative Quantitative Mixed	Methodology utilised in the study.
6. Sample	Migrants Elderly Children Students Mixed Not Applicable	Principal sample targeted by the study, if applicable.
7. Scale	National Regional City Neighbourhood Not Applicable	Scale of study analysis, if applicable.
8. Main Focus	Subjective Wellbeing Measurement Subjective Wellbeing Determinants Life Satisfaction Assessment Life Satisfaction Distribution Subjective Wellbeing (SW) and Income Inequality SW and Inequality SW and Social Capital/Sense of Community SW and Housing SW and Safety SW and Urban Jobs	Publication's predominant topics of interest.

	SW and Governance SW and Modernisation SW and Residential Environment SW and Expectations SW and Pollution SW and Leisure SW and Religious Beliefs SW and Transport SW and Social Mobility Residential Satisfaction Assessment Residential Satisfaction Determinants Residential Satisfaction and Gated Living RS and Moving Behaviour RS and Sense of Community RS and Housing RS and Public Facilities RS and Relocation Quality of Life Assessment Quality of Life (QOL) and Urban Regeneration/Residential Environment QOL and Welfare System Discourses on Happiness Social Sustainability Cultural Construal of Wellbeing Courtyard Housing Urban Communities Neighbourhood Attachment Tourism Impacts	
9. Nature of Study	Conceptual/Theoretical Wellbeing Assessment/Measurement Wellbeing Determinants Residential Satisfaction Assessment Introduction to Special Issue Book Review	Nature of study determined by topics addressed or general approach taken.

Table 4. Classification of sources in NVivo using attributes and values (author).

B. BY CONTENT		
MAIN ('PARENT') NODE	SUB – ('CHILD') NODE	EXPLANATION
1. China Development	-	Indicators and descriptions of socio-economic development in China until now.
2. China Transitions	-	Indications of societal change in China, in a period of rapid transitions.
3. Cultural Construal of Wellbeing	Terminology Value Systems	Theorisations surrounding the concept of wellbeing, including socio-linguistic and cultural differences in defining it.
4. Wellbeing in Discourse	-	Reflections of wellbeing in political and policy discourse.
5. Definitions	Subjective Wellbeing Objective Wellbeing	Definitions for different terms used in academic discussions.

	Quality of Life Happiness Life Satisfaction Residential Satisfaction	
6. Determinants	-	Factors which determine wellbeing for Chinese society.
7. Measurements	Methodologies Results	Measurement of subjective wellbeing (including happiness and life satisfaction), objective wellbeing (including quality of life) and residential satisfaction – findings.
8. Literature Overview	-	Sections which summarise previous literature on the subject.
9. Economic Dimensions of Wellbeing	Income Inequality Employment & Industry Fiscal Decentralisation Compensation System	Factors impacting wellbeing from an economic point of view.
10. Governance Dimensions of Wellbeing	Welfare System Equity, Choice, Participation Government Accountability	Factors impacting wellbeing from a governance point of view.
11. Social Dimensions of Wellbeing	Hukou System & Migration Social Capital Sense of Community Lifestyle, Beliefs, Traditions	Factors impacting wellbeing from a social point of view.
12. Environmental Dimensions of Wellbeing	City Size Housing & Living Conditions Public Space Services & Amenities Transport Safety Pollution Residential Segregation Redevelopment and Relocation Regeneration	Factors impacting wellbeing from an environmental point of view.
13. Other Topics	Tourism Neighbourhood Typologies Historical Blocks	

Table 5. Classification of source contents in NVivo using nodes (themes) (author).

3.2. SUMMARY OF REVIEW FINDINGS

The publications selected for this review represented predominantly journal articles, but also included five reports, four discussion papers, three books, three newspaper articles, two PhD theses and one MA thesis. Below is a brief summary of the relevant characteristics of the reviewed publications.

Yearly Distribution

Almost 40% of the studies were published in the period 2010-2015, 32% in the period 2015-2019, 20% in the period 2005-2010, 8% in the period 2000-2005, and only 2 studies published before 2000. Taking the studies year by year, most were published in 2016 and 2017: 10.5% and 12% respectively. These figures clearly point towards the growing interest in the study of wellbeing and quality of life in China.

Journal Distribution

The most represented journal out of 43 featured in total is *Social Indicators Research* (with 20.5% studies published here), followed by *Journal of Happiness Studies* (13%), *Habitat International* (7.4%), *Urban Geography* (4%), *Urban Studies* (4%), *World Development* (2.5%), *Cities* (2.5%), *Housing Studies* (2%), *Environment and Planning* (2%) and *China Economic Review* (2%). The journals *China Quarterly*, *Ecological Economics*, *International Journal of Comparative Sociology*, *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, *Social Science and Medicine*, *Social Science Research*, *Travel Behaviour and Society*, and *Urban Affairs Review* all had two publications each. The following remaining journals were also represented with one article each: *Applied Research in Quality of Life*, *Economics Bulletin*, *European Journal of Political Economy*, *Health and Place*, *International Journal of Community Wellbeing*, *Journal of Architecture and Urbanism*, *Journal of the Asia Pacific Economy*, *Journal of Chinese Sociology*, *Journal of China Tourism Research*, *Journal of Contemporary China*, *Journal of Development Studies*, *Journal of Economic Behaviour & Organisation*, *Journal of Environmental Economics and Management*, *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, *Journal of Family Issues*, *Journal of Social Service Research*, *Landscape and Urban Planning*, *Oxford Development Studies*, *Population and Environment*, *Quality of Life Research*, *Social Sciences in China*, *Sustainable Development*, *Tourism Management*, *Urban Design*, *Urban Forestry and Urban Greening*. Despite all of the above being English-language publications, over 70% of the studies are authored by scholars of Chinese origins.

Methodology, Sample, Scale, Approach

An analysis of publications' attributes reveals a vast range of approaches resulting from diverse combinations of methodologies, samples, scales of study and specific topics addressed in relation to urban wellbeing in China. Over 60% of studies utilise quantitative methodologies and 25% mixed in order to assess levels of subjective wellbeing, quality of life, life satisfaction and residential satisfaction of various samples at various scales. Less than 10% of studies, considerably lower than their previous counterparts, employ qualitative methods mainly to explore socio-cultural and philosophical constructions of wellbeing in China. 45% of studies apply their analysis to national scale (included here are also the qualitative studies due to their universal nature), 30% focus on one or more specific cities in China, 7% address regions, and 5% centre their analysis on neighbourhood scale. The majority of studies, over 75%, address mixed samples, while other focus more specifically on particular demographic groups such as migrants (12%), elderly (4%) and students (two studies). The most represented category of studies, those assessing overall levels and/or determinants of wellbeing (i.e. the correlation between subjective wellbeing / satisfaction and different domains), either utilise large existing datasets for their analysis or administer surveys at different scales. Six additional papers represent introductions to special issues which are directly or tangentially related to wellbeing in China.

The scope of topics and approaches featured in the publications included in this review is vast and an in-depth summary of this could amount to self-standing research. Nevertheless, this is not the intent or primary focus of this review, which is primarily to discuss determinants and dimensions of wellbeing for urban China. Therefore, for the purposes of this review, a summary of the publications' main focuses and approaches is presented in Table 6. In order to facilitate the understanding of this summary, the publications are presented as categorised by typology of focus, including 1. Measurements and Determinants Studies, 2. Conceptual Studies, 3. Residential Satisfaction Studies, 4. Miscellaneous (Supporting Studies) and 5. Introductions to Special Issues. The articles are also identified by the scale of study: national and regional/city/neighbourhood.

SCALE	MAIN FOCUS	REFERENCES AND OVERVIEW
<p>1.</p> <p>NATIONAL</p>	<p>1.1.</p> <p>Wellbeing Measurements (Subjective Wellbeing, Happiness, Life Satisfaction, Perceived Quality of Life)</p>	<p>Nation-wide surveys are employed and analysed in order to carry out subjective wellbeing and happiness assessments (Bian et al. 2015, Davey & Rato 2012, Easterlin, Wang & Wang 2015, Smyth, Nielsen & Zhai 2010, Tang 2014, Shu & Zhu 2009) and life satisfaction across China (Abbott et al. 2016, Chen & Davey 2008b, Han 2012).</p> <p>Also employing large-scale surveys, Knight & Gunatilaka (2010) assess the subjective wellbeing of rural-urban migrants.</p>
	<p>1.2.</p> <p>Determinants of Wellbeing in China (Subjective Wellbeing, Happiness, Life Satisfaction)</p>	<p>Studies such as those by Appleton et al. 2008, Brockmann et al. 2009, Cheng et al. 2017, Han 2015, Jagodzinski 2010, Knight & Gunatilaka 2010 and Wang & Vanderweele 2011 attempt to empirically question which are the overarching determinants (economic, social, cultural) of happiness, life satisfaction and wellbeing in a transitioning urban China – alongside questioning the reasons for subjective wellbeing decline despite economic growth. Alongside these, an earlier study by Frey & Song (1997) examines variations of wellbeing across the country and question what factors contribute to this.</p> <p>Similarly, qualitative studies explore social determinants for quality of life (Liu 2006), potential transitions from collectivism to individualism in relation to wellbeing pursuits in China (Steele & Lynch 2013), discuss the socio-cultural construal of wellbeing and happiness in the country (Ip 2011, Ip 2014, Lu 2001, Lu & Gilmour 2004, Tiberius 2004,</p>

		<p>Uchida, Ogihara & Fukushima 2015), present Chinese discourses on happiness (Wielander & Hird 2018), as well as compare survey methodologies for wellbeing in China (Hsu, Zhang & Kim 2017).</p> <p>Other large-scale studies focus on identifying wellbeing determinants for specific demographic groups: elderly (Chyi & Mao 2012), migrants (Gao & Smyth 2011).</p>
	<p>1.3. Assessment and Determinants of Residential Satisfaction in China</p>	<p>A study by Ren & Folmer (2017) utilising data from the China General Social Survey analyses disparities and determinants in urban residential satisfaction across different regions in China.</p>
	<p>1.4. Specific Determinants and Their Influence on Wellbeing in China (Subjective Wellbeing, Happiness, Life Satisfaction)</p>	<p>This category of studies analyse specific aspects of wellbeing in China by employing large-scale datasets or surveys in order to assess the influence of specific pre-defined determinants on Chinese people's wellbeing. Studies thus analyse the impact of the following elements on subjective wellbeing and life satisfaction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Income (Asadullah, Xiao & Yeoh 2018), income inequality (Wang, Pan & Luo 2015, Wu & Li 2013, Zhao 2012) and income expectations (Frijters, Liu & Meng 2012, Liu & Shang 2012) - <i>Hukou</i> conversion and pathways to urban residency (Chen et al. 2015, Zhang & Treiman 2013) - Economic growth (Knight & Gunatilaka 2011, Zhou & Xie 2016) - Inequality, particularly in relation to <i>hukou</i> status (Huang & Guo 2017, Jiang, Lu & Sato 2009, Jiang, Lu & Sato 2012, Smyth & Qian 2008, Zhang et al. 2009) - Social capital and social networks for mixed

		<p>sample (Bartolini & Sarracino 2015, Bian et al. 2015, Churchill & Mishra 2017) and for elders (Chen & Short 2008)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Homeownership (Cheng et al. 2016, Hu 2013, Ren, Folmer & van der Vlist 2018) - Individual extended capabilities (Tsai, Chang & Chen 2011) - Job satisfaction (Poon & Shang 2014) - Leisure activities (Liang et al. 2013) - Transport and commute time (Nie & Souza-Poza 2018) - Religious belief and practice (Lu & Gao 2017) - Fiscal decentralisation (Chen, Huang & Li 2017, Gao, Meng & Zhang 2014) - Governance and corruption (Wu & Zhu 2016) - Crime and safety (Cheng & Smyth 2015) - Environmental surroundings- pollution, traffic, access to parkland (Smyth et al. 2011)
	<p>1.5.</p> <p>Reports on Chinese Human Development</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - UNDP (2013); UNDP (2016) - <i>World Happiness Report 2018</i> - Xu & Hua 2015. <i>The Role of Happiness in People's Lives. 10 Years of the Chinese People's Livelihoods</i>
<p>2.</p> <p>REGIONAL, CITY, NEIGHBORHOOD</p>	<p>2.1.</p> <p>Wellbeing Measurements (Subjective Wellbeing, Happiness, Life Satisfaction, Perceived Quality of Life)</p>	<p>Assessment of subjective wellbeing in Guangdong (Li 2015), Hong Kong and Taiwan (Liao, Fu & Yi 2005), Taiwan (Tsou & Liu 2001), Beijing (Wang & Wang 2016), Zhuhai (Chen & Davey 2009), Macau (Rato & Davey 2012).</p>
	<p>2.2.</p> <p>Determinants of Wellbeing at Regional, City or Neighbourhood Scale in China (Subjective Wellbeing, Happiness, Life Satisfaction)</p>	<p>Life satisfaction determinants in Shanghai/Tianjin (Ji & Rich 2002), across different social groups in Beijing (Cheung & Leung 2004).</p>
	<p>2.3.</p> <p>Assessment and Determinants</p>	<p>Assessment and determinants of residential satisfaction in Hangzhou (Huang & Du 2015),</p>

	of Residential Satisfaction at Regional, City or Neighbourhood Scale in China	Dalian (Chen et al. 2013), Xi'An (Yin et al. 2016), Wenzhou for migrants (Lin & Li 2017), Shenzhen for migrants (Tao, Wong & Hui 2014), Guangzhou for migrants (Liu et al. 2017), Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou (Li & Wu 2013)
	2.4. Specific Determinants and Their Influence on Wellbeing at Regional, City or Neighbourhood Scale (Subjective Wellbeing, Happiness, Life Satisfaction)	<p>These studies analyse the impact on the following elements on wellbeing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Social Capital/Community: Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong (Yuan 2016), Shanghai (Yip, Leung & Huang 2013), Hangzhou, Xiamen and Shenzhen (Lin 2016), Guangzhou (Du & Li 2010), Beijing and Hong Kong, for elderly (Chan & Li 2006), Shanghai for migrants (Jin et al. 2012) - Residential segregation for migrant elders: Shanghai (Liu, Dijst & Geertman 2014) - Residential environment: Shanghai, for elders (Liu, Dijst & Geertman 2017), Nanjing, for elders (Feng, Tang & Chuai 2018), Beijing (Dang et al. 2017, Dong & Qin 2017, Fang 2006, Ma et al. 2018, Qiao, Wong & Zheng 2019, Zhang & Lu 2016), Xi'An four neighbourhood typologies (Gao, Ahern & Koshland 2016) - Pollution: Tangshan (Li & Tilt 2017) - Access to parkland: Shanghai (Wang et al. 2016) - Transport and commute time: Xi'An (Ye 2017) - Tourism: Shanghai (Guo, Kim & Chen 2014), Beijing (Gu & Ryan 2008)
	2.5. Specific Determinants and their Influence on Residential Satisfaction at Regional, City or Neighbourhood Scale (Subjective Wellbeing,	<p>These studies analyse the impact on the following elements on residential satisfaction:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental quality, public facilities, housing: Taiwan (Lee, You & Huang 2013, Li & Tsai 2014), Guangzhou (Li, Zhu & Li 2012), Chongqing and Shanghai (Jiang, Feng &

	Happiness, Life Satisfaction)	Timmermans 2017), Beijing (Yang et al. 2012) - Neighbourhood attachment: Taiwan (Liao 2004) - Redevelopment, displacement: Shanghai (Li and Song 2009) - Homeownership: Hangzhou (Huang, Du & Yu 2015)
	2.6. Other Supporting Studies	- Attitudes towards gated living in Guangzhou (Breitung 2013), in Shanghai (Yip 2012), general (Douglass, Wissink & van Kempen 2012) - Social sustainability assessments: Tianjin Eco-City (Caprotti & Gong 2017), in Tianzifang Shanghai (Yung, Chan & Xu 2014), in Hong Kong (Ng 2005) - Housing preferences: Beijing (Wang & Li 2004), Guangzhou (Wang & Li 2006) - Residential location preferences: Chengdu (Wang et al. 2016) - Neighbourhood attachment: in informal settlements (Wu 2012), Guangzhou (Zhu, Breitung & Li 2012) - Social networks at neighbourhood level: Guangzhou (Forrest & Yip 2007, Hazelzet & Wissink 2012) - Neighbourhood development and wellbeing: morphological approach (Tosi, Turvani & Munarin 2017, Rowe, Forsyth & Kan 2016)

Table 6. Breakdown of literature topics addressed by the literature (author).

In terms of conceptualisations, the term wellbeing, as it has been utilised in intellectual and political debates in the West (see Chapter 2) has a variety of translations in Mandarin. These translations have qualitatively different meanings and backgrounds and using them interchangeably must be done with caution and consideration. Some of the terms evoke emotion or mood, while others are more related to broader evaluations of life. As previously mentioned, amongst the three most relevant translations of wellbeing in Mandarin are *xingfu* (happiness), *manyi* (satisfaction) and *hao shenghuo* (good life). *Xingfu* is a concept influenced by Confucianism,

Daoism and Buddhism, and it encompasses a broad range of life domains such as friendship and family, learning, virtue, comfort, personal growth and living in simplicity; to say that one is *xingfu* might colloquially mean that their parents and children are well, they have a good social life and they have personal accomplishments (like career or material wealth) (Hsu, Zhang & Kim 2017). The complexity of the term, encompassing both a combination between a good life and a meaningful life, also justifies its choice in state discourse, which emphasises morality, social harmony and the common good. The other two terms have more ad literam equivalents in the English language, with *manyi* (satisfaction), denoting met expectations and hopes, and *hao shenghuo* (good life), representing a broader life evaluation including largely material and physical comfort (Hsu, Zhang & Kim 2017).

There is a wide array of approaches in exploring the topic of wellbeing across China. These span from more conceptual approaches on the cultural construal of happiness and perceived quality of life for Chinese societies, to assessments of levels of wellbeing and satisfaction at various levels (national, regional, city, residential), to attempts at pinning down the determinants of happiness and satisfaction in a time and context marked by rapid socio-economic transition. In highly simplified terms, the publications included in this review could broadly fall under three principal, distinguishing categories: a) those which develop more conceptual, philosophical explorations of the meaning of wellbeing and happiness in China; b) those which measure levels of wellbeing in China and highlight some of the most prominent factors influencing these; c) those which are rooted in the field of urban studies, which attempt to explore wellbeing in relation to various urban dynamics such as development, housing, public amenities and services, or social life.

Most studies included in this review address measurements or determinants of subjective wellbeing, life satisfaction, quality of life and residential satisfaction in China, at different scales. Subjective wellbeing studies utilise overarching frameworks and conceptualisations established in the West, and with very few exceptions no studies utilise frameworks of (subjective) wellbeing which have been specifically constructed for China. These assessments take as a starting point definitions by scholars like Appleton and Song (2008), or Diener, Oishi and Lucas (2001), treating satisfaction as a function of the relationship between one's cognitive or affective evaluation of one's life, and one's objective reality. The studies measure subjective wellbeing by looking at positive affect with respect to different defined domains, and by evaluating the extent of fulfilment of life goals or values of people.

This definition is also adopted in the studies which feature residential satisfaction and subjective wellbeing, similarly adopting Western frameworks where the concept has been introduced into

residential studies in order to measure the extent to which the residential environment is meeting the needs and goals of its inhabitants (Chen et al. 2013). When it comes to studying cities and wellbeing, residential satisfaction studies make up an overwhelming majority in the existing body of scholarship. Overall, despite variations in the specific topics addressed, most of the studies included in this review focusing on subjective wellbeing and satisfaction assessments use theoretical and methodological frameworks relying on a combination between three main factors: the sample's background, objective life (or residential) conditions, and the sample's subjective evaluations of their life conditions. Studies analyse the impacts of a series of urban dimensions on residential satisfaction and subjective wellbeing, including sense of community (Lin 2016, Yip, Leung & Huang 2013) environmental quality, public facilities, housing (Dang et al. 2017, Dong & Qin 2017, Fang 2006, Gao, Ahern & Koshland 2016, Ma et al. 2018, Qiao, Wong & Zheng 2019, Zhang & Lu 2016), homeownership (Huang, Du & Yu 2015), residential segregation (Liu, Dijst & Geertman 2014), redevelopment & displacement (Li and Song 2009), neighbourhood attachment (Wu 2012), housing characteristics (Yang et al. 2012) and others. It was noted that numerous studies use cross-sectional data to examine the impact of these determinants of wellbeing in the urban realm. This means the studies do not draw any correlations between wellbeing determinants and time considerations, preventing them from drawing conclusions on causality. The conclusion of this chapter will revisit this issue and question to what extent residential satisfaction studies are sufficient for painting a comprehensive picture of wellbeing in urban China.

3.3. CHINA TRANSITIONS AND DETERMINANTS OF WELLBEING

3.3.1. Collectivism and Wellbeing in China

Literature on China rooted in the social sciences (predominantly cultural psychology and political science) still widely recognises the country as *collectivistic* (Davey & Rato 2012, Steele & Lynch 2013).¹⁰ From the perspective of sociological analysis, it could be argued that this characteristic is manifested in all four spheres including macro-objective (society, law, bureaucracy etc.), the macro-subjective sphere (norms, values etc.), the micro-objective sphere (patterns of behaviour, action, interaction) and the micro-subjective sphere (perceptions, beliefs, etc.).¹¹ In the discussions on defining wellbeing and quality of life, one of the key observations is that views on the concepts are socio-culturally constructed, in that there are significant differences in how people define, perceive and pursue wellbeing across cultures (Uchida, Ogihara & Fukushima 2015). These two observations are relevant to this study because collectivism can have a crucial impact not only on the ways in which Chinese people construct their views of wellbeing, but also on the ways in which wellbeing is being delivered from a governance and policy perspective.

Scholars argue that in Eastern cultures in general and Chinese in particular, conceptions of the self are constructed in relation to others, fostering a relational way of being which prioritises social interactions and a shared recognition of similar desires, views and goals which simultaneously apply to every realm of the human existence (Liao, Fu & Yi 2005, Liu 2006, Lu & Gilmour 2004). This can be observed in opposition to what are considered Western, individualistic societies, where models of the self are defined in terms of independence, individual freedom and personal rights (Uchida, Ogihara & Fukushima 2015). Wherein happiness in the West is attained through personal achievement, wellbeing in China is pursued through supportive social relationships, collective efforts, and feeling that one is part of something larger than oneself (Luo & Jian 1997, Suh & Oishi 2004, Hsu, Zhang & Kim 2017).

In part, this can be attributed to China still in large part adhering to what could be considered long-standing traditional values, and a shared cultural heritage of Confucianism which has shaped China for over two millennia (Cheung & Leung 2004, Liao, Fu & Yi 2005). Confucianism embodies a belief system that shuns hedonism and values forbearance, hard work, education (self-improvement and introspection) and the practicing of moral values (Lu & Gilmour 2004, Luo & Jian

¹⁰ Collectivism here is understood as the principle of prioritising the group over the individual. This is often discussed in opposition to individualism although some scholars have criticised the division (Schwartz, S. H. 1990).

¹¹ Four levels of sociological theory from Ritzer & Goodman (2008).

1997, Shek, Chan & Lee 2005). The philosophy is still considered one of the reasons why family life and community are so important in Chinese culture, as it indicates strict vertical family relations (filial piety and subordination to the family group) and hierarchical social relations, the latter of which are manifested in all domains of life – work, formal education etc. (Davey & Rato 2012). In this system, the rights and duties of individuals are constructed relative to the power and authority of fathers, elders, political leaders (Shu & Zhu 2009). With regards to private life, some scholars argue that for cultural and socio-economic reasons, traditional family structures are still widely maintained in China (Feng, Tang & Chuai 2018), where, for example, patrilocal living arrangements have so far been widely encountered as part of filial responsibilities and family networks of mutual aid (Chen & Short 2008).¹²

Confucianism professes a conception of happiness as harmony, where the collective welfare of the family (extended to society) should take precedence over individual welfare (Luo & Jian 1997). Arguably, this entails the willingness to sacrifice individual interests for the benefits of the collective good, where fulfilling one's social and moral responsibility, contributing to society and helping others is the ultimate form of happiness (Davey & Rato 2012, Ip & Shek 2014, Jagodzinski 2010). This also points towards a vision that individual wellbeing depends upon the wellbeing of the group, a doctrine which is also often utilised in Chinese political discourse. Importantly, this is also related to an emphasis on sharing the fruits of individual success with the group (Lu 2001), a viewpoint that not only influences potential behaviours and conduct but may also shape Chinese people's expectations and attitudes towards issues such as inequality and wellbeing 'provision'. Luo & Jian (1997) highlight (arguably controversially and risking to project reductionist views on the discussion) another important component of wellbeing rooted in Confucianism, which is related to feelings of being at ease with life and accepting one's fate or position: a philosophy of submission to, rather than control over external circumstances, which could be an important element to take into consideration when discussing things like participation in issues of public interest, rising civil society voices and other related topics.

Interestingly, a series of scholars link the regeneration of Confucianism to the East Asian economic boom, given the emphasis on authority, discipline and hard work (Shu & Zhu 2009, Tu 1996). It might seem controversial to attribute the recent growth of the Chinese economy to Confucian tradition, but its underlying philosophies are complexly linked to governance mechanisms and state discourse and have undoubtedly played an important role in enabling the Chinese government to mobilise society and achieve economic development. In this sense, it is important

¹² However, as will appear evident in the following sub-chapter, scholars have come to challenge this as they highlight changing family values and preferences in the wake of drastic socio-economic shifts in China.

to highlight that the socialist values which underlie China's governance generally do not emphasise or encourage individualism (Cheung & Leung 2004, Qiao, Wong & Zheng 2019), since a key feature of socialist ideology is the promotion of the collective good (Steele & Lynch 2013). This is often displayed through state propaganda which encourages people to adopt the 'correct spirit' and to place collective happiness over the individual one in order to ensure the development of a 'harmonious society' characterised by the rule of law, justice, honesty, friendship, stability and order (Wielander 2018, Ip 2014).). In parallel, the state takes on the commitment of delivering equitable wellbeing and quality of life, safeguarding all interests and ensuring common prosperity under the umbrella of egalitarian ideologies (Cheung & Leung 2004, Wang & Vanderweele 2011). In this sense and as already mentioned, the role of state intervention in determining the wellbeing of the Chinese people cannot be overlooked (Ip & Shek 2014), as neither can be its role in shaping expectations and attitudes.

Findings from certain studies assessing wellbeing or life satisfaction in China could be claimed to support the abovementioned statements. First of all, a series of studies test and confirm a cultural response bias to surveys assessing satisfaction and subjective wellbeing amongst Chinese samples, finding that Chinese respondents are more likely to choose moderate scores and express contentment with their lives or with the specific factors of interest to the study (Davey & Rato 2012, Qiao, Wong & Zheng 2019). If this is taken as a reality for Chinese samples, although these kinds of studies are rooted in long-standing traditions of life satisfaction and residential satisfaction studies, they might turn out to be less conclusive than hoped and therefore redundant in terms of revealing important aspects of wellbeing in China. Other scholars remind us of the importance of social harmony for Chinese people and argue that this should be introduced as a measure of wellbeing in order to reveal the true nature of happiness in China (Ip 2014).

Studies seeking to identify the determinants of subjective wellbeing in China present similar findings. For example, in a study on the subjective wellbeing of Chinese people, Bian et al. (2015) report that their 'happiest' respondents were engaged in community activities, had a wider social network going beyond their kinship boundary and had a high level of trust in others and social institutions. A study by Churchill & Mishra (2017) also highlights that policies aimed at promoting trust and membership to a series of social groups, which can facilitate exchange and support, can have positive effects on wellbeing in China – nevertheless, their study also reveals that the effects of social capital on subjective wellbeing are slightly weaker than the effects of income, an issue which will be expanded upon in the following sub-chapter. The importance of collectivism is also apparent in a study by Ji, Xu & Rich (2002) on family life and the determinants of satisfaction, whose analysis reveals that practices such as frequent contact with family and co-residence

increases satisfaction in urban China. They also point out the contribution to wellbeing of formal and informal ties with colleagues, supervisors, leaders etc., which for the context of China can be explained with the phenomenon of *guanxi* (social networks/relationships), through which numerous tangible and intangible resources are attained in China. Importantly, however, these findings are currently being challenged by emerging scholarship (Brockmann et al. 2009, Davey & Rato 2012), and might not be fully applicable to the heterogeneous and rapidly transitioning context of urban China- an issue which will be further discussed in the following section.

3.3.2. Rapid Transitions and the Rise of Individualism

China is perhaps one of the world's most striking cases of rapid social and economic transition within a framework of political continuity. The country is now participating in globalisation and witnessing the penetration of Western values and norms, its tertiary industries are rapidly growing, and the country is making rapid developments in science high-tech and education (Cheung & Leung 2004). Infrastructure developments are facilitating personal mobility, internet access has penetrated all corners of society, and mass consumption is becoming the new norm, challenging previous lifestyles (Brockmann et al. 2009). Arguably, these have provided important foundations for promoting the wellbeing of Chinese people, while also contributing to new visions about what 'the good life' is. Even so, China's per capita income still characterises it as a developing country, being less than one quarter of the average of OECD countries (World Bank 2019). Rapid and arguably imbalanced growth has brought a series of social challenges such as rising inequality, insecurity, rising crime rates, demographic pressures related to internal labour migration and an ageing population. In fact, findings from numerous studies assessing the subjective wellbeing of the Chinese people identify the country as one of the most prominent examples of the Easterlin Paradox, according to which economic growth has not resulted in increased levels of happiness (Bartolini & Sarracino 2015, Brockmann et al. 2009, Cheng et al. 2017, Easterlin, Wang & Wang 2017, Knight & Gunatilaka 2011, Tang 2014). A number of inter-related explanations have been offered for this phenomenon, and they include increased unemployment and the fall of the social safety net (Easterlin, Wang & Wang 2017), perceptions of relative deprivation instigated by rising inequality (Tang 2014), shifting values towards more materialistic, individualistic concerns, and mass disorientation resulting from rapid change (Brockmann et al. 2009).

One of the most impactful measures of economic reforms in China has constituted the radical restructuring of state-owned enterprises (SOEs) in the 1990s, when the largest ones were consolidated while the smaller were privatised/dissolved (Appleton & Song 2008, Easterlin, Wang

& Wang 2017). Prior to this, the SOEs labour system guaranteed life-long employment for essentially the whole bulk of urban employment and offered benefits including subsidised housing, food, health care, child care, pensions and job guarantees for children once they could start working (Easterlin, Wang & Wang 2017). With SOE restructuring, in little more than a decade, millions lost their jobs and their social safety net and employment benefits virtually disappeared, with the exception of a temporary, modest layoff support. Even for those retaining public jobs, new policies abolished the life-time guarantee of employment and benefits, and those who found jobs in the private sector no longer enjoyed any benefits at all (Asadullah, Xiao & Yeoh 2018, Easterlin, Wang & Wang 2017, Shu & Zhu 2009). In this sense, it wouldn't be exaggerated to say that GDP growth had little to do with people's welfare and wellbeing in that period. Gradually, welfare provision was replaced by a series of social insurance programmes which are operated and supervised by the government, and it could be argued that in the last 15 years China has entered a new phase of welfare provision, where a number of pilot welfare reforms (particularly social insurance programmes) are being tested in several cities such as Guangdong, Beijing, Shenzhen, Shanghai and Chengdu (Bartolini & Sarracino 2015, Huang & Guo 2017, Knight & Gunatilaka 2011). In fact, fiscal decentralisation for service delivery and local economic growth have been found to have positive effects on welfare and therefore wellbeing in the country (Gao, Meng & Zhang 2014). Mostly, however, wellbeing domains such as housing, employment, health or education were transferred to the private sector (Easterlin, Wang & Wang 2017, Yip, Leung & Huang 2013).

Moreover, in the ideological realm of Chinese state discourse, the meaning of economic growth completely shifted during market reforms: once deemed immoral, economic success has been, for the last decades, propagated as the ultimate national and personal goal: "To get rich is glorious" claimed official discourse under Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s, challenging a previously egalitarian tradition with the introduction of capitalistic and meritocratic norms (Anderson et al. 2003, Brockmann et al. 2009). Nevertheless, rising inequality has been one of the most prominent and marking consequences of reforms in China, manifesting itself in a multitude of domains ranging from striking wealth and living standard gaps to equitable access to resources, facilities and social services (Asadullah Xiao & Yeoh 2018, Bartolini & Sarracino 2015, Davey & Rato 2012, Easterlin, Wang & Wang 2017, Han 2015). In economic terms, egalitarianism meant that wages were kept at an average subsistence level without much variation – since 1978, China's move towards private ownership and a market-based economy has brought dramatic changes to property rights and the distribution of resources; today, according to the a report from Merrill Lynch, approximately 300,000 Chinese have a net worth of over \$1 million excluding property, rural China is largely

lagging behind prosperous cities and large gaps exist between the country's coastal areas and its other regions (Shu & Zhu 2009).

Additionally, in this context, the quest for social mobility has given rise to one of the largest internal migratory movements in the world. Although reforms have meant that the Chinese can now move freely in the country and seek opportunities wherever they consider fit, one of the most prominent sources of inequality is China's household registration system (*hukou*), regulating rural to urban migration. The *hukou* system entails that citizens are granted rural or urban residency based on their place of birth, which limits rural migrants' access to social services in cities (Chen, Huang & Li 2017). In this sense, rural to urban migrants of all generations lead difficult lives in China's cities, having limited access to urban educational or health facilities, low participation in insurance schemes, facing wage discriminations and stigmatisation, being segregated both physically and socially within cities and having poor working and living conditions (Du & Li 2010, Gao & Smyth 2011, Huang & Guo 2017, Jiang 2006, Knight & Gunatilaka 2010, Liu, Dijst & Geertman 2014). In this sense, it comes as no surprise that most studies find that the subjective wellbeing of migrants is considerably lower than that of urban *hukou* holders (Jiang, Lu & Sato 2009, Knight & Gunatilaka 2010, Liu, Dijst & Geertman 2017, Zhang & Treiman 2013), and that *hukou* conversion leads to increases in life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing (Tani 2017).¹³ Although at present no policy has been introduced in order to abolish the *hukou* system, a series of measures are being taken by the Chinese government in order to reduce the inequality associated with it and to facilitate rural to urban *hukou* conversion; it is important to note, however, that decentralisation in China has meant that most of these decisions are made autonomously at local level, and in accordance with local interests (Huang & Guo 2017, Tani 2017, UNDP 2016).

