



How does public-private collaboration reinvent? A comparative analysis of urban bicycle-sharing policy diffusion in China[☆]



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ABSTRACT

The public-private collaboration process reinvents itself during policy diffusion. To reveal the cooperative-reinvention process, this study integrates theories of policy reinvention and collaborative governance to develop a framework outlining the interplay between initial conditions, learning, the reinvention process, the governance structure, and outcomes of reinvention. This study uses the framework to conduct an exploratory in-depth case study of *Mobike* urban bicycle-sharing service in China to examine such interplay. Findings showed that the combinations of leadership, formalization of cooperation mechanisms, and centralization of governance structure led to reinvent outcomes of institution innovation and content innovation.

1. Introduction

Since the 1980s, governments around the world have adopted collaboration between public and private sectors as cross-organizational formats to supply public services. Developed countries such as the UK, the United States, Canada, Australia, The Netherlands, and other regions, have witnessed a steady growth in the number of public and private collaboration services (Petersen, 2010). The developing countries, such as the Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, can be viewed as active followers and adopters of public and private co-operation to supply public services. Public-private collaboration (PPC) can be defined as “collaborative between public and private organizations in which partners share information, resources, or capabilities in order to achieve an outcome that could not be achieved by organizations that operate either in the public or private sector” (Crispeels, Willems, & Scheerlinck, 2017, p. 1). Public and private sectors are interdependent. PPC includes formal and informal relationships, extends the scope of public-private partnerships (PPPs), and can be understood as a broad version of PPPs because PPPs are often only seen as a contractual partnership (Hurk, 2016; Velotti, Botti, & Vesci, 2012).

Across China, PPC has increasingly become governments' preference for delivering infrastructure projects and public services. Since China's reform and opening up in 1978, three distinctive waves of public and private collaboration policy practice have emerged (Chen & Li, 2017).

The first wave of PPC in China was planned and delivered from 1980s to the mid-1990s. During this period, China's private companies were weak. Collaboration between public and private sectors supplied few public services. The main characteristic of the PPC in the first wave was cooperation between local governments and foreign capital. After the 1990s, with the rapid development of urbanization, local governments in China faced a universal problem: fiscal instability.

The second wave of PPC practice occurred from the end of the 1990s to 2008. In 1993, China moved toward the market economy; 1993 could represent a policy window for continuous adoption of the PPC form. During this period, greater numbers of domestic private capital took part in delivering public services in China. Also, public services in the second wave involved more sectors than the first wave, including infrastructure, public utilities, and public services. More recently, China's central government actively promoted private companies and state-owned enterprises to supply public services in 2013, which initiated the third wave of the collaboration process.

The top-down approach of promotion resulted in effective policy implementation. After 2014, PPCs in infrastructure markets expanded, as anticipated, especially in developing provinces with large budget deficits. For example, from 2014 to 2016, the number of projects supplied by the collaboration increased to 1351,¹ a number larger than the sum of the first and the second waves of projects. China has become a leading practitioner supplying public services by cross-sector

