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New pathways for sustainable urban development in China's medium-sized cities

# Urban China and the challenges of sustainability

Sessions' abstract



## **Round table: transnational dynamics of participative planning in Chinese cities**

From Porto Alegre to Tokyo, from Brussels to Hangzhou, concertation practises seem to develop all around the world. Legitimization of urban planning is now closely related to local authorities' ability to engage - and to show that they engage - "ordinary people" in the decision-making process. So it would be easy to come to the conclusion that we have been witnessing a "global participatory turn in urbanism".

This panel intends precisely to interrogate such an assessment through a few questions: who are the professional of participation in Chinese cities? How do concertation packages and knowledge about participation circulate between Chinese local authorities and their partners (other Chinese cities or foreign cities, European Union, universities, NGO, consultancy firms...)? Who are the purveyors or passers of concertation? How are those good practises defined? Where do those exchanges take place? What are the local conditions of the concertation packages reappropriation? And how do certain experiences become models?

Based on the MEDIUM project experiences in participative planning, this panel will examine the concrete development of participative planning in Chinese cities so as to understand both the production of transnational dynamics of urban "best practises" and their domestic uses.

## **Spatio-temporal behaviour in complex urban systems**

Space, time, and human activities are the eternal topics of human geography. The spatio-temporal behaviour research provides an important theoretical tool and perspective to reveal the patterns and dynamic system of space and place. Two complementary ways to enter the domain are data analytics and modelling. This panel gathers diverse approaches which have in common the study of spatio-temporal dynamics.

Today a wide range of ubiquitous data can be harvested using carefully designed methodologies, and corresponding data mining and machine learning techniques unveil underlying structure of the complex system, implying a statistical and structural approach. To explore the spatio-temporal behaviour of individual, group and the whole society, and to analyse the demand of individuation and socialization, the research on spatial-temporal behaviour and its application is ushering in a new opportunity. The emergence of new paradigms such as "big data" and "Internet +", or "Crowdsourcing", imply the rise of new ideas and research questions. The rapid development of new technology and production methods of massive spatial-temporal data also brings new methods and means. Complying with the interdisciplinary development, to further expand the application field of spatial-temporal behaviour research, has important practical significance on the aspects of planning, public security, health, quality of life and intelligent decision-making applications.

On the other hand, new methodologies and techniques in modelling bring also useful insights on spatio-temporal dynamics. Complex networks analysis acts in the same way as an efficient dimensionality reduction and dynamical structure reconstruction tool, and aims at providing information on intrinsic components of the dynamics. Complex models of simulation, for example of



Urban Systems, allow to reconstruct the emergence of complex macroscopic patterns from the interaction of lower scale agents. They can for example be applied to the study of particular trajectories of cities, and evaluate corresponding potential policies.

Building on the confrontation of these different visions, a round table shall take a step back and attempt an overview of the study of spatio-temporal behaviour, and how different approaches can be complementary. Some conclusions on the processes of knowledge production are also expected, by extracting for each particular process the relation between knowledge domains (empirical, theoretical, modelling, data, methodology, tools) in a comparable way since each one is framed in the same context of complex urban systems.

## **Population ageing and living arrangements of old people in Chinese and European cities**

The demographic transition in Western Europe and East Asia is raising awareness of the growing financial resources needed to provide appropriate housing and services for the elderly. Against a background of shrinking public budgets, ageing-in-place is increasingly promoted as the most relevant living arrangement to limit the cost of housing provision for the seniors, particularly in medium-size and big cities where land prices reach high levels. Ageing-in-place also echoes older people's expectations. Studies conducted in various countries suggest that most seniors are willing to remain in their own homes and live independently for as long as possible. It is acknowledged that housing is not simply a shelter but also an important factor for mental health, quality of life and well-being. An important driver is the complex network of social and non-social relations established by seniors across various spatial and temporal scales (Progress in Geography, special issue, 2015). These considerations are particularly acute in the old age since the seniors spend more time at home than any other age group, and become increasingly attached to their dwellings and networks.

This panel will examine the living arrangements of older people in China and Europe (France and the UK), from various perspectives including public policies, inter-generational relationships, social relations, and financing channels. It is partly sponsored by the work package 5 of the ODESSA project ("Optimising care delivery models to support ageing-in-place: towards autonomy, affordability and financial sustainability") managed by Géographie-cités (CNRS/Paris I-Panthéon Sorbonne).

## **Urban China sustainable development**

With the rapid urbanization and industrialization, Chinese cities are confronted with various problems ranging from environmental and social issues, to transportation and security problems, and are facing complicated challenges and opportunities. As a result of recession of export processing industry, shortage of domestic labour force and austerity of land finance market, the brutal division between cities and shrinking cities come into being. Due to unequal income distributions, religious believes and other reasons, crime rates, anti-social behaviour and ethnic conflict make citizens feel unsafe and threaten their quality of life. Owing to geographic conditions, human socioeconomic activities and the development of human beings, air pollution, food safety, the allocation and availability of medical resources, and human health and wellness are seriously impacted. On account of development of



market economy and stratum differentiation, social space gradually forms and problems of social inequity emerge. Moreover, with the new technologies, urban planning and management usher in new challenges.

