

Empowering Community Participation in Urban Redevelopment Through Habermas' Communicative Action Theory

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ABSTRACT

Urban redevelopment is a well-established practice aimed at addressing community needs while fostering economic growth. However, limited access to information and weak cooperation often hinder meaningful community participation. Although numerous studies have examined community involvement in urban development, few focus specifically on redevelopment contexts, where displacement and long-term socioeconomic implications intensify the need for genuine community participation. This paper addresses this gap by developing a conceptual framework to empower community participation in urban redevelopment, serving as a guideline for local agencies and stakeholders. Decision-making in urban redevelopment frequently overlooks community input, despite its direct impact on residents' lives. Grounded in Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action, the proposed framework emphasises creating communicative spaces for planners to actively listen to community voices, build trust, and facilitate consensus among diverse stakeholders. Through an Integrative Literature Review (ILR) as a method, a conceptual framework was developed by synthesising previous studies and integrating theoretical perspectives. The framework contributes to theoretical discourse by integrating Habermas' communicative principles into urban redevelopment, offering policy-oriented insights for planners and local authorities to promote more inclusive, transparent, and equitable decision-making processes. Future research may empirically validate this framework within specific redevelopment contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Urban development has been a significant catalyst in shaping the economic and social fabric of cities around the world. As cities expand and modernise, they experience transformative changes, including economic growth, improved infrastructure, and the attraction of diverse populations. However, these developments also present challenges, particularly concerning social disparities, spatial and economic inequalities, and the strain on resources (Kohli, 2024). Over time, these challenges can accumulate, creating an urgent need for urban redevelopment, especially in areas that must adapt to changing demands. Consequently, numerous issues continue to pose significant challenges in achieving successful urban redevelopment, notably in empowering community participation.

The community plays a vital role in urban redevelopment because it promotes inclusion, sustainability, and long-term success. According to Sabran (2003), a community is defined as a collection of individuals, groups, and institutions that share time, space, and resources over a prolonged period for a common purpose. The principle that the community should have a voice in shaping the decisions that affect their lives is fundamental to community development (Dean, 2017). Engaging the community in the decision-making process helps them understand the importance of their participation in shaping the future (Marzuki, 2015). However, in many developing contexts, urban redevelopment remains largely driven by a top-down planning approach that prioritises economic and infrastructural objectives over social inclusion (Kelabu & Fadzil, 2019). Such an approach often marginalises community voices, resulting in limited trust, poor communication, and a weak sense of ownership among affected groups. The exclusion of local perspectives not only undermines the legitimacy of planning decisions but also contributes to resistance and project failures. To address these limitations, this study applies Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action, which promotes dialogue, consensus-building, and mutual understanding as the foundation for participatory decision-making. By emphasising communicative rationality rather than administrative control, the theory offers a transformative framework for shifting from hierarchical governance to inclusive urban redevelopment.

Furthermore, in addition to raise awareness and educating the public, community participation is crucial for developing a more efficient planning framework. It fosters a deeper understanding of the needs and demands of stakeholders, facilitating effective resource planning and management (Marzuki, 2015). However, in many developing countries, planning practices often fall short in integrating community participation (Zhang et al., 2012). Many urban redevelopment projects fail to effectively engage communities, resulting in limited representation and participation from diverse population groups (Treija et al., 2023).

Several factors contribute to this issue, which will be discussed in detail in the literature review of this research. An extensive literature survey has been conducted to identify these challenges and analyses relevant concepts and theories. The core question guiding this research is: "How can the community's capacity, and consequently their willingness to actively participate in urban redevelopment planning, be strengthened?" By exploring this question, the research aims to make both theoretical and practical contributions to the field. In the discussion section, the research proposes a conceptual framework by synthesising existing scholarly concepts to guide stakeholders in fostering consensus and strengthening community empowerment, thereby promoting more active participation in decision-making. While there is extensive literature on community participation in urban development, few studies explicitly address participation within the context of urban redevelopment, where displacement, resettlement, and socioeconomic restructuring present unique challenges. Moreover, limited conceptual models incorporate a theoretical perspective, such as Habermas' Communicative Action Theory, to explain how empowerment can be institutionalised within redevelopment processes. This study fills this gap by proposing a framework

that integrates communicative action, collaboration, and empowerment as key dimensions for achieving more democratic urban redevelopment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This section presents a comprehensive review of urban redevelopment and community participation, examining their definitions, benefits, key elements, and associated challenges. Additionally, it explores the implementation of urban redevelopment on a global scale and highlights factors influencing the success of redevelopment projects.

Urban Redevelopment: A Global Perspective

Existing research primarily focuses on community participation in urban development, with limited attention given to its role in urban redevelopment decision-making. While studies on urban development extensively explore participatory methods and their effectiveness in planning processes, there remains a notable gap regarding how community participation specifically influences urban redevelopment outcomes. Wates (2014) highlights the importance of incorporating community perspectives into decision-making to achieve sustainable urban transformations. However, much of the existing literature prioritises redevelopment outcomes over the participatory processes that shape them.

Urban redevelopment has become a globally significant strategy for advancing urban development (Yang et al., 2022). This process typically entails complex components such as land acquisition, displacement, and substantial modifications to existing urban infrastructures, presenting distinct challenges compared to broader urban development initiatives. Notably, existing research predominantly emphasises the outcomes of redevelopment, while giving comparatively less attention to the participatory mechanisms that underpin these processes.

