



Localized place-making and the knowledge-based regeneration strategies – The case of Xiasha Village in Shenzhen



Xiaohong Tan^{a,b,*}, Uwe Altrock^b, Sonia Schoon^c, Juan Zhao^b

^a School of Architecture and Urban Planning, Guangdong University of Technology, China

^b Department of Urban Regeneration and Planning Theory, University of Kassel, Germany

^c University of Applied Languages Munich, Germany

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at scrutinizing the influence of knowledge utilization on the actors' interplay and self-organized localized regeneration of an urban village in China, thereby developing alternatives to simple demolition and redevelopment approaches. In particular, it investigates a bottom-up place-making initiative for the upgrading of Xiasha village in Shenzhen. The case study shows how an urban village may take advantage of its favorable location factors by gradually and relatively carefully upgrading its built environment and developing its assets as profitably as possible at the same time. Despite its crucial role in understanding the regeneration of urban villages, the knowledge dimension is still absent from the respective debates in China. In the case of Xiasha, local, institutional and technical knowledge of stakeholders' rationalities, behavior and interpretations were utilized simultaneously and strategically. Technical knowledge contributed to the idea of a spacious central square; institutional knowledge enabled its implementation; and local knowledge allowed to give symbolic meaning and local identity to the place by making strong use of traditions, historic memories and cultural values when designing the layout and the furniture of the square and its surroundings. Traditional local culture and festivals even experienced a renaissance. With an increasing awareness of the importance of urban villages as living space, more careful and gradual approaches towards upgrading urban villages are needed notwithstanding the low quality and serious urban problems that are very often found in them. The case study shows that the way knowledge is used may serve as a role model for urban village regeneration during high-speed urbanization in China, instead of resorting to simplistic developer-led, socially exclusive models of renewal.

1. Introduction

The economic success and the related rapid urbanization have led to an enormous growth of major coastal cities in China (Friedmann, 2005; Logan, 2002; Ma & Wu, 2005; McGee, Lin, Marton, Wang, & Wu, 2007; Wu, 2006; Wu, Xu, & Yeh, 2007). Due to the influx of migrants and floating workers, not managed adequately by urban planning and development, many former villages next to the cities became densely built-up “urban villages” (*chengzhongcun*) characterized by “hand-shaking houses” (*woshoulou*) on former farmers' plots (Chan & Zhang, 1999; Gransow, 2007; Taubmann & Fan, 2002; Wang, Wang, & Wu, 2009; Wu, 2009; Zhang, Zhao, & Tian, 2003).

Over time, organizational reforms and physical interventions in urban villages were developed and implemented in an attempt to integrate them better into the surrounding cities. Demolition and

redevelopment seem to be the dominant strategy of this kind of urban regeneration in coastal cities like Shenzhen. The spatial restructuring of areas with relatively low densities allows for much higher profits due to higher building standards and even higher residential densities especially in times of urban growth. This well-known process of “rent-gap seeking” (Smith, 1987) can affect even relatively densely built-up areas such as urban villages when the inexpensive self-built hand-shaking houses are replaced by well-planned yet much higher commodity housing (Yang & Chang, 2007). The redevelopment of urban villages depends on a delicate governance balance between the involved actors. They comprise the (local) state, the villagers, which still control their assets economically despite the reforms that have turned their collectively managed land and premises into joint stock companies (JSC) or economic development companies, developers, and urban planning experts not necessarily affiliated with governmental institutions.

* Corresponding author. University of Kassel, School of Architecture, Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture, Room 1109, Gottschalkstr. 22, Kassel 34127, Germany

E-mail addresses: tanxh9@gmail.com (X. Tan), altrock@asl.uni-kassel.de (U. Altrock), soniaschoon@hotmail.com (S. Schoon), juan_zhao@gmx.de (J. Zhao).