In recent years, Chinese urban geography pays close attention to urban sustainable development. Several hot fields and key problems emerge, including development challenges in the wake of land contraction, urban public security and crime prevention and control, promotion of quality of life such as public health, urban social equity and justice, developments and challenges under computerization etc.

## **Measuring progress toward urban sustainability**

The challenges brought by urbanization have led to global recognition of the need for effectively implementing sustainable development principles in urbanization process. Moreover, global climate change is expected to challenge the sustainable development of urban areas, affecting the intensity and frequency of extreme events (e.g. heat waves, drought, heavy precipitations events) and increasing natural disasters and damaging events worldwide (e.g. storms, pluvial floods and coastal flooding), with cascading implications for population and economic activities.

Many governments, researchers and practitioners have dedicated efforts to developing policies and methods for promoting sustainable urbanization, such as developing indicators to guide policy makers and planners at city level in order to make adequate decisions to implement urban development towards the mission of sustainable development. Nevertheless, it appears that the established indicator systems are not commonly applied in practice, especially in China. The inconsistency between various indicator systems is large, presenting the need for studying indicator selection methods in further research. Inconsistency and lack of sustainability metrics is particularly evident in the social and socio-political aspects. The scarce regard to social and political issues is reflected also in the lack of participation of the public in defining indicators systems, which in turn exerts a negative impact on the relevance and responsiveness of indicators systems to measure progress towards sustainability goals. Another issue is the lack of metrics relevant to the challenge posed by Climate Change, which may seriously affect the efficacy and efficiency of urbanization policies in the long term.

## **Urban governance: conflicts, mass action, social and political regulation**

In this panel, we consider cities as part of local authorities' politics and of sub national policy levels: so we intend to discuss interactions between urban regeneration public policy, coalitions of interests, and decision making processes about urban planning.

On one hand, cities may be analysed as crucial levels of social and political instability. Generally speaking, they gather population sprawl, land congestion and pollutions of all kinds. In China, they also concentrate 3 paradoxes or contradictions: between housing free market and public land ownership; but also between local economic initiatives and state centralism; and finally between broader participation processes and bureaucratic control over social organisations. We shall consider those aspects of urban governance challenges.



But on the other hand, cities may be also analysed as important levels of regulation, where the stabilization of rules are specifically settled. First, new tax resources (on production and services) might replace the classical land or real estate contributions to local fiscality (and careers). Second, urban growth coalitions, including local cadres, could turn to more environmental concerns through specific incentives. Third, through generalizing some experiences, local participation concerning master plans as well as local urban projects may be generalized.

This panel will discuss probability of these new perspectives, in light of trends of urban instability aspects mentioned before.

## **Internal migration and urban integration in Chinese medium-sized cities**

Over the past few years, rural to urban migration and integration patterns intersect with two developments in China's current context: first, the increasing pressure on China's largest megalopolis resources due to the ever more noticeable and lasting presence of Chinese migrant-workers in urban areas; and second, the recent shift from an export-driven economy to one powered by domestic consumption to ensure a constant economic growth. These two emerging trends contributed to shape a new urbanization scenario, which calls for the integration of a large number of migrant-workers in small and medium-sized cities rather than large urban centres.

While attempting to balance economic development with a commitment to social inclusion and urban integration, Chinese medium-sized cities are experiencing quantitative and qualitative changes, which bring about both economic and social challenges.

The advent of a new era of urbanization in China, which is switching attention towards cities of smaller size, should receive more scrutiny and the emerging integration issues need to be further inquired. Under the new circumstances, what does it mean to be integrated into the city? How to ensure that urban areas become inclusive spaces as they expand in size and diversity? To what extent do migrants' mobility and settlement choices reflect the current and ongoing reshaping of medium-sized cities?

Earlier research on migrant workers' urban integration has highlighted the role of the household registration system (*hukou*) in the generation of social exclusion and discrimination, an aspect which has been crucial but whose weight is shrinking, since the easing of restrictions. More recently, the growing academic interest on migrant workers' urban issues revealed how integration is not just dependent on *hukou* related topics, but is a more multi-layered process, which needs to be explored, taking into account social context, public policies and actions of individuals.

This panel will explore and discuss the crossroads between migrants' integration, urban development and key related issues. It will thereby raise awareness on the current situation of migrant workers in medium-sized cities, contributing in critically reflecting on the "integration process". While addressing research gaps on the issue, this panel aims at bringing together migrants' integration research from different disciplines in order to further develop a fruitful exchange on theoretical approaches, research methods and results.