The rapid urbanisation of cities underscores the transformative nature of urban development, integrating social, economic, cultural, and environmental dimensions (Roy & Saha, 2011). This expansion involves enhancing urban spaces to accommodate increasing populations and economic activities. However, although economic growth and infrastructure expansion drive urbanisation, these developments also pose significant challenges, including increased pressure on resources, environmental degradation, the reduction of green spaces, and greater vulnerability to natural disasters (Bimenyimana et al., 2022).

Consequently, urban redevelopment emerges as a crucial approach adopted by many developed nations to address socio-economic inequalities, environmental concerns, and political challenges in urban planning (Wang et al., 2022). This strategy is essential for revitalising urban areas by fostering economic growth, preserving cultural heritage, reversing urban decay, and mitigating urban sprawl and disaster vulnerabilities (Yang et al., 2022). In East and South Asian countries, redevelopment has also been strategically utilised to relocate low-income communities to alternative locations (Zhang et al., 2012). These initiatives are often undertaken to enhance the aesthetic and economic value of urban spaces (Dalton, 2005; Zhang et al., 2012).

Unlike large-scale demolitions, urban redevelopment prioritises the preservation of property rights while repurposing land for functional use, offering a cost-effective and less disruptive alternative (Turcu, 2012). However, despite the advantages associated with urban redevelopment, several barriers continue to hinder the realisation of truly inclusive outcomes. Addressing these challenges requires a deeper understanding of participatory processes that empower communities and contribute to more equitable and effective urban redevelopment initiatives.

Empowering Community Participation in Decision-Making Process

The concept of empowerment has become increasingly central to urban development, as it enables individuals to contribute toward a shared vision (Sabran, 2003). At its core, empowerment functions as a motivational tool that drives individuals toward goal achievement while simultaneously acting as a catalyst for broader development (Alsop et al., 2006). Furthermore, empowerment serves as a critical metric for assessing community participation, allowing communities to anticipate potential redevelopment outcomes by considering current conditions, historical contexts, and desired future transformations (Borer, 2010).

According to (Noworól, 2012), community participation is a key instrument in urban redevelopment, facilitating the creation of a shared development vision. Actively engaging communities in redevelopment initiatives ensures that their needs, interests, and priorities are carefully considered. This involvement fosters a sense of ownership and social cohesion, enhances overall well-being, and provides avenues for skills development and employment creation. By recognising the significance of community participation, stakeholders can implement projects more effectively, ensuring sustained engagement and empowerment (Marzuki, 2015). Collaboration between government agencies, private developers, and the public enhances trust and strengthens relationships, further reinforcing the success of urban redevelopment efforts. Notably, extending an invitation to communities to partake in decision-making is perceived as an acknowledgment of their role in shaping urban futures (Marzuki, 2015).

Despite its recognised benefits, community participation in urban planning is often limited by agencies and policymakers due to concerns over additional costs and project delays. Engaging communities necessitates resources, time, and coordination, which some perceive as hindrances to timely implementation (Maginn, 2007). However, this viewpoint disregards the long-term benefits of inclusive planning, such as increased project acceptance and reduced conflicts. Manaf et al. (2016), highlight that community participation within the Malaysian planning system is often reactive, primarily addressing public objections rather than fostering proactive engagement. Similarly, Marzuki and Hay (2013) emphasise that in Malaysia, public participation in planning frequently functions as a procedural formality rather than a genuine mechanism for community involvement in decision-making.

Importance of Community Participation

Community participation in decision-making is a fundamental pillar of urban redevelopment, as it ensures that planning outcomes genuinely reflect the needs, priorities, and lived experiences of affected communities. When systematically integrated, community participation enhance governance by promoting transparency, inclusivity, and long-term project legitimacy. Extensive literature underscores that incorporating community voices into redevelopment processes strengthen the alignment between proposed interventions and the social, cultural, and economic contexts in which they are implemented (Healey, 1997; Zhang et al., 2012).

Several dimensions illustrate the importance of community participation. First, local knowledge contributes valuable insights into historical practices, neighbourhood conditions, and socio-cultural dynamics, enabling planners to design interventions that are contextually appropriate and socially responsive. Second, meaningful participation promotes equity by ensuring that diverse and marginalised groups have the opportunity to articulate their needs and concerns, thereby improving representation and reducing the risk of exclusion (Chen, 2022). Third, transparent and continuous communication fosters trust between stakeholders and strengthens collaborative relationships, which can lead to higher acceptance of redevelopment initiatives and smoother implementation processes (Treija et al., 2023). Fourth, participation contributes to community capacity-building; through engagement and dialogue, communities gain greater

awareness, confidence, and skills to assert their interests in ongoing and future development processes (Sabila et al., 2024).

Recognising these benefits, community participation becomes not merely a procedural requirement but a strategic mechanism for enhancing the quality and sustainability of redevelopment outcomes. Effective engagement encourages shared ownership of projects, strengthens social cohesion, reduces conflict, and supports more equitable decision-making processes. As a result, the active involvement of communities ultimately contributes to the creation of vibrant, resilient, and inclusive urban environments.

Challenges in Empowering Community Participation

Several factors hinder effective community participation in urban redevelopment, including.

