

Public Participation in China Urban Planning Development

Han Li*

Luskin School of Public Affairs, UCLA, Los Angeles, CA, United States

Abstract. Public participation usually acting as an important role in urban planning of developing countries. In the process of developing, the government need to build new cities and fix the old areas. However, questions must come with the revolution. Citizens want a new, clean, and orderly city to live that has a safe community with some culture characteristic. During this process, citizens would use the tools to make their requirements to the government. This paper will analyze two examples in China of people trying to make demands on local government. The research question is how do social movements differ from the third-party institutions in the public participation of urban planning.

1. Introduction

As one of greatest work for developing countries, urban planning has been studies by all different scholars around the world. It is an important topic for the governments of developing countries to make a fitful plan for the urban development. A local government would like to make a new city for citizens with enough public needs that also good for city development. During this time, the public participation is playing a great role so that the local government are not building whatever they want.

However, it is not that easy for citizens to make the government hear the voices as the social and political system are also in the process of developing. More public participation is not only asking for the openness of governments, but also the consciousness of people in society. This paper will compare two examples in the same city of China on different building program to analyze how citizens get involved when they are unsatisfied with government's plan. The analyze would show out how public get involved in urban planning of Chinese cities. Finally, this paper will argue the difference between social movements and the third-party institutions in public participation.

The two cases used in this paper are from Guangzhou city of Guangdong province in south of China. Guangzhou is a city coastal city with 18870.6 thousand population and 86.46% of urbanization rate^[1]. Guangzhou is one of the National Historical Culture City and first group of cities that open to the international trade after China open up to the world economy. Thus, Guangzhou develops faster than other province in China, which is also one of the first few cities that shows out developing problems. Thus, the cases from this city could be particularly classic to the statement of China.

The two cases happened in 2006 and 2007, which is the year of developing time of the city. For the first case, Guangzhou city started a new urban planning program to rebuild up the old part of the city in 2007. The

government notices citizens that they are going to take down all old traditional buildings on Enning Road. By doing this, the Enning Road will be build as a new shopping road that might become a new economic center of the city^[2]. The old Enning Road was full of illegal construction, old building, and massive wires. The government believes that they should take down all constructions so a new modern road could be built up. Politicians also want a new economic center can carry up the economic development of the city. However, the civil society organizations and 220 civilians live on Enning Road disagree with the plan and suggest the government to protect historical relic. The local NGOs recognizes the requirement of citizen and intervene into the problem. The government changes plan for few times and finally makes a new plan to keep all historical building in 2011.

For the second case, the local government of Guangzhou city Fanyu area decides to build up a waste treatment plant between two villages. The waste treatment plant should burn away the refuse from the whole area and generate electricity with fire. However, the place they choose to build the factory surrounded by a community lived with more than 300000 civilians, which might threat the health condition of citizens. People then start a social movement to state their requirements. Finally, the central government send officers to learn about the situation and move the plant to a new place with less environmental effect.

2. Problems

In case 1, the government announces a new plan of taking down the old building after the decision has made. Some of old buildings are seen as an important part of the city culture. A new modern shopping center might make more opportunities of economic development. However, economy is not the only thing people wants. In this case, the main conflict of urban planning is a decision between

* Corresponding author: hl8030@g.ucla.edu

modern life and old culture. It is also an important topic for the cities with long history to consider when they have to rebuild some old buildings. There is always some hidden dangerous or problems in the old streets because the buildings or structures could not hold for so many years. Thus, the government must take care of the public safety when doing the urban planning. Usually the easiest way is to take down the old buildings so they can build up new buildings, which is prettier, safer, and fit more in the new modern city. However, as it shows in the case that Chinese people are sensitive to traditional and cultural life by living in a long, multi-culture country^[3]. It is normal to see that in a multi-culture country that people prefer old styles than new things. The longer history a country has, the more aggressive people are on the cultural topics^[3]. People would have stronger emotion of having old lives rather than modern styles. Sometimes the most aggressive groups would think the modern stuffs are ruining their lives. Once people feel that they need to resist to the popular trends, they would be much more difficult to be convinced on accepting new buildings in the area around their living place^[3,4]. The local government needs to balance the relationship between development and history.

Unlike case 1, case 2 is more about new development but not old culture protection. The site selection of waste treatment plant has a close relationship with daily life of citizens. People understand that waste treatment is not the only public needs, a health environment is also important to the community^[4]. Usually, the waste treatment plant would built in the industrial area because the smoke of burning waste will raise the risk of lung cancer or asthma of people living around^[5]. Once the plant successfully build, more than 300000 people will living under the affect of the smoke. On the other hand, the place is also one of the important transportation hubs of the city. The plant site is only 3 miles far from Asian biggest train station in Guangzhou. There is also a wildlife reserve 1 mile away from the plant. The location also have more than three main subway trail going through. Thus, everyone in this city will be impact by the smoke pollution of burning waste because it is almost the central of the neighborhood. According to the possibility of great dangerous to the environment, citizens suspect that the local government are not taking the responsibility of public health. Thus, citizens in case 2 are acting more aggressive than case 1 to make the public participation available.