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In the case of urban villages, the remainders of traditional power structures within the villages are crucial. The JSC managing the complex socio-cultural enclaves depend on former village structures but are now professionally managed. In this context, the Chinese party-state has allowed for a certain degree of conceded informality (Schoon & Altrock, 2014) and self-organization at the grassroots level so as to find the most appropriate solutions for urban problems. Village communities still have an important stake in the related negotiation processes. Even though redevelopment is embedded in a legal framework, urban villages enjoy creative freedom to find individual upgrading strategies. As village communities have to give up their assets in the case of renewal and get involved into an open-ended negotiation process with developers about compensation, redevelopment processes often take time and can even produce stalemate between the villagers and the developers. Depending mainly on the value of the existing assets, the potential profit of renewal and the planning goals of the local state, a gradual adaptation of the physical fabric, trying to upgrade public spaces and at the same time seeking ways to develop the assets of the village as profitable as possible can become an attractive alternative.

This paper investigates a rare case of an experimental bottom-up initiative to upgrade the urban village of Xiasha in Shenzhen. It draws upon certain qualities and features of the place that play no similar role in many comparable cases. They are embedded into a complex place-making strategy, the elaboration of which requires specific knowledge not only of the history and identity of the place and the needs of the local population, but also of the involved stakeholders' rationalities. The sophisticated use of those types of knowledge can be seen as an indicator for a maturing system of urban regeneration in urban villages that is able to give differentiated answers to the enormous challenge of how to integrate those informally planned areas into modern Chinese mega-cities successfully.

2. Regeneration of urban villages in Shenzhen

The regeneration of urban villages has been a major challenge for cities in the Pearl River Delta over the last 30 years. Local governments are particularly concerned with issues such as illegal property, overcrowding, a deterioration of the environment, fire hazards, and crime, and have therefore framed urban villages mainly as urban problems. In order to address those problems, the government of Shenzhen began to issue various policies in 1986 to fight against illegal construction, which was seen as a central problem associated with urban villages.

Policies issued in 1986, 1999, and 2004 demonstrate the continuous adjustment of the definition of illegal buildings and the related penalties (Altrock & Tan, 2017). However, the government did not strictly impose penalties for a long time, and this stimulated speedy illegal construction rather than suppressing such problems. Consequently, the government finally decided in 2004 that redevelopment was the way to solve the illegal construction problem. A comprehensive urban village redevelopment program was launched, and later the redevelopment of urban villages became the prevailing discourse of the local government as the most feasible solution to address the urbanization challenges when land for development became increasingly scarce. Government reports and planning documents considered land use in urban villages as inefficient. For example, the *Master Planning Guidelines for Urban Village (Old Village) Redevelopment in Shenzhen (2005–2010)* elaborated the urban village problem as follows:

the village environment is hard to improve, life qualities of the residents are difficult to improve, and also the serious safety risk in many village has hindered the improvement of urban structure and land-use efficiency and meanwhile devalued the surrounding land. (Section I, without page)

Motivated by those development constraints, Shenzhen government launched an initiative for an integrated and comprehensive improvement of urban villages. It can be considered the first elaborated

approach to tackle this issue in China. Shenzhen had already tried to establish internationally recognized planning standards. In this context, the redevelopment of urban villages had a particular significance. While a more differentiated approach was promoted, renewal still dominates the practice (Old Town Reconstruction Bureau of Futian District et al., 2005).

On the other hand, scholars have started to emphasize positive facets of urban villages since the 2000s such as their role as suppliers of affordable housing for the urban poor, especially the low-income young migrant population. Consequently, academics have shifted to promoting their maintenance. For example, Zacharias and Tang noted that,

redevelopment means reducing the stock of affordable housing. In the relatively high-wage economy of Shenzhen, reducing the supply of housing to the lowest income groups would mean that service workers would have to commute long hours from remote locations (2010: 231).

In this context, there was a great need for alternative regeneration approaches that represent locally-based interests and may contribute to more integrative development sensitive to the needs of the local population, including migrant workers or the so-called “floating population”.

