

Research on the Revitalization Modes and Mechanisms of Historical Buildings in High-density Cities: A Case Study of Hong Kong

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Abstract

The conservation and revitalization of historic buildings constitute a critical challenge for high-density cities in balancing urban development with cultural continuity. Hong Kong's practice in this domain offers paradigmatic insights. This study systematically examines the evolutionary trajectory and defining characteristics of heritage revitalization in Hong Kong, identifying three prototypical modes through the analytical framework of multi-stakeholder interest coordination. This study reveals that negotiable interest commonality serves as the inherent driver shaping these differentiated models, with governance processes involving interest concession, value co-creation, and benefit-sharing mechanisms. Hong Kong's experience provides actionable references for Asian megacities undergoing urban regeneration, such as integrating differentiated incentives with rigid protection, synthesizing cultural inheritance with innovation, and strengthening whole-process public participation to forge preservation consensus.

Key words: Revitalization; historical buildings; Benefit coordination; Diverse entities; Hong Kong

1 Introduction

As non-renewable resources in cities, historical buildings' conservation and adaptive reuse yield economic, socio-cultural, and environmental benefits (Gražulevičiūtė and Urbonas, 2011). However, urban central areas in high-density cities frequently confront acute land scarcity (Wang et al., 2015). Conserving historical buildings may reduce government revenue, limiting its ability to allocate resources for other policies (Liu and Tang, 2014), and also restricts land development rights. Thus, historical buildings are often demolished under high development pressure (Yung and Chan, 2016). Hong Kong exemplifies such urban contexts, where historical neighborhoods in Hong Kong Island and Kowloon Peninsula—key development zones—operate under severe land constraints (Ye, 1998). Therefore, how to maximize their socio-spatial value and regenerate aging urban districts remains a pressing scholarly inquiry, particularly regarding balancing conservation imperatives with developmental necessities, thus constituting a critical research imperative.

Hong Kong's historic building regeneration operates within a demolition-redevelopment paradigm, where conflicts arise among governments, developers, and the public over competing conservation and revitalisation agendas. Urban renewal, predominantly driven by real estate interests and governmental land reclamation needs, subjects heritage revitalization to dual pressures of capital accumulation and political prioritization (Xu et al., 2022). Transferring urban development rights to conservation initiatives inevitably diminishes potential economic returns from market-driven redevelopment (Urban Renewal Authority, 2008). Thus, achieving equilibrium between demolition and adaptive reuse fundamentally hinges on institutionalized interest coordination among stakeholders. This positions interest coordination as the critical nexus for resolving revitalization dilemmas in land-constrained metropolises, where optimized institutional arrangements mediate tensions between heritage integrity and urban growth imperatives.

Existing studies predominantly address socio-political dimensions of heritage conservation in Hong Kong, such as public engagement awareness and urban renewal conflicts (Yung et al., 2015). However, systematic examinations through an interest coordination framework remain scarce, particularly regarding dynamic interplay among governmental, market, and societal actors in resource allocation, as well as the stakeholder interest configurations underlying diverse revitalization models. Institutional barriers hinder social institutions' resource access and decision-making participation (Chan and Yung, 2004), while market-driven revitalization exacerbates developer-community conflicts (Lee and Chan, 2008). Community-led initiatives often require external interventions to establish interest equilibrium due to weak endogenous capacities (Ng, 2002), resulting in superficial project evaluations that inadequately dissect power dynamics and resource distribution inequities.

Present research also pays insufficient attention to the operation phase, predominantly centering on preliminary planning and transformation (Langston et al., 2008) but overlooking the dynamic operational processes. Critical issues like functional compatibility of revitalized historical buildings gradually emerge during this stage, yet lack

systematic scrutiny, undermining long-term impact assessments and practical guidance. Moreover, Eurocentric studies on low-density urban contexts inadequately address Hong Kong's high-density specificities. As a typical high-density city, Hong Kong faces unique challenges, such as functional hybridization driven by land scarcity (Cheung and Chan, 2014), complex community networks fostering competing interests (Yung et al., 2014), and necessity for context-specific conservation technologies (Yung and Chan, 2012), which existing studies have inadequately addressed.

From a lens of stakeholder engagement, this study employs a tripartite methodology integrating case studies, in-depth interviews, and documentary analysis to systematically examine core interest coordination mechanisms in historic building revitalization within Hong Kong's urban renewal context. It particularly investigates how institutional configurations mediate interactions among the government, market, and societal actors, elucidating pathway formation processes for balancing multi-stakeholder interests. Based on the interest-balancing logic of different stakeholders, it proposes optimization strategies for high-density cities, aiming to solve the dilemma of historical building protection and urban development coexistence.

2 Revitalization of Historical Buildings in Hong Kong: Evolution and Overview

2.1. Evolution of Historical Building Revitalization in Hong Kong under Urban Renewal Context

Hong Kong has evolved through four stages, reflecting the dynamic interaction of urban renewal and cultural awareness. 1) The Inception Stage (Before 1970). Hong Kong, dominated by economic development and pragmatism, focused on infrastructure and housing construction due to the post-1894 plague demolition and post-war housing shortages. As a borrowed place (Gallagher, 2021), weak public place attachment and an underdeveloped local identity (Lin, 2015) marginalized conservation concerns. 2) The Scattered Conservation Stage (1970–2000). During rapid economic growth, the Land Development Company was established to drive urban renewal, with demolition and new construction becoming the norm. The release of the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance in 1976 and the formation of related committees marked the government's conservation efforts, but commercial interests still led to widespread demolition of historical buildings, with only limited preservation due to public conservation struggles. 3) The Reflection and Adjustment Stage (2000–2010). Demolition-dominated renewal caused housing rights conflicts (Wu, 1996) and community network disruption (Lai et al., 2018). In 2001, the Urban Renewal Authority (URA) replaced LDC and introduced the 4R strategies, including Redevelopment, Rehabilitation, Preservation and Revitalization, integrating conservation into policy. Post-SARS public resistance to high-density development (Lin, 2015) and conservation movements at places like Wan Chai's Lee Tung Street and Queen's Pier (Audit Commission, 2013) prompted the government to launch the Revitalising Historic Buildings Through Partnership Scheme (Revitalisation Scheme, R-Scheme) in 2008 and the Central Conservation Plan in 2009, significantly enhancing public conservation awareness. 4) The Pro-Active Inheritance Stage (Post-2010). The Hong Kong 2030+ plan established goals of Sustainable Development and Cultural Inheritance. The government explored Conservation through Design and Development strategies (Development Bureau, 2012; Legislative Council, 2011). Projects like the Blue House Cluster and Tai Kwun, winning UNESCO awards, proved conservation-revitalization and economic-development compatibility. By setting up conservation funds and cultural activities to encourage public participation (Development Bureau, 2025), society's perception of historical buildings has shifted from physical elements protection to social-cultural inheritance, creating a diverse development pattern with the government, community, and NGOs working together.