Therefore, in an economy in which many crucial life domains such as healthcare, retirement and education are commoditised, money does matter, and the fulfilment of needs no longer depends exclusively on the state or on social capital. In this sense, rising consumerism, capitalism, competition and social comparisons (whereby the new norms of competitive culture are characterised by differentiations in consumption and an obsession with achievement [Abbott et al. 2016]) are marking an important shift in values and are transforming China into a more individualist society in terms of the ways in which wellbeing is perceived and pursued (Han 2015, Steele & Lynch 2013,). This lies at the basis of Easterlin's explanations, which posit that aspirations

¹³ This, however, requires further investigation given one of the common paths of *hukou* conversion in China until now: since the 90s, urban *hukou* has been offered as part of the compensation for farming and housing land expropriation, with expropriated farmers losing their rights to land allocation in their village of origin. The resulting socio-economic shock for former farmers makes it therefore difficult to evaluate wellbeing with regards to *hukou* conversion (Tani 2017).

rise along with income and therefore cancel out the positive effects of income increases – in this sense, Chinese people have started experiencing sentiments of *relative deprivation* due to a change in reference norms and expectations coming with economic growth- this can further be correlated with the rise of hedonism and individualism in China (Davey & Rato 2012, Easterlin, Knight & Gunatilaka 2011, Ma et al. 2018, Wang & Wang 2017). These sentiments are further exacerbated by mentalities about egalitarianism in wealth, reinforced by repeated government promises of common prosperity in contrast with realities of growing inequality (Wang & Vanderweele 2011). Not only does this have the potential to destabilise social harmony and social cohesion, but it may exacerbate tensions between the state and society: market reforms and shifting citizen needs and demands are putting the Chinese government in a challenging, conflicting position, given that, as some argue, its legitimacy until now has been largely based on its ability to deliver wellbeing (Tang 2014).

Overall, it is not surprising that a society which has been through rapid transition finds material factors important to their wellbeing (Abbott et al. 2016). Nevertheless, it could be speculated that once the pleasure in materialistic pursuits starts to wear down and the emerging middle class has satisfied its needs for consumption, other wellbeing concerns, such as freedom, choice and a certain degree of democracy might become prominent as wellbeing determinants in China (Brockmann et al. 2009). In fact, studies found that subjective wellbeing predictor factors which generally indicate collectivist sentiment – national pride and support for collectivist policies – have become less important (Steele & Lynch 2013). In parallel, Brockmann et al. (2009) find that the perception of the decline of effective and trustworthy governance and therefore a disaffection from the system reduces life satisfaction in China, where corruption and the absence of the rule of law are starting to be important concerns for Chinese people. Another study which assesses the correlations between reported functional capabilities (taken to refer to Amartya Sen's approach, including physiological functions, skills, level of knowledge, creative ability etc.) and subjective wellbeing finds that those with increased capabilities have lower life satisfaction levels – a phenomenon which has been attributed to that fact that this category of people may be more susceptible to noticing and being affected by what they perceive as injustices and breaches of their rights (Cheng et al. 2017).

Finally, it is important to point out that from a socio-cultural point of view, China's rapid transitions have turned it into a melting pot of transforming values and norms, and a continuous redefinition of class and identity which influences views on happiness and wellbeing and takes a variety of different forms such as, for instance, consumer and lifestyle choices (Poon & Shang 2014). In a study which also adapts Amartya Sen's capabilities approach conceptualisation, the

authors find a positive correlation between subjective wellbeing and expanded capabilities such as extensive linguistic skills, having transnational connections and experiences etc. (Tsai, Chang & Chen 2012) – a set of necessary assets for not only constructing one's identity but also functioning in an increasingly competitive and globalised society. Poon & Shang (2014), who similarly study correlations between happiness (subjective wellbeing) and job types, find that an emerging class of creative workers are more satisfied not only due to their jobs which imply autonomous decision-making powers and mental challenges, but also due to their lifestyle choices. The authors argue that this falls in line with Richard Florida's well-known theorisation surrounding the idea that urban amenities which are designed around the work and lifestyle preferences of skilled or creative workers raise a city's quality of life and wellbeing levels (Florida 2002).

Another example of shifting values and lifestyle choices is the fact that despite traditional family forms remaining relatively resilient to change in China, certain recent studies are pointing towards changing preferences (for example, different generations within one family are increasingly reporting that they would prefer to live independently from each other if circumstances allow it, challenging the 'three generations under one roof' living arrangements that have characterised the country until now (Chen & Short 2008, Chyi & Mao 2012, Wang et al. 2016). Others have discussed the decline in social capital characterised by weakening social cohesion and community networks in the wake of rising individualism and heterogeneisation of community groups, especially in urban areas (Bartolini & Sarracino 2015, Douglass, Feng et al. 2018, Forrest & Yip 2007, Wissink & van Kempen 2012). In support of this, studies have demonstrated that currently, in China, the effects of trust and social networks as determinants of wellbeing are relatively weaker compared to the effect of income (Churchill & Mishra 2017).

3.4. WELLBEING DIMENSIONS AND DETERMINANTS IN URBAN CHINA

3.4.1 Quality of Life in Urban China. Reforms, Processes, Residential Environment

Drastic reforms resulting in rapid transitions and growth in China have left one of their strongest imprints on the country's human settlements, with dramatic effects on the quality of life and wellbeing of millions. Urban expansion has largely blurred demarcations between city and countryside; internally, residential mobility is flourishing, the functional integration of the *danwei* work-unit has made way for gated housing estates, urban villages, specialised shopping streets, shopping malls etc., and everyday life is now organised within complex city networks (Douglass, Wissink & van Kempen 2012, Wu 2012). Additionally, the ever-increasing numbers of rural-urban migrants and the economic disparities discussed in the previous section are continuously developing the socio-economic heterogeneity of metropolitan areas and are resulting in the creation of enclaves (Wu 2012). There is an increasing diversity of residential design and standards, residential segregation based on housing tenures (Wu 2012) and increasing neighbourhood social changes (Forrest & Yip 2007). Such shifting realities are likely to have large impacts on residents' wellbeing due to varying forms of liveability but also due to shifting urban processes as well as access to new opportunities and various degrees of choice.

Following decades of market reforms, a series of residential neighbourhood typologies shape the current Chinese urban landscape and determine the living conditions of millions of city dwellers, including but not limited to historic lane housing, former work-units, commodity housing, affordable housing and urban villages. In a relatively short period of time since the egalitarianism-oriented housing system which guided housing provision in China, reform has brought an array of residential choice, arguably responding to emerging consumers' needs and preferences (albeit differences in the quality of the residential environment, location, facilities etc.), rights of ownership, and opportunities for mobility and for seeking better living conditions, all crucial elements contributing to wellbeing (Chen et al. 2013). Some researchers have found, for example, that the freedom associated with housing choice resulting from the emergence of the commodity-housing system has contributed to increased levels of satisfaction and wellbeing (Yang et al. 2012). Nevertheless, these choices and freedoms are conditioned by a number of impeding factors, amongst which the most prominent being housing policies, the *hukou* household registration system, and affordability (Chen et al. 2013, Dang et al. 2017, Easterlin, Wang & Wang 2017, Wang & Li 2006). In fact, anxieties surrounding the difficulties of purchasing a house in periods of rapidly

rising house prices especially in China's mega-cities, which lead to large residential disparities, are an important contributor to levels of life satisfaction and subjective wellbeing amongst the Chinese (Cheng et al. 2016).¹⁴

These issues are further exacerbated in light of findings by a variety of studies which correlate subjective wellbeing with housing property rights: these highlight China's long tradition of preference for homeownerships (associated with traditional family values wherein assets such as a house can often be perceived as 'positional' goods which enhance one's competitiveness on the marriage market), and the strong impacts that this has on influencing not only residential satisfaction but also life satisfaction (Chen et al. 2013, Cheng et al. 2016, Hu 2013, Huang & Du 2015, Ren, Folmer & van der Vlist 2018). These studies also highlight that homeowners also have a stronger sense of belonging and more participation in social affairs, findings which are hardly surprising given the fact that, for example, owning a house can bring added benefits such as, for example, the right to specific nearby schools (Huang & Du 2015). Even so, the success of government efforts to close housing gaps has been contested: studies have noted that despite the welfare function of the affordable housing programmes, these have not been very effective in satisfying the needs of lower-income households, who often still end up renting through the market, which offers dwellers more choice in terms of location, size and quality (Yang et al. 2012).

Finally, an important additional phenomenon has marked the urban landscape in Chinese cities over the last three decades, with important wellbeing implications for the communities involved: urban redevelopment resulting in large scale relocation processes. Carried out by entrepreneurial governments and developers, this has happened at two levels: during the inner-city regeneration of dilapidated neighbourhoods, or in the process of widespread mega-construction projects where land was confiscated and rural residents dispossessed. Studies on the impact of relocation are mixed. Some find that improved living conditions in resettlement neighbourhoods contribute to raised levels of satisfaction and better living conditions for those residents who are unable to access the commodity housing market due to high prices (Fang 2006, Li & Song 2009). Nevertheless, relocation due to urban redevelopment has uprooted neighbourhoods and given rise to widespread social issues, reduced economic opportunities and dissatisfaction, resulting in civil society unrest in the face of inadequate compensation and power abuses (Fang & Zhang 2003, He & Wu 2009, Li & Song 2009). Even so, further policy reforms ensured that after 2000 the pace of displacement has gradually declined and a series of horizontal ties have emerged challenging previous power relations. Currently, numerous residents are no longer passive actors in urban

¹⁴ It is important to note, however, falling housing prices as a result of the recent financial collapse of the Chinese property giant Evergrande, expected to have repercussions on China's financial system and social stability (Hoskins 2021).

intervention processes but have become active negotiators continuously seeking to collectively defend their rights and, therefore, wellbeing (Li & Song 2009).

3.4.2. Residential Satisfaction and Socio-Cultural Shifts

As previously mentioned, a wide variety of the studies incorporated within this review which approach the topic of wellbeing in relation to living in cities align themselves with a long tradition of residential satisfaction studies. Despite the potential downfalls of conceptualising wellbeing as purely related to satisfaction, collating and analysing these studies on China may provide important insights into the shifting values, preferences and behaviour of a transforming Chinese society – aspects which are important if conceiving that wellbeing is attained once aspirations are aligned with reality.

Depending on their specific focus, numerous studies on residential satisfaction in China reveal converging results. A recent study by Qiao, Wong & Zheng (2019) finds an almost inexistent correlation between subjective wellbeing levels and the objective measure of personal conditions and residential conditions. Others, however, note that a nice dwelling, clean environment, good services, security, privacy and adequate living space contribute to perceptions of a ‘good life’ (Breitung 2013), and that where one lives within the city matters for one’s life satisfaction (suburban living bring, for example, lower levels of life satisfaction) (Wang et al. 2016). With regards to residential satisfaction determinants and levels, scholars have also found positive correlations with the following: neighbourhood characteristics including safety, physical environment, social environment, travel convenience; housing characteristics including housing quality, tenure, floor area (Ma et al. 2018, Ren & Folmer 2017).

Findings also point out that in larger cities such as Shanghai there are higher residential satisfaction levels with housing accessed through the market (Yang et al. 2012), which exhibits features such as lifts, larger dwelling space, private kitchens and bathrooms, as opposed to lower satisfaction levels with residing in older, un-renovated neighbourhoods (Jiang et al. 2017, Li & Song 2009). This potentially points to the fact that, in such rapidly changing cities, people would not be too resistant to moving provided that their new neighbourhoods were of desirable quality. Others, however, highlight important issues of neighbourhood and community attachment as well as the convenience of living in, for example, historic neighbourhoods (Zhang & Lu 2016, who compare the residential satisfaction of citizens in a redeveloped Beijing *hutong*) or informal settlements such as urban villages (Li & Wu 2013, Wu 2012), arguing that incremental upgrade

rather than demolition could significantly contribute to resident's levels of satisfaction and wellbeing. Last but not least, in light of drastic demographic change and ageing in China scholars have emphasised the importance of planning neighbourhoods which are convenient for the elderly, a group which is increasingly valuing the self-sufficiency determined by their residential environments (Feng, Tang & Chuai 2018).

Zooming in on a variety of urban phenomena and forms such as gated living and enclave urbanism, can provide a series of additional insights. Gated living in the form of commodity housing dominates Chinese urban landscapes. Throughout time, critical discussions within the West, and particularly Europe, have widely discussed gated living in relation to private governance, a lack of access and social segregation, widely seen as urban illnesses to be avoided (Breitung 2013). Nevertheless, scholars have attempted to contextualise this discussion in light of studies on China, with interesting findings surrounding psycho-social and cultural responses to gated living. These studies first point out long traditions and cultural affinities towards gated living in China, with both traditional (courtyard housing) and socialist (*danwei*) city forms having walls and gates which reflected well-known specific political and socio-economic circumstances (Breitung 2013, Douglass, Wissink & van Kempen 2012, Li, Zhu & Li 2012). Arguably, three important elements emerge from studies on enclave urbanism in China: the issue of safety and security, the issue of living standards, and the issue of privacy.

The effects of perceived safety levels on Chinese people's subjective wellbeing have been documented by a series of scholars until now (Cheng & Smyth 2015, Inoguchi 2015). However, in light of rapid societal change, perceived inequalities and rising uncertainty, Chinese collective anxieties about safety and security in the urban realm arguably go beyond their understanding as absence from crime and extend to a longing for stability, homogeneity and harmony. Within this frame of understanding, findings such as those by Breitung (2013) – who highlights that three quarters of the resident sample which he studied said that they approve of, or at least accept, segregation as opposed to a socially mixed neighbourhood – do not come as a big surprise. Scholars also highlight that, materially, gated compounds ensure a better quality of life, offering good dwelling units, a clean and tidy environment and good services: all falling under the umbrella of what has been termed *fengbi guanli* (enclosed management), an important selling point for commodity estates (Breitung 2013).

Such physically and psycho-socially constructed boundaries, characterised by inclusion – exclusion dynamics, can also contribute to the definition of new identities in periods of rising consumerism, materialism and competition, and satisfy a desire for social distinction. Finally, and perhaps most

interestingly, commodity compounds provide residents with a stable, homogenous context and good living conditions, while at the same time relieving them of the social obligations and levels of control which characterised dwelling units in the past (Breitung 2013, Douglass et al. 2012). This aspiration towards privacy, standing in contrast with the realities of social control and state monitoring prevalent in, for example, the former socialist work-unit, has become an important reasons for aiming towards commodity housing.¹⁵ Nevertheless, the freedom to retreat into anonymity and privacy which are aspirations of certain urban consumer groups are not equally available to everyone due to the fact that they often come at a high cost, unaffordable for many (Zhu, Breitung & Li 2012).

In light of growing arrays of lifestyle choices some studies have questioned what kind of housing attributes and preferences characterise Chinese society following market reforms. Comparing findings of a large-scale survey in two Chinese cities, Beijing and Guangzhou, Wang & Li (2006) highlight that location-related attributes, including accessibility, amenities and security, are stronger than dwelling-related attributes when considering buying a home. This is not surprising, considering that in relative terms there exists increasing freedom in housing consumption, but in absolute terms the choices are still limited: when it comes to the dwelling itself, despite some variations, most of the choice is still constituted by apartment buildings, with detached houses being very rare in urban China (Wang & Li 2004). Interestingly, scholars are also increasingly noting that the return of a series of traditional belief systems linked to the natural and built environment, such as *feng shui* or geomancy, are also becoming important determinants of housing preference and are even becoming marketing tools for commodity housing (Madeddu & Zhang 2017, Wang & Li 2004, Wu, Yau & Lu 2012). That, of course, is not to say that such belief systems are being restored to the status of planning or design principles, but their increasing importance in consumer preferences and the daily lives of Chinese society are making relationships to current development and planning outcomes more complex (Madeddu & Zhang 2017).

Other issues such as the importance of social capital, such as trust, perceived sense of social support and group norms, as well as a sense of community, community attachment and social interaction have also long been discussed as wellbeing domains in relation to urban living. Studies on urban China have focused on discussing the effects of the abovementioned elements on both subjective wellbeing and residential satisfaction in an age of rapid change and rising individualism. Such studies' findings are mixed. As previously mentioned, a study by Yuan (2016) confirms the positive correlations between life satisfaction and strong neighbourhood social ties in urban Beijing, Shanghai and Guangdong. Similarly, Yip, Leung & Huang's (2013) examination of Shanghai

¹⁵ This observation is further confirmed by fierce resident opposition to 2016 government directives aimed at banning gated communities and opening up housing enclaves (Poon 2016).

neighbourhoods demonstrates that a sense of community (conceptualised as a feeling of belonging to a group, a faith in the collective capabilities of the group and emotional bonding) has a significant impact on residents' wellbeing. Similar findings are shared by a study conducted by Dong and Qin (2017), although they and others note that rapid change has led to less importance being attributed to social ties and social capital than before. This observation can be read in light of shifting social network structures in contemporary Chinese cities (Feng, Tang & Chuai 2018), an expansion of urban social networks beyond one's residential area (neighbourhoods are no longer the nucleus of social interaction for young urbanites) (Zhu, Breitung & Li 2012), increased residential mobility, diversified socio-economic profiles of neighbourhoods (Hazelzet & Wissink 2012), more diverse geographies of individual and group activities (Forrest & Yip 2007), and the privatisation of neighbourhood goods which increases self-sufficiency and overtakes the need for social networks (Zhu, Breitung & Li 2012). In this sense, certain studies discuss how, in fact, current sources of neighbourhood attachment are more related to the physical rather than the social environment, with residents often appreciating privacy and deliberately distancing themselves from one another (Zhu, Breitung & Li 2012). Even so, grassroots organisations such as the homeowner association are not an uncommon phenomenon, with different groups becoming increasingly organised in order to take collective action for defending their property or other rights (Forrest & Yip 2007, Yip 2012).

In light of this rapid change which was anticipated after the fall of the *danwei* system, policy responses by the Chinese central government consisted of strenuous efforts to rebuild communities at the neighbourhood level; this responsibility was passed on to the *juweihui* (residents' committee) and *jiedaoban* (street office) and the terms community and neighbourhood were morphed into one single term: *shequ* (Li, Zhu & Li 2012, Rowe, Forsyth & Kan 2016). As quasi-governmental neighbourhood organisations established since the 1950s, residents' committees (*juweihui*) were institutions which could alleviate the effects of social welfare being transferred from the state to the government. Therefore, they were delegated the functions of service provision, social control and community mobilisation, being responsible for issues such as neighbourhood security, sanitation, welfare, education or conflict mediation (Yip, Leung & Huang 2013). Additionally, they were also given the task of developing "a new sense of geographically-based community into people's everyday lives and to increase the quality of people's well-being through encouraging community participation in service delivery" (Yip, Leung & Huang 2013, p. 678).

Other scholars focus on discussing the shifting relationships between people and their access and experience with services and amenities, which are not only instrumental in covering basic needs

such as education, health provision, transport or other daily needs (shops, post offices etc.), but are also instrumental in facilitating social interaction and engagement. In this sense, scholars have questioned the adequacy of the overall urban fabric in providing the quality spaces which might support the wellbeing of residents from a variety of points of view. In a study on the experiences and satisfaction of residents inhabiting a new Chinese pilot eco-city, researchers found that facilities such as community centres and spaces such as libraries were highly utilised and considered to contribute to a sense of wellbeing due to facilitating opportunities for social engagement and interaction (Caprotti & Gong 2017). Similarly, studies highlight the importance of having neighbourhood recreational facilities which encourage sport and physical activity for healthy communities, even though the distribution of such facilities is uneven and scarce in Chinese neighbourhoods, with commodity housing estates being much more adequately equipped than more traditional neighbourhoods (Chen et al. 2016). Consumption amenities, consisting of cultural and recreational opportunities, such as restaurants, art museums, movie cinemas etc. have also been recognised for their key contribution to personal development and therefore personal wellbeing, with studies indicating their rising importance amongst urban residents especially in transition economies such as China (Andreoli & Michelangeli 2015, Liang, Yamashita & Brown 2013). Last but not least, Tosi, Turvani & Munarin (2017) highlight an increased demand for accessible, good quality public spaces which can support social interaction and recreation. In fact, a stroll along the streets of Shanghai will immediately evidence the ways in which its residents continuously re-invent public spaces for socialisation, with places like sidewalks, overpasses, public squares or even parking lots being utilised by a variety of daily, collective activities such as dancing, singing, rehearsals and performances, storytelling, eating and cooking, playing games, and others.

3.5. CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided an overview of the ways in which scholars have been engaging with the topic of wellbeing in urban China, an emerging field of study in a country which has experienced rapid growth and is now attempting to move towards alternative frameworks for assessing and attaining human development. Towards completing this summary, just over 170 English-language publications, including journal articles, books, book chapters, reports, newspaper articles and discussion papers were reviewed utilising methodology pertaining to the completion of systematised literature reviews. The primary limitation of this exercise is constituted by the fact that only English-language publications were considered due to linguistic barriers, albeit their scholars being predominantly of Chinese origin. It is envisaged that publications written in Chinese could have provided even further insights into the academic understanding of wellbeing in China, although efforts were made to ensure representation by including articles written by scholars of Chinese affiliation.

The studies included in the review reveal a series of broad and interesting discussions. These discussions reflect a socio-cultural, economic and political context where the understanding of wellbeing lies at the convergence between traditional, collectivistic values, and the emergence of individualistic ones resulting from rapid economic growth, rising inequality, globalisation and changing social structures. As discussed in this review, this duality is expressed in a multitude of complex and inter-related forms which construct a vast and varied tableau of wellbeing dynamics in China. In this tableau, collectivist-oriented policies are mirrored by the rise of market-led processes, the decline of social welfare systems and rising inequality; a growing range of choices and opportunities available like never before is overshadowed by increasing gaps and disparities in terms of access; the reliance on social capital and traditional social structures, or the persistence of community and family values is accompanied by new forms of collective organisation, but also by a rise in individualism, a retreat towards the private and reliance on self-sufficiency; and aspirations towards democratic values and various forms of freedom are increasingly counteracted with emerging forms of social control, as well as ideas of the public good and social harmony promulgated by the government. These interesting dynamics further justify the importance of re-contextualising and re-conceptualising issues related to wellbeing and quality of life when discussing China.

In this sense, the tableau of wellbeing developed in this chapter is derived primarily from an identification of shifting value systems and norms pertaining to the complex socio-cultural and political setting of China. These subjective and structural dimensions constitute two of the core

elements identified by the theoretical framework developed in this thesis: the *Wellbeing Nexus* (see Chapter 2, section 2.2.3). In this sense, the discussion in this chapter can be instrumental for starting to build upon the *Wellbeing Nexus*, transforming it into a more contextually adapted framework for China. As previously explained, values directly shape what people consider to be important for attaining wellbeing. Complementarily but often also conflictually, norms determine what is accepted and what is expected as good or normal behaviour. As evidenced by the findings and discussion of this review, perceptions on wellbeing in China lie at the tension between the legacies of collectivistic values and norms, and rising individualism (Figure 3). This is a significant point of variability for the context of China, and, as will be evidenced throughout this thesis, has significant implications when considering the mechanisms that shape wellbeing in urban transformation processes.

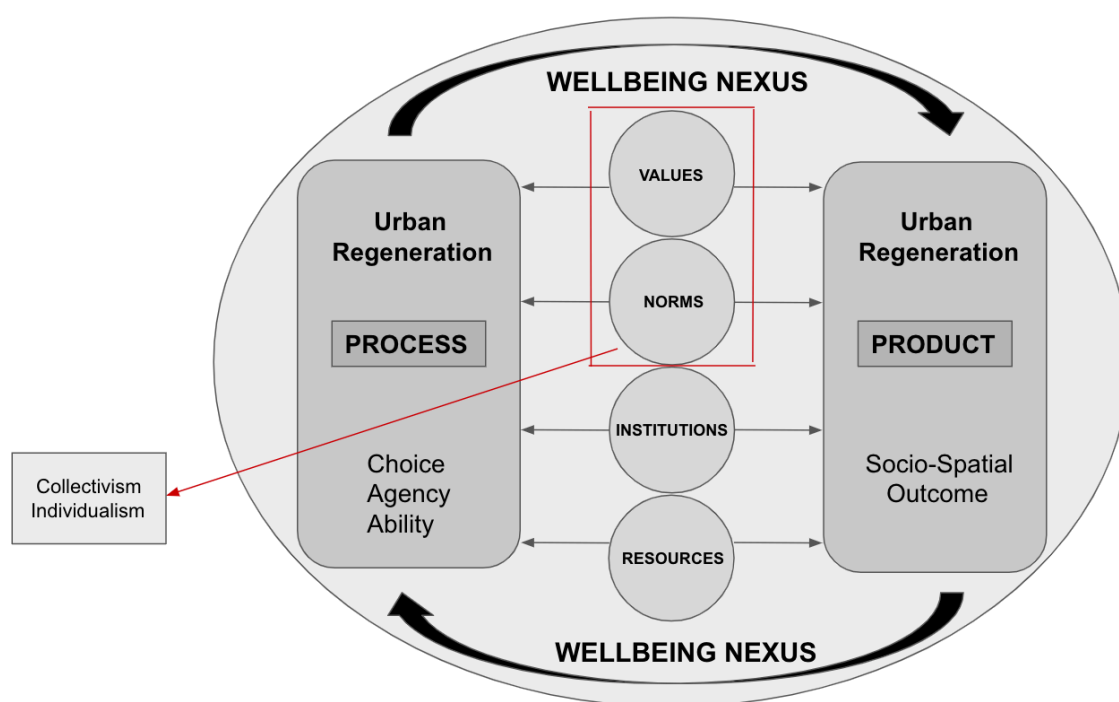


Figure 3. Wellbeing framework for socio-spatial transformation: China context (author)

Last but not least, it is important to revisit the ways in which the topic of ‘wellbeing’ has been approached within the studies included in this review. What particularly stands out is the fact that, whilst these publications cover a broad range of scales (from national to neighbourhood), and topics related to different life domains (including urban life), a majority of studies adopt quantitative methods in order to measure levels of subjective wellbeing and satisfaction (life and residential), the predominant way in which wellbeing is defined and conceptualised. This, of course, provides a series of valuable insights into citizen and resident views of what constitutes wellbeing or the ‘good life’ in a period of rapid transition – a topic which has been widely overlooked until now. Nevertheless, it could be argued that purely assessing levels of satisfaction

on the basis of one's objective reality provides an incomplete picture of wellbeing in all its conceptual and practical complexities (Kahneman & Krueger 2006). For example, after the completion of an urban intervention project, it might not be enough to measure post-factum levels of satisfaction with the outcomes of the project, without understanding the degree of choice and agency (wellbeing dimensions which are becoming prominent in the current context of transitioning China) that residents had in the processes leading up to implementation. A more comprehensive and holistic view of wellbeing and urban transformation, as proposed by the framework developed in this thesis (Chapter 2), would highlight that both the process and product of urban development are equally relevant for understanding wellbeing in the built environment. In this sense, if levels of satisfaction are found to be high, it might be difficult to tell if this is because people's aspirations and needs have actually met with reality, or because of having a limited range of other alternatives, opportunities or basis for comparison. Alternatively, if levels or satisfaction are found to be low, understanding wellbeing more comprehensively might entail knowing the level of control that people have over influencing the course of events. But importantly, the question remains of how are findings from such studies currently interpreted, re-conceptualised and integrated into new and innovative solutions for promoting wellbeing and quality of life in urban China, at policy and practice level? These are all important questions which could define new theoretical explorations and future research agendas.

4

URBAN REGENERATION AND WELLBEING IN CHINA

Overview, Issues and Practices

4.1. INTRODUCTION

4.1.1. Aims and Methodological Considerations

Chapter 3 has focused on constructing a value-based understanding of wellbeing in the context of China, with particular attention given to urban development. It revealed how, in an environment of complex socioeconomic and political shifts, wellbeing determinants and dimensions lie at the convergence between collectivism and rising individualism. This has important implications for the ways in which urbanites have been constructing aspirations and expectations for a good life – but also for the ways in which the state might go about shaping and meeting these.

This chapter begins to focus this discussion on the main urban transformation phenomenon with which this thesis is concerned: urban regeneration. In this sense, it aims to present an overview and analysis of urban regeneration policy and practices which have marked the Chinese urban landscape in the decades following market reforms at the end of the 1980s. The account starts with this period given that initial urban regeneration initiatives materialised primarily through large-scale urban redevelopment which started to proliferate following market reforms in China. It attempts to provide a summary of policy and governance mechanisms and the ways in which these have materialised into strategies and practices for urban regeneration in China - ending with the question to what extent policy and practice, particularly in better developed regions such as the Yangtze or Pearl River Deltas and the Beijing region, are increasingly pointing towards more wellbeing-oriented processes. The chapter also aims to identify some of the primary structural mechanisms which have an impact on wellbeing during urban regeneration in China. Structural mechanisms here refer to institutions that may enable or disable certain regeneration outcomes and processes. This exploration will also be instrumental for continuing to build upon the wellbeing framework previously developed (Chapter 2), in order to offer even more nuance in terms of context-specificity.

This chapter is concerned with scrutinising the ways in which ideas of wellbeing have been employed and mobilised in relation to shifting urban regeneration agendas in China. As will become more evident, while discourse and policy instruments in the last decades have incorporated ambitions for wellbeing-centred regeneration approaches, a more critical examination using this thesis' framework could reveal more complex realities on the ground.

The chapter draws on a vast number of sources (primarily secondary literature, a number of policy documents, international reports and media reports) focusing on Chinese urbanisation more generally and urban regeneration more specifically, in the last three decades. This is linked to time and resource limitations, and to the fact that these phenomena have been sufficiently well documented since China's reform and opening up policy. In line with some of the aims pertaining to this research, this chapter has the following objectives:

- a) critically examine Chinese urban regeneration mechanisms in the last three decades, in order to highlight key challenges and achievements in the path towards incorporating a more wellbeing-oriented urban agenda;
- b) identify and briefly examine a series of urban regeneration case studies from different Chinese regions, in order to question to what extent they point towards more people-centred urbanisation;
- c) unpack how wellbeing outcomes and processes materialise in Chinese urban regeneration.

The present review primarily focuses on the last three decades – specifically the period following the beginning of the 1990s – taking into account a series of methodological considerations. These are mainly related to the fact that following market reforms, China became an interesting context for studying a unique path of urban development and therefore regeneration, within a relatively short, concentrated period of time. This path partially paralleled the well-known experiences of Western cities, where neoliberal, market-led policies proliferated, while simultaneously being characterised by a strong interventionist role from the state and, more recently, pilot projects and substantial policy shifts. Due to the intensity of urban change in the last three decades, the period is also noteworthy as it witnessed a fluctuation of the concept of urban regeneration and its applications, despite being used as an umbrella term for referring to a series of differing interventions. Varying in scale, strategy and mechanisms, this fluctuation ranged from urban redevelopment (for example in the case of slum clearance and reconstruction), to urban rehabilitation (restoring smaller sites or buildings to good condition), all the way to more comprehensive, recent strategies aimed at improving socio-economic and environmental issues of deprived urban areas – commonly defined as urban regeneration (Zheng, Shen & Wang 2014).

As will be further expanded on in the present chapter, the end of the 1980s constituted an important turning point for inner-city urban renewal in China, which is why this review chooses to focus mainly on the period which followed. The intense urban redevelopment activity initiated in that period was the result of multiple inter-related factors. On the one hand, it responded to housing issues and physical decay in cities, following long periods of socio-economic and environmental stagnation and decline (the most prominent being the Cultural Revolution period, between 1966-1976) (Ye 2011). On the other, due to the marketisation of housing provision and land transactions (land and housing reforms at end of 1980s), as well as the decentralisation of fiscal authority, the redevelopment of dilapidated inner-city areas became an important economic tool for extracting local revenue (Wang & Aoki 2019). The policy shifts, governance structures, urban transformations and social impacts emerging in this period attracted a significant amount of academic interest exploring urban regeneration in China.

From the beginning of the 21st century, mass grassroots protests and resistance triggered by forced relocation and contested compensation policies led to legislative changes which better protected the interests of affected citizens. These were also coupled with the central state's promotion of the "harmonious society" ideology, which manifested in more populist policies and social stability being added as a metric for evaluating the performance of local governments (Wu 2015). Since the 2011 State Council revision of urban redevelopment and relocation policies (rectification of the previous policy issued in 2001), forceful relocation is no longer permitted, majority resident agreement is required, and compensation calculations are carried out more transparently and equitably (State Council 2011). As a result, since the 2010s, urban regeneration in China has witnessed yet another wave of transformation characterised by the emergence of new actors and stakeholders (Verdini 2015), pilot projects, and experimental forms of governance (Zhang & Lu 2016). These aggregated factors make the period following market reforms in China a distinct period of time in which to analyse urban regeneration efforts which struggle between promoting economic growth, maintaining social stability, and improving wellbeing and quality of life for urban residents.

This chapter also engages with reviewing three significant recent case studies in Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou, with the aim to highlight the outcomes and working mechanisms of urban regeneration practices that arguably took more nuanced directions than in the past. The cases are constituted by 1) Chunyangli in Shanghai, a historic *lilong* (neighbourhood lane) area currently undergoing a government-led process of incremental upgrade with the aim of retaining its social fabric and improving living conditions; 2) Nanluoguxiang in Beijing, a historic *hutong* (alleyway) area where entrepreneurial resident activity supported by an active role of the street-level local

government contributed to urban renewal; and 3) Liede Village in Guangzhou, an urban village which underwent redevelopment led by the village collective, a process which resulted in more equitable and profitable outcome for local residents.

The rationale behind the selection of these particular case studies is rooted in a series of conceptual and pragmatic considerations. From a feasibility point of view, these cases had already been explored in secondary literature and/or in governmental reports, sources which were necessary for constructing an understanding of the principal working mechanisms, strategies and contexts of each case. Multiple sources of literature were consulted, systematised and information cross-referenced in order to ensure a consistency of narratives across different reports describing the three urban regeneration projects. Meanwhile, it was considered that these three cases, albeit unique and contextually-dependent, were representative of a series of typologies of neighbourhoods targeted for urban regeneration in China (old and dilapidated areas, and urban villages) – while not yet overly explored in the literature compared to other more famous examples. Importantly, the city regions they belong to (Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou) all shared comparative development paths, having been some of the most prominent recipients of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in China (Zhang, LeGates & Zhao 2016). This makes the three cases suitable for comparison. Chunyangli, Nanluoguxiang and Liede were also considered representative of a series of institutional and planning reforms which have been taking place in China, including upgrade and conservation planning and design in Shanghai and governance innovation and plurality in Liede and Nanluoguxiang. In this sense the cases also reveal different aspects of urban regeneration mechanisms in China, leading to a more nuanced understanding of practices and different outcomes.

