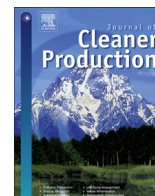




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# Towards inclusive and sustainable transformation in Shenzhen: Urban redevelopment, displacement patterns of migrants and policy implications

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## ABSTRACT

Sustainable urban transformation is a socially inclusive process in which urban residents, including the most marginalized groups, have a representative voice in planning and redevelopment. Nevertheless, the redevelopment of ‘villages in the city’ (ViCs) in China is often an exclusive process in which rural migrants are absent from decision-making, resulting in inequality and a redistribution of migrants’ real income, defined as command over society’s scarce resources. Migrants’ displacement pattern of spatial attachment is explained by their attempts to maintain real income through three modes of integration (redistribution, market exchange and reciprocity). In particular, there is a spatial logic behind each mode of integration: centrality and access are essential for command over resources in market exchange; the limited redistributive resources available to migrants are strictly defined by political territory, which is to a certain extent supplemented by the ‘externality effect’ of public goods; and proximity to social groups gives rise to a variety of reciprocal activities that help migrants to integrate in the urban system. The research outcomes show that displaced migrants exhibit a strong desire to remain nearby and maintain their real incomes. The impacts of displacement on migrants must be taken into account in urban redevelopment projects, since this social group can become more marginalized in the city due to the redistribution of real incomes resulting from displacement. Considering that ViCs are very lively and accommodate diverse commercial and industrial activities, they could be gradually transformed into sustainable neighbourhoods with small interventions and incremental upgrading. In light of this, this research suggests economically, spatially and socially inclusive planning strategies to replace the demolition–redevelopment model and provide pathways towards the sustainable transformation of ViCs in Shenzhen.

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## 1. Introduction

Since the 1970s, the new wave of globalization and trade liberalization has both fostered economic prosperity and led to increasing social polarization and inequality. In particular, urban development under the neoliberalism regime has given rise to urban exclusion in terms of economic, spatial and social dimensions, which is manifested in housing by the proliferation of informal settlements in developing countries. A broad consensus has been reached in the international community that economy-oriented

urbanization is not sustainable and tends to consolidate urban exclusion (World Bank, 2015). Against this background, inclusive urban development and redevelopment has gained increasing attention and is promoted by leading international organizations such as UN–Habitat (2015b) and the World Bank (2015). Flagship initiatives with innovative approaches to the implementation of inclusive urban transformation have been launched in many developing countries.

Like that of many other countries, China’s urban built environment is undergoing a profound transformation. In February 2016, a series of guidelines for urban planning were announced by the Chinese central government. One of the guidelines is that ‘by 2020, the transformation and renovation of existing shantytowns,

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villages in the city [ViCs, or urban villages] and dilapidated houses will be complete'.<sup>1</sup> These transformative processes will no doubt have enormous social consequences for urban areas, manifested as various forms of residential displacement. However, insights into the patterns and dynamics of this urban phenomenon are extremely scarce in China. This study sheds light on this pressing issue, by focusing on the redevelopment of ViCs and the consequent displacement in Shenzhen.

Compared to other urban residents, the inhabitants of informal settlements suffer more economic, spatial and social exclusion from the benefits and opportunities of the broader urban environment (UN–Habitat, 2015b). Local governments often stigmatize ViCs as an urban pathology and many ambitious plans to redevelop these migrant enclaves have been announced (Lai and Zhang, 2015). However, ViCs have played an essential role in providing affordable housing for the majority of China's rural migrants (Lin et al., 2011). ViCs also accommodate a diversity of commercial and cultural enterprises and make a significant contribution to the urban economy. These 'unslumming slums' (Jacobs, 1961) are lively and have great potential to be gradually transformed into sustainable neighbourhoods. Nevertheless, migrants who are displaced from these informal settlements to make room for large-scale redevelopment are seldom put under the spotlight. A main obstacle might be that it is extremely difficult to trace them. In order to understand the impact of redevelopment on migrants, we conducted in-depth fieldwork and mapped the spatial displacement patterns of a sample of migrants displaced from four redevelopment projects in Shenzhen. The research outcome reveals migrants' strong desire to stay close to their original neighbourhood. In light of this, we argue that the dominant demolition–redevelopment approach adopted by local governments is unsustainable and tends to intensify socio-spatial exclusion and inequality. Therefore, more inclusive approaches to urban transformation in China are urgently needed. Drawing upon international experiences, we propose a framework for the inclusive and sustainable transformation of ViCs in Shenzhen, by taking into consideration the economic, spatial and social dimensions of urban inclusion.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In Section 2, we first elaborate on the theoretical basis for this study, wherein following the conceptual thinking of David Harvey (1973) and Karl Polanyi (1944), residential displacement is viewed as a redistributive process of residents' real income, defined as command over society's scarce resources through three modes of integration (market exchange, redistribution and reciprocity). We then review literature on the issue of the displacement of migrants in China, and share international experiences of inclusive transformation of informal settlements. In Section 3, we briefly introduce our study area, research methods and data. In Section 4, we show how the empirical study in Shenzhen led to an understanding of the spatial logic behind migrants' displacement patterns, evidencing migrants' strong desire to remain nearby and maintain their real incomes. In Section 5, we reflect upon the empirical findings and propose an inclusive and sustainable planning framework that consists of economic, spatial and social dimensions of urban inclusion. We give some concluding remarks in Section 6.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. Three modes of integration