This evolution shows Hong Kong's transformative journey from initial neglect of historical buildings to valuing conservation due to social conflicts and public awakening, and then achieving a preservation-development balance via policy innovation. It offers a paradigmatic case study for cultural continuity in high-density cities. Overall, Hong Kong's urban renewal focuses on historical conservation after large-scale demolition and redevelopment. Within this context, Hong Kong's historical building conservation and revitalization reflects a sustained negotiation to balance socio-cultural values under a strong economic-interest orientation.

2.2 Historical Building Revitalization in Hong Kong

In Hong Kong, historical buildings are categorized as Declared Monuments and Graded Historical Buildings. The first is protected under the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance¹. The Antiquities Advisory Board (AAB) assesses

¹ This legal designation enables the Authority to prohibit any alterations to the monument or, at its discretion, impose conditions that must be complied with when alterations are made, ensuring statutory protection measures are enforced for the protection of the monument.

historical buildings using six criteria: historical, architectural, group, rarity, social and regional values, and integrity (Antiquities and Monuments Office, 2005), grading them into Grade 1, 2, or 3². These graded buildings lack legal protection, and owners can demolish them (Gallagher, 2021). From Hong Kong's published list of 1,444 historical buildings (Antiquities Advisory Board, 2025a) and supplementary list (Antiquities Advisory Board, 2025b), over 70% are privately owned.

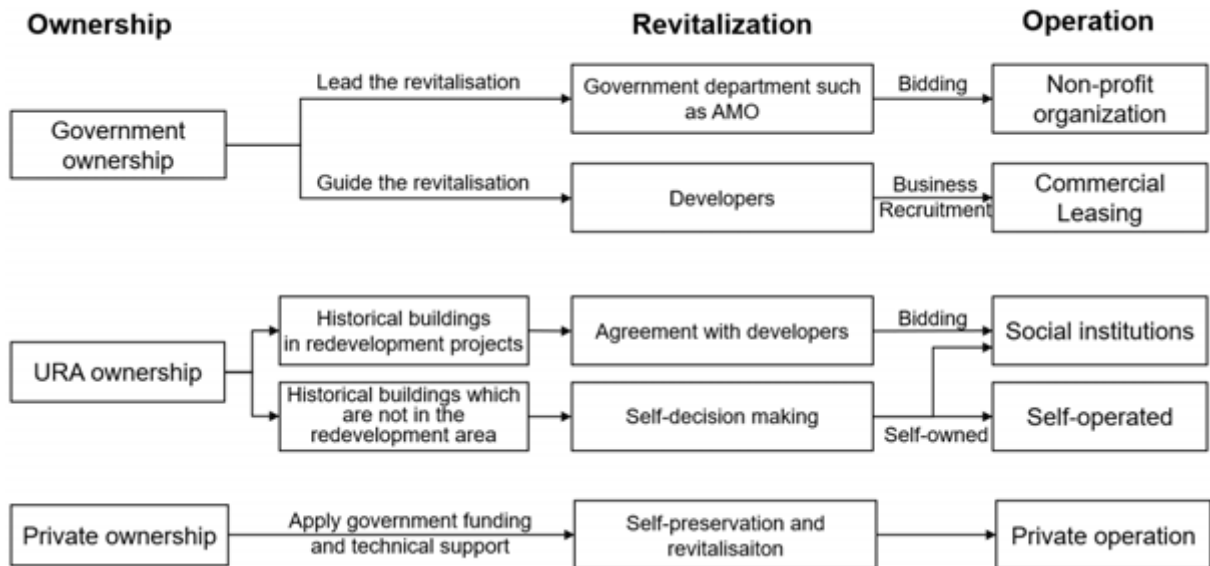


Figure 1. The Revitalization Pathways of Historic Buildings in Hong Kong
Source: By author

Hong Kong's historical building revitalization operates through three property-rights frameworks, forming multiple revitalization paths based on government, URA, and private ownership (Figure 1). Government-owned buildings are revitalized through the R-Scheme, where non-profit organizations are introduced to create public cultural spaces. For buildings with commercial potential, market capitalization is brought in via public bidding. The former Marine Police Headquarters (1881 Heritage) exemplifies heritage-commercial integration, transforming cultural assets into commercial value (Rong et al., 2017). Additional strategies include adaptive reuse as public museums (e.g., Kom Tong Hall as Dr. Sun Yat-sen Museum) or governmental offices (e.g., Old Supreme Court Building as Court of Final Appeal), ensuring functional continuity.

URA-owned buildings are managed with ownership control. Tenant compensation follows district-based property valuation standards (Urban Renewal Authority, 2024), and special projects (e.g., Wing Lok Street) get targeted subsidies like the Home Improvement Allowance (Press Release, 2010). URA executes two typologies: Preserved Buildings in Redevelopment Projects, i.e., contextual conservation integrating heritage elements within redevelopment zones, and Pure Preservation and Revitalisation Projects. From now on, URA has preserved over 60 buildings (Urban Renewal Authority, 2025) through self-operated or leased cultural and commercial programs.

In privately owned historical buildings, owners can revitalise cultural heritage through independent functional transformation. For instance, the Grade III historic residential building at 11 Yuk Sau Street was converted into the F11 Poto Museum, focused on photographic art. The Nan Fung Cotton Mills, an industrial heritage site, was revitalised into an experiential retail and textile art complex. Owners of graded buildings can apply for the Financial Assistance for Maintenance Scheme on Built Heritage with a maximum of HKD 6 million per project. However, grantees must commit to not demolishing or transferring ownership during repairs and allow reasonable public access (Commissioner for Heritage's Office, 2024).

2 Grade 1: Buildings of outstanding merit, for which every effort should be made to preserve if possible. Grade 2: Buildings of special merit; efforts should be made to selectively preserve. Grade 3: Buildings of some merit; preservation in some form would be desirable and alternative means could be considered if preservation is not practicable.

As historical buildings are bundles of cultural heritage, economic resources, and living spaces, their revitalization involves conflicting interests of the government, markets, residents, and civil society. These conflicts manifest in tripartite value contests: authenticity preservation, economic viability, and community equity (Aigwi et al., 2021). Thus, regardless of revitalization pathways, core challenges stem from divergent stakeholder interests and their dynamic interplay. In Hong Kong's high-density context, land scarcity intensifies the conflict between conservation and development. Market-led commercialization can cause gentrification and squeeze public cultural rights (Yung and Chan, 2016). Top-down planning, lacking participatory mechanisms, often disconnects from communal cultural aspirations (Ng, 2018). Mandatory public access requirements in privately-owned heritage spark private-public domain boundary disputes over residential privacy and usage restrictions (Luo and Wen, 2025). These tensions not only hinder revitalization but also undermine social consensus, highlighting the urgency of establishing interest-coordination mechanisms among different entities. Moreover, the long-term sustainability of historical building revitalization requires full-cycle investment, yet high costs deter market, social, and resident participation (Fang and Wu, 2025). Therefore, only by using interest coordination as a starting point and identifying the root of conflicts among entities can we protect cultural authenticity while accommodating diverse interests. This can transform historical buildings from conflict arenas to symbiotic value platforms, ensuring sustainable revitalization of cultural heritage in high-density cities.