- (i) **Information delivery:** The lack of clear and accessible information is a major barrier to community engagement. Limited communication between authorities and community members often results in the exclusion of certain groups from the decision-making process (Marzuki & Hay, 2013; Manaf et al., 2016). According to research done in Kapit, Sarawak, many communities were unaware of rehabilitation initiatives that the authorities had started, which caused them to become confused and disengaged (Kelabu & Fadzil, 2019). Collaboration can be significantly hindered by ineffective dissemination of project information, particularly when affected communities lack clarity regarding the project's objectives, implementation process, and opportunities for participation.
- (ii) **Financial constraint:** Addressing community concerns and incorporating public feedback often requires modifications to redevelopment plans, which can increase costs and delay project implementation. Budgetary limitations may also lead to compromises in community engagement efforts, restricting opportunities for meaningful participation and fostering mistrust between stakeholders (Maginn, 2007).
- (iii) **Power dynamics:** Government agencies and private developers frequently exert disproportionate influence over redevelopment initiatives, relegating local communities to a passive role with minimal decision-making power (Nour, 2011). Traditional public participation mechanisms often fail to alleviate scepticism and mistrust, reinforcing a top-down planning approach that limits genuine community engagement (Ashade & Mutereko, 2022).
- (iv) **Ineffective communication and bureaucratic barriers:** Poor communication strategies and bureaucratic inefficiencies often prevent communities from actively participating in redevelopment processes. Maier (2001) argues that ineffective engagement efforts, in combination with administrative red tape, contribute to the failure of participatory planning approaches. The willingness of municipal authorities to incorporate community feedback remains a crucial determinant of the success of inclusive redevelopment frameworks.

Overcoming these challenges requires a concerted effort from all stakeholders to foster a culture of transparency, inclusivity, and mutual trust. By implementing effective communication strategies, ensuring equitable financial allocation, and promoting community empowerment, urban redevelopment can become more participatory, sustainable, and reflective of local needs.

Factors Influence Participation in Urban Redevelopment

Various factors impact the level and effectiveness of community participation in urban redevelopment. To systematically identify these factors, an extensive literature review was conducted, drawing insights primarily from the Scopus and ResearchGate databases. The review focused on publications spanning a ten (10)-year period (2014 to 2024) to capture evolving trends and contemporary perspectives on community engagement in urban redevelopment. This timeframe was selected to ensure a balanced integration of foundational studies and recent advancements, providing a comprehensive understanding of both historical and emerging challenges in participatory urban.

Table 1. Literature Review on Factors Influencing Community Participation in Urban Redevelopment

	Contributing factors	Indicators	Reviewed Literature
Internal factors	Socio-cultural	Cultural values	Naku (2020)
		Leadership	Maria et al. (2022)
		Education and awareness	Sun et al. (2024)
		Social profile	Chen (2022)
	Socio-economic	Economic incentives	Nwaobiala (2014)
		Income level	Chen (2022)
External factors	Communication Strategy	Transparency	Trejja et al. (2023)
		Trustworthy	
		Collaborative effort	Trejja et al. (2023)
	Legal and institutional frameworkPolicy Framework		Johar (2017)

Source: Authors (2026)

Table 1 presents a synthesis of key internal and external factors that influence community participation in urban redevelopment, as identified through a comprehensive literature review. The internal factors primarily include sociocultural and socioeconomic conditions such as cultural values, leadership, education, awareness, income level, and social profile (Naku, 2020; Chen, 2022; Maria et al., 2022; Sun et al., 2024). These elements highlight the importance of intrinsic community attributes that shape readiness and capacity to engage in redevelopment processes. Conversely, external factors comprise communication strategies and the legal and institutional framework that shape participation environments. Economic incentives and income level are identified as socio-economic drivers (Nwaobiala, 2014; Chen, 2022), while transparency, trust, and collaborative efforts fall under communication strategies that foster inclusive engagement (Trejja et al., 2023). The policy framework, representing institutional support, is also highlighted as a critical enabler (Johar, 2017). Collectively, these factors underscore the multi-dimensional nature of participatory urban redevelopment, which requires both internal community strengths and enabling external structures to be effectively addressed.

Strategies of Successful Empowerment

By identifying the challenges and factors influencing community participation, targeted strategies can be developed to enhance the capacity of communities in decision-making processes. Strengthening community engagement can lead to improvements in their socioeconomic, cultural, and environmental well-being. Previous research highlights various approaches to fostering efficient community involvement, with most strategies emphasising collaborative and participatory frameworks involving communities, local

governments, and other key stakeholders (Zhang et al., 2012). However, addressing deeper issues such as cultural differences, language barriers, and historical distrust requires a more context-sensitive approach. Strategies must be designed to account for these internal factors, ensuring that engagement efforts are inclusive, culturally appropriate, and capable of rebuilding community trust. A comprehensive and adaptive planning framework is essential to creating meaningful and lasting community participation in urban redevelopment initiatives.

Table 2 summarises key approaches from previous studies that have demonstrated effective strategies to improve community participation in redevelopment. The inclusion of this table provides empirical justification for the conceptual framework by linking theoretical concepts to practical strategies derived from existing literature.

Table 2. Previous Studies Have Highlighted Efforts That Have Led to Improved Participation

Type of Approach	Strategies	Related literature review
Physical Approach (Tangible actions)	Creating a framework model	Azhar et al. (2019)
	Establishing legal status	Adamson & Bromiley (2013)
Civic approach (Intangible actions)	Collaborative effort	Maginn (2007), Adamson & Bromiley, (2013)
	Technocratic approach	Zhang et al. (2012)
	Cultural oriented	Obot et al. (2022)
	Economic empowerment	Zhang et al. (2019)
	Communication strategy	Azhar et al. (2019)
	Political involvement in legislative framework	Rifkin (2002)

Source: Authors (2026)

Table 2 further clarifies how different approaches contribute to successful empowerment by outlining specific strategies and the empirical support behind them. Physical approaches, which involves tangible actions, focus on establishing institutional and structural foundations for participation. For example, creating a framework model (Azhar et al., 2019) and formalising legal status (Adamson & Bromiley, 2013) provide communities with clear procedure, rights, and protections to participate meaningfully in urban redevelopment initiatives. These structural mechanisms reduce ambiguity, strengthen accountability and legitimise community involvement.

