



An institutional perspective of “Glocalization” in two Asian tigers: The “Structure–Agent–Strategy” of building an age-friendly city



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ABSTRACT

This paper expands the focal point of glocalization to the non-western context, and revisits glocalization in light of the promulgation of an international policy regime. Particularly it examines how the politics of scale in various contexts assists local pragmatic exercises and institutional organizations in building up an age-friendly city (AFC). The functioning mechanisms of glocalization are conceptualized through a triadic framework incorporating structure (mode of local governance), agents, and strategies. The empirical cases examine how AFC has been promoted in Chiayi City of Taiwan and in Hong Kong, the former two Tiger economies. Drawing on a comparative analysis of the two cases, the paper presents three major findings. Firstly, local policy networks are integral to glocalization in that they govern how different resources (i.e., political commitment, professional knowledge, human resources, communication skills, and financial resources) are synthesized under a local institutional framework. Often local policy networks reveal the fragmentation of resources provided by different stakeholders. Secondly, the case study illustrates two different modes of local governance. The Chiayi case reflects an institutionalized governing framework with both hierarchical coordination between levels of state bureaucracies and the horizontal exchange of information and resources between the state and non-state sectors. Hong Kong reflects a grassroots mode whereby the promotion and implementation of AFC initiatives are prompted among NGOs, charities, district councils, and universities. Both modes reveal pros and cons. Thirdly, academic associations have played a major role in promoting AFC, though the extent to which their advice can shape policy decisions relies much on the discretion and political commitment of district councils.

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1. Introduction

Population ageing is taking place across all countries and has become a global phenomenon. Overall, the segment of the population aged 60 and above is the fastest growing group globally. It is projected that by 2050, all major areas of the world (except Africa) will have nearly a quarter or more of their populations aged 60 or over (United Nations, 2015). Given population ageing is inevitable and continuing, the Age-Friendly Cities (AFC) Network proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 2007 soon became a popular global movement. By 2015, a total of 258 cities and

communities in 28 countries across the world had joined the network. Most participating countries are advanced economies, such as the United States, Canada, United Kingdom and countries of Western Europe.

Development of age-friendly cities has been a more critical issue for developing economies as a result of longer life expectancy, lower fertility rates, and limited social welfare resources (Chao & Huang, 2016). This is particularly the case for China, since demographic ageing happens when issues like social welfare, poverty, and urban-rural integration have yet to be fully addressed. Also, the fast industrialization in the past few years turned a blind eye to the quality of built environment as well as the ecological sustainability conducive to producing livable communities for the elders. It is under such background that cities in the global South are one of the most active partners in this global AFC initiative. Currently, Asian partners include four members from China (including three from Hong Kong), one from Japan, two from South Korea and one from

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Turkey. Although Taiwan is not a participating member of the WHO, the AFC principles have been incorporated in various policy address of its 22 cities since 2010.

Asian cities are unique given their culture, social political landscapes, and past dependent policy making paradigm. For example, most Chinese cities bear on a strong characteristic of centralized decision making, whereas Hong Kong has for a long time followed positive noninterventionism to regulate socioeconomic life (Wong, 2012). For Taiwan, policy regime up to the late 1980 was highly centralized, whereas the democratic forces since late 1980s progressed social deregulation and economic liberalization making the decisional system more open to public view (Mcbeath, 1999). The embodiment of the localized AFC initiatives is not analogous across different places. As ageing is emplaced and relational (Schwanen, Hardill, & Lucas, 2012), it is of great significance to put ageing into a comparative discourse. Central to this question is to what extent a strong integration with the impact of global forces can reinforce manifestation at local level (Buffel & Phillipson, 2016). We argue that the geographies of ageing policies should be highlighted such that different knowledge, actions and processes can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of a global–local articulation for making international policy regimes.