3. Demands

Citizens in case 1 on Enning Road program are easy to communicate. In this case, there are more elder citizens involved because they have stronger emotion bonds with the old buildings^[6]. The citizens would also prefer a better environment to live in. This wish includes a clean street, enough public services, convenient public transportation, and so on. Thus, citizens in case 1 accept the local government wish of rebuilding up Enning Road for a new economic center to make city more pretty and cleaner. However, Enning Road is an old neighborhood

that full of elders^[6]. It is more difficult for elders to move around for a new place to live. From this point of view, the local government has more elements to consider while they are making a decision. In case 1, the government is only thinking of the normal needs of citizens as they are planning, which underestimate the compilation of the issue. Usually, the local government would choose to pay citizens some subsidy for moving so they can rebuild the area easier^[2,3]. However, the subsidy is not as important for elders as it for young people. The elders would have more emotion with the place they live in because they have been stay around for a long time. It is also more difficult for elders to move than young people. The elders in case 1 would prefer to stay in old place rather than looking for a new house. The old neighbors are also important to them that elders would have less interests on making new friends in a new neighborhoods^[5,6]. In this case, the first conflict is that original neighbors of the area disagreed with moving out for new streets building up. On the other hand, the old buildings that local government wants to take down has been there for more than hundreds years. There are lots of historical decoration and cultural subject in the building. Compare to a new modern shopping center, citizens prefer an old building with cultural relic being protected^[3,7]. The grievances of the public is that local government is only focusing on the economic income but not paying enough attention to the historical culture or real life of citizens.

Moreover, citizens in case 2 is asking more than only moving the plant away. As the local government resist to change the plan for the first time and makes a fake poll result, people start to think of accountability to the government^[7,8,9]. The problem in case 2 has changed from urban planning issue into an acceptability problem of the local government. The unusual action of the local government has raised the suspicion up from citizens. The problem became worse when it might related with some corruptions in the local government. Thus, the citizens in case 2 got angry for the attitudes and actions of the local government. The public participation became imminent because people in the case believes that some hidden corruptions must be found. The citizens are asking the government give a new plan of waste treatment plant and also be honest with the reason why the government wants to site the plant at the beginning.

4. Allies and Resources

Since there are more elder people in case 1 participating with the problem, they find limited resources to help with the issue. Compare to citizens, the third party play an important role in this case. There is a NGO called China Biodiversity Conservation and Green Development Foundation (CBCGDF) hear about the situation and the rebuilding plan of Guangzhou government. CBCGDF is a non-government organization that focus on the green life, environment protect, and culture protect^[8]. The organization introduce them as an organization that work for the public benefits of green and sustainable urban living. Thus, CBCGDF recognize the requirements of

citizens on Enning Road about cultural relic protection. As an organization focus on living environment of the public, they want to join and show the public how they can help on the public benefits so more people could hear of them and give some supports. The organization first contact with newspaper called Guangzhou Daily to make a poll for the public to get a result of citizens' opinion because there are voices that local government never asked before they announce the decision^[9]. After the poll, the CBCGDF have a meeting with the Guangzhou Municipal Institute of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology, which is an institution responsible with the protection of cultural heritage and archaeology. The meeting talk about the Enning Road with diverse culture for hundreds of years and how to protect them^[9,10]. The cultural department of Guangzhou government then publish a new law about protecting cultural heritage and rebuilding of old road. The document is suggesting all local government focus on fixing old building and recover intangible cultural heritage but not taking down to rebuild a city into modern style^[3,9]. The document stops the whole plan of rebuilding Enning Road. However, the department of urban planning only says the plan would be paused but not stopped. This announcement enrage the citizens again because they think the government wants to prolong the process of making decision until the public forget about this topic^[1,10]. CBCGDF then sues the whole department to the supreme people's court for against the national law of protecting cultural relic^[5,10]. The central government finally recognize about the issue and send a investigation team to talk with local government, CBCGDF, and citizen deputy.

