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Urban Renewal In China: The Long Road From Top-Down to Bottom-Up

***An Essay On Public Participation And Lack Thereof in Chinese
Urban Planning***

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Abstract

China's cities are currently facing immense challenges due to the vast rural-urban migration that has been triggered by the country's market-transition. The country's rapid, top-down implemented, urban (re)developments have answered the call to a certain extent. However, the startling pace and scale of the projects has caused concerns internationally about the sustainability of its urban planning and governance. International scholars of urban planning are demanding a shift towards increased public participation in the Chinese planning processes. At the same time, western ideas of good governance are being promoted in the country by international development organizations and academics. Through an extensive literature review, this thesis tries to understand the historical and contemporary relevance of public participation and "good" (urban) governance in Asia's Rising Giant. It then tries to identify possible problems that the western promoters of these concepts could run into in the country. In order for the thesis to "touch ground", the urban renewal practice of two Chinese cities is put under closer analysis. The study concludes that the country is standing at a point in time where it has become accustomed to a long standing form of top-down governance and planning that is quite opposite to what the dominant western discourses are promoting. Various cultural and historical factors may have a negative impact on attempts of power decentralization. The two case studies of also indicate a range of potential obstacles that promoters of participatory planning might face in the country.

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1. Introduction

“We aspire to build cities that establish harmony between diverse people, between development and environment, between cultural legacies and future innovations. A City of Harmony reveals itself when people are in harmony with nature, society, and themselves, and when there is also harmony between generations (Expo 2010 Shanghai, China:1).”

The declaration made at the end stages of the Shanghai World expo brings up concerns of natural and social sustainability. Often at the expense of these aspects, China’s urban planning of late has focused on creating and sustaining economic growth (Roberts & Chan, 1997). The main challenge the country faces now in the 21st century is the juggling of economic, environmental and social concerns in contexts of rapid urbanization. As approximately 18 million people migrate from its rural areas to cities yearly, the task becomes extremely challenging (UNFPA, 2007).

Boasting one seventh of the world’s population, out of which over half now lives in urban environments, the implications of the successes and failures of China’s urban policies are vast even from a global perspective (Simpson, 2012). The sustainability of the development of its cities has become an interest shared by many. Lately, the amount of research on the country’s cities has been exploding, more works have been published on the topic in the past two decades than in the preceding 50 years (Whitehand & Gu, 2006).

Urban renewal, the practice of upgrading neighborhoods with declining living conditions, has played a major role in providing the growing populations of China’s cities with adequate living standards as high population densities are getting more common. The quality of housing has been improving impressively during the past years and some are heralding the country’s planning achievements as a developmental miracle (UN-HABITAT, 2008). However, the scale and ruthlessness of the new urban developments is also unlike anything the world has seen recently. Entire neighborhoods and districts are being destroyed to pave the way for high rises equipped with modern amenities. According to Fukuyama (2008) the country is trying to build a future by erasing its past. The startling speed and scale of urban growth poses such a huge challenge to individual planners that doubts are now arising whether the Chinese top-down approach to planning can possibly yield sustainable results.

Indeed, changes in the country’s urban governance have been occurring in recent years. During and after Deng Xiaoping’s reign in the 80s, China has taken constant steps towards decentralization and human-oriented development (UN-HABITAT, 2008). In the beginning of his time as general secretary, decision-making authority shifted greatly from the central government to the municipal level (Abramson, 2006). In 2003, under its new leader Hu Jintao, China took a further step towards people oriented development by unveiling its “harmonious society” policy framework, which involved a variety of “bottom-up” policies. There had been a certain realization amongst the government, that some social issues could hamper the future growth and development of the country as public unrest was increasing. Some scholars have now started documenting a trend of increasing participation in the country’s urban planning processes, but they agree that it is not happening quickly (Abramson, 2006; Shin, 2008).

This trend of power decentralization is surprising from a Chinese perspective but hardly so from a global one.

The international discourses of development have been seeing some significant changes in recent years. Much of this change has been related to *participation* and moving from top-down decision making processes towards “bottom-up”. This approach of “development from below” has, since its emergence, become a dominant paradigm amongst both planning and development practice and the currently popular notions of good governance have also begun to entail a participatory component. However, according to Robert Chambers (cited in UN-HABITAT 2001, p. 8), the rhetoric of participation has now gone far ahead of understanding. This is why it is extremely important that the theoretical underpinnings and practical uses of the concept are further investigated. No concept should receive a status that renders it immune to scrutiny. The urban planning practice of developing countries, such as China, should not be analyzed in isolation as it can often be greatly influenced by theoretical discussions of development.

Now, in the past several years, it has become apparent that a significant volume of research (Enserink & Koppenjan, 2007; Plummer & Taylor, 2004; Ng, 2004) is claiming, some more directly than others, that participation in urban planning is a necessary prerequisite for sustainable urban development in China. At the same time, some scholars as well as international organizations are advocating for good governance in the country (Chiu & Hung, 2004; OECD, 2005; UN-HABITAT, 2010). This two-pronged support for participation and decentralization of governance may have a strong influence on the nation’s urban future. However, not much scientific work has dwelled on the possible problems that these approaches might face in the Chinese context, thus giving an opening for my study. Exploring the challenges related to the participatory approach and the notion of “good” urban governance in specific contexts makes sure that they do not solidify their status as a default cure-it-all without justification.

This thesis strives to do just this. It employs a large-scale literature review and a deeper analysis of two specific cases of urban renewal to delve into the more problematic aspects related to participatory planning and “good” urban governance in China. It concludes that participation is a significant component of some of the most dominant paradigms of development and urban planning, but it has never played a significant role in Chinese society and urban planning practice, making it potentially hard to grasp for its citizens. The study also identifies a series of other possible obstacles to the participatory planning approach in the country.

1.2 Specific aims

Through an extensive literature review this study seeks to achieve a deep understanding of the role of public participation in Chinese urban planning practice. It will explore the history of urban planning in the country and take a closer look at urban renewal initiatives in two Chinese cities. It will draw connections between the Chinese experience and the global discourses of public participation and good governance.