In this paper, the current initiatives towards an age-friendly city are positioned under the Asian context, and through a comparative case study of Hong Kong and Taiwan. Using a framework of glocalization, different practices to promote AFC are examined. Particularly, a triadic framework explaining the institutional mechanisms of glocalization will be established, namely, “structure–agent–strategy”. We argue that expressions of glocalization are varied across the local, leading to great flexibility in translating and implementing international standards at the local level. This results in the deployment of different participating actors, strategies and governance that effect specific politics of scale. The remainder of the paper consists of four parts. Initially glocalization under different contexts is reviewed, with a particular reference to the reshuffling of scale and its economic, social and institutional implications. This is followed by an introduction to the development pathway of the global AFC project that constitutes one side of global–local articulation. The third part presents a case study in the form of a comparison between Hong Kong and Chiayi City in Taiwan, with a view to examining the actual embodiment of AFC as two manifestations of glocalization. Two modes have been identified. The last part summarizes the glocalization of AFC and how the politics of scale stands out to enable the integration of various actors and strategies. The policy implications of our study are also discussed.

2. “Structure–Agent–Strategy”: the institutional analysis of glocalization

After the new economic geography emerged in the Western Europe regions, the spatially equalized distribution of population, industry and infrastructure was replaced by the new “spatial selectivity” – geography of socioeconomic development preferred the subnational sites such as cities, city regions, or industrial districts (Brenner, 1999, 2003, 2004). The equalized socioeconomic policies were replaced with inter-place competition, leading to the demise of the equalized and complementary economic development and industrial strategies among different regions. Consequently, industrial growth and new investment were exercised through a distinct geography that depended much on the specific production elements at the local (e.g., corporations, wage labors, assets, knowledge, etc.) (Swyngedouw, 2004). The local horizons of economic cooperation, institutional coordination and political

mediation become essential for affecting the globally oriented policy making and its embodiment (Swyngedouw, 1997).

The connections between global and local seemed to bypass the nation state which used to be one primary scale for economic development and social control. The hyper mobility of productive capital, communication technologies, and forms of consumption against the context of globalization leads to a fierce competition among subnational areas for the territory-, place- and scale-specific ways of socioeconomic development and regulation (Gibbs & Jonas, 2000). It is under this context that existing scholarship on glocalization burgeoned, and the term depicts how global dynamics nurture the local and progress uneven socioeconomic landscape among selected geographies (Humbert, 2003). The inception of international treaties and emergence of global institutions give rise to some global scientific knowledge, identities or the international standards such that some national policies are pushed upwards to represent “universal goods”. However, the contingent combination of local actors, organizations, as well as goals and strategies determines how internationally initiated policies are implemented across places.

Under the context of glocalization, it is important to take local into a detailed examination since local has become a key site of organizing and intervening socioeconomic life, with rich institutional interpretations on economic activities, industrial strategies, the condition of wage earners and spatial development patterns. Local agents and their functional structure are key elements in terms of how international policies are situated and transformed which also determine the state effectiveness on this point. Central to the global–local articulations is how structural coherence could be formed at locale considering not only the institutional designers and actual institutional outcomes but also the functional mechanisms among actors/agents, policy networks, and the strategies mediated in between.

How will localized structure strategically select the most powerful actors, and vice versa, is essential to various manifestations of glocalization. The answer to this question requires an in-depth analysis of the local institutions. The institutional aspect, that is, the inception of both formal and informal rules, as well as the interactions among actors and organizations with an aim of socializing costs and generating integrated outcomes (Amin & Thrift, 1995; Williamson, 1994), is crucial to the new framework and ways of doing. Jessop (2001) developed the strategic-relational approach (SRA) for an institutional analysis that not only allows for the spatiotemporal dimension but also links institution with power and bargaining. SRA model aims to “examine structure in relation to action and action in relation to structure”, in that “structure may privilege some actors ... some spatial and temporal horizons, some actions over others” (p.1223). Likewise, actors reveal a structural preference based on a “strategic context analysis” (i.e. actors learn and are aware of the contexts when they enact social process) (Stones, 1991). The combination between structure and agents are not spontaneous. The emergent structure results from strategic selection of actors and their socioeconomic activities; by the same token, actions will strategically choose the most suitable structure that underpins purposeful social practices.

The SRA model spells out three crucial factors that determine the actual embodiment of some globally promoted policy networks, namely, the structure (i.e., the governance framework), the agents (i.e., participating actors), and the strategies that intermediate between actors and local governance framework. These three components not only articulate the most efficient structure of social practices but also explain how selected spatial extent can address the resolution of information and decisions to enact a means of local politics for an articulated policy objective (Zulu, 2009).

Many studies of glocalization center around the strategic

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