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**Public Participation in Urban Renewal Projects**  
A Chinese Perspective

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<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1 RESEARCH LOCATION	5
1.2 PROBLEM FORMULATION	6
1.3 AIM OF THE THESIS	6
1.4 THESIS LAYOUT	7
<b>2 METHODS AND MATERIALS OVERVIEW</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 CASE STUDIES	8
2.2 LITERATURE OVERVIEW	10
<b>3 THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK</b>	<b>11</b>
3.1 COMMUNICATIVE PLANNING THEORY	11
3.2 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN URBAN PLANNING	11
3.2.1 PARTICIPATORY APPROACHES TO PLANNING	12
3.3 URBAN SUSTAINABILITY	13
3.3.1 SOCIAL ASPECTS OF SUSTAINABILITY	14
3.4 URBAN PLANNING AND RENEWAL	14
<b>4 CHINA'S URBANIZATION OVERVIEW</b>	<b>16</b>
4.1 URBANIZATION	16
4.2 URBAN PLANNING	17
4.3 URBAN DEVELOPMENT AND URBAN RENEWAL	18
4.4 URBAN SUSTAINABILITY	19
4.5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	19
4.5.1 INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN CHINA	20
<b>5 CASE STUDIES</b>	<b>22</b>
5.1 YANGZHOU	22
5.1.1 BACKGROUND	22
5.1.2 PROJECT	22
5.1.3 PROCESS	22
5.1.4 RESULTS	24
5.2 XI'AN	25
5.2.1 BACKGROUND	25
5.2.2 PROJECT	26
5.2.3 PROCESS	27
5.2.4 RESULTS	27
5.3 SHANGHAI – TAIPINGQIAO	28
5.3.1 BACKGROUND	28
5.3.2 PROJECT	28
5.3.3 PROCESS	30
5.3.4 RESULTS	30
<b>6 FINDINGS</b>	<b>32</b>
6.1 BARRIERS TO PARTICIPATION	34
6.2 DISCUSSION	35
<b>7 CONCLUSION</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>39</b>

## List of Figures

FIGURE 1: CASE STUDIES LOCATIONS. ....	9
FIGURE 2: ASPECTS OF URBAN SUSTAINABILITY ACCORDING TO WHEELER. ....	13
FIGURE 3: PROCESS OF CAP BY GOETHERD AND HAMDI. ....	23
FIGURE 4: POSTER OF MINI-CAP FOR OPEN SPACE IMPROVEMENT IN YANGZHOU. ....	24
FIGURE 5: PILOT PROJECT HOUSE IN YANGZHOU BEFORE AND AFTER RENOVATION. ....	25
FIGURE 6: BACKYARD MEAT PREPARATION OF THE LOCAL BUSINESSES IN XI'AN. ....	26
FIGURE 7: HOUSE IN THE PROJECT AREA IN XI'AN BEFORE AND AFTER THE RENOVATION. ....	26
FIGURE 8: THE LOCATION OF XINTIANDI AND TAIPINGQIAO. ....	29
FIGURE 9: EXAMPLE OF SHIKUMEN HOUSES BEFORE AND AFTER RENOVATION. ....	31
FIGURE 10: A LADDER OF PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN CHINA. ....	32

## **Abstract**

Based on predictions, almost 60 percent of the world population will be living in cities by 2030. In order to increase standards of living and at the same time to protect the environment, urbanization will have to be performed in a sustainable way. The biggest urban transition is happening in China where urban population increased by 200 million over the last decade, while over 300 million peasants moved from countryside to cities during the past twenty-five years which led to increases in demand for urban infrastructure as well as resources.

In order to contribute to the sustainable urban development debate this paper offers an analysis of public participation processes in urban renewal projects in China. The first part of the analysis is focused on contextualization of urbanization processes and urban planning in China. A qualitative study of three, completed projects conducted in Yangzhou, Xi'an and Shanghai were analyzed in order to answer the general research question of "how is public participation addressed in urban renewal projects". All three case studies represent projects that were implemented under different circumstances, local conditions and with various stakeholders involved. However, the projects also have things in common such as that they were done under the same political conditions and tried to address same environmental deterioration and prospects of resettlement issues.

All of the cases presented here approach public participation in different ways and with varying levels of success. The common denominator in all the cases is the fact, that public participation is considered as problematic and even in the successful cases the processes were not fully inclusive due to various reasons. This leads to a question about prospects of participation in the current political regime in China and to whether urban sustainability can be achieved under non democratic conditions. Since these questions can be debated rather than answered, the main contribution of this paper is to bring more knowledge and understanding to the complex phenomenon that public participation presents. Experiences from the presented case studies can help to understand dynamics behind state society relations in China. At the same time they serve as an inspiration and learning opportunity for future projects to ensure they are sustainable not only from an economical standpoint, but also, a social perspective.

# 1 Introduction

Urban sustainability is an important element of sustainable development. Cities are sources of innovation and culture, but they are at the same time big sources of pollution, consume raw materials, and require large areas with resources in order to meet the population's needs. In many cases, especially in developing countries they are sources of social exclusion and income disparities (Evans et al. 2005). The world population is becoming increasingly urban and in order to accommodate urban population inflow and to promote development without compromising environment requires good urban governance, better planning and effective management (UN Habitat 2009). Good governance is an important element in achieving urban sustainability agenda since it is hard to disassociate the geographical form of the city and its social structures from the government (Evans et al. 2005).

Based on predictions, almost 60 percent of the world population will be living in cities by 2030 (Sastry 2009). Policies in the past supported these tendencies in order to promote economic development and in order to achieve welfare gains (Sastry 2009). However, to increase the standards of living and at the same time to protect the environment, urbanization should be performed in a sustainable way (Sastry 2009). According to UN Habitat, making cities sustainable requires innovations in planning which includes citizens and community participation in planning and management. In theory, public participation can lead to better design of cities as well as accommodation of people's wants, needs but also concerns in planning strategy. Community involvement is therefore considered as an important, if not crucial, element in making cities more sustainable (UN-Habitat 2009).

Planning for sustainable cities should also take into consideration challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. These include demographic developments, environmental changes and degradation, economic restructuring, social and spacial changes as well as institutional. Planning these days has to deal with legacy of past planning practices, which resulted in decreased resilience of towns to climate change (UN-Habitat 2009).

## 1.1 Research location

Historically the biggest urban transition is occurring in China and the magnitude of this process attracts academic attention across various disciplines. Despite the fact that the global impact of this transformation is a contested arena, this phenomenon deserves to be studied for nothing but its size (Friedmann 2005). China's urban population increased by 200 million over the last decade, while over 300 million peasants moved from countryside to cities during the past twenty five years which led to increases in demand for urban infrastructure as well as resources (Ziegler 2006). It is important to mention, that China, compared to other countries, has a lower share of natural resources (Smil 1992). The availability of arable land per capita is 60% below the world average, while in case of water it is 75% below the world average. In order to address these issues, China is revising its urban planning policies and adapting sustainable development agenda in order to secure further economic expansion and urban development (Ziegler 2006).

Wu (2007) argues that the role of planning in China in the past was influenced by creating conditions for rapid economical development and legitimization of the government. Problems created by this rapid urbanization cannot longer be ignored and there are already signs of responses to these problems and issues such as community building, property rights and environment are brought up by central government. However, in order to do so, urban planning in China needs to be re-focused from large scale developmental projects into small scale housing projects, which were so far left unregulated (Wu 2007). Since housing is for people and formed by people, it is important that the needs and

concerns of communities involved are adequately addressed by these projects in order to make them sustainable.

## **1.2 Problem formulation**

China, as well as other countries in South-East Asia has to balance high population growth and impacts of climate change, at the same time sustaining economic growth. Due to growing economic opportunities in towns, China faces considerable rural – urban migration and at the same time environmental degradation. This, together with a growing middle class will require a changing approach from pro-growth urban planning into a long term sustainable one that will provide for “economic efficiency, social equity and environmental sustainability in the shaping of build environment” (Zhu in Harper 2008).

Innovative planning compared to a traditional one is more inclusive, which ensures public participation (UN Habitat 2009). However this participation should be meaningful, socially inclusive and it should contribute to urban planning. According to Tibaijuka (2009), there are certain conditions that need to be met such as political system that allows and encourages active citizen participation, legal basis for these processes, and appropriate mechanisms to ensure that all the involved groups will have a voice and will participate in planning processes which is not always the case in China (UN-Habitat 2009).

Greening projects in China are often criticized for their “top down” approach and lack of local participation and innovation that leads to lack of permanence of projects. Proponents of conservation efforts call for democracy as a solution to environmental problems, while those engaged in urban renewal try to avoid addressing political change as a precondition for environmental protection and rather focus on immediate changes in urban quality of life. Urban greening projects are therefore not seen as a driver for political change (Economy 2005).

However, in order to make these urban renewal projects sustainable, community involvement and participation are necessary. Therefore even without direct call for political change, urban greening projects, if implemented in a sustainable way, have a potential for raising democratic consciousness of inhabitants through democratic processes used in planning and implementation of projects. Inclusive participation approaches can empower ordinary residents to establish voluntary organizations and contribute to the project success through local innovation.

## **1.3 Aim of the thesis**

The aim of this thesis is to contribute to the sustainable urban development debate by researching the current state of urban planning in China. The focus of the paper is on the social sustainability of urban renewal projects and on community participation. There is a larger volume of research done concerning public participation as well as on inclusive urban planning. However there is little research dealing with implementation of these practices in non-democratic countries and in the case of China, in urban settings. Considering what kind of impact the renewal strategies have on the local residents and social sustainability, there is currently little research to be found in this area either. I would like to contribute to the existing knowledge in this area and since renewal strategies are based on visions and are largely influenced by political, economic, social and cultural contexts I believe that this paper may also contribute to the debate on current state-society relations. Understanding of this dynamic is important in order to address sustainability challenges in China and in order to secure that projects that will be implemented in the future will be sustainable not only from economical and environmental but also social perspective.

## **1.4 Thesis Layout**

Chapter 2 opens the paper with methods and materials overview that were employed in order to investigate studied phenomena. This section is followed by an explanation of theoretical and conceptual frameworks upon which the paper is based. Chapter 3 also includes definitions of terms that are used throughout the paper as well as detailed insight into issues surrounding urban sustainability with focus on the social aspects. Section also examines the role of planning in addressing urban sustainability.