The primary aim of the study is to shed light on the problems that participatory planning practice might face in the country. Its secondary objective is to compare the contemporary western ideas of good governance and participatory planning to Chinese urban planning and governance. The end goal of the paper is to enrich the understanding of participation in urban planning processes by providing an insight into a context

where democratic processes have until recently been almost completely unknown. It strives to bring the discipline of urban planning closer to development discourse by portraying its large role and developmental relevance in an urbanizing country. In order to achieve these aims, the following research questions are employed:

- 1. Could there be any problems related to implementing participatory urban planning and renewal policies in China? If so, what might they be?*
- 2. How do western ideas of participatory planning and “good” (urban) governance compare with Chinese ways of urban planning and governance?*

1.3 Structure of Thesis

- *Chapter 2* introduces the methodology of the thesis. This will help the reader understand how the study reached its conclusions, how data was gathered and what kind of biases might exist in this particular research.
- *Chapter 3* presents the main concepts of analysis. It will make explicit the lens through which this study views the research problem.
- *Chapter 4* will give a short overview of the historical context of planning and participation in China. This part of the study serves the role of a background and since China has a very peculiar history it is especially important for reaching some of the conclusions in the end of the thesis.
- *Chapter 5* exhibits examples of Chinese urban renewal practice. Projects in two different cities are subjected for analysis. This allows the study to “touch ground” and give its main unique contribution to the topic of study. These cases illustrate and support some of the arguments and discussions that are put forward by this thesis.
- *Chapter 6* discusses the findings from the cases and the historical overview and synthesizes them.
- *Chapter 7* will sum up the thesis in a concise manner.

2. Methodology

2.1 Scope of Study

Spatially, the study limits itself to the context of China and does not try to generalize from it. The closely related subject of democracy, and the theoretical discourses related to it, will be avoided to the extent they can be, as they are a vast subject of study on their own. The paper will not go into detail about the practicalities of urban planning practice as the study wants to maintain a focus on the theoretical aspects that can be easily understood by social scientists.

2.2 Epistemological Stance

This research does not believe in an entirely objective truth regarding social matters. It sees “truths” as constructions of reality that are dependent on the observer. The study will maintain an interpretivist position to the extent that it is possible. The example cases used are recognized as unique and the complexity of the social world is acknowledged (Bryman, p.16). The work will try to not produce any major generalizations and maintain a focus on the context of China and the selected cases. However, for the sake of a more interesting overview, a small amount of comparison within the boundaries of China will be done.

2.3 Process of Data Collection

Identifying literature

The process of data collection for the thesis has been conducted in a flexible manner, as a more systematic approach would require the justification of excluding some writings when including others. Also, since the boundaries of the topic in question are fluid and prone to change, as in many other qualitative studies, a highly disciplined approach to literature identification becomes nearly impossible (Bryman 2008, p.91).

The process has also been a purely subjective one that was guided by my interest. In the beginning, the net was cast widely to avoid the risk of finding nothing on the topic of interest. Even the less relevant writings could touch upon issues that would later be deemed important for the study (Flowerdew & Martin 2005, p.49). Data was found by using web searches, library catalogue searches and by going through bibliographies. Out of the three methods the last one was used the most as it proved itself as the most effective method.

The way of selecting data by what is conveniently accessible is no doubt biased. However, the problems related to the tight time frame and the gathering of data from afar (about a country that has an effective system of censorship), make any slight inclinations more tolerable.

Sampling of cases

After some initial research had been conducted on the topic of interest, the cases of urban renewal in Yantai and Shenzhen were chosen for deeper analysis in the study. They were picked with several criteria in mind. First, they had to be somehow representative of Chinese urban renewal practice in major cities. Second, information about them had to be available online in English due to the relatively short time-frame of gathering data.

Due to the context-sensitive nature of urban planning and the fact that municipalities in China have started to have differing planning policies, cases that share some major similarities were chosen over others in order to leave at least some room for comparison. Hence, both cases are large cities that have been given the status of export processing zone, meaning that they share the national government’s interest in their success.

For the case of Yantai a UN-HABITAT (2008) report of the city’s urban renewal projects was analyzed from the perspective of participation. The same was done for the case of Shenzhen, but an article (Hin & Xin 2011) analyzing the power relations of the city’s urban redevelopments was deconstructed to provide further insights into

the topic at hand. The material used for both cases is authored by a single person, meaning that they are inherently biased. However, for the purposes of this study these biases might prove to be more interesting than harmful.

Identifying categories

Identifying key words and categories has been essential throughout the work. They have been found by coding the different readings. This process has been an unconscious one as often as intended and has happened through making notes. More or less obvious categories such as “Urban planning” “Urban regeneration” and “Urban renewal” were widely employed as keywords for searches in the beginning of the study. Asking oneself “what is being done and why” has been helpful in finding some of the less clear categories when working with the documents chosen for the example cases (Flowerdew & Martin 2005, p.222). After having looked into the a greater amount of writings, new interesting categories such as “Confucianism”, “Public participation” and “Community building” begun to emerge as categories of interest as they were repeatedly found in different writings.

Types of Data Used

The detachment from actual events and happenings in the target country renders the gathering of primary material challenging. This is why the study makes extensive use of secondary empirical material. Furthermore, the fact that this data exists already makes it cheaper and faster to acquire.

Peer-reviewed journal articles are a highly attractive source of data for this kind of research due to their availability, authenticity and credibility (Bryman 2008, p.93; Flick 2009, p.257). The fact that these documents have already passed a certain level of quality control saves the researcher some valuable time. All the aforementioned reasons go to show why peer-reviewed journal articles have formed the backbone of the study. Documents that are not peer-reviewed will only be used in a supporting role. According to Scott’s 1990 classification of documents (cited in Flick 2009, p.256), almost all of the materials used in the study have are “personal” and “private”, authored by individuals and openly available for students of Lund University and some to everyone. In addition to reading academic or official documents, openly observing how different medias, such as local and international newspapers and blogs, address the issues of public participation and planning has added valuable information for the thesis. Doing this has formed a picture of the country’s situation that is not produced by academics. Different Chinese protests and riots have been widely covered especially by newspapers. The exploration of these stories has proven to be beneficial in giving further backing to my arguments.

The major weakness with all of the data above is that they are all cultural artefacts, produced for administrators whose world-view and priorities might differ substantially from the researcher’s. Also, due to the political situation and censorship in the country some of the data can be unreliable, thus encouraging the researcher not to take things for granted. However, since there is sometimes no way of replicating or verifying the information, occasionally there is no other option but to make use of the data available and interpret it as a social construct (Flowerdew & Martin 2005, p.58).

2.4 Alternative methods

The research design is modeled to a great extent by the realities of a third year student, where time and money are significant constraints. Certainly there would have been good alternatives to the way the study was conducted. The possibility for a quantitative study was abandoned as access to Chinese statistics proved to be extremely difficult. A tempting option would have been to conduct a longitudinal study in a Chinese city over an extended time period that would have allowed for a deeper analysis of a specific urban renewal project that compared its intentions with its results (Bryman 2008, p.49). A larger amount of primary data would have provided a uniquely interesting and valuable addition to the research. Interviews with the beneficiaries of the housing upgrading projects probably could have yielded interesting data as well by bringing the perspective of the subjects involved in the processes under study. In more general terms, being immersed in the local culture would certainly also have produced a different, perhaps more culturally sensitive, result. However, there is value in the outsider's perspective as well, as it can help locals see things they wouldn't normally pay attention to or reflect upon.

