



## BOOK REVIEWS

**Planning for growth: urban and regional planning in China** by *Fulong Wu*, Routledge, London, UK, 2015 pp. ISBN 0-415-81442-1.

Fulong Wu analyses a great variety of material to provide an outline of Chinese planning since its origin, tracing the influence of the modernistic approach, imported in the early days of the Republic of China and focusing on its development since the establishment of the People's Republic of China. This book is helpful for non-Chinese scholars to get a basic knowledge about current Chinese planning and various related phenomena. Its content is organized under the framework of governance theory. This is appropriate, since planning is not only a pursuit of spatial form, but also a response to social and economic conditions and, more broadly, to the very structure of societies. Although some of the case studies are detailed, Wu does remarkable work in organizing his material and exploring underlying principles.

China has a long tradition of cosmology and geomancy in city building, but modernist planning only appeared in the late-imperial era. The ideas of modernist urban planning were imported from the West by colonists as well as by students returning from abroad. Yet endless warfare, weak government and economic conditions created enormous difficulties in implementing its principles until the establishment of the People's Republic of China. The new regime created social and political conditions more congenial to planning.

In the early period of socialist China, urban planning was an approach to the implementation of economic planning, notably dealing with the spatial distribution of industries and factories. At that time, powerful state-led industrialization had a strong influence, especially on the task of allocating resources. At the national scale, more resources were particularly dedicated to the establishment and development of industrial cities, while within

urban areas resources were mainly devoted to productive industry rather than to general urban construction. At the grass-roots level, urban planning was implemented by state work units, known as *danweis*. They became the basic units for both national investment and social government. They usually occupied a large proportion of urban land and functioned beyond the control of local city government.

After the enactment of the Reform and Opening Policy, urban planning thrived and gained new prominence in the context of government reform concerned with economic growth. Basically, economic decentralization gave more autonomy to local governments so that they had the power to promote economic development in a context of unprecedented GDP growth. However, taxation reform has led to drastic decreases in local revenue at times of increasing local responsibilities. Land finance and city entrepreneurialism emerged in response. The so-called 'land finance' refers to a financing method that consists of acquiring rural land at a low price, urbanizing it through planning, and selling it at a high price. By doing so in the context of a monopoly land market, local governments could generate fiscal incomes to make up for their taxation reform losses.

During the boom in urban construction, urban planning was a 'quasi-legislative' tool serving the will of local political leaders by legalizing land finance initiatives through frequent planning revisions and by fostering various new town and development zone plans. For local governments, planning is a way to attract investment and ensure urban expansion. Getting the approval of central government could mean loosening up land regulation and the receipt of higher land quotas, so that the city and the regional status improve. Upon realizing the risk associated with land finance and other problems derived from local planning, such as excessive competition, assimilation of industrial

structure, and excessive production capacity problems, central government developed a national land plan and national urban system plan as a powerful counter measure to set constraints for local urban construction. In spite of their differences, local and central government approaches to planning share the common aim of planning for growth. Their effects on China's long-run economic performance remain unclear, as urban construction has contributed to a local government debt crisis. To understand these effects better, more time is needed for them to become fully exposed.

The theory and practice of urban planning as public policy are strongly shaped by certain political conditions. Tracing the history of Chinese planning practice allows Wu to identify specific characteristics of current Chinese urban planning. Different from the Western paradigm, Chinese urban planning concentrates more on resource allocation, which is the legacy of the planned economic system that functioned before the Reform and Opening Policy. Chinese planning is more a part of an inner-government process. What matters is the negotiation between local and central government, or even that between different departments within central government. Public participation and negotiation between stakeholders, which are quite common in Western planning, are rarely seen in China.

Urban planning practice has experienced several distinct periods, but one theme persists as a process influencing resource allocation. Chinese planning is regarded by both central and local governments as a method to promote economic development. The political motivation behind such growth-based planning is China's unshakable will to become a modernized country and to revitalize from the shame endured since the late-Qing Dynasty.

New conditions, such as a decreasing rate of urbanization and the increasing will to restrain urban expansion, has led the central government to propose a planning paradigm shift from incremental planning to inventory planning. As a consequence, professional knowledge structure and planning education in colleges will soon face changes. It is necessary for urban planners to find new methods to cope with this new trend. What will Chinese planning in the future look like? How will the structure of government change? Will planning for growth persist? More research is needed to explore these questions and produce answers. *Planning for growth* offers a useful

background to understanding how current debates in China are framed by the experience of recent, truly extraordinary, decades.

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**La ville parfaitement imparfaite** edited by *Anne-Marie Châtelet, Michel Denès and Cristina Mazzoni*, Éditions La Commune Paris, France, 2014, 275 pp. ISBN 979-10-94148-02-0.

This collection of essays was compiled in honour of Michaël Darin, a founding member and first Secretary of ISUF and for many years a member of the Editorial Board of this journal. After graduating in philosophy and sociology in France in 1969, Darin trained at the Architectural Association in London. He later wrote a thesis under the supervision of Marcel Roncayolo at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales*. Upon returning to France from London, Darin started almost immediately to teach architecture at Nantes while working as a young architect. In their introduction, the editors trace the portrait of an intellectual journey that is somewhat characteristic of the experience of French architects who entered academia in the months and years following May 1968. It was the time of the dissolution of the *École des Beaux-Arts* and its replacement by architectural schools (the *unités pédagogiques d'architecture*). There a nascent scientific research practice took hold, first very influenced by social sciences, then also concerned with the materiality of the city, 'urban architecture' and urban forms, under the influence of Italian typomorphological studies.

Aware of the wide diversity of essays received from eighteen different contributors, the editors deemed pertinent to indicate that all the contributions have in common an interest in architecture and the city, though explored through a variety of research approaches. The book is divided into four parts, interspersed by so-called *interludes*: the 'stratified city' (*la ville stratifiée*), 'scenes from city life' (*scènes de la vie urbaine*), 'scenes from architectural life' (*scènes de la vie architecturale*), and 'analytical studies' (*études analytiques*). The