Chapter 4 details general discussion on urbanization processes in China with emphasis on historical developments. This chapter further analyzes the different perceptions and framing of the sustainability, urban planning and public participation in Chinese context. This Chapter is an important part of later analysis of the case studies as well as in order to conceptualize the researched subject from overall perspective.

Chapter 5 is dedicated to case studies analysis and it is divided into three sections covering background information about the particular case, description of the project, processes that were used in implementation and results of the projects.

Chapter 6 offers discussion derived from the analysis. It summarizes the main findings and places them into a larger sustainability debate. It also attempts to make recommendations for future projects or research in this area as well as reflections on the analysis. Chapter 7 concludes and summarizes the main points and issues addressed in this paper and it reflects on processes and findings.

## 2 Methods and Materials Overview

There are several authors and researchers upon which I build my work. John Friedman's *China's Urban Transition* was a main resource used in order to understand the urban development from historical and cultural perspective as well as his article *Four Theses in the Study of China's Urbanization*. I chose Friedman's approach to address the research question which is accepting China's unique socio cultural, political and historical circumstances and that sees the developments in China as driven more from within than by external factors. I do accept that this development, especially in last decades didn't occur in isolation; however, it was a matter of my personal choice to focus more on endogenous forces rather than analyzing it from a globalization perspective (Friedman 2005). The decision to take a more endogenous approach was taken also due to the fact that in order to understand urban planning practices it is better to analyze them within the local urban governance practices rather than from outside (Leaf and Hou 2006).

Another perspective that I chose in my thesis is based on Friedman's suggestion to see China from a civilization perspective and not as a nation state due to its geographical size and cultural differences among the regions (Friedman 2005). Case studies are therefore different as well, each having particular circumstances, local conditions and various stakeholders involved. However, all of the case studies have also things in common as that they were implemented under the same political conditions and tried to address similar issues such as environmental deterioration, social exclusion, resettlement prospects and issues with public participation that this paper focuses on.

Based on these assumptions, this paper avoids addressing political issues or making ambitious predictions on future urban developments in China. What it attempts to do is to bring more understanding into the complex phenomenon that public participation presents.<sup>1</sup> I chose to focus my thesis on urban planning as a basic tool for urban sustainability and urban renewal projects where I believe the concept of public participation can be studied the best since in these kinds of projects inhabitants are directly affected by project results.

### 2.1 Case studies

I chose the multiple case study method in order to address the topic of this paper. Cases were selected based on excessive literature review and online search. These include professional journal articles, governmental reports, reports from international organizations, research institutes and international organizations. Due to the character of studied phenomena and time boundaries I chose to rely primarily on secondary resources in order to work with high quality data and as well as allow more time for the analysis. Additional information was acquired from semi-structured interviews with people involved in implementation of projects in order to get better understanding of processes and interviewees point of view on researched issue.

Cases were selected based on various criteria. First of all, they had to be well documented and in English as my own Chinese language is not sufficient for this type of analysis. Another criterion was that they had to be completed within the last ten years and the information provided in documents had to have a relevance to the researched subject.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the paper, public participation term is understood as the right of people to be informed, consulted and heard in the decision making processes that have impact on their lives. For the purpose of this paper, public participation is used interchangeably with community participation and despite not being a silver bullet solution to urban renewal projects it is treated as having mainly positive benefits on the communities affected by projects.

Purposive sampling was done in order to show cases that are different in order to get different perspectives on the issue. Last criterion was the availability of multiple sources of evidence (Yin 2003).

Cases of projects conducted in Yangzhou, Xi'an and Shanghai were selected based on mentioned criteria and in order to answer the main research question "*how is public participation addressed in urban renewal projects in China*". The analysis of case studies is more process than project oriented. I am not analyzing the overall results of projects and their contribution to the sustainable urban development neither the technical details related to the construction work and upgrading of urban infrastructure. Despite this factors being crucial from the sustainability perspective, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyze them.



**Figure 1:** Case studies locations (Google Maps).

Documentation on project implemented in Yangzhou is based on information provided directly from implementation agency while additional information was acquired through conference papers and municipality records. This case is well documented since it was a pilot project intended to be replicated in other locations as a best practice example. Information on project in Xi'an was collected through formal study done in this location. Since it was not possible to obtain sufficient data from the secondary resources, key informant interview was used in order to generate more evidence. Last case from Shanghai is based on formal studies done in this location mainly by Fulong Wu and Shenjing He from Cardiff University. There was sufficient data available on this case since urban redevelopments in Shanghai attract lot of attention of researchers from various disciplines.

## **2.2 Literature Overview**

Except above mentioned work of John Friedman, work of Fulong Wu and Shenjing He from School of City and Regional Planning of Cardiff University served as a great source of knowledge and inspiration in understanding urban development in China as well as social and neighborhood impacts of property led development in Shanghai. Basis of this understanding comes from the book *China's Emerging Cities*, various journal articles and a 500 questionnaire study done in Shanghai in order to analyze socio-spatial outcomes of urban development by contrasting two sites before and after redevelopment project.

The book *The New Chinese City and Urban China in Transition* edited by John R. Logan from Brown University were an excellent source for understanding the dynamics of China's urban transition and the impact that this process had on cities and urban life. These books were inspirational since they offered insight on various aspects of urban changes from scholars from different fields ranging from geography, sociology and urban planning to Asian social scientists. These books helped me to reach better conceptualization of the Chinese urban transition and especially the effects that it had on people's everyday lives.

In order to build my theoretical framework and to gain understanding of different planning paradigms I reviewed various articles from Patsy Healey, John Forrester and R. Warren Smith.

## **3 Theoretical and Conceptual Framework**

### **3.1 Communicative Planning Theory**

The theoretical framework for this thesis is based on communicative planning theory defined by John Forester (1982). This theory is based on Jürgen Habermas and his *Theory of Communicative Action*. Forester suggested that the access to information and understanding the decision making processes is crucial in planning and planners need to include communication practices to their technical work in order to encourage community participation. Forester was concerned with political dimension of planners work and his major work evolved around power use in decision making processes. He also pointed out that planners, in a way they use the information in planning process, can empower citizens (Stiftel 2000; Mahjabeen et al. 2008; Healey 2008).

Except being focused on political dimension of planners work, Forester pointed out how planners can address inequalities and oppression and how they can contribute to building informed democratic communities. His work and theory is important for this paper as it addresses what it means to be a planner and also doing this work in specific contexts. He emphasized not only what planners do, but how they do it (in order to create understanding and change the practice), and what implications their actions have on governance culture, and how these can contribute to the construction of democratic practices (Forester 82; Healey 2008).

Forester acknowledged that planners have in many situations little influence upon implementation of their plans but he stressed that they have impact on creation of conditions under which citizens are able to participate, act and organize their lives. They can do this in many ways through document creation and selection of participants, but the major power in the planning process that they have is their control over information. Knowledge and understanding in communicative planning theory is developed through mutual learning and through communication about challenges, dilemmas and possibilities (Forester 82; Healey 2008).

### **3.2 Public participation in urban planning**

Despite the fact that citizen participation in urban planning can be traced back to the Greek city states and Middle Ages, theoretical foundations for participatory urban planning were first outlined only in 1973 by Warren Smith when he argued that individuals and communities are important for planners as they can provide them with necessary information and judgments of local settings (Smith 1973; Mahjabeen et al. 2008). According to Smith (1973), participatory planning has a consensual aspect and it supports value creation, definition of communities and development of their identity which subsequently leads into more democratic society. He further suggests that participation enhances management of complex environments through creative decision making of participants who can better identify consequences of certain alternatives. This saves a lot of time for planners as well as it leads to better selection of alternatives.

Participation can also enhance processes within society that lead into stability. It also leads to coordination of actions among individuals, groups, communities, agencies and institutions involved in the planning process. It promotes co-extensiveness of power with authority in a sense that it prevents relapse of authority into power since it depends on democratic processes. There are also personal and social aspects of participatory planning such as increasing competencies of individuals and communities. Overall, public participation contributes to achievement of personal, community and society's goals (Smith 1973).

Public participation in planning emerged as a part of communicative planning school in the late 80s, where its proponents challenged the traditional rational model that dominated planning practice in the decades after WWII. There were several theories challenging the rational model before, however the communication theory was the first one that had public participation as a central theme (Stiftel 2000; Mahjabeen et al. 2008).

### **3.2.1 Participatory approaches to planning**

According to UN Habitat (2009), participation is needed but often neglected in practice. There are however certain preconditions for successful participation related to resources, political context and legal system. Cases that show successful participation have in common:

- Measures that allow marginalized groups to have voice in the process and supporting the civil society in order to do so.
- Ensuring win-win outcomes in order to avoid resistance from political representatives.
- Combining direct participation with decision making.
- Overcoming resistance from planners and other professionals involved.
- Learning from participation from other sectors.
- Enhancing participation on city level.

There are various participatory approaches to planning both at neighborhood and city level. On the neighborhood level it is participatory urban appraisal (PUA) and participatory learning and action (PLA) that allow people to identify and prioritize their needs. Community Action Planning (CAP) is used in situations where there is existing community organization. It involves collaborative planning with experts and organizations and it involves residents' input in order to fill in gaps in knowledge during project planning and implementation (UN Habitat 2009).

Other approaches are used on the city level, such as participatory budgeting where citizens vote on the municipal budget and discuss how it will be spent. However, this is not easy to implement under different political cultures since it requires grassroots democracy. Other methods that are used are connected more to development than spatial planning or are promoted by international agencies such as Urban Management Program (UMP) by World Bank, UN-Habitat, and Cities Alliance. International Development Agencies are involved as well by promoting sectoral programs such as The Localizing Agenda 21 Programme (LA21) by UN-Habitat, Sustainable Cities Program by UN-Habitat and UNEP, Safer Cities Program, Disaster Management Program and Gender responsiveness by UN-Habitat, Healthy Cities Program by World Health Organization and many others (UN Habitat 2009).

Despite general agreement on positives and benefits of participatory planning among scholars and planning practitioners, there is also a concern that the current planning practices are dominated by politicians, bureaucrats and planners who are mainly driven by targets and economic benefits. The main criticism of the participatory planning theory is that it creates an illusion of empowerment while manipulation and exploitation is still occurring (Mahjabeen et al., 2008).