3 Revitalisation Modes Under Different Interest Coordination Mechanisms and Case Studies

From the perspective of interest coordination, Hong Kong has established three typical stakeholder collaboration modes in the historical buildings revitalization: the government-social institution collaboration mode, the market-led with benefit recirculation mode, and the community-engaged co-creation mode. These modes balance the demands of multiple stakeholders, achieving coordinated conservation and development.

3.1 The Government-Social Institution Collaboration Mode

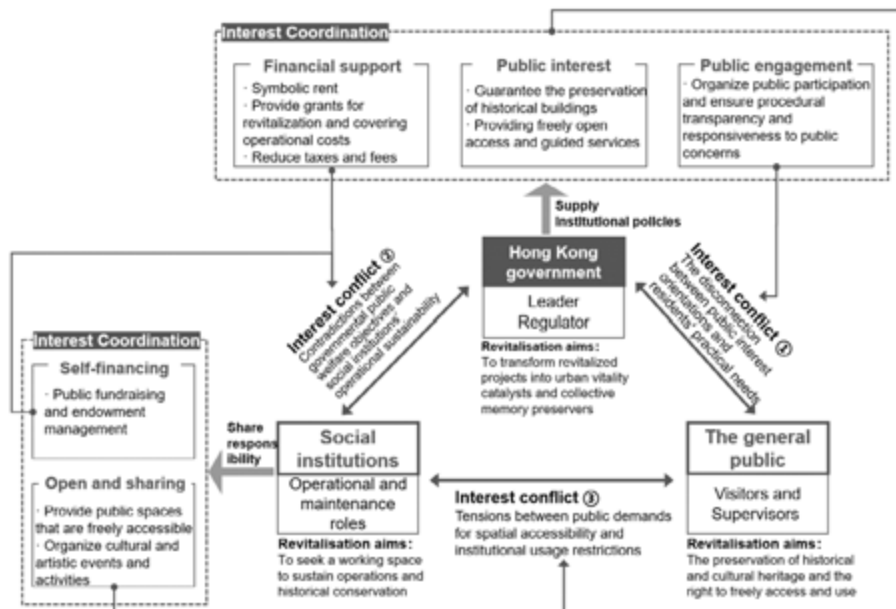


Figure 2. Operational mechanism of the government-social institution collaboration mode Source: By author

This mode is commonly applied in revitalizing government-owned historical buildings. As illustrated in Figure 2, this mode prioritizes government funding and policy-driven initiatives, focusing on public domains such as cultural exhibitions and community services while strictly limiting commercial development. Within this framework, the government assumes the leading role in overseeing and regulating the revitalization process, aiming to transform

revitalized projects into urban vitality catalysts and collective memory preservers. Social institutions, such as non-profit organizations (NPOs), assume operational and maintenance roles, seeking a working space to sustain operations and architectural conservation. The general public, as the visitors and supervisors of these projects, is mainly concerned with the preservation of historical and cultural heritage and the right to freely access and use the spaces. Divergent stakeholder interests arising from distinct roles often trigger three types of conflicts, including contradictions between governmental public welfare objectives and social institutions' operational sustainability, tensions between public demands for spatial accessibility and institutional usage restrictions, as well as the disconnection between public interest orientations and residents' practical needs. To address these, the government coordinates the interests of different parties through institutional arrangements. It offers symbolic rent and tiered financial support to NPOs, such as providing grants for revitalization projects and covering operational costs for the first two years (Commissioner for Heritage's Office, n.d.). The government also implements stringent application reviews and supervision mechanisms to guarantee reasonable preservation, freely open access and guided services. Furthermore, the government organizes public participation to ensure procedural transparency and responsiveness to civic concerns. Selected social institutions collaborate with the government to fulfill obligations, alleviating financial burdens through public fundraising and endowment management while proactively opening historical buildings. In this way, a collaborative mechanism that balances the interests of all stakeholders is established.

The Former Explosives Magazine(Asia Society Hong Kong Center)

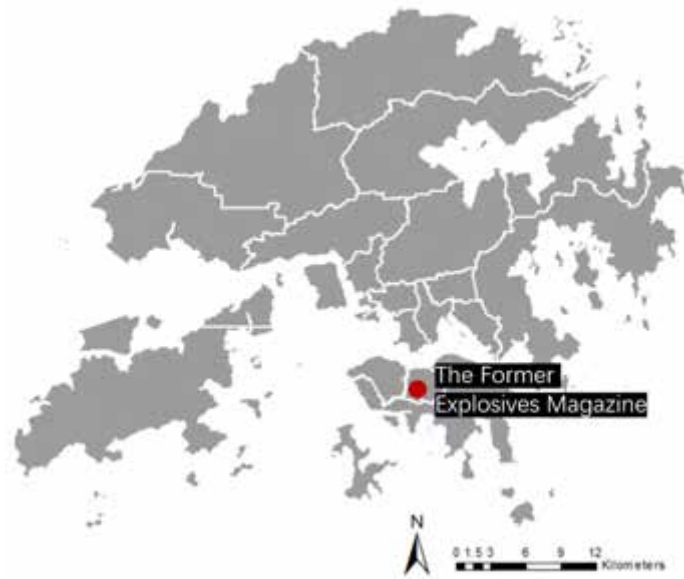


Figure 3. The location of The Former Explosives Magazine
Source: By author

The Former Explosives Magazine, located in Admiralty, Hong Kong Island(Figure 3), is part of the Victoria Barracks, one of Hong Kong's oldest military camps. It comprises four historical buildings, three of which are Grade I and two are Grade II³. In 2002, the Hong Kong Government, in collaboration with the non-profit Asia Society Hong Kong Center, leased the former depot site via Private Treaty Grant⁴ at a nominal rent of HKD 1,000 to revitalize it

3 A mid-19th century explosives magazine (Magazine A, Grade 1 historic building), an early 20th century explosives magazine (Magazine B, Grade 1 historic building), a mid-19th century laboratory complex (Old Laboratory, Grade 1 historic building), and a 1930s military barracks (the GG Block, Grade 2 historic building).

4 Private Treaty Grant: Land allocation in Hong Kong primarily occurs through public auction for private residential and commercial developments. Under exceptional circumstances, specific projects aligning with established policies and contributing to Hong Kong's socio-economic needs may obtain land through private treaty grants. <https://www.landsd.gov.hk/en/land-disposal-transaction/land-transaction/private-treaty-grant.html>

as the Asia Society Hong Kong Center's headquarters and a cultural museum. After formally taking possession of the site in 2005, the Asia Society initiated the revitalization project in 2006, completing it in 2012(Figure 4). In the adaptive reuse of these buildings, A and B Warehouses were converted into an exhibition hall and a 100-seat multifunctional theater. The old laboratory was repurposed into meeting rooms and offices. GG Barracks became the administrative office space for the center. To meet modern functional requirements, the project added new service buildings and linked the historical structures with a contemporary bridge (Figure 5), merging old and new elements into a cohesive cultural space.