2.5 Analysis

The analysis and collection of data were done in a way that was reminiscent of Grounded Theory. The process of data collection was inseparable from the process of analysis - as they happened simultaneously in an iterative manner. However, this is where most of the similarities end as no primary data was gathered. The analysis of data started right after it was gathered as editing, summarizing, segmenting and then moved on to coding (giving labels to gathered data that seems to be of potential theoretical significance), memoing and pattern-finding. In the latter stages data analysis focused on conceptualizing and explaining (Punch, 2005; Bryman, 2008).

3. Conceptual framework

This chapter will focus on presenting and discussing the main guiding concepts of analysis. The emergent participatory paradigm of planning is put under closer inspection, and western ideas of "good" (urban) governance are explored. Also, a short definition is provided for the concepts of urban planning and urban renewal.

3.1 Urban Planning & Renewal

The ever fluctuating global economic climate can have a great impact on the livelihoods of urban residents and hence the entire structure of a city. The ability of urban areas to adapt to these changes is crucial in this process. The inability to adapt can force certain areas or entire cities to fall into decline. Some examples of this decline could be high unemployment rates, loss of population or physical deterioration of buildings (Lang, 2005). According to Pacione (2009) urban planning and policy are state activities that

are concerned with managing the urban change by directing investment and distributing resources in a way that is in accordance with the public interest. Although urban planning is a country and city specific practice, it is important to note that it does not function in isolation and is a result of national and international social and economic policies.

Urban renewal, then, can be viewed as a response to urban economic change that attempts to revitalize areas that are in relative decline. In developing contexts, the initiatives often refer to the kind of urban planning initiatives that aim to improve the infrastructure, housing or general living conditions of a selected neighborhood (Pacione 2009). The concept is commonly used almost interchangeably with the terms of urban upgrading and urban redevelopment. The minor definitional differences that might exist between the concepts are not especially relevant for this study, as it will be focusing on the participatory aspects of the initiatives.

According to He & Wu (2009), the process of urban renewal can also be understood as a specific form of neoliberalism. As cities have become recognized as motors of economic growth and stages for market competition, they have become the geographical areas of focus for various pro-growth neoliberal experiments. Urban renewal can be seen as one of these experiments that represents a spatialized form of capital accumulation. Around the world, urban redevelopment projects have become known for their search for short-term returns through private investment and value extraction (He & Wu, 2009).

3.2 Participatory (Communicative) Planning

In the late 1990s the discipline of planning experienced a paradigm shift that mirrored some of the changes that had happened in development thinking in the previous decades. Around this time the profession experienced a clearly discernible move away from top-down and expert reliant practice towards participatory “bottom-up” approaches (Potter et al., 2008). This change has been labeled the communicative turn.

The establishment of the planner as a negotiator and intermediary among stakeholders is at the core of the communicative planning model. This model, sometimes labeled collaborative or participatory planning, has reached a hegemonic status in the contemporary planning discourse (Huxley, 2000). According to Innes (1995) the communicative model has become the norm in planning theory to the extent that it can be called an emerging paradigm. The model was made attractive by the countless failed, top-down driven urban-renewal projects in the latter half of the 20th century (Fainstein, 2000).

The approach has its roots in the critiques of positivist science and neo-Marxist structural theory. It rejects the idea of the planner as a technical and apolitical being and refuses to accept a technocratic and instrumental rationality (Huxley 2000, p.1; Purcell 2009, p.149). The thoughts of German philosopher Jürgen Habermas concerning *communicative action* have been a pivotal influence to the movement.

Communicative action puts forward the ideal of a shared, intersubjective understanding that would serve as a globally applicable groundwork for democratic governance. Communicative action stands in contrast to *strategic action*, which according to Habermas’ understanding (cited in Purcell 2009, p.149) is the way in which people involved in politics seek to achieve self-interest driven goals. The goal of communicative action, then, is to achieve an intersubjective understanding of the

common good for all through engaging in long and careful consideration that involves communicating together and using rational argumentation. This ultimate goal is what he calls “the ideal speech situation” (cited in Purcell 2009, p.149). It is an inherently idealistic situation that Habermas himself does not consider to be easily achievable, but he does argue that is worth striving towards. Moving towards the ideal has multiple requirements: all participants are to state their wishes clearly and transparently, power relations are to be neutralized, everyone should have an equal opportunity to participate in the consideration process, all people that are subject to the effects of the decision should participate, all should empathize with each other’s arguments and that the good of all should be prioritized over self-interest (Purcell 2009, p.149).

In his 2002 work (cited in Purcell 2009, p.148), Harris claims that the fact that the model has achieved such a dominant position in planning discourse makes it inevitably less radical and more leaning towards the existing state of affairs, the status quo. The conflict-avoiding, power-relation-neutralizing and exclusion-eliminating nature awakens such positive connotations amongst people that the model can be powerful in legitimizing many kinds of decisions. According to Purcell (2009) these characteristics make the model a very useful tool for contemporary neoliberals to maintain hegemony whilst ensuring political stability. The factors that the model seeks to eliminate are commonly seen as a breeding ground for social mobilization and thus their removal could have adverse impacts for contentious politics.

Fainstein (2000, p.461) also points out that, in western countries, the well-known failures of urban renewal during its golden age, which partly inspired the communicative turn, were not solely attributable to the deference to experts, that is, the urban planning professionals. Political and economic interests were, almost without exception, the driving force behind the projects and, unlike today, planners were people with a background in design and engineering professions. The author argues that modern planning practice is more susceptible to the needs of the citizens and in the cases when it is not, open and public processes can only partly save the outcome. The ability to participate in the planning process is not enough by itself and needs other resources such as money and effective organization for support so that the people will be empowered to the extent that they have genuine influence. Communicative planners would perhaps not deny the importance of these resources but their analyses often do not linger on them, thus unveiling an important weakness of the approach (Fainstein, 2000).

The model suggests a change in the planning practice where the beneficiaries increasingly participate in decision making by communicating with planners. The process can be seen as a “democratization” of the planning process. Harris argues in his 2002 study (cited in Purcell 2009, p. 149), that even if communicative action has offered a seemingly radical change to planning practice, the results can be very conservative as providing evidence of participation is ultimately very difficult. Perhaps this is why recorded or studied benefits of communicative planning approaches are extremely hard to find.

3.3 Good (Urban) Governance

Since participation in urban planning is largely a question of how to govern urban areas, what is considered to be sound governance internationally becomes an extremely relevant topic to discuss. No form of governance in the contemporary interconnected

world can be completely immune to the pressures exerted by powerful business and development actors.