### 3.3 Urban sustainability

As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, urban sustainability is an important element of sustainable development. However, discussion about urban sustainability has to be based on the notion that urban sustainability is not necessarily about preserving status quo. Urban sustainability has a potential to expand on what is present and at the same time to address new issues as well as correct problems that cities have (Castells 2000).

According to Wheeler (1998)<sup>2</sup> there are two underlying themes for urban sustainability. First one is a concern for long term perspective in planning and building urban areas. This means expansion of planning horizons and thinking about effects of urban development over 50 years, 100 or more. Another one is the concern about earth's natural environment and acknowledgment that the current developmental model creates ecological and social problems on global scale. Last one is the complexity of interconnections based on the seeing the world as an organic system. This has implications for planning as it requires coordination of economic, environmental and social goals into planning practice and putting equal emphasis on social dimensions of sustainable development to environmental (Wheeler in LeGates 2003).

There is no exact definition of sustainable city, however, Wheeler suggests following aspects of urban sustainability.

Efficient land use	Within already build areas, farmlands and green areas around towns. It includes shift from seeing land as a commodity to a thing with intrinsic value.
Less automobiles	Better access to public transport, decreasing transport demand and bringing people closer to places they need to be.
Efficient resource use	Decrease in pollution levels and waste, wiser use of resources and shift toward flows where resources are reused and recycled.
Natural systems restoration	Making cities more livable by restoring original ecosystems and by doing this, reconnecting people living in cities with nature.
Good housing and living environments	Creating affordable and healthy places for people to live.
Social ecology	Creating healthy communities, including solving social issues and problems. This can be done by communities building and creating opportunities for people and empowering them.
Sustainable economics	Puts emphasis on long term health of human and natural systems.
Community participation and involvement	Considered as a most important element of urban sustainability and it is dependant on functional local and regional democracy with community participation on local planning.
Preservation of the local culture and wisdom	Respecting uniqueness of places and preserving the best of it.

**Figure 2:** Aspects of urban sustainability according to Wheeler.

<sup>2</sup> Wheeler builds his explanations of urban sustainability by seeing sustainable development as one that "improves the long term health of human and ecological systems" while the way in which sustainable development is achieved should be build on participatory processes of all relevant stakeholders. He introduces this definition in order to avoid discussion about the meaning of terms such as carrying capacity or needs that are basis of the most widely used "Brundtland Commission" definition.

### **3.3.1 Social aspects of sustainability**

Social dimension of sustainability receives less attention in academia and practice compared to economic and ecological. The context for studying social aspects of sustainability is formed by globalization processes, new risks and uncertainties, inequalities and growing urbanization (Koning 2001).

Koning further argues that social sustainability is one that is equal, socially just without exclusion and with decent standards of living for all. It can be achieved through education, employment, provision of housing and changes in behavior. Social sustainability is therefore a way by which cities can react to challenges they face.

Ability to participate in societal activities is the basic element of social sustainability. Empacher and Wehling state that social sustainability is contextual and may not necessarily mean the same thing in developed and developing countries (Empacher and Wehling in Kunz 2006). To Koning (2001), social sustainability is normative and can be shaped by education or change of habits and mentalities. Empacher and Wehling, as well as Koning point out that the level of public participation is an indicator for social sustainability. Since there is no single definition of social sustainability, Kunz (2006) offers a summary of its principles:

- the satisfaction of people's basic needs,
- access to sanitary and healthy environment,
- access to health care, education and work,
- physical and mental integrity,
- safeguarding for old age, illness hardships and misery,
- social interaction and sense of belonging,
- spiritual and cultural enrichment,
- social justice with regard to decision making and access to resources (gender equity, inter and intra generational justice, broad participation).

Castells (2000) in his article *Urban Sustainability in the Information Age* argues that social sustainability is critical for cities and depends on the acceptance of plural identities that cities have. This acceptance is according to Castells an important aspect of social sustainability and critical for urban progress. It has to incorporate avoidance of social exclusion and creation of conditions for cooperation and competition within society.

Discussion about social sustainability cannot omit the importance of social capital, which is considered as one of the five crucial elements for sustaining livelihoods together with natural, human, physical and economic capital and therefore are necessary for achieving sustainability. Although there are also negative sides of social capital such as exclusion of outsiders or restrictions of freedom, social capital is needed in order for communities in order to secure equitable and participatory economic development and in order to fight poverty. Except economic benefits, social capital can provide a sense of belonging and norms that guide interactions among people and contribute to the overall society's well being (Koning 2001).

### **3.4 Urban planning and renewal**

Urban planning is a concept describing "territorial governance arrangements that seek to shape patterns of spatial development in particular places" (Nadin and Stead 2008:35).

According to Nadin and Stead, planning systems are derived from social, economic, political and cultural contexts. How the planning is done can be explained by social models that are present in particular society and are derived from common social and cultural values. These shape the relationship between the state, market and the citizens in particular place and influence the policy decisions. Planning is therefore shaped by these models and different contexts and it is nowadays under influence of external and internal pressures caused by globalization and resulting increasing economic competition, accession to international agreements as well as increased cooperation between planners (Nadin and Stead 2008).

Sustainability is an appropriate concept for guiding urban regeneration while sustainable urban renewal should be a community based process directed towards achieving the economic, environmental and social well being of the people through upgrading of the urban areas (Ng et al. 2001). In order to achieve sustainable urban renewal there is a need for collaboration and communication among all stakeholders while taking into consideration all of the dimensions that are necessary for achieving sustainability such as participation, community, environment, equity and economy.

Based on Jane Jacobs (1984), cities are spaces for people and are created by people. They are formed by activities taking place in people's homes, but also in public places. Therefore people should be main beneficiaries of renewal projects and investments should be perceived as social rather than physical ones. Regeneration efforts, if implemented successfully have the power to deal with social and equity issues that present cornerstones of sustainability. They can also promote diversity if they are built on local culture, history and heritage of the community and holistic thinking. Community and its heritage and culture need to be at the basis of projects in order to revitalize spaces and to secure urban sustainability (Ng et al. 2001).

Sustainable urban renewal according to Ng, has to be based on following principles:

- Participation – process needs to be participatory, respecting and using local knowledge and taking into consideration concerns and interests of various stakeholders. Information needs to be available and accessible. Participation has to be viewed as an active engagement with having impact on the future of the project.
- Community – project should respect the history, culture and facilitate community building. It should also meet people's expectations and needs.
- Equity – project should take into consideration distribution effects and prevent unequal distribution of the benefits that could impact disadvantaged groups.
- Environment – urban renewal should prevent environmental degradation and safeguard rational utilization of resources. It should also secure healthy living conditions and improve overall standard of living of the affected communities.
- Economy – overall economic conditions should be improved, not only within the project area but also within larger territory.

## 4 China's Urbanization Overview

In order to get insight into the complexity of the public participation phenomena in Chinese urban context the analysis offers insights into urbanization processes and urban planning in China since the public participation and urban renewal cannot be studied in isolation.

### 4.1 Urbanization<sup>3</sup>

A detailed description of urbanization processes in China are beyond the scope of this thesis, however, I would like to focus in this section on major drivers behind urban transformation. First of all, urban China isn't a new phenomenon. Cities in China can be dated back to already Western Zhou period 1025-256 BCE while temporary migrants were populating cities already during late imperial era from Ming (1368-1644) to Qing (1644-1911) (Friedman 2005; Heng in Douglass 2008). However, China is unusual for its lagging level of urbanization while at the establishment of the People's Republic in 1949, China was primarily a rural nation (Logan 2002). Afterwards, during the Mao period, population in the cities grew continuously and urban population almost doubled between 1949 and 1960 (Heng in Douglass 2008).

Despite continuous growth, there were also periods of rapid deurbanization caused by food shortages connected with Great Leap Forward<sup>4</sup>, changes in defense strategy that moved industry from coastal areas inward and also Cultural Revolution that resulted in sending millions of urban youth to the countryside (Logan 2002). Deurbanization tendencies stabilized in early 1970s and the urban population grew since then. Mao's regime introduced policies such as *danwei* or *hukou* that resulted in harsh rural urban migration controls and shaped the urbanization process. *Danwei*, or a work unit controlled by the Communist Party Committees, served a role of a small city, providing its members with basic services such as housing, health care or food but also entertainment. *Danwei* system prevented creation and existence of public sphere since particular *danwei* were in control of all the resources, therefore the community couldn't develop autonomously. People who were members therefore didn't have a reason to participate, nor competence or willingness to do so (Heng in Douglass 2008).

*Hukou*, was a household registration system introduced in the 1960s that fixed people's residences to a particular place. It defined identities of people as agricultural or non-agricultural and except limiting migration it also resulted in a two class creation between urban and rural residents (Friedman 2005). *Danwei* and *hukou* were designed in order to keep the urbanization cost low in order to finance industrial expansion. Industries were established in rural areas, new urban housing constructions were kept at minimum and later the one child policy was introduced in order to control population growth (Friedman 2005).

The *hukou* system is still present in China and despite considerable reforms it still is a source of social stratification in as it prevents, to a certain degree, migrant workers from accessing urban labor markets and services. People having a local *hukou* have a preferential access to jobs while certain positions are restricted to migrants. Due to reforms, migrants are able to attain better jobs, but they are still more likely to receive

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<sup>3</sup> Urbanization in China was influenced by myriad of reforms ranging from administrative to fiscal decentralization, land and housing reform and many others. For more information on these please refer to Logan, J. *The New Chinese City, Globalization and Market Reform*, 2002.

<sup>4</sup> There is vast literature dealing with Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution policies and their impact on Chinese economy and society. For more information on these, please refer to J.K. Fairbank's *China: A New History*.

manual jobs than people having local hukou. Despite lowering formal restrictions, in reality people with non-local hukou are still with lower status and incomes than people with local one (Logan 2008).

Post 1978 reforms brought many changes to urban life in China which Logan puts into two categories:

- Changing patterns of social differentiation and creation of new social classes.
- Changes in the way cities are build and constructed and urban space restructured.