3. A knowledge-based approach for place making in urban China

3.1. A knowledge-based approach towards understanding urban regeneration

According to the cognitive turn in social science, possessing knowledge is considered to be represented by the basic capacity to act on a knowledge-based approach. Knowledge is often defined in relation to information or data. Knowledge is defined as “information associated with rules which allow inferences to be drawn automatically so that the information can be employed for useful purposes” (<http://www.seanet.com/~daveg/glossary.htm>). This paper aims to demonstrate how the intentional utilization of knowledge contributes to developing refined strategies of urban regeneration. It examines how knowledge and actors' relationships are mutually shaped by each other. Research into the collective utilization of knowledge has made clear that different types of knowledge can be distinguished according to its form (Abel, 2008), the way it is related to action (Eraut, 1994), the sphere in which it is applied (Edelenbos, Van Buuren, & Van Schie, 2011; Getimis, 2012; Matthiesen, 2005), and its use in planning (Alexander, 2008).

In the following, we categorize knowledge utilized in urban regeneration into three types according to its relationship to the actors involved in planning and decision making: local knowledge, institutional knowledge, and technical knowledge (Antweiler, 1998; Concilio, 2010; Matthiesen, 2005). This typology of knowledge will guide the empirical study and analysis in this paper.

Local knowledge could be also called “indigenous knowledge”. It consists of factual knowledge, skills, and capabilities, most of which have some empirical grounding (Antweiler, 1998), much of it taking the form of tacit knowledge acquired through intuition, trial and error, and learning as individuals “experience” the context within which they live and work (Headlam & Hincks, 2010). Besides, local tacit knowledge is mainly possessed and utilized by local residents. The very basis of tacit knowledge held by local communities, the experience generated from living in poverty and deprivation, can preclude individuals from putting their knowledge to practical use (Fraser & Lepofsky, 2004).

Institutional knowledge refers to “knowledge about the systemic and functional as well as formal and informal logics of organizations and institutional arrangements” (Matthiesen, 2005: 7). It is the aggregate mental product of individuals, like meanings, values, norms, and symbols. Attention needs to be paid to the habits and values that are deeply embedded in cognitive patterns of actors and are thus simply taken for granted. Such habits and values are reflected in practices and

discourses.

Technical knowledge in urban regeneration can be seen as a body of expert practices framing planning action (Concilio, 2010), often codified and explicit in visible planning products and relevant policy documents. Experts or specialists are seen as the people “who have special skills or knowledge in (usually) a fairly narrow and definable area,” and they are expected to solve problems which “ordinary” people cannot cope with (Bearel, 1987). People often trust technical knowledge as it is possessed by qualified individuals that received professional training and experience (Booker & McNamara, 2004). Nevertheless, it is increasingly challenged by experiential, perceptive and tacit knowledge (Chettiparamb, 2013).

Knowledge is a fluid resource (a form of “currency”), but also a neglected commodity in urban regeneration, unlike notable physical resources such as land, capital, and labor (Burrage, 2009). Gibney (2011: 621) claims that “knowledge cannot be thought of as either value- or power-free”, as its spatial flow and its impact on wealth spread, social inclusion, and empowerment, is influenced by “the interplay of a variety of factors, including deeper power and resource dynamics”. The knowledge production and exchange are engaged with political practices “that protect the powerful and confuse the powerless” (Healey, 1992: 78). The “forms of power at work in society are embedded with knowledge both of substances (what) and process (how), and equally those forms of knowledge are embedded with power relations” (Hillier, 2000: 34). Therefore, examining how knowledge dynamics shape the relations among various actors is critical for an understanding of urban regeneration strategies.

3.2. Place making in the Chinese context and knowledge utilization

Examining how alternatives to conventional renewal strategies referring to the history and identity of a place play out in the redevelopment of urban villages requires an analysis of the control and utilization of relevant knowledge in framing the urban problems that are addressed in the redevelopment process. For this purpose, the evolution of the redevelopment strategy in Xiasha is seen as a case of place-making that is achieved by a better integration of local knowledge into the planning process. A key mechanism in this respect is the leeway for experimental upgrading that has allowed for bottom-up initiatives after the formal integration of urban villages into the city of Shenzhen, when redevelopment strategies were only gradually being formulated.