At the moment many of the largest development organizations such as the UNDP and the World Bank as well as many other international financial institutions and donor-agencies are advocating for “good governance” perhaps more than for anything else (Painter, 2002). The concept was originally taken from corporate governance, but since its large-scale emergence in the 1990s it has become associated also with political governance. For the most part it has replaced the rhetoric of democracy that dominated the previous decades (Van Wie Davis, 2009). Temporally, this advocacy has gone almost hand in hand with the support for public participation in planning.

There are frequent disagreements over what good governance means or should mean, but a general agreement is emerging over its major constituent parts. This is shown by the way in which the large development organizations are constantly referring to each-others pronouncements (Painter, 2002). As exemplified by the list below, participation and the inclusion of all stakeholders are increasingly becoming seen as important characteristics of any good governance framework (Potter et al., 2008). However, they are often only a part of a larger policy package. The following are the eight factors that UNESCAP (2012) recognizes as important components of sound governance:

- Participation
- Consensus oriented
- Accountability
- Transparency
- Responsiveness
- Rule of Law
- Efficiency and Effectiveness
- Equity and Inclusiveness

The term of good governance is nowadays being applied not only on the national level, but also to the level of cities and urban areas. According to UN-HABITAT (2000), good governance on the urban level is an enabling tool that guarantees the effectiveness of the city’s functions. The organization’s experience has shown, that a new enabling approach is replacing the direct provision of goods and services by government. This approach entails three core strategies: “decentralizing responsibilities and resources to local authorities; encouraging the participation of civil society; and using partnerships to achieve common objectives” (UN-HABITAT 2000, p.199).

According to Potter et al. (2008, p.277) good governance is increasingly being understood as a vital determinant of development. This stands in contrast to earlier thinking where sound governance and democracy were seen more as a result of development rather than a necessary precondition. As the term is a result of a long history of political development in western countries, the orthodoxy has a strongly liberal democratic feel to it. As stated by Painter (2002), it advocates a universal end point for political development around the world and phrases such as democracy, rule of law and free market often pop up in related discussions. Where the development trajectories differ significantly from the assumed or wanted ones, as in the case of China, the term can be used to take aggressive action against a state’s traditional way of doing things (Painter, 2002). The World Bank has in recent years become known for its

determination to curb the state's power in many developing countries through means of privatization and decentralization.

4. Public Participation & Urban planning in China - a Historical Overview

“Local government officials and citizens alike soon discovered that effective public participation processes are a learned behaviour. And, at times, the lessons learned were painful. Many public officials were loath to share decision-making powers with citizens (UN-HABITAT 2001, p.13).”

This section will explore the historical context to Chinese urban planning policy while focusing on the relationship between the planners and the intended beneficiaries. It highlights the nature of the strict top-down system of governance and planning that has been present in the country from time immemorial and contrasts it to the changes that have been occurring in the country in recent years.

4.1 Ancient Era

China has an extremely long, if not the longest, tradition in urban planning on earth. The city of Chang'An (modern Xi'an) has a history of planning that dates back over two thousand years. This city was one of the first in the world to employ a grid layout in its plan. According to Abramson (2006), people were organized strictly into square shaped wards that were patrolled by guards. This cellular structure of cities became widespread in ancient China and has remained relatively strong ever since. In the 16th century four out of the ten largest cities in the world were located inside the country's borders. Instead of being mere commercial centers, these cities were administrative hubs that were planned in order to legitimate the state's control through ritual and cosmology. Capitals often changed location and vast cities were built from scratch (Abramson, 2006).

In traditional Confucian thought the ruler was seen as the mediator between heaven and earth, an enlightened one that had everyone's best in mind (Whitehand & Gu, 2006). According to Confucius' teachings (cited in Wong, 2009), the leader as well as his servants and subjects should conform to commonly understood norms and social rules without coercion to achieve social harmony. The functioning of the state, then, would be reliant on the moral character of all. The society was built on the trust that everyone will do his or her part, even when a strictly hierarchical social and economic order was in place. Institutional mechanisms did not exist, neither did other just or open participatory processes, but it was the emperor's and his servants' moral responsibility to behave virtuously as an example to the people (Wong, 2009). According to Plummer & Taylor (2004), contemporary Chinese people still expect or assume, that the government is responsive to their needs and organizes them when necessary.

Throughout the ages, the urban planners of China have no doubt served to increase the well being of the people but they have also served its leaders in bolstering their legitimacy. Chinese planning projects have always had a strong component of

symbolism and tokenism where function is secondary to the images created in people's minds (Abramson, 2006). Whether the projects were meant to symbolize the majesty of the empire (e.g. Forbidden City of Beijing), the economic strength of the country (e.g. the rather ostentatious Pudong district in Shanghai) or government concern over the urban poor, they have often been meant to legitimize the state by showing off its achievements. Chinese planners have, for the most part, always been more accountable upwards than downwards as they have looked to their superiors for promotion (Abramson, 2006). According to Zhang (2010), there is evidence to show that planners even today are more interested in receiving more power from the top rather than sharing it with the bottom, which means that many participatory processes should be viewed critically as a possible form of modern tokenism.

The mentioned traits of traditional Chinese urban planning and governance stand in stark contrast to today's internationally accepted practice. Wong (2009) argues that the modern principles of good governance such as accountability, participation and transparency do not belong to the Chinese Confucian tradition, as the country has historically been governed by its leaders and not by laws. In fact, if one accepts UNESCAP's (2012) definition of good governance (mentioned in chapter 3.3) it is possible to see that out of the 8 criteria it presents, the traditional form of Chinese governance was likely to have fulfilled 2 at most. Efficiency and effectiveness as well as responsiveness might have been qualities that the old system possessed but the rest of the components are not descriptive of traditional Chinese urban governance.

These testimonies also imply that China's state apparatus was sufficiently strong to maintain social order and even mobilize populations if necessary already thousands of years ago. Highlighting the longevity of urban planning and governance traditions, Abramson (2006, p. 201) claims that even today "(t)he state continues to rely on hierarchical administration, cellular organization of communities, and ideological domination of public space to maintain social order and assert its legitimacy. Urban planning in China assists in these endeavors." Strict top-down control has been the norm in the country for millennia, which means that a certain belief in the system and the capabilities of its leaders has had to have existed. Since the country's opening up the mentality is changing and traditional ways of doing things are becoming increasingly difficult. However, unlearning such a long tradition is no easy feat. In fact, several authors (Delury, 2008; Fan, 2011; Qing, 2011) are now claiming that Confucian traditions are experiencing a renaissance in China.

