



# Comparison of critical success paths for historic district renovation and redevelopment projects in China



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## ARTICLE INFO

### Article history:

Received 24 January 2017  
Received in revised form  
18 April 2017  
Accepted 21 June 2017

### Keywords:

Critical success path  
Critical success factors  
Historic district redevelopment projects  
Historic district renovation projects  
Interpretive structural modeling  
Critical path method

## ABSTRACT

Urban regeneration has emerged as a response to the process of decay in historic districts. Based on a detailed literature review and the distinctive features of this mode of project practice in China, the current paper examines critical success factors (CSFs) in historic district regeneration projects. These factors are grouped into six main dimensions, namely, external environment, project characteristics, participants, project implementation, organization governance and the conservation of historic and cultural values. The internal relations among the identified CSFs are developed with the Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) Method. This is followed by a case study showing the use of these results. Project K (a renovation project) and Project J (a redevelopment project) are selected to explore and compare their critical success paths (CSPs) with the optimized Critical Path Method (CPM), drawing on project management methods. The results show that Project K relies on the strength of the real estate market to achieve development of cultural industries with cultural characteristics, while Project J creates a strong cultural atmosphere to attract tourists and then increases cultural propaganda efforts, with an operating income used to achieve cultural continuity. Both cultural operation modes can achieve the cultural objectives of the project with a different CSP. The identification of CSFs, their internal relations, and the CSPs are explored in two cases, which provide useful guidance to project parties planning to participate in dynamic management of historic district regeneration.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the mid-nineteenth century, UNESCO and ICOMOS have identified or recognized many world heritage sites as a protected zone to reduce the risk from human or animal trespassing, due to unmonitored/uncontrolled/unrestricted access or threats from local administrative negligence. These actions play an important role in the development of human culture. Meanwhile, culture as a new dimension also becomes a core standard of urban construction and development (Campbell, Cox, & O'Brien, 2017; Ferilli, Sacco, Tavano Blessi, & Forbici, 2017). However, many historic heritage sites do not have enough conservation value, or they need a more aggressive re-development in order to realize their value. Therefore, regional redevelopment with historical and cultural value is an inevitable trend of urban development.

Many old districts in China have been in decline since the onset of the urban sprawl which has been a major strategy for urban development, leaving behind a legacy of derelict buildings. Serious social issues have also arisen as a consequence. Urban regeneration has been widely regarded as a panacea for addressing urban and social problems caused by the urban development process in numerous western cities (Akkar Ercan, 2011). Over the past two decades, urban regeneration in China has undergone a rapid transformation from being economy-oriented to a sustainable, culture-led mode. There is a growing body of evidence demonstrating that culture-led urban regeneration can offer lasting environmental, economic, social and cultural benefits, on balance (Liu, 2016). While attempting to revive central declining areas, regeneration of historic districts has been initiated in many cities (Kim, 2015; Zhong, 2016). By conserving the historic fabric of an area, culture-led regeneration is used as means for attracting investment and consumption to stimulate the economy and boost long-term economic growth, with incidental economic benefits for citizens (Jones & Evans, 2008; Jung, Lee, Yap, & Ineson, 2015). With the increased demands of regenerating old historic districts, the

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question of how to implement the development of these areas successfully has become a heated issue.

Urban regeneration projects are more complex and uncertain than general construction projects. They involve a chain of actions to achieve the goal of improvement in physical, environmental, social and economic aspects (Roberts, Sykes, & Granger, 2016; Yu & Kwon, 2011). The Government mainly focuses on the economic functions of regeneration projects that do not have cultural value, but has increased concern for the cultural dimension of projects. Historic district regeneration projects face more complex issues than traditional projects due to the involvement of a large number of stakeholders with different goals. The distinctive problem that such projects face is in balancing culture with urban development, industrial economics and the local neighborhood - a distinct challenge for entrepreneurs. This is the reason why historic district regeneration projects require multi-dimensional analysis (see Fig. 1) to weigh the relationships among stakeholders and goals.