This chapter is structured as will be elaborated below: the following, introductory section briefly presents an overview of urbanisation and urban planning mechanisms in China. This section focuses primarily on identifying a few clusters of research on urban China and briefly summarising some of their main discussions in order to simultaneously present information about institutional frameworks, policy shifts, and important urban dynamics shaped by rapid urban development processes and socio-economic shifts. The section touches upon issues such as market transitions, growth, and the making of global cities in China; socio-spatial inequality, urban fragmentation and urban poverty, as well as emerging literature on “right to the city” (Harvey 2003) theorisations and growing social movements related to urbanisation in China. The introduction subsequently zooms in on laying out some relevant contextual and background details on China’s planning system (including the role of planning and planners, as well as policy shifts and planning strategies), and

on existing urban forms (such as residential typologies) which are relevant to this research as they constitute areas involved in processes of urban regeneration.

The subchapter which follows transitions directly to providing an overview of the particular form of urban transformation which is the focus of this research: urban regeneration. This section initially engages with an overview of discourses and policy mechanisms which have increasingly incorporated ideas of wellbeing-centred urbanisation and urban regeneration. It then goes on to examine how these have been interpreted and materialised into regeneration processes since the 1990s. Focusing in particular on institutional and planning mechanisms operating under entrepreneurial urban governments in China (facilitating growth with arguably little consideration for the rights and wellbeing of urban residents), and with the brief support of a few documented case studies, this section highlights the shortcomings and challenges of approaches up to date. This exploration also serves to unravel some of the key structural dimensions that influence wellbeing in urban regeneration: institutions, thus contributing to adding more dimensions to the *Wellbeing Nexus* theorisation.

The final subchapter reviews the three selected case studies: Chunyangli in Shanghai, Nanluoguxiang in Beijing and Liede in Guangzhou. The final section attempts to construct a preliminary discussion framed by the conceptual underpinnings of the *Wellbeing Nexus* framework. Therefore, it highlights some of the process-outcome dynamics of the discussed urban regeneration projects, in order to briefly introduce the ways in which wellbeing is attained and achieved following socio-spatial transformation within specific cases in China.

4.1.2. China Urbanisation and Planning: Context Overview

Research on Chinese Urbanisation

China's unique urbanisation path, and the country's continuous changing cities have been attracting significant attention from Chinese and foreign scholars alike in the last two decades, starting with the 2000s. The growing body of scholarship has become increasingly more sophisticated and nuanced in terms of theoretical debate, challenging the earlier stages of domination from positivist stances and taking increasingly more multifaceted and interdisciplinary approaches. Previous reviews have identified three main strands of research to categorise scholarship on Chinese cities: analyses/measurements of the magnitude of spatial transformation; examinations of social and political transformations guiding urbanisation in the reform era; and close-up explorations of socio-cultural dynamics at a variety of scales (He and Qian 2017). Aggregated, these cover a variety of topics, and cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and

Guangzhou appear to have been amongst the most documented until now. A couple of research clusters relevant to this research could be identified as follows:

1. Market Transition and Making of Global Cities

A substantial amount of scholarship has centred on exploring the dynamics of rapid growth following market transitions, and the emergence of global city regions. A variety of interdisciplinary approaches cover social, spatial, economic and governance dimensions, including land use, housing, urban regeneration/redevelopment, growth and place-making strategies (He and Wu 2009, Wu 2015, Zhang, LeGates & Zhao 2016). Regions such as the Pearl River Delta, the Yangtze River Delta and the Beijing-Tianjin corridor are amongst the most documented, after cities such as Guangzhou, Shanghai and Beijing capitalised on concentrated influxes of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in order to become global multifunctional centres. This strand of research examines public-private growth mechanisms and growing socio-spatial differentiation, in an era of re-imagined globalisation and consumption characterised by landmark planning and design projects (He and Wu 2009, Shin 2008, Wu 2015, Wu 2018, Ye 2011). Inter-related elements such as a rising middle class and the consumer revolution, housing consumption, large-scale commercial redevelopment projects, as well as the hegemonic deployment of culture/creativity discourses and a rhetoric of 'modernity' and 'development' are analysed and critiqued in order to highlight growing processes of socio-spatial inequality and increased social unrest. A tangential thread of inquiry has provided comprehensive overviews of China's urban planning system at the convergence between centrality and market instruments, by examining important structural and institutional dynamics, and planning mechanisms (Abramson 2006, Douay 2017, Wu 2018, Zhao 2015).

2. Socio-Spatial Inequality and Urban Fragmentation

Related studies are focusing on issues of growing urban poverty and polarisation following fragmented growth processes. As identified by the literature, urban poverty is primarily materialised in residential differentiation, with poverty being directly linked to political, social and economic issues such as institutional discrimination, rural-urban migration, urban redevelopment, market reforms and land grabs. Three vulnerable social groups are identified including urban migrants, laid-off workers following market reform and urban unemployed (Qian and He 2012). These are primarily concentrated in poverty-stricken neighbourhoods such as older, dilapidated inner-city neighbourhoods, former workers' units (*danwei*) and urban villages (*chengzhongcun*). These are discussed by literature theorising the concept of enclave urbanism, which contrasts the privileged lifestyle of gated commodity housing with marginalised neighbourhoods (Douglass, Wisskink & van Kempen 2012, He 2013, Zhang 2010). An ensuing line of growing research has

focused on the urban experiences of rural migrants, including their marginalisation, citizenship and social integration (Yue, Fieldman & Du 2010), living conditions and residential satisfaction (see Chapter 3), but also more multifaceted accounts of community attachment, sense of belonging and negotiations of improved urban living (Hsu 2012, Wu 2012).

3. “Right to the City” and Social Movements

Recent studies have presented a more sophisticated and nuanced account of interactions between the market, the state and Chinese urbanites. Awareness of property rights and spatial rights amongst citizens has inspired activism and growing grassroots movements, challenging unequal relations between state-market coalitions and a growing civil society and generating state responses in the form of policy and practice reforms. Studies analyse issues such as rights defending activism (*weiquan*), spaces of resistance, newly emerging social organisations such as homeowners’ associations and ambiguous property rights which are argued to constitute the core of the political economy of China’s urban development (Zhu 2004). Other studies advocate for more refined understandings and accounts of the ways in which Chinese urbanites re-appropriate, re-invent and re-claim urban space generating new dynamics of public/private, individual/collective experiences and practices (Qian 2014).

China Planning System: Overview

Having undergone, since the 1980s, a transition from a centrally planned to a market-oriented economy meant that China’s urban planning environment was impacted by trends such as political decentralisation, marketisation, privatisation and globalisation. A centrally planned system has been continuously adapted alongside market reforms, generating new and complex institutional and socio-economic environments guiding the mechanisms of planning implementation. At present, certain traditional planning principles (such as, for example, institutional arrangements which determine relationships between the state, legislation and the public) continue to play an important role in urban planning; nevertheless, contemporary paradigms and dynamics are continuously shifting as a result of drastic socio-economic change materialised in phenomena such as the emergence of a middle class, the rise of civil society or increased importance of the rule of law (Abramson 2006, Zhao 2015).

Throughout a significant portion of China’s history which was guided by Confucian philosophy, urban planning was employed in order to maintain political legitimacy through establishing a strict hierarchical system between urban and rural areas, between different cities, and within cities themselves. After the 1949 formation of the People’s Republic, following the model of Soviet planning, a socialist urban planning system took over in order to establish cities which were

centres for production and growth. Importantly, decisions, including those related to planning, were predominantly linked to 'leadership politics' rather than a strict legal system, and public accountability/participation were not important due to civil society not being a prominent part of public institutions in China: traditions which some argue persist to this day (Leaf 2005, Zhao 2015). Cellular planning dominated the urban landscape of the time, and the remnants of units such as the self-contained work units (*danwei*) still exist (Li, Zhu & Li 2012). Broadly speaking, this period, characterised by cellular planning and heightened social control, pointed towards a predominant lack of custom of planning for the public realm (Abramson 2006).

In 1989, the central government enacted the *City Planning Act of China*, which marked the beginning of the legalised planning system era in China, setting out the principles for the modern urban planning system (including a system of urban development control through planning permits) (Zhao 2015). One year before, in 1988, two fundamental pieces of legislation had already marked land reform and housing privatisation (*Amendment to the Constitution* and *Land Administrative Law*), separating land use rights from land ownership rights. In short, specifying that although land remains state-owned (in urban areas) or collectively-owned (in rural areas), land use rights could be separated from ownership rights and therefore commercial, industrial and residential property owners were entitled to acquire land use rights for a 40-, 50- or 70-year term, respectively, with options to renew (Fang & Zhang 2003, Ye 2011).

Starting with the 1990s, as market reforms and decentralisation reforms deepened, the lack of flexibility of the statutory *City Planning Act* was no longer deemed appropriate for responding to rapid urban growth (Leaf and Hou 2006). Strategic plans were therefore introduced, alongside a series of sector specific development plans (Abramson 2006). These were formulated and managed by local governments, had no specified time restrictions, and therefore supported economic growth and rapid urban development through a complex mechanism which scholars have identified as *state entrepreneurialism* (Wu 2018).¹⁶ Under these institutional shifts, inner-city regeneration and redevelopment, and the development of the urban fringe (often implemented by selling land use rights expropriated from rural communities) have been critiqued for favouring the state and the private sector at the cost of displaced urban and rural residents.

Overall, in recent years scholars and Chinese planners alike have debated and reflected on the multifaceted role played by urban planning in China. Some have focused on the ways in which planning has served a strategic goal for achieving economic growth, as well as for expanding the

¹⁶ Drawing from critical urban theory on urban entrepreneurialism (Harvey 1989), which explains urban governance shifts from management to entrepreneurialism in Western market economies.

state's position within the market sphere and consolidating state power (Wu 2018). This is further highlighted by insufficient involvement in planning decision-making processes by civil society, including individuals, non-governmental organisations or community-led organisations, although public participation and multi-stakeholder partnerships are increasingly finding their way in formal institutional settings and planning practice (Chen & Qu 2020). Planning in China also continues to play a significant role in maintaining state legitimacy by sustaining hierarchical systems between not only cities and rural areas, but also amongst cities and within cities (Zhao 2015). Undoubtedly, it has had an important influence on the distribution of public resources, having determined a series of inequalities which left many questioning its normative and declarative role in advancing social development, social justice and public good. Nevertheless, a growing civil society, greater local government autonomy and shifting central government urban ambitions are increasingly contributing to the advancement of institutional reform and a new era of urban planning in China.

Market Reforms and Urban Profiles

In order to understand socio-spatial dynamics, urban regeneration and wellbeing, it is important to briefly examine current spatial hierarchies and residential typologies which characterise urban landscapes in China. This section specifically focuses on housing and residential urban typologies because these are considered to embody important dimensions of urban fragmentation, socio-spatial inequality and urban quality of life in China.

There are four spatial hierarchies in a Chinese city: city (*shi*), district (*qu*), sub-district (*jiedao*) and neighbourhood (*xiaoqu*). Different districts are characterised by large heterogeneity and disparities in terms of land use patterns, public facilities and socio-demographic composition. Not only are these disparities a result of 1980s land reforms where land use rights were transferred to the market, but also a result of the fact that municipal governments set up different development plans for each district (Dang et al. 2017).

Following decades of market reforms, a plethora of housing and neighbourhood typologies can now be easily distinguished as shaping the urban landscape in China, based on attributes such as tenure or housing characteristics. Some of the most prominent abovementioned neighbourhood typologies are as follows:

1. Pre-1949 historic lane or courtyard housing (*lilong*, *hutong* etc.):

This is represented by residential areas constructed prior to the formation of the People's Republic of China. Notable examples are represented by the Shanghai *lilong* lanes, lined with *shikumen* stone houses (developed between the late 19th Century and the 1920s), or the 2000-year old

Beijing *hutong* lanes lined with *siheyuan* courtyard housing (Arkaraprasertkul 2018, Shin 2010). For decades prior to the formation of the People's Republic, lane housing accounted for a majority of the housing stock in urban China. Following processes of expropriation after 1949, most were placed under the control of the municipal housing bureau (supported by street office and residents' committee administration), and housing stock was confiscated from individual property owners and redistributed to accommodate multiple households (Li, Zhu & Li 2012) leading to a significant decline in living conditions. As a result, under the umbrella of 'urban renewal', 'modernisation' and 'place-making', and facilitated by complex state-market mechanisms, starting with the 1980s large numbers of such areas were cleared for redevelopment into commercial compounds as well as expansive public spaces such as squares, boulevards or commercial facilities (eg. large shopping malls) (Jiang, Feng & Timmermans 2017). Besides the destruction of a considerable amount of tangible and intangible heritage resources, these projects were accompanied by the large-scale forced relocation of millions of residents (Fang 2006, Li & Song 2009).

2. Former work-unit compounds (*danwei*):

Danwei were work units developed during China's socialist planning system. These were integrated, mixed-use compounds comprising of work places, housing and social infrastructure (schools, clinics, markets etc.), which were characterised by high levels of social cohesion, interaction and control (Zhu et al. 2012, Yip et al. 2013). Most of their construction took place between the 1950s and 1980s, with the exception of the Cultural Revolution period (1966-1976) when development stagnated (Ye 2011). In that period, they gradually replaced pre-1949 as residential forms (Douglass Wissink & van Kempen 2012). Since 1978, reforms in China, including housing reforms and emerging complex state-market relationships, gradually dissolved the *danwei* as predominant socio-spatial structures (Zhu et al. 2012). During the end of the 1980s and in the 1990s, *danwei* housing units were sold to residents at discounted prices employing large subsidies. During the housing boom, numerous such owners sold their units, offering them the possibility to upgrade their living conditions and resulting in more diversified social profiles in these neighbourhoods as they were a viable option for buyers with limited financial possibilities, such as, for example, white-collar migrant workers. (Douglass, Wissink & van Kempen 2012). Given their legacy as formed *danwei* units, these were managed by the previously prominent administrative establishments such as the residents' committees (*juweihui*) and the street offices (*jiedaoban*). Meanwhile, during the 1980s market reform period, due to the fact that enterprises were unable to purchase their *danwei* housing but still wished to fulfil the housing welfare commitment towards their employees, certain work units purchased commodity-housing units. In parallel, others which had land launched joint ventures with property developers, and, by providing the

latter with land for building commodity housing, they received a proportion of completed units to be distributed amongst employees, who eventually became owners. In this sense, the newly emerging mixed neighbourhoods exhibited the characteristics of both commodity housing and sold public housing, having good quality living conditions and services but at the same time being strongly connected with traditional administrative establishments (Yip, Leung & Huang 2013).

3. Commodity housing estates, in inner-city neighbourhoods or in newly developed suburban districts (*shangpingfang*):

Concomitantly with *danwei* transitions, commodity housing estates were emerging in redeveloped sites within the inner-city and in the suburbs, many of which were built as gated communities and attracted a younger, emerging middle class (Li, Zhu & Li 2012, Yip, Leung & Huang 2013, Zhu, Breitung & Li 2012). These are mostly high-rise (as opposed to older housing which does not exceed eight stories), generally exhibit good living conditions, increased security levels (most are gated and guarded), and display a certain variety of choice in terms of housing types and designs, as well as facilities (amongst the more luxurious would include facilities such as swimming pools, tennis courts, landscaped gardens, and even services such as housekeeping) (Dang et al. 2017). These are now the predominant form of residential development, with a 2007 census highlighting that over 50% of urban households in China now live in commodity housing, whilst less than 40% live in privatised *danwei* housing (Zhu, Breitung & Li 2012). Here, the link with traditional managerial establishment is almost inexistent, and the majority of residents started displaying a degree of reticence towards bodies such as the residents' committees (which were increasingly viewed as an agent of control), whose services have successfully been replaced by property management agencies. These neighbourhoods are additionally often divided into two types: high and low density. The high density developments are built on older, demolished city plots, with generally mixed-use and dense surroundings, while areas developed on previously industrial or agricultural land are low density and have fewer surrounding amenities (Gao, Ahern & Koshland 2016).

4. Affordable housing (*jingji shiyong fang*):

This typology is also referred to as 'economic and comfortable housing', referring to a category of low-cost, subsidised housing under government price control, which has been introduced in order to boost supply for the lower-end market. These are primarily sold to mid to low income households who are unable to access market commercial housing, or they often house residents who were relocated during a redevelopment project and were unable to purchase commercial properties in their original locality (Qiao, Wong & Zheng 2019). They are generally built by municipal governments in (peri-urban) areas due to significantly lower land prices, therefore

having more limited access to employment opportunities or public services (such as medical or educational) (Dang et al. 2017). Additionally, due to the fact that this type of housing is allocated as a result of central government requirements, and because of political accountability measures that hold local governments responsible for the fulfilment of top-down mandates, most of the attention is usually paid to the quantity of affordable housing supply and not the quality or other aspects (Dang et al. 2017). In this sense, interestingly, studies have noted that despite the welfare function of these types of houses, they have not been very effective in satisfying the needs of lower-income households. Therefore, rather than relying on these housing schemes for purchasing, these households often still end up renting through the market, which offers more choice in terms of location, size of housing unit, quality etc. (Yang et al. 2012).

5. Urban villages (*chengzhongcun*):

Urban villages or 'villages in the city', generally located in peri-urban areas, are represented by former rural villages which have been engulfed by urban development. Many have characterised them as a unique phenomenon of socio-spatial segregation which has deep roots in China's rural-urban administrative dualism (Wu, Zhang & Webster 2013). As rural land in China is collectively owned by rural villagers, land in rural areas can only be subject to urban development if expropriated and converted into land for construction. Due to high expropriation costs, growing cities have encircled villages and failed to integrate them in formal urban development plans (Wong, Qiao & Zheng 2018). In theory, the land in such villages is owned by rural collectives, or collectively by the villagers. Nevertheless, these are often characterised by ambiguous development control measures and ambiguous property rights. This has resulted in a process of organic, illegal development with villagers having built informal housing for obtaining rental income. Numerous *chengzhongcun* are characterised by over-crowding and insufficient infrastructure. Nevertheless, they have served an important function by providing inexpensive and relatively well-located housing for rural-urban migrants, a group which has not only become socially and spatially marginalised due to the *hukou* system, but due to being virtually unable to financially access commodity housing (Li, Zhu & Li 2012, Wu and Ma 2005). Recently, however, with the surge in government-led urban redevelopment and renewal projects, numerous residents have been relocated: in this process, whilst indigenous villagers receive a specific compensation package, the new tenants constituted primarily by migrants have no rights to compensation and are therefore pushed even further towards the periphery (Wong, Qiao & Zheng 2018).

As exemplified above, rapid reform in China has brought an array of new residential and spatial choice as well as opportunities for mobility and for seeking new urban lifestyles. Nevertheless, the advancement of privatisation, the expansion of homeownership, increasing urban mobility, and a

redistribution of urban wealth resulted in increased residential differentiation and socio-spatial segregation. Within the new, fragmented urban landscape, inequality has been embodied through the contrasting of elitist commodity residential areas with often left-behind, dilapidated neighbourhoods containing increased concentrations of urban poverty and vulnerable, marginalised communities (He & Wu 2007, Wu & Ma 2005). Until recently, such neighbourhoods have been the target of profit-led urban redevelopment processes, which, at times, resulted in reproducing and fostering additional fragmentation, inequality and marginalisation.

4.2. URBAN REGENERATION AND WELLBEING IN CHINA: DISCOURSE, POLICY AND MECHANISMS

4.2.1. Discourse and Policy Instruments

Urban renewal is one of the most frequently cited domains in relation to state ambitions for improving the life of Chinese people. China's most recent 14th Five-Year Plan explicitly outlines targets for the regeneration of older and dilapidated inner-city neighbourhoods, urban villages and inner-city industrial areas (State Council 2020). Similar to the discourse of 'wellbeing' mobilised in relation to broader development goals in China, urban regeneration ambitions are promoted as a key project for improving the lives of many. The following section examines discourse employed in relation to urban regeneration goals in China in recent years. This includes justifications of urban renewal efforts, as well as declared pathways towards achieving set goals. The discussion draws from a series of selected, recent Chinese media reports, state reports and policy guidance documents on future urbanisation directions and urban renewal. It is hoped that this can help construct a picture of declared policy ambitions, in order to better understand, in the subchapters that follow, how these translate into solutions for urban regeneration.

Rationale and Motivations for Urban Regeneration

Urban renewal, or urban regeneration, has often been cited as a crucial urban quality of life project in documents released by the Chinese state. This is particularly relevant for what has been referred to as *shantytowns* in Chinese government policy. A 2013 State Council of the PRC policy guidance document on the *Reconstruction of Shanty Areas* refers to the ambitions as a "major livelihood and development project" and as having a "strong public welfare nature" (State Council 2013, State Council 2014). The document calls on coordinated efforts to continue the improvement of living conditions for millions in urban China. This lexicon has been since adopted by numerous guidance documents that followed, receiving coverage from a series of state media outlets. Such media channels draw evocative analogies between commercial estate development and shantytown renewal: "while commercial real estate has economic and 'image' value, the transformation of shantytowns is a project for society's core" (China Youth Net 2015). Most recent policy guidance documents such as the *Reconstruction of Old Communities in Urban Areas* emphasise that the "rebuilding of old urban communities is a major livelihood project and development project, which is important for meeting the needs of the people for a better life" (State Council 2020). Such documents released by the state highlight the poor living conditions of these neighbourhoods, including the scale of housing, inadequate facilities (such as public space or sanitation) and inefficient management mechanisms. Cited goals include "adhering to the people-

centred development concept and building a healthy, well-equipped and well-managed residential community” which “enhances a sense of gain, happiness and security” [Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD) 2020] and can help increase “the happiness index of many residents” (China Youth Net 2015). In the same vein, documents on urban regeneration also emphasise its crucial importance in China’s efforts towards improving the quality of cities in line with new urbanisation goals, as well as “promoting social harmony” (State Council 2013). Such discourses have also been supported by ideas of social equity and justice, with Premier Li Keqiang reportedly emphasising in 2015, “If the shantytown problem is not resolved, how can we talk about social justice?” (China Youth Net 2015).

Declared Urban Regeneration Objectives

Recent urban renewal policy guidance documents have placed increasing importance on the preservation, improvement and re-use of existing built urban fabric. This appears relevant not only in the context of listed cultural heritage areas, but also in the context of shantytown transformation. In recent years, policy guidance documents have emphasised restrictions on the scope of demolition and reconstruction projects, instead calling for the need to develop, at local level, coordinated and comprehensive strategies for “organic”, incremental upgrade (MOHURD 2013, State Council 2013). For projects where relocation is required, the state calls for improved resettlement and compensation policies – these include a prioritisation of on-site relocation, or comprehensive planning for adequate housing and facilities in the need for off-site resettlement (State Council 2013). A more recent State Party policy guidance document on implementing the 2014-2020 New-Type Urbanisation Plan explicitly correlates policy goals linked to environmental sustainability (such as the recent “sponge city” strategy), with urban renewal efforts, calling for more integrated, comprehensive approaches, as the following quote illustrates.

Combine renovation of shanty towns and the organic renewal of old communities with solving the problems of urban flood control safety, rainwater collection and utilisation, and unsanitary water treatment. Strengthen the construction of sponge-type buildings and communities, sponge-type roads and squares, sponge-type parks and green spaces, green storage and drainage and purification utilisation facilities. (State Council 2016).

Earlier declared objectives of urban renewal efforts primarily consisted of improving housing conditions and supporting vulnerable communities with realising their “housing dream” (MOHURD 2013). In 2013, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development was reporting that between 2008-2012, 12.6 million shantytowns were regenerated across China, accounting for 40% of the 31

million urban affordable housing projects concomitantly being carried out.¹⁷ Reportedly, this ensured an improvement in living conditions for many including an expansion of dwelling size; this is also equated with resettlement standards, which had allegedly reached an average of 45 square meters per household (MOHURD 2013). In recent years, policy guidance documents are placing stronger emphasis on addressing the shortcomings of residential neighbourhood facilities, in line with local needs and conditions (State Council 2020). This includes plans to ensure that residents are within 5-10 minutes walking distance from basic public service facilities such as medical clinics, kindergartens, leisure spaces and centres for the elderly. There is also an emphasis on the improvement of water management facilities (such as flood prevention and drainage infrastructure) and demolishing illegally built constructions in order to create more public space within residential units. Recent documents also acknowledge the need to make units inclusive and accessible, responding to the diverse needs of residents with disabilities (MOHURD 2020).

Implementation Mechanisms

Policy guidance documents on urban regeneration highlight the guiding role of the government in the process, while wider participation from the market, residents, and other “social forces” (State Council 2013). This is particularly relevant in terms of funding, with the central government calling for increased government support at all levels (particularly for areas in financial difficulty), mechanisms for obtaining credit support from financial institutions, regulating the use of corporate bond financing, and innovation for incentivising private capital (MOHURD 2013). Notices from the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development also briefly outline proposals for tax incentives and cost sharing mechanisms (MOHURD 2013).

Regulations also prohibit forced relocation and emphasise local government obligations to consult residents, offer them reasonable choices, obtain consensus and “respect wishes of the masses” (State Council 2013). A more recent MOHURD notice additionally introduces goals to standardise and improve government affairs and communication channels at grassroots level (neighbourhood committee level). This is aimed at promoting a more effective dissemination of information with regards to urban regeneration processes (including affordable housing programmes, expropriation and compensation rights, and legislative issues) (State Council 2020). One key element of relevant policy guidance documents that has been considered here is the deployment of the language of *participation* with explicit calls for the need to “fully listen to the opinions of the public and protect the public’s right to know, participate and supervise” (MOHURD 2018). These ideas are also inextricably linked to calls for bottom-up approaches, including more efficient cost sharing

¹⁷ Shantytown Redevelopment Projects (*penghuqu gaizao*) were initiated in 2008 by the Chinese central government, with the reported aim to improve living conditions for low-income residents (Li, van Ham & Kleinhaus 2018).

mechanisms, as well as joint decision-making, implementation and evaluation, for example by “establishing an incentive mechanism to guide and encourage residents to participate in the renewal of residential communities”, by donating money and materials, offering labour and know-how etc.) (MOHURD 2020). Numerous media outlets report on, for example, recently launched pilot programmes such as one entitled “creating a beautiful environment and happy life together”, calling on “joint efforts” and mass mobilisation for transforming older neighbourhoods (Qiu 2020).

As is becoming apparent, discourse on the urgency and direction of urban renewal is linked to ideas of social harmony, happiness and justice. Similar to what has been previously elaborated in this thesis, such articulations draw explicit links between state-led urban renewal ambitions, broader governance goals, and explicit egalitarianism-oriented ideologies on the common good and wellbeing. Nevertheless, the reality on the ground reveals a more complex and heterogeneous picture in terms of the ways in which wellbeing is actually materialised in regeneration efforts. The next sections will turn toward unpacking the complex dynamics that have shaped urban regeneration in the last decades in China, to highlight how discourses on urban renewal have materialised into a series of policy and practice solutions.

4.2.2. Urban Regeneration Approaches Since Market Reforms

As evidenced in the previous section, urban regeneration has been one of the most frequently mobilised strategies in relation to the improvement of Chinese people’s wellbeing, within state-led discourse. A closer scrutiny of approaches and practices in the last decades may, nevertheless, reveal a more complex reality on the ground.

In light of the drastic socio-economic reforms which have been taking place in China within the last decades, rapid urban development and regeneration have been one of the most transformative forces impacting the lives of rural and urban communities alike (Zhang, Le Gates & Zhao 2016). During the country’s transition from a planned economy to a market economy, numerous scholars have argued that economic reform has preceded socio-political reform, with financial gains having been widely prioritised over social and human rights (Fang & Zhang 2003, Sun & Zhang 2016). Under the discourse umbrella of regeneration and improved wellbeing, state-led projects have been criticised for their primary focus on selective physical upgrading and beautification (with property-led redevelopment involving wide-scale demolition, relocation and high-density reconstruction), lacking a more holistic view of the impact of resident’s lives. Various forms of renewal, such as events-led regeneration or heritage-led regeneration, have similarly incurred high social costs as a result of the often politico-economic speculative nature of the projects (Fang

& Zhang 2003, Shin 2010). These issues have raised numerous critical questions, particularly amongst scholars, regarding the ways in which local communities' economic and social rights are being protected in urban regeneration processes, but also whether they have truly benefitted from the outcomes (Ye 2011).

Inner-city urban regeneration in China commenced as the result of a series of complex internal and external factors and has been driven by numerous interacting forces in the last three decades. Particularly during the Maoist period's Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the urban landscape had reached an undesirable condition, with development having stagnated and numerous cities facing urban problems such as the severe deterioration of dwellings and other buildings. Domestically, there was an urgent demand for the improvement of living conditions for urban residents, and large-scale projects in cities such as Shanghai and Beijing took precedence. Urban regeneration in Beijing was referred to as *weigai* (unsafe building reconstruction) and in Shanghai as *penghu qingli* (shanty clearance). Within the wider international framework, marked by crucial moments such as the global financial crisis which called for economic restructuring, as China opened up its land and real estate development market, private and foreign investment entered the country and targeted, amongst others the field of urban regeneration, particularly in regions such as the Yangtze River Delta or the Pearl River Delta, amongst others (Zhang, LeGates & Zhao 2016).

As previously mentioned, in 1988 two important pieces of legislation guided land reform and housing privatisation (*Amendment to the Constitution* and *Land Administrative Law*), separating land use rights from land ownership rights: China dual-track land ownership system where in urban areas land remains state-owned and in rural areas collectively-owned. Importantly, despite this system, land use rights could be separated from ownership rights and therefore commercial, industrial and residential property owners could be entitled to acquiring land use rights (see above) (Fang & Zhang 2003, Ye 2011). The mid-1990s were marked by a decentralisation of fiscal authority, leading to a situation in which local governments had to thereafter assume the responsibility of independently seeking financial resources for urban (re)development. As the state-run model suffered from underfunding, the private sector was invited to intervene, leading to the rise of local entrepreneurial urban governments. This opened the real estate market, added a large commercial dimension to urban regeneration, and led to the real estate boom in the 1990s (Ren 2008, Wu 2018, Ye 2011), highlighting what many have theorised as a shift towards neoliberal approaches and an emphasis on capital accumulation through urban redevelopment (He & Wu 2009).

This phenomenon, which became dominant for urban regeneration projects in China, has been widely characterised and described by scholars and experts in the field as a *regime-like growth coalition* formed by local governments and private developers (national and international) which marginalised the role and rights of local communities (He & Wu 2007, Wu 2015, Yang & Chang 2007, Ye 2011). In simplified terms, within this model, the urban district government is seen as the “active collaborator”, the municipal government is seen as the “authoritative mediator and supervisor”, the developer as the “primary participator” while urban neighbourhoods and communities are the “excluded actor”, pointing towards a highly unbalanced power structure whose actions have been widely characterised by demolition, displacement, relocation, inadequate compensation policies and a lack of participatory practices (Ye 2011, p. 343). In this context, some have argued that urban regeneration, which had once been the obligation of the state, was transferred to the market as a means of growth promotion through state-encouraged property development (Ye 2011). Within this framework, there are a variety of reasons for which local governments actively pursue urban regeneration. Firstly, urban regeneration contributed to general economic development by enabling Chinese cities to maintain their growth. This is also important given central government strategies of political promotion, where local political leaders compete over targets for growth in order to attain career advancement. Secondly, the financial and political inter-governmental dynamics between local and central governments have pushed local governments to seek the collection of large amount of revenue from land leasing, through the pursuit of urban (re)development (Wu 2018, Yang & Chang 2007). Similarly, at intra-city level, district governments are also steered towards obtaining revenue from land acquisition due to financial targets set to them by city governments (Yang & Chang 2007). However, authors also importantly argue that informal, local regimes focused on financial gain are also established due to the state’s responsibility to provide social services and welfare, especially in cities like Shanghai which reportedly has one of the most sophisticated systems of social welfare in China (Pan 2005, Yang & Chang 2007). Others have complemented these analyses by bringing more complex theoretical nuances into the analysis and arguing that although value captures are crucial to the current forms of urban development governance in China, ultimately planning for growth is a strategic form of achieving and consolidating central state power, by extending the state’s position into the market (Wu 2018).

Regeneration and redevelopment projects operating under the mechanisms described above have targeted a series of specific neighbourhoods which historically have been shaped by various social, economic and political forces. Amongst the most prominent are dilapidated state-owned work unit compounds, urban villages, and old/historic residential quarters such as Beijing’s *hutong* (Cheng 2012). As has been previously mentioned, the three are often referred to within

government policies or discourse as *penghuqu*, or shantytowns (Li, Kleinhans & van Ham 2018). Despite contextual variations, a majority of studies which have focused on the different types of targeted regeneration areas link processes and outcomes with urban coalitions and uneven power dynamics (He & Wu 2007, Li & Xin 2011, Zhou 2014).

Tensions between neoliberal urban regeneration practices and social resistance have mostly risen from processes and outcomes of housing demolition, forced relocation and displacement. These have critical implications for understanding dynamics of wellbeing in current and previous Chinese urban regeneration strategies, but also for understanding correlations between regeneration discourse and practice. It is estimated that in Shanghai alone, 1.1 million households were relocated between 1995 and 2012, with 72 million square meters of housing having been demolished. More recent rounds of shantytown renewal in Shanghai saw over ten million households impacted between 2013-2017 (Li, van Ham & Kleinhans 2018). While accomplishing inter-related agendas of economic growth, city modernisation and quality of life improvements for millions, such approaches to regeneration incurred complex dynamics of socio-spatial marginalisation, affecting in particular vulnerable communities.

In this context, one of the most significant and sensitive procedural elements of regeneration approaches characterised by relocation is constituted by compensation and resettlement policies. Beyond institutional and policy shifts with regards to land expropriation and relocation, residents have been and continue to be offered a choice between primarily two types of compensation packages: monetary compensation (based on dwelling size), or in-kind compensation (housing provision based on dwelling size and number of family members (Huang et al. 2020, Li, van Ham & Kleinhans 2018). Despite the potential of monetary compensation to ensure more housing choice for relocated residents, such choice is limited by structural issues of affordability and access: given the rising housing prices and shifting markets, it is often difficult for lower-income residents to attain home ownership, a significant wellbeing determinant in contemporary China (He & Wu 2009, Hu 2013).

