



Struggling for an adaptive strategy? Discourse analysis of urban regeneration processes – A case study of Enning Road in Guangzhou City



Xiaohong Tan*, Uwe Altröck

University of Kassel, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 28 September 2015

Received in revised form

5 June 2016

Accepted 8 June 2016

Available online 17 June 2016

Keywords:

Urban redevelopment strategy

Problem framing

Discourse analysis

Guangzhou

Old town regeneration

ABSTRACT

Over the last two decades, China has experienced urban redevelopment at an unprecedented scale and speed. The state-sponsored property-led redevelopment pattern has been widely deployed as dominant urban regeneration strategy in many Chinese cities. Meanwhile, more and more attention has been paid to the protest and resistance of civil society to the tremendous demolition and eviction during the implementation of such strategies. Investigating the process, content and context of urban regeneration strategies in China provides fertile ground to understand the public participation process, specific plight and challenge of decision-making in urban regeneration in China. This reflects the logic and trend of urban governance in China within existing regulatory practices and institutional settings during the transformation period. As the understanding of strategy and problem are concomitant to each other, problem framing in urban regeneration is pivotal to understand urban regeneration strategies. Starting from this point, the object of this paper is to explore what the problems are, how they are defined and perceived by different actors, what strategies are promoted as solutions, and how they are legitimated or excluded. As problem framing is social construction through discourse by different actors, such close relationship of discourse and problem proves the necessity of undertaking discourse analysis as research approach to understand problem framing, also the process, content and context of urban regeneration strategies.

To understand specific problems and challenges of urban regeneration strategies implemented in China's inner cities, this study inquires a controversial and well known redevelopment project called Enning Road, which has been the first "pioneer" in terms of comprehensively redeveloping old town areas in Guangzhou since the last decade. This project has received tremendous criticism, and it can be characterized by a continuous adjustment of the unstable strategies that were applied and a frequent stagnation due to social resistance from 2006 to 2015. It will demonstrate how different discourse coalitions are formed by the government, scholars, journalists, residents and NGOs and other stakeholders. For this purpose, the paper will discuss their shared interests, beliefs or rationalities and the way they use storylines to frame problems. In this context, a lot of local knowledge and expert knowledge is activated and utilized to construct those storylines. The urban regeneration process of Enning Road involves continuously changing problem definitions and continuous experimentation, translating into emergent adaptive strategies. It also shows the interplay between different ways of problem framing, and the complex interaction between problem framing and strategy promotion.

© 2016 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Urban regeneration can be seen as a "comprehensive and integrated vision and action which leads to the resolution of urban problems and which seeks to bring about a lasting improvement in the economic, physical, social and environmental condition of an area that has been subject to change" (Roberts, 2000: 17). Based on a

* Corresponding author.

E-mail addresses: tanxh9@gmail.com (X. Tan), altrock@asl.uni-kassel.de (U. Altröck).

discussion of predecessors to and criticisms of this well-known definition, Leary and McCarthy (2013:9) propose an alternative definition that focuses on “area-based intervention which is public sector initiated, funded, supported or inspired, aimed at producing significant sustainable improvements in the conditions of local people, communities and places suffering from aspects of deprivation, often multiple in nature” and yet discuss the relationship between public and private activities in that context. Karadimitriou, de Magalhães, and Verhage (2013:8ff) discuss the widening scope of urban regeneration in the context of the decline of manufacturing industries and note a re-arrangement of the governance relations concerning public and private tasks and resources involved in urban regeneration as a consequence of structural changes in Western economies, political reforms and a major ideological shift in policy making. Magalhães (2015:919) explains that the “structural nature” of decline that “will not be reversed spontaneously as part of the normal process of change and adaptation that is part of the life of cities. In this case, change requires purposive action by the state through policy and direct intervention, as market forces are not sufficient to trigger and ensure adaptation or transformation.”

