

ARTICLE

Comparison of Social Participation in South Luoguxiang and Charlevoix Village Renewal Planning

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ABSTRACT

As China's urban planning enters an infill stage of development, public participation in the planning process is receiving more and more attention. By comparing domestic and international cases, this paper provides an in-depth understanding of how different political systems and community values affect social participation practices, draws on diverse experiences, and explores better ways of participation in China.

Keywords: Urban renewal; Public engagement; Social equity

1. Introduction

As urban planning in China has entered the era of infill development, public participation in the planning process has received more and more attention. This essay will talk about renewal projects of South Luoguxiang and Detroit. By comparing diverse interest groups, their interactions and different ways of participation in domestic and foreign cases, we can more deeply understand how different political systems and community values

affect in the practice of social participation, learn from diverse experiences, and eventually, explore better ways of participation in China.

2. Comparison of Social Participation in South Luoguxiang and Charlevoix Village Renewal Planning

South Luoguxiang is a historic district in the center of Beijing, known for its unique hutong culture and traditional architecture. In the renewal

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planning process, South Luoguxiang focuses on community participation and actors' feedback. The government and planning agencies regularly organized public hearings and symposiums, inviting residents and relevant actors to participate in discussions and decision-making. In addition, the community office played a critical role to oversee and led the participation in the implementation of urban planning. This mechanism of community participation makes the renewal planning of South Luoguxiang more in line with the needs and interests of residents and other interest groups, and enhances the cohesion and sense of identity of the community.

In contrast, Detroit is a city in Michigan, USA, which used to be the center of the automobile industry. However, due to economic recession and population loss, Detroit has faced significant challenges in urban planning and community development. Over the past few decades, Detroit's urban planning has been largely dominated by government and private corporations, with relatively little participation by community residents. This has led to some planning decisions that do not match the needs and expectations of residents, and has sparked dissatisfaction and protests in some communities. In Charlevoix, a village located on Detroit's lower east side, planning agencies planned a new master plan named "Islandview and the Greater Villages" (IVGV), but in the process, many residents feeling that they are marginalized, and they can't reach a consensus with planning agencies and community development corporations (CDCs). These limitations inspired insurgent planners to arise from the resident Charlevoix Village Association (CVA) in Detroit and to intervene in the planning process. (Allison B. Laskey & Walter Nicholls, 2019)

In the terms of interest groups and interactions between them, local government (Community office), local residents, Commercial interest groups such as merchants, renters, enterprises within the community) and NGOs such as South Luoguxiang Chamber of Commerce, are involved in the process. Different from typical situations in many other local planning projects in China, the local government

in South Luoguxiang did not have a strong alliance with commercial developers. Usually, Chinese government attaches great importance to economic construction, local governments regard the sale of land to developers as a fantastic way to increase fiscal revenue and develop the regional economy. However, due to many reasons such as the unique historical and cultural background of South Luoguxiang, the superior government invests rather than the developers and awakening of a sense of social participation, the local government decided to implement a "harmony" and "sustainable" project, Commercial interest groups that hope to Access to business development space, Local residents that hope to Improve the quality of living space and NGOs that hope to promote community participation were treated equally as participants.

Different from South Luoguxiang, in Charlevoix Village, the government and developers are almost regarded as a same interest group (planning agencies). The reason is that Detroit experienced the bankruptcy of the city in 2013, and the government attracted a large amount of private capital in under the urgent needs of boosting the economy, increasing fiscal revenue and promoting regional redevelopment. Planning agencies planned a project called IVGV (Islandview and the Greater Villages) was planned and the area of Charlevoix Village is at the center of it. In the United States, planning agencies came to rely on nonprofit community organizations, especially community development corporations (CDCs), to facilitate resident participation. (Allison B. Laskey & Walter Nicholls, 2019). Local residents in Charlevoix Village, are mostly working-class Black people, they are plagued by community problems such as housing, lacking of public services, and hope that the Renewal Project will address them.

Comparing the two cases, we find that even when interest groups are similarly stratified, their objectives for participation can vary be different, depending on the regional context.