In contrast, civic approach or intangible approaches emphasise the social, cultural, and communicative dimensions of empowerment. Collaborative efforts (Adamson & Bromiley, 2013; Maginn, 2007) and technocratic approaches (Zhang et al., 2012) improve coordination between stakeholders and enhance decision-making transparency. Culturally oriented strategies (Obot et al., 2022) address deeper issues such as identity, values, and representation, which are essential for building trust in historically marginalised communities. Economic empowerment initiatives (Zhang et al., 2019) help strengthen the capacity of the community to engage, while communication strategies (Azhar et al., 2019) and political involvement within legislative processes (Rifkin, 2002) ensure that communities have sustained channels to voice concerns, negotiate, and influence redevelopment outcomes. Together, these strategies illustrate that successful empowerment requires both tangible structures and intangible social processes. Table 2 therefore provides empirical justification for the conceptual framework by linking practical strategies to the theoretical foundation of participation and communicative action.

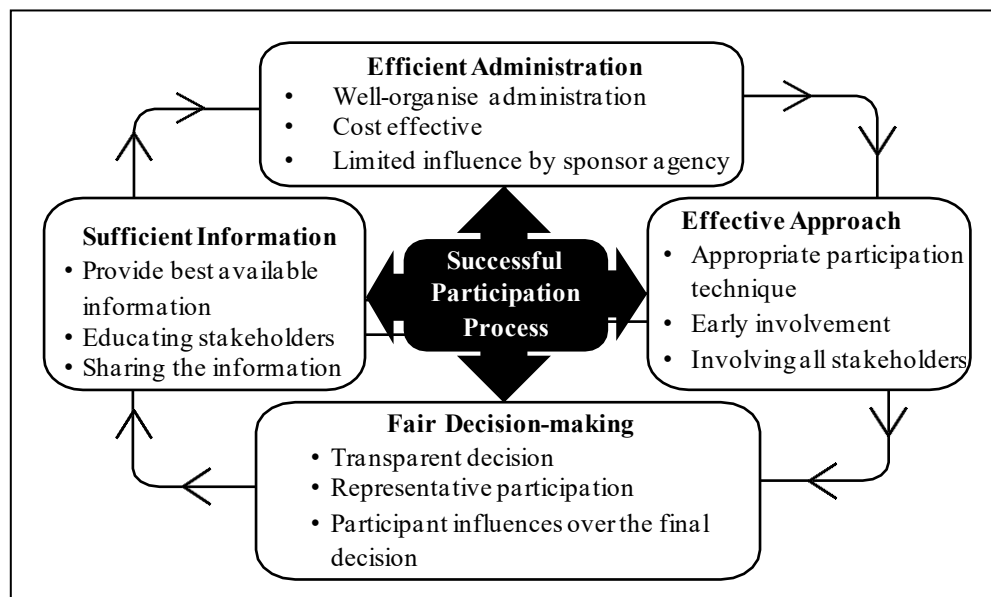


Fig. 1. List of Criteria for Successful Participation Adapted From Marzuki (2009) and Dalton (2005).

Source: Authors (2026)

Four (4) key criteria are fundamental to ensure an effective participation process in Malaysia: access to adequate information, efficient administration, a strategic approach, and equitable decision-making (Dalton, 2005; Marzuki, 2009). These elements are crucial for fostering meaningful engagement, allowing participants to make informed contributions, and ensuring that decision-making processes remain fair and efficient.

By establishing an inclusive participatory framework, community members feel empowered, valued, and actively involved in shaping redevelopment outcomes. This approach enhances urban redevelopment initiatives by aligning them with the needs and aspirations of the community. Additionally, government agencies benefit from improved access to local knowledge and resources. Enhanced community engagement also reduces the costs of disseminating project-related information, as well-informed residents contribute to smoother project implementation and a stronger sense of collective ownership.

Harbemas' Communicative Action Theory and Empowering Community Participation

Habermas (1984)'s Theory of Communicative Action offers a critical foundation for participatory planning by promoting dialogue-based consensus, mutual understanding, and rational discourse as mechanism for legitimising decision-making. In contrast to instrumental or strategic forms of communication, communicative action emphasises the co-construction of meaning among stakeholders, making it highly relevant to inclusive urban redevelopment practices.

In the context of urban planning, this theory advocates a transition from top-down governance to collaborative, deliberative frameworks where community voices are integrated into policy and planning decisions. The participatory mechanisms proposed under Habermas' framework foster trust, reduce conflicts, and empower communities, particularly those historically marginalised in development processes (Innes & Booher, 2004; Fischler, 2014).

Integrating communicative action with strategic planning enhances the clarity of information dissemination to communities (Mukuzunga et al., 2021), thereby strengthening relationships between municipal authorities or planners with the community. This approach fosters trust and collaboration, leading to more effective and inclusive urban redevelopment.

According to Mukuzunga et al. (2021), most urban planning issues are not well-known to the public, and effective communication with communities enhances understanding and cooperation, enabling solutions to problems such as informality.

Habermas (1984)'s Theory of Communicative Action, first introduced in his seminal work *The Theory of Communication Action*, provides a framework for rational, inclusive dialogue aimed at achieving mutual understanding among diverse actors. In the context of urban planning, this theory is instrumental in shifting from traditional, top-down decision-making towards participatory governance where legitimacy is derived through discourse, not hierarchy (Habermas, 1984; Innes & Booher, 2004).

Moreno et al. (2024), identify public sphere, deliberative democracy, and legitimacy power, and communicative rationality as key elements of Habermas' theory that are directly relevant to the challenges explored in this study. These concepts provide a critical lens for examining the dynamics of participatory governance, power legitimacy, and the effectiveness of democratic decision-making processes in engaging community in development.