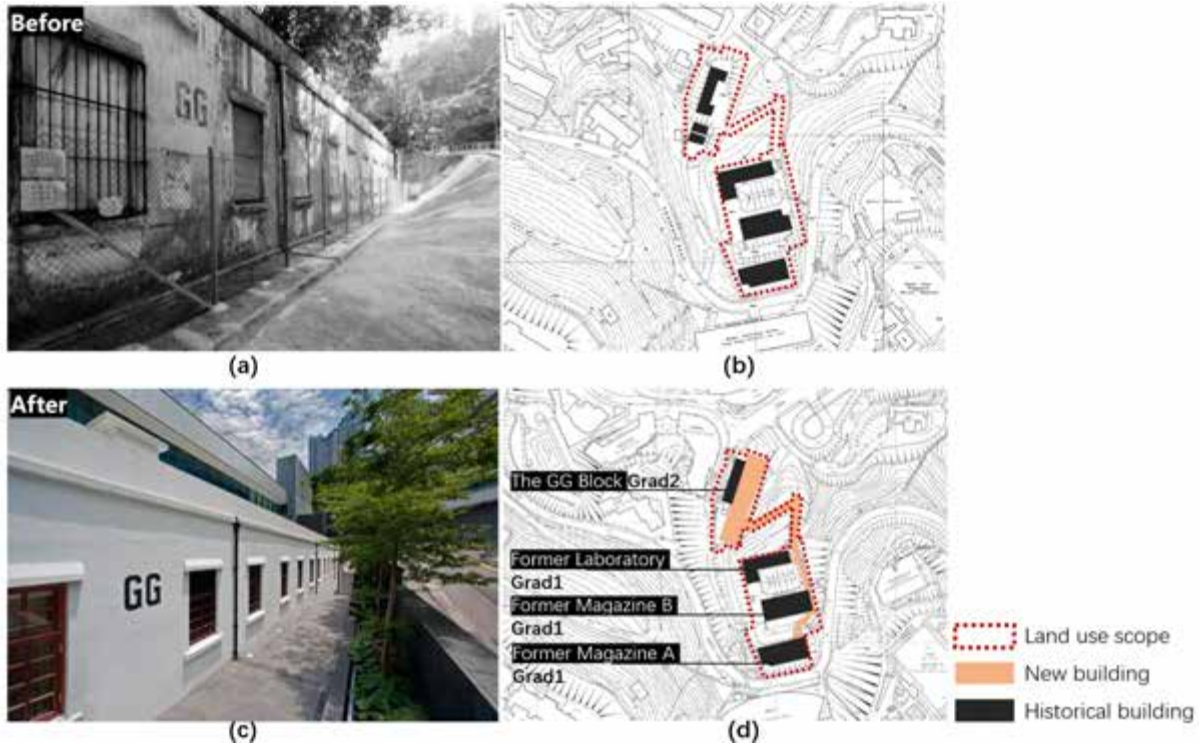


Figure 4. The Former Explosives Magazine before and after revitalization
Source: (a)(c)Asia Society Hong Kong Center;(b)(d)by author

Examining the Asia Society Hong Kong Center revitalization project through the lens of interest coordination reveals a dynamic interplay of competing demands and reconciliation mechanisms among multiple stakeholders. Initial conflicts primarily arose from public and conservation groups concerned about potential compromises to the historical authenticity of the ordnance depot and its ecological context (The Conservancy Association, 2002). These objections delayed project implementation, extending the timeline from the 2002 agreement to a 2005 groundbreaking, prolonging the construction period to 13 years. Concurrently, the budget doubled from HKD 200 million to 400 million, with sustained high operational costs (HKD 30-40 million annually), exposing resource allocation challenges for social institutions in heritage revitalization (Cummer, 2021). The government's symbolic lease arrangement (HKD 1,000 for a 21-year term) and the Asia Society's reliance on philanthropic donations drew public criticism as elitist, perceived as creating a private club for Hong Kong's elite (Chan, 2016).

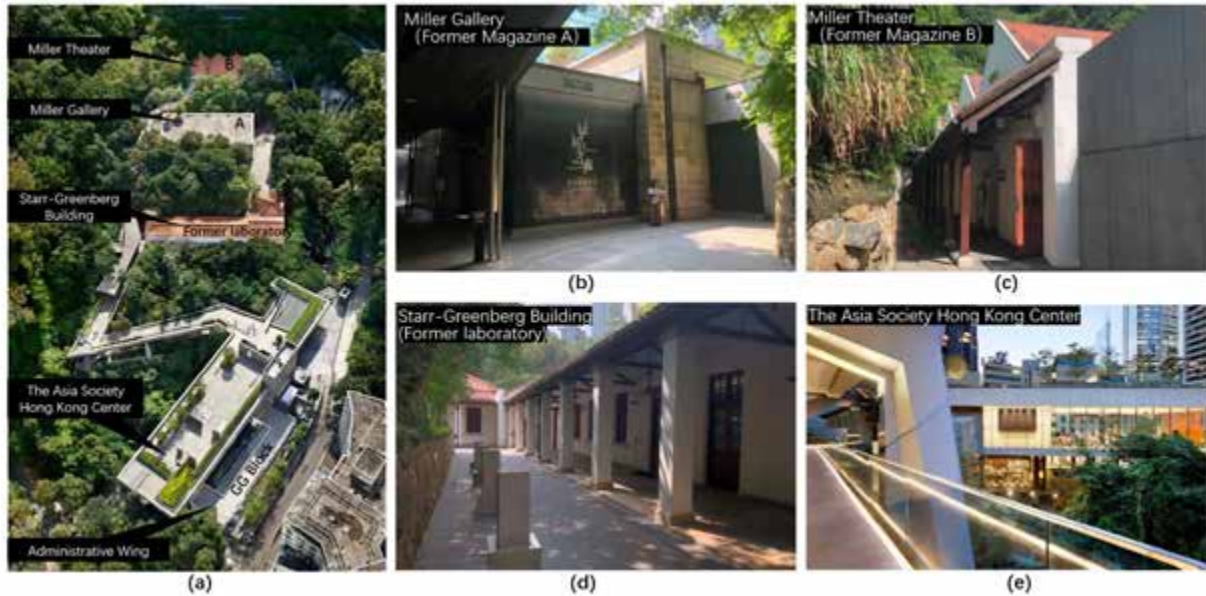


Figure 5. The revitalized former explosives magazine has become the headquarters of the Asia Society Hong Kong Center