Over the last three decades, China has experienced urban development at an unprecedented scale and speed, and it became a main topic for urban researchers. In this context, the progressing urbanization has gradually led to an incorporation of ever more types of neglected areas in need of urban regeneration. For a long time, inner city redevelopment had been the main task, and it was often related to the preservation of traditional residential areas such as Hutong areas in Beijing (Lü, 1997) and Shikumen in Shanghai (Wai, 2006; Yang & Chang, 2007). However, the destruction of traditional buildings received a lot of critics in this context. Meanwhile, the redevelopment of urban villages has become another important task of urban regeneration. It can now be considered as one of the most important and scrutinized topics in the research of urban regeneration in China, covering issues previously discussed in the international literature on urban regeneration such as the roles of land owners, residents and developers in changing governance arrangements, (a lack of) participation in planning, the social impact of upgrading, displacement and possible gentrification (Hao, Sliuzas, & Geertman, 2011; He, 2007; Lin and De Meulder, 2012; Li, Lin, Li, & Wu, 2014; Tan & Schoon, 2014; Zhou, 2014; Wang, Wang, & Wu, 2009; Wu & Wang, 2016; Zhuang, 2014). Due to the restructuring of the Chinese economy, industrial sites have been abandoned, re-used and often redeveloped since the late 1990s in selected urban centers such as Shanghai (Wu, 1997; Zheng, 2010). However, the systematic upgrading and adaptive re-use of derelict industrial sites has only recently become an important task in urban regeneration (Liu, van Oort, Geertman & Lin, 2014), often related to a boom in “creative clusters” (Liu, Han, & O’Connor, 2013; Shan, 2014). In 2009, Guangdong province became an experimental site for the establishment of new institutional arrangements in order to facilitate urban redevelopment and to create an elaborated system of urban regeneration based on clearly defined policies. For this purpose, a policy called “Several Opinions on Promoting Three Olds Redevelopment to Increase Land Use Efficiency” was issued. In this context, the term “three olds” refers to declining and run-down inner-city old towns, old factory sites and urban villages (for details see Schoon, 2014).

Urban regeneration strategies in Chinese inner cities have taken a dramatic shift from the former state-led pattern, characterized by strong welfare provision during the era of the planned economy, to a more market-oriented approach. Especially property-led redevelopment as an important urban regeneration strategy has been increasingly applied in many Chinese cities. Since the mid-1990s,

urban regeneration in China has been dominated by property-led redevelopment (He & Wu, 2005; Wu & He, 2005). Property-led redevelopment strategies are widely deployed to redevelopment projects in urban villages, inner-city communities and sites of derelict industries due to their premium location and high commercial value. One of the most typical redevelopment projects realized with the help of such a strategy has even given the name to a famous pattern called “Xintiandi Pattern”.¹ Local governments have played an irreplaceable role not only in facilitating property-led redevelopment, and it could therefore be termed “state-sponsored property development” (He & Wu, 2007). Recently, even the mechanisms that are behind deterioration prior to redevelopment have been proven to be determined by state-led spatial production (Wu, 2015).

While the scope of urban regeneration has widened, the applied methodologies have matured and a number of powerful institutional settings have been established in some Chinese cities (Altröck and Schoon, 2014), regeneration strategies in China have long been characterized by their strong entrepreneurial nature, termed as “territorially based entrepreneurialism” (Wu, 2003). Meanwhile, the tremendous demolition and relocation as a result of an implementation of those strategies have become a contentious issue that provoked heated debate in China. Since the end of the 1990s, displaced local residents were mainly offered cash compensation to become owner-occupiers elsewhere (Shin, 2007), but the acute affordability problems made it difficult for them to finance their new homeownership with the cash compensation to stay in inner-city districts (Shin, 2009). Unfair compensation schemes are one of the most important issues in this context. Rithmire (2013) claims that the confrontation between citizens and local authorities over land has been one of the most visible flash-points of state-society conflict in rural and urban China alike. Residents’ resistance to redevelopment is referred to as “property rights activism” (Lee, 2008). Hsing (2012) terms social actors’ conscious cultivation and struggles to form their own territoriality at both physical and discursive levels as “civic territoriality”. Shin argues that resisting neighborhood demolition should take “the fragmentation of property rights, supported by the coalition of residents on the basis of rights-based awareness” into account (Shin, 2010:128). In order to search for means to deal with such plights and challenges, public participation is often proposed as panacea by scholars and planners. Public participation in urban regeneration has been accepted as “good practice” and also as one main policy issue for a long time in the West (Ferilli, Sacco, & Blessi, 2016). Comparatively, the implementation and practice of public participation in China’s urban regeneration is still at the very beginning, lacking policy and institutional support. However, there have been accounts of bottom-up practice struggling for more rights to participation, noting the importance of social capital in particular (Verdini, 2015; Zhai & Ng, 2013).

Current research in the field of urban regeneration in China has mainly identified the property-led redevelopment pattern as one dominant urban regeneration strategy and also paid more and more attention to the negative social and spatial impacts of demolition and eviction as the consequence of respective strategies. This focus follows a long-lasting international debate on the role

¹ Xintiandi (in Chinese: 新天地) is a property-led urban redevelopment project in Shanghai. It is an area of reconstituted traditional mid-19th century *shikumen* (“stone gate”) houses on narrow alleys. The redevelopment strategy of Xintiandi has been considered one of the first examples of strategic urban redevelopment in China. In the project of Xintiandi, some of the old houses were renovated and converted to bookstores, cafes and restaurants, and shopping malls. Many of the old buildings, however, were demolished and replaced by similar new ones. Such a practice received much criticism as creating “fake antiques”.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1047715>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1047715>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)