

URBAN AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Frontier Urbanism. A Chinese Perspective

Funded By	Dipartimento DIST COMPAGNIA DI SAN PAOLO [P.iva/CF:00772450011]
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Context of the research activity	<p>In Chinese rural contexts, modernization often correspond to processes of remaking ecologies, economies, spatial patterns and habits. These changing, 'frontier' contexts necessitate adjustments of traditional methods and processes of design and planning. This means a redefinition of design strategies and discourses, which often trigger opaque relationships and conflicts between traditional societies and new inhabitants, as well as between different dwelling and spatial production practices.</p>
	<p>This research will be conducted in line with the strategy of Politecnico di Torino towards the enhancement of architectural and urban research and design activities in China: thus, it aims at strengthening applied research collaboration with Chinese partners.</p> <p>Frontier Urbanism. A Chinese Perspective</p> <p>Urbanisation of rural, regional, and peripheral China has aims that include the modification of discourse and the retelling of history, as well as the modification of space and the remaking of everyday habits.</p>

Objectives

The Chinese narratives of urbanisation are intimately connected with the broader narratives of modernisation, development, and search for economic, ecologic and spatial equilibrium. In inner rural parts of the Chinese state, this narrative of urbanisation concurrently seeks to maintain socio-political stability and to 'advance' cultural and economic integration with rural regions of China considered as frontiers of urbanization and development.

In other words, urbanisation has both tangible and intangible objectives, which are interwoven, interdependent, and inherently political.

Modernizing is a teleological process, in that it has a series of stages that must be passed through to reach a final destination. The final destination is imagined to be known, is often idealised, and is assumed to be imminent, reflecting what Immanuel Wallerstein calls "the enormous subterranean strength of the faith in inevitable progress." In particular, Michel Foucault and Norbert Elias have also argued that the modernization mission is about 'normalisation' and 'standardisation'.

Urbanisation is often treated as a process of transforming spaces, ecologies, bodies and social relations. In Chinese inner rural contexts, modernization and urbanisation often correspond to processes of remaking ecologies, economies, spatial patterns and habits. This happens, in particular, when rural villages are transformed into urban spaces, when certain agricultural production practices are modified and when assumptions of peripheral behindness becomes an expectation of urban modernity.

These changed, and changing, 'frontier' contexts necessitate adjustments of traditional, modernizing, methods and processes of spatial design and planning. In particular this means a redefinition of certain design strategies and discourses, which, indirectly, often trigger opaque relationships and conflicts between traditional societies and new inhabitants, as well as between different dwelling and spatial production practices.

For these reasons this research project is strongly design-oriented.

What has to be highlighted is how Chinese rural societies experience urbanisation, how they remake their space and body habits, how they define strategies of interaction with new dwellers. In this sense a new project of relationship is needed.

The objective of this research project, then, is to reflect on a different 'rural project, to define design strategies useful to configure better conditions of 'coexistence' between differences, between different social groups, spatial production practices, ecologies and forms of dwelling, questioning traditional classifications and cartographies as well as the clarity of the tools and concepts that we use in our analysis and design practices.

The objectives of this project are:

Identification of characters and problems of contemporary 'frontier urbanism' in China.

Identification of main socio-spatial problems in Chinese urbanization processes and in rural contexts.

Definition of innovative design strategies useful to configure better conditions of 'coexistence' between differences, in rural Chinese contexts.

Strengthening of the existing relations between Politecnico di Torino and Chinese Universities and Research Centers in the field of Architectural, Urban and Territorial Design.

The outputs of the project will be the dissertation thesis of the candidate, publications in peer reviewed journals with open access scheme and the presentation of the results at conferences and workshops. A further expected outcome is represented by the publication of a book related to the identified design strategies.

**Skills and
competencies
for the
development of
the activity**

The required skills and competencies are:

Knowledge of contemporary urban planning strategies and discourses.

Ability to produce critical thinking on territorial and socio-spatial processes and dynamics.