These two dimensions create a context for understanding urban growth and change in China as a result of modernization of the economy. Social differentiation is characterized by rising income inequalities, growing middle class and position of migrant workers while the city building, and construction it is the commercial land development that occurs on a large scale in urban China (Logan 2008). These projects vary in range from small local to big national ones financed by international property capital. Despite the fact, that there are many players in the development in China, the land remains state owned and the developers are dependent on local municipalities leasing which according to Logan, reveals the contradictions and complexities of a “partially marketized system” (Logan 2008).

## **4.2 Urban Planning**

According to Leaf and Hou (2006), urban planning in China nowadays undergoes the so called third spring period. First spring occurred during the 1950s when Soviet style planning was implemented in China as a result of China-Soviet cooperation. This resulted in industrial master plans creation and residential development of *microrayon*<sup>5</sup> housing areas. This era was followed by “winter” and resulted from Sino Soviet split and the planning discipline became considered as a “bourgeois intellectualism” under the events of Cultural Revolution. The second spring was after the open up policy was introduced in 1978 and third one started in late 1990s during industrial expansion resulting from the Asian crisis where the investments were redirected from the region to China.<sup>6</sup>

Each of these springs refers to a particular political regime period in Chinese history. Urban planning was an important part of the modernization period since it helped to define and materialize visions for modern urban China (Leaf and Hou 2006). In contrast, the current planning of the reform era should be seen more as a part of larger national development project where state tries, through construction efforts, to legitimize its role in the globalization process (Leaf and Hou 2006; Ambramson in Wu 2007).

Market transformation in China resulted in considerable changes for the cities and economic development which according to Leaf and Hou has following implications for planning:

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<sup>5</sup> Microrayons were Soviet style housing areas that were designed in order to address growing urbanization. Except residential housing, microrayons included public service buildings such as schools, shops and playgrounds while they had a good access to public transport.

<sup>6</sup> Important for urban planning was also the Republican Era 1911-1937 that was shaped by western educated intellectuals and overseas Chinese (*huaqiao*) whose influence was mainly visible in southern China cities.

- Recognition of the value and potential of tertiary sector. This has implications for the land prices and land markets development that in many cases are subject to speculations and corruption.
- Difficulty to control rapid urbanization of previous village lands with high density of population, poor infrastructure and buildings structures.
- Inter-city competition for development and investments in construction.

All these new developments resulted in expansion of construction and urban planning has to fulfill two main objectives. To create environments which facilitate consumption and at the same time to bring more value to the cities that they attract further investments. These developments have also social implications of increased income disparities that created neighborhoods with varying access to services. The most extreme example is the so called floating population *liudong renkou* of migrant workers that can possibly create a permanent underclass of displaced rural dwellers (Leaf and Hou 2006).

Compared to pre-reform period, there are new actors in planning such as companies, investors or citizens groups however their influence on planning remains small. On the other hand, the introduction of new actors raises issues with urban governance since state is interacting with new social forces and at the same time it's facing decentralization and rising power of market forces (Leaf and Hou 2006). This is however a question of control and power relations that this thesis doesn't want to address. Future research should be done on this on how these competing interests are changing forms of urban governance and planning practice.

In general, Chinese urban practice has been criticized as being too technical and not taking into consideration social science perspective on planning when compared to Western practice. In order to interpret current urban planning practice in China one has to keep in mind the role that the state has on the urban governance in general. Despite the changes of urban planning in the post Mao period, there is still a continuity in this practice with the past (Leaf and Hou 2006). According to Leaf, the purpose of urban planning in China is nowadays, as in the past, supporting the state led economic goals. The result of this position is, that the main object of planning which is city and its people is still to a lesser extend important to planning than economic objectives.

### **4.3 Urban development and urban renewal**

Many Chinese cities are attempting to restructure and upgrade their urban areas and to deal with the results of the socialist planning legacy. These changes are reflecting the transition to a market oriented economy and are top down led, initiated by the government (Binqing 2008). Since China is facing considerable rural urban migration and economic growth, cities are changing their faces at an enormous rate. Old areas are being rebuilt and changed in order to meet demands for new housing, but also to attract investment.

In the pre-reform era, the approach to urban development was directed at large scale urban renewal schemes led by central government. After the open up policy, the control of central government was shifted to local governments in order to attract investments. Urban renewable projects were directed at improvements in physical infrastructure but failed to address many of the needs of local residents (Qian 2009). Despite the fact that some benefited from the projects, for many inhabitants it meant relocation to different areas. Nowadays, there are some innovative approaches taking place involving foreign partners in projects' planning and implementation, but the pressure of the market and investments still influence the success of the majority of urban renewal projects (Qian 2009; He and Wu 2007).

So despite the fact that experimental approaches to urban renewal are taking place in some locations, majority of the renewal projects are still done by real estate development that is able to attract large numbers of domestic and international capital (He and Wu 2007). This type of development promotes urban and economic growth and it improves the visual appearance of towns as well as housing conditions of inhabitants. However, it has negative socio economic impacts on local communities such as broken social networks or lost job opportunities (He and Wu 2007). These projects also destroy the diversity and vibrancy of neighborhoods and create inequalities. Since redevelopment policies were introduced in China, they were accompanied by demolitions and citizen relocations. In Beijing for example, 4.2 million m<sup>2</sup> of the old city was demolished between 1990 to 1998, while in Shanghai it was 33 million m<sup>2</sup> and 745 000 households were relocated (He and Wu 2007).

Plummer and Taylor (2004) argue that people on the lower end of the socioeconomic scale are the ones who will not benefit from the projects most. It is therefore important for planners to understand the distribution effects of the renewal strategies. In China the social effects are addressed by compensating people and offering them new housing. What is missing is the attention to social networks and to consideration of local inhabitant's interests and concerns. However renewing the physical environment in cities doesn't address the sustainability issues and regeneration has to address multidimensional not just physical aspects of towns (Ng et al. 2001).

#### **4.4 Urban Sustainability**

According to Ng (2004), perception of sustainability in Chinese concept is very different from the Western one. Government officials in China see economic development as a precondition for sustainable development, while sustainable growth is not seen in contrast to economic oriented growth. As a result, economic growth is seen as an essential element for environmental protection and a basis for social and environmental sustainability. This is reflected in a state of cities that face severe and acute environmental problems including water pollution and distribution, poor air quality increased pressure on energy supplies and transportation (Day 2005). In order to address these problems government drafted vast legislation aiming to tackle most pressing issues and introduced Eco Cities development in order to address urban sustainability that are being implemented with various levels of success and mainly focus on design solutions (Hald 2009).

Using Eco City concept to address sustainability is in line with Ng arguments that there is a major emphasis among the Chinese government in the contribution of science and technology to sustainable development while the emphasis on the participatory aspect in decision making is missing. However, as she argues, this social dimension of sustainability is crucial for eliminating adverse impacts of development practices. Since urban planning is not a value neutral process and it is largely influenced by political ideologies, missing social aspects of sustainability have negative implications on urban planning and therefore also for urban sustainability (Ng 2004).

#### **4.5 Public participation**

Public participation in China started with development projects in later 1980s and it was focused on introducing people centered approach to projects and to create a shift from seeing communities more as participants not as beneficiaries (Plummer and Taylor 2004). Participation in China is different from other countries and this difference comes from the unique relationship between people and the state as well as historical events characterized by collective action and mobilization. Changes that took place in China after

1978<sup>7</sup> created conditions under which experiments with participation took place in pilot projects, usually initiated and implemented by international development agencies. These attempts faced numerous problems caused by the low adaptation to local situation and lack of commitment, skills and capacities on national and local levels of government (Plummer and Taylor 2004).

There is an agreement among academics and development practitioners that public participation in China is different, however it is difficult to make conclusions on how different it is. Zhao sees the main contrast between participation in West and China to Western perception of participation that in a Chinese context, participation traditionally has a form of “mass participation that imposes an obligation on the people to cooperate with and support the government and the Party in the implementation and enforcement of State laws and party policies” (Zhao 2010). Plummer, based on various case studies examined following differences:

- Economic reform preceded socio-political reform and economic rights are prioritized over social and human rights. This factor makes participation in China problematic, as participatory activities are dependent on inclusion and social equity.
- Unique features of the centralized system in China with the size, nature and presence of the government in all aspects of society creates conditions for participation that differ from those in other countries. The scale and nature of the governing system relies on strict reporting and monitoring, based on quantitative targets and focus on meeting paper targets by local government officials.
- Attitudes towards the poor and the skepticism about the value of their participation, which makes local Chinese officials wary. In general, they tend to be risk averse therefore they prefer to skip the risk options in order not to endanger their promotion.
- Lack of capacity at the implementation level and lack of commitment to build the capacity.<sup>8</sup>
- Participation in China has a historical significance that affects community members’ perceptions. Communities during Mao period were involved to provide labor to collective production for a cooperative that managed lives of people.

In theory, the public in China has a right to be involved in the decision making processes, however, this remained rhetoric except projects implemented by international institutions that imposed legal requirements to do so, in order to fund projects that were implemented in early 1990s. Cooperation on these projects at this time helped to strengthen the concept of public participation and recognized its role in sustainable development, however participatory approaches were limited only to the project areas, while outside participation remained untested (Plummer and Taylor 2004; Zhao 2010).

#### **4.5.1 Institutionalization of Public Participation in China**

Public participation in environmental protection is based on *Environmental impact assessment (EIA) law*. There are several measures that facilitate public involvement in EIA such as *Regulation on Information Disclosure*, the *Provisional Measures on Public*

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<sup>7</sup> These changes started with agricultural decollectivization in rural sector with resulted in massive changes in countryside. Urban changes came more slowly (Plummer and Taylor 2004).

<sup>8</sup> Attitudes and lack of capacity and commitment are not necessarily specific only to China however they are much stronger there because of the large bureaucracy and the power it has. (Plummer and Taylor, 2004)

*Participation, and the Measures on Environmental Information Disclosure.* Despite these, there are various constraints limiting public participation such as limited access to information, limited impact of the public on decision making and limited access to judicial redress and remedy (Zhao 2010).

Participation is also embedded in the Chinese Agenda 21, Chapter 20, which deals with Public Participation in Sustainable Development:

“...The support and participation of public and social groups is essential to the achievement of sustainable development. The form and degree of their participation determine the rate at which the objectives of sustainable development are realized... It is necessary for the public to not only participate in policy-making related to environment and development, particularly in areas which may bear direct impact on their living and working communities, but also to supervise the implementation of the policies...”

