Study on the Construction of the Adaptive Governance System for Resettled Communities

Feiran Li*

School of Political Science and Law, University of Jinan, Jinan 250022, Shandong, China

*Author to whom correspondence should be addressed.

Abstract: Against the backdrop of Chinese new-type urbanization, resettled communities—characterized as "neither fully urban nor rural but embodying characteristics of both"—confront prominent governance challenges. Taking the X resettled community, the largest of its kind in the Yellow River Floodplain of Shandong Province, as a case study, this research adopts in-depth interviews, on-site observations, and policy text analysis to explore the community's spatial disorder dilemmas and adaptive governance paths. It identifies three core disorders: physical spatial disorder, social spatial disorder, and mental spatial disorder. Corresponding adaptive governance strategies are proposed, including a multi-level governance system, a continuous learning mechanism, and a multi-stakeholder collaboration network. The X resettled community has initially achieved a transition from spatial disorder to systematic reconstruction, which offers practical references for the governance and transformation of similar resettled communities nationwide.

Keywords: Resettled communities; Spatial disorder; Adaptive governance

1. Case introduction

Resettled communities refer to new-type communities formed by the government-led relocation of rural residents in the process of China's urbanization. These communities possess the unique characteristic of being "neither entirely urban nor rural, yet both urban and rural." Although they are undergoing the urbanization of production and lifestyle, they still differ significantly from mature urban communities due to constraints such as institutional policies, traditional culture, social relations, and values. Consequently, they face numerous governance challenges [1].

The resettlement project in the Yellow River Floodplain is a key practice of China's national new-type urbanization strategy. As the largest resettled community in the Yellow River Floodplain of Shandong Province, the X resettled community has confronted multiple governance dilemmas after residents moved into high-rise buildings, including physical spatial disorder, fractured social relations, and cultural identity crises [2]. The

governance of resettled communities is a vital livelihood issue in resettlement projects, and the effectiveness of post-resettlement governance is a crucial factor for large-scale resettlement projects to achieve expected outcomes in the livelihood sector. Through in-depth interviews, on-site observations, and policy text analysis, this study systematically sorts out community governance contradictions, summarizes its adaptive governance paths involving a multi-level governance system, continuous learning mechanisms, and a multi-stakeholder collaboration network, and proposes phased policy recommendations to provide references for the transformation of similar communities.

2. Theoretical foundation

This study will employ the Theory of Spatial Production and the Adaptive Governance Theory to conduct an analysis of the case of the X resettled community.

2.1. Spatial production theory

Henri Lefebvre, the founder of Western Neo-Marxism, systematically elaborated on the concept of space in his book *The Production of Space*. He argued that space is of great significance—it is not an objective entity but a construct shaped by society and history. Building on the traditional dualistic division of space into physical space and mental space, he proposed that space also possesses social attributes, emphasizing that space is a product of society and encompasses all worldviews and practical activities.

On this basis, he put forward the "spatial triad dialectic", which includes three dimensions:

(1) Spatial practice: The perceived space, representing the material outcomes of social space created by social activities and interactive behaviors.

(2) Representations of space: The conceived space, an abstract space constructed through words, symbols, and language. It is infused with ideology, power, and knowledge, and its discourse power is mostly held by scientists, planners, urban designers, and other professionals.

(3) Representational spaces: The lived space, encompassing abstract cognitions such as experiences, norms, and values formed by individuals' social interactions in daily life contexts [3].

2.2. Adaptive governance theory

Adaptive Governance is a governance paradigm proposed for complex, dynamic, and uncertain Social-Ecological Systems (SES). Its core lies in enhancing the overall resilience of the system to respond to external environmental disturbances through flexible institutional design, continuous learning mechanisms, and multi-stakeholder collaboration networks. Compared with the traditional governance model, which adopts a one-dimensional response to linear and static problems, adaptive governance emphasizes the integration of social capital, institutional flexibility, and ecological resilience to construct a multi-level dynamic response framework [4].

For resettled communities, the original single "village governance" system has shown obvious limitations in meeting the increasingly complex needs of public affairs. Moreover, due to their unique attribute of being "neither entirely urban nor rural, yet both urban and rural", resettled communities cannot directly apply the governance experience of mature urban communities. At present, the social structure and social form of resettled communities are still in a process of dynamic evolution. Meanwhile, the original governance model in the floodplain areas is relatively mature. To more steadily promote the community into an orderly operation track and enhance the

resilience of community governance, a gradual adaptive governance model should be adopted to address the social unrest caused by "campaign-style relocation" and more effectively respond to the complex governance environment of resettled communities [5].