With the advent of urban development, massive historic district regeneration projects arise continuously in China. In Chengdu, large-scale rebuilding of shanty areas and urban renewal have been implemented since 2002. The average annual demolition area could reach 200 million square meters. Each year, the Office for the Reconstruction of Dangerous Housing is responsible for the implementation of more than 30 key projects. Among the projects, many prioritize culture due to the deep cultural heritage of Chengdu. In the historical and cultural areas, the historic district regeneration projects Dacisi, Wenshuyuan, Kuanzhaixiangzi and Jinli have been famously successful. They were implemented from planning to operation in 10, 10, 6 and 8 years respectively. The implementation period of such projects is longer than traditional projects, leading to a larger risk. The subjects of the implementations are all enterprises with a government background that can ensure adequate funding; however, what should not be ignored is that many projects end in failure and don't consider the level of local economic development. Projects can retain their unique characteristics, but may imitate successful cases automatically which has a very negative impact on the development of the economy, society and culture in the area. These characteristics of historic district regeneration projects result in a high failure rate.

Therefore, it is essential to identify the critical success factors (CSFs) of historic district regeneration projects to provide a basis for project success.

“CSFs” is an approach widely used in construction projects to reasonably allocate limited resources and monitor project performance efficiently (Banihashemi, Hosseini, Golizadeh, & Sankaran, 2017; Chua, Kog, & Loh, 1999; Cox, Issa, & Ahrens, 2003; Yu & Kwon, 2011). A large body of research about the CSFs of construction projects ranges from general to special types, such as PPP projects, BOT projects and mass-housing building projects (Ahadzie, Proverbs, & Olomolaiye, 2008; Tiong, 1996; Zhang, 2005), and has attracted the interest of many researchers and practitioners. Project characteristics, project management, project participants, and the economic environment are generally considered to be the keys to the success of a project. In-depth studies are also underway into the basis of CSF research. Attempts were made to examine the relationship between CSFs to make them controlled and more viable in implementation (Zhuang, Xu, & Wang, 2015). Additionally, the CSFs in each phase are separately identified, due to different content and objectives found in previous studies (Yu & Kwon, 2011); the factors contributing to the success of construction projects vary according to the different project objectives (Jaselskis & Ashley, 1991). The general key success factors have been examined in many studies, while the special requirements of historic district regeneration projects have not been investigated thus far. For a regeneration program to achieve success, it must be in line with the local cultural economy, and within the broader urban development (Gibson & Kong, 2005; Landry, 2000; Nyseth & Sognnaes, 2013). In addition, China is undergoing a large wave of urban regeneration, which often have problems and therefore fail to succeed. Research about CSFs for historic district regeneration projects has key issues awaiting further exploration. It is being undertaken in order to assist practitioners in improving their critical thinking, dynamic management and allocation of limited resources.

There are complicated relationships between CSFs which influence each other and contribute to project success. Factors with similar characteristics form clusters, which then form the success network through their relationships. Any failing link in the network

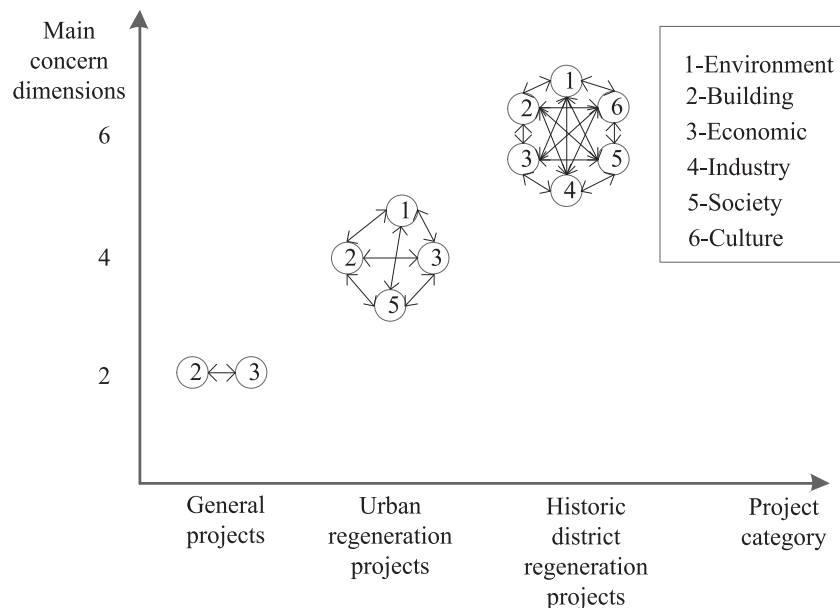


Fig. 1. Main concern dimensions for different categories of projects.

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