Meanwhile, the possibility for in-kind compensation to ensure an improvement in living conditions has long been an issue for academic debate. Some studies highlight increased levels of satisfaction with post-relocation living conditions such as dwelling size and quality (Li & Song 2009, Xia & Zhu 2013). Nevertheless, such studies arguably fail to account for determinants of wellbeing that go beyond materialistic concerns. These include impacts on place attachment and sense of place, a fragmentation or dissolution of community ties and support networks, the degree of freedom to resist involuntary relocation, and exercise of agency in terms of influencing the course of events. What is more, such findings tend to overlook the disproportionately more unfavourable wellbeing

outcomes for migrant residents, who are not entitled the same compensation packages as owners and are therefore pushed into areas with poor living conditions (Huang et al. 2020). Other studies have reached consensus on the substantial social costs of such regeneration approaches, finding that relocation sites often marginalise residents and reduce their socio-economic opportunities due to poor housing standards, limited access to facilities (educational, healthcare etc.) and reduced opportunities for employment (Fang 2006, Li & Yuan 2008). These challenges are exacerbated by varying degrees of uncertainty in the transition period, with residents scheduled for relocation often having to wait for an undetermined amount of time before being rehoused, often having to seek temporary accommodation through the market (Li, van Ham & Kleinhans 2018). This can prove particularly challenging for vulnerable groups such as low-income communities, the elderly, or people with disabilities. Such concerns are further exacerbated by fragmented or inexistent formal or informal support networks, as well as non-transparent communication channels between residents and other regeneration actors.

As a result, these approaches were met with rising social unrest, rights protection movements (*weiquan yundong*) and forms of resistance such as becoming 'nail households' (*dingzihu*). This is a term coined to refer to residents' refusal to move out despite coercive pressure from government and developer bodies (Weinstein & Ren 2009)¹⁸. Such tactics included the use of both more formal mediums (such as internet activism or filing official legal complaints), as well as informal (actions such as registering extra family members and illegally building temporary structures in order to obtain better compensation packages) (Li & Song 2009). In most cases, various strategies are deployed through individualised, fragmented bargaining actions (households acting separately, in self-interest), leading to secretive and often inequitable arrangements between single households and state institutions (Sheng 2020). This renders the improvement of one's living conditions as a result of regeneration/relocation conditional on elements such as bargaining power and household resources (monetary, social network, access to information etc.).

Nevertheless, social unrest and rising resistance to coercive and inequitable urban regeneration processes meant that in 2003, the Central Government issued an urgent notice instructing local governments to monitor and maintain social stability during urban redevelopment projects. A notice launched one year later, in 2004, prohibited coercive demolition processes and introduced an endorsement of standardised legal procedures instead of arbitrary mediation for solving demolition and relocation disputes. Last but not least, in 2007 the Central Government passed the milestone *Property Rights Law*, which had crucial implications for protecting housing rights and supporting communities in negotiation processes (Weinstein & Ren 2009). Such policies generated

¹⁸ A metaphor linked to the difficulty of removing a nail once it has been hammered into a surface.

a set of more complex and nuanced approaches to regeneration, despite adding new layers of challenges and shortcomings.

Recently, scholars have argued that the power structure of the urban regime which had been operating for the last two decades has become much more complex in nature, being best described as “informal and project-based coalition of international and domestic business, governmental, professional and cultural elites, under constant challenges from community residents” (Ren 2008, p. 27). Within this model, it is argued that although official channels for community participation in decision-making processes are still weak, their formal and informal resistance, strengthened by growing forms of grassroots organisation, are increasingly shaping the pace and direction of urban development (Logan 2018, Ren 2008, Verdini 2015). Indeed, this proposal is illustrated by cases such as the regeneration of Tianzifang Area in Shanghai (well-documented) or the Drum Tower Muslim District in Xi’an, where rising civic sphere voices and action from local communities, strengthened by a socio-cultural and economic connection with the built environment (with both sites being rich in tangible and intangible heritage), managed to better protect the interests of local residents and to obtain a process of revitalisation alternative to the previous large-scale demolition and reconstruction models (Sun & Zhang 2016, Verdini 2015, Yung, Chan & Xu 2014, Zhai & Ng 2013).

It is important at this stage to break down the institutional set-up that plays a role in decision-making during urban renewal projects, with certain degrees of variation. This is critical for understanding the structural dynamics which influence processes and products of urban regeneration, and therefore wellbeing. Firstly, references to state or government encompass a multitude of actors whose roles differ depending on administrative level. Three administrative levels are the most prominent and active stakeholders in regeneration processes:

1. Municipal governments, which generally guide and oversee the work of the district government, approve relevant plans, and contribute to the interpretation of central government policy guidance and development objectives;
2. District governments, which arguably hold the most significant decision-making power and oversee the entire administrative process;
3. Local government bodies such as sub-district administrative bureaus or neighbourhood committees, who are primarily responsible for supporting plans on the ground through advocacy, communication, resident mobilisation etc.

Within the course of urban renewal projects, government bodies are often supported by a plethora of consulting parties, either independent or state-owned. These include expert groups

such as academics, planning and design firms, or research and consulting services that support government work, as well as multiple other agencies such as real estate and construction firms. Despite being involved in the implementation phases of renewal projects, according to current legislation in China, private developers are not formally involved during planning and decision-making processes (Zhuang et al. 2017, Zhuang et al. 2019). As will become more evident at a later stage in this thesis, these institutional settings are currently witnessing the introduction of new actors, a shift which is bound to transform urban regeneration dynamics in practice.

Finally, in order to summarise what has been discussed until now, and to illustrate regeneration-related urban transformations in the last decades, the following table presents a summary of some of the most significant socio-political and economic events and policies which have shaped urban regeneration mechanisms in China in the last three decades.

NOTABLE POLICY/ EVENT	DOMINANT ACTORS	IMPACTS / AIMS
1966 – 1976: Cultural Revolution	-	- Housing shortage - Urban development stagnation - Urban decay
Early 1980s: Economic reform	State-work units Local governments	- Dilapidated housing renovation - Local government funded housing renewal - Subsidised housing purchase by state-work units
1988: Land reform and housing privatisation laws 1989: 'City Planning Act of China' (beginning of legalised planning system) 1991: First regulation on urban housing demolition, requiring in-kind compensation 1997: Asian financial crisis 2001: Revision of urban housing demolition and relocation policy, encouraging monetary compensation	Property developers Entrepreneurial local governments	- Influx of Foreign Direct Investment - Commodity housing and suburban new towns redevelopment (property-led redevelopment) - Residential displacement from inner-city - Shanty-town clearance - Suburbanisation - Land revenue generation
Early 2000s: social unrest	Local resident groups	- Rights-protection movements (protests, petitions, court actions, resistance to relocation)
2004: Revised constitution regarding property rights 2005: 'Building a Harmonious Society' ideology introduced 2007: Property Rights Law	Central government	- Greater protection of private property, conferring full legal rights to property owners - 'Social stability' adopted as key metric to evaluate local governments
2008: Beijing Olympic Games 2010: Shanghai World Expo	Property developers Entrepreneurial local	- New round of urban redevelopment/regeneration, also

2010: Guangzhou Asian Games	governments	targeting shantytowns and dilapidated urban neighbourhoods - Place branding, inter-city competition, making of global cities - Economic restructuring - Land revenue generation - Urban spatial order - Continued displacement, particularly of urban migrant renters
2011: Revised policy on urban redevelopment, including expropriation and compensation of houses on state-owned land	Central government	- Plans for urban redevelopment required to have majority resident agreement and forceful expropriation forbidden by law - Lawsuits permitted for violations - Monetary compensation based on market price or in-kind compensation (household choice)
2013: Shantytown reconstruction agenda	Central government Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development (MOHURD) Local governments	- Renewed central government and MOHURD call & guidelines for the redevelopment of dilapidated residential areas in view of improving citizens' livelihoods
2014: New-Type Urbanisation Plan 2014-2020	Central government MOHURD Local governments	- People-centred urbanisation, including more careful consideration of urban migrants - Speeding of urban renewal projects, including shantytown transformation and old residential neighbourhood revitalisation
2017: Urban Design Management Measures	Central government MOHURD Local governments	- Quality design and place-making: improvement of public space, people-oriented design, context-sensitive interventions (including heritage conservation) - Forms of participation
2020: Guidelines for old residential neighbourhood regeneration	Central government MOHURD Local governments (municipal, district, street level) Local resident groups	- Regeneration of "old urban communities" (residential neighbourhoods) declared major livelihood project - 39,000 urban communities to be renovated by end of 2020 - Grassroots governance - Cost sharing mechanism

*Table 7. Timeline of relevant policy and events impacting urban regeneration at national level
(based on Abramson 2006, He & Wu 2009, Shin 2010, State Council 2011,
Wang & Aoki 2018, Wu 2015)*

The following section will turn towards providing a more in-depth scrutiny of shifting urban regeneration practice in China, through an analysis of three case studies.

4.3. CASE STUDY REVIEW: URBAN REGENERATION IN SHANGHAI, BEIJING AND GUANGZHOU

4.3.1. Context Overview

Channelled initially from Hong Kong and Macao, influx of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) irreversibly shaped regional economic profiles and urbanisation in China. Following market reforms, FDI, domestic capital and expertise concentrated in the more developed parts of China such as the Yangtze River Delta, the Beijing-Tianjin Corridor, and the Pearl River Delta. Their main city regions – Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou respectively – became more economically aligned with global metropolises such as New York or London, than with cities in China's less developed regions (Zhang, LeGates & Zhao 2016). Building on already existing plans to regenerate dilapidated housing stocks, cities such as Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou capitalised on FDI and embraced various strategies for urban redevelopment.

As part of Shanghai's 1980s plan to become a multifunctional economic centre in China, the city government formulated a policy for redevelopment of the old city centre, entitled *Shanghai 365 Urban Renewal Program*. This had as a particular target the complete removal of 365 hectares of dilapidated housing stock such as pre-1949 lane houses or *danwei* units, in the name of shantytown clearance. From the beginning of the reform to the early 1990s, the city government transferred authority to each district government, which assumed the right to examine and approve detailed plans and to negotiate the transfer of land use rights for urban development to private investment companies seeking to obtain a lease (Zhao, Lu & Woltjer 2009). Generally, negotiations included the land acquisition fee, including both compensation for residents' relocation and accompanying infrastructure expenses (Yang & Chang 2007).

Despite a soft introduction of certain market mechanisms, programs at the time progressed slowly, as opposed to the policies that were to come in the 2000s. The Shanghai Municipality also partially exempted land-leasing charges for private developers, and subsidised large-scale redevelopment schemes, with local-level institutions continuously emerging to optimise market operations (He & Wu 2009). In Shanghai, for instance, policies shifted "from on-site relocation to off-site relocation, from in-kind compensation to monetary compensation, and from a household size-based compensation method to a floor area-based compensation method" (Wu 2016, p. 636)., attracting large opposition from resident groups. Overall, the process of urban redevelopment was facilitated by a commodification of housing and property rights redistribution, and "the redevelopment process favoured property developers and neglected the interest of

affected residents” (Wu 2016, p. 636-7). The working mechanisms of the regime-like growth coalitions resulting in large-scale demolition and relocation are often exemplified with one of the most well-documented urban redevelopment cases in China, the Taipingqiao project. Located in the central Luwan District, one of the most densely populated districts of Shanghai with a high concentration of historic *shikumen* housing, 52 hectares of Taipingqiao area were leased to Hong Kong Developer Shui On Group for redevelopment into a high end residential and commercial district. The Master Plan was completed in 1996 and allowed for a 10-15 year redevelopment process (World Bank 2015). Thousands of households were displaced with the support of professional companies affiliated with Luwan District government, and residents were compensated following case-by-case negotiation, albeit as part of a coercive process with little choice for displaces (He & Wu 2005, He & Wu 2007, Yang & Chang 2006). The Taipingqiao redevelopment attracted attention due to its flagship project ambitions of, for the first time, preserving a *lilong* heritage area. At the heart of re-development project, two blocks of *shikumen* were renovated and adaptively reused as a luxury retail and entertainment zone emblematically named Xintiandi (translated as New Heaven and Earth, or New World). This branding and place-making strategy aimed at shaping the imaginaries of a rising middle class and attracting their consumer power, whilst veiling a multifaceted process of rising inequality and spatial differentiation.

Following a comparable path to that of Shanghai’s, Beijing launched an initial redevelopment program in 1990s, entitled the *Old and Dilapidated Housing Redevelopment Program* (ODHR). The primary declared objectives of the programme were the renewal of old, deteriorating inner-city neighbourhoods, and the provision of more adequate housing for residents. In initial phases, implementation consisted of large-scale demolition of particularly historic housing stock (Beijing *hutong*) and the replacement with *xiaoqu* residential neighbourhoods (enclosed superblocks characteristic of the *danwei* units). By 1998, over 4 million square meters of traditional courtyard housing had been demolished, drawing increasing criticism from heritage professionals who were decrying the fast-paced loss of urban heritage fabric (Shin 2010). As market mechanisms started to take more contoured shape in Beijing, the ODHR gradually morphed into speculative forms of commercial property development, leading to highly scrutinised processes of large-scale demolition and relocation. As housing prices started to soar in the 1990s, relocated households were no longer able to afford returning to inner-city areas. Studies examining housing offered to relocated residents have highlighted that although, in relative terms, the new apartments offered modernised, improved living conditions, newly-built resettlement areas often lacked adequate infrastructure and services (Fang & Chang 2003). This was partially due to the necessity of developing plans for rapid construction, even though relocated residents often had to wait as long

as five years in temporary accommodation waiting for the new units to be completed. Vulnerable groups, including the elderly and laid-off workers, were particularly impacted due to being uprooted from formal and informal support networks which had been developed after decades of living in inner-city. What is more, operating under a new housing compensation policy, relocated residents were not granted ownership of new units, leaving them at risk of potential rent increases from the landlord (often the ODHR developers themselves). In this sense, what had originally been welcomed by Beijing citizens as a modality of living standard improvement eventually resulted in mass protests and processes of court litigation from the part of residents.

Later, new rounds of urban redevelopment were stirred by the organisation of mega-events such as the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games or the 2010 Shanghai World Expo, and driven by intense city competition, branding and the making of 'global cities' — goals arguably more ambitious than the extraction of land revenue of housing improvement (Wu 2016). Meanwhile, inspired by the success of Xintiandi, similar strategies blending historic, cultural simulacra with emerging forms of globalisation, commercialisation and consumption, emerged in projects such as Beijing's SOHO commercial street, Hangzhou's Xihutiandi, or Foshan's Donghuali (Cheng 2012, He & Wu 2005, Ren 2008). Although projects such as these started to point towards a shift from *chai* (demolition) to *bao* (preservation) - led by a new, multi-faceted national agenda of heritage preservation – they have often led to processes of over-commercialisation with questionable effects on the livelihood of affected communities and similar processes of resident displacement in the name of conservation.

Concomitantly, Guangdong province (Guangzhou) was experiencing slightly different redevelopment mechanisms, as a result of its status as a pilot zone for new policies (Li & Liu 2018). During market reform, a variety of existing policies (including those protecting agricultural land) and local conditions (lack of developable land) had slowed down urban sprawls and land acquisition processes in the 1990s, therefore slowing the pace of economic growth expected by the local government. Additionally, given the elevated costs of redevelopment, as well as ambiguous property rights, cities such as Guangzhou were unable to tackle the redevelopment of its numerous urban villages (Wu 2018). In order to overcome these challenges, the province began negotiating with the central government to break through institutional barriers and launch institutional reforms, and in 2009 it was designated as a pilot zone for 'new style renewal' by the central government (Tian 2018), being granted a unique policy privilege encouraging self-regeneration by land owners (Zhou 2014). This paved the way for the Three Old Renewals (*sanjiu gaizao*) strategy for Guangzhou (Li & Liu 2018), an institutional innovation aimed at introducing

new land governance and urban regeneration mechanisms. The policy targeted three types of deteriorating urban fabric:

- a) old neighbourhoods which had been identified for re-development within city planning due to their dilapidated state and chaotic distribution throughout cities;
- b) old factories which had been identified for relocation out of the inner city district either because their production activities do not comply with safety and environmental protection regulations, or they no longer fit the development agenda set by the master plan of the city;
- c) urban villages that had been identified for complete regeneration or smaller scale incremental upgrade. Complete regeneration applies to dilapidated areas which are difficult to redevelop in terms of infrastructure and housing, whereas upgrade involves partial refurbishment and restoration which aims at preserving as much of the original fabric (both physical and social) as possible (Li & Liu 2018).

The core feature of the Three Old Renewals policy is constituted by a shared-interests mechanism across different stakeholders, namely local authorities, the market and communities, a mechanism which would provide a solutions for issues related to uneven resources in various sectors. As part of the policy, revenue from land transactions is shared across stakeholders rather than monopolised by local authorities, albeit operating with the approval of *sanjiu gaizao* offices (Wu 2018). The mechanism is operational and innovative on a variety of levels: first, it encourages coordination between villages, factories and developers who have more incentive to redevelop; second, local communities are granted more decision-making power with regards to setting a redevelopment agenda, choosing the mode of redevelopment and choosing a preferred developer while capitalising on existing social structures such as village clans and rural collectives (Wu 2018); third, it puts an emphasis on social production rather than social control (“making things happen is more important than who makes things happen”, Li & Liu 2018, p. 1409); fourth, it guides new directions for regeneration in order to achieve longer-term, more strategic visions of socio-economic development and built environment improvement, beyond just land revenue maximisation.

In order to illustrate and examine more recent processes and mechanisms of urban regeneration, the following section will turn to presenting and discussing three case studies located in Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou. These are represented by two historic inner-city neighbourhoods, Chunyangli in Shanghai and Nanluoguxiang in Beijing, and an urban village, Liede in Guangzhou. This section will utilise the previously developed conceptual framework on wellbeing and socio-spatial transformation (*Wellbeing Nexus*) in order to discuss directions for urban regeneration arguably different from the predominant models which have been highlighted so far.

4.3.2. Case Studies Overview

Chunyangli, Shanghai

Chunyangli is a typical 1930s *lilong* area located in Shanghai's Hongkou District. Despite being morphologically well preserved and centrally located, the lack of basic facilities, as well as processes of housing expropriation and redistribution following 1949, contributed to a gradual deterioration of living conditions. Based on Shanghai Municipal Government reports, the neighbourhood is comprised of 23 *shikumen* townhouses and 1181 households: individual units are shared by two to eight households, with converted living area reaching as little as 2.2 square meters per person (Shanghai Municipal Government 2019). The neighbourhood has mixed demographics with almost 60% of previous owners having rented out their units. The neighbourhood was listed as a protected heritage area by the municipal government in 2016, operating in line with a series of recent municipal and district policy reforms targeting heritage conservation in Shanghai. Since 2015, the Shanghai Municipal Government has been launching and revising a series of policy measures stipulating the conservation of historic areas in urban renewal projects and offering technical guidance on conservation and upgrade of lane houses (Shanghai Municipal Government 2017, Shi et al. 2019). Under municipal guidance, Hongkou District launched in 2019 an *Action Plan on Upgrading Old District Renewal and Urban Organic Renewal* (2019-2021) outlining targets for continuing living condition upgrade (including the upgrade of public space, the provision of improved sanitary facilities, and the expansion of living space), "organic renewal", and heritage conservation under a programme entitled "Beautiful Homes" (Shanghai Hongkou District 2019). The renewal of Chunyangli had already been launched as a pilot project since 2017 in order to try out planning and design strategies aimed at modernising living facilities while preserving the socio-spatial morphology of historic areas. Renouncing more complex governance mechanisms, the project was to be conducted with full subsidy and under guidance of the local government, albeit with full community consultation and consent. Two phases of the project had already been completed consisting of structural improvements and interior design alterations in order to valorise the use of limited space and incorporate facilities such as kitchens and bathrooms, and temporarily relocated residents have already moved back in (Shanghai Municipal Government 2019). Despite ambiguous property right issues in Shanghai *lilong* areas, one of the core, reported strategies of the Chunyangli regeneration project was to support interested residents, through government-led leasing companies, to rent out their newly refurbished apartments. This was envisaged to start a soft process of gentrification and demographic renewal, supplying housing for white-collar workers (Hongkou District is an emerging as a business and creative industry hub) and ensuring the future maintenance of the neighbourhood (Shanghai Municipal Government 2019).



Figure 4. Location of Chunyangli in Shanghai (Source: Google Earth)

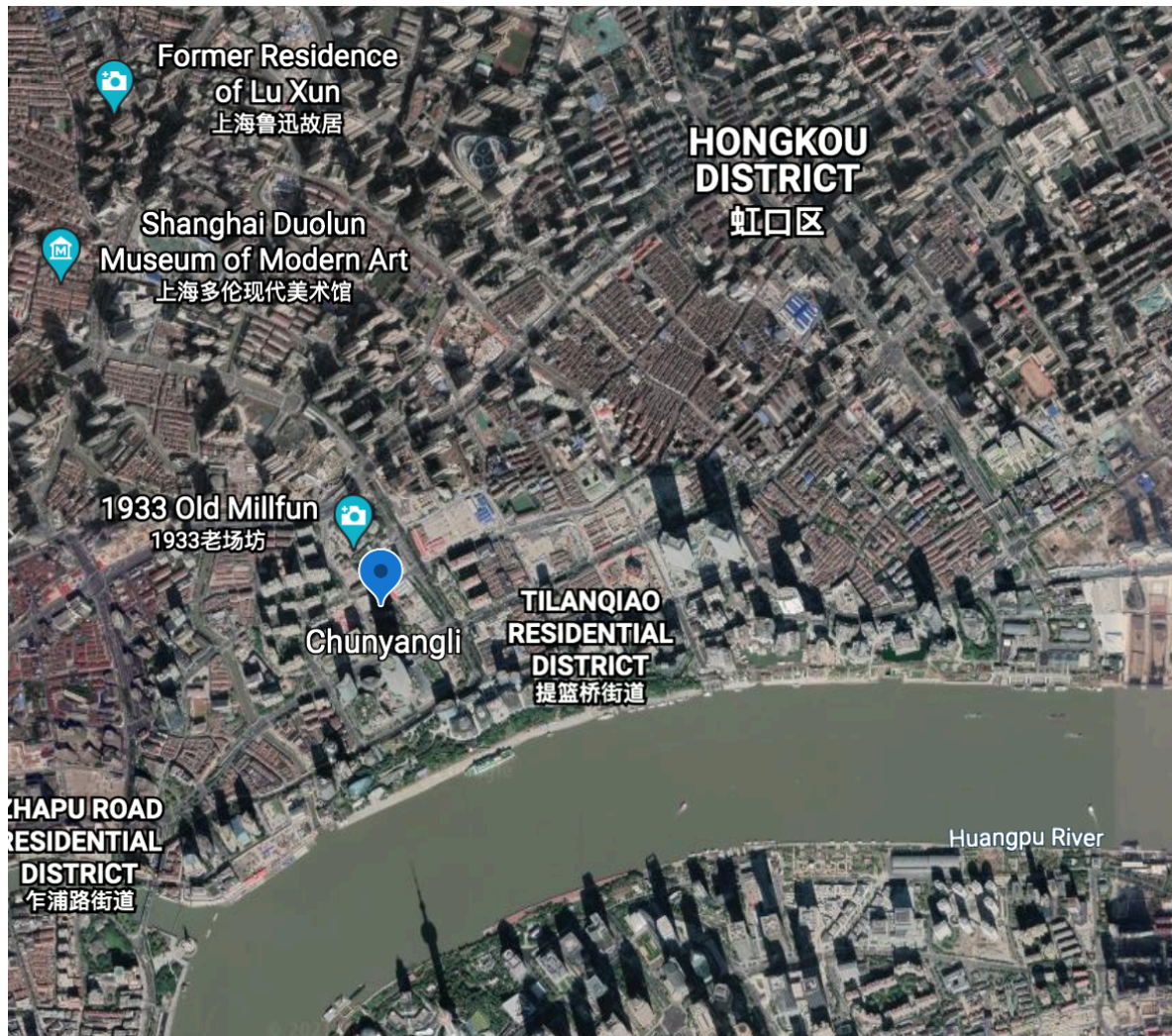


Figure 5. Location of Chunyangli in Hongkou District, Shanghai (Source: Google Earth)

Nanluoguxiang, Beijing

Nanluoguxiang is a historic *hutong* area which experienced a process of incremental upgrade as opposed to the large-scale demolition that characterised Beijing urban regeneration after the 1980s market reforms. As one of the areas with the highest concentration of courtyard housing in Beijing, it also underwent expropriation and was transformed into housing rental units after 1949 (Shin 2010). In 2002, it was designated as a conservation area following Municipal Government calls of developing detailed conservation plans for 25 areas in Beijing. A conservation plan for Nanluoguxiang therefore followed, aimed at addressing the neighbourhoods' poor living conditions by reducing its density from 22,000 residents to about 14,000, suggesting that 8000 long-term residents would be eventually displaced (Shin 2010). The plan also aimed to dismantle and 'formalise' some of the informal living space which residents had constructed to accommodate various housing needs. Given the slow pace of government investment following the finalisation of the conservation plan, entrepreneurial residents identified the emerging commercial potential of the area and started opening relatively small-scale entertainment business (such as cafes or shops) or took the opportunity to sub-let their properties. By early 2009, Nanluoguxiang had been morphed into a culture-centred consumption space targeting a rising middle class as well as national and overseas tourism, undergoing a gradual process of gentrification as rents started to rise. Within this context, the street office which the neighbourhood belonged to (Jiaodaokou) took a uniquely proactive stance of attempting to develop, in partnership with planners, a strategy targeting Nanluoguxiang comprised of two dimensions: a plan in support of developing a 'harmonious' community in Jiaodaokou, and another guiding development in Nanluoguxiang (Hu, de Roo & Lu 2013). Concomitantly, district government intervention strengthened, and a new policy document was developed aiming to create a Nanluoguxiang *Culture and Leisure Street*, guiding the facilitation of investment and business in the area, as well as wide-spread face-lifting and beautification (Shin 2010). Government-led efforts were intensified around the Beijing-wide preparations for the 2008 Olympic Games. Nevertheless, the street office continued to maintain primary responsibility for coordinating amongst different actors and guiding the direction of renewal, aiming to be a platform for communication and facilitating a process of government-led participation (Hu, de Roo & Lu 2013).

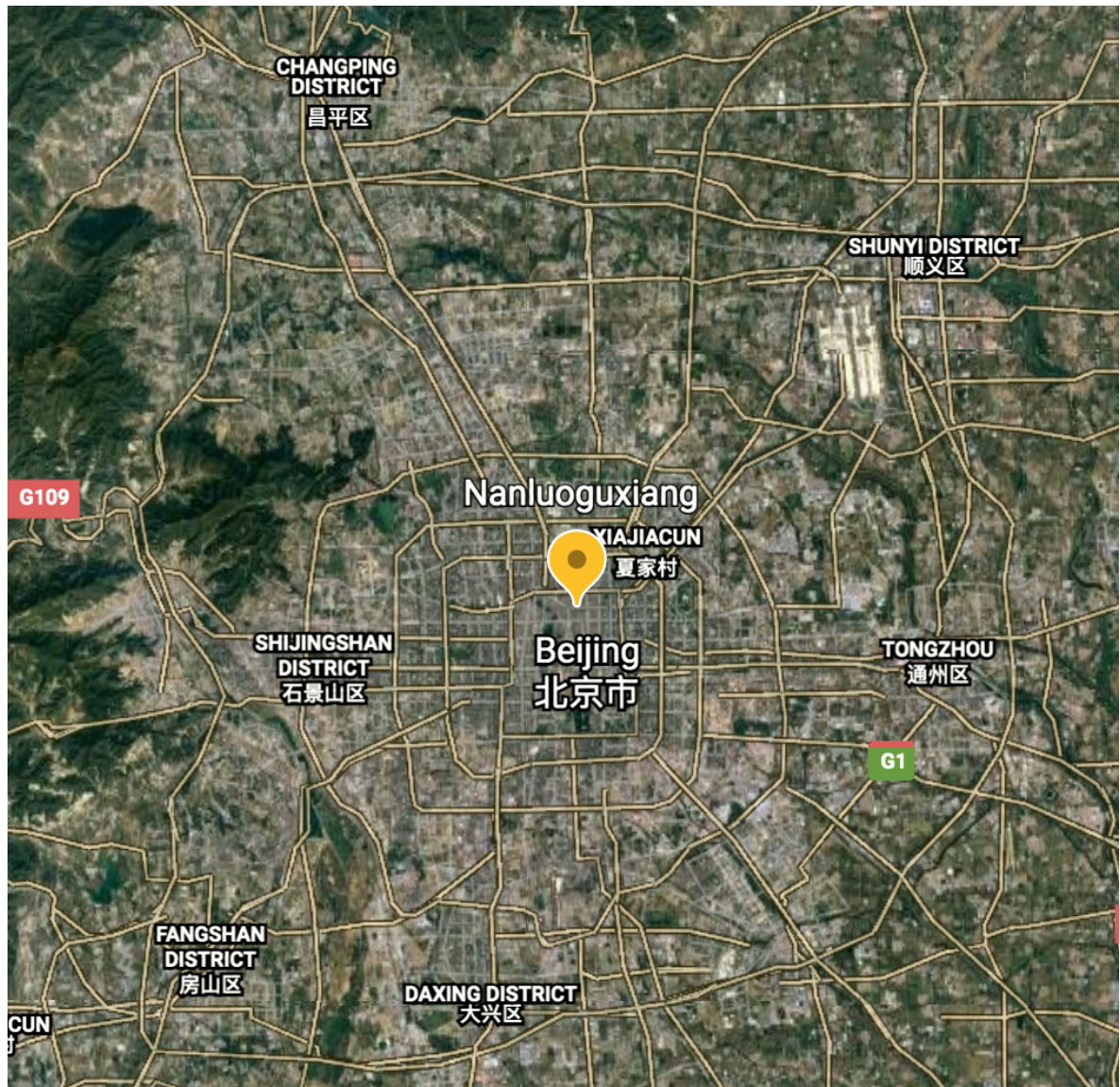


Figure 6. Location of Nanluoguxiang in Beijing (Source: Google Earth)

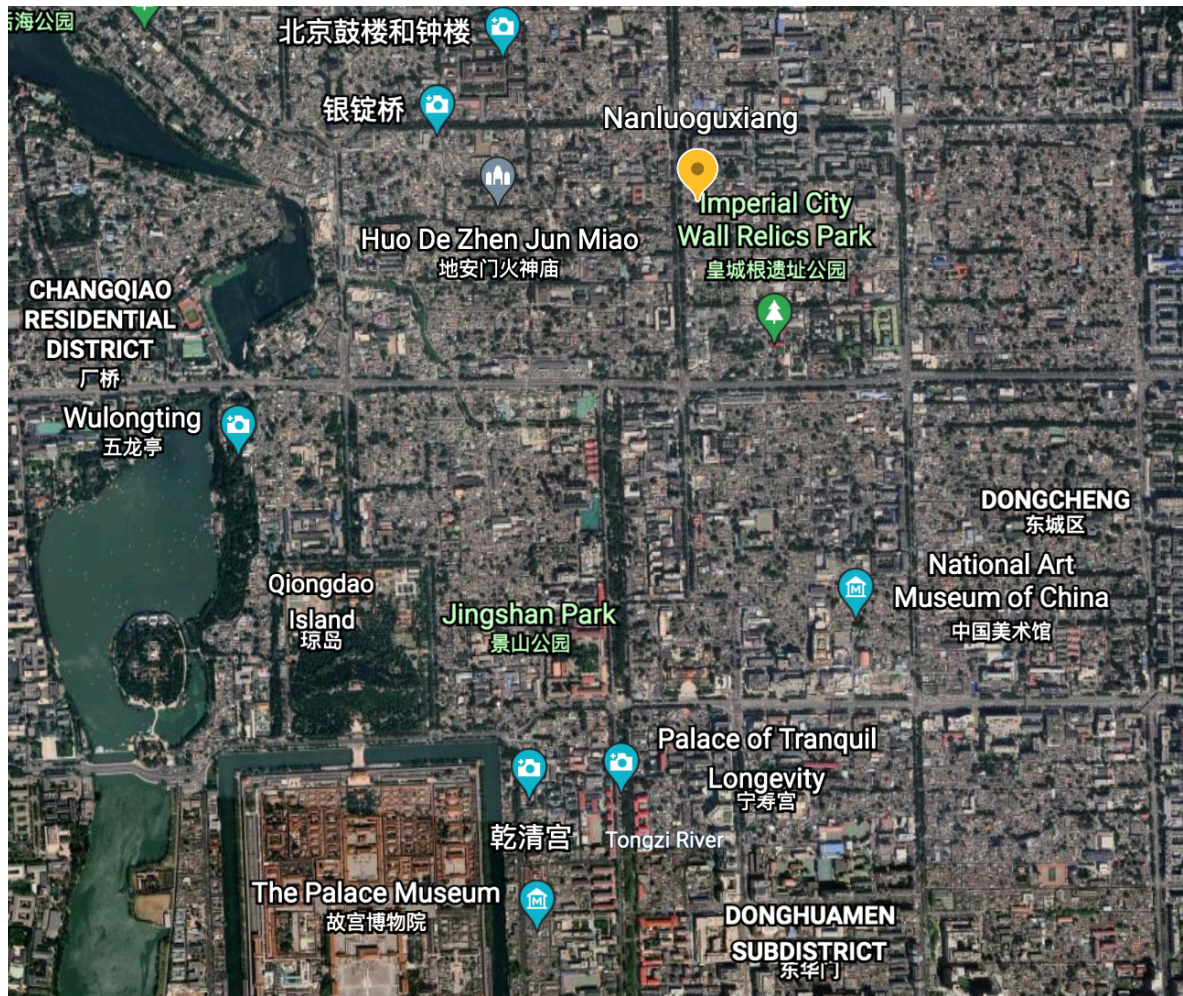


Figure 7. Location of Nanluoguxiang in Dongcheng District, Beijing (Source: Google Earth)

Liede Village, Guangzhou

Liede is an urban village located in Guangzhou and is amongst the better documented cases of urban renewal in the region due to having been amongst the first to benefit from Three Old Renewals policy innovations in Guangdong. Liede is located in Guangzhou's Central Business District, which had been planned as a development zone albeit containing a series of villages where land was collectively owned (Zhou 2014). It presented some of the more typical characteristics of Chinese urban villages, including informal constructions, declining living conditions, high density, relatively high number of unemployment (or employment in informal sectors), and a large degree of land-lordship operating amongst villagers renting dwelling to migrants (Li et al. 2014). Despite being part of 138 urban villages which had been scheduled by the municipality for regeneration across ten years since the 1990s, costly redevelopment, land ownership rights and existing governance mechanisms did not yield any fruitful negotiation outcomes and redevelopment stagnated (Wu 2018). However, in 2007 as part of preparations for the 2010 Asian Games, Liede was designated for urgent redevelopment due to its close proximity to the event's inauguration site, and the village collective organisation took advantage of rising land value and declined the government's compensation offer. Instead, the village collective put forward an application for self-regeneration under the new Guangzhou regeneration policy schemes, which was rapidly approved due to government's urgency to accomplish the project before the Asian Games (Zhou 2014). The plan identified three different regeneration sites that the village was to be divided into. The first plot was converted from collectively owned land to government-owned, and the revenue resulting from selling the land for commercial use was reinvested in village development (instead of becoming government fiscal income, as had been the case previously). The second site was directly leased to the private sector for the development and of a high-end complex containing commercial facilities (a mall, a luxury hotel and office buildings) with the land remaining property of the village collective and villagers obtaining an annual share of the complex's operation. The third site was designated for the development of residential areas with improved living conditions for local villagers, as well as facilities such as schools and markets (Li et al. 2014, Zhou 2014). Thus, the village collective-led tri-partite collaboration between the government, market forces and the village itself generated an alternative governance approach which not only succeeded in carrying out Liede's intended regeneration but also secured more profitable outcomes for its villager residents.