Source: (a) K.Cummer;(b)(c)(d)(e)Asia Society Hong Kong Center

Facing initial public skepticism, the ASHKC later eased tensions through multi-dimensional cooperation. Financially, it established a mechanism led by social capital with government support. All HKD 400 million construction funds came from private donations, including HKD 102.5 million from the Hong Kong Jockey Club (Legislative Council, 2005). The government only offered maintenance subsidies in 2023-2024 via the Historic Buildings Maintenance Sponsorship Scheme, reinforcing the non-profit mandate by allocating all revenues to operational upkeep and enhancing resource allocation transparency. In terms of space use, the Center implemented inclusive measures such as complimentary guided tours(Asia Society, 2023) and public art exhibitions, transforming the revitalized heritage site from an elite enclave to a socially shared space, thereby gradually dispelling public distrust. The adaptive reuse of the Former Explosives Magazine, including the conversion of Buildings A/B into exhibition halls and a theater, achieved a balance between historic preservation and contemporary cultural functionality. This approach garnered professional acclaim, demonstrating practical value in reconciling philanthropic funding, governmental oversight, and public demands.

3.2 The Market-Driven with Benefit Recirculation Mode

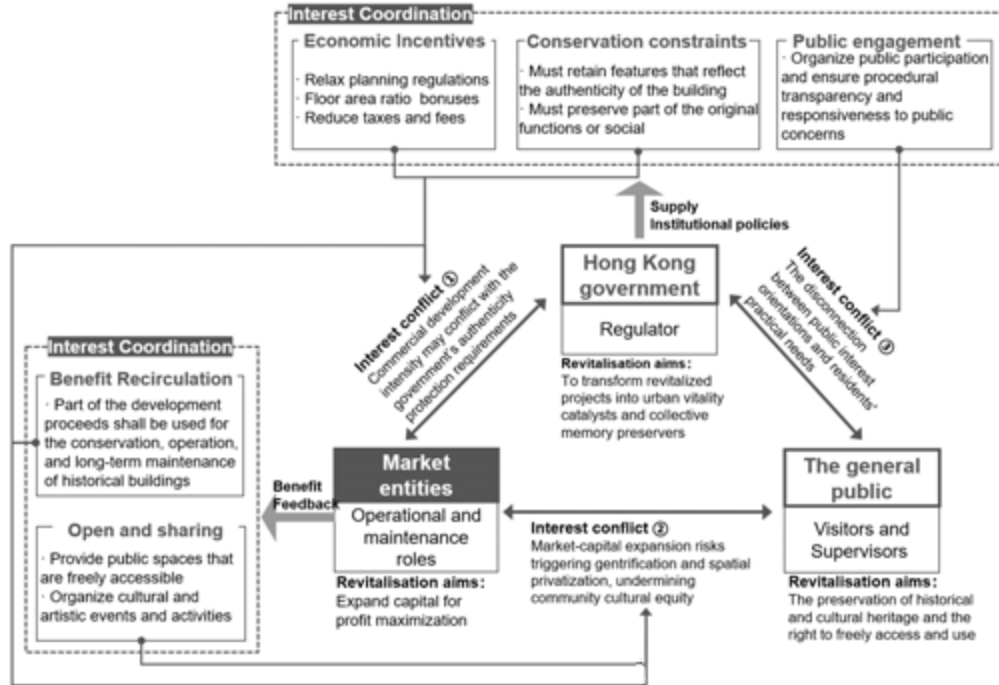


Figure 6. Operational mechanism of the market-driven with benefit recirculation mode
Source: By author

This mode is primarily applied to private historical building revitalization, a developer-led process. As Figure 6 shows, market entities, as operators and maintainers, leverage the building's cultural value to expand capital space for profit maximization. The government assumes a regulatory role, enforcing conservation obligations while promoting these projects as new urban vitality drivers. The public, as users and supervisors, prioritizes heritage continuity and equitable access to revitalized spaces. This mode also faces multiple stakeholder conflicts. Market-capital expansion risks triggering gentrification and spatial privatization, undermining community cultural equity. Commercial development intensity may conflict with the government's authenticity protection requirements, potentially degrading historic fabric through over-renovation. Insufficient profit margins may deter market participation, compounded by misalignments between regulatory efficacy, public expectations, and functional mismatches with community needs. To reconcile these conflicts, the government implements dual regulatory mechanisms. Policies like floor area ratio (FAR) bonuses and relaxed planning regulations reduce revitalization costs and enhance commercial feasibility. Technical conservation guidelines limit development intensity, enforce adaptive reuse standards, and embed authenticity protection in plans. Concurrently, a portion of commercial revenues must be allocated for building maintenance, with designated public access zones to mitigate the impact of capital expansion on public interests. Market entities reciprocate by reinvesting profits into conservation, environmental improvement, and public cultural services, fostering a symbiotic cycle where commercial operations sustain conservation efforts, which in turn enhance commercial viability.

The former headquarters building of CLP (CLP Pulse)



Figure 7 The location of CLP Group Headquarters
Source: By author

The former headquarters of China Light and Power Company (CLP), situated on Argyle Street in Kowloon (Figure 7), was originally constructed in 1940 and embodies profound urban historical significance. This three-story reinforced concrete building features brick-patterned ceramic tile cladding, exemplifying distinctive Art Deco architectural motifs. In 1959 - 1968, two adjacent residential buildings were converted into offices (Figure 8) and linked to the headquarters, expanding the complex. The building's clock tower once served not only as a critical public timekeeping facility but also as a local landmark, silently bearing witness to Kowloon's developmental trajectory. Historically, residents frequently paid electricity bills on-site, forging an enduring connection between the building and community life, thus solidifying its role as a living repository of collective urban memory (am730, 2023).