- (i) **Public sphere:** The public sphere, as conceptualised by Habermas (1984), provides a framework for addressing the challenges of ineffective information delivery in community participation. Within the public sphere, rational discourse and inclusive dialogue ensure that information is not only disseminated but also critically engaged with by all stakeholders. One (1) of the major barriers in development planning is the lack of transparency and accessibility to key information, often resulting in community disengagement (Brorström & Styhre, 2021). Bureaucratic constraints, technical jargon, and selective disclosure by authorities further limit the public's ability to meaningfully participate (Maier, 2001). Strengthening the public sphere facilitates a two-way communication process where governments and planning agencies actively engage communities through open forums, participatory workshops, and digital platforms, ensuring that information is accessible, comprehensible, and actionable (Alenzi & Miskon, 2024).
- (ii) **Deliberative democracy:** Deliberative democracy, another key foundation in Habermas' theory, addresses the financial constraints often associated with public participation in development planning. Governments frequently cite budget limitations as a barrier to meaningful engagement, viewing public consultations as resource-intensive and costly (Maginn, 2007). Deliberative democracy offers a cost-effective alternative by prioritising structured, inclusive, and reasoned discourse over large-scale, resource-heavy participation models (Moreno et al., 2024). Instead of expensive mass consultations, deliberative democracy promotes the use of representative citizen panels, digital engagement platforms, and community-led forums to optimise participation while minimising costs (Habermas, 1984). Digital tools, such as virtual town halls and e-consultations, significantly reduce logistical expenses while expanding outreach to a broader demographic (Toukola & Ahola, 2022).
- (iii) **Legitimate and power:** Legitimacy power, as conceptualised by Habermas (1984), is fundamental in ensuring that decision-making processes in governance and planning derive

authority from rational, inclusive, and participatory discourse rather than hierarchical imposition.

- (iv) A persistent challenge in urban planning is the unequal distribution of power, where government agencies and private developers often dominate decision-making, marginalising community voices and fostering mistrust and disengagement (Healey, 1997; Innes & Booher, 2004). This power imbalance limits meaningful participation and can lead to resistance against development initiatives (Arnstein, 1969). By institutionalising participatory decision-making, establishing legal frameworks for inclusive governance, and creating structured platforms for rational discourse, legitimacy power can help mitigate these power asymmetries (Moreno et al., 2024).
- (v) Ensuring that planning decisions are grounded in deliberative and transparent processes strengthens civic engagement, enhances social accountability, and fosters equitable decision-making (Olsson, 2009). When legitimacy power is embedded in planning structures, it shifts governance from a top-down, power-centric approach to one that is more democratic and participatory, ultimately reducing conflicts, increasing policy acceptance, and ensuring the long-term sustainability of urban development projects (Haikio, 2007).
- (vi) **Communicative rationality:** Communicative rationality, as discussed by Olsson (2009), and grounded in Habermas' theory of communicative action, offers a framework for overcoming ineffective communication in planning by emphasising rational discourse, mutual understanding, and shared meaning rather than strategic or coercive interactions.
- (vii) A significant challenge in urban and regional planning is the prevalence of one-way, hierarchical communication structures that exclude community voices, leading to disengagement and mistrust in the decision-making process (Arnstein, 1969; Haselbacher et al., 2024; Healey, 1997). Ineffective communication often results in misinterpretations, resistance, and conflicts that hinder policy implementation and project success (Maier, 2001).
- (viii) By integrating communicative rationality, planning processes can transition from unilateral decision-making to participatory, deliberative engagement, ensuring that all stakeholders are involved in open, rational dialogue and consensus-building (Fischler, 2014). This approach fosters transparency, inclusivity, and relational rewards, where continuous engagement strengthens trust, reduces conflicts, and enhances public acceptance of planning initiatives (Fischler, 2014). Furthermore, by institutionalising communicative rationality, planning agencies can improve access to information, encourage diverse stakeholder participation, and create sustainable governance frameworks that legitimise planning outcomes (Moreno et al., 2024). The adoption of communicative rationality in planning enhances public engagement, facilitates reciprocal trust-building, and ultimately creates more equitable and effective urban development policies.

By embedding these principles into urban redevelopment frameworks, planners and decision makers can transcend tokenistic and move toward genuine empowerment. For Malaysia, where community participation is often procedural rather than substantive, Habermas' theory offers a transformative pathway to reconfigure governance structure and planning practices.

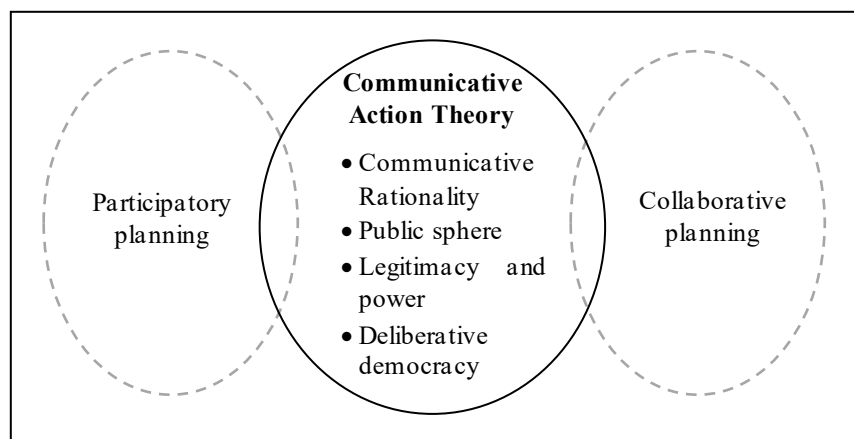


Fig. 2. Theoretical Linkage of Empowering Community Participation through Communicative Action Theory

