

City Story 3 Chongqing, China

Urban Regeneration in Chongqing

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Land Area:
5,473 km²



Population:
8,750,000



Population Density:
1,599 people/km²



Chongqing (China): a mountainous city of history and modernity.

Image: Ming Chen on Wikimedia Commons



Urban Regeneration of the “Mountain City”

Chongqing is one of China’s four Municipal Cities and among the country’s top five cities by GDP. It is also a city of rich heritage, having served as the capital of China during World War II. The development of Chongqing is of strategic importance given its location as a transport node, connecting the country’s vast under-developed west to the east via the Yangtze River Economic Belt, and connecting China’s heartlands to the world via the Belt and Road Initiative.

However, Chongqing’s urban development faces several challenges: First, rapid economic growth and population influx over the past decades have exacerbated urban sprawl, traffic congestion and environmental degradation. Second, there are large stocks of vacant and obsolete industrial sites, which require policy changes for them to be re-activated for other uses. Third, Chongqing’s rough and unruly urban terrain makes redeveloping the old city centre difficult due to engineering complexity and high construction costs.



Liziba monorail station: a compact development integrated into a mixed-use building.

Image: David290 on Wikimedia Commons

Given these challenges, the city’s planners decided to look inward and worked innovatively to regenerate the city centre.

Benchmarking Through International Collaboration

In 2017, urban planners from Chongqing participated in the TFLUGP, where they exchanged insights with the CLC and other participants. Several important principles were distilled, which have been guiding Chongqing’s urban regeneration journey, namely:

- An inclusive approach is necessary for multi-stakeholder cooperation.
- Connectivity is key to rejuvenating the old inner city and solving traffic congestion. Urban regeneration requires a different financing strategy to attract private sector investments.
- The provision of more greenery in the urban fabric makes the city more liveable and sustainable.
- A creative operation model is needed for the project’s varied scale and function.



Professor, Chongqing Institute and Principal Planner, Chongqing Planning Bureau Mr Sang Dongsheng sharing the city’s urban challenges and the lessons learnt from Singapore at the TFLUGP 2017.

Image: Centre for Liveable Cities

Chongqing also embarked on the “New Urbanisation Pilot and Demonstration Project” with the World Bank in 2018–19, which connected local stakeholders to global expertise, and implemented two pilot regeneration planning projects aiming to improve the use of public space and pedestrian mobility in Nan’an and Jiulongpo districts.

These initiatives have enabled Chongqing to benchmark its urban regeneration with international best practices and to adapt planning and governance principles to its own unique context, for more sustainable and inclusive urban regeneration.

More Inclusive and Innovative Urban Regeneration

Since 2017, an 8-hectare residential precinct called Nanjing Road in Beibei district in the northwest of Chongqing’s old city has been rejuvenated. The old building façades were retrofitted coherently based on the historic architecture style of the region, characterised by red-bricks and arched balconies/doorways. Moreover, the precinct’s rejuvenation fits into a long-term district master plan together with the conservation of core historic areas and surrounding landscape improvements.

Kampong Glam—When Old is Also Hip



Sultan Mosque is the main attraction at Kampong Glam.

Image: Wengang Zhai on Unsplash

Kampong Glam was once a booming district with the settlers from the Malay Archipelago, Arabic Muslims, and other ethnic groups in the early 20th century. It became run-down and quiet after the resettlement of the residential population.

To inject a new life into this heritage district, local authorities have made concerted efforts to rejuvenate Kampong Glam, which include:

- Restoring shophouses to retain traditional activities such as textile businesses in the historic core area surrounding Sultan Mosque.
- Bringing in new businesses such as boutique cafes and restaurants to attract patrons to the area.
- Making its streets more pedestrian-friendly by introducing heritage trails and markers to improve walkability and the tourist experience.
- Working with community groups to showcase the district’s rich Malay-Muslim heritage through festivals and performances.



Nanjing Road Precinct: rejuvenation based on heritage.

Images: Chongqing Architectural Design Institute Co., LTD

The TESTBED2, (aka Er-Ling 2nd Factory) was an abandoned 80-year-old printing factory cluster in Yuzhong District. It has been transformed through private investment into a cultural and creative hub, hosting about 100 modern art galleries, lifestyle boutiques, bars and cafeterias. A concept

of “empowering by design” was applied through modern architecture to enable the adaptive re-use of space for local creative art events such as performances, exhibitions, and product launches. It attracted 9 million visitors in the first five years since its transformation.



TESTBED2 Project: a factory transformed into a chic and modern art space.

Images: TESTBED2 Cultural and Creative Park

At the heart of the city, a new 1.7-kilometre pedestrian promenade opened in 2021, connecting a total of 28 historic landmarks from Chaotianmen Square to the Liberation Monument. The municipal government also announced that by 2022, Chongqing would further expand its “mountain city walkway” by an additional 353 kilometres, in a network of 17 themed routes to promote healthy living.

Summary

Through these systemic explorations with both district planning and pilot projects, the urban regeneration of Chongqing will become an model to revitalise the old city into a more compact, efficient, and liveable urban form, able to adapt to the economic needs and residents’ aspirations, and to meet China’s commitment to reducing carbon emissions and achieving sustainable urban development.



Chaotianmen-Liberation Monument pedestrian promenade today.

Images: Yang Rong