(China's Agenda 21, 1992).

Public participation became the formal component of EIA in late 1990s, however according to Zhao changing rhetoric into practice is more difficult mainly because of the fears of the central government that more open processes would create confusion and chaos and fears of undermining government authority. Despite these, there are signs that the Central Government is becoming more open minded towards more democratic decision making processes. For example the State Council adopted in 2004 “*Implementation Guide to Fully Promote Administration*”, which calls for the use of seminars, hearings and calls in order to get public views in case of decisions that have extensive impact on society and are related to the rights and interests of people (Zhao 2010).

Despite these measures EIA in China is still far from being inclusive and it is more in a stage of nonparticipation. In construction projects, there is a very limited number of projects that are required to do EIA. Only 3-5.5% of projects are required to prepare EIA in China (Zhao 2010). In case that public participation occurs, under current legal regime it happens too late and for too short period which means people are not informed well in advance about the project, don't have enough time to go through all the materials, or don't understand them if they are written in overly technical language. Another problem is the access to a place of participation, which is not always in a convenient or easily accessible location (Binqing 2010).

## **5 Case Studies**

### **5.1 Yangzhou**

#### **5.1.1 Background**

Yangzhou city is located in the central Jiangsu province in the East of China. It covers a total area of 6638 km<sup>2</sup> and has a population of 4.59 million out of which 1.31 million live in the inner city area. Yangzhou has a 2500 years history and belongs to the Chinese cities, which have a record of considerable economic and social growth since the reforms in early 1980s (Cities Alliance 2007). The old city of Yangzhou has a history dating back to Ming and Qing Dynasties and has many places listed as cultural heritage sites. The old town area was deteriorated due to economic and urban development and younger generation and high income residents moved to the newly developed housing areas. In order to solve the situation in the old town and to address the sustainable urban development, municipal government in 1999 decided to adopt an Eco City Planning Approach (Zhu and Sippel 2008).

Eco City Plan was conducted in cooperation with China Academy of Sciences, and under the framework of Sino-German cooperation “Eco City Planning and Management Program”.<sup>9</sup> As part of the plan, the city implemented improvements in urban water management, urban conservation and the creation of eco industrial park. In order to raise awareness among citizens and also to inform them about environmental efforts, Yangzhou municipality opened an Eco Centre that also serves as a place where citizens can share and discuss their ideas related to the environment. The Eco City plan of Yangzhou was created based on participatory principles and preparation of the plan took four years and expertise of external consultants (Cities Alliance 2007).

#### **5.1.2 Project**

The goal of the old inner city renewal strategy was to improve living conditions of the inhabitants by upgrading the area and supporting the “self-help” initiatives with the focus on public participation (Zhu and Sippel 2008). The project was done with focus on processes and gradual upgrading instead of a project oriented (market led) approach that leads to the relocation of a large number of residents and subsequent demolition of deteriorated houses. Residents were therefore encouraged to participate in the modernization of their houses and community as a whole. In the past, residents attempted to revitalize the area on their own and to increase the space of living in houses; however, these efforts did not take into consideration the historical and cultural value of the area. When the project started the situation was as such that residents relied on government decisions and despite the efforts of the team who was involved in project the public participation was very low. In order to encourage the residents’ participation, project team decided to use Community Action Planning (CAP) approach (Zhu and Sippel 2008).

#### **5.1.3 Process**

A Community Action Planning (CAP) was developed by Reinhard Goetherd and Nabeel Hamdi. The basis of this approach is to empower communities to design, implement and

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<sup>9</sup> The program was run between June 2002 and May 2007 and implementing partners were municipality of Yangzhou and German Technical Cooperation (GTZ) on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. Executing agency of the program was the Department of Foreign Trade and Economic Cooperation of the Jiangsu provincial government.

manage their own settlements and it is based on participatory processes that are community based, problem driven and bottom up. Key elements of the CAP are intense workshops carried out from 2-5 days and their goal is to create a development plan with a list of prioritized problems that need to be solved and strategies that are to be taken in order to address the problem. It includes also division of responsibilities as to what needs to be done, by whom and when. Key of this process is that the inputs at this workshop are balanced between community and professionals and that the workshop is taking place at accessible location preferably within the community (Goetherd and Hamdi, 2010).

Stage 1	<i>Problem identification and prioritizing: What are the problems?</i>
Stage 2	<i>Strategies, options and trade-offs: What approaches and actions are most suitable to deal with problems?</i>
Stage 3	<i>Planning for implementation: Who does what, when and how, and how to get it going?</i>
Stage 4	<i>Monitoring: How is it working and what can we learn?</i>

**Figure 3:** Process of CAP by Goetherd and Hamdi.

CAP in Yangzhou started with the selection of a pilot neighborhood in the area with 147 households. CAP was organized by team from GTZ and was coordinated by local neighborhood committee. There were three stages in the whole process, pre CAP, CAP Workshop and post CAP. In the first stage the GTZ team investigated existing problems and potential areas for improvement among governmental institutions and residents (Zhu 2008).

Part of the CAP process was an event “The Old City in My Eyes” where residents were encouraged to walk around the place they live and take pictures of historical and non historical sites. These pictures were later used during the first day of the workshop in order to discuss the historical value of the area. This part of the workshop was focused on raising awareness of participation as well as the historical value of the Old City Area. After the discussion participants highlighted major problems with their streets and houses and tried to prioritize them (Zhu 2007).

Second day of the workshop was focused on further specification of problems and issues with all the stakeholders. Participants visited resident’s homes and lanes in order to determine problems and prepare detailed action plans. Detailed action plans were finalized and categorized on the third day where representatives set out action plans on what needs to be done by whom and what measures should be taken. Timing, financial issues were discussed together with policies that were needed in order to smooth the process. Post CAP phase involved creating guidelines for upgrading that could be understood by residents not only professionals and a master plan of a pilot block which was revised based on resident’s suggestions. Cost estimations were done so that residents could get a better idea of cost estimates of particular measures. Overall the workshop lasted three days and it was located in the area easily accessible for the residents. About 30 residents were willing to take part in the workshop out of 147 and results of their discussions were presented to the mayor of Yangzhou (Zhu 2007).



Figure 4: Poster of Mini-CAP for open space improvement in Yangzhou (Zhu 2007).

### 5.1.4 Results

According to Gerard Sippel and the project team, participating residents were enthusiastic and they were satisfied with the activities and results. Rising awareness and created enthusiasm could indicate that they will take more initiatives themselves in the future. Residents already commented on the master plan for the area and the plan was amended based on their suggestions. They even prepared an action plan to implement short and

medium term improvements in their housing environment and selected their contact persons who will monitor and ensure the lasting participation (Zhu and Sippel 2008).



**Figure 5:** Pilot project house in Yangzhou before and after renovation (Zhu and Sippel 2008).

## **5.2 Xi'an**

### **5.2.1 Background**

Xi'an is located in Shaanxi province in Northwestern China. It has a total population of about 5,41million out of which 420,000 live in a historical centre area. The total area of the city is 3,582 km<sup>2</sup> and the historical centre area is about 12km<sup>2</sup>. City of Xi'an had four master plans that were implemented in about 20 years periods and reflected particular socio economic circumstances. The latest plan covers the period of 2008-2020 and its main goal is to improve physical environment in order to attract more investment (Binqing 2008).

Regeneration of Xi'an was divided into several parts. One of them was the Drum Tower Muslim District, which is declared as a historical area in the downtown area. There are 60,000 residents out of which about 30,000 are Hui people distinguished by practicing Islam. The historical district faced many challenges such as self-construction activities of local residents aimed at increasing living spaces that resulted in decrease in public space, waste of space, poor lighting and ventilation. Structures that were built had poor quality and were in sharp contrast with the historical area. Another problem was the environmental deterioration and traffic problems that were caused by business activity of the local residents. Majority of families own local businesses (selling in front of their houses) while the backyards serve as preparation places, for example for butchering

animals or boiling meat. Due to lagging infrastructure these activities had a negative effect on the environment and also on the living standards of the residents (Binqing 2008).



**Figure 6:** Backyard meat preparation of the local businesses in Xi'an (Høyem 2010).

### 5.2.2 Project

The project was implemented under the framework agreement signed between the Norwegian and Chinese states in 1997. The main focus of the agreement was on environmental projects with focus on water supply however it included also the urban upgrading in the Drum Tower District in 1998. Partner to the local municipality in the project was the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD) and Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU). The project was based on principles of environmental and cultural continuity and its main objectives were to improve the housing conditions of local residents, restoration of courtyards and buildings, protection of cultural relics and sights, teaching program for Chinese staff and communication with local residents (Høyem 2010).



**Figure 7:** House in the project area in Xi'an before and after the renovation (Høyem 2010).

### 5.2.3 Process

Initially, the project was supposed to work with residents through creating activities for them, working with committee and organizing exhibition and other awareness raising events. However the area was facing contradictions on various levels. There were ongoing tensions between local residents and government, between Hui and Han Chinese, and also between various schools of Islam and individual families. In the beginning, Norwegian partners were advised by their Chinese counterparts not to work in the district at all since already in the past locals demonstrated against restoration of the areas and in some cases managed to stop the process. Despite this, the project continued and it involved 5,000 people belonging to the Great Mosque. With help of anthropologists coming from both Norway and China, the project team managed to communicate with locals and overcome their initial skepticism. The majority of people wanted to demolish their houses and build new ones since they were not aware of their historical and cultural value or just didn't appreciate it. One family showed interest in participating in the project and after their house was conserved, rest of community became interested in the project (Høyem 2010).

Financing of the project was done by NORAD, partly by local government and partly by the residents themselves. In total three courtyards were restored with finances available for a fourth, however the residents were not interested. Important part of the project was the improvement of infrastructure and creating access to water and sewage treatment system which allowed people to have private bathrooms and kitchens. Nowadays the area is a tourist location; however, the uncontrolled construction is going on especially among the rich people in the neighborhood. This construction is far from original and traditional Chinese urban landscape and is characterized by modern, concrete, 2-4 storey buildings (Høyem 2010).

### 5.2.4 Results

According to Binqing (2008) the project resulted in the creation of attractive residential area both for local inhabitants and tourists. Streets were widened and houses were restored in traditional Ming and Qing styles. The project involved relocation of certain families due to public space widening, however, these were compensated for and they were able to purchase new houses that were built behind traditional ones for this purpose.