4.2 The Planned Era

In 1949 the civil war between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party of China (CPC) ended. The CPC retained control of the mainland and the People's Republic of China was established (Lian, 1995). The period in China's history that started then, under the rule of its new leader Mao Zedong, is sometimes referred to as the planned era.

At this time, an economic order modeled after the Soviet Union was put in place. Land was confiscated from landlords and redistributed to peasants and existing wealth-gaps were gradually equalized. During this period, the interests of the nation were always more important than the individual's. Everyone was tied into collective institutions and harnessed to achieve the national project of large-scale industrialization (Friedmann, 2007). The tradition of rigidly enforced, top-down governance

strengthened its grip to encompass almost every aspect of life and there was a notable lack of public participation in urban planning projects (Friedmann, 2007; Shin, 2008).

In the years following the war, China had its taste of large-scale rural-urban migration when peasants started moving from the war-torn countryside to the cities. The party-state decided, with great consequences to the country's future, that something had to be done about this phenomenon. A multitude of anti-urban policies were implemented and industrialization was to be achieved without urbanization. Extensive neighborhood management systems were set up to control households. Among these were the mutual responsibility groups, which shared commonalities with some of the household surveillance systems that had been used at irregular intervals for 2000 years (Friedmann, 2007).

However, the main method for halting the urbanization process was to be the *hukou* (household registration) system and it did indeed succeed in its goal (Lian, 1995). As in ancient times, the government showed that it was able to mobilize the entire country by giving orders from above. The *hukou* meant that, broadly speaking, people were categorized into rural and urban households and their rights and entitlements were tied to a specific location. Citizens found their life opportunities severely restricted, as their only way of surviving was to rely on social benefits that could only be received in their communities of registration (Friedmann, 2007). Chan & Buckingham (2008) claim that this system remains strong in contemporary China and is the main cause of social segregation and inequalities.

As heavy industry was the intended cornerstone of the new economy, most of the other "non-productive" public expenditures, including housing, were neglected. The government had total control of housing which it saw as a consumption good, a welfare enterprise that was to be provided to all by the state (Friedmann, 2007). It allocated the material for construction and decided the locations. Even the distribution was controlled by state-controlled work-units (*danwei*), which were also a source of social benefits for their workers (Lian, 1995). According to Ye (2011), it was during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) that it became apparent that the country's urban landscape had deteriorated into an extremely bad condition. The government's lack of attention towards housing had led to a situation where many cities were littered with structurally unstable buildings. Regardless of the emerging problems, urban renewal undertakings remained small-scale and of little significance to the country's cities (Shin, 2008). However, the decay of cities did pave the way for the emergence of urban redevelopment as a vital developmental factor in China's urban scene from the 80s and onwards (Shin, 2008).

4.3 After The Market Transition

After the death of Mao and the tragic events of the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, China initiated its market reforms in the late 1970s. The reforms began with the de-collectivization of the countryside and decentralizing government control in the industrial sector. Later on, steps were taken to open up the country's economy for foreign investment in several designated Special Economic Zones (SEZs). Poverty was now recognized as a problem and improving people's living standards was set as the most important goal by the government. It was decided that the way to achieve this goal would be through economic growth.

This approach had a significant impact on the social security that was established during the planned era. Enterprises now had to do their accounting themselves and work under budget constraints, that is, take the responsibility for their profits and losses. Ultimately this meant the collapse of the work-unit based social security (Dong & Ye, 2003). With much of the social welfare system gone, a large proportion of the country's population was now standing on thin ice. Also, the tradition of urban planning as a welfare undertaking also suffered a blow in 1980 as the government realized that its capacity in dealing with the huge need for housing creation and upgrading was limited, and thus the profit-oriented real estate development was to be the solution (Lian, 1995). This started a trend where urban development and redevelopment became seen more and more as a means of growth promotion than a welfare undertaking. By the mid 1990s urban renewal had become dominated by private interests as the central government stopped allocating funds for projects. This caused an explosion in the number and scale of urban renewal projects (Ye, 2011).

Currently, it is easy to see that the economic reforms have had a tremendous impact on the society on the whole. They have triggered a vast exodus towards the country's cities (Liang & Ma, 2004). In recent years it has been officially estimated that some 18 million people migrate from rural areas to cities every year (UNFPA, 2007). Only a few decades ago, the idea of abandoning one's location of registration was rather impossible as one's hometown provided the only means for everyday survival. However, since China's market transition the prospects of city life have become so much more promising than rural lifestyles that citizens are willing to migrate even if they are denied permanent residency or access to social benefits. This willingness is not surprising as the number of people who have managed to pull themselves out of poverty with the help of the increased job-opportunities is mind-boggling.

But all is not well in modern China. There is an ever growing number of people who move away from their location of household registration (*hukou*). These migrants are being referred to as the "floating population" and in many cases they have to rely on the informal housing and employment sectors to get by. According to the Population Census Office (cited in Liang & Ma 2004, p. 467), the size of the floating population had reached 79 million by the year 2000, if it is defined as people who had moved between provinces or counties and lived in their new home for a time equal to or greater than six months.

Naturally, the country's urban planners are struggling with the migration currently taking place in China. The scale and pace of the phenomenon puts extra pressure on planning schedules and as a result they stand, quite understandably, in stark contrast to western equivalents (Hugentobler & Lütolf, 2006). Plans are often made quickly and buildings can be seen to go up virtually overnight. This can make considerate and participatory housing solutions difficult, as the need to improve some of the neighborhoods that are quickly filling with squalor can be urgent. It can sometimes be the case that long processes of consensus building that are in accordance to notions of good governance are just too time-consuming. As argued by Purcell & Brown in 2005 (cited in Potter et al. 2008, p.121), this can be a problem especially when the populations are fragmented by differing interests of diverse people.

The insufficient capacity and limited reach of top-down planning are most visible in the quickly growing, densely built and often informal residential areas that are present in the core, as well as on the outskirts of many Chinese cities. These neighborhoods are vast in number and sometimes characterized by poor living

conditions and social problems. According to Song et al. (2008), they have mostly been seen as an obstacle standing in the way of economic growth and modernity in the past decades. Hence they have become a target for many urban renewal projects. These processes often involve requisition of land, demolition of structures and relocation of populations. In recent years, the issue has become surrounded by controversy as the impact on the poorer residents and the city itself can be significant (Song et al., 2008).