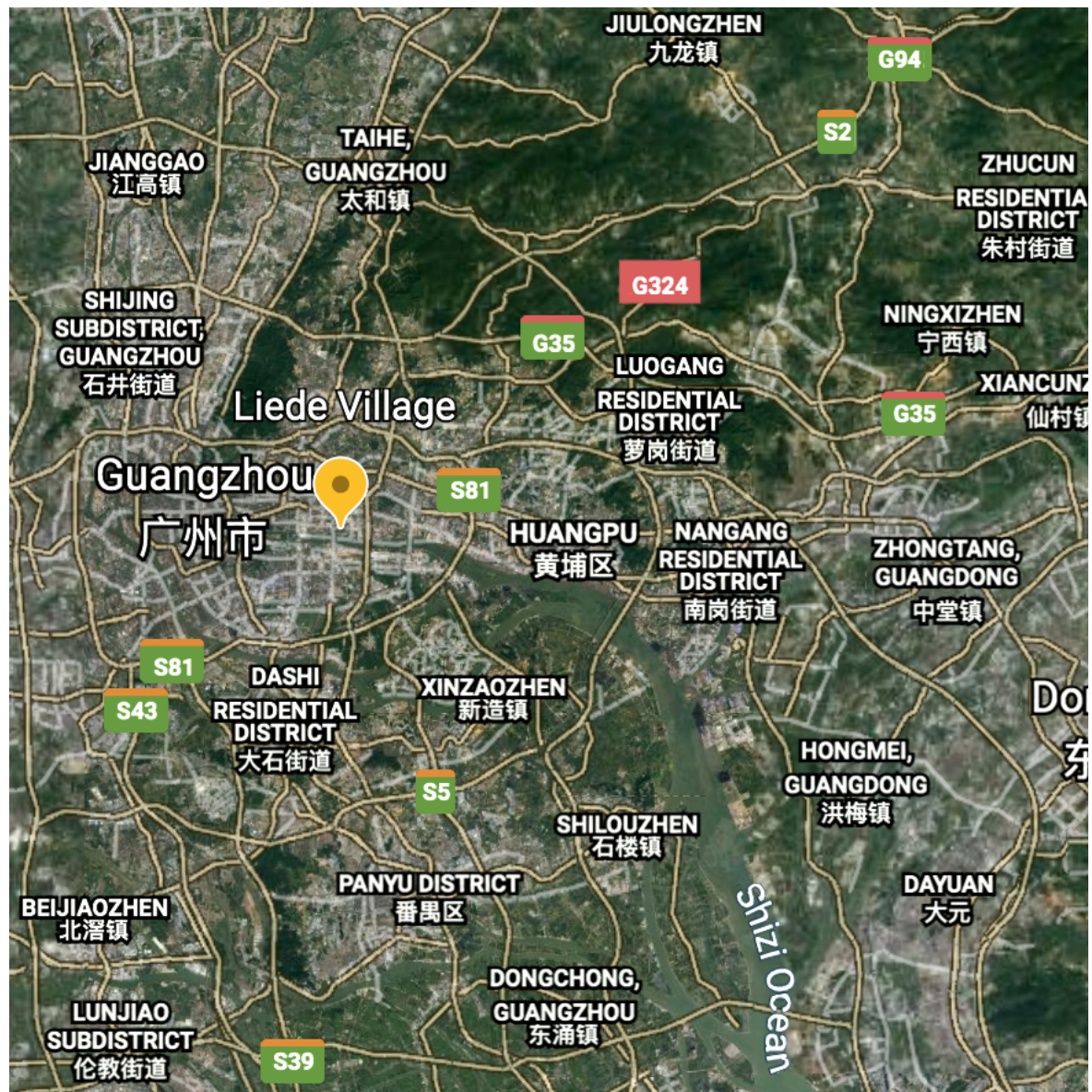


Figure 8. Location of Liede Village in Guangzhou (Source: Google Earth)



Figure 9. Location of Liede Village in Tianhe District, Guangzhou (Source: Google Earth)

4.3.3. Wellbeing and Urban Regeneration in Chunyangli, Nanluoguxiang and Liede

Despite pertaining to three different regions, contextual and circumstantial background, and policy frameworks, the cases of Chunyangli, Nanluoguxiang and Liede Village highlight comparable attempts to navigate around existing institutional frameworks and to find alternative solutions for urban regeneration.

Arguably, an examination of state-led urban regeneration strategies from the 1990s until recently, targeting historic *lilong* residential stock in Shanghai, reveals two predominant approaches. One has been large-scale demolition under the 365 *Urban Renewal Program*, whilst the other represented selective preservation and adaptive re-use within large-scale commercial redevelopment programmes, led by public-private growth coalitions (He & Wu 2015). The implementation, working mechanisms and guiding policies of projects such as Chunyangli highlight a current, gradual transition towards a third phase, characterised by *in situ*, incremental upgrade and design innovation aimed at preserving not only the built environment but also the social fabric of historic areas. It also highlights incipient trials at navigating around and addressing complex ownership issues in *lilong* areas in order to provide residents with more opportunities and choice

for mobility constituting a middle way between demolition and relocation and a coercive process of conservation which would force residents to stay in historic areas despite shifting preferences or life aspirations. Projects such as Nanluoguxiang also represent efforts to find alternative routes for regeneration as opposed to similar clearance and commercial redevelopment models dominating in Beijing through programmes such as the *Old and Dilapidated Housing Redevelopment Program* (ODHR) (Shin 2010). These programmes materialised through context-specific institutional shifts at grassroots level, facilitated by a pro-active and leading street level government which was able to act as a mediator between the state, the market and local communities. Meanwhile, the Liede Village case study highlights a regeneration model pertaining to an experimental policy trial, catalysed and enabled by exogenous circumstances (the 2010 Asian Games event). Instead of adopting conventional top-down approaches forcing an agreement with the village collective, marginalising landless farmers (Lin, Hao & Geertman 2015) or, equally, renouncing plans for regeneration altogether, the functional approach by the municipal government encouraged the collective to come up with a market solution with developers directly, while guiding the process from the background—a pragmatic approach supporting social production over social control.

The plurality of these cases, as well as their contextual specificities and divergences from forms of urban regeneration which have been predominating in Chinese cities, brings us back to questions of the ways in which wellbeing is understood, negotiated and achieved in regeneration projects in China. The *Wellbeing Nexus* conceptualisation developed in Chapter two can help to unpack and frame this discussion by analysing the plural nature of wellbeing in urban regeneration and breaking it down into processes and outcomes of socio-spatial transformation, with a specific focus on a series of concepts pertaining to the understanding of wellbeing. Different albeit converging elements of the framework can help highlight a variety of different important elements coming into play in the cases of Chunyangli, Nanluoguxiang and Liede, contributing to a multifaceted, dynamic understanding of wellbeing in urban regeneration in China. In all three cases, wellbeing is achieved both through processes of mediation, negotiation, guidance, consensus building and choice, and through socio-physical outcomes including living condition improvements, heritage conservation and economic benefits. An analysis of these urban regeneration outcomes and processes facilitated by structural and institutional arrangements unique to each project discussed here, can assist with conceptualising wellbeing in each of the three case studies (Table 8).

CASE STUDY	SUMMARY OF REGENERATION MECHANISMS	WELLBEING NEXUS	
		URBAN REGENERATION OUTCOMES	URBAN REGENERATION PROCESSES
CHUNYANGLI, SHANGHAI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listed as heritage protected area in 2016 Renewal project launched in 2017 Led and subsidised by Hongkou district government, under the supervision of municipal government Modernisation of living facilities and conservation of socio-spatial morphology Resident consultation: support with temporary relocation or leasing renovated properties. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Design innovation: improvement of living conditions (living space, sanitation facilities, public space), while conserving a series of historic elements such as morphology and house facades. Reduced scale: small-scale, place-based approach Continuity of use: original use as residential space Social mix: soft gentrification in the long term (encouragement of white collar workers to move in), alongside government support for original residents who wish to remain – avoidance of relocation. No demolition: incremental, in-situ upgrade 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Government-led negotiation: government-led (top-down) process characterised by case-by-case consultation and negotiation, while ensuring social stability and control. Choice and consultation: community consultation and transparency: provision of choice for mobility, taking into consideration the shifting residential preferences and needs of different social groups.
NANLUOGUXIANG, BEIJING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listed as heritage protected area in 2002, but slow pace of government investment Entrepreneurial residents setting up businesses – development of culture consumption space Street office taking proactive steps towards setting up development plan Government 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Beautification: conservation of heritage streetscape and beautification Commodification: transformation from primarily residential use into cultural consumption space for tourism (shops, restaurants etc.) Gentrification: social morphology modification: reduction of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Grassroots agency, entrepreneurship: mobilisation of grassroots agency and local resident entrepreneurial capabilities, under the careful guidance of local authorities Mediating local government: pro-active street-level government

	intervention (investment and coordination) strengthened as a result.	residential density • No Demolition: Avoidance of government-imposed community relocation or demolition.	acting as mediator between local community and district/municipal government • Negotiation and social stability: process of communication and negotiation aligned with plans for maintenance of 'social harmony'.
LIEDE VILLAGE, GUANGZHOU	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One of 138 urban villages scheduled for redevelopment since 1990s– stagnation due to high costs and land ownership rights • Designated for urgent redevelopment in 2007 due to proximity to 2010 Asian Games site • Village collective used momentum and put forward plan identifying three different redevelopment sites. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living conditions: Improvement of living conditions for village residents due to development of new residential site • Reinvested revenue: land conversion revenue reinvested in village development and regeneration • Economic opportunities: revenue obtained from commercial space development (lease to the private sector) redistributed amongst villagers + job creation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stakeholder capabilities: Pragmatic municipal government capitalising on capabilities of rural collectives. • Negotiation, consensus: pro-active and capable village collective guiding process of negotiation, and consensus-building in order to ensure more equitable distribution of urban regeneration benefits amongst village residents.

Table 8. Summary of case study wellbeing processes and outcomes (author).

In the case of Chunyangli, 'innovation for wellbeing' is materialised more explicitly in the form of testing out alternative socio-spatial outcomes for the regeneration of inhabited heritage areas. These consisted of experimenting with design and conservation techniques that would modernise historic building interiors while conserving their facade and the existing urban morphology. This type of smaller-scale, arguably more place-based approach aims to test out declaredly more human-centred practices that are fundamentally different from previous landmark projects characterised by heritage commodification, large-scale demolition and commercial property redevelopment (He & Wu 2005, He & Wu 2007). The primary aim in this case is constituted by top-down government intervention for improving the living conditions of local residents, while importantly avoiding large-scale relocation, displacement and the complete destruction of the

historic fabric through *tabula rasa* modernisation (Zhong & Chen 2017). It is an attempt to mediate the conflict between resident needs for better living conditions, and heritage conservation, with scholars both in China and abroad noting that for local communities material needs for better housing can often trump emotional and spiritual ones linked to place attachment and sense of place (Ercan 2011, Wang & Aoki 2019). What is more, within this context, such compromises between livelihood enhancement and partial heritage conservation also arguably challenge concepts of urban heritage authenticity found within the more traditional conservation doctrine (Gonzalez Martinez 2017) by putting more emphasis on intangible elements such as continuity of use, and understanding cities as organically evolving, ever-changing entities (Taylor 2016).

An analysis of media and local authority reporting on the project reveals a predominant utilitarian discourse of happiness and satisfaction, repeatedly highlighting strategies of obtaining consent from residents, offering choice between relocation and continuing to live in the neighbourhood, and providing case-by-case design modifications responding to individual household needs (for example, apartments specially equipped for the needs of the elderly) (Shanghai Municipal Government 2019, Shine News 2018, Surging News 2017). These serve to reinforce the role of the state in guiding processes of consensus building and consultation, ensuring the public good and providing wellbeing for all (Smyth et al. 2011) while at the same time attempting to understand local needs and providing a certain degree of choice and flexibility. They aim to also shape Chinese urbanites imaginaries about desirable forms of 'modern' urban living beyond the commercial, high-rise compound, a residential form which has been found to contribute to residential satisfaction in present-day China, albeit being difficult to access for numerous social groups (Li, Zhu & Li 2012). Such dynamics should also be understood in light of government-led efforts to stimulate a soft process of gentrification and encourage some degree of social mixing in Chunyangli, by aiming at attracting white-collar workers and a newly emerging creative class to rent apartments from the original inhabitants who chose to move away, through government-owned rental companies.¹⁹ This also contributes to highlighting a shifting understanding in China's globalised cities, with recent studies in the country corroborating Richard Florida's conceptualisation that urban amenities catering to the needs and preferences of creative workers contribute to raised levels of wellbeing and quality of life (Florida 2002, Poon & Shang 2014).

Nevertheless, further investigation is required into understanding whether such government-guided actions, partially aimed at appealing to a rising middle class, may not lead to the further marginalisation of vulnerable communities whose wellbeing is overlooked. This is particularly

¹⁹ It is important to note, here, that Chunyangli is located in Hongkou District, which in recent years has been at the core of municipal efforts to become a creative-industry and culture-led economic centre of the city (Gonzalez Martinez 2017).

relevant in light of scholars' highlighting the weak causal links between 'cosmetic', imposed social mixing policies and reduced social exclusion or deprivation within urban regeneration projects (Lees 2008). It is also crucial to develop further research into the processes and working mechanisms of projects such as Chunyangli, which are currently undergoing and whose long-term impacts will be better understood in the future. It will be particularly important to understand if the current strategies for the project, including the strong role of the state, a lack of mobilisation of social capital at community level, and the lack of structures supporting community agency and initiative, will materialise in durable, replicable and comprehensive renewal outcomes in the future – ones which are not only easily sustained and maintained, but which also offer genuine mobility and other choices for residents (Hansen 2013).

In the case of Nanluoguxiang the *Wellbeing Nexus* is similarly materialised at the interplay between socio-spatial outcomes, and processes such as manifestations of more grassroots agency and emerging local entrepreneurial abilities. The socio-spatial outcomes resulting from the gradual regeneration of Nanluoguxiang are characterised, to a certain extent, by elements of cultural commodification and gentrification associated with the tourism-oriented renewal of urban historic areas in China (Pendlebury & Porfyriou 2017, Xie & Heath 2017). The resulting space is one that caters to the rising demands for cultural consumption of a rapidly growing middle class, and one that contributes to commercial gain, city branding and place-making efforts, and a national agenda centred on fostering national identity and pride in an increasingly fragmented society (Svensson 2016).

Nevertheless, whilst the area has been morphologically preserved but commercialised, and its function has shifted from residential use to tourism site, it is important to highlight how wellbeing materialised through the processes that brought about this change. In this case, a shift towards more wellbeing oriented urban regeneration took the form of more bottom-up processes, arguably indicating new forms of horizontal links between the different stakeholders involved in urban transformation processes which, at micro-level, may be challenging the top-down governance Orthodoxy in China (Verdini 2015). It can be argued that such linkages were made possible by emerging local entrepreneurial abilities (embodied by local residents turned business owners), and a pragmatic and pro-active local government (street office). Acting as an extension of the state tasked with building consensus and welfare provision, the street office had the critical role of guiding the project and acting as a mediator—an exercise of agency from local authorities under the careful supervision of the central/municipal government unique to China. This encouraged a certain degree of 'government-led participation' from local residents who, in turn, exercised their own grassroots agency and capabilities (for example, as entrepreneurs),

capitalising on local formal and informal social networks, market forces and their property rights in order to negotiate better wellbeing outcomes (such as financial benefits) from Nanluoguxiang's transformation (Hu, Lu & de Roo 2013).

In order to start drafting a conceptualisation of wellbeing, in this case it is also important to note that the regeneration of Nanluoguxiang took place at a historical moment of rising social unrest, tightly linked to protests related to urban redevelopment, often at the expense of social justice, leading to shifting policies on compensation, relocation and property rights (Hu, de Roo & Lu 2013, Ye 2011). Having understood that a strategy that prioritises growth coalitions at the expense of local communities would result in social unrest, media scrutiny and central government criticism, local authorities aimed to facilitate processes which were characterised by a heightened degree of communication, negotiation and flexibility whilst maintaining a high level of control with the aim of ensuring social stability. This phenomenon once again highlights the ambitions and role of the state in building consensus around shared views of wellbeing, centred on ideas of social harmony and collective, public good. In this sense, it could be argued that the path towards wellbeing in the case of Nanluoguxiang was characterised by a comparatively more transparent, collaborative and choice-oriented process for the resident communities, under the close supervision of the state. Nevertheless, similar to the case of Chunyangli, further investigations are required into more veiled processes of structural marginalisation in the case of Nanluoguxiang, where more vulnerable voices and rights (such as those of poorer residents, migrants, or those with ambiguous property rights) were overlooked at the benefit of residents with stronger socio-economic capital.

Finally, the case of Liede village highlights how a series of innovative and context-specific urban regeneration processes, driven by unique governance mechanisms and stakeholder dynamics, ensured more equitable socio-spatial outcomes for the local community. The socio-spatial outcomes achieved through this type of mechanism were arguably more comprehensive than in previous models, contributing to economic growth and urban development but also the wellbeing of actors which otherwise would be neglected by the process (such as landless farmers, who have previously been affected by aggressive demolition and redevelopment projects) (Hao, Sliuzas & Geertman 2011). The benefits of the socio-spatial outcomes ranged from financial (including redistribution of benefits amongst villagers resulting from land leasing revenue, and the creation of job opportunities through the development of the multifunctional service complex), to the improvement of living conditions (construction of improved residential units and facilities), to the negotiation of more profitable and equitable compensation and relocation packages for those required to move—material dimensions critical for the improvement of quality of life in China's villages in the city (Li et al. 2014).

Importantly, these wellbeing outcomes were achieved and reinforced through a series of processes of collaboration, negotiation and exercise of agency. Wellbeing dimensions were shaped by the existence of a pragmatic and flexible municipal government which capitalised on the capabilities and strengths of the rural collective and supported it in exercising agency in order to negotiate better outcomes for village residents. These mechanisms had also been previously identified in the context of other urban villages in Guangzhou, where strong village leadership (characterised by entrepreneurial abilities, negotiation leverage and initiation of projects), a stronger collective economy, and systems for shared decision-making, ensured the protection of resident rights and improvement of their quality of life (Lin, Hao & Geertman 2015). Similarly, the case of Liede highlights that the key to negotiating and capturing regeneration benefits, as well as developing plans which offered residents more complex choices and opportunities besides just relocation, consisted in the strength and ability of the pre-existing village collective to negotiate, initiate and build consensus surrounding issues such as the redistribution of benefits. It is nevertheless important to note that the path towards wellbeing was still pursued under the careful supervision and strong presence of the state, a context widely different from that of deliberative democracies which tend to form the context of international literature on wellbeing, collaborative governance and urban development projects (Frediani 2015).

5

WELLBEING IN CHINESE NEIGHBOURHOOD REVITALISATION

New Actors and Approaches

5.1. INTRODUCTION

5.1.1. Aims and Methodology

The present thesis has thus far provided a review of state discourses, policy and practice shifts which have shaped urban regeneration efforts in China over the last three decades. In order to contribute to a comprehensive analysis, the present chapter aims to shift the scrutiny on the ways in which urban practitioners are experimenting and innovating with new, people-centred urban regeneration practices, as determined by their understanding of wellbeing, their shifting values and their institutional affiliations. Using the context of Shanghai as basis for analysis, the present chapter is constructed as a continuation of Chapter 4 in order to highlight a transition from regeneration projects characterised predominantly by large-scale demolition, relocation, and rising societal unrest, towards potentially less invasive, bottom-up regeneration practices. The transition is explored through the wellbeing conceptualisation developed throughout this research project (see particularly Chapter 2).

The focus of this chapter is to shine a light on the views and agendas of experts leading processes of regeneration at present, and the ways in which these are turned into new pilot practices. The objectives are as follows:

- a) to reveal urban practitioners' understanding of wellbeing, based on their operating within a specific disciplinary background, system of values, agendas and institutional positions;
- b) to examine how wellbeing is planned for and negotiated at local level, potentially resulting in narrow materialisations when it comes to practice;
- c) to understand what processes and outcomes of current urban regeneration projects in Shanghai reveal about the state of innovation in urban projects, at present.

This chapter explores how a contextually-specific understanding of wellbeing as reflected in practitioners' ideologies and actions is materialised in current regeneration projects. The chapter explores a series of urban interventions such as community gardens, the development of multi-stakeholder partnerships, community building actions, outreach and education campaigns, and place-based, small scale design solutions. It discusses the ways in which these are situated at the cross-roads between business-as-usual practices on one hand, and innovation on the other. In order to do this, the present chapter initially reviews recent Shanghai policy and discourse on urban regeneration, as well as a brief overview of the context studied (completing what has already been covered on Shanghai in Chapter 4). It then goes on to present and discuss findings from research carried out in Shanghai in 2019.

As previously touched upon, following market reforms in China, influx of Foreign Direct Investments have shaped regions such as the Yangtze River Delta into global city regions. Cities such as Shanghai rapidly and proactively adopted strategies for becoming national multifunctional centres and global mega-cities (He & Qian 2017). An economic, cultural and demographic hub within China, Shanghai has embraced and declared ambitions to act as a leader in fields spanning from science and technology all the way to urban planning and policy innovation (Shanghai Master Plan 2017-2035). As it continues to engage in this ambitious mission, Shanghai qualifies as an ideal laboratory for studying not only shifts in urban policy, but also practice experimentation in the form of pilot regeneration projects. Crucially, Shanghai's latest strategic urban plan calls for zero growth in urban construction after 2020, indicating that the city will now focus exclusively on redevelopment and renewal of its existing developed land (Zhang, LeGates & Zhao 2016). This is why it was considered appropriate, for the current project, to conduct the investigation in Shanghai. This justification is also supported by a logistical dimension, as the author's access to data in Shanghai was facilitated by their experience of having worked and lived there previously, and being acquainted with a series of key experts operating there.

Data collection for this study consisted of conducting a set of semi-structured, in-depth interviews with experts from Shanghai and Suzhou. Most of the interviewees were academics from a prominent architecture and urban planning university in Shanghai. As members of a variety of different thematic research groups and professional backgrounds (planning, design, architecture), they had been assigned as community planners and, at the time when the research was conducted, worked on a series of *weigengxin* (micro-scale urban regeneration) projects across Shanghai. A number of the interviewees were founders of university-based programmes involving students in practice: these include *Clover Nature School* (founded 2014), a university-led NGO which organises community garden projects and workshops across Shanghai whilst also training

and educating students; and a *Service Learning* course which involves students in community development and urban renewal projects. Additionally, the interviewee group also included an urban planner working for the Suzhou planning bureau and a designer working for a university-affiliated planning and design firm (Table 9).

CODE	AFFILIATION	DESCRIPTION	DATE
INT1	Associate Professor at College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University, Shanghai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involved in research group on <i>Urban and Rural Community Development and Housing Construction</i> - Appointed as community planner involved in micro-scale urban renewal programmes in Shanghai. 	31.05.2019
INT2	Lecturer at College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University, Shanghai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involved in research group on <i>Urban and Rural Community Development and Housing Construction</i> - Involved in micro-scale urban renewal programmes in Shanghai. 	03.06.2019
INT3	Associate Professor at College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University, Shanghai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Founder of <i>Service Learning</i> course, involving students in projects on the ground, including micro-scale urban renewal and community education programmes. 	22.06.2019
INT4	Lecturer at College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University, Shanghai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Founder of <i>Clover Nature School</i>, a non-profit NGO which has set up numerous community gardens and permaculture capacity building projects in Shanghai since 2014. 	23.06.2019
INT5	Urban Designer at Tongji Urban Planning and Design Institute, Shanghai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involved as an urban designer in micro-scale urban regeneration projects in Shanghai, with a particular focus on the 'healthy city' agenda. 	24.06.2019
INT6	Professor at College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University, Shanghai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involved in research group on <i>Urban and Rural Development History and Heritage Protection</i> - Involved in heritage-led urban and rural regeneration projects throughout China, piloting participatory practices. 	25.06.2019

INT7	Urban Planner at Suzhou Urban Planning Bureau, Suzhou	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involved in supervising (for example through the provision of planning permits) urban revitalisation interventions in inner-Suzhou - Involved in development of strategy for the regeneration of declining central district of Gusu. 	03.07.2019
INT8	Researcher at College of Architecture and Urban Planning, Tongji University, Shanghai	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Involved in heritage-led urban and rural regeneration projects throughout China, piloting participatory practices. 	04.07.2019

Table 9. Interviewee list (author)

These experts were identified during a pilot fieldwork phase in 2018, when the author attended a series of conferences and events on Chinese urbanisation in Shanghai. They were also identified using the author's network in Shanghai, as well as using the snowball method, where initial interviewees recommended colleagues who could also be approached. One of the principal challenges faced was the difficulty with encountering participants who had the availability and disposition to be interviewed – only about one fourth of those contacted were eventually interviewed. This research chose to focus on the views, perceptions and experiences of practitioners, experts, consultants and academics (who, often play more than one of these roles at once) who have been or are currently involved in what they have self-identified as people-centred urban regeneration. Acting often as mediator between policies, policy-makers and local communities, whilst at the same time operating within their own system of values, formative background and interests, their perspective is crucial due to their close involvement with project design, implementation and follow-up. Their capacity, both formal and informal to guide and shape future directions, is significant. Consulting this group of experts in the context of this research project was particularly relevant given their close involvement with the regeneration process, and their shifting role: from expert to facilitator (elaborated on in the next sections).

Semi-structured, in-depth (approximately 2-hour long) interviews were carried out in 2019 in Shanghai and Suzhou. Given the context of the COVID-19 pandemic which shortly ensued, it was difficult for the author to return to China to follow-up on the on-going projects identified. Depending on the preference of the interviewee, the interviews were conducted in either English or Mandarin, with the help of a consecutive interpreter. The latter set of interviews underwent a second phase of translation following the transcription process (facilitated by a subcontracted

translator), as the author wanted to ensure that important information had not been lost during the interpretation process. Besides the interviews, the author carried out participant observation by accompanying three of the interviewees in a series of events related to their activity: a community workshop about urban renewal design proposals (KIC Community Garden); a community education event about recycling and sustainability (Tongji University); and an initial consultation meeting about a prospective urban revitalisation project, held between the local residents' committee, a district government representative, and the expert (interviewee) (Shouchangfang *xiaoqu*). Participation in these events facilitated observation and documentation which supported, confirmed and complemented information that had been supplied during the interviews.

Interviews were centred around past, current and upcoming urban regeneration processes and projects that the participants had had experience with. It was considered that a semi-structured interview format would enable a richer conversation, allowing interviewees to speak more freely and to focus on elements that they considered noteworthy. This was also suited to the descriptive, narrative nature of much of the information provided. Interviewees were asked about urban regeneration challenges, priorities, principles, and innovations with a specific focus on issues such as choice, participation and decision-making processes, efforts for community building and social integration, the provision of services and facilities, living condition improvements, the consideration of lifestyle patterns and cultural values in renewal solutions etc. The interviewees were also questioned about what their understanding of wellbeing was, relative to the current context of China, and what roles they considered they could and should play in ensuring these for communities. Despite working on individual projects and commissions, the experts often referenced each other's work and seemed to be part of a growing community of practitioners who were working on inter-related, often similar types of regeneration cases in inner-city Shanghai.

All interviews were recorded following permission from interviewees, using a hand-held device. Interview recordings were transcribed manually and integrally by the author. Each transcribed interview was managed and analysed using the software NVivo, which was employed for thematically coding and systematising the contents. Codes (or themes) were defined both before and during the data analysis process: key concepts were initially laid out following this research project's conceptual framework and were then supplemented with themes deriving from the data itself. The codes can be divided into a series of categories which were used for different purposes in the study.

1. One category of themes was linked to identifying the main characteristics of urban regeneration projects and regeneration interventions either carried out by the interviewees or referred to by

the interviewees. These themes represented descriptive characteristics of the projects and interventions (e.g. intended outcomes, processes challenges, working mechanisms, governance, funding etc.). This set of codes was used for identifying two types of spatial urban regeneration intervention in Shanghai: *weigengxin* (micro-scale urban regeneration) and community gardens. Section 5.2.1. reports on these by describing what they entailed and how they were carried out, providing illustrative examples from the case studies referenced by interviewees.

2. A second category of codes still identified a descriptive layer of information but analysed it with an interpretive filter. This was aimed at identifying some categories of what the abovementioned interventions can reveal about a) current regeneration practices, and b) a context-specific understanding of wellbeing in urban regeneration. The discussion section is supported by this category of themes.

Given that most of the interviewees were based in/around Shanghai, prior to the presentation of findings organised according to the outline above, the following section provides a context overview. This includes a review of recent policy in Shanghai, highlighting the discourses and aims informing practice shifts at the time when this research was conducted. It also provides some additional relevant supporting material about concepts of community, community building and 'self-governance' in China, as well as residential forms commonly targeted for regeneration. This is crucial for understanding the context in which the interviewed experts were operating.

5.1.2. Context Overview: Shanghai Policy and Practice Shifts

A scrutiny of policy and practice shifts reveals fundamental changes in the pace and direction of urban regeneration projects in China. As previously mentioned, urban regeneration now finds itself operating at the crossroads between business-as-usual practices and experimental approaches which explore new visions for people-centred cities. At policy level this is happening at a variety of scales. At national scale, in 2004 the Chinese constitution was revised to give greater protection to private property, conferring citizens impacted by redevelopment projects rights to litigate and negotiate better outcomes (Abramson 2006). Three years later, in 2007, a property rights law was adopted by the National People's Congress conferring full legal protection to property owners (Shin 2010). This fuelled important discussions about how planning decision-making can be made more transparent, democratic and just. The 2014 central government *New-Type Urbanisation Plan* (NUP 2014-2020) provided new visions for urban sustainable development, emphasising the need to develop "intensive and efficient, people-oriented, ecologically liveable, fair and just, inclusive and harmonious environments" (State Council 2014). Meanwhile, at regional level, urban regeneration policy innovations were already being piloted or

started to propagate, responding to different contexts and issues. One such example is Guangdong's Three Old Renewals strategy which promotes a stakeholder shared-interest mechanism for regeneration and confers more decision-making power to communities (Li et al. 2019) (as elaborated in Chapter 4).

Shanghai rapidly continued with its own policy and practice responses. In fact, years prior to the *New-Type Urbanisation Plan*, the Municipal Government had already included concrete guidelines on public participation in the 2010 *Regulations of Shanghai Municipality on Urban and Rural Planning*. Later, the city's newest Master Plan (2017-2035) provided a blueprint for realising ambitions of consolidating itself as a global city which puts people first. The blueprint is framed under a broad vision for Shanghai to become a liveable, global city. This is drafted across three dimensions including: innovative city (global gateway with enhanced regional and internal infrastructure, and better employment or entrepreneurial opportunities); environmentally sustainable city (protected green networks, environmental regulatory systems, addressing climate change); and human-centred city. The last vision is articulated across a series of ambitions, summarised below:

- Ensuring living environments are diverse and inclusive, with facilities for vulnerable groups such as an increasingly aged population;
- Meeting people's needs for affordable, diversified housing, including supporting the housing rental system, ensuring that social housing accounts for 8-10% of the total housing stock by 2035, and providing a greater array of choice;
- Improving access to facilities: public facilities within 15 minutes walk from residential areas, four square meters of public space per capita (particularly green space);
- Limiting commuting time;
- Protecting cultural heritage and developing the cultural and creative industry sectors;
- Advancing the 'organic renewal' (understood as reuse and revitalisation) of older residential areas, including improving living conditions and facilities.

(Shanghai Municipal People's Government 2017).

Anticipating the new Master Plan, the Municipal Government had already launched a set of policy measures for the *Implementation of Shanghai Urban Regeneration* in 2015, calling, amongst other things, for public participation and people-centred, innovative approaches in neighbourhood revitalisation and public space improvement (Shanghai Municipal Government 2015). Such policies also operated alongside more specific nation-wide documents such as the 2017 *Urban Design Guidelines* (MOHURD 2017), which called for quality design emphasising human scale, context-

specificity, public space provision, and improved stakeholder participation and consultation during design processes (Articles 4, 11, 13).

Taking into consideration local specificities and district priorities, Shanghai District Governments have, since 2010, been piloting and incorporating new regeneration approaches into existing working mechanisms, addressing some of the directions set out at national and municipal level. For example, as discussed in the presentation of the Chunyangli case study, Hongkou District has been developing urban planning, design and governance models which focus on the renewal of its *lilong* heritage areas, through combining historic preservation, living condition improvements, community participation and soft gentrification processes. Neighbouring districts such as Yangpu took a different path given their profile. One of Shanghai's main industrial areas between the 1920s and 1980s, the district's economy was challenged after the city undertook service industry-oriented restructuring in the 1990s (Zhang 2005). Nevertheless, capitalising on its high concentration of universities and former industrial space, Yangpu encouraged a collaboration model between universities, private developers and local communities which fostered the development of the multifunctional 84 hectares Knowledge and Innovation Community (KIC) site (Urban Land Institute 2015). With KIC as a regeneration catalyst, Yangpu District has started to experiment in recent years with more innovative urban renewal approaches. These include the *weigengxin*, or micro-scale urban regeneration model, aimed at revitalising dilapidated *xiaoqu* (Chen & Qu 2019).

Xiaoqu, directly translated as micro-district²⁰, were constructed between the 1950s and 1980s as the living units of the *danwei* (work unit). One *xiaoqu* is composed of multiple basic living units: enclosed superblocs with open space for recreation and basic facilities such as some shops (Rowe, Forsyth & Kan 2016). Several *xiaoqu* formed a residential district. The functioning of the *xiaoqu* was ensured by the establishment of *juweihui* (resident committees) operating under *jiedaoban* (street offices). Corresponding to each *xiaoqu* and working in parallel with the *danwei*, resident committees extended the party's reach within neighbourhoods by performing a series of functions such as encouraging mass mobilisation, distributing welfare benefits, carrying out political education and maintaining the neighbourhood orderly and clean (Rowe Forsyth & Kan 2016).