In the terms of participation methods. In the renewal process of South Luoguxiang, government-

led participation is implemented. The community office of South Luoguxiang attaches great importance to public participation, especially the local residents, they are considered to be the most important and influential group. Various methods are adopted to attract interest groups to participate in discussions such as consultation activities, Creation of platforms for communication with community office and for negotiation among the actors. Through this model, local residents expressed their opinions adequately through community platforms, negotiated with other actors, other interest groups such as commercial interest groups and NGOs also played roles in the renewal process.

In Charlevoix Village, institutional participation—common in the United States—is implemented. CDCs are key parts of this participatory approach, as relays, CDCs are variously charged with disseminating establishment norms and discourses in have-not communities, planning and enacting projects in concert with the establishment, normalizing and legitimating projects, and assuaging potential insurgents. But in Charlevoix Village, CDCs failed to help reach a consensus between planning agencies and local residents. On the one hand, the local residents often fail to understand what is being discussed at project meetings due to a lack of planning-related knowledge and information, and on the other hand, planning agencies placed so much emphasis on the economic and social benefits the project can bring that often ignore residents' and volunteers' views and even suppressing their protests. For CDCs itself, Because of their market orientation, their dependence on economic and political resources from the planning agencies, and their overlapping personnel with the planning authority, CDCs have gradually sided with the planning agencies, eventually, marginalized local residents chose insurgency.

About the type of governance, in South Luoguxiang, the community office provided information of the plan and established a multi-channel public opinion expression mode, and listened to the opinions of participants, but the objects

of communication were limited to participants. Residents did not form a group like CVA to represent their own interests. As the “first civil force”, South Luoguxiang Chamber of Commerce, which has played a leading role in the participation of civil society in local governance, still were represents the interests of commercial developers, and residents are still passive participants, they answer after questioned, negotiate after disturbed, so it governance type here should be consultative.

In Charlevoix Village, Planning agencies informed residents of the renewal plan through CDCs and IVGV project meetings, “told them to participate”, but in practice the effectiveness of the notification was worrying. Marginalized residents set up Charlevoix Village Association (CVA) to gather the power of the residents in the community and put forward their appeals in the community meeting. But when residents put forward their appeals, planning agencies turned a deaf ear and even tried to suppress them. There was only one information flow from the top to the next, so it should be the governance model of informing.

To sum up, the renewal of South Luoguxiang seems to be more successful that of Charlevoix Village, no matter in terms of efficiency or equity, The community office did not seem to encounter strong resistance like CVA in the process of renewal, and interest groups especially residents seem to had enough participation. So, are these more successful outcomes the result of better participation structures? Or is it just that the community office did a better job, working more proactively with the community and generously giving residents more attention? Also at the community level, although the CDCs did not succeed in fulfilling its functions in Charlevoix village, it is actually partly due to the extreme situation of economic backwardness, concentrated poverty, and serious racial problems in Detroit, in any case, the CDCs is still a relatively effective system of promoting community participation. In China, the community office is actually a dispatching agency of higher levels of government, and it is even more controlled by superior government than

the CDCs that rely on the resources from planning agencies, and the level of community participation decided by the will of the government, which cannot be a stable participation guarantee institution. It is also worth noting that which interest groups are considered to participate in the project was also determined by the community office. which more reflects a characteristic of government-led participation: it is delegated and given. Is the participation given are true participation? Is the scale of decentralization appropriate or sufficient? What about the lack of institutional guarantee in this model? These are issues that need to be considered.

3. Conclusion

While the condition of both cases coincidentally differed from the context of practice in their respective countries. There still some political features can be deciphered. China's political decision-making is relatively efficient, and some affairs can be quickly implemented through government decisions. However, due to the centralization of political power, government decisions often lack discussion and debate, and are prone to damage the public interests of certain social groups. America's capital-oriented political system is responsive, and the government can respond quickly and adapt to social changes. However, there are many participants in political consultation in the United States, and political decisions need the coordination and cooperation of different interest groups to be implemented.

Although there are still problems, considering the current situation of public participation problems caused by China's omnipotent government, large population base, political system and cultural background, as well as the practical experience of South Luoguxiang's transformation, government-led participation is still a feasible and effective way to enhance public participation, and it can even become a transition, a step, to a higher level of social participation mode, like institutional reform focus on Social participation. Not only in special or historical and cultural streets such as South Luoguxiang, but

even in the urban and rural outskirts of an ordinary county town, the voices of people should still be heard, considered and adopted by the government and planners.

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