3. Spatial disorder dilemmas in x resettled communities

During the transition process of resettled communities, there exists disorderliness in physical, social, and spiritual spaces.

3.1. Physical spatial disorder: Economic pressure and industrial lag

After relocation, most residents face a significant increase in living costs. As Villager A (a former resident of the floodplain) stated in an interview: "In the past, we grew our own vegetables and raised chickens, with almost no expenses on water and electricity. Now, the monthly property fees, water fees, electricity fees, and gas fees add up to more than 500 yuan, which is a huge pressure."

At the same time, some families have experienced a decline in income due to the separation from traditional agricultural models [6]. This is particularly true for middle-aged and elderly groups who relied on land for their livelihoods, as they have lost stable sources of income. Agricultural enterprises also generally report insufficient supporting facilities, such as the lack of adequate drying grounds for agricultural products and the shortage of catering and accommodation services for the cultural and tourism industry.

The root cause of this problem lies in the fact that although land transfer has unleashed the potential for large-scale operation, residents lack systematic support in their livelihood transition. On the one hand, most residents are middle-aged or elderly, making it difficult for them to engage in modern production activities. On the other hand, industrial planning overly relies on low-value-added primary processing and fails to introduce high-efficiency projects, resulting in low-quality jobs with high mobility.

3.2. Social spatial disorder: Governance inefficiency and population imbalance

The inefficiency of community affairs handling is prominent. Taking the random placement of items in corridors as an example, Resident B commented: "The problem of accumulated debris took two months to solve, despite repeated complaints during this period."

There is an absence of a coordination mechanism for cross-village public affairs. As a cadre from a management district admitted: "Regarding the sanitation of public areas, villages have never been able to reach a unified consensus, and we have to rely on street communities for mediation." In addition, the community's population structure is severely imbalanced: residents over 60 years old account for more than 40%, and the outflow rate of young and middle-aged people is nearly 60%, leading to a shortage of human resources for grassroots governance.

The core contradiction contributing to this problem lies in the existence of a structural conflict between the logic of traditional "village-based autonomy" and the governance demands oriented toward urbanization. On the one hand, the governance capacity of village committees has weakened. Cadres are generally older and lack digital skills, making it difficult for them to adapt to the information-based management requirements of communities. On the other hand, governance units have not been adjusted in line with spatial restructuring. Original administrative villages remain the main entities of autonomy, but there is no unified coordination mechanism for cross-village

public affairs, resulting in both "duplicate management" and "governance vacuums" [7].

3.3. Mental spatial disorder: Identity ambiguity and cultural disruption

Residents' identity recognition shows significant fragmentation [8]. As Resident C mentioned in an interview: "Our ID cards were updated immediately after moving into high-rise buildings, but we still pay medical insurance according to rural standards. It feels like an awkward in-between."

The participation rate in traditional folk activities has dropped sharply. For example, the annual number of participants in the original floodplain market has plummeted from tens of thousands before relocation to less than 5,000. A market vendor lamented: "In the past, I could earn at least 200–300 yuan a day; now, on bad days, it's only 20-30 yuan."

The construction of cultural carriers in the new community lags behind, failing to effectively connect tradition and modernity. On the one hand, the design of public spaces tends to prioritize functionality and lacks symbols that carry collective memories. On the other hand, cultural policies "prioritize form over essence." Although various cultural galas are held, their content is mechanical and formalized, failing to integrate into residents' daily lives and thus lacking appeal.

4. Construction of the adaptive governance system for X resettled communities

The X resettled community achieves the establishment of an adaptive governance system by establishing a multi-level governance structure, a continuous learning mechanism, and a multi-stakeholder collaboration network.

4.1. Multi-Level governance system: Vertical integration and horizontal coordination
4.1.1. Management structure

Regarding the division of governance powers and responsibilities in the X resettled community, the street-level is responsible for the overall planning of policy formulation and the rational allocation of resources; the sub-district, as a quasi-administrative organization, undertakes the responsibility of coordinating cross-village conflicts and disputes; administrative villages, relying on their existing committees structure, deeply integrate into the community governance system while retaining the ownership of collective assets.

4.1.2. Grid-based construction

A four-level organizational network system has been established, covering all 39 administrative villages. This system has effectively strengthened the core leading role of the organization in dispute mediation and resource integration.