The market reforms and the shift from welfare-oriented towards growth-oriented policy have had an impact on the life-opportunities and mentality of the common people, but also on the mentality of leaders and urban planners in China. Individualism is said to be rife and the country has become known for widespread corruption (Jin, 2004; Leaf, 2006). Amongst planners, confusion is spreading regarding their role as social actors. In an increasingly market-driven environment they find it difficult to balance between the interests of investors, the commands of different levels of state government, their personal aspirations and the people's needs. According to Leaf (2006), this is indicated well by the appearance of a column called "Planner's ethics" in one of the most prestigious planning journals of China, the *City Planning Review*, in 2004. Shin (2008) argues, that the concern over the social aspects of planning and the opinions of people, which has lately emerged amongst planners in western countries, has not become apparent in China. The domination of market-interests is making it harder for planners to promote the public interest. What makes this promotion even harder is that there is an apparent lack of connection to the grassroots level due to the rareness of non-governmental organizations (Leaf, 2006).

5. Cases Of Urban Renewal in China

Here, contemporary Chinese urban renewal practice will be put under closer inspection. The chapter will explore the extent and nature of public participation in two different cities and tries to pinpoint possible obstacles and pitfalls in their experiences. It will also look for possible motives for public involvement or lack thereof. In the first case the analysis is entirely based on my subjective interpretation of the UN-HABITAT (2008) report "Housing and Urban Upgrading in Yantai". In the second one I draw my own conclusions from Hin & Xin's 2010 analysis of the power relations in the urban renewal projects of Shenzhen.

5.1 City of Yantai

Yantai is a prefecture level city situated on the northern coast of the Shandong peninsula of Shandong province. Boasting an urban population of 1.1 million, it is a medium-sized city by Chinese standards. The GDP per capita of the city was 3,148 USD in 2004 and in economic terms it is one of the fastest growing cities in China. It was amongst the first 14 coastal export-processing zones that were established after the country's economic reforms. In addition to this specific role, it was selected as one of the first cities to experiment on housing reform policies in the 1980s (UN-HABITAT, 2008).

Urban upgrading constitutes a major part of UN-HABITAT's activities and the 11th millennium development goal of the UN is to achieve significant improvement in

the lives of at least 100 million slum dwellers by 2020. The city's urban renewal initiatives impressed the constituents of UN-HABITAT to the extent that they were chosen as a model of good planning practice by the organization to explore their applicability to other contexts (UN-HABITAT, 2008).

The city initiated its urban renewal projects to counter the deteriorating housing conditions in the city's older neighborhoods in the beginning of the new millennium and less than 5 years after the call for planning proposals they were already near completion. This is remarkable as the redeveloped building area totaled 740,000 m², the equivalent of more than a hundred soccer fields. Compared to the often decade-long planning processes of western countries the pace of the developments is nothing short of astounding.

What meets the eye first is that the complaints, hopes and desires of the residents are mentioned multiple times in the document and that they seem to have served a central role in the plans. Surveys were said to have been conducted to enquire about the needs & wishes of the residents. According to the document "*(t)he survey showed that 100 per cent of the residents wanted collective conditions upgraded*" (UN-HABITAT 2008, p.43). However, the findings of this survey are rather unsurprising. After all, when it comes down to it, who wouldn't want collective conditions to be upgraded? The question of what kind of upgrading the residents would have preferred remains unanswered. Further details on the methods as well as results of the surveys are left undisclosed. The fact that the results are in perfect accordance with the plans and no attention is given to the methods with which these opinions are gathered casts doubt on the validity of the results as well as the motives behind engaging the residents. Regardless, the collective wish for redevelopment is repeatedly used to legitimize the projects.

According to the report (UN-HABITAT, 2008) the residents were notified of the impending developments but they had no opportunity to influence the decision. Shin (2008) claims that this kind of notification is the most basic form of involving citizens and seems to be common all around China. In one of the two major projects the municipality published a master plan and arranged consultations as well as exhibitions. However, the report states that this was done so that the locals could familiarize themselves with the changes and the way in which locals "participated" is not openly stated (UN-HABITAT, 2008).

Table 1 (UN-HABITAT 2008, p.44 emphasis added) illustrates what the role of the residents has been in the housing projects of Yantai. The public is included in the process only in the survey phase in the very beginning and the exhibition phase towards the end of the process. These two phases are the ones that best serve the purpose of legitimizing the projects. If the questions in the survey phase are vague enough (as is implied by the results of the survey mentioned above), it can be ensured that the residents answer in a way that supports the project. On the other hand, in the exhibition phase it is already too late for the residents to have any influence on the direction of the project.

Table 1.

1. <u>Survey & Data Collection</u>	6. Submission of Detailed Upgrading Plan to Relevant Municipal Agencies for Approval
2. Data Analysis & Identification of Problems	
3. Goal setting	
4. Preparation of City-wide Upgrading Plan	7. <u>Public Exhibition of Upgrading Plan</u>
5. Preparation of Detailed Upgrading Plan	8. Finalizing the Upgrading Plan
	9. Implementation

(Source: UN-HABITAT 2008, p.44, emphasis added)

This does not mean that the residents are being cruelly ignored, but it shows how the concept of participation can be used as a legitimizing force, in this case by the municipality. The kind of shallow participation exhibited in Yantai is sometimes called *confirmation*. According to Plummer & Taylor (2004, p. 43) it is done by “only asking participants to become engaged in a narrow band of questions and issues that are closely linked to the decision that an external agent or government official wants to pursue”. The same authors argue that this is a dominant model of participation in China (Plummer & Taylor, 2004).

It seems that residents had little influence on the initiation or the design process of the housing upgrading projects in Yantai. The motives and power, perhaps expectedly, lay somewhere else entirely. The commercial incentives for this kind of projects are oftentimes strong (Pacione, 2009). By redeveloping neighborhoods large land-areas covered by old one-story courtyard housing can be replaced with multi-story housing, thus freeing space for other, especially commercial, uses. In one of the projects 10% of the land area was devoted for commercial use, while in the other the entire residential area was completely relocated “due to changing functions of the area” (UN-HABITAT 2008, p.41), that is, to make space for modern high-rise commercial land use. Even in the first project, where a large proportion of land was devoted for residential use, all of the residents were not willing or were not able to continue living in the same neighborhood. In fact, the pricing of the new housing made sure that all the original residents did not have the opportunity to stay. The smallest 55m² apartment was available to the residents at a price of 52,500 yuan (around 6 500 USD) when the average annual disposable income of the Shandong province was 7101 yuan (890 USD) around the time of the project’s initiation (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2001). It seems that this particular upgrading project was not a planned only with the original residents’ best interest in mind as the option of staying was denied from some of the residents. This supports the argument of Leaf (2006) that the societal role of urban planning as a provider of welfare has been changed along with the emergence of market interests.

