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Community-based planning and social innovation

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Title

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN THE COMMUNITY PLANNING IN CHINA

Text

In the 1980s, Chinese scholars in the field of planning began to introduce the theory and experience of Western public participation to China, and meanwhile carried out the practices. After 30 years' development, public participation in Chinese planning is involved in macro --, meso --, and micro levels of planning, namely urban comprehensive planning, control detailed planning, and community planning. Furthermore, more and more attention is paid to the micro level community planning.

In 1969, Arnstein divided public participation into three levels, namely nonparticipation, tokenism and citizen power in the article "A ladder of citizen participation". And the eight types are arranged in a ladder pattern with each rung corresponding to the extent of citizens' power in determining the plan, it includes manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, citizen control. According to Sherry R Arnstein's ladder theory, we observe thirty Chinese public participation cases in the field of community planning. These cases imply that, first, 77% cases are on the rungs at the degree of tokenism, whereas about the other 20% cases reach the rungs at the degree of citizen power. Besides, most of the cases of tokenism are on the rung of consultation. Only two out of the thirty reach the rung of delegated power. We make further analysis for this result.

Firstly, most of the public participation in community planning in China is on the rungs at the degree of tokenism, especially the consultation gradient. And there is a trend toward a higher gradient——placation. Most of the public participation's action occurs only in the two stages of opinions survey and results publicity. The government will selectively delegate power to the public without affecting the final goals and consequences of the planning implementation, so that the public can only cooperate with the decision-making department to achieve the prescribed goals and tasks, but which ignore the procedural and dynamic characteristics of the planning. In the meanwhile, due to the lack of protection mechanism of legal system, the public participation in the evaluation and supervision mechanism is insufficient, which makes public participation is only become a mere formality. On the rungs at the degree of tokenism, in order to appease the public, the government will adopt the "reward system" and " substitute subsidies with rewards " policies to stimulate the enthusiasm of public participation and reduce the risk of aggravating conflicts. To some extent, residents have more rights to know and say, but limited options and voting rights, which does not have a substantial impact on the goals and results of the planning. In the meantime, the public participation relies heavily on the community planners' and village planners' work. These planners build a platform on



which stakeholders of different interests and perspectives can have their voices. Besides, recently the digital media technology has also promoted the diversification on the public expression of opinions with its characteristics of high-speed transmission and significant influence. Although the government will make concessions under the pressure of public opinions, online communication lacks pertinence and effectiveness, and has not made a substantial apparent advance on the level of public participation.

Secondly, on the rungs at the degree of citizen power, the size of the urban area where public participation process is taken place, the degree of marketization, education level, etc. can effectively influence the depth of public participation. The planning form is mainly based on the old city renewal, and the development mode is market-oriented. In particular, it usually adopts a higher level of public participation when it comes to clear and concrete interest issues such as demolition compensation. Above all, the cases of the delegated power are all through the masses' spontaneous construction of cooperative organizations to encourage the residents to participate in the community planning actively.

Analysis of the above problems, at first, based on education and training to the public, the knowledge of urban planning shall be popularized throughout the society. And the ability and enthusiasm of the public to participate in public affairs shall be fully cultivated and enhanced. In the preliminary stage, this requires the assistance of the government and planners. At the same time, we must focus on training local people with planning potential to become community planners, which drives the masses to participate in urban planning and construction. Meanwhile, the community should create more public communication space, which not only can strengthen the interpersonal communication, also can make public participation as a part of the residents' daily life by organizing various forms of community activities, such as community planning knowledge competition, public comment activity and so on.

In the last, the study shows that public participation in China is still in its infancy, legal guarantee and public awareness need to be improved in the future urban transition.