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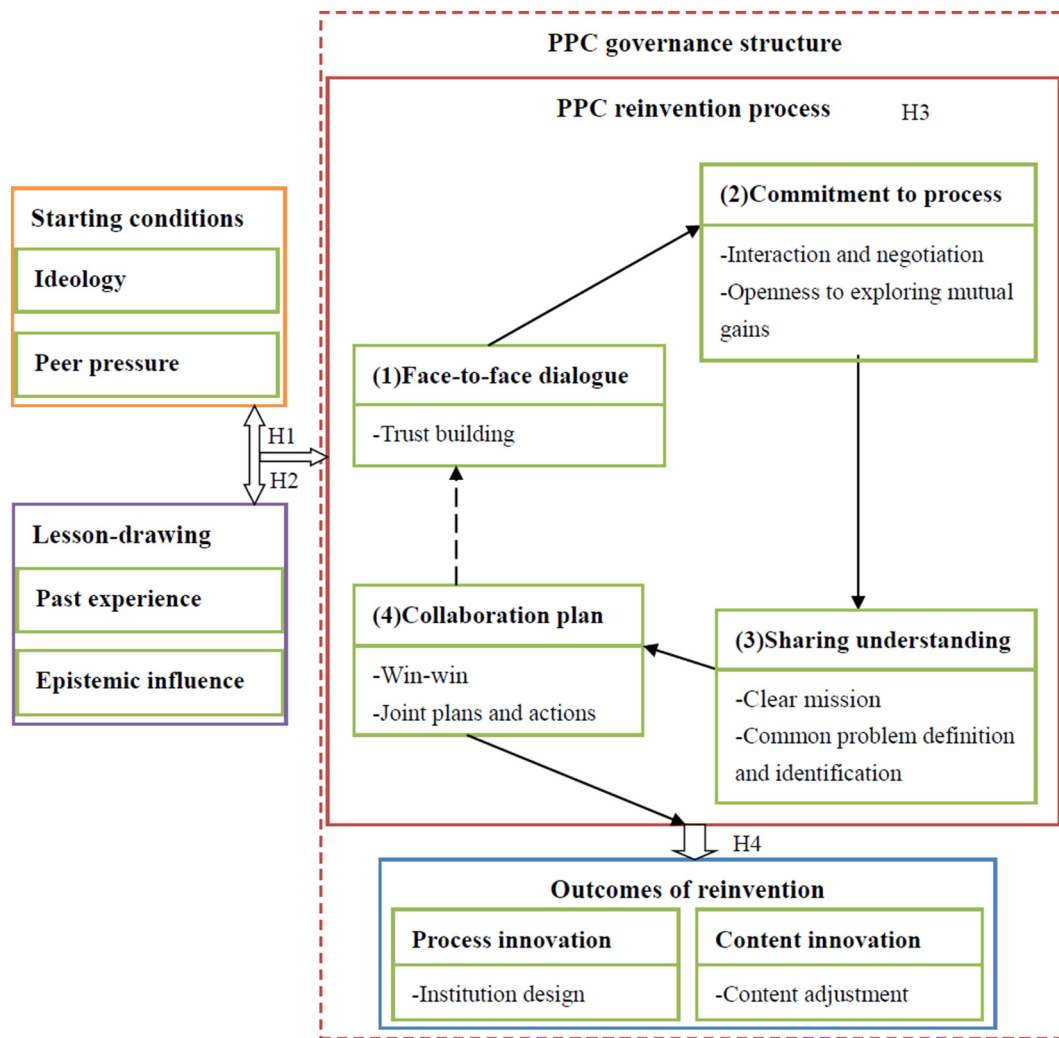


Fig. 1. A model of PPC reinvention. Source: Authors, inspired by the approaches in Ansell and Gash (2008) and Kim (2016).

collaboration. During this period, collaboration encompassed two distinctive features that differed from the former two waves. The first feature in this period was cooperation between local governments and state-owned enterprises. Second was that the collaboration between public and private sectors broadened from a contractual relationship to working arrangements, based on mutual commitment. Similar to Russia's experience (Mouraviev & Kakabadse, 2014), governments in China understood the meaning of a partnership to include any form of government and enterprise collaboration.

Supplying public services by PPC has contributed to achieving infrastructure financing, greater efficiency, and sustainability (Pinz, Roudyani, & Thaler, 2018; Wang, Xiong, Wu, & Zhu, 2018). A series of studies examined the effects of PPC on success such as enhanced social value (Caldwell, Roehrich, & George, 2017; Crispeels et al., 2017; Quelin, Kivleniece, & Lazzarini, 2017). Another group of researchers studied the effects of PPC strategies such as formalization of coordination, management capacity, and leadership (Cristofoli & Markovic, 2016; O'Toole Jr. & Meier, 1999; Raab, Mannak, & Cambre, 2015; Turrini, Cristofoli, & Frosini, 2010). However, only a limited portion of the literature discussed PPC's dynamic policy-diffusion process (for an exception, see Wang, Graddy, & Zhao, 2017). More research is needed to delineate the processes of how a collaboration policy spreads and how the contents of the collaboration process reinvent. Also, the theoretical development of collaboration-process diffusion and reinvention has been based on projects in developed countries.

Little is known about whether this theoretical contribution persists in developing countries, such as China.

This article attempts to further the research on PPC reinvention, combining policy diffusion and collaborative governance theories. Our research question was, *How does a collaboration-network reinvent during the diffusion process?*

To answer the question, this study presents an exploratory framework explaining the PPC reinvention process and outcomes, using the Mobike bicycle-sharing service in China as the primary case study. The following section details the construction of an integrated conceptual framework for collaborative governance and policy reinvention. We then discuss the methodology and the rationale for the selection of Mobike bicycle-sharing services for comparison purposes. An exploration and summary of the results follows, along with a final conclusion and recommendations for further research.

2. An integrated conceptual framework for collaboration governance and policy reinvention

2.1. Policy reinvention and collaboration governance theories

The study of policy reinvention is a subset of the policy-diffusion literature. Policy reinvention means the extent of modification and adoption by late adopters of a core innovation during the policy-diffusion process (Glick & Hays, 1991), and can assume a dynamic and

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