Another part of town was regenerated in a property development way. Local streets in a Damaishi and Sajinqiao areas were planned to be widened in order to solve the traffic problems and to bring more business opportunities to the area. Strategy for the project involved housing removal and relocation of the residents to the outside district areas, while existing low houses were to be replaced by multi level modern complexes. Relocation is problematic among the mainly Muslim residents, since their traditions are linked to the Mosque presence, which is located in the central district, at the same time they have close family ties and their neighbors are in many cases their family. They also refuse the relocation since they depend on local business activities as mentioned above that make them dependent on the urban area (Binqing 2008).

There are around 1,000 households in total that were affected by the project and there were various meetings and discussions between them and the municipal government that didn't resolve the situation. In 2005 the local government started forceful relocation that was followed by local residents petitioning to higher authorities. Based on this, the Ministry of Construction initiated investigation of the practices, however based on mechanisms investigators were only checking whether the current practices are in line with the master plan. In case they are within the master plan that was previously approved by the State Council, it is difficult to question legitimacy of such redevelopment practices.

What the local municipality has to deal with now is the community movement petitioning as well as paying high compensations. From this perspective it would be much easier for the local government to change its approach and to focus on conservation, or community led development instead of market based (Binqing 2008).

## **5.3 Shanghai – Taipingqiao**

### **5.3.1 Background**

Shanghai is a city in Eastern China with a population reaching up to 20 million inhabitants and land area 6,340km<sup>2</sup>. The city is divided into 18 districts and one county (Shanghai Municipal Statistics Bureau 2006).

Plans for redevelopment of the city started after the Cultural Revolution and were driven by a large inflow of migrants. The city had to be re-organized in order to accommodate a growing population and city municipality in 1990s initiated project “365” which was a housing scheme targeted at dismantling and upgrading an area of 3.65 million m<sup>2</sup> of slum houses. The project had a goal of providing “adequate shelter for all” and during its implementation government managed to “re-house” on average 50,000 households per year and 1.5 million people in total. As a result, the physical living conditions of people improved, while per capita living space increased from 8 to 13.1m<sup>2</sup>. However, this project was done through land rentals and property led development<sup>10</sup> and it meant complete removal of old houses and people living in them (Gill 2005; Yang and Chang 2007).

### **5.3.2 Project**

After the completion of the project “365”, district governments continued with their own redevelopment projects. One of the oldest districts, Luwan<sup>11</sup>, decided to redevelop the old alleys area called Taipingqiao. This project is in the literature considered as the most successful redevelopment practice (He and Wu 2005; Yang and Chang 2007). The process started in 1996 and the agreement between government and private developer was aimed to redevelop area of 52 ha with 23 residential objects with approximately 70 000 residents. Projected time for redevelopment was 15 years. Reasons to start with a property led development were twofold. One was a revenue generation and second the houses in the area lacked maintenance and were dilapidated, what didn’t match the modern image of Shanghai. There were also political interests of district government driven by the fact that city government ranks districts based on financial and urban development index. Since land acquisition fees are a source of major revenue for districts it helps the district governments to achieve higher ranking. The urban development index is similar to the financial one and it’s important for district government officials’ promotion (Yang and Chang 2007).

Major funders in the redevelopment strategy were US architectural and urban design firms Skidmore, Owings, and Merrill, Wood and Zapata, Inc., Singapore office of Nikken Sekkei

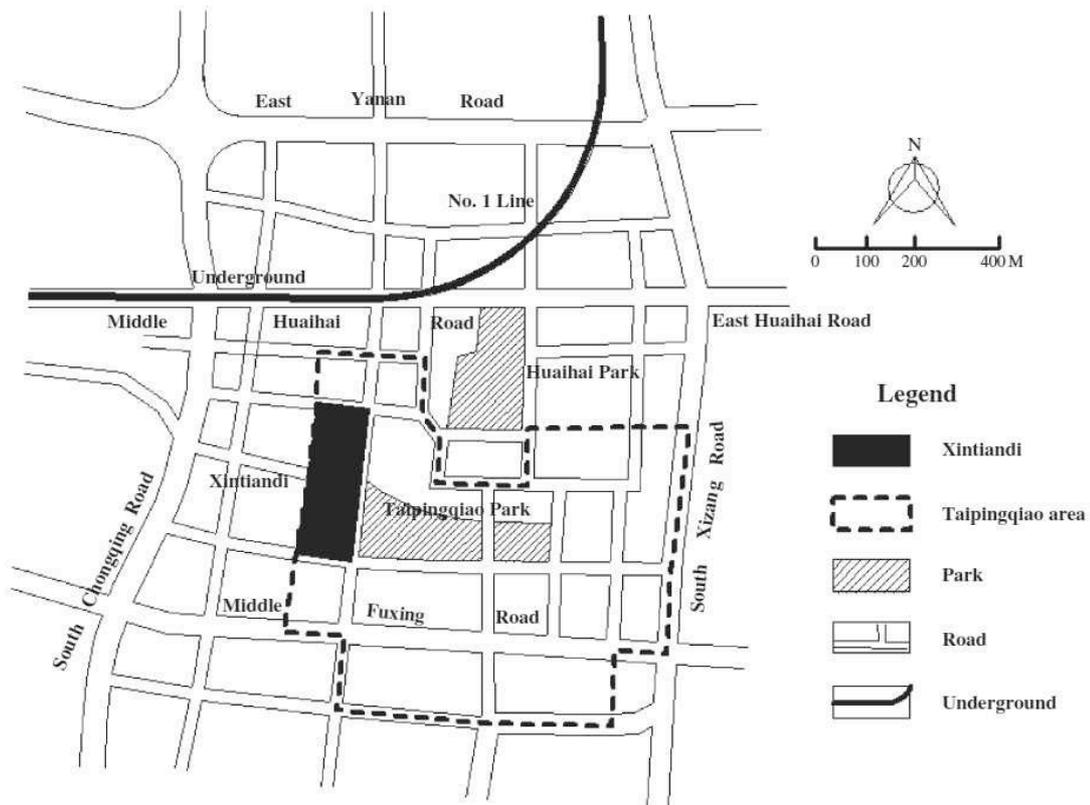
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<sup>10</sup> Property led development occurs when states relies on private property development to drive urban regeneration. It usually involves displacement of residents and public support is provided to private investors creating alliance between public and private sector with central interest on private property. Main criticism is ignoring issues of social integration and community participation. (Turok 1992; Healey 1992).

<sup>11</sup> Luwan district used to be a part of French concessions and it is the most densely populated district in Shanghai. Southern and Northern parts of district were developed into commercial areas, while central part remained housing and residential area. Since the area was densely populated, the district government had problems to attract investors due to fear of high resettlement costs (Yang and Chang 2007).

International Ltd. From Chinese counterparts it was Shanghai Tongji University, and Luwan district and municipal government. District government had an important role in the process, especially due to the fast relocation of residents that is fastest in the relocation history of Shanghai (He and Wu 2005).

Part of the Taipingqiao area, called Xintiandi (XTD) was part of the French Concession in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century and is characterized by traditional houses (*shikumen*)<sup>12</sup> with courtyards that have a historical and cultural value. Shanghai municipality therefore decided to preserve the area but this was also due to the fact that one of the buildings in the area is a location of the first Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (He and Wu 2005).



**Figure 8:** The Location of Xintiandi and Taipingqiao (He and Wu 2005).

Since the building of the first Congress has a historical value, the area falls under *Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics of the People's Republic of China* and the redevelopment should have been therefore guided by this law. Due to the ambiguity and lack of specific guidelines on how this protection should be implemented in practice the protection wasn't the case. Another reason was the fact that the project team lacked the expertise with historical conservation projects. According to Yang and Chang (2007) during the project planning process, rising floorage of surrounding buildings was approved in order to "protect" the historical site of first Congress building. At the end, all surrounding historical buildings, except of the Congress one, were demolished and rebuild as "historical style" buildings and were designated for commercial use.

<sup>12</sup> Shikumens are residential buildings combining Chinese and Western architectural influences. Shikumen style buildings were build in lanes called "lilong" that served as small communities with overlapping public and private spaces ([http://www.xintiandi.com/english/aboutus\\_history1.asp](http://www.xintiandi.com/english/aboutus_history1.asp)).

### 5.3.3 Process

Since the redevelopment was done in various stages, different areas of Taipingqiao residents received different treatment. In general, they were not informed about the redevelopment plan until it was announced by government and developers and they didn't even know when the demolition will start. In case of XTD, residents were "lucky" as they received reasonable compensation. This was due to the fact, that XTD received political attention and it was a pilot project that started in 1999 when the property prices were lower than in later stages. For example residents in other part of Taipingqiao were in 2003 compensated in almost the same prices as those in 1999 while prices went up by 23% (He and Wu 2005). According to Wu, residents had no voice in these projects, which is a common practice in case projects run developers and local governments. Residents don't know how and when the projects are going to take place, neither are they involved in any way in decision making or implementation of the projects. In this kind of situation they can only resume to individual resistance as they are in a position of a "cost" to developers.

As mentioned before, people were well compensated in the first stages of the project, while in later stages they were no longer provided with free housing and even the monetary compensation was decreasing. In the first stage that took place in 2000, inhabitants were offered housing in newly built areas while they could exchange 20m<sup>2</sup> flats for 70m<sup>2</sup> (value RMB168,000) in new area or receive monetary compensation approximately RMB 130,000. In 2001, Shanghai city government introduced new law *Shanghai Municipality Provisions for Implementing Removal of Urban Residents* that changed the way in which compensation was calculated from per person to per household in order to prevent inflating the number of household members in order to increase compensation cost. As a result, based on the new law, the same household that was being compensated for a 20m<sup>2</sup> flat would under new law receive RMB 123 477 (Yang and Chang 2007).

