

# **Analyzing Incremental Changes in Local Planning Institutions: Investigating transformation process after city-county consolidation in Tainan, Taiwan**

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For two decades, some planning scholars have tried to apply the concept of institutionalism in the studies of planning theory, but most of them mainly focus on how institutional innovation occur in a particular place, or how planning systems vary in different places (for example Pasty Healey, Bishwapriya Sanyal, and so on). Recently, Andre Sorensen proposes a historical institutional (HI) research agenda in planning theory. He argues that applying the HI approach to study the development of planning institutions in a particular place or to compare planning systems in different places can strengthen their theoretical framing and provide meaningful connections between physical and social phenomena. However, applicability of the approach and its contributions in planning studies remains further exploration. In light of this, this study aims to explore the potential of the HI approach in planning research via investigating the transformation process of planning institutions in Tainan City, Taiwan after a city-county consolidation.

Historical institutionalist provides a systematical way to analyze what contribute to the institutional change or path dependence after critical junctures. Historical institutionalism is best known for the concept of 'path dependence' and 'critical junctures'. According to Sorensen (2015, p. 21), '[t]he core idea of path dependence is that, once established, some institutions tend to become increasingly difficult to change over time, and so small choices early on can have significant long-term impacts.' Critical junctures are those moments of major change when new institutions are

established. Collier and Collier define critical junctures as ‘a period of significant change, which typically occurs in distinct ways in different countries (or in other units of analysis) and which is hypothesized to produce distinct legacies’.

Based on two reasons, this study chooses Tainan city-county consolidation as our study case. First, if we see a city-county consolidation as a critical juncture, the case of Tainan city-county consolidation provides a good opportunity to investigate how the critical juncture contributes to institutional change. Tainan City and Tainan County were not only consolidated in 2010, but also was upgraded its administrative level to a special municipality. This made the consolidated government have more authority and responsibility in spatial planning. In order to respond to the new planning authority and responsibility, the consolidated government has to conduct administrative reorganization, to formulate new rules, and to alter existing rules. This offers a chance to have new institutional designs. Second, Tainan city-county consolidation has been implemented for around five years. According to previous studies of city-county consolidation, it is common to take about five years to work out of the system (Reese, 2004), so it may be good timing to conduct the investigation.

In short, this study will investigate the transformation process of planning institutional arrangements and practices in Tainan City after its city-county consolidation. It will assess the change of local planning institutions and its influences on spatial planning practices from a historical institutionalist perspective. The research results will deepen the understanding of how the institutional variables influence planning practices. To reach the goal, two major research questions are raised to lead the study process. First, after the consolidation, whether and to what extent have the planning institutions changed? Second, what are the major factors that lead to institutional change or path dependence in the local planning system of new Tainan City? This paper will demonstrate the preliminary finding of this study which mainly focuses on whether and to what extent the working standards and enforcement rules regarding spatial planning institutions in Tainan are changed after the consolidation and its potential influences on planning practices.

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