To organize our argument, we return to Harvey's (1973)

conceptualization of the 'real income' of residents within the urban system and Polanyi's (1944) notion of three modes of integration. The urban system is regarded by Harvey (1973) as a gigantic resource system. Resources can be either natural or man-made, but within an urban system most of them are man-made, such as parks, health and educational services, and recreational and transport facilities. The real income of an individual is defined as his or her command over society's scarce resources, whether or not those resources are purchased with monetary incomes (Titmuss, 1962). Unlike conventional economic interpretations, this broadened definition of income takes into account not only direct access to resources, but also various public goods and services that have impacts on urban residents' real income because of their externality effect (Harvey, 1973). This externality effect, which is also called the 'spill-over' or 'third-party' effect, is defined by Harvey (ibid.) as an unpriced or non-monetary effect generated by certain activities in an urban system. Typical examples are state-financed or collective-financed infrastructure (e.g. public transport) and amenities (e.g. parks and plazas).

According to Polanyi (1944), there are three main ways for households to gain access to resources, namely through market exchange, redistribution and reciprocity (Fig. 1).

- Market exchange is the dominant mode in contemporary society. In order to engage in market exchange, households must develop a social utility. Most households exchange their labour power in the market; others are self-employed and sell goods and services. These activities generate an income that allows them to buy the goods and services in the market that they need and cannot produce themselves. However, the 'free' market is inherently unequal, and this is partially compensated for by state redistribution (Kesteloot and Meert, 2000).
- Redistribution means the centralization, by a powerful social institution, of resources (goods, money, services) that are then redistributed according to a set of rules. The condition for participating in the redistribution system is usually citizenship or 'villagership' (in the case of ViCs in China) (Kesteloot and Meert, 2000; Lin et al., 2012).
- Finally, reciprocity enables households to access resources through mutual support networks (Murie and Musterd, 2004).

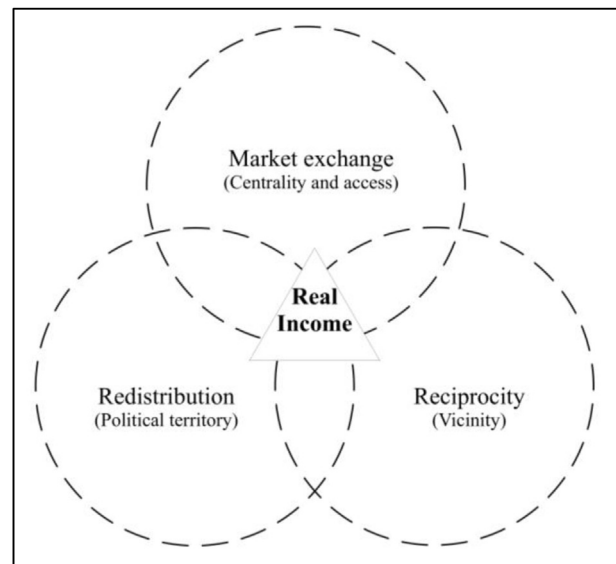


Fig. 1. Generation of real income through three modes of integration. Source: Authors' drawing based on Harvey (1973) and Polanyi (1944).

<sup>1</sup> [http://english.gov.cn/news/top\\_news/2016/02/22/content\\_281475294306681.htm](http://english.gov.cn/news/top_news/2016/02/22/content_281475294306681.htm) (last visited 22/07/2016).

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