UN-HABITAT’s (2008) report on Yantai’s housing upgrading projects offers a great insight into Chinese planning policy and how public participation is viewed and utilized in a widely accepted project. The document clearly shows that there is at least some concern over the public’s opinions on the housing projects. It recognizes that there has been a change towards people-centered governance in Chinese politics and stresses

the importance of having people's interests as a priority. Opinion surveys and countless discussions are said to have been held with the residents about the future of their neighborhoods. However, after several readings it becomes strikingly clear that the voice of the residents is used solely for the sake of legitimizing the planning decisions and no genuine participation seems to have been occurring. The lack of transparency in the planning process and in the document itself, the minimal amount of participation, the nonexistence of accountability and the absence of consensus building make it rather impossible to call this project an example of "good" urban governance, at least according to the western understanding of the term. Ultimately, there is not much in the report that supports its claims of "people-centered" governance. Also, seeing as UN-HABITAT is a valiant defender of good governance, this leaves the reader wondering about the possible motives of the organization's support for the projects.

What we see in Yantai is that the participatory components of its planning processes were limited in scope and used mostly to legitimize top-down market-oriented developments. Not much effort was made to gain insights from the residents for sustainable solutions or to build their capacities. Much like the ancient leaders would command their planners to construct temples that would symbolize their divine rule and like the communist leaders would order the construction of landmarks to symbolize the supremacy of the socialist ideology, the participation in the housing upgrading projects of Yantai remains on the symbolic level. Perhaps the motives for it are clean and more was done than what is explicitly stated in the document, but from what can be gathered from the paper it seems like the participatory components of the plan were meant to show how concerned the municipality is over the opinions of the people.

There is no doubt that many people received a significant upgrade in their living conditions. Also, it is very possible that the economy of the area received a boost from this initiative. Either of the two accomplishments would be laudable by itself, and who knows whether results of similar scale in a similar time-frame would have been possible with a more inclusive approach. Maybe the results would actually have been better or more sustainable, but the implementation slower. In any case, these kind of dilemmas are probably common in China's urban management and when one adds to the equation the fact that China's urban planning has had no participation in the last 2000 years, it suddenly becomes more understandable that the decisions tend to lean towards the less inclusive options.

5.2 City of Shenzhen

The economic powerhouse that is Shenzhen is located in the vicinity of Hong Kong on the southeastern coast of China. It is one of the cities that experienced the most rapid urban development and population growth after the country's economic reforms. For this exact reason the city has an ample amount of "urban villages", densely built informal areas that have for years now been the eyesore of many Chinese planners around the country due to their disorderliness (Song, 2008). These areas feed on the rental income derived from the rural-urban migrants that have no other place to go in the city. During the past three decades the city had two very different experiences of redeveloping these areas in which the level of cooperation of the local residents had a major impact on the results (Hin & Xin, 2010).

The first redevelopment process, that of Yunang village, was less bumpy than the second one. According to Hin & Xin (2010) the village was, as many others in China, characterized by its open defiance of the municipality's authority. Under the leadership of the village joint venture enterprise (VJVE) the neighborhood made sure that its voice was heard. In this case, as in many others, the reason for this kind of unruliness was that the residents of these neighborhoods had become oblivious to any policy guidelines. This is not surprising, as they had always been left to take care of themselves when the municipality hadn't offered any resolutions to their problems (Hin & Xin, 2010).

According to Hin & Xin (2010), in 1999, the local authority issued a clear statement of its intentions to redevelop the village and after 5 years of conflict with the locals, a private developer was enlisted to the coalition and a tri-partner collaboration agreement on redevelopment was established between the developer, the villagers, and the local authority. The resistance in Yunang village turned into co-operation when the nature and amount of compensation was explicitly stated. Among other things, the developer promised new flats to each of the affected residents. In 2005, all the villagers agreed on the terms of compensation and the green light was shone on the redevelopment. Ultimately, The VJVE had a strong influence on the final decision of the villagers, thus showing the importance of grassroots level organization in achieving positive results by mediating between parties (Hin & Xin, 2010).

The same authors claim that the second redevelopment experience in Gangxia village was less successful in terms of collaboration and time wasted. It experienced similar problems to those of Yunang village since its commencement in 1998. However, midway through the process, the district government of Futian district, having gained confidence from the experience in Yunang village, tried to replicate the earlier approach that had worked relatively well. The starting point here was quite similar, and the VJVE of the neighborhood was to be a collaborative partner again. However, soon a significant difference became apparent: the area had an internal divide between its residents. Two different subgroups of the Wen-family, which originated from different parts of China, had occupied the neighborhood for a long time and their conflicts of interest led to bickering over the terms as well as the legitimacy of the redevelopment agreements. The Wen-subgroups were mistrustful not only towards each other, but also towards the local authorities. The various conflicts that took place eventually led to the exclusion of the VJVE from participating in the project. However, the villagers still managed to stall the redevelopment for a significant amount of time. Ultimately in 2008, the government succeeded in clearing out the area, but only after the use of armed force. A year later, one by one, the villagers had to sign the compensation agreement, no matter how embittered they were by not having their terms acknowledged. At this point in time, the project had taken a total of 11 years before developments could finally begin (Hin & Xin, 2010).

The level of participation in both redevelopment processes was extremely low. In both of the urban villages the locals had no say on whether the projects should be conducted, nor were they heard on what the nature of the developments should be. In Yunang the locals were involved in the compensation negotiations, which ultimately led to a swifter and less unethical result. In Gangxia, the entire redevelopment plan was a drawing board discussion from start to finish without any input from the locals. This contributed to public unrest and the use of armed force to finish the plans (Hin & Xin, 2010).

The redevelopments in Shenzhen highlight several issues related to participation in urban planning processes in China. The case of Yunang underscores the potential of grassroots-level organizations for mediating between different actors to achieve positive results while the case of Gangxia supports Purcell & Brown's 2005 argument (cited in Potter et al. 2008, p.121) of how this potential can be highly context specific issue as reaching consensus in highly fragmented areas can be very difficult. Both redevelopment processes portray how the pace of participatory planning processes can sometimes be painstakingly slow, which may call into question the practicality of the entire communicative planning model. However, it has to be remembered that the problem might have been something else completely. Perhaps it was the lack of determined and proper collaboration that led to the long duration of the projects.

The case study also exemplifies how mistrust towards authority might cause problems for participation in some areas. The lack of trust towards the local authorities that was present in the village of Gangxia seems to be common in contemporary China (Shin, 2008; Li, 2004). Interestingly, Li's (2004) study of political trust in rural China has shown that this mistrust does not necessarily extend to higher levels of government. Participants in the study had much less faith in the goodwill of local authorities than the central state.

6. Discussion

Through the investigation of the theoretical background of public participation it becomes clear that the concept has become an important component of two of the most dominant paradigms of development and planning theory and is currently being widely promoted. However, when faced with the context of urban renewal in China the concept seems to run into trouble.