Source: Adopted from Gunton (2003)

The diagram illustrates how the core elements of Communicative Action Theory (public sphere, deliberative democracy, legitimacy and power, and communicative rationality) interact to empower community participation in urban redevelopment. Additionally, communicative rationality ensures that community engagement is not merely symbolic but is embedded within institutional frameworks that facilitate meaningful participation (Fischler, 2014). By fostering cooperation among multiple stakeholders, including government authorities, private sectors, and local communities, Habermas' theory strengthens the legitimacy and effectiveness of participatory planning. This ensures that urban development initiatives are not only socially just but also widely accepted. The diagram illustrates how communicative action theory serves as a foundational bridge between participatory and collaborative planning by integrating few keys. This integration underscores the necessity of shifting from hierarchical imposition to mutual understanding and fostering equitable urban redevelopment.

To summarise, the reviewed literature reveals that while numerous studies have addressed community participation, few have systematically connected the underlying factors, empowerment strategies, and theoretical mechanisms that enable inclusive urban redevelopment. Integrating Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action provides a coherent foundation for linking these dimensions. The theory not only emphasises rational dialogue and consensus-building but also operationalises the notion of empowerment by legitimising public involvement in decision-making. Within this perspective, empowerment emerges as both a process facilitated through communicative rationality and collaboration engagement and as an outcome reflected in stronger trust, capacity, and shared control over redevelopment decisions.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs an Integrative Literature Review (ILR) approach method to analyse and synthesis information and knowledge from various sources including theoretical and conceptual debates, hence develop a conceptual framework that aimed to empower community participation in urban redevelopment process. The ILR process was carried out systematically through the following five (5) steps process proposed by Lubbe et al. (2020).

Prior to conducting the Integrative Literature Review, the study identified a critical gap in existing research: the lack of a consolidated framework that links empowerment, participation, and communicative action within the context of urban redevelopment. While previous studies have separately addressed factors influencing participation and theoretical perspectives on empowerment, there remains limited integration between these strands. The ILR method was therefore selected as it enables the systematic synthesis of diverse bodies of literature to construct a comprehensive conceptual framework that addresses this gap.

Step 1 - Composing the Review Question

The main review question guiding this study is, “How can the community’s capability, hence their willingness to participate actively in urban redevelopment process can be strengthened?”

This question was based on the gaps identified in existing literature, where limited exploration of community participation within the context of urban redevelopment process compared to general process of urban development. The review question focused on three (3) interrelated themes namely community empowerment, community participation, and urban redevelopment.

Step 2 - Sampling of the Literature (Searching, screening and selecting)

As suggested by Lubbe et al. (2020), the sampling process is conducted in three (3) phases - searching, screening, and selecting.

In this study, a comprehensive literature search has been conducted using several databases including Scopus, Web of Science and Google Scholar. The search was limited to publications between 2000 and 2024 to capture both the fundamental and recent studies. Moreover, Boolean operators (AND/OR) were used to combine several of these keywords.

“Community empowerment”, “community participation”, “urban redevelopment”, “communicative planning theory”, “collaborative approach”, and “decision-making process”.

Following literature search, the titles and abstracts of selected literature were screened to exclude irrelevant and duplicate studies. Only English-language publications directly addressing the study themes were retained as references. Subsequently, full-text articles were reviewed based on these criteria, a) relevance to urban planning and redevelopment, b) discussion of participatory or empowerment processes; and c) theoretical or empirical contribution.

Step 3 - Critical Appraisal of Sample (Literatures)

To ensure quality and credibility, only literatures that reflect reasonable level of methodological soundness and relevance to the research objective are selected as sample (references). It is based on the fact that these selected samples are retrieved from reputable academic databases which are Scopus and Web of Sciences.

Step 4 - Data Extraction and Thematic Synthesis

Relevant data such as authorship, conceptual discussion, theoretical underpinning, context of study, key findings, and contribution to the understanding of empowerment and participation are extracted. Subsequently, these data are grouped according to several themes, hence synthesised. The grounded themes are:

“Challenges to community participation”, “factors influencing participation”, “empowerment strategies”, “collaborative approaches”, “application of Habermas’ communicative action theory”.

These themes were then integrated into a logical structure, forming the foundation of the conceptual framework.

Step 5 - Presentation of Results

The findings of ILR are then presented through a conceptual framework (Figure 2) supported by narrative explanations and summary tables (Table 2). The framework displays the relationships among key concepts such as empowerment, communicative action and collaborative planning.

Overall, the ILR method provides a foundation for this study by enabling the researchers to draw connections between fragmented bodies of literature and to propose a structured, theoretically informed, and practice-oriented framework. This methodological approach ensures the comprehensiveness and depth of the conceptual model presented in the discussion section of the paper.

DISCUSSIONS AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Numerous scholars and previous studies have emphasised that empowering community participation is closely linked to participatory approaches, which, despite certain limitations, have demonstrated considerable effectiveness. Enhancing communication to foster stronger collaboration among stakeholders is also widely recognised as a vital strategy for improving participatory outcomes.

In response to these findings, a conceptual framework has been developed to offer a structured and systematic means of enhancing community involvement in decision-making processes. This framework facilitates the organisation of relevant variables, concepts, and components, while illustrating their interrelationships. It is presented in the form of a logical flowchart, capturing the dynamic connections among key elements influencing urban redevelopment. The framework incorporates a combination of linear sequences, cyclical feedback loops, and overlapping constructs to reflect the complexity of the urban redevelopment landscape while maintaining conceptual clarity.