The gradual dissolution of the *danwei* system in the 1990s, and the re-emergence of the discipline of sociology in China (which had been banned since the 1950s) re-introduced the concept of community and transformed it from an abstract idea to a tangible institutional model, with a clear

²⁰ From the Russian *mikrorayon* (Rowe, Forsyth & Kan 2016).

spatial dimension (Bray 2007, Rowe Forsyth & Kan 2016). Rapid socio-cultural shifts, including rising unrest in the late 1980s, encouraged the government to develop a strategy for strengthening grassroots links through which party building could be promoted. This generated a broad paradigm of community building (*shequ jianshe*), to be materialised by strengthening communities' grassroots organisational infrastructure under the leadership of officials and within a specific territorial delimitation (Yip, Leung & Huang 2013). The responsibility was passed on to the resident committees and the street offices, with a 2000 Ministry of Civil Affairs document defining a *shequ* (community) as being under the jurisdiction of resident committees. The resident committees, led by government employees, now had the tasks of service provision, social control, mass mobilisation, neighbourhood management and the development of a geographically based sense of community, separating the urban population into more manageable governance units. Ensuing community building efforts were interpreted in both more conceptual and more theoretical terms, including the encouragement of new forms of organisation as well as the physical construction of infrastructure such as community centres (Bray 2007). Some of the findings of this study will highlight contemporary, re-defined forms of community building and grassroots governance.



Figure 10. Illustration of 1980s *xiaoqu*: Shouchangfang *xiaoqu*, Shanghai (author)

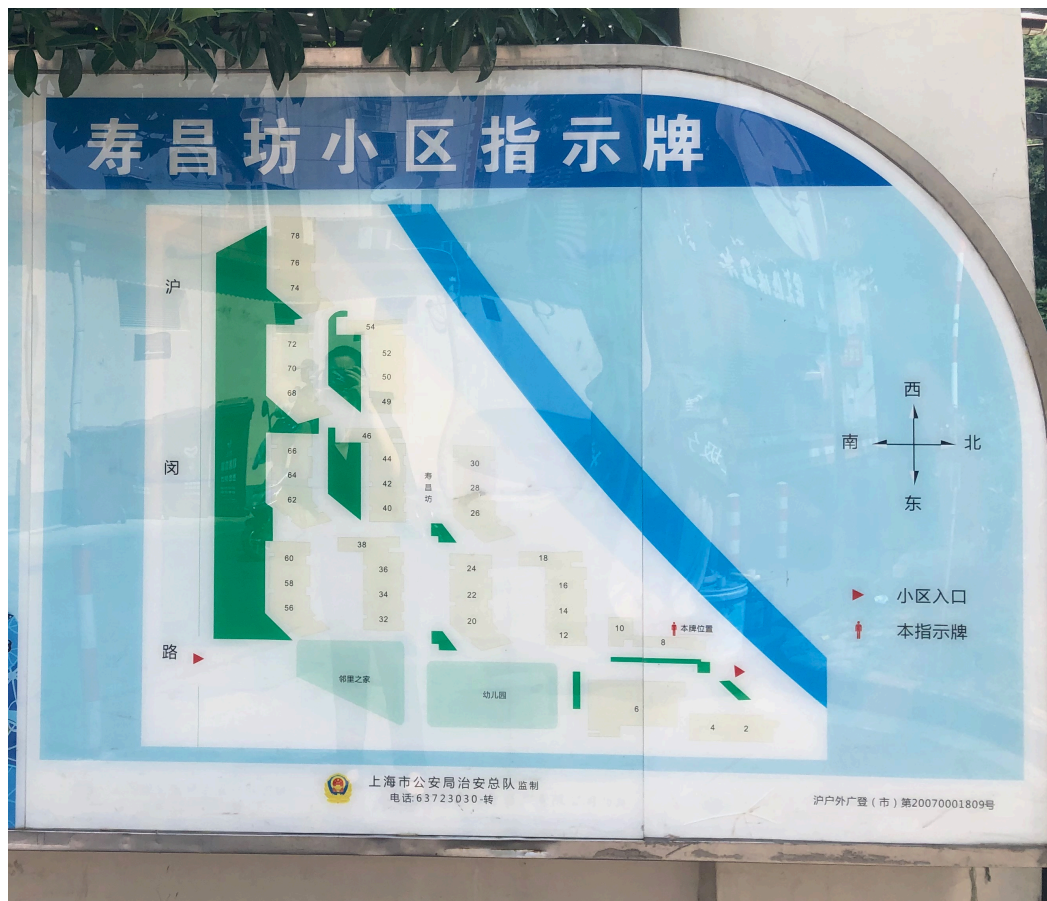


Figure 11. Illustration of xiaoqu layout: Shouchangfang xiaoqu, Shanghai (author)



Figure 12. Illustration of renovated community centre in Shouchangfang xiaoqu, Shanghai (author)

5.2. FIELDWORK FINDINGS: DESCRIPTIVE OVERVIEW

5.2.1. Micro-Scale Urban Regeneration

Overview

Sixty per cent of the practitioners interviewed were engaged in micro-scale urban regeneration (*weigengxin*) projects taking place in inner-city Shanghai. All interviewees promptly referenced this typology of intervention when questioned about new, people-centred approaches to urban regeneration which are flourishing in China as alternatives to previous practices such as the ones highlighted in Chapter 4. This might also be related to the fact that those interviewed were primarily academic-practitioners from Tongji University in Shanghai, which, following formal and informal discussions and observation during fieldwork, was understood to be one of the primary institutions in Shanghai targeted by district governments who wished to propose a regeneration project. The size of the projects varied slightly but most are confined to one *xiaoqu*, which, as previously explained, is a compact, high-density residential unit with apartment buildings and a few public service buildings. The most common typology of *xiaoqu* targeted was built in the period between the 1950s and 1980s, and is composed of low-income, vulnerable residents such as the elderly, migrants, or workers who were affected by the fall of the *danwei* system. Unlike newer commercial developments which are administered by private property management companies (paid for collectively by the residents), these units are managed by the *juweihui* (See Section 5.1.).

The underlying rationale for the shift to such projects, as reported by interviewees, provided a confirmation of evidence gleaned from policy documents, reports and state discourse (see Chapter 4 and Section 5.1.). Partially as a result of increasing resistance from communities in recent years, partially as a result of ambitions to foster more people-centred practices, projects characterised by forced demolition and relocation had been stopped. This was replaced by requirements to negotiate with residents and obtain full consensus on proposed plans: “We stopped forced demolishment, which has slowed down the whole regeneration process. Currently you can only negotiate with residents individually: if two or three of them disagree with the whole plan, the whole strategy, then you will be stopped.” (INT7).

Within this environment, also characterised by shifting relocation compensation policies and significantly reduced government funding, simpler and lower-cost solutions started to be sought for the regeneration of older neighbourhoods in urban China, leading to numerous *weigengxin* pilot projects spreading across the country, predominantly in wealthier cities such as Shanghai.

The author was told that it was estimated that in China there were around 170,000 such old communities which had sub-standard living conditions, making regeneration for them a large national project which was being dealt with slightly differently across the country. Given the large disparities existing in cities at the moment, the author was told that improving residential living conditions for all is a crucial target in line with the central government *xiaokang shehui* (moderately prosperous society) objective (see Section 2.1.2). A number of interviewees referred to the “shockingly” poor living conditions (small living space; cases of three generations living in only 25 square meters; lack of private amenities such as toilets or kitchens etc.) which still exist in seemingly developed sub-city centres of metropolises such as Shanghai. When the author asked one interviewee about shifting community needs and aspirations (whether or not he perceived that community priorities were shifting beyond the provision of basic needs), he acknowledged that this was a good question but that unfortunately numerous communities in cities such as Shanghai had not yet “shared the benefits of development” and basic needs were still to be satisfied, a rationale still underpinning many of these projects.

Implementation Mechanisms

Weigengxin projects are generally carried out with low budgets and in limited periods of time (approximately six months), and most focus primarily on the improvement and provision of public space using primarily cost-effective, place-specific design solutions and community building. This includes beautification of communal areas (such as open space in-between buildings), provision of greenery, reparations and beautification of building facades, ‘formalisation’ of ‘informal’ space (e.g. demolition of illegal structures which occupy public space), improvement of *xiaoqu* services (e.g. garbage disposal units) and in some cases establishing community centres and/or community gardens.

As reported by the experts, local community views are generally split with regards to expectations about the extent of government intervention. Whilst some still aspire to being relocated to what is perceived as a modern, suburban apartment, or to being given compensation for re-development – an opportunity for lower income families to obtain financial gain – others would never accept or consider relocating. Additionally, in cities such as Shanghai, which have a longer and more complex history of urban re-development, residents are increasingly more demanding in terms of compensation, and complex funding mechanisms and cannot adequately meet these demands.

Projects are generally initiated by the street level government or the district government, which identifies and designates a *xiaoqu* for urban regeneration. Rarely, projects can also be initiated by the professors themselves, if they wish to utilise specific *xiaoqu* as a testing ground for new

approaches. This is usually facilitated both by formal channels of collaboration, as well as informal (e.g. the professor has a more prominent say within their institution, or they have a good personal relationship with a specific street-level or district government). An expert is then appointed by the district-level government in the role of community planner. The community planner (*shequ guihua shi*) is a newly introduced role currently being piloted for finding a more efficient mechanism to mediate between local governments and communities in the process of *weigengxin*. Community planners are thus tasked with capturing the needs and voices of local residents, while at the same time reflecting the regeneration intentions and ambitions of the district government, and guiding the projects in the planning, design and implementation phases: “They ask the street level government to get my agreement- that means for any small renovation projects, they need to get my approval. So, the community planner role is a kind of authority. And during this process, for the construction, we can also make some suggestions – if they don’t listen to me, I can report it - because this role is under the district level government.” (INT1).

For *weigengxin* projects, expertise is often offered for very low payment, or even pro-bono in some cases. Some have reported that this kind of work is time and energy consuming and unprofitable, so they often have to turn down proposals. Nevertheless, especially academics engage in them because it gives them the opportunity to test out new approaches, to develop a data-base of case studies for carrying out action research, and to engage students in projects on the ground. An emerging strategy for dealing with these kinds of projects is also setting up non-governmental organisations involving student volunteers. Two of the interviewees who were in mature phases of involvement with these kinds of projects were operating in this manner. Reportedly inspired by American scholar John Dewey, one had set up a *Service Learning Course* at Tongji University and a corresponding NGO involving his students. Through this channel, they carried out community service actions, entailing educational programmes for both their students and resident communities. These ranged from design consultation for regeneration projects to community building events and educational campaigns about different civic duties like teaching communities how to use the newly installed recycling facilities inside each *xiaoqu*. The author had the chance to attend one such event organised at Tongji University in Shanghai, a day-long event primarily led by students and supervised by the professor, where citizens were taught about utilising recycling facilities. Another had set up an NGO to support their *weigengxin* and community garden projects (further details in the next section).



Figure 13. Sustainability pop-up educational event organised by university-led NGO at Tongji University, Shanghai (author)

Once an expert takes on the project, the first meeting is conducted between themselves, their team (often composed of students), and the residents' committee. Concomitantly, the residents' committee has several key tasks (see Section 5.1), including the following:

- Facilitating the first steps of the project by organising initial meetings with the expert groups;
- Identifying neighbourhood problems and resident demands which need to be tackled by the regeneration intervention, and communicating these to the experts;
- Mediating conflicts amongst the community and persuading residents to reach a consensus during the planning phases of the intervention;
- Encouraging residents to participate and provide feedback;
- Identifying residents who are active and have some form of capabilities in order to assist with the project implementation (people who have some competence, or key resource people): these are often one and same with the already existing volunteer residents.

The role of the residents' committee seems to be variable and context-dependent, according to accounts by different interviewees. Whilst some emphasised the role of the *juweihui* as a mediator and between the community and the experts throughout the whole project, capable of building consensus and encouraging more numerous feedback from residents, others pointed out

that the *juweihui* stepped back after the initial phases of the consultation, leaving way for residents to take over.

Following this process, a series of consultation activities are carried out involving the experts and the local community, in order to identify priorities and needs for regeneration. Once these are agreed upon, the planning and design team proposes a series of design ideas which are then discussed and altered following additional rounds of consultation with local residents (workshops facilitated by the *juweihui*, often utilising existing built facilities such as the local community centres). Reportedly, communities are encouraged to contribute with design ideas or solutions through co-creation events lead by expert teams made up of professors and students where design maquettes and information panels are presented to local communities and subjected to feedback. However, the general direction and focus of the project is still guided by the experts (see Kailu Village 'healthy city' case study below as an example).

Case Studies

1. Nandan (Shanghai)

This is an inner-city micro-scale urban regeneration project carried out after INT3 had set up his service learning course, in order to test out some community engagement mechanisms. The aim was to carry out incremental upgrades, to provide flexible design solutions which residents could approve or modify, and to educate and convince local communities of the benefits of incremental upgrade as opposed to strategies involving relocation and compensation. The community consultation process consisted of presenting the community with proposals for the built environment renewal (an exhibition with design renderings created by students). This was aimed at gathering resident feedback and educating them about alternative paths to regeneration as opposed to redevelopment and relocation ("Most of them still think that this is a good way of redevelopment, especially in terms of compensation.", INT3). Importantly, the project placed great emphasis on the improvement of neighbourhood services and public space, particularly in the context of limited domestic space and a lack of homeownership. The author was therefore told that these types of projects have social value due to the attention given to assisting vulnerable groups such as those with limited financial possibilities ("Taking care of the poor, the minority, this is also the responsibility of the planner.", INT3).

Funding came from two funding programmes: *Beautiful Home*, a fund established for the purposes of urban renewal, and *Community Care Project*. The physical outcomes consisted of environment beautification and the creation of enhanced public spaces, for example the construction of a community leisure centre which would offer a place to gather but also prevent residents from

engaging in illegal activities such as gambling. Additionally, a series of outreach and community building initiatives were organised through INT3's service-learning NGO. After the project was completed and the experts had left, the residents developed an incipient form of self-organisation which led them to apply, with the help of the *juweihui*, for funding to build a community garden.

2. Kailu (Shanghai)

This is an inner-city neighbourhood built in the 50s and 60s; the project was initiated at the alternative of the local government, who appointed a Tongji professor to guide the process. The *weigengxin* project for Kailu was carried out under the theme of *Healthy City*, with a particular focus on providing greenery, sports facilities, facilities for the elderly, public spaces for interaction to combat loneliness etc. The process involved surveying and consulting, with the help of the *juweihui* acting in this case as a mediator identifying community representatives, capturing resident interests and priorities, and communicating these to the experts. Subsequent design proposals and plans underwent further rounds of consultation through survey and public discussions, where residents were encouraged to provide feedback. Reportedly, this new process is significantly more lengthy than previous approaches, with multiple rounds of consultation taking place before final consensus is reached and the implementation phase begins: "In the past we just used to have a 15-day demonstration of the project and then made some small changes to the original plan, but now the whole process is different." (INT5).

3. Hongkou District *weigengxin* project (name undisclosed):

The expert working on this project was asked by the *juweihui* with whose director they were acquainted to carry out a micro-scale regeneration project in neighbourhood built in the 1980s. The project was initiated with meetings amongst the Tongji team, *juweihui*, and local resident representatives in order to identify requirements, issues and visions for the area. The next step was a workshop to present design proposals to which all residents were invited. These comprised around 36-40 households in total, some of whom were migrants renting from resident owners. The interviewee reported that they encountered resistance to participate, especially from the migrants, who were worried that the rent would increase after the regeneration project. The workshop consultation process consisted of renderings being shown to residents, who had to reach a consensus about what to prioritise and what to choose amongst the options offered by the experts. All proposals were related to public space beautification and minor, low-cost infrastructure improvements. During the implementation process, residents were also co-opted to participate in the renovation work. As a conclusion, the project was deemed successful from the point of view of residents being pleased and contributing to some community building efforts, despite crucial funding and time limitations.

5.2.2. Community Gardens

Overview

A couple of the practitioners interviewed were involved with establishing community gardens as part of *weigengxin* projects or as self-standing efforts. The gardens were a combination of landscape design and agricultural space, including flowers, greenery, vegetables, fruit etc., which residents from specific neighbourhoods could care for collectively. Bigger gardens also included an indoor community centre specifically equipped as a meeting place for socialisation, events and other activities. In some reported cases, following a *weigengxin* project residents had applied for funding through the resident committee channel in order to set up a community garden in their unit. Amongst the eight interviewees, two were engaged primarily in *weigengxin* projects where amongst other things they also assisted the residents with setting up community gardens, mainly following the ideas of a third interviewee (INT4). As previously mentioned, INT4 is the founder of the NGO *Clover School* and its *Community Garden Initiative*, which has set up community gardens and related programmes (training and capacity building, co-design and co-creation activities, community centres) in over sixty different residential units across Shanghai. Utilising a community-university partnership mechanism (neighbourhoods benefit from the professional support and universities need locations for action research and student education purposes), the initiative created a cooperative network of public-private actors linking government, enterprises, NGOs and self-governing community groups.

The rationale and motivation behind establishing community gardens involved a range of complex and inter-related factors. Firstly, they contribute to the beautification of the neighbourhood and provide public, green space, which some *xiaoqu* units currently lack. They have a functional role, too, offering residents, especially vulnerable groups such as the elderly and children, an occupation and a sense of shared purpose which could contribute to community building, constructing a sense of place, pride and ownership. Reportedly they also contributed to a wider agenda of city ecology and building healthy cities, bringing back an understanding and a connection with nature and agriculture within a highly urbanised context. Symbolically, one of INT4's community gardens was named the *Healing Garden*. Last but not least, according to the experts, they created a pretext for communities to develop a framework and the capabilities for becoming self-organised, firstly under the umbrella of caring for the community garden, and later for establishing a wider system of grassroots governance (more on this below).

Implementation Mechanisms

In the case of the practitioners interviewed, community garden projects were organised through NGOs established by themselves. Similarly to *weigengxin* interventions, the first contact with the residential unit was conducted through the *juweihui*, which assisted with setting up the initial meetings, capturing requests and issues and identifying who amongst the residents had any specific capability or interest to participate. A form of participatory process followed, in which the experts co-identified issues and explored solutions with the residents, and once people were on board the NGO could assist with applying for funding from the government and implementing the project. The funding was subsequently invested in (1) designing and setting up the gardens; (2) building capacity on the mechanisms, processes, and policies on carrying out self-governance; (3) carrying out workshops on permaculture and training community representatives to take the lead and train fellow residents; (4) carrying out any tangential activities such as for example, for leisure purposes (e.g. harvesting event where residents could eat together).

Case Studies

1. Community Garden within Knowledge and Innovation Centre (KIC), Wujiaochang, Yangpu District (Shanghai)

According to the interviewee, this community garden project was one of the most prominent in Shanghai. It consisted of a medium-scale outdoors permaculture space which included a small community centre in the middle, as well as facilities such as children's play area. It is located in a plot of land situated amongst different typologies of housing, including more modern, commercial blocks, and 1980s *xiaoqu* units. Since its establishment, the garden (and particularly its community centre) infrastructure had been utilised for a variety of community events such as, for example, consultation for future *weigengxin* projects.

2. Saturn Road Project (Shanghai):

This was a large-scale project involving the training of community representatives from 37 different *xiaoqu* (residential units) in order for them to set up two to three community gardens in each. This was described as a 'training the trainer'-type project, where INT4's team was sub-contracted by the government to carry out the whole process.



Figure 14. Entrance to KIC community garden, bordered on one side by commercial property development (author)



Figure 15. KIC community garden bordered on another side by 1980s xiaoqu (author).



Figure 16. KIC community garden and community centre (author).



Figure 17. KIC community garden cultivation area (author)



Figure 18. Interior of KIC garden Community Centre featuring elements such as educational ‘Seed Library’ (left wall), during community consultation event led by INT4 and his team of student volunteers (author)

Overall, all interviewees specifically highlighted that both micro-scale urban regeneration projects and community garden projects had a dual agenda: on the one hand, they were still rooted in the imperative need to improve living conditions within urban *xiaoqu*, including a revitalisation and beautification of public space and other facilities. On the other, these were initial steps towards gradually replacing investments in the physical fabric with investments in human and social capital. Based on converging but also diverging approaches of some of the interviewees, this investment in people took a variety of different forms. First of all, it materialised in attempts to test out “micro-governance” (community self-governance, or bottom up governance mechanisms) and ways of integrating this into existing governance structures: “In fact, my main target as community planner is not to make the design, my main aim as a community planner is to explore the micro-governance, so I was also thinking about how to set up the system, and how this system can be integrated into the existing framework.” (INT1). The same rationale was also described by another interviewee: “Our aim is to help the community to also have the ability to work on the two levels. The soft governance is more and more important, so if the government gives some money to our team, we really want the money, or most of it, to go to the self-governance, not to the physical hardware.” (INT4).

Beyond an agenda of building autonomy amongst the residents, such approaches were also reportedly mandated under government efforts to create new forms of social control at grassroots level: “[The government] hope that [the residents] are a mass organisation that can be governed. That’s why the government started to support the creation of this kind of NGO, which in China they call social service. But when this policy was launched, it opened the door for us to apply for some money and to do something different.” (INT4). As reported by another interviewee, attempts were made in 2012-2013 by the government to set up a community committee led by a democratically elected representative. However, this endeavour was unsuccessful for a series of different reasons, and efforts were thereon channelled at setting up “micro-governance” mechanisms through *weigengxin* projects.

Setting up incipient mechanisms for community self-governance was reportedly achieved by carrying out community building efforts, as well as attempting to give inhabitants a voice and offering a quasi-participatory design and planning process, as well as involving them in project implementation. Last but not least, as part of this agenda there were attempts to carry out public outreach and education activities in order for communities to become more civic minded and involved in the improvement of their living environment: “I think designers and planners are only consulting tools. The decision making is the most important. [...] So that’s why it’s very important for us to educate everyone to guarantee that the majority of the community don’t make poor decisions.” (INT3). What also came across was a concern for ensuring community-led neighbourhood maintenance strategies in the long term, once the experts had left: “[The residents] need to participate in these projects, recognise them, get familiarised with them, make them their own, and get a sense of ownership so they can abide by it.” (INT5).

As identified by the interviewees themselves, in the long term this shift towards an agenda of investing in people as opposed to solely the built environment would require a diversification in the traditional role of the urban planner / expert, who would also be required to deploy interdisciplinary skills and knowledge in order to address issues such as social work, education, design and so on. This consideration was captured by one interviewee as follows: “I think the role of the planner is going to diversify, because we will be the designer, we will be the community teacher, we will do things to educate people. We need to be an educator, a sociologist, a psychologist. But I think maybe in the future there will be different people in charge of different sectors – education, design, planning, people specialised in social work. [...] We are still in search of how to do city regeneration.”

5.3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

5.3.1. Understanding of Wellbeing: Agendas, Roles, Implementation

Numerous interviewees referenced previously outlined observations on rising societal instability manifested by increased community heterogeneity (for example, social mix in urban residential units) and rising civil society protests on proposed urban interventions, including issues such as land use rights, residential rights or demolition and relocation projects (see Chapter 4). In the last ten years (following, approximately, the 2010s), the community building agenda which has already been operating since the 1980s (see 5.1.2.) has been reinforced by further policy shifts calling for the adjustment of governance structures to include an additional level, variously referred to as grassroots political power or community self-governance. This policy was launched by the Shanghai Municipal Government. According to one interviewee, the operationalisation of this policy consisted of the possibility for communities (in the sense of neighbourhood unit, or *shequ*) to apply for funding in order to develop ‘community building’ and ‘community empowerment’ activities.

These accounts echo previous research conducted prior to 2014 policy shifts, which outlined community self-governance ambitions reported by the Ministry of Civil Affairs (Bray 2007). Part of the community building agenda, one of the most prominent characteristics of the self-governance model was constituted of supporting democratic methods for electing community representatives, and for internal decision-making (Bray 2007). Thus, the idea of self-governance was born out of ambitions for the creation of a governance structure that operated outside of formal government structures. Nevertheless, as an important mechanism operating under the government-led ‘community-building’ agenda, self-governance is not to be understood as implying complete autonomy, but rather as being more related to expectations for communities to manage their own affairs under the guidance and operational mechanisms of the government (Bray 2007). In fact, this is confirmed by the interview findings which highlight that following government realisations that implementing such a system might not be viable (and might loosen authority control), the strategy was adapted and new mechanisms were introduced.

Amongst these avenues can be listed the appointment of the community planner, a hybrid role embodied by urban planners or designers usually affiliated with institutions such as universities, who are tasked with playing a mediating role between local communities and district governments and supervising as well as implementing *weigengxin* projects. This role operates on two levels: whilst their scope of work involves exploring more participatory, grassroots urban transformation

models, their operation under a district government planners' organisation authorises them with ensuring a certain degree of control and guidance over what happens within *xiaoqu* regeneration processes. As such, they operate as a professional extension of the district level government and are tasked with implementing the governments' wellbeing provision agenda, which includes items such as community building and small scale, low-cost urban interventions aimed at improving neighbourhood living conditions. Interestingly, however, community planners have autonomy to explore alternative regeneration routes, genuinely identifying and responding to community wellbeing needs through generating more place-specific outcomes and encouraging small-scale participatory processes that could constitute an important first step towards more grassroots autonomy.

Community building and self-governance mechanisms in China have previously been described as encompassing three inter-related dimensions, including: self-management, self-education and self-service (Chen 2004, cited in Bray 2007). Self-management has been defined as the ways in which communities operate internally and manage to mobilise themselves to create internal management structures which are able to solve local issues. These may include matters like sanitation or security, or even dealing with unexpected public crises such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Li et al. 2020). Self-education and self-service are seen as communities' abilities to rely on their own resources in order to attain a certain form of economic and social improvement. These derive from socialist traditions of mass participation and self-help, drawing conceptual links between ideas of self-governance and moral quality. In this vein, ideas of self-governance can be understood as 'governing the self' and behaving according to societal norms, in view of attaining shared goals and ambitions (Bray 2007). This further exemplifies how an understanding of wellbeing in China is shaped by ideas of the collective good and social harmony, attained both through mass mobilisation as well as individual effort. What is more, if successful and comprehensively implemented (including through, for example, urban renewal projects), self-governance and community building efforts could eventually significantly relieve the government of wellbeing-provision burdens, and will forever shape expectations on the extent of government intervention.

The notion of education and social development, in relation to grassroots governance, was also a recurring declared objective across interviewees' urban interventions. Education and social development efforts seemed to encompass a dual role. In line with the discussions above, community service actions (with the use of NGOs and as part of urban renewal projects) could be interpreted as efforts to build civilised, harmonious and orderly communities where aggregate groups of individuals abide by written and unwritten rules of living in the city and participating in

bringing about the collective good. For instance, this can be exemplified by actions to cease illegal activities such as gambling within *xiaoqu*, efforts to formalise informal spaces (such as the dismantling of structures built illegally by residents in efforts to increase living space), or events educating people on civic duties and urban living (these include a recent agenda focused on recycling). On the other hand, the education agenda also seemed to encompass a more emancipatory dimension relating to capacity building. This could be valuable not only in terms of participating during the planning and implementation phases of regeneration projects, but also taking ownership, maintaining built environment improvements once the experts leave, and working towards ensuring that communities have decision-making capabilities and greater autonomy. Even so, it should be observed that such actions are still at very incipient phases, with efforts being scattered and somewhat inconsistent. One interviewee noted that numerous regeneration projects, in practice, still have a long way to go until they comprehensively and substantially go beyond the boundaries of built environment upgrade.

Challenges with diversifying the scope of wellbeing-oriented urban regeneration practices are also, in part, related to the evidently shifting role of the planner-academic-expert. This is manifested at two levels: firstly, with regards to their position between different converging but also conflicting interests (in this case those of the government, the community, and personal aspirations), and secondly due to the multitude of new responsibilities that they are required to undertake in current projects. How planners ensure wellbeing, promote the public interest, or maintain their neutrality in an increasingly fragmented urban sphere, have for a long time been a cause of concern and discussion in China. In fact, the *City Planning Review* (one of China's main planning journals) started a special column on "Planner's Ethics" (Leaf and Hou 2006) in 2004. For a long time, the urban planning profession in China has been regarded as technocratic and statist, almost exclusively a governmental activity. Such conceptualisations have, however, been challenged due to the emergence of a plurality of new actors (particularly private), whose interests and actions have an influence in shaping spatial and societal shifts (Leaf and Hou 2006). Faced with new challenges following drastic periods of reform, it has been argued that planners often found themselves in a position where securing private interests meant pursuing a sharing of power with government bodies rather than local communities (Zhang 2002). Adding to this, so far the lack of community-based non-governmental organisations has made it more difficult for planners to advocate on behalf of the public, or even to directly engage with grassroots movements or concerns (Leaf & Hou 2006).

The newly appointed community planner position contributes to this on-going discussion on the planners' social responsibility and role in China. Their position is institutionalised within official

government structures, and they arguably act at the convergence between personal beliefs and agendas and a role mandated by the state. Nevertheless, while authority is still vested in this category of planners by municipal governments (whom they eventually report to and whose broader agenda they implement), interviewees point towards the fact that their ultimate mission is to try and represent local residents and their needs and aspirations. This analysis is perhaps even more pertinent when looking at some of the experts interviewed, who had not been appointed as official community planners but operated within similar institutional and policy boundaries mandated from the top, whilst setting up social networks (e.g. NGOs) aimed at better engaging with grassroots issues. It has been previously noted that an integration of NGOs within the Chinese governance system may be tolerated or even encouraged, when these play the role of relieving the state from wellbeing or welfare provision obligations and when they work under the close supervision of the state (Spire 2011). These observations highlight that practitioners engaged in current urban regeneration in China are gradually shifting from a role of technical experts to social actors, from technocratic leaders to consultants or mediators, therefore corroborating findings from previous studies which highlight the emergence of a 'third realm' in China (Huang 1993). This is requiring planners to re-assess their position and value-systems, redefine their discipline, and re-evaluate what novel skills, knowledge and human resources they need in order to achieve new outcomes and regain a sense of social purpose. Such shifts may open avenues for planners to exercise new forms of agency and play the leading part as innovators for pushing forward a people-oriented agenda in urban China, not only in terms of wellbeing outcomes but also in terms of processes.

This shift, however, is lined with numerous challenges which partly explain the fragmented and incoherent nature of approaches which are taking place in Shanghai at the time when the research was conducted. For one, new regeneration ambitions, which imply operating beyond solely the built environment, require the development of cross-sectorial partnerships involving the non-profit, the public, private and informal sectors. As evidenced by the findings of this study, currently the different sectors and groups are still in the exploratory phase of defining what will be the most effective collaboration mechanisms, and how these can be inserted in already operating institutional systems. The difficult task for finding the best working mechanisms seems, in this case, to fall largely on the shoulders of the planners working on different renewal projects. Working closely with local governments, they are one of the main coordinators of multi-stakeholder partnerships involving the universities they work for, the NGOs set up by themselves, and other grassroots organisations which they are helping to set up. As political and administrative transformations have not yet been radical, these partnerships currently operate at the crossroads

between formalised and in-formalised modes of action, and their outcomes will require further scrutiny in the future.

5.3.2. Wellbeing in Current Regeneration Approaches

This section will briefly add an additional layer of discussion to fieldwork findings by discussing the ways in which wellbeing is pursued and achieved in the urban renewal interventions reported here. The discussion will be framed by employing the *Wellbeing Nexus* conceptualisation of wellbeing in socio-spatial transformation, focusing specifically on its two central dimensions: processes and outcomes.

Importantly, most of the experts interviewed here were involved in *weigengxin* projects and cited these when asked to reflect on new, people-centred practices for regeneration. This is critical as it highlights a shifting understanding of wellbeing in urban regeneration, one which is also linked to issues of scale. Projects such as *weigengxin* and community gardens result in a series of inter-related socio-spatial outcomes facilitated by processes of collaborative planning, multi-stakeholder participation and community empowerment. The physical reduction of scale characterising *weigengxin* projects identified in Shanghai has provided an important first step into thinking about viable ways to engage citizens in problem-framing and solving processes. Focusing on individual *xiaoqu* residential units allowed for place-based, context-specific design and planning solutions, challenging previously widespread one-fits-all models; they are solutions which take into account resident needs rather than pre-defined achievement frameworks which may fail to meet real community priorities or opportunities, or even more problematically, hinder them (Fischer 2018).

Limiting circumstances such as reduced government funding are an undesirable new reality faced by Shanghai municipal authorities, but they compel communities to identify pressing issues and reach consensus about priorities, as well as to take a more actively involved role if this means getting things done more efficiently. For example, particular attention is paid to public space provision inside residential units, especially within projects where there is no possibility to improve private living space. This highlights an agenda of small-scale, people-oriented place making designed for injecting targeted pockets of vitality within ageing neighbourhoods. Similarly, circumstances such as reduced funding have compelled consultants (experts) to think more creatively about eliminating wasteful solutions and focusing instead on efficient resource distribution and low-cost interventions which can be feasibly maintained by communities in the long term. Additionally, increased attention is paid to outcomes addressing needs beyond their

physical dimension: for example, the needs of vulnerable groups such as the elderly, acknowledging that China has an ageing population which is battling with new issues such as, for example, loneliness, leading to mental health problems (Yao 2018).

The existing agenda of community building is rooted in more complex dynamics of maintaining social stability and control. Nevertheless, the projects identified by this study are operationalised within a much more complex framework of capacity building for residents, support for the formation of grassroots organisations, participation and consultation, as well as gradual incentives for residents to mobilise their collective agency and become actors within renewal projects. These mechanisms are not only intrinsic to community wellbeing, ensuring more just and equitable processes of urban regeneration, but they also contribute to the achievement of arguably more sustainable socio-spatial outcomes contributing to subtle but significant forms of quality-of-life improvements. In their turn, the intended socio-spatial outcomes are planned to strengthen community capital and create further platforms for collaboration and action.

The community gardens case study is a clear example of this. Beyond shaping the built environment and contributing to an agenda on greening and healthy cities (Kou, Zhang & Liu 2018), the community gardens currently emerging in Shanghai are designed as a tool for building social capital and fostering social inclusion at neighbourhood level, findings corroborated by studies on urban permaculture conducted outside of China as well (Kinglsey & Townsend 2006). In the specific case studies identified here, they could even be interpreted as budding efforts to bridge socio-spatial gaps encountered in Chinese cities. This is clearly exemplified by the KIC community garden in Yangpu District, physically located between, and open to both, an older 1980s *xiaoqu* (typically inhabited by more vulnerable residents) and a high-end commercial development (Figure 14, Figure 15). Last but not least, they are also designed to act as community hubs with training and education facilities, providing a physical and social platform for mobilising collective action and empowering citizens to participate in shaping their neighbourhood – important catalysts for residents to take ownership of their built environment and begin addressing a multitude of other issues in the community as well (Firth, Maye & Pearson 2011, Ulug & Horlings 2019).