From exploring the historical and contemporary context of Chinese planning practice several factors can be identified that could potentially impact the implementation as well as the results of participatory policies and processes in the field.

Culture & tradition

Some Chinese values and traditions can be seen as potential counter-forces to western ideas of participatory planning and good urban governance in the country. In Confucian thought the relationship between the leaders and citizens is strictly hierarchical and society is guided by principles of morality rather than the rule of law (Wong, 2009). To a certain extent, the people still expect the government to organize them, often by means of planning, and take care of their needs (Plummer & Taylor, 2004). In places where it has failed to do this, as in the case of Shenzhen, people can start feeling abandoned and mistrustful towards it (Hin & Xin, 2010).

One of the most central goals of any good governance framework, the decentralization of power, might not happen smoothly in the country. Not only do urban planners and political leaders want hold on to their power, but their status is also supported by Confucian ideology and a long heritage of top-down planning. Trying to reconstruct a governance system that has rooted itself so deeply into the society might turn out to be a slower process than expected.

Legitimizing tendency

Whereas public participation was originally meant to provide a radical means to empower people, in the case of Yantai public participation was used as a tool by the municipality to provide legitimacy for the market-oriented urban developments in the city. This finding supports some of the critiques of communicative planning who maintain that the model can be used in very conservative ways that can legitimize a wide array of decisions that are oriented towards the current state of affairs (Purcell, 2009). It is also noteworthy that urban planning in China has, for a long time, been used as a tool to provide legitimacy to the ruling segment via ambitious and symbolic gestures motivated by the planners' own hopes of promotion (Abramson, 2006). Thus making the profession historically geared towards maintaining the status quo.

Issues of scale and time

As noted before, the process of urbanization in China is unmatched in its pace and scale. This can pose challenges to participatory planning solutions in the country due to the sometimes time-consuming nature of the method. Plans are made quickly and implemented even quicker, as otherwise the situation at hand might have changed to the extent that it scraps all plans (Hugentobler & Lütolf, 2006). The country's urban planning needs to respond quickly to the new challenges it is facing and moving towards a more inclusive system too quickly might disrupt the efforts of providing people with adequate living standards. On the other hand, the case of Shenzhen shows us that in situations of conflict, collaboration can actually shorten the time frames of urban redevelopment considerably.

Fragmented communities and undeveloped grassroots-level organization

Many of China's fastest growing neighborhoods that are possibly in the biggest need for planning assistance boast a very diverse populace with migrants from all around the country. These people can have very different needs and priorities. As argued by Purcell & Brown in 2005 (cited in Potter et al. 2008, p.121) and as exemplified by Gangxia urban village in Shenzhen, conflicting interests in fragmented communities can significantly disrupt urban planning projects that seek to involve locals. These problems could most likely be mitigated, as shown by Yunang village of Shenzhen, with effective grassroots-level organizations that mediate between stakeholders. This could also improve the often patchy communication between the planners and the locals (Shin, 2008). Unfortunately, the amount of NGOs and grassroots-level organizations remains low in contemporary China (Leaf, 2006).

Dominance of market-interests

After China's opening up to the world market, economic growth has become the goal that almost everything is geared towards (Abramson, 2006; Shin, 2008). As exemplified by the case of Shenzhen, the interplay of power-politics has become increasingly complicated. In urban planning, new and powerful business actors have entered the playing field, which has left Chinese planners in a confused state about their role in society where they do not know who they are supposed to serve, the people, their superiors or the businesses (Leaf, 2006; Shin, 2008). The currently dominant profit-making interests of developers and local authorities as well as the economic goals set by the central government, will probably continue to push planners towards an emphasis on economic growth. In market-driven scenarios, significant involvement of locals in

discussions is not likely to happen. And if it does, it might happen for completely different reasons than building the capacities of people or strengthening democracy. In Yantai, the projects were for the most part guised to be serving the interests of the people but they were in fact clearly market-friendly developments. As long as there is no change in the power relations and social stability is sufficiently maintained, implementing participatory policies with motives of good governance can prove to be difficult.

Due to the aforementioned factors it possible to argue that China may be ill prepared for any large-scale participatory planning policies. The road towards the Habermasian “ideal speech situation”, that is at the core of the communicative planning model, can be long and winding. In fact, this road may not even be desirable for the country’s citizens, as the model can be used in ways that merely legitimize projects and support the status quo. Such a method of planning might keep people more content but it is unlikely to lead to social mobilization and real empowerment. If the goal of the model is to empower people to the extent that they have influence over their urban surroundings, it can fall devastatingly short of this aim in some cases, as market forces dominate the planning scene. It is possible that the voicing of concerns due to unfair power-relations may ultimately be a more potent agent of change in the country than a potentially unradical shift in urban planning that is adept at keeping citizens satisfied.

China also seems to be, historically and contemporarily, quite incompatible with western ideas of good (urban) governance. The country has developed along a radically different path than its western equivalents. Participation, accountability and transparency have never really been a part of the way the country has been governed. These are all features of “good” governance that would have to be learned from scratch. This is not to say that the effort would not be legitimate or worthwhile, since the ability to have influence over one’s life through, for example, participatory processes, is something that is very much worth fighting for. However, in China, this process might require extra consideration and effort. Also, it should be remembered that advocating for a policy framework that is the result of the experiences of developed countries should be done cautiously in contexts like China. In such countries, where development trajectories have been like nothing ever seen before, it can deny opportunities for alternative developments.

7. Conclusive remarks

This study has shown that the participatory trend is so strong in both development and planning discourses that international development organizations and scholars of both disciplines are most likely to continue persuading China towards more inclusive planning. However, the participatory paradigm is consisted of parts that seem to be relatively alien to the Chinese context of urban planning. The historical overview shows us that the country is standing at a point in time where it has become accustomed to a long standing form of top-down governance that is quite opposite to what the dominant discourses of participatory planning and development are promoting.

A closer look at the two cases of urban renewal practice unveils a range of potential problems that promoters of participatory planning might face in the country.

They also support some of the critiques of the participatory paradigm. There, public participation is being used in an extremely shallow manner that legitimizes market-oriented developments and is not genuinely interested in the desires or opinions of locals. Fragmented communities, undeveloped grassroots-level organization, the dominance of market interests and issues of scale and time are also identified as potential obstacles for participation.

It has to be stressed that the evidence provided by this thesis does not justify the undemocratic planning in China's cities but it provides an alternative viewpoint to the matter of participation in urban development projects. The paper provides some possible explanations as to why participatory change isn't happening in China at an expected pace. All this is not to say that increasing public involvement in urban planning is a hopeless task, but perhaps a difficult and time-consuming one that requires an incremental approach.

8. References

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