Through the innovative model of cooperatives led by organizations, reclaimed land resources have been revitalized, strongly promoting the growth of the collective economy. Some cooperatives have achieved annual revenues of millions of yuan and created a large number of jobs for community residents.

4.2. Continuous learning mechanism: Institutional and cultural adaptation
4.2.1. Institutional innovation

A "five-in-one" joint meeting mechanism has been established, involving participants from the Community Party Committee, property management companies, specialized service units, police officers, and resident representatives. Through dynamic consultation, this mechanism focuses on solving various problems in

community governance.

Taking the issue of random placement in corridors as an example, the problem has been effectively alleviated by adding public storage cabinets and formulating scientific zoning rules.

4.2.2. Cultural integration

Leveraging the local filial piety culture resources, a series of activities have been carried out, such as the "Top Ten Filial Sons" selection and the revival of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) temple fairs, to reshape residents' collective identity.

In 2025, the old town temple fair successfully attracted a large number of tourists. Traditional snacks and folk performances have become important carriers for cultural inheritance and regeneration, strongly promoting the prosperity of community culture.

4.3. Multi-stakeholder collaboration network: Stakeholder coordination and social capital activation

4.3.1. Government-society coordination

In the X resettled community, the functional boundaries of the Community Party Committee, property management companies, and residents in community governance have been continuously clarified. The Community Party Committee assumes the decision-making function, property management companies are responsible for specific implementation, and residents perform supervision duties, forming a complete and efficient governance loop.

Taking public facility construction as an example, property management companies are responsible for project planning, while village collectives coordinate residents' demands to ensure the smooth implementation of the project through multi-party collaboration.

4.3.2. Market-linked development

The X resettled community has actively introduced agricultural enterprises to carry out large-scale operations on transferred land. In this process, some families have achieved stable income growth through the "minimum guaranteed income + dividend" model, effectively promoting regional economic development and improving residents' living standards.

4.3.3. Volunteer network construction

Community self-organizations such as volunteer service teams and cultural art troupes have regularly carried out activities such as art performances and sanitation cleaning. These activities have fully mobilized residents' enthusiasm for participating in community affairs, gradually reconstructed the trust network among neighbors, and created a favorable atmosphere for the harmonious development of the community [9].

5. Conclusion

Through adaptive governance paths, the X resettled community has initially achieved a transformation from spatial change and disorder to systematic reconstruction. The practical experience of this community shows that to resolve the complex contradictions in physical, social, and mental spaces, resettled communities must integrate resources through multi-level governance, respond to uncertainties through dynamic learning, and activate social capital through multi-stakeholder collaboration.

Looking forward, the X resettled community can further explore the potential of digital empowerment, cultural empowerment, and market empowerment in building community resilience.

Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

References

[1] Zhang M, Wu W, Zhong W, 2018, Agency and Social Construction of Space under Top-down Planning: Resettled Rural Residents in China. Urban Studies, 55(7): 1541—1560.

[2] Wang Z, Shen J, Luo X, 2023, Can Residents Regain their Community Relations after Resettlement? Insights from Shanghai. Urban Studies, 60(5): 962–980.

[3] Lefebvre H, 2021, The Production of Space. Commercial Press, Beijing.

[4] Chaffin BC, Gosnell H, Cosens BA, 2014, A Decade of Adaptive Governance Scholarship: Synthesis and Future Directions. Ecology and Society, 19(3): 56.

[5] Wang Z, 2022, Life after Resettlement in Urban China: State-led Community Building as a Reterritorialization Strategy. International Journal of Urban and Regional Research, 46(3): 424–440.

[6] Xu G, Liu Y, Huang X, et al., 2021, How does Resettlement Policy Affect the Place Attachment of Resettled Farmers? Land Use Policy, 2021(107): 105476.

[7] Nickerson A, Liddell BJ, Keegan D, et al., 2019, Longitudinal Association between Trust, Psychological Symptoms and Community Engagement in Resettled Refugees. Psychological Medicine, 49(10): 1661–1669.

[8] Xu K, Gao H, Bao H, et al., 2021, Sustainable Transformation of Resettled Communities for Landless Peasants: Generation Logic of Spatial Conflicts. Land, 10(11): 1171.

[9] Ruan H, Chen J, Wang C, et al., 2022, Social Network, Sense of Responsibility, and Resident Participation in China's Rural Environmental Governance. International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(11): 6371.

[10] Ma L, Li Y, Yan H, et al., 2024, The New Integration of Information Technology and Community Governance. IEEE Access, 2024(12): 161866–161883.