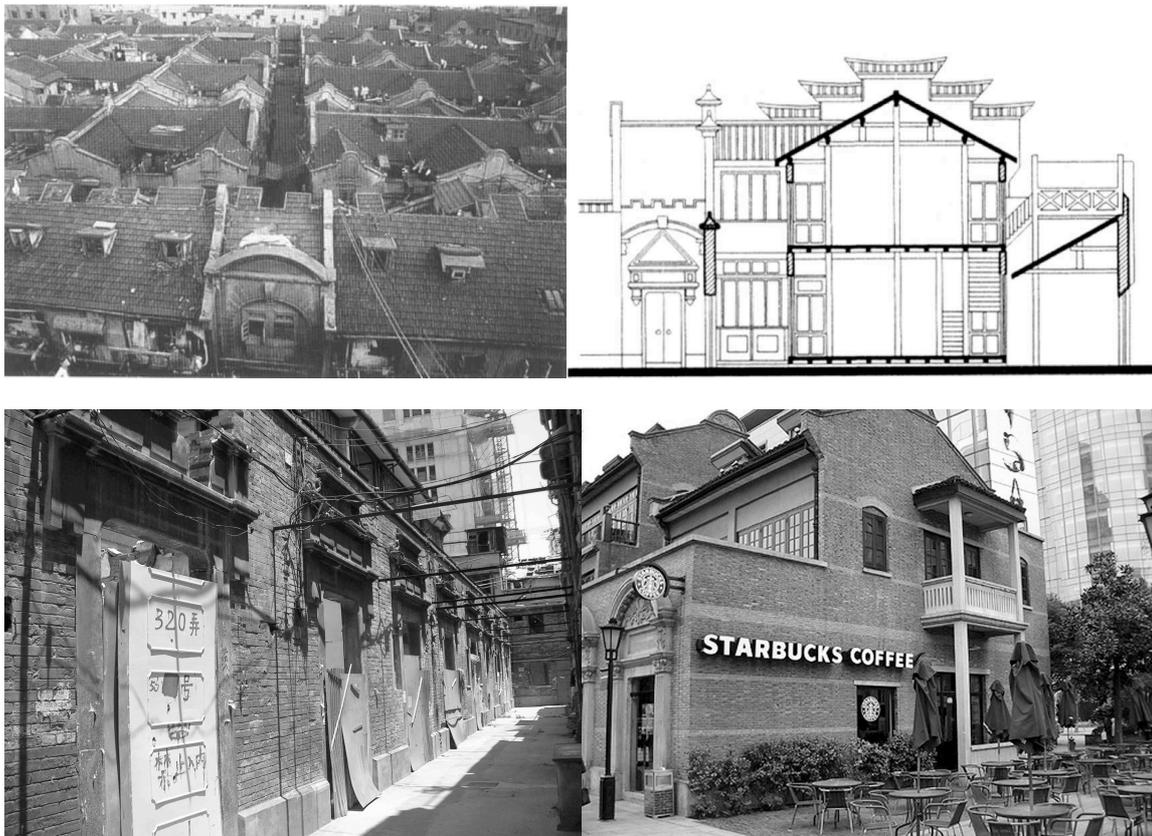
The process of the removal of residents in property led projects is following. The developer first negotiates the prices with district government that includes the demolition costs, transporting persons and the so called service charges that include compensation for inhabitants and the cost for building housing for them. These prices are calculated for overall cost, not per individual household. Relocation is done either by the developer or the "removal companies" that are usually former parts of district government, thus having close ties with the government officials. In case the developer decides to outsource this service to a company, they can profit from the process in many ways. One is to purchase houses in less desirable areas at lower costs or by buying housing where real estate has lower market value. What can also happen is that the resettlement money is used to purchase houses previously build by the developer so basically they pay to themselves (Yang and Chang 2007).

After the prices are negotiated, a removal team comes to demonstrate the advantages of moving to the residents with the assistance of Resident's Committee. The residents according to Yang and Chang have little say in relocation, since its compulsory. They were not represented in the case, but they were very well aware that their compensation will be minimal. What the relocation meant for people, was the fact that they had to give up their cheap rents and purchase housing at market prices (Yang and Chang 2007).

### 5.3.4 Results

According to Luwan district government, around 70% of land acquisition fees went in the project on removal and resettlement of local inhabitants (Yang and Chang 2007). Based

on research in XTD area,<sup>13</sup> He and Wu argue that even though the people were offered spacious resettlement houses, this compensation didn't address the needs of low income residents. With interviewing households, it was found that people have lost their jobs and became poorer after relocation. They lost the opportunity of small business ownership, couldn't afford to commute to town, lost access to social welfare and lost social networks. They were offered a better physical environment, however in peripheral areas with no amenities. Some people lost their jobs since they couldn't afford to commute (He and Wu 2007). On the other hand, XTD area is now commercialized with old fashioned neighborhoods housing cafes, restaurants and it became the "hottest" entertainment district in town. For some it is a benchmark that should be replicated all over the China and a success and role model for historical redevelopment across Asia (Gluckman 2003; He and Wu 2007).

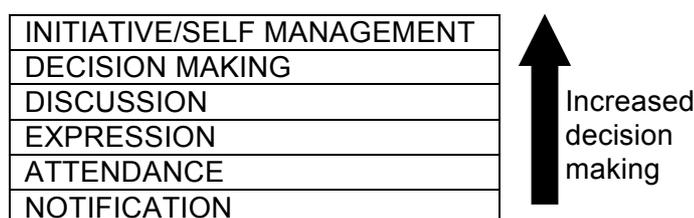


**Figure 9:** Example of shikumen houses before and after renovation (Zhao 2004).

<sup>13</sup> He and Wu analyzed data from 500 questionnaire surveys done in two influential redevelopment projects in Shanghai, among them also XTD. The study was done in order to understand the socio-spatial impacts of property-led development on neighborhoods and to indicate the new trends of urban change in the Chinese city (He and Wu 2007).

## 6 Findings

All three cases presented in this paper show the complexities of a phenomenon that public participation presents in a Chinese context. Historical, political and cultural circumstances created conditions that make public participation practices very difficult; however, as can be seen from the example of Yangzhou, not impossible. Since China has a long history, urban upgrading practices are not only about improvement in physical environment but in many cases also about conservation and preservation of historical relicts. In order to reach better understanding of the participatory practices in these projects, ladder of public participation,<sup>14</sup> developed by Plummer and Taylor (2004) will be used in order to interpret participation practices together with factors that most likely influenced it in respective projects.



**Figure 10:** A ladder of public participation in China.

*Notification*<sup>15</sup> – notifying citizens about activities that affect them with no input from them, widely used in urban areas while making master plans. Government has control over what is disclosed and how and to whom.

*Attendance* – situation under which community members attend meetings, and they are expected to be involved in activities. Decision on what activity it will be, when and how is decided by the project staff.

*Expression* – communities are given the opportunity to express their views, they have space where they can share information, knowledge and where they are notified on plans of government officials. After this process government officials decide on project implementation and activities. The dialogue is two way, but it is not interactive. This form of participation is in many cases in a form of confirmation, where government officials seek community confirmation of their activities.

*Discussion* – communities debate and discuss their ideas in informative stage, the expressions of individuals or community is encouraged. It is possible, but not guaranteed that these will influence authorities. Final decision lies on the authorities.

*Decision making* – community is involved in decision making and has input in planning and allocation of resources. This decision making power is however given to community by another party and can be taken away.

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<sup>14</sup> Plummer and Taylor reinterpreted the ladder of citizen participation created by Arnstein (1969) and reinforced by Paul (1987). Reinterpretation was done in order to better reflect on forms of participation in Chinese context.

<sup>15</sup> According to Plummer and Taylor, considering notification as a form of participation is highly unlikely in other than Chinese context.

*Initiative* – communities initiate ideas and mobilize themselves to make them happen. They have control over the decision but also about who makes the decision.

The case of Yangzhou had clear participatory agenda and was built on urban upgrading experience with taking into consideration local conditions. Political conditions were favorable to the project as Yangzhou was the first municipality in China that adopted an Eco City Plan while the upgrading of the old town area was a main issue of the plan. The main agenda of the project was to demonstrate public participation approach with focus on partnership between residents, private sector and municipal government. Major part of the project was an information and experience exchange in order to demonstrate best case example.

From the reports presented from implementing agency, the participatory approach in urban upgrading process was explicitly supported by the municipal government and changing from a top down approach to the one where local residents have a participatory role and responsibilities was part of the project aims.

This project had a very rare form of participation for a Chinese context, where local community was directly involved in decisions that were to be made. This project can be placed on the ladder of participation on *decision making* and almost reaching *initiative* or *self management* stage. However it is difficult to reach a final conclusion whether the main reason to do so was to really empower community, or just to achieve better project results.

The Xi'an case was mainly conservation based. The main agenda was the improvement of housing standards and protection of cultural relics and sights. As part of this process communication with local residents was included in the project, however it wasn't the main project's focus. Local conditions were different than in the Yangzhou case, project was done in area with tensions among inhabitants, while from local municipality there was an advice not to do the project at all. Public participation was to be included; however, the local conditions prevented its implementation. Despite this resistance from local officials, project team managed to communicate with locals and to establish information flow, but they didn't do any planned activities as it was the case of Yangzhou. This case is on the ladder between *expression* and *discussion* where the project partners mainly seek confirmation of their actions from the community.

Shanghai Project had a completely different agenda from both Yangzhou and Xi'an. There was no intention to include community in any stage of the project other than their participation in removal. Participation in this case can be equaled to compensation since the main discussion concerning local inhabitants evolved around the amount of compensation. Unfortunately this form of participation presents the most common form nowadays. On the participation ladder, this project can be considered at the *notification* stage, where community was notified about the fact that they will be removed from the area. The only participation that was in this case expected from community was in the relocation activities.

Based on the case studies it can be assumed that public participation was successful in case where one or a several of the following conditions were met:

- Local political conditions favor participation – this is the case of Yangzhou where local government supported the project from the beginning and created favorable conditions in order for project to succeed. Local government support can also help to increase credibility of the implementing party in the eyes of local community, who may not be in favor of project from the beginning, as it was the case of Xi'an. In the case of Shanghai local government favored property developers and

prioritized economic benefits over concerns of local community. In this case the public participation remains impossible.