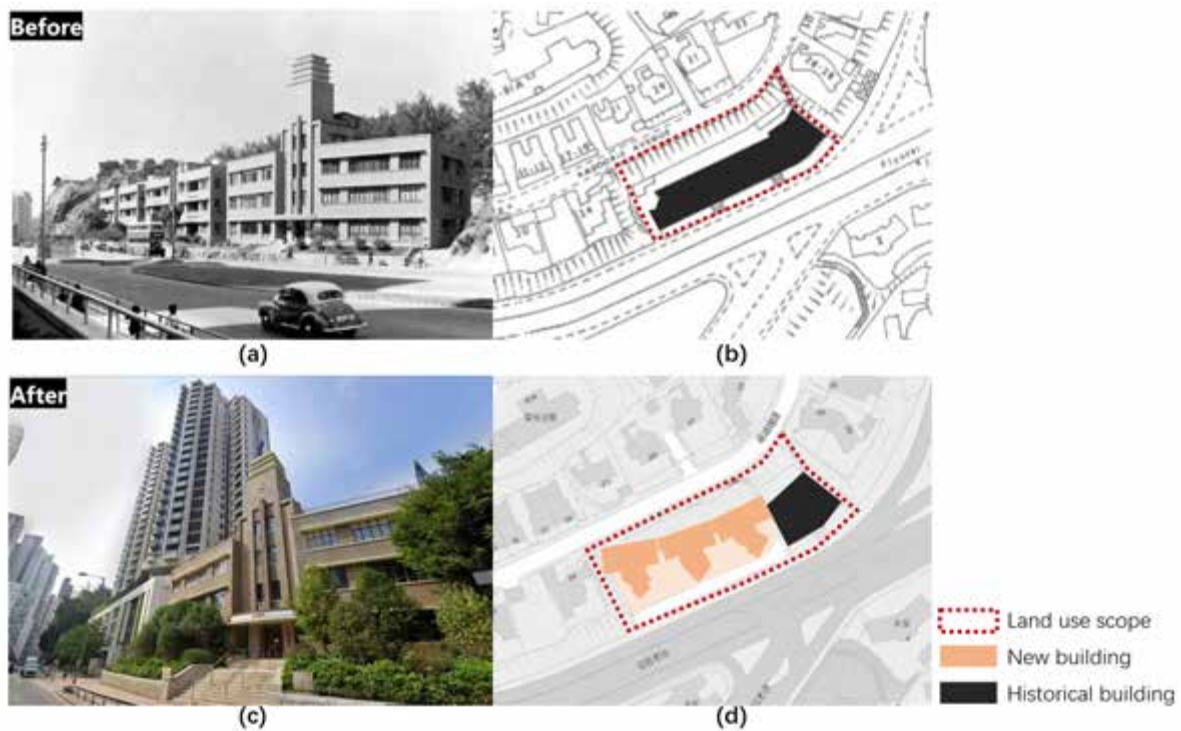


Figure 8. The former headquarters of CLP before and after revitalization
Source: (a)CLP Pulse;(b)(d)by author; (c)Google Street Map

From the lens of interest coordination, the revitalization of CLP Group's former headquarters has been marked by conflicts and coordination among multiple stakeholders. The initial contradiction between redevelopment returns and cultural preservation emerged when the government-approved 43-story residential redevelopment plan (2001) directly clashed with authenticity preservation demands following the building's proposed Grade 1 heritage designation in 2009. CLP contested the heritage status based on commercial priorities, suspending the redevelopment plan. In 2011, CLP provided a proposal for partial conservation with partial redevelopment, sparking new disputes. Local residents raised concerns that three residential buildings, forming a 70-metre-long and 100-metre-high screen wall, might cause canyon effects and trap vehicle exhaust fumes (Green Sense, 2011), highlighting tensions between high-density development and environmental rights. Conservation groups insisted on preserving the entire building and opposed only keeping the clock tower, criticizing the fragmented protection approach (Oriental Daily, 2011), exposing fundamental disagreements over commercial development intensity versus authenticity preservation.

In response to these conflicts, the government facilitated interest balancing through policy adjustments. Development rights were transferred to market entities. The Town Planning Board approved CLP's partial demolition plan, relaxing building height restrictions from 80 meters to 100 meters and increasing the FAR to 5.5 (Oriental Daily, 2012). These measures compensated for floor area losses due to heritage retention, incentivizing corporate conservation participation. Simultaneously, conservation clauses enabled a 23% reduction in land premium payments for China Light and Power in 2018 (Ma, 2018), further motivating market engagement through fiscal concessions. CLP reciprocated by fulfilling social responsibilities through functional adaptation. The clock tower was revitalized as a cultural center (Figure 9), hosting free public exhibitions such as Power World and Humanity & Intangible Heritage, alongside multilingual guided tours (English, Cantonese, and Mandarin). This transformation established a hybrid space for historical interpretation, cultural education, and community interaction. By reallocating commercial profits to public cultural services, the company addressed demands for equitable cultural access, demonstrating responsiveness to civic rights.



Figure 9. After revitalization, the former headquarters of CLP has been transformed into a public space integrating historical display, cultural education, and community interaction
Source: CLP Pulse

3.3 The Social-Engaged and Community Co-Creation Mode

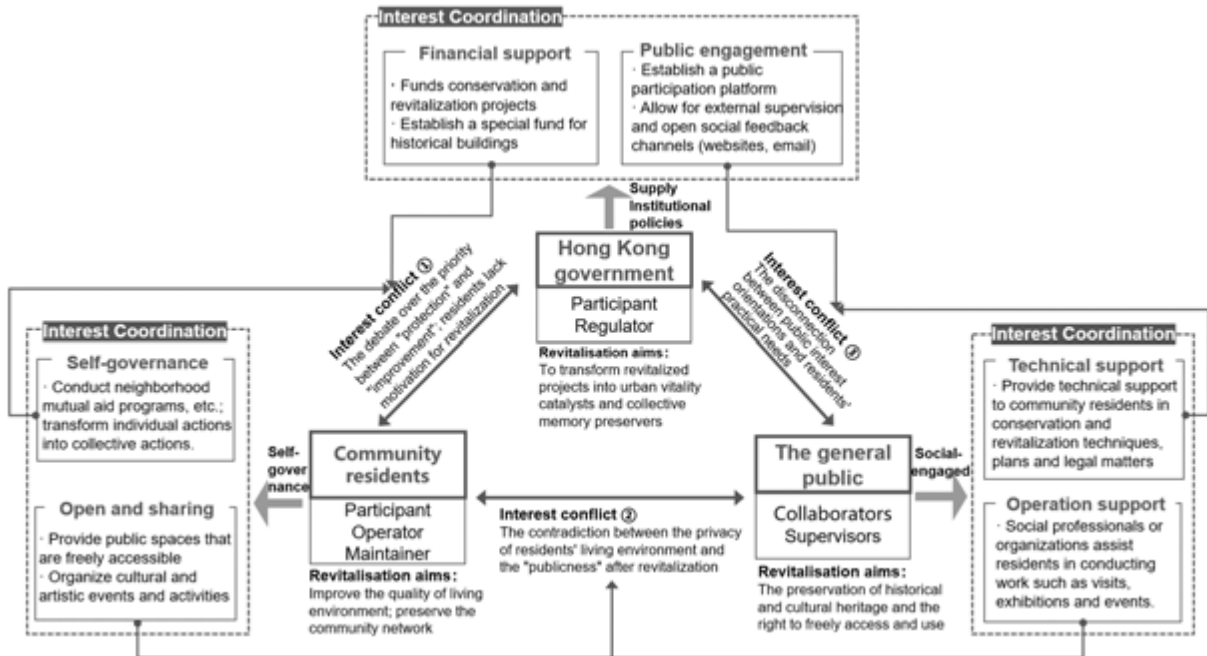


Figure 10. Operational mechanism of the social-engaged and community co-creation mode
Source: By author