The synthesis of literature through the ILR reveals recurring elements that determine the success of community participation, including effective communication, trust-building, and collaborative decision-making. These findings align with recent studies that highlight empowerment as both a process and an outcome of participatory governance (Fennell, 2019; Healey, 1997; Innes & Booher, 2004). Incorporating Habermas’ communicative principles within these elements strengthens the conceptual framework by ensuring that dialogue and rational discourse serve as instruments for mutual understanding among stakeholders. Such integration aligns with the view of Fischler (2014) and Haikio (2007), who argue that communicative action legitimises planning outcomes by transforming them from purely technical exercises into socially responsive processes. Hence, the framework is grounded in both theoretical and empirical insights that collectively illustrate how empowerment can emerge through communicative participation in urban redevelopment.

The conceptual framework shows that empowerment is not achieved in isolation but through cooperation and mutual participation between stakeholders. In line with a collaborative approach that emphasises the participation of all key actors in working together and sharing in the decision-making

process for urban redevelopment projects, this model contrasts with traditional top-down approaches where decisions are made by only a selected few.

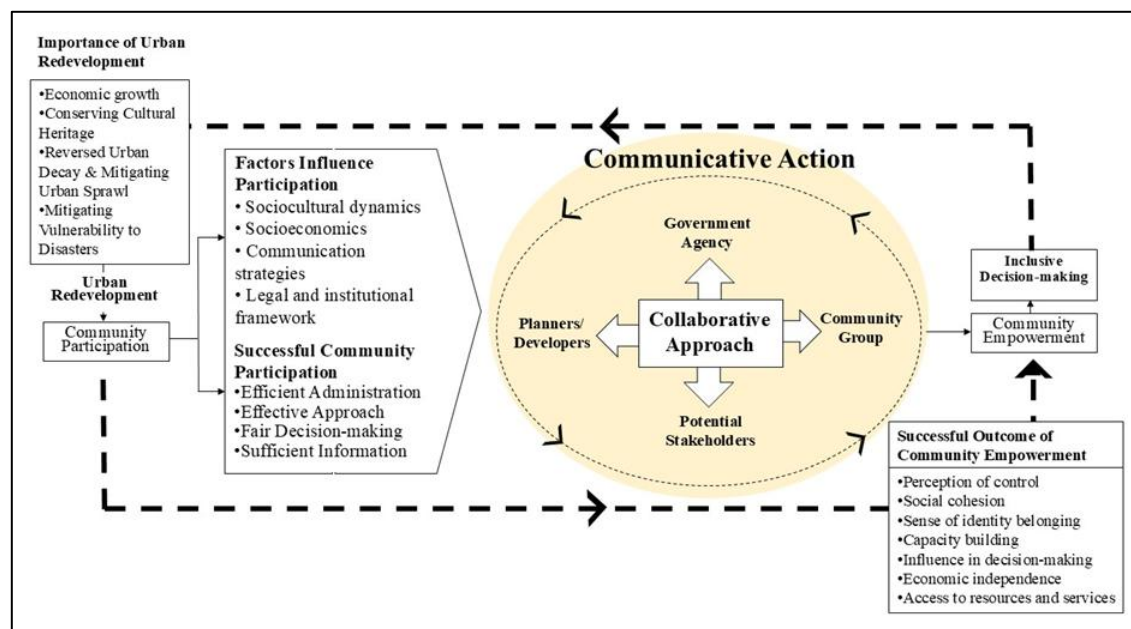


Fig. 3. Conceptual Framework of Empowering Community Participation in Urban Redevelopment

Source: Authors (2025)

Habermas' Communicative Action Theory provides a normative foundation that redefines success in urban redevelopment, extending beyond physical and economic achievements. By positioning legitimacy within the realm of rational dialogue, the theory ensures that redevelopment decisions are not imposed hierarchically but are co-constructed through a process of collective reasoning. This process enhances democracy in planning, as stakeholders engage in deliberation that values shared understanding rather than dominance or compliance. As a result, redevelopment initiatives become more socially acceptable, equitable, and sustainable. Empirical examples from collaborative planning practice demonstrate that participatory legitimacy leads to higher levels of trust, fewer project disputes, and stronger community ownership (Ashade & Mutereko, 2022; Innes & Booher, 2004; Olsson, 2009).

To sustain collaboration among all key actors, a communicative approach is integrated to foster continuous dialogue and enhance public trust. This approach adopts a circular structure, symbolising that community empowerment and redevelopment are iterative processes, characterised by ongoing evaluation and active participation. Meanwhile, the framework's structure is designed to balance theoretical foundations, (Habermas's communicative theory) with practical applications. Its mix of linear pathways, central collaboration nodes, and iterative feedback loops ensures that it is both easy to follow and comprehensive enough to address the complexities of urban redevelopment. In practice, community participation can be enhanced by respecting sociocultural dynamics, using effective communication strategies, engaging local leaders, and ensuring transparent policies.