- Participation is clearly on project agenda – Yangzhou project was directed at public participation while at the same time managed to deal with conservation of historical old town area. Primary focus in Xi'an project was preservation of cultural relics but inclusion of local inhabitants was planned as well, therefore despite the local tensions project team was able to and willing to engage in discussion with locals.
- Creative approaches to participation are used that take into consideration local circumstances – the event “The Old City in My Eyes” where citizens in Yangzhou were encouraged to take pictures of the place they live in order to discuss historical value of the area is a good example. This approach shows that people involved in the project were aware of the local circumstances and general lack of awareness of local inhabitants about the value of the area they live in. In case of Xi'an the situation was similar where residents preferred to have their houses demolished instead of having them preserved, however in this case no creative approaches were employed.
- Participation builds upon knowledge, experiences and expertise from other projects - Community Action Plan is a technique used worldwide in order to engage local communities in planning. Project team in Yangzhou was therefore able to build on the experiences from these projects and expertise of people developing the concept while adapting it to the local circumstances.
- There is a continuous work with community and exchange of information – inhabitants have to be involved in all parts and stages of the project, their engagement has to be meaningful and contribute to the project results.
- There has to be trust from local community towards the project team – due to tensions in Xi'an and bad experiences that people had with projects done in the past that resulted in relocation, local inhabitants were suspicious of any new urban renewal activity. This created difficult conditions for the project and together with lack of support from local government it created limited conditions for participation.

## **6.1 Barriers to participation**

Barriers to participation in China were already briefly mentioned in part 4.5.1. This section will therefore build upon those with applying them to findings from the case studies introduced in this paper. Except for the already mentioned barriers such as lack of legal requirements for participation, there are also barriers that are present irrespective of government and these are not necessarily linked to lack of democratic tradition in the government. As can be seen from example of Yangzhou, there are various barriers preventing participation even in cases when supported and promoted by the government or implementing partners. Based on Diduck and Sinclair (2002), these barriers are structural and individual. In general the barriers are considered informational, where public doesn't participate due to lack of access to information, insufficient amount of information or overly technical language in which the documents are written.

Lack of resources is another barrier, especially when there is missing institutional capacity within the society that prevents generation and spreading of knowledge. There can be also process barriers such as unequal opportunities to participate, which prevent widespread involvement as well as the lack of impact on final decision. Lack of motivation, lack of interest and time are individual barriers. Some people also believe that their interests are already represented by government officials or they feel they have nothing to

say on the issue or that no one will be interested in their opinion (Diduck and Sinclair 2002).

Among the structural barriers in the Western countries is the so called involuntary complexity cause by time pressure of modern living that prevents people from participating (Diduck and Sinclair 2002). They find life stressful and already have a hard time to balance work and family commitment, which can be the case also among the rising middle class population in China.

In China another barrier is lack of tradition of public participation, negative connotation of participation indicating voluntary community work and lack of understanding of the concept. As seen from the case of Yangzhou, the major barrier was the perceived reliance on the state that it will take care of everything or lack of confidence in making own decisions. In Xi'an case the lack of trust towards the project was the most dominant barrier.

## **6.2 Discussion**

Despite public participation being institutionalized in China, it is still more rhetoric than practice. In order to make participation meaningful, Zhao (2010) argues that changes in thinking among the government officials have to occur. However these changes will not happen overnight. One thing that could improve the citizen involvement in urban renewal projects would be to institutionalize public participation of local residents in development plans in cities (Ng 2004). Nowadays they are involved in the project only to a limited extend and in case there is a foreign partner involved in the project that is requiring it. However this inclusion needs to be specified to what extend and on which activities should local residents take part. If this is not done, public participation in Chinese context can mean that local residents can pay notified about their removal or they can end up in a situation where they pay for improvement in their physical environment but have no influence on the situation surrounding them. However there would have to be a political will to implement such a legislative change which is probably not possible under the current political climate since it would have impact on property led developments.

According to Binqing (2008), prioritizing investments and economic benefits over community interests is still the basis of planning in China. This is probably not going to change anytime soon unless fundamental changes occur in thinking for making public interests central. The reason behind dominance of property led neighborhood renewals is the raising land prices. Based on Land Administration Act, Article 28, all state owned urban land is categorized and given grades. Land for commercial and tourist uses has naturally higher prices, therefore it is attractive for governments to sell the land use right and change residential areas into mixed use purpose ones. This is in line with attracting investments in the cities and promoting economic growth. Based on this, urban renewal practices are based on economic development strategies.

Property led redevelopment results in physical changes in the environment, but doesn't have sustainability effect which is dependent on long term behavior of the local inhabitants. With presence of foreign institutions and agencies doing projects in China character of projects is changing; however, it is important to think how this presence alters local conditions. Friedman (2009) argues that when talking about planning, ideas travel from the West to China, but it is questionable whether these ideas also become rooted in the system. The projects using public participation processes in China are still in a pioneering stage and test the possibilities for participation within state society relations rather than being the common practice.

However, China has a record of experimenting on small scale and then learning from these experiments, adjusting them and applying on large scale. Therefore the presence of foreign partners and implementation of pilot projects can result in positive change. As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, Nadin (2008) argues that planning systems are derived from social, economic, political and cultural context which can constrain the process of mutual learning but he also argues that these contexts can be influenced by external forces and can also have the ability to undermine the established planning practices.

Friedman suggests, that planners in their work have to acknowledge “people’s right to the city” and to recognize that neighborhoods are “above all spaces of social reproduction”, neighborhood is therefore important to inhabitants even if the physical environment in it is deteriorating. What they appreciate is the special places that have meaning for them, people who live next door and all that disappears when the neighborhood is lost to demolition (Friedman 2009). Mumford (1937) in his essay “*What is a city?*” talks about importance of social needs that have to be “subservient” to the physical city organization and calls for “intelligent public control” in planning in order to prevent the overly technical organization of cities that prevents flourishing of social activities that create urban life (Mumford in LeGates 1996). After all, urban places and neighborhoods are formed not only by the houses and built environment, but mainly by people living in these areas. But according to Cook and Ng (2001) public participation and empowerment of communities in decision making is “beyond the imagination” of Chinese leaders as well as government officials.

Urban planning for sustainable development needs to integrate all the dimensions of sustainability. Ignorance of social dimension and prevention of direct participation of public in planning threatens the long term sustainability of the projects, even if they result in improvements in physical infrastructure and contribute to the local economic growth. Since sustainable development is not seen in China in contrast to economic growth it is hard to believe that participatory approaches will find their way into achieving sustainable future. As Ng (2004) points out, planning has not a big role assigned in achieving sustainability agenda in China and it is not even mentioned in Agenda 21. What is also missing is the recognition of the political nature of planning and the shift from technical plan making to discussing positions with various stakeholders. Planners in China don’t have this role and they will not have it in the future either, unless there is shift in understanding of sustainability.

So what are the prospects of sustainable development in China. On one hand, there are signs indicating possible changes in government pro-growth orientation, especially among new generation of leaders.<sup>16</sup> The current Five Year Plan (2006-2011) reflects recognition of environmental and energy crisis and the focus on sustainable development. On the other hand, skeptics argue that previous leadership already showed concern for environmental issues; however did little to improve the situation (Lam in Wheeler 2009). According to Lam, there seems to be a shift on the state level and in some local municipalities that have progressive leaders, however China is a huge country and in many cases central government is not able to exercise control over many local initiatives and actions. Local officials are interested in promotion and this is done purely based on quantitative targets and local economic development.

Whether China will succeed in its transition towards a sustainable society remains yet to be seen. China is a country with long tradition of strong leadership that can both prevent

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<sup>16</sup> Mark Leonard’s *What does China Think* (2008) discusses current intellectual debates shaping political climate in China as well as world views of Chinese thinkers reflecting on democracy, globalization, US dominance in world politics and the growing influence of China.

as well as encourage sustainable development. If government wants to maintain its legitimacy and gain support of the public, it will have to engage in a discussion with people and to accept growing presence of the civil society. Despite civil society is a sensitive topic in China, help of NGO's is inevitable in reaching public awareness and in promoting government led sustainable development (Lam in Wheeler 2009). The problem for the Chinese government would be to separate this civic engagement from further political action. While this cooperation between state and civil society might be negotiable, the state of the environmental degradation and energy crisis in China is not. What might at the end influence the government's orientation is the fact that the environmental degradation already constrains economic growth by 8 to 12% of GDP annually and environmental problems already led to social unrest, migration and public health problems that the state needs to address in order to maintain its authority (Economy 2005).

## 7 Conclusion

In order to make cities more sustainable and to address challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, urban planning and management needs to be innovative and include citizens and public participation in decision making. To achieve meaningful public participation that contributes to urban planning requires political system that has a legal basis for these processes and mechanisms that ensure that voices of people are heard. Public participation is traditionally linked with Western democracies, this paper therefore tried to bring understanding how public participation is addressed in non democratic regime.

In order to bring more understanding into how public participation is addressed in urban China, this paper analyzed three case studies of completed urban renewal projects from Yangzhou, Xi'an and Shanghai. The focus of the analysis was on the processes employed during the project implementation and on mechanisms used in order to secure inclusive planning and project results.

All three analyzed case studies show various degrees of participation, depending on the aims of projects. Based on analysis following conditions were identified as important for successful participation:

- Local political conditions favor participation.
- Participation is clearly on project agenda.
- Creative approaches to participation are used that take into consideration local circumstances.
- Participation builds upon knowledge, experiences and expertise from other projects.
- There is a continuous work with community and exchange of information.
- Trust from local community towards the project team.

Analysis shows that except for the political regime there are various other barriers to participation in urban renewal projects such as lack of motivation, lack of interest and reliance on state in making decisions. Lack of tradition and negative connotation of participation based on historical reasons present another barrier as well as lack of confidence in own decision among inhabitants, tensions among stakeholders and overall lack of trust towards the projects.

Despite the fact that a bottom up approach is considered as being important for social inclusion and participation in decision making, case studies' results show that government presence and good urban governance are important for the success of the projects, especially for creating positive environment and trust in order to make projects possible. On the other hand, the case study from Shanghai shows the negative social consequence of a traditional top down approach with ignorance to the needs and interests of the community.

The main goal of this study was to bring more knowledge and understanding of a complex phenomenon that public participation presents in Chinese urban settings in order to serve as an inspiration and learning example for future projects, so they are sustainable not only economically and environmentally, but also from a social perspective. Despite the fact that cases presented here are just a very small representation of the overall urban redevelopments in China, continuing research of this subject will hopefully contribute to a change in the current participation practices that will result in more sustainable urban development.

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