6

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

6.1. RESEARCH SUMMARY: QUESTIONS, AIMS, OBJECTIVES

The following chapter brings together the outcomes of doctoral research centring on wellbeing and urban regeneration in China, by developing a unified discussion of findings derived from the three inter-related albeit separate studies that comprise the present thesis. This final chapter reiterates the research project's aims, questions and objectives, summarises correlated findings, and reflects on a few overarching theoretical dimensions that the research has engaged with. It goes on to present a thematic discussion of findings by attempting to answer the research questions, both in terms of Chinese urban policy and practice considerations, as well as in terms of contributions to a more nuanced theorisation of wellbeing for socio-spatial transformation in the Chinese context. Finally, this section summarises research conclusions and lays out recommendations for new research directions in the field.

This thesis explored the multifaceted ways in which wellbeing is understood and integrated in the context of urban regeneration schemes taking place in China after 2015. The rationale at the core of this research is rooted in two global discussions on urbanisation and development. On the one hand we find the unquestionable impact that the built environment has on people's flourishing (and therefore their physical, socio-economic and mental wellbeing). On the other, there is a need to achieve more people-centred settlements, that is, the imperative need to transform today's unsustainable, health-threatening, unsafe, declining cities into ones that nurture people's wellbeing and tackle rising challenges such as inequality, injustice, climate change and chronic disease. Such visions have also been articulated in China's ambitions to shift towards more just, equitable and sustainable urbanisation, in line with broader governance aims on wellbeing-oriented development. Within this framework, urban regeneration was taken in this thesis to have been one of the most transformative forces shaping cities in China since market reforms. Albeit rooted in goals to address urban decline, liveability and improved quality of life for millions, urban renewal efforts in China have veiled complex dynamics of injustice and marginalisation, especially for vulnerable communities (He and Wu 2009, Li, van Ham & Kleinhans 2018). Nevertheless, a series of discourse, policy and practice shifts call for a more nuanced understanding of regeneration mechanisms in Chinese cities – using assessment frameworks that account for the

socio-economic, political and cultural specificities of the Chinese context. Below I provide a summary reiterating the thesis' broad research aims, corresponding research questions, and respective research objectives:

RESEARCH AIMS	RESEARCH QUESTIONS	RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
1. Construct a more comprehensive and contextually-specific framework of 'wellbeing in China', informed by complex shifts since market reforms.	1. How is the concept of 'wellbeing' understood and mobilised in China's development agenda more generally and urbanisation agenda more specifically? What are the primary wellbeing determinants, and dimensions for Chinese urban development, and how is wellbeing planned for, achieved and negotiated within a context of rapid socio-economic transition?	1.1 Political and intellectual discourse on 'wellbeing' Highlight nuances in the political and intellectual interpretation and use of the 'wellbeing' concept in China, especially in relation to the country's most recent development and urbanisation agenda (with particular focus on urban regeneration agenda) - with the ultimate goal of understanding how these are translated into urbanisation solutions.
		1.2. Urban wellbeing determinants Identify and systematise urban wellbeing determinants in the rapidly changing context of China, as revealed by relevant studies, with the ultimate goal of highlighting that the country's definition of wellbeing lies at the transition between collectivism and rising individualism.
2. Scrutinise how ideas of 'wellbeing' have been deployed and materialised in relation to shifting urban regeneration agendas in China, often veiling complex processes of socio-spatial injustice.	2. Has the Chinese urban regeneration agenda shifted in the last three decades, and how is this situated within a broader context of urban reform? To what extent does the use of 'wellbeing' as a discourse and policy tool truly translate into people-centred urban regeneration outcomes?	2.1. Urban regeneration paradigm and policy transitions Critically examine Chinese urban regeneration in the last three decades, in order to highlight key shortcomings in the implementation of a genuine wellbeing-oriented agenda.
		2.2. Urban regeneration shifts in practice Identify and examine comparable urban regeneration case studies from different regions in China, in order to question whether or not policy and paradigm shifts point towards more people-centred urbanisation.
3. Reveal if recent shifting paradigms and	3. How is the concept of wellbeing interpreted by practitioners	3.1. Urban practitioners understanding of wellbeing

agendas, as well as practitioner understandings of wellbeing, are being materialised into new solutions for urban regeneration in Chinese cities.	working on urban regeneration in China, and how do they operate within existing institutional frameworks? What kind of projects is this vision materialising into, and to what extent are more innovative practices being interwoven with business-as-usual mechanisms?	Reveal urban practitioners' own understanding of wellbeing, based on them operating within a specific disciplinary background, system of values, agenda and institutional position.
		3.2. Current urban regeneration approaches Describe the processes, institutional mechanisms and outcomes of the current urban regeneration projects identified, in order to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examine how wellbeing is planned for, and negotiated at local level, often resulting in narrow materialisations when it comes to practice; - Understand what this reveals about the state of innovation in urban projects, at present.

Table 10. Research aims, questions and objectives (author)

In order to address the abovementioned questions and objectives, the research has attempted to address a series of scales and dimensions of analysis. These have included a consideration of wellbeing and urban regeneration at national, regional and neighbourhood scale. They have also included understanding different manifestations of wellbeing in discourse, policy and practice, with regards to urban regeneration. In order to reconcile with these varying scales and dimensions of analysis, the project core was structured into three main chapters that each address different relevant issues. They each draw an independent set of findings and conclusions, which are reflected upon cohesively in this chapter. Despite a certain degree of overlap, each of the three chapters aimed to address one primary research aim and its set of corresponding research objectives (see Table 10).

The first one (Chapter 3: *Wellbeing in Urban China. Discourses, Determinants and Urban Development*) built a broad exploration of urban development and wellbeing discourses, determinants and dimensions in the socio-cultural and economic context of China. It aimed to contribute to the development of a more nuanced and context-specific understanding of wellbeing in urban China. In order to accomplish this, this chapter collated, summarised and analysed a growing body of inter-disciplinary academic and grey literature on wellbeing in urban China. Over 170 English-language sources were considered, including academic articles, newspaper articles, books, reports and a short documentary. Such an exercise led to the

identification of some of the primary urban wellbeing determinants and dimensions in a country which is experiencing rapid social and economic shifts – amongst the most prominent being a transition from a previously collectivist-oriented value systems, towards a more individualistic society. This revealed interesting implications for the ways in which aspirations and expectations for ‘a good life’ are continuously reshaped and addressed at present, in China.

The second (Chapter 4: *Urban Regeneration and Wellbeing in China. Overview, Issues and Practices*) focused on constructing an analysis of wellbeing in relation to urban regeneration discourses, policies and practices that have shaped Chinese cities in the last three decades following 1980s market reforms. This specific period was focused on due to the fact that intensive urban regeneration activities started to particularly proliferate in China following market reforms, making this a relevant timeframe to study rapid change within a concentrated period of time. Similarly drawing from a number of academic and grey literature sources (including media outlets, international reports, policy / policy guidance documents and academic articles), this chapter examined how wellbeing is mobilised in relation to urban regeneration in discourse and policy mechanisms. This examination was complemented by a consideration of how discourse and various policy instruments may have materialised into a series of practices and different approaches to regeneration – including looking at structural mechanisms (institutions and stakeholders involved), processes and outcomes. Here, three selected case studies from Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou were treated with more in-depth analysis.

Finally, the third (Chapter 5: *Wellbeing in Chinese Neighbourhood Revitalisation. New Actors and Approaches*) switched its focus on the context of Shanghai, in order to identify how an understanding of wellbeing and people-centred urbanisation is translating into current regeneration practices. The chapter drew from fieldwork conducted in China in 2019. This consisted of conducting open-ended interviews with a set of practitioners-academics, a group of experts who is playing an increasingly important mediating role between governments and communities, thus shaping future directions for urban regeneration in China. The chapter revealed expert understandings of wellbeing, in the context of institutional affiliations, personal agendas and value systems, and professional background. It then went on to examine some of the projects currently underway in Shanghai, in order to understand how wellbeing is planned for and delivered on the ground – and what this reveals about the state of innovation in urban projects. These projects included a series of place-based urban renewal interventions such as community gardens and *weigengxin* (micro-scale urban regeneration).

Considering the questions and objectives set out for this research, the following table presents a brief collation and summary of the main, corresponding findings revealed in this research as well as the methods, source types and exemplifications of evidence that brought them about. These will be discussed at length in the following chapter.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	RESEARCH OBJECTIVES	METHODS, SOURCES, EVIDENCE	FINDINGS
<p>1. How is the concept of ‘wellbeing’ understood and mobilised in China’s development agenda more generally and urbanisation agenda more specifically?</p> <p>What are the primary wellbeing determinants, and dimensions for Chinese urban development, and how is wellbeing planned for, achieved and negotiated within a context of rapid socio-economic transition?</p>	<p>1.1 Political and intellectual discourse on ‘wellbeing’</p> <p><i>Highlights nuances in the political and intellectual interpretation and use of the ‘wellbeing’ concept in China, especially in relation to the country’s most recent development and urbanisation agenda (with particular focus on urban regeneration agenda) - with the ultimate goal of understanding how these are translated into urbanisation solutions.</i></p>	<p><u>Methods:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discourse analysis. - Systematic literature review. 	<p>1. At national discourse level, China’s development goals are associated with ‘wellbeing’ lexicon which includes terms such as <i>xingfu</i> (‘happiness’), associated with ideas of the common good, prosperity and social harmony.</p> <p>2. ‘Wellbeing lexicon’ is employed in the context of the ‘China Dream’ agenda – more specifically in relation to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - “Building a Moderately Prosperous Society” - “Building a Harmonious Society” - “Ecological Civilisation” <p>3. ‘Wellbeing lexicon’ is also adopted by discourses on latest urban regeneration aims, wherein old neighbourhood revitalisation is reported as a “major livelihood project”, and a means for promoting “social harmony”, “happiness” and “social justice”.</p> <p>4. In some academic work, wellbeing is conceptualised as <i>manyi</i> (satisfaction) e.g. residential satisfaction studies at different scales and different samples.</p>
	<p>1.2. Urban wellbeing dimensions and determinants</p> <p><i>Identify and systematise urban wellbeing determinants in the rapidly changing context of China, as revealed by relevant</i></p>	<p><u>Examples of Evidence:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collated findings of academic literature. - Use of ‘wellbeing lexicon’ in relation to development and urbanisation goals in China, in policy, news and state discourse.. 	
		<p><u>Methods:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Systematic literature review. 	<p>1. At societal level, Chinese people are still largely influenced by collectivist attitudes to wellbeing. These include wellbeing determinants such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Idea of individual happiness depending on group success; - Belief in egalitarianism and high expectations from the state; - Importance of social relations; - Traditional family and social
		<p><u>Source types:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Academic literature on the concept of wellbeing and urbanisation in China. - Grey literature such 	

	<i>studies, with the ultimate goal of highlighting that the country's definition of wellbeing lies at the transition between collectivism and rising individualism.</i>	as policy documents on national development agenda and urbanisation. (Body of literature A)	structures. 2. Rapid socio-economic and cultural shifts are bringing about the rising importance of individualism . This includes wellbeing determinants such as: - Capitalist values and aspirations like consumerism, materialism; - Anxiety about income, opportunities, and competition; - Reliance on self, decline of social capital, retreat from traditional social structures; - Aspirations towards democratic values such as freedom, choice. 3. Blend between collectivist – individualist values evident in residential satisfaction determinants: - Homeownership is valued; - Access to commodity housing preferred due to quality and privacy; - Community ties are important amongst certain groups like migrants or elderly; - Growing requirements for services and amenities: leisure and consumption spaces, public space etc. - Growing importance of just, equitable and participatory urban processes. - Diluting belief in government's benevolence, alongside expectations from interventionist state.
		<u>Examples of Evidence:</u> - Collated findings of studies exploring wellbeing at different scales in China (from national to neighbourhood level).	
2. Has the Chinese urban regeneration agenda shifted in the last three decades, and how is this situated within a broader context of urban reform? To what extent does the use of 'wellbeing' as a discourse and policy tool truly translate into people-centred urban	2.1. Urban regeneration paradigm and policy transitions <i>Critically examine Chinese urban regeneration in the last three decades, in order to highlight key shortcomings in the implementation of a genuine wellbeing-oriented agenda.</i>	<u>Methods:</u> - Systematic literature review.	1. End of 1980s: housing decay, decentralisation of fiscal authority, marketisation of housing provision and land transactions, regime-like growth coalitions. 2. Early 2000s: social unrest, right-protection movements, shift in policy: - greater protection of private property - 'social stability' adopted as metric to evaluate local governments. 3. 2000s- Present: new rounds of redevelopment rooted in shantytown regeneration
		<u>Source types:</u> - Academic literature on urban regeneration policies, processes and practices in the last 3 decades. - Grey literature such as policy documents, policy guidance documents and reports. - News reports on new policy or projects. (Body of literature B)	

regeneration outcomes?			agendas, city branding, making of global cities, policies on expropriation and compensation continuing to reform, grassroots governance and participation, cost sharing mechanisms, quality design agenda, diversification of actors involved, greater civil society resistance.
		<u>Examples of Evidence:</u> - References to wellbeing and new urbanisation agendas in general, and urban regeneration in particular, within policy documents, reports and news outlets in the last 3 decades. - Collated findings of academic literature, reporting on urban regeneration mechanisms since economic reforms.	
	2.2. Urban regeneration shifts in practice <i>Identify and examine comparable urban regeneration case studies from different regions in China, in order to question whether or not policy and paradigm shifts point towards more people-centred urbanisation.</i>	<u>Methods:</u> - Review of three case studies in Shanghai, Beijing, Guangzhou.	<u>1. Chunyangli, Shanghai (2019-2021):</u> 1930s <i>lilong</i> housing in Hongkou District (heritage site), with increasingly deteriorating living conditions. Under municipal guidance, Hongkou District launched <i>Action Plan on Upgrading Old District Renewal and Urban Organic Renewal</i> (2019-2021). Projects underway incur: - Modernisation of living facilities and preservation of socio-spatial morphology, with community consent and full guidance of local government; - Inclusion of actors such as government-led leasing agencies for supporting demographic renewal (white-collar workers). <u>2. Nanluoguxiang, Beijing (2002-2009)</u> Historic <i>hutong</i> area undergoing incremental upgrade as opposed to large-scale demolition typical of Beijing urban regeneration following market reform. Project incurred designation as conservation area in 2002, with conservation plan that followed aimed at reducing density (resident displacement) and dismantling some of the informal
		<u>Source types:</u> - Academic literature on Shanghai Chunyangli, Beijing Nanluoguxiang, Guangzhou Liede Village. - Policy documents on three cities, at municipal and district level where available. (Body of literature B) <u>Examples of Evidence:</u> - Collated evidence of academic literature reporting on the three regeneration cases. - New policies such as the Shanghai Hongkou <i>Action Plan on Upgrading Old District Renewal and Urban Organic Renewal</i> (2019—2021), or the Guangzhou Three Old Renewals (2009).	

			<p>living space. Given slow pace of government investment following plan, entrepreneurial residents started opening small-scale entertainment businesses, under strict guidance from resident committee.</p> <p><u>3. Liede Village, Guangzhou</u> Project operating under the new Three Old Renewals policy in Guangdong. Site consisted of an urban village with typical characteristics such as declining living conditions, high density, unemployment, land-lordship. In 2010 it was designated for urgent redevelopment as part of preparations for 2010 Asian Games. Therefore, village collective applied for 'self-regeneration', proposing three different regeneration sites:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. From collectively owned land to government-owned land, with revenue to be reinvested in village development. 2. Private sector lease for development of high-end complex, with village collective obtaining annual share of its operation. 3. Development of residential area with improved living conditions for local villagers.
<p>3. How is the concept of wellbeing interpreted by practitioners working on urban regeneration in China, and how do they operate within existing institutional frameworks?</p> <p>What kind of projects is this vision materialising into, and to what extent are more innovative practices being interwoven with</p>	<p>3.1. Urban practitioners understanding of wellbeing</p> <p><i>Reveal urban practitioners' own understanding of wellbeing, based on them operating within a specific disciplinary background, system of values, agenda and institutional position.</i></p>	<p><u>Methods:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviews in 2019 with academics / practitioners who work on urban regeneration in Shanghai. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Discourse regarding wellbeing and urban regeneration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Not all urban residents have shared the benefits of development, so they need to be supported in improving their living condition. - Ideal ways of operating would be state support and interventions, plus grassroots mobilisation. - Regeneration should be an investment in people, not just places. - Emphasis on common good and social service. 2. Shifting role of the practitioner: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Community planner (new role): intermediary between communities and local government.
		<p><u>Source types:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviewees with background in planning and design (academics / practitioners / government officials). 	
		<p><u>Examples of Evidence:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviewees' discourse linking wellbeing and community-oriented approaches with their urban regeneration work. 	

business-as-usual mechanisms?			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tasked with exploring grassroots governance solutions and pushing community building agenda. - Obtains support through university channels. - Gradual shift from technical role to social service role. - Between system-transforming and system-maintaining role. <p>3. Agenda and positionality:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government-appointed but retaining some possibility for experimentation through association with academia; - Use of projects in teaching and research activities; - Attempting to pilot new approaches which can become blueprint for urban regeneration. <p>4. Support and actors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Government appointment experts often approached by street-level government. - NGOs creation and involvement of students (volunteering or learning activities).
	<p>3.2. Current urban regeneration approaches</p> <p><i>Describe the processes, institutional mechanisms and outcomes of the current urban regeneration projects identified, in order to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Examine how wellbeing is planned for and negotiated at local level, and whether this results in narrow materialisations when it comes to practice; - Understand what this reveals about the state of innovation in urban projects, at present. 	<p><u>Methods</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviews in 2019 with academics / practitioners who work on urban regeneration in Shanghai. - Site visits and observation. <p><u>Source types:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviewees with background in planning and design (academics / practitioners / government officials). - Regeneration neighbourhoods/sites, related events, working meetings. <p><u>Examples of Evidence:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interviewee accounts of their motivations, views, working mechanisms, and urban regeneration projects themselves. 	<p>1. Examples of approaches: <i>Weigengxin</i> (Micro-Scale Urban Regeneration) in 1980s neighbourhoods: lower-income communities with vulnerable populations and declining living conditions – small-scale improvements, education, self-governance.</p> <p><u>Community Gardens</u>: permaculture beautification, with community building and urban revitalisation agenda; often located in geographically and economically significant areas such as the <i>Knowledge and Innovation Centre</i> of Yangpu District</p> <p>2. Small-scale regeneration interventions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improvement of public spaces (greenery, service areas). - Intended collaboration with community. - Education agenda with strong emphasis on health and environmental sustainability (e.g. events teaching about recycling).

		- Site characteristics, event and meeting dynamics identified during visits.	- Community building agenda (mass mobilisation, education, self-governance).
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Table 11. Summary of research questions, objectives and corresponding methods, types of evidence and findings (author).

6.2. TOWARDS WELLBEING-CENTRED URBAN REGENERATION IN CHINA

6.2.1. A Framework of Wellbeing in the Chinese Context

The first aim of this research has been the construction of a more comprehensive and context-specific framework of wellbeing in China, informed by complex shifts since market reforms. In order to achieve this, the following questions were articulated:

- How is the concept of 'wellbeing' understood and mobilised in China's development agenda more generally and urbanisation agenda more specifically?
- What are the primary wellbeing determinants and dimensions for Chinese urban development, and how is wellbeing planned for, achieved and negotiated within a context of rapid socio-economic transition?

In order to address these questions, the research applied a theoretical framework on wellbeing for socio-spatial transformation (urban regeneration), entitled for the purposes of this research the *Wellbeing Nexus*. This was developed based on a series of theorisations which aided with conceptualising the notion of wellbeing, such as the capability approach, an open, multi-purpose framework of thought which has been previously used for the construction of theories of justice, poverty, policy evaluations and others (Robeyns 2003). The thesis drew correlations between such conceptualisations of human flourishing and discussions from critical urban studies, in order to argue that they make similar normative claims about issues such as justice, equity and wellbeing in the context of urbanisation and people-centred cities (Fainstein 2010). The newly constructed framework therefore put forward the idea that in order to understand the ways in which wellbeing is achieved, impacted and materialised in the context of urban regeneration projects, it is important to take into account both products (socio-spatial outcomes of urban regeneration such as changes in the built environment, the creation of opportunities, improved accessibility, community development, socio-spatial segregation etc.), as well as processes through which they came about (including degrees of choice and agency that different concerned actors have in order to bring about the change they value). The framework proposes seeing processes and products of urban regeneration as having a cyclical, self-enforcing relationship, at the core of which one can better understand the complex nature of wellbeing in urban transformation. This determined the choice of name for the framework: the *Wellbeing Nexus*. The framework was designed to make a series of prescriptive theoretical claims about comprehensive, alternative ways of defining and examining wellbeing in the context of urban regeneration in order to allow room for encapsulating

the conceptual and methodological complexities of this notion. It can therefore be valuable both as an open, qualitative analytical framework, and as a way to conceptualise wellbeing for socio-spatial transformation.

The *Wellbeing Nexus* was also intended to have a degree of flexibility in order to allow tailoring to the specific socio-political, cultural and economic context of China. This aim was deemed critical in order to address some of the problematic ways in which Eurocentric epistemologies and ontologies have been and continue to be mobilised in order to examine contexts such as China. Different ways of conceptualising and measuring wellbeing have previously received similar critiques of their shortcomings in encompassing a diversity of epistemic and ontological positions that can be relevant to contexts beyond Western liberal democracies (Miller 2018). This set of critiques is particularly relevant given the fact that notions of wellbeing are socio-culturally constructed (Uchida et al. 2015). The *Wellbeing Nexus* framework was therefore designed to account for a series of China-specific variables impacting different forms of urban transformation and therefore determining wellbeing dynamics. These variables include subjective issues such as values, structural issues such as norms and institutions, and material issues such as resources. Considerations on values, norms, institutions and resources unique to the context of China were developed throughout the thesis, and drawn from some of its findings.

Political and Intellectual Discourse on 'Wellbeing' in China

This research has highlighted how, in recent years, Chinese state discourses have increasingly mobilised the lexicon of wellbeing in order to convey ambitions about future governance directions for the country. Literature review and discourse analysis revealed the extensive employment of terms such as *xingfu* (happiness) being explicitly presented as a new governance target (Liang 2018, Wielander 2018).

It is important to note that such lexical mobilisations are employed as part of wider state ideologies that frame the core of Chinese governance efforts at the time when this research was conducted. Two such inter-related ideologies are constituted by "Building a Harmonious Society" and "Building a Moderately Prosperous Society", both re-appropriated from Hu Jintao and Deng Xiaoping, respectively, and put forward as political goals (Koptseva 2015). Ideas behind harmonious development and a moderately prosperous society are linked to policy goals combining economic growth and a more egalitarian and equitable distribution of wealth, addressing growing inequality, social polarisation and growing tensions between the state and society. In complementarity, the Xi Jinping regime has re-appropriated and reiterated Hu Jintao's 2007 national development target on "Building an Ecological Civilisation", a commitment to

expanding the criteria for evaluating governance performance beyond just economic growth (State Council 2015). In parallel with ambitions for a “moderately prosperous” and “harmonious” society, ideas around “Ecological Civilisation” can be read as government promises about putting people first, economic growth within ecological boundaries, and harmony between not only people, but also people and nature: an ideological call towards not only ecological justice, but also increased social justice (Marinelli 2018). This new emphasis and shifting philosophy could therefore be correlated to ambitions for shifting towards an era of sustainable development, where socio-ecological balance can ensure wellbeing for all.

Rooted in values such as increased equality, justice, collaboration, civility, harmony and prosperity (Feng 2015), it is argued that such articulations seek to reassure the Chinese people of the state’s continuous efforts and central role in ensuring the collective good and wellbeing for all. Adopting the language of benevolent politics, such a rhetoric does not only remind citizens of the state’s central role in ensuring wellbeing, but also seeks to shape ideas around the fact that prosperity and wellbeing can only be achieved through cooperation, social stability, discipline, placing collective happiness over individual one, and adopting the ‘correct spirit’, characterised by discipline, self-growth and contribution to the greater good (Kuhn 2013, Wielander 2018). In this sense, state discourse shapes not only expectations but also attitudes and views around wellbeing, constructed around a set of shared socio-cultural values and norms.

Given the inextricable links between China’s broader national development goals and its urbanisation goals (“The China Dream is an Urban Dream” as Jon R. Taylor entitled his 2015 article), it was additionally not surprising to find a similar wellbeing lexicon also adopted in relation to urbanisation more generally, and urban regeneration more specifically. Urban regeneration ambitions are one of the domains more widely promoted in relation to state goals for improving the wellbeing and quality of life of Chinese people (State Council 2020). The urban regeneration agenda, when associated with the improvement of old and dilapidated residential areas, has increasingly been referred to as a “major livelihood project”, aimed at enhancing people’s sense of “gain, happiness and security” and at “promoting social harmony” (MOHURD 2020, State Council 2013). What is more, rhetoric on implementation mechanisms increasingly emphasises ideas around “respecting the wishes of the masses” and understanding resident wellbeing needs on the ground, calling on participatory practices and collective efforts towards mass mobilisation in order to achieve “a beautiful environment and happy life together” (Qiu 2020).

Similarly to the wellbeing lexicon employed in relation to broader development goals, urban renewal slogans are associated with ideas of social harmony, justice and happiness, thus defining state-led urban regeneration ambitions based on egalitarian ideologies and ideas of the common good. While notices on participation and collaboration can be interpreted as a genuine ambition to shift to more democratic and transparent processes, they also veil more complex dynamics of stricter control efforts at grassroots level, and efforts to guide public opinion towards shared social goals. Similar to the rhetoric on future directions for China's development, here too it can be argued that these discourses on urbanisation adopt the language of benevolent politics, seeking to reassure people of the state's strenuous work in ensuring wellbeing in cities. Additionally, they provide important insight into the ways in which regeneration projects are justified and presented at discourse level, in a coordinated effort to build consensus on shared ideas of development and the role of the state in guiding urbanisation in China.

Last but not least, in order to address questions around the ways in which the concept of wellbeing is mobilised and understood in China's broader development agenda, and urbanisation agenda more specifically, it was deemed necessary to review how this concept has been dealt with within intellectual discourse, i.e. academic work. This exercise revealed that a vast majority of scholarship conceptualised wellbeing as satisfaction, drawing from methodological and theoretical frameworks developed by international literature. This particular approach consists of measuring levels of satisfaction with urban life - more specifically, utilising sample surveys that assess people's subjective assessments of various urban domains such as public services, neighbourhood quality, or housing (Marans 2015). As demonstrated in Chapter 3, wellbeing in Chinese urban development has mostly been explored through the conceptual lens of residential satisfaction studies. This conceptualisation is deemed narrow from a number of points of view, thus justifying the need to construct a more complex and contextually specific framework for China. First could be observed an ontological critique of the concept, in that there is more to human wellbeing than feelings of happiness and satisfaction (Robeyns 2003). Second, from a policy perspective, studies have demonstrated how vulnerable groups affected by issues such as poverty or injustice may, in time, develop adaptive preferences and report relatively high levels of satisfaction despite living in conditions which are objectively damaging to their wellbeing (Kahneman and Krueger 2006). Third, such approaches can be viewed as theoretically prescriptive and unable to capture contextual complexities if not adapted to the place studied. Fourth, as elaborated in Chapter 3, a post-factum evaluation of satisfaction with the outcomes of urban interventions may fail to provide a comprehensive view of the processes which preceded and led to project implementation – a dimension also crucial for understanding wellbeing. For example, if levels of satisfaction are found to be high, it might be difficult to determine if people's needs have actually met, or if this is

because of having a limited range of other choices or basis for comparison. These factors justify the need for constructing a more nuanced, explorative understanding of wellbeing in Chinese urbanisation, as attempted in this work.

Urban Wellbeing Dimensions and Determinants

One of the key contributions this thesis makes to theory and knowledge in this unexplored field is the development of an understanding of shifting value systems and norms that shape wellbeing in urban China by analysing different dimensions and determinants identified through a systematic literature review (Chapter 3). This research puts forward the idea that in light of drastic social and economic change, and rapid urban development in a concentrated period of time, values that shape an understanding and pursuit of wellbeing in China lie at the junction between more traditional, collectivistic values and the emergence of individualistic ones. China has long been considered a collectivistic society, which, different from its Western counterparts, has long been characterised by an importance attributed to the interconnectedness between the self and other society members (Steele & Lynch 2013). Within this context, group values and societal norms prescribe an ideal pursuit of wellbeing through group efforts, networks of mutual aid, self-improvement, as well as aspirations towards the common good and towards social harmony. These views have been found to be rooted in a shared heritage of Confucianism, a philosophy which values forbearance, hard work, and strict hierarchical social relations in multiple life domains (family, work, political sphere) (Shek et al. 2005).

As previously mentioned, such a discussion is also relevant in the context of China's political system and governance ideology, which pursues good governance through ensuring social harmony and collective welfare, while broadly reflecting the will of the people in the absence of liberal, electoral democracy (Li 2020). The findings about collectivism-oriented values in China have relevant implications for the ways in which wellbeing is planned for and pursued. On the one hand, they point towards Chinese people's expectations about state commitments to provide wellbeing under egalitarian ideologies. Such dynamics are linked to the perceived interventionist role of the state in providing a good life for all, including with regards to planning cities which are more just, equitable and liveable. This is paralleled with normative expectations about adopting the correct spirit (including the willingness to sacrifice one's individual wellbeing for the wellbeing of the group and mass mobilisation efforts), towards attaining shared goals (Ip 2014). Such goals may include, for instance, maintaining order and stability, urban development, economic growth, environmental protection or dealing with a public health crisis (this has been witnessed during the past year's COVID-19 pandemic [Fu 2021]). In socio-spatial terms, these dynamics are also manifested in context-specific forms of collective organisation and formal as well as informal

community support networks, and in nuanced forms of social control through state extensions at grassroots level. Lastly, these findings argue for the need to introduce an added layer of nuance to metrics that evaluate wellbeing in China, which are derived from the Global North and largely overlook concepts such as for example social harmony or stability (Ip 2014).

Concomitantly, given China's rapid social and economic transitions since market reforms in the 1980s, the country is now at a crucial crossroads of value systems. Existing collectivist values and are challenged by the rise of individualism. Through its participation in globalisation and forces such as rapid urbanisation and economic growth, Chinese society is now witnessing the dissemination of Western values and norms, often associated with individualism. Previous lifestyles have been transformed by phenomena such as personal mobility (mass migration in the search for better opportunities), wide access to digital technology and mass consumerism (including, for instance, an increased value given to private property such as homeownership) (Brockmann et al. 2009). Market reforms resulted, amongst others, in a reduction of the social safety net and welfare-oriented policies, with material wellbeing domains such as housing, employment or health being transferred to the private sector (Yip et al. 2013). The resulting collective anxieties about rising inequality and limited access to different life domains that could support flourishing in China's cities, may lead to important shifts in the ways in which wellbeing is perceived and pursued. These include an increased reliance on the self for the provision of wellbeing with increasing friction between society and the government, linked to diluting beliefs in the benevolence of the paternalistic state whose legitimacy, some argue, is largely based on its ability to deliver wellbeing under egalitarian principles (Tang et al. 2014).

These frictions are also likely to manifest themselves in increased resistance to various forms of state control and imposition, potentially decreasing shared consensus on ideas of the common good and social harmony. Tensions between collectivism and individualism are also leading to redefinitions of issues of class and identity, manifesting in consumerist lifestyle choices such as a preference for commodity housing (Breitung 2013) and growing demands for services and amenities such as leisure and consumption spaces, or quality public space (Liang, Yamashita & Brown 2013). Therefore, this discussion confirms the first research hypothesis, highlighting that rapid socio-economic shifts since market reforms have rendered a multifaceted and complex understanding of wellbeing in China.

Arguably one of the most significant implications of this shift towards individualistic values and norms could be an increasing preoccupation, particularly amongst the rising middle class, with post-materialistic concerns often associated with liberal democracies such as the rule of law, increased

freedom, a diversification of choices and opportunities, and social justice (Brockmann 2009). Nevertheless, further investigations are required into this. Such concerns can also be extrapolated to growing demands for just, equitable and participatory urban processes (Weinstein and Ren 2009). This argument is particularly relevant for determining the structure and some of the core elements of the *Wellbeing Nexus* framework, while maintaining its application to the context of China. As a result, the framework emphasises the idea that in order to understand the complexities of wellbeing in urban transformation, it is crucial to take into account not only outcomes but also the processes that bring them about. Given the rapidly shifting value systems and norms in China, it also places theoretical dimensions of analysis such as choice, opportunity and agency at the forefront. What is more, this theoretical framework goes beyond previously prominent ways of conceptualising urban wellbeing, which predominantly defined it and evaluated it as satisfaction – a retrospective evaluation of one’s subjective assessment of urban life domains. The complementary, more nuanced and more comprehensive understanding of wellbeing for urban transformation put forward in this research (both in the Chinese context as well as in more general terms), constitutes a significant, original theoretical contribution to the field.

6.2.2. Wellbeing and Urban Regeneration Shifts

The second aim of this research was to scrutinise how ideas of wellbeing have been deployed and materialised in relation to shifting urban regeneration agendas in China, often veiling complex processes of socio-spatial injustice. In order to address this, the following questions were put forward:

- Has the Chinese urban regeneration agenda shifted in the last three decades, and how is this situated within a broader context of urban reform?
- To what extent does the use of wellbeing as a discourse and policy tool truly translate into people-centred urban regeneration outcomes?

With the aim of answering these questions, a review of secondary and grey literature was carried out, focusing on Chinese urban regeneration in the decades following market reforms, primarily – a period that was deemed crucial for understanding the unique path that Chinese urbanisation and urban regeneration in particular, took after market reforms. This review was also supported by the scrutiny of three urban regeneration case studies carried out in Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou.

Urban Regeneration Paradigm and Policy Transitions

The end of the 1980s and beginning of 1990s constituted a crucial turning point for urban regeneration in China, with shifts in terms of policy, paradigm and practice being witnessed.

