Managing social risks at the housing demolition stage of urban redevelopment projects: A stakeholder-oriented study using social network analysis

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Abstract

In China, the social risks associated with housing demolition increasingly challenge the success of urban redevelopment projects. In practice, these risks are interacting and are associated with various stakeholders. Previous studies have largely focused on risk identification and evaluation without giving sufficient consideration to stakeholders and their linkages with risks. Therefore, we used social network analysis to investigate social risks related to housing demolition, from a stakeholder perspective. Stakeholder-associated risks and their interrelations were investigated based on a literature analysis and interviews with key stakeholders. Using a network analysis we identified critical risks and their corresponding stakeholders. Social security schemes, efficient financial management, multi-dimensional impact assessments, policy analyses and adherence to laws, and public participation were proposed to mitigate risks. The effectiveness of these solutions was quantified based on a network simulation.

This study contributes to the body of knowledge on social risk management via linking social risks with stakeholders.

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Keywords: Housing demolition; Social risk; Social network analysis; Stakeholder perspective; Urban redevelopment project

1. Introduction

In recent decades, China has experienced an unprecedented urban redevelopment process with multiple strategic targets including economic growth, urban modernization, gentrification, and updating of substandard housing (Ye, 2011; Alpopi and Manole, 2013; Zhang et al., 2014; Peng et al., 2015). In many large Chinese cities, urban redevelopment has become a primary way for local governments to address urban issues such as land shortage and environmental pollution (Xue et al., 2015). Numerous urban redevelopment projects (URPS) such as the URPS of the Dongcheng District in Beijing (Shin, 2009), the “Urban Renewal 365” programs in Shanghai (Shih, 2010), and the redevelopment of urban villages in Guangzhou (Chung and Zhou, 2011) have been carried out in response to this tendency. Laws and policies have been released to facilitate this prevalent redevelopment process. For example, the Hong Kong government established the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) in 1974 to manage URPS and issued a series of policies such as the “Urban Renewal Strategy” to support urban redevelopment activities. In 2012, the city government of Shenzhen promulgated the “Detailed Rules for the Implementation of Urban Redevelopment in Shenzhen” to provide basic guidance for
practitioners to develop URPS in Shenzhen. In 2015, the city government of Shanghai released the “Rules for the Implementation of Urban Renewal in Shanghai” to regulate and promote URPS in this international city.

Housing demolition is an important byproduct of URPS because urban redevelopment typically involves the redevelopment of built-up areas and the reuse of urban space (Talen, 2014; He, 2014). To meet the land demand from URPS, 460 million square meters of buildings were demolished annually during the 12th Five Year Plan (China Academic of Building Research, 2014). As a result, more than 20% of urban residents have already experienced housing demolition and relocation because of URPS in Chinese cities (Beijing Cailiang Law Firm, 2015). Various stakeholders have been affected by housing demolition and the inter-relationships of these stakeholders are very complex. Due to sharp conflicts of interests among different stakeholders, housing demolition has resulted in many social risks that increasingly challenge the success of URPS. For example, legal disputes over relocation compensation can easily incur cost overruns and the delay of the delivery time of URPS. Unreasonable relocation schemes frequently cause dissatisfaction among different project stakeholders and even lead to unexpected results (Shi et al., 2015). Misunderstandings among governments, developers and relocated residents can even give rise to mass incidents that significantly hinder the implementation of URPS (Beijing Cailiang Law Firm, 2015). Within a worst situation, the pressures from public opinions against housing demolition may force governments and developers to terminate ongoing URPS (Chu, 2008). In summary, social risks related to housing demolition are extremely important for the success of URPS. The central government of China even stipulates that every redevelopment project must conduct a social risk evaluation before carrying out any housing demolition activities (The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2011).

In the Chinese context, social risks are typically associated with mass incidents, violent resistance, social conflicts, and unrests that stem from the conflicts of interests among different stakeholders (Liu et al., 2016). Numerous studies have investigated social risks during the housing demolition stage of URPS. These studies largely focus on risk identification and evaluation (e.g., Chen et al., 2012; Chen and Yu, 2011; Jiang, 2014). However, very few of them examine the social risks based on a thorough stakeholder analysis despite these risks being subject to various stakeholders with different goals and interests in URPS. Although scholars such as Shi et al. (2015) have emphasized the importance of stakeholder analysis and investigated the key interest of stakeholders in their studies, they have not fully examined the linkages between social risks and stakeholders during the risk evaluation process. Since the conflicts among different stakeholders have become the primary source of social risks in housing demolition (Yang and Shen, 2012), sufficient attention should be paid to the linkages between stakeholders and social risks. The central government of China suggests that local governments and property developers should carefully collect the opinions of key stakeholders during URPS (Li et al., 2014). Scholars such as Li et al. (2016) and Yang et al. (2016) argued that in terms of analyzing stakeholder-associated risks, the inter-relationships of risks should be considered on a network basis. However, previous studies do not sufficiently analyze the interactions among different social risks during the housing demolition stage of URPS. These knowledge gaps can lead to ineffective risk management (Li et al., 2016). Therefore, we used social network analysis (SNA) to investigate social risks and their inter-relationships during the housing demolition stage of URPS, from the perspective of stakeholders. This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge via bridging social risk management with stakeholder management. In addition, the complex interactions among different social risks, which present a challenge to risk management, were analyzed based on a network viewpoint.

2. Research background and literature review

2.1. Critical stakeholders in housing demolition

Housing demolition is an important process in URPS because it can facilitate the reuse of built-up lands, redevelopment of urban areas and the updating of substandard housing (Talen, 2014; He, 2014; Wang et al., 2014). Various stakeholders with different interests are directly or indirectly affected by this process. Due to the sharp conflicts of interests among different stakeholders, housing demolition has become a primary source of social conflicts and unrests (Shih, 2010). Therefore, the central government issued the Regulations on the Expropriation and Compensation of Houses on State Owned Land (RECHSOL) to regulate housing demolition and reduce the adverse impacts of URPS on social stability (The State Council of the People’s Republic of China, 2011). This policy clearly stipulates the rights and responsibilities of governments, relocated residents and property developers. In addition to these three stakeholder groups, demolition crews, nearby residents and the general public are also potential stakeholders during the housing demolition stage of URPS.

Local governments are responsible for managing and supervising the entire process of housing demolition. Before initiating URPS, governments must judge whether these projects are in the public interest. If URPS can benefit the general public, then housing demolition will be conducted to make room for these projects. Governments should develop a preliminary relocation and compensation scheme, and subsequently negotiate with relocated residents to determine an improved scheme. Relocated residents must move to other places but they can receive compensations for their economic losses according to the improved scheme (Hu et al., 2015). Governments can employ demolition crews (typically from professional demolition or construction companies) to complete the relocation and demolition work. It is worth noting that existing laws start to constrain the power of demolition companies in URPS due to the previous violent incidents between demolition crews and relocated residents. However, to increase the efficiency of relocation and demolition, it is very difficult to mitigate the impacts of demolition companies in a
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