In this mode (Figure 10), residents, merchants, and tenants within historic buildings serve as core participants who act as both operators and maintainers of revitalization projects. Their primary objectives involve improving residential environmental quality while preserving their essential social networks (Ng, 2018). The public transitions from traditional users to co-creation participants, while the government assumes dual roles as both participant and coordinator, striving to stimulate new dynamics for regional development while preserving urban historical and cultural heritage. Key conflicts of interest manifest in four dimensions: 1) the tension between residents' privacy requirements and the post-revitalization publicization of buildings; 2) the divergence between governmental prioritization of historical environmental authenticity and residents' practical needs for environmental improvements; 3) diminished participation incentives due to high revitalization costs; and 4) cognitive disparities between governmental revitalization objectives and public perceptions regarding resource allocation and participatory rights. To reconcile these conflicts, the Hong Kong government has implemented institutional support through financial mechanisms and public engagement strategies. This includes direct funding for conservation projects and the establishment of special funds to alleviate residents' economic burdens. Residents, tenants, and merchants engage in co-construction through neighborhood mutual assistance and community self-governance, while appropriately opening shared spaces to facilitate public access to historical-

cultural resources. Social stakeholders, including experts, scholars, and professional institutions, provide technical support in revitalization strategies, design solutions, and legal consultation. They assist in organizing cultural activities such as guided tours and exhibitions, fostering collaborative efforts between residents and social forces to establish a “living community” that achieves integration of historic building preservation, community quality enhancement, and cultural inheritance.

Staunton Street/ Shing Wong Street(H19)



Figure 11. The location of Staunton Street/ Shing Wong Street(H19) Source: By author

The Staunton Street and Shing Wong Street community, located in the Central District, Hong Kong Island (Figure 11), traces its origins to mid-19th century commercial development. Initially evolving into an international lower and middle class settlement where Chinese-Portuguese labor families established roots, Staunton Street gradually developed into 30 tenements, namely Tong Lau (唐樓)⁵, by the late 19th century. These buildings collectively formed the culturally and historically significant landmark known as Thirty Houses (卅間). During the early 20th century, Dr. Sun Yat-sen frequented the area, which became a significant hub for Hong Kong’s early educational institutions, revolutionary networks, and newspaper industry, marking its critical role in the city’s printing history. Post-World War II reconstruction transformed it into a vibrant community characterized by wet markets, restaurants, and close-knit neighborhood ties. Since the 1990s, urban road planning initiatives have enhanced community vision, preserving historical heritage while elevating community identity(SVhk, 2019). As such, this neighborhood embodies not only layered historical narratives but also a cultivated cultural distinctiveness (Figure 12).

⁵ Tong lau were historically inhabited only by Chinese people, hence they are commonly referred to as "tong lau". This architectural style was quite common in towns and cities of southern China during the 19th century.



Figure 12. H19 before and after revitalization
Source:(a)(c) URA; (b)(d)by author

Examining the H19 community revitalization project through the lens of interest coordination, its progression demonstrates a characteristic trajectory of conflict eruption, multi-stakeholder negotiation, and mode innovation. Intense conflicts of interest emerged since its launch. The 2003 commercial-residential redevelopment plan proposed by URA triggered dual opposition from residents and conservation advocates. Residents demanded fair compensation (referencing property appraisal values in the same district), tenant rights protection, and transparent communication mechanisms, citing severe building dilapidation and prolonged project stagnation due to litigation (Legislative Council, 2004). Concurrently, civic groups and conservation organizations advocated preserving the historical fabric and community culture embodied in this tenement community (Press Release, 2010), directly challenging URA's initial high-density oriented redevelopment. The 2010 film *Echoes of the Rainbow*, using Wing Lee Street as its backdrop, amplified public demands for preserving urban memory (Lui, 2022), exposing fundamental contradictions between commercial development and cultural conservation, as well as between residents' livelihood rights and urban renewal efficiency.

To reconcile the interests of all parties, the government and the URA adjusted the plan and introduced community-engagement initiatives. URA abandoned the original high-density development scheme, reducing the plot ratio from 8 to 4.5 (Press Release, 2010). Aligned with the revitalization policy for the former Hollywood Road Police Married Quarters, Wing Lee Street was rezoned as a Comprehensive Development Area in 2011 and further designated for cultural-historical community use in 2020, shifting from demolition-redevelopment to preservation of historical-cultural ambiance (Legislative Council, 2012). In terms of implementation, URA introduced a community-engagement mode in 2019, commissioning Social Ventures Hong Kong (SVhk) to establish a multi-stakeholder platform integrating residents, conservation groups, and professional institutions. Through sustained dialogue, this collaborative process developed an inclusive revitalization framework (SVhk, 2019). The plan transformed tenement buildings into mixed-functional complexes featuring "co-living units + retail units + community-making units," preserving the terrace-style urban fabric while providing housing improvement options. Socio-culturally, residents' self-organized activities, such as community nurseries and plant-sharing programs, strengthened neighborhood bonds. Intergenerational integration was fostered through youth-elderly co-working spaces, while economic sharing concepts revitalized community vibrancy (Figure 13). Concurrently, URA implemented a building rehabilitation program with owners' associations to enhance environmental quality, and commissioned professional organizations to manage co-living projects. This approach achieved multidimensional progress encompassing physical restoration, social network cultivation, and cultural value regeneration.



Figure 13. After revitalization, H19 has become a community shared space. Source: Co-living Unit and Community farm, URA; Community-making units, by author

4 Discussion

4.1 The comparison of the three modes

Hong Kong's three interest coordination modes for historic building revitalization in high-density urban contexts demonstrate distinct strategic responses to revitalising costs and public interest preservation, with marked operational divergences in practice. The government-social institution collaboration mode, as a top-down public welfare approach, leverages government-owned property rights through symbolic rents, fiscal subsidies, and policy instruments to enable non-profits delivering cultural exhibitions and community services. While ensuring authentic preservation and safeguarding public accessibility under governmental stewardship, this mode's heavy reliance on public financing raises sustainability challenges in balancing non-profit operational costs against their social missions. The market-driven with benefit recirculation mode, operating through public-private bundling mechanisms, centers on developers, receiving planning incentives, such as FAR bonuses and planning concessions, to integrate heritage conservation with commercial projects. Exemplified by the CLP Clock Tower's conversion into a free cultural venue, this approach effectively mobilizes private capital while mandating profit-sharing for conservation. However, its commercial orientation risks gentrification and privatization of communal spaces (Yung and Chan, 2016), frequently triggering community dissatisfaction regarding benefit distribution. Contrastingly, the social-engaged and community co-creation mode initiates bottom-up revitalization through multi-stakeholder negotiation, exemplified by URA's acquisition-based community making in the H19 project. While effectively preserving cultural identity and achieving high social acceptance (Yung et al., 2015), it requires sustained governance to reconcile immediate livelihood improvements with long-term conservation goals.