Table 3. Roles of Key Terminologies Applied in the Conceptual Framework

Key Terminologies	Roles
Urban Redevelopment	Urban redevelopment serves as the contextual foundation for the framework rather than an independent variable, as it provides the setting in which empowerment and participation processes occur. It highlights the necessity of revitalising urban areas to achieve goals.
Community Participation	Community participation is the driving force that influences the process and outcomes of urban redevelopment.
Community empowerment	Community empowerment is the ultimate outcome of successful community participation and collaboration.
Importance of urban redevelopment	This element highlights the overarching goals and significance of the framework, emphasising why urban redevelopment matters.
Factors influence participation	These factors determine the quality and extent of participation within urban redevelopment projects.
Successful community participation	These are the tangible and intangible benefits achieved through empowerment
Communicative Action	Communicative action plays a central role and as the process through which stakeholders engage in meaningful dialogue to reach mutual understanding and consensus.
Collaborative Approach (mediating process)	The collaborative approach facilitates communication and cooperation among key stakeholders
Inclusive Decision-making	Represents a key enabler of both community participation and community empowerment, serving as the bridge between these two (2) concepts. It ensures that the voices of diverse stakeholders especially marginalised groups are heard and reflected in decisions
Successful outcome of community participation	The outcomes of effective participation are captured.

Source: Authors (2026)

From the framework, urban redevelopment is the central issue that requires action from the community and acts as the primary input to achieve empowerment. Participation is mediated by communicative action theory, ensuring inclusiveness, collaboration, and effective communication. The goal is community empowerment, which produces successful outcomes for the community.

Table 4. Elements in Empowering Community Participation in Decision-Making Process of Urban Redevelopment

Importance of Urban Redevelopment	Factors Influence Participation
Economic growth	Sociocultural dynamics
Conserving cultural heritage	Socioeconomics
Reversed urban decay	Communication strategy
Mitigating urban sprawl	Legal and institutional framework
Mitigating vulnerability to disasters	
Successful Community Participation	Key stakeholders of the framework
Efficient administration	Communities
Effective approach	Government agencies
Fair decision-making	Public/private planners
Sufficient information	

Communicative Action	Successful Outcome of Community Empowerment
Foundation of the collaborative approach	Perception of control
Improves the quality and depth of community participation	Social cohesion
Bridging factors influencing participation	Sense of identity belonging
Enhancing trust and relationships	Capacity building
	Influence in decision-making
	Economic independence
	Access to resources and services
Practical Steps for Implementation	
Step 1: Stakeholder identification	
Step 2: Establish communication channels	
Step 3: Conduct community needs assessment	
Step 4: Integrate socio-cultural and economic considerations	
Step 5: Develop collaborative decision-making processes	
Step 6: Strengthen legal and institutional support	
Step 7: Implement and monitor the redevelopment process	

Source: Authors (2026)

The practical application of this framework is further clarified in Table 4, which outlines a series of actionable steps for implementation. Each step corresponds to the theoretical principles embedded in the framework: stakeholder identification reflects inclusivity; communication channels operationalise communicative rationality; and collaborative decision-making embodies deliberative democracy. These steps collectively transform theoretical constructs into tangible actions that guide planners, policymakers, and community leaders toward participatory redevelopment practices. Thus, the framework not only advances academic understanding but also provides practical guidance for real-world urban governance.

The benefits of applying the framework include enhanced trust and cooperation between stakeholders. Transparent communication and genuine collaboration build stronger relationships between stakeholders. Moreover, projects that align with community needs and receive their support can lead to more meaningful outcomes, empowering communities by fostering a sense of ownership and encouraging active participation in maintaining and enhancing their neighborhoods.

To conclude, applying this conceptual framework transforms urban redevelopment from a top-down process into an inclusive, participatory endeavor. By actively engaging communities through effective communication and collaboration, stakeholders can ensure that redevelopment projects not only meet economic and infrastructural goals but also enhance social cohesion and community well-being.

CONCLUSION

This paper presents a conceptual framework designed to empower community participation in urban redevelopment planning. Through an Integrative Literature Review, it identifies critical challenges, influencing factors, and strategic approaches that shape effective participation. Central to this framework is Habermas' Theory of Communicative Action, which emphasises inclusive dialogue, mutual understanding, and legitimacy through rational discourse which offering a powerful foundation for participatory urban governance.

The framework not only organises theoretical insights into a coherent structure but also bridges the gap between theory and practice by outlining actionable steps for implementation. It stresses the importance of transparent communication, collaborative decision-making, and respect for sociocultural dynamics in achieving genuine community empowerment.

By applying this framework, urban redevelopment projects can shift from top-down planning toward inclusive, equitable, and community-driven processes. This paper contributes to both academic literature and practical planning by providing a guide that planners, policymakers, and community leaders can adapt to foster more responsive and sustainable urban transformations, particularly in contexts such as Malaysia, where public participation remains largely procedural.

The proposed framework provides valuable guidance for policymakers and planning authorities in strengthening participatory governance within urban redevelopment projects. By institutionalising communicative platforms and transparent decision-making procedures, planning agencies can enhance trust, inclusivity, and social legitimacy in redevelopment initiatives. The framework also highlights the need for continuous stakeholder engagement mechanisms that can be embedded into existing planning systems, ensuring that community empowerment is sustained beyond the implementation phase.

Future research should empirically validate this conceptual framework across different redevelopment contexts to examine its applicability and outcomes. Comparative case studies involving diverse urban settings may reveal how communicative practices vary according to cultural and institutional factors. In addition, integrating digital participatory tools and social media-based engagement strategies could further expand the framework's practical relevance in shaping inclusive, community-driven urban transformations.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors agree that this research was conducted in the absence of any self-benefits, commercial or financial conflicts and declare the absence of conflicting interests with the funders.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Shazni Awang Samat contributed to the literature review, data synthesis, conceptualising the framework and drafting of the manuscript. Khalid Zanudin supervised the research process including the methodology, provided critical revisions of the manuscript. Yusfida Ayu Abdullah contributed to the validation of the conceptual framework. Haslina Hashim assisted in manuscript editing. Nur Auni Ugong supported the literature search and formatting of the paper. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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