Citizens in case 2 are more aggressive with more allies and resources. First, the citizens post problem on the social media so people in other cities could see and support them^[4,9]. The topic quickly draws attention of people from the whole nation. The media are also reporting the newest requirement and situation of the case. More than ten daily newspapers around nation are posting related information. However, the media posts have no impact to the plan. The local government announces in 2009 that the waste treatment plant will be built in 2010 and everyone who against or trying to stop the plan will be sued as hinder the national work^[6,8,9]. This document suddenly enrage the citizens so they work as communities to make litigation. Citizens unite as few neighborhood coalitions to sign on a letter for declaring their requirements^[5]. After receiving the letter, the local government suggest to have a meeting between mayor and 30 deputies from the community that selected by citizens. However, citizens state that they do not want to be represent so no one show up on the meeting hold by the government^[6]. The mayor wait for two hours but never get a chance to start talking. Two month later, an anonymous netizen post on the social media to report that more than one politicians in the local government is taking benefits from the contractor of waste treatment program^[4]. The true reason that local government persist to build waste treatment plant become an important "public event" to the central government because there are more than one citizen reporting the evidences of

corruption after this post. A litigation start again in 2011 by the neighborhood community of citizens. However, this time the public are not reporting to the local government but the central government. Citizens skip the local government and send a letter with more than 100000 signatures to the central government that ask for investigating the local government for corruptions and redo the site selection of the plant^[2,10]. As the central government learn about the case, the National People's Congress Deputy (NPC Deputy) from Guangdong make a public speech that the local government should stand out and claim their position of this issue^[10]. The pressure in case 2 is from the central government to the local government, which is from top to bottom.

5. Outcome

The outcome of both cases are successful that the public meet their requirements. As a result, the government in case 1 agree to keep the old historical building on Enning Road. The government also spend more money to protect more than 100 traditional related building on the road^[1]. On the other hand, the government makes a deed for the citizens. The meeting allows citizens choose their representative join the discussion of rebuilding Enning Road^[1,10]. The community could tell the professions which part they want to keep so the government could make a city with both urbanization and cultural characteristics. The public also meet their requirement in case 2 that the local government choose a new place for the plant. The central government send officers to check on the politician who are responsible to the problem.

6. Conclusion

As it shows above, case 1 and 2 were happened in the same city and both of them spent a long time to achieve the goals. It is clear that the public is choosing different strategies in case 1 and 2 based on the different structures they have. Compare to the social movement, the public organization are acting more orderly and risky.

The process of social movement in case 2 was a mess and always repeating the same steps. The neighborhood communities start litigation for two times and there are more than one communities doing litigation, which cause a confusion to the citizens. Some of citizens are too tired to support the litigation because they have a feeling of doing one thing over and over again without any responses. One of the most important part of public participation is letting the citizens see the feedback or any other progress of their work. Some times the citizens are only asking for responses no whether positive or not. In another word, no information could kill the enthusiasm of public participation. Too much work with less efficiency reduces the willing of the public on fighting for their needs, which also raise the difficulty of social movements. The participatory institutions are more orderly and efficient on making demands. An well-developed institution would have a stable structure with clear work division of everyone. There is no issue for

organizations on unite people for the public benefits because the institution will decide the path to go.

Furthermore, the participatory institutions could act more risky than the social movement. The organizations tend to have a chance to talk with different government departments about the problems. It is also less risky for the institutions if they act against the government because they usually have great impact in society. The local government does not want to mess up with the participatory institutions since they are presenting the public benefits with social power. Unlike the NGOs, people in social movement are acting more carefully to make demands. Citizens are worried about the vengeance from the politicians if they posts the negative information but could not bring the politicians down. As we can see in the case 2, people started to report tons of evidence of corruption only after one person post anonymously online first. A leader that start the social movement might encourage others to join, but the first step is always a great risk to citizens^[11].

However, the social movements have wider net work in society than the participatory institutions. As the example in case 2, citizens use the social medias to get support from other cities. One of the main strategies of social movements is changing the issue of one city into an important public event so the central government could take it serious and pay attention to the hidden problem of local governments^[11]. In conclusion, the public organization are acting more orderly and risky while the strategies of social movements are relying more on few great leaders and wide net work in society.

Although the methods and outcomes of two cases are different, the citizens in both cases are facing the dilemma of participating into urban planning. The culture diversity with globalization and the conflict between history and new technology are raising up the requirements of public participation in urban planning. In this process, the government might choose to build up easier application path or other choices for the public. This will lower the cost of participation of citizens with easier process, which could make citizens more willing to participate with less work requirements. The local governments might also want to advertise the importance of public participation so more citizens could have an idea of participating into the urban planning. Same as education or advocacy of public participation, the local governments could also make a public survey before doing a new arguable urban project. However, the most important is that urban planners need to change opinions so they could fit into the new social environment. As Davidoff says that pluralism urban designers need to see themselves as technician during the process of urban planning^[12]. Traditional city value is no longer the only element to consider for urban planning. The urban planners need consider more about social culture and public interests when they are designing a city. The suggestion for designers is to have a wide knowledge of philosophy, social work, law, the social sciences, and civic design.

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