The intense urban redevelopment activity that followed market reforms in China was catalysed by a multitude of complex, inter-related factors. Firstly, due to fiscal decentralisation (wherein local governments had to independently seek financial resources) and the marketisation of housing provision and land transactions (following land and housing reforms in the 1980s), the redevelopment of old and dilapidated inner-city neighbourhoods became an important tool for local revenue extraction (Ren 2008). There was also an urgent and increasing demand for addressing urban decay in cities and the improvement of living conditions for millions, following periods of socio-economic and environmental decline or stagnation (Ye 2011). Therefore, the private sector was invited to intervene and join entrepreneurial urban governments, leading to the real estate boom in the 1990s, to capital accumulation through urban redevelopment, and to the rise of what have been conceptualised as regime-like growth coalitions formed by private developers and local governments – a structure which was widely argued to marginalise the interests and voice of local communities (He & Wu 2007, Wu 2018). Operating under these mechanisms, large-scale redevelopment projects started targeting a series of neighbourhoods such as dilapidated state-owned work unit compounds, urban villages and historic residential areas. Particularly in regions such as the Yangtze River Delta or the Pearl River Delta, which benefited from extensive foreign direct investment, projects were characterised by large-scale demolition, forced relocation and commercial redevelopment (Zhang, LeGates & Zhao 2016).

Although legitimised by state discourse on the improvement of wellbeing and quality of life for millions, the mechanisms characterising these projects have veiled more complex processes of socio-spatial marginalisation and injustice. This is particularly evident when scrutinising policies for compensation and resettlement in the relocation process. In the case of monetary compensation (based on dwelling size), which has been argued to ensure more housing options for relocated residents, it is important to note that such choice was limited by structural issues of affordability and access to homeownership, a significant determinant of wellbeing in China (Hu 2013). On the other hand, in-kind compensation (housing provision) was found to increase residential satisfaction due to housing quality (Li and Song 2009), albeit failing to account for determinants of wellbeing linked to processes and post-materialistic concerns. These include the degree of freedom to resist involuntary relocation, exercise of agency in influencing the course of events, impacts on place attachment and sense of place, a dissolution of community ties and support networks, anxieties surrounding the uncertainties in the relocation period, and reduced socio-

economic opportunities in the relocation site (Fang 2006, Li, Kleinhans & van Ham 2018). It can therefore be argued that financial gains and the consolidation of central state power were widely prioritised over the rights and complex wellbeing needs of local residents in the period of intense redevelopment following market reforms (Fang & Zhang 2003, Sun & Zhang 2016, Wu 2018). While accomplishing inter-related agendas of economic growth, city modernisation and quality of life improvements, such approaches to regeneration incurred large social costs affecting in particular vulnerable communities such low-income communities, migrants and the elderly.

These phenomena gave rise to social unrest and right protection movements in the 2000s, with tactics including the use of both formal and informal mediums of resistance to coercive relocation: internet activism, official legal complaints, the illegal building of temporary structures in order to increase housing size and to obtain better compensation packages etc. (Li and Song 2009). Such spaces of resistance were characterised by a series of negotiations and tactics aimed at attaining better wellbeing outcomes during regeneration processes. Strategies were organised through fragmented, secretive bargaining actions between individual households and state institutions, rendering the improvement of one's situation conditioned by elements such as household resources (social network, monetary etc.) and negotiation power (Sheng 2020). The existence of such dynamics indicates a need to go beyond discourses that view the role of residents in urban regeneration processes as purely passive. Nevertheless, the different forms of agency exercised in the context of negotiating regeneration outcomes are arguably a form of fragmented, limited trade-off and coping mechanism. In the absence of structural instruments allowing residents to shape their cities, it would be difficult to argue that such forms of action can deeply challenge existing power structures and urban dynamics.

Social unrest and inequitable urban regeneration processes and outcomes did lead to policy and paradigm shifts meant to maintain social stability and better protect the rights of citizens. This included prohibitions of coercive demolition processes, indications for more transparent compensation calculations, and the introduction of a milestone Property Rights Law (2007) protecting housing rights (State Council 2011, Weinstein & Ren 2009). Importantly, more populist policies were reintroduced in the form of social stability being adopted as a metric to evaluate local government performance alongside economic development indicators (Wu 2015). In this sense, in recent years the power structures guiding urban regeneration directions have become more complex and diverse in nature, with growing forms of grassroots organisation, rising civil society voices, professional elites and the private sector increasing shaping the pace of urban intervention (Ren 2008, Verdini 2015). This is giving rise to a series of innovations in policy and

practice, also importantly influenced by state-level policy guidance on people-centred urban development and calls for a shift to quality urbanisation and context-specific interventions.

Urban Regeneration Shifts in Practice

In order to unpack how these shifts have been paying out in practice, and to understand what this might reveal about wellbeing in urban regeneration in China, three case studies were examined through the *Wellbeing Nexus* developed in this thesis: Chunyangli in Shanghai's Hongkou District, Nanluoguxiang in Beijing's Dongcheng District, and Liede Village in Guangzhou's Tianhe District.

Chunyangli in Shanghai is a typical *lilong* historic area, listed as a protected heritage zone in 2016. In 2017, the Hongkou District government, under the guidance of the municipal government calling for people-centred urbanisation and heritage-led renewal, launched the regeneration of Chunyangli as a pilot project. Currently on-going, the project is characterised by a series of design innovations for the modernisation of living facilities (dwelling size, sanitation facilities), while conserving the socio-spatial morphology of the neighbourhood. Claiming to rely on resident consultation processes, support was provided to residents either for remaining in the renovated dwellings, or for leasing the properties through government-linked rental companies (Shanghai Municipal Government 2019, Shi et al. 2019).

Nanluoguxiang is similarly a historic *hutong* area located in the centre of Beijing, which was listed as a heritage protected zone in 2002 and has since been the subject of extensive scholarly scrutiny. Given the slow pace of government investment for revitalisation following listing (despite the existence of a conservation plan targeting the neighbourhood's poor living conditions), entrepreneurial residents began setting up small-scale businesses catered to the tourism sector. This sparked street office intervention in setting up a development plan for the area, which was subsequently followed by extensive government intervention (investment and coordination) towards transforming Nanluoguxiang in a culture and heritage consumption space (Hu et al. 2013, Shin 2010).

Finally, Liede Village was one of 138 urban villages scheduled for redevelopment since 1990s in Guangzhou, under the Three Old Renewals policy. Given the high costs and complex issues related to land ownership rights, progress on Liede's regeneration stagnated. In this sense, it was designated for urgent redevelopment in 2007 due to its geographical proximity to the site of 2010 Asian Games. Using this momentum, the village collective put forward and obtained approval, under the guidance of local government, for an extensive plan identifying three different redevelopment sites: a plot to be converted from collectively-owned land to government-owned,

with the revenue reinvested in village development (instead of becoming government fiscal income); the second plot was leased to the private sector for the development of a commercial complex, with villagers obtaining an annual share of its operation; the third was designated as a site for the development of a residential area with improved housing and facilities for local villagers (Li et al. 2014, Zhou 2014).

An analysis of Chunyangli, Nanluoguxiang and Liede Village through the lens of the *Wellbeing Nexus* framework reveals a non-linear and complex path towards wellbeing in urban regeneration, thus confirming the second hypothesis of this research. With contextual differences, wellbeing in all three cases can be broadly understood as being achieved through processes of negotiation, mediation, guidance, choice and consensus building, as well as through socio-spatial outcomes such as improvements in physical living conditions, conservation of heritage areas, and a series of economic gains benefitting a multitude of actors including local residents.

Similarly to what has been discussed in the previous subchapter (6.2.1.), the utilitarian discourse on happiness and satisfaction, constructed by media outlets and government reports, is also prevalent in the cases analysed. In the case of Chunyangli, this serves to reinforce the leading role of the state in providing 'wellbeing for all' and building consensus in the regeneration process, by highlighting efforts to offer choice to residents and case-by-case interventions designed to address individual needs and concerns on the ground (Shanghai Municipal Government 2019). Nevertheless, beyond populist discourse and a strong presence of the state (top-down interventions), such processes result in arguably more innovative socio-spatial outcomes. These include design innovations that show efforts to mediate tensions between residents' material needs for improved living conditions, and heritage conservation, all the while taking a more flexible approach in comparison as opposed to tabula rasa modernisation or coercive relocation, which have long characterised urban regeneration efforts, particularly in historic areas (Zhong & Chen 2017). Therefore, the working mechanisms, implementation processes and outcomes of such projects may indicate the start of a new phase of urban regeneration, one characterised by more *in situ*, place-based and incremental upgrade that offers residents more opportunities for quality of life improvement, as well as choices for mobility, piloting a middle way that avoids both demolition followed by relocation, and coercive processes which would force residents to stay in historic areas for the sake of conservation, despite shifting preferences or life aspirations.

In parallel, in the case of Nanluoguxiang it can be observed how the path towards wellbeing is characterised by more bottom-up processes and the formation of horizontal links between stakeholders which, with contextual variation, could be argued to challenge pre-existing power

structures in Chinese urbanisation, as has also been highlighted by other case studies in China (Verdini 2015). Here, wellbeing processes materialised through the manifestation of grassroots agency and emerging local entrepreneurial abilities, embodied by a pro-active street-level government and local residents turned business owners. Even so, the strong presence of the state continues to be felt through the strong involvement of the street office – the key mediator between resident voices and the municipal government – generating what could be coined as ‘government-led participation (Hu, de Roo & Lu 2013). Similar to the previous case, processes characterised by more transparency, communication and flexibility in the case of Nanluoguxiang also evidence government agendas to ensure social stability, maintain a certain degree of control, and build consensus around shared values and norms, centred around ideas of social harmony and the collective good.

It is also important to note at this stage that concepts of collectivism and individualism in the context of wellbeing in China, which were discussed in the previous subchapter, are not theoretically akin to ideas of collectivity and collective action that circulate in global debates on urbanisation, particularly in Western contexts. While collectivism in the Chinese context is linked to value systems rooted in the traditions of Confucianism and more recently, socialist thought, notions of the collective have been employed in Western scholarship in relation to work on urban social movements (Castells 1983), and the rights of citizens to shape cities through community-based collective action (Marcuse 2009, DeFilippis and North 2004). Collective action is often conceptualised as a key political component of urban life in Western cities, and ideas of community and collectivity have often been mobilised within Anglo-American politics (for example in relation to the UK’s New Labour philosophy) and urban case studies (DeFilippis and North 2004).²¹ Structural issues unique to the Chinese context render such conceptualisations of little relevance when studying dynamics in its cities. As has been briefly discussed in this thesis, an analysis of urban renewal processes (for example with regards to shantytown regeneration agendas) reveals realities on the ground characterised by forms of negotiation and fragmented community action in order to obtain more favourable wellbeing-oriented outcomes. This is radically different from community-based collective action movements characterising Anglo-American cities. In the general absence of formalised structures that would invest communities with the collective power to shape regeneration outcomes in China, more common tactics include individualised bargaining and fragmented (albeit increasingly effective) rights protection movements like those previously discussed in the case of resident resistance to forced demolition (6.2.1) (Sheng 2020, Weinstein and Ren 2009).

²¹ For instance, authors such as DeFilippis and North (2004) have discussed community collective action in relation to identity politics and residents challenging the set of power relations guiding a proposed urban regeneration process targeting the Elephant & Castle area in South London.

Finally, similarly characterised by inter-related and complex mechanisms of agency, negotiation and mediation, the case of Liede Village highlights how innovative processes resulted in more beneficial and equitable wellbeing outcomes for local residents. These included a reinvestment of financial benefits in village upgrade, a redistribution of financial benefits from commercial opportunities, job creation, the improvement of living conditions, and the negotiation of more profitable relocation packages for those wishing to move (Li et al. 2014), providing a strong contrast to the widely discussed costs suffered by landless farmers in previous urban regeneration projects (Hao, Sliuzas & Gaertman 2011). This was made possible through the exercise of agency by the village collective whose entrepreneurial, mediation and leadership abilities, as well as an emergent system for shared decision-making facilitated by a pragmatic and flexible municipal government, ensured better outcomes for village residents, and more complex choices and opportunities for quality of life improvement.

Overall, this discussion identifies some preliminary elements which contribute to a more nuanced understanding of wellbeing in Chinese urban regeneration. What is more, it confirms the second hypothesis of this research, highlighting that despite the fact that ideas of wellbeing have been mobilised in relation to urban regeneration agendas in China, often veiling processes of socio-spatial injustice, a scrutiny of recent policy and practice shifts may reveal a more complex picture, characterised by a non-linear path towards wellbeing-centred practices. In the three cases discussed, institutional and planning innovation and experimentations, despite being dependent on context-specific conditions, highlight a more multifaceted way in which wellbeing is negotiated and achieved in regeneration projects. This way lies at the intersection between the exercise of collective agency (Zhou 2014), emerging grassroots capabilities and forms of government-led participation (Hu, de Roo & Lu. 2013), processes offering more choice and opportunity under the strong presence of the state (Shi et al. 2019), and government efforts to maintain stability and social control. Concomitantly, the path towards wellbeing is also defined through ‘products’ or spatial outcomes (see *Wellbeing Nexus*) of urban regeneration. In the case studies discussed here, these include, amongst others, material aspects such as design innovations aimed at adapting and improving the physical environment (and therefore resident living conditions), efforts to conserve a series of historical features and avoid tabula rasa modernisation, and economic benefits such as revenue redistribution. An important further line of inquiry will need to ask questions about whose wellbeing is considered: while in various ways, the local communities in these case studies manage to access different dimensions of wellbeing, vulnerable groups such as rural migrants are left behind. It may be that, given their status in cities (including, for example, lack of property rights, limited access to urban services, and reduced socio-economic capital), rural migrants end

up being further marginalised, even in more alternative regeneration models such as Chunyangli, Liede and Nanluoguxiang.

6.2.3. Expert Views: Wellbeing in Practice

The third aim of this research was to reveal to what extent recent shifting paradigms and agendas, as well as practitioner understandings of wellbeing have materialised into new solutions for urban regeneration in Chinese cities. This aim was expressed in the following questions:

- How is the concept of wellbeing interpreted by practitioners working on urban regeneration in China, and how do they operate within existing institutional frameworks?
- What kinds of projects does this vision inform, and to what extent are more innovative practices being interwoven with business-as-usual mechanisms?

In order to address the questions elaborated above, fieldwork was conducted in China in 2019. This consisted primarily of in-depth interviews with a set of practitioners (the majority of whom were also academics) currently involved in inner-city urban regeneration, who were questioned about their current projects and their understanding of wellbeing in this context. This was supported by a series of case study (site and events) visits in Shanghai during the same period.

Findings highlighted a series of inter-related approaches to regeneration in inner-cities such as Shanghai, the predominant form being *weigengxin*, or micro-scale urban regeneration, a typology of project characterised primarily by cost-effective, place-specific design solutions and community building efforts. This includes beautification of communal areas (such as open spaces between buildings), provision of greenery, reparations and beautification of building facades, formalisation of 'informal' space (e.g. demolition of illegal structures which occupy public space), improvement of *xiaoqu* services (e.g. garbage disposal units), an agenda on education and community building, and in some cases establishing community centres and/or community gardens (permaculture). As has been found, this is facilitated by municipal and district government mandates, a strong involvement of the local *juweihui*, and the introduction of the newly appointed community planner role.

Urban Practitioners Understanding of Wellbeing

Interview data analysis revealed a series of overlapping views and perspective by practitioners. Interviewees shared the view that a vast number of communities in China's inner-cities (even in developed metropolises such as Shanghai) have not shared the benefits of development, and are therefore in need of being supported by the government and experts for the improvement of

living conditions. Strong emphasis was placed on the need for the improvement of physical living conditions such as dwelling size and quality, services or facilities, thus making the urban regeneration of older residential areas one of the key targets in line with the central government goals on building a “Moderately Prosperous Society”. In line with structural urbanisation processes characteristic of China, practitioners acknowledged that in order for this to be achieved, there was a need for state intervention, ensuring that even vulnerable communities (such as those with low income or the elderly) are supported in improving their living conditions, under the umbrella of egalitarian principles. This was accompanied by a complementary line of discourse that emphasised the need for current regeneration projects to not only consist of investments in places, but also in people, materialising in ambitions for stimulating grassroots mobilisation, carrying out social service, developing community self-governance, and encouraging forms of participation and consultation.

Key to the government’s path towards welfare and wellbeing provision through urban regeneration are community planners, a role recently introduced and being piloted, at the time of the fieldwork, in cities in China. A hybrid role targeting urban planners and designers, usually affiliated with universities, community planners are appointed by district governments and tasked with mediating between these and local communities to supervise urban regeneration projects. This includes understanding resident needs in the regeneration process, guiding the process from a technical point of view, mediating potential conflicts, and building consensus on solutions that would benefit the community as a whole. Such a process allows for a much more intimate relationship with each project – a transition which sometimes transgresses technocratic and rigid, formal barriers – facilitating the incipient development of new power dynamics, flexibilities and pluralities. Nevertheless, while having autonomy to explore alternative regeneration routes to more effectively capture residents’ wellbeing needs and to improve participatory practices, it is important to note that community planners operate as a professional extension of state authorities. Operating under the rhetoric of maintaining social stability and ‘building a harmonious society’ and implementing state-mandated regeneration objectives under government-led participation mechanisms, questions remain about the potential of such professional groups to challenge existing structures and provide a stronger degree of autonomy and agency to communities (Zhang et al. 2020).

Regardless of these limitations, the depoliticised nature of this role, and the important position given to community planners in guiding the process of regeneration points to the emergence of new models of governance where professionals are shifting between technical assistance roles, mediation roles (Liao, Zhang & Feng 2019), and even social service roles. This is also evidenced

through the practice of setting up NGOs (two of the interviewees had set up such organisations under the umbrella of the university) to aid with project implementation – a practice which, in the authoritarian context of China, might be increasingly tolerated if it helps relieve the state from wellbeing provision obligations, while working under the close control of the state (Spire 2011). In fact, it is also important to consider these discussions in light of state mandated calls for strengthening grassroots governance (19th National Congress of the CCP, 2017), to be materialised in two principal ways: encouraging public participation, and strengthening the role of social organisations under the supervision of the state (Liao, Zhang & Feng 2019). Further investigation will be required to better understand the degree of flexibility and autonomy conferred to such university-led NGOs in urban regeneration projects.

It is also important to remember that the experts' positionality is also defined by their affiliation to the university sector, that is, essentially, by the fact that their primary status is that of an academic. In this context, research and practice reinforce each other in a cyclical, reiterative dynamic: research is informed by on-going projects, while practice is utilised as a testing ground for conceptual matters and for bringing innovation into teaching and education (most *weigengxin* projects are carried out with the support of architecture and planning students). Arguably, this confers experts with a certain degree of independence and flexibility, allowing for experimentation and innovation that could, in time, become blueprints for new ways of designing and implementing urban regeneration practice leading to both new processes and well as new outcomes for regeneration.

This, could be argued, puts community planners at the crossroads between maintaining existing power structures and mechanisms, and transforming them. These shifts could result in better representations of resident wellbeing needs and demands when it comes to regeneration outcomes, while setting up processes characterised by more communication, transparency and choice, even though existing institutional mechanisms still make it difficult for planners to advocate on behalf of the public (Leaf & Hou 2006). The position of community planners also opens up a broader discussion of the ways in which planners in China promote the public interest and ensure wellbeing, while maintaining their neutrality in an increasingly fragmented urban context (Leaf & Hou 2006). This is also linked to rising debates in China on the role of urban planning in social development where the state is expected to be the spearhead of egalitarianism and social justice, and planning, as its direct satellite, is expected to advance the public good and 'wellbeing for all' (Abramson 2006).

These dynamics are further complicated by the fact that responding to new regeneration agendas requires practitioners to employ sets of soft skills and knowledge which have, for a long time, fallen outside of their scope of activity. Planning education in China is still very much derived from technical subjects such as engineering or architecture, with the social sciences weighing very lightly. This has prompted some scholars to argue that planning education in China has failed to keep up with the country's rapid socio-economic and urban shifts (Leaf and Hou 2006). The current environment also requires investing larger amounts of time and energy in projects. These aggregated issues raise questions about a) the adequacy and availability of expertise needed for coping with current projects, and b) the feasibility of operating in this manner in the future, assuming that no further administrative reform is carried out.

Current Urban Regeneration Approaches

An analysis of current urban regeneration approaches carried out by the practitioners discussed above, consisting primarily of micro-scale urban regeneration (*weigengxin*), reveals a series of interesting aspects about the way wellbeing is materialised at the intersection between multiple processes and socio-spatial outcomes, as framed by the *Wellbeing Nexus* theorisation.

With regards to physical outcomes, one key characteristic defining such projects is a reduction of the scale of intervention, contrasting previous approaches dominated by large-scale demolition, relocation and commercial redevelopment (He and Wu 2007). Firstly, a focus on individual *xiaoqu* units allows for more place-based and context specific planning and design solutions, which more efficiently and systematically take into account resident needs and priorities. Secondly, more attention is paid to public space improvements inside residential units, highlighting an agenda of small-scale, people-oriented place making which is purposefully designed to insert corners of vitality within neighbourhoods which are physically and socially ageing. This includes placing an emphasis not only on beautification and small-scale restoration efforts (physical interventions), but also on improving services and facilities for different community groups. This results in efforts such as, for example, setting up elder care community facilities, community centres or community gardens, designed around ideas of collective care, socialisation and community building (Kou, Zhang & Liu 2019, Yao 2014). Such examples of interventions, beyond shaping the build environment, are designed as tools for building social capital through socialisation and shared activities, and, importantly, providing platforms for the development of grassroots forms of organisation (Kingsley & Townsend 2006). As previously argued, such innovative solutions to urban devitalisation could provide new forms of social (not merely individual) living arrangements, a solution to creating more vibrant communities and thus contributing to what authors have termed "creative aging cities" (Fischer 2018). Beyond socio-spatial outcomes, *weigengxin* projects

also provide a platform for experimenting with implementation processes such as new forms of community consultation and participation, mediated and guided by experts (community planners) and local authority bodies (resident committees). Albeit in an incipient phase, such efforts could be a genuine shift towards efforts to mobilise grassroots agency and support residents to become actors within renewal projects, rather than passive recipients of social welfare (Fischer 2018).

It is important to note that existing efforts towards community building and grassroots mobilisation operate within a more complex context of agendas for maintaining social stability and control in an increasingly fragmented urban sphere, in line with what has been previously discussed in relation to broader national governance goals. In fact, community building (*shequ jianshe*) is a paradigm broadly circulated by the state following the dissolution of the *danwei* system, as a response to rising social unrest in the 1990s (Yip et al. 2013). This was to be materialised through the strengthening of community grassroots organisations within delimited territorial boundaries (*xiaoqu*), and under the leadership of government cadres (resident committees) who were tasked with service provision, social control and mass mobilisation towards shared goals such as unit management (Bray 2007). In the case of the approaches highlighted in this research, such dynamics may become evident when looking at the education agenda prevalent in many of the projects. As part of multiple projects identified, practitioners had set up systematic community education programmes, for example related to strongly mandated state requirements related to environmentalism and recycling, which some authors have recently conceptualised as indicating certain forms of “coercive environmentalism” and state-led “green control” (Li & Shapiro 2020, p. 35). These approaches can be situated within the wider context of the recent formulation of the *Shanghai Community Action Plan on Education for Sustainable Development* (2020-2021). The document, broadly designed as policy guidance, is a local response to the UN’s call for increased literacy on its *Education for Sustainable Development* framework (ESD) and operates under institutional collaborations between the Shanghai Municipality and UNESCO’s Institute for Lifelong Learning (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning 2020). The action plan covers a series of priority areas, including community health education, community environmental education, community vocational skills and, notably, community harmonious development (centred on issues such as civic spirit, intergenerational living, social inclusion, and volunteering) (Shanghai Municipal Government 2020).

Therefore, part of current urban regeneration efforts as linked to education and community building agendas can be interpreted as efforts to build ‘harmonious’ and orderly communities where collective groups share similar values and abide by rules and norms that contribute to the broader, collective good under a certain degree of state control and supervision. The ways in

which these dynamics come to play in practical terms have been made evident through, for example, the management, at neighbourhood level, of the COVID-19 health crisis (Fu 2021). Even so, current efforts do seem to aspire towards having a more emancipatory dimension, one which could be critical in terms of ensuring that communities take ownership of their built environment and are able to initiate and maintain changes once the experts leave, as well as to develop decision-making capabilities and greater autonomy.

Overall, this discussion confirms the final research hypothesis that in cities such as Shanghai which are spearheads for experimentation and pilot projects, urban regeneration solutions at the time when this research was conducted are characterised by a series of diverse processes and socio-spatial outcomes that combine business-as-usual with new, innovative practices. In part, this is a result of the agendas, institutional frameworks and perceptions of urban practitioners such as community planners, who are playing an increasingly important role in carving the path for more wellbeing-oriented practices in Chinese urban regeneration.

6.3. FUTURE RESEARCH AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This piece of research investigated how the concept of wellbeing, increasingly utilised globally to define new directions for human development, is interpreted, integrated and materialised in urban regeneration in China. This represents an important contribution to knowledge for a number of reasons. Firstly, despite becoming an important policy tool framing discussions on new directions for measuring human progress, wellbeing is still a broadly unexplored field in relation to urbanisation, one of the most transformative forces of the current century. The *Wellbeing Nexus* framework, conceptualising wellbeing as situated between both processes and socio-spatial outcomes of urban transformation, as well as rooted in theories of justice and development, constitutes an original and nuanced theoretical addition to this interdisciplinary field.

The importance of further studying this field is particularly notable in rapidly changing contexts such as China, where notions of wellbeing are increasingly utilised in political and intellectual discourse as well as policy guiding future development directions in general, and urbanisation in particular. Despite a growing body of literature, conceptualisations remain arguably narrow, calling for a theorisation of wellbeing more tailored to the unique socio-economic, cultural and political Chinese setting. It is through its construction of a more comprehensive and context-specific framework of wellbeing in socio-spatial transformation in China where the present study has an additional layer of theoretical implications in the field. This contributes to capturing a diversity of ontological and epistemic positions providing a relevant concept suited to contexts beyond Western liberal democracies, aiding more relevant comparisons and exchanges between Chinese cities and, for example, other urban contexts in the Global South. Such considerations should constitute the basis for further research in order to address power imbalances in knowledge construction and to contribute to the creation of a critical mass of scholarship on urban innovation beyond the typically explored Global North contexts (Robinson 2006).

Furthermore, literature on Chinese urbanisation has widely focused on the social and environmental costs incurred in the process of profit-driven urban regeneration following market reforms. But as has been evidenced throughout this thesis, recent paradigm, policy and practice shifts in the country demand a closer scrutiny of what could be considered a transition to more people-centred urbanisation approaches. The findings of this study challenge assumptions about Chinese urban regeneration and highlight a series of diverse, heterogenous and case-specific dynamics which are emerging and characterising the country's path towards wellbeing in urban transformation.

By way of summary, the research can draw a couple of broad conclusions whose implications will be unpacked below. This will also be accompanied by suggesting future research directions that could shed important insights into some of the issues touched upon in this study. These conclusions can be summarised as follows:

1. The way in which wellbeing is defined and pursued in China lies at the convergence of traditional, collectivist values, and the emergence of individualist values resulting from rapid economic growth, rising inequality, globalisation and changing social structures.

2. In the urban realm, this complex tableau of wellbeing is characterised by:

- A growing range of choices available like never before being overshadowed by gaps in terms of access;
- A reliance on social capital being accompanied by new forms of collective organisation and the rise in individualism, a retreat towards the private and an expected reliance on self-sufficiency;
- Growing aspirations towards post-materialistic concerns such as increased freedom and participation, which are increasingly counteracted with emerging forms of social control framed by ideas of social harmony and the public good.

3. Driven by complex economic and political dimensions marking the Chinese urban landscape following market reforms and operating under the discourse of happiness and wellbeing, urban regeneration projects have veiled processes of marginalisation and injustice given approaches such as demolition, coercive relocation, and unbalanced power structures.

4. A scrutiny of projects and mechanisms in the last decade however reveals a diversification of power structures and innovations in policy and practice, highlighting a complex, non-linear path towards wellbeing in China. In this context, the following observations stand out:

- Wellbeing in current urban regeneration projects lies at the intersection between the exercise of emerging forms of collective agency, emerging grassroots capabilities, negotiation and consensus building tactics, and forms of government-led participation, processes offering more choice and opportunity under the strong presence of the state, and government efforts to maintain stability and social control;
- In terms of wellbeing related socio-spatial outcomes, projects are increasingly being characterised by a reduction of scale, place-based approaches centring on design innovations and low-cost interventions, and a focus on public spaces and service

improvements aimed at supporting place-making, community building and new forms of social living;

- Professional elites such as practitioner-academics are playing an increasingly important role in guiding the direction of current regeneration projects, being positioned at the intersection between system-transforming and system-maintaining approaches.

It should be noted that a more comprehensive understanding of tensions and shifts in China (such as the one attempted by this study) should, in the future, constitute the conceptual basis for developing alternative, more nuanced and more context-relevant measures of wellbeing in Chinese cities. This would have important implications for constructing a better understanding of social development in China more specifically, and transitioning economies in authoritarian political contexts more generally.

The first conclusion implies that a continued support for collectivist policies existing in parallel with the transition towards a market economy may create shifting attitudes and expectations as Chinese urbanites reshape their identity and views towards wellbeing. At the same time, these tensions can be observed as the state utilises discourses on wellbeing and happiness (framed by complex propaganda and persuasion techniques) to tighten social control, build consensus on shared values and norms, and legitimise top-down development policies and actions (Chen & Wang 2019). This understanding sheds an important light on the ways in which the Chinese state can mobilise public participation and consensus on the common good, in order to achieve shared goals. At the same time, the rise of individualism and of post-materialistic wellbeing concerns may mean that an individualist moral code could begin to undermine the collectivist one in terms of citizen attitudes and behaviours (Steele & Lynch 2013). This could imply that the state will be required to find a complex balance between social control and collectivist policies on the one hand, and increased freedoms, rights-based approaches, and more tolerance and autonomy for grassroots movements, on the other. These could include support for emerging civil society and new actors in the urban sphere, e.g. NGOs. In the future, it will be particularly interesting to examine how these dynamics materialise into collective action towards broader ambitions such as, for example, addressing contemporary crises like climate change, or global pandemics (Li & Shapiro 2020).

In the urban realm, these tensions are further manifested in a multitude of ways. While there is a growing range of choices and opportunities shaping lifestyles in urban China (for example, in terms of housing, leisure, services), rising inequality brings significant limitations in terms of access. Further research is required into understanding how state policies and interventions are

attempting to address such gaps under the umbrella of egalitarianism. These might include issues such as increasing the provision and improving the quality of affordable social housing and encouraging the rental market (State Council 2021) (this issue is currently complicated by the collapse of the real estate market), supporting the integration of previously marginalised groups such as rural migrants (Chen et al. 2019), and implementing urban projects with a welfare scope. In fact, urban regeneration projects such as the ones identified in Shanghai by this study (micro-scale urban regeneration in 1980s *xiaoqu*) fall into the latter category, designed to incrementally revitalise residential areas that have been left behind in the development process, whose inhabitants are often vulnerable communities such as the elderly, low-income groups and migrants.

Another critical aspect is constituted by the decline of social capital, the heterogenisation of urban community groups, and an increased reliance on self-sufficiency in a society that had previously widely relied on formal and informal support networks in cities (Ji, Xu & Rich 2002). Similarly to what has been discussed above, this might result in increased support for social service and welfare policies and interventions. It is not surprising to find that one of the main agendas of urban regeneration projects highlighted in this study is the provision of social services and design innovation aimed at supporting the wellbeing and self-sufficiency of demographics such as the elderly. If similar initiatives continue to multiply in Chinese cities, more in-depth research is required to understand impacts, draw useful comparisons at national, regional and international scale (e.g. across Asian cities), and gather a critical mass of case studies (Chong & Cho 2018).

The findings of this study reveal that attaining different wellbeing dimensions in Chinese urban transformation processes such as regeneration is often still the result of complex, fragmented, formal and informal channels of negotiation and mediation where wellbeing outcomes often depend on the resources, capabilities and networks of individuals or isolated groups. In this context, further academic investigations are required into wellbeing dynamics and more veiled processes of structural marginalisation for social groups such as lower-income residents, urban migrants, or those with ambiguous property rights (such as a portion of those inhabiting the Chunyangli, Nanluoguxiang or Liede case studies discussed in this work). It will be important to identify whether their wellbeing and rights are overlooked in favour of residents with stronger socio-economic and political capital. This is especially relevant given the fact that political and administrative transformations in China have not yet been radical, and that structures formally supporting community agency and initiative have not yet been formally established.

It is also important to note that some of the projects discussed in this thesis constitute on-going interventions, therefore signifying that long-term impacts and benefits will be better understood in the future. These could include areas of research such as evaluating community capabilities with project maintenance once experts have departed, future exercises of grassroots agency derived from strengthened social ties and a sense of belonging, or long-term impacts on mental and physical health. Perhaps one of the most critical points to be highlighted in this context is the importance of a growing the body of scholarship which takes into consideration the viewpoints, positions and perspectives of community groups involved in urban regeneration processes in China, using comprehensive theoretical and methodological approaches on wellbeing.

In parallel, it is crucial to bear in mind that the investigations carried out in this thesis centre on wealthy and highly urbanised Chinese cities (such as Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou) which have shared comparable development paths, have high quality of life rates in comparison to other regions in the country, and have long been spearheads of policy innovation and experimentation (Zhang, LeGates & Zhao 2016). This implies a high degree of context-specificity, limiting the possibility for generalisation to the broader Chinese setting. Although beyond the scope of this work, the hypotheses on the path towards wellbeing-oriented urban regeneration put forward in this thesis should, in the future, also be tested out in smaller or medium-sized Chinese cities or regions that receive less attention by scholarship on Chinese urbanisation. This would allow for a greater degree of contextualisation and generalisation, and would likely reveal the fragmented and multifaceted nature of wellbeing and urban development in the country. Additionally, it remains to be seen whether current pilot projects are replicable in other Chinese contexts. Projects identified through fieldwork in Shanghai revealed a reiterative research-practice continuum, where experts returned to the site to reflect academically on whether these could become efficient blueprints for alternative urban regeneration solutions throughout China. Further scrutiny is required into the ways in which research informs new practice in Chinese urbanism, and, importantly, into the degree of freedom to innovate conferred to planning professionals in their role as mediators between communities and the government (Zhang et al. 2020).

Finally, the findings of this study pertaining to small-scale, place-based solutions for urban regeneration also imply a significant degree of case-specificity, challenging one-size-fits-all models that, arguably, have dominated urban interventions in the past. This is a crucial point of innovation, and further research should be conducted exploring wellbeing and the specific dynamics incurred by *weigengxin* projects carried out in different typologies of neighbourhoods: for example, heritage residential areas, 1980s *xiaoqu*, or urban villages. A closer inspection and comparison considering the social, morphological and institutional specificities of these different

neighbourhoods would provide further valuable insights into the nature of innovation in Chinese urban regeneration.

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