In the three modes, the government dynamically shifts from a leader to a regulator and then to an enabler, yet it remains the defender of historical buildings' public attributes. Across all paradigms, governments employ institutional frameworks encompassing funding regulations, conservation mandates, and participatory mechanisms to safeguard core objectives of cultural continuity and public accessibility against commercial encroachment or individual interests. Concurrently, authorities bear ultimate regulatory responsibilities through controlling commercial development intensity and monitoring fiscal subsidy allocation, thereby mitigating risks of authenticity erosion and benefit inequity during revitalization processes. Notably, URA, with a semi-governmental and semi-market identity (Zhang and Wang, 2024), leans differently in various modes. In market-led, benefit-feedback revitalization, its market role dominates, and its governmental role weakens, as seen in the Johnston Road Project (J Residence) involving the revitalization of 60 - 66 Johnston Road and Woo Cheong Pawn Shop (URA, 2008). Conversely, its governmental identity prevails in community co-creation initiatives through programs like H19, where market considerations become subsidiary to participatory governance.

The resolution of stakeholder conflicts fundamentally lies in innovative institutional designs for interest concessions and benefit-sharing mechanisms across different modes. In government-social institution

collaborations, this mode reconciles contradictions through public resource transfers. The government relinquishes historical building usage rights via symbolic rents and directly funds initial revitalization costs, such as covering restoration works and two-year operational expenses in revitalization schemes, thereby addressing high conservation expenditures. Social institutions then assume public service delivery through nonprofit operations. The market-led benefit-recirculation mode resolves funding constraints through development profit redistribution. Market entities gain planning concessions (e.g., plot ratio incentives) and commercial premiums from heritage cultural value (Licciardi and Amirtahmasebi, 2012), while contractually reinvesting partial profits into public space enhancement or conservation. The government essentially “purchases” conservation outcomes through regulatory incentives, achieving a commercial-public interest exchange. The community-engaged co-creation model establishes community value co-creation scenarios where residents sacrifice short-term redevelopment profits in exchange for improved living environments, community identity preservation, and social network maintenance, establishing shared value co-creation (Zheng et al., 2020). Governments and social institutions transform heritage conservation into tangible quality-of-life enhancements through community placemaking initiatives.

4.2 Revitalization Policy Optimization and Implications

To address existing challenges across these modes, the Hong Kong government should refine heritage conservation policies through four dimensions: funding system construction, economic incentive design, balanced rigid-flexible governance, and deepened public participation.

Funding system construction

The government should establish a multi-stakeholder funding framework. This requires expanding support for public education, academic research, and maintenance projects within existing heritage conservation funds while strengthening the coordinating role of heritage trusts to enhance fiscal efficiency. Concurrently, a dedicated heritage revitalization fund should be established to support vulnerable groups’ adaptive transitions during revitalization processes (Yung et al., 2015). Policy instruments like tax incentives and honorary recognition should channel social capital from corporate donations and lottery surpluses into heritage conservation (Liu and Tang, 2014). NPOs should be encouraged to manage government-owned historic buildings through social enterprise models (Antiquities Advisory Board, 2014), permitting revenue reinvestment from low-impact commercial operations, such as cultural experiences and creative retail. This approach would ultimately form a sustainable financial ecosystem integrating fiscal allocations, social capital, and project-generated income, ensuring economic viability for revitalisation.

Economic incentives design

The government should integrate policy instruments (Antiquities Advisory Board, 2014), establishing a transparent tiered incentive system. Based on evaluations of historical significance and adaptive reuse potential, differentiated incentives, such as maintenance subsidies and plot ratio concessions, should target high-adaptability projects to enhance market participation (Langston et al., 2008). Concurrently, mandatory benefit-reinvestment rules must institutionalize profit-sharing clauses in redevelopment agreements, requiring market entities to proportionally allocate value-added benefits from rental premiums and asset appreciation to heritage maintenance, public space enhancement, or community services. This ensures commercial developments reciprocally replenish public interests while securing economic returns, fostering a virtuous cycle between conservation efficacy and developmental benefits.

Governance System Optimization: Balanced the rigid-flexible

Governance frameworks must reconcile mandatory conservation requirements with adaptive management. The government should legislatively mandate compulsory public access provisions for revitalization projects (Lang et al., 2018), resident retention incentives, and social obligations like public space allocation ratios (Yung and Chan, 2012). Collaborative governance with social institutions necessitates strengthened procedural oversight, requiring periodic submission of visitor statistics (Audit Commission, 2013), long-term viability assessments, and dynamic adjustments to funding caps (Audit Commission, 2020) to safeguard the public attributes of historic buildings. Meanwhile, policy adjustments should relax overly restrictive modern regulations (e.g., fire safety codes) on heritage buildings by exempting non-critical safety standards. Technical adaptations should enable flexible integration of conservation techniques with contemporary functionalities (Yung and Chan, 2012). Local service priority clauses must further ensure community welfare, requiring commercial tenants to

prioritize neighborhood employment and services (Cheung and Chan, 2014). This hybrid governance framework institutionalizes both regulatory safeguards and adaptive flexibility, addressing heritage-specific operational challenges while maintaining public accountability.

Public Participation and Educational Innovation

The government could innovate heritage education through digital platforms such as QR-code-guided tours and virtual reality experiences, enhancing owners' awareness of timely maintenance while leveraging public engagement to constrain excessive commercialization (Yung and Chan, 2016). Participation channels should be expanded via District Councils and NGOs, incorporating resident consultation mechanisms for functional needs during planning phases (Lam et al., 2022). Operational agreements should embed free community workshops and multilingual revitalization documentation (Cheung and Chan, 2014), with independent heritage management bodies facilitating bottom-up participatory planning to optimize transparency in balancing diverse interests. A tiered public access policy should be implemented: government-owned historic buildings maximize physical accessibility, while private properties adopt 3D archival sharing as a non-intrusive alternative to onsite visits (Antiquities Advisory Board, 2014). This approach safeguards cultural rights while respecting owner privacy, forming a comprehensive public engagement network spanning education, planning consultation, operational involvement, and access management.

5 Conclusion

This study deciphers three core revitalization modes through the lens of interest coordination, elucidating governance logics for multi-stakeholder equilibrium in high-density cities. These modes institutionalize negotiable interest commonality by translating development profits, cultural preservation, and community well-being into tradable governance metrics, establishing a "benefit concession, value co-creation and outcome sharing" governance cycle. This framework offers localized references for cities like Shenzhen and Shanghai to address challenges of exorbitant conservation costs, development conflicts, and weak public engagement. However, limitations arise from the exclusive focus on Hong Kong's singular context, insufficient analysis of adaptive mechanisms under divergent property regimes, such as mainland China's land tenure system, and inadequate exploration of latent factors like quantified community identity assessments and social capital allocation efficiency. Future research should extend comparative analyses to Tokyo, Singapore, and other high-density cities, prioritizing dynamic interest mediation mechanisms in multi-actor negotiations. Integrating surveys and benefit models could empirically evaluate the efficacy of these models across dimensions like cultural continuity, resident satisfaction, and commercial sustainability.

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