In this context, the rapid mega-urbanization of Chinese cities had raised the question of how local identities may be shaped, and whether there is scope for an integration of migrants into fast developing cities that are more than just anonymous faceless agglomerations. Little has been written in terms of the possible role of place-making in that context (Clark, 1998; Feuchtwang, 2004; Friedmann, 2007). Some of the literature deals rather with the struggle to become a world-class city with a clear focus on global branding and inward investment (Wu, 2000), leaving open what place-making could mean at the neighborhood level. Friedmann, although full of respect for the idea of “community construction” by the Chinese government, somewhat sceptically summarizes the observable challenges for the creation of liveable communities in China's mega-cities as follows:

Place-making in today's China is a contested process. The city is filling up with immense, architect-designed, non-place spaces, from airports and subways to luxury hotels, office towers and suburban malls. But ... ‘no one lives in the world in general’ but in localities where human ties and familiar landscapes give rise to sentiments of place, providing shelter against the vicissitudes of life. ... the zeitgeist is against us: in a globalizing world, mega-projects trump the small, humanized spaces of the city most of the time. Meanwhile, there is much to be learned about the actual processes of place-making and breaking in Chinese cities. Both are potentially rich

topics for research. The community construction program being implemented by the Ministry of Civil Affairs is one such topic. Another is popular resistance to the erasure of places. A third and very promising topic is the revival of popular religion A fourth is the question of the actual role of an emerging civil society in the formal and informal arrangements of neighborhood governance. (2007:277)

In Friedmann's words, the loss of places with identities and sense of belonging is caused by unprecedented rapid demolition and large-scale redevelopment in China. Owing to the fact that local communities are often precluded from putting their local knowledge into practice, the “collective” is usually dependent on “experts” to transform its knowledge into action, thereby excluding local knowledge (Headlam & Hincks, 2010). The place-making concept allows for a closer examination of how active and permanent interventions into a spatial setting change its character as a place. This is the context in which development, planning and design professionals act when they try to upgrade urban environments with the aim of providing anchors for identity construction. In this sense, place-making is the “way all of us as human beings transform the places in which we find ourselves into places in which we live” (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995:1). Bürkner (2005) sees it as “the strategic component in processes of space- and place-related formation of identity and the use of culturally coded locational attributes in urban development processes”. Fürst, Lahner, and Zimmermann (2004: 38) understand it as “collective process of designing spaces with the objective of improving the possibilities of using space and the quality of life and of appropriating space socio-emotionally”. Thus, it is closely tied to the utilization of local knowledge, indispensable for identity construction in urban village regeneration and building on the experiences of local residents (Fraser & Lepofsky, 2004).

The analysis of Xiasha Village regeneration serves as a case study that allows exploring some of the topics called for by Friedmann. It conducts a closer and fresh look into how knowledge utilization contributes to localized place-making and enables us to identify how the different types of knowledge play out in urban regeneration.

4. Xiasha Village: localized place-making pioneer

Xiasha is located in the south of Futian district in Shenzhen. It has been proactively implementing regeneration projects for the urban villages since the 1990s. Thus, the actions of upgrading a public square with temples, recreation areas, an underground parking lot, a swimming pool, and a museum were all initiated and implemented by the urban village itself. This project enjoys a reputation as an example of careful and prominent bottom-up upgrading of public space. The urbanization method in Xiasha differs from those in many other urban villages that have insufficient public space due to over-densified illegal construction or large-scale demolition through property-led redevelopment. The findings presented in this paper originate from extensive field research on urban village redevelopment and related urban governance conducted by the authors between 2007 and 2017. The empirical work started at the grassroots level, first exploring phenomenological characteristics of the urban village as well as the opinions and experiences of original and migrant populations living there. Monitoring the process of redevelopment through participatory observations and ethnographic descriptions allowed for an in-depth understanding. Building on that, higher-ranking stakeholders could be interviewed. These are e.g. representatives of urban planning authorities on municipal and district levels, real estate agencies, government officials, lawyers, planners working on site, the staff of Xiasha JSC, and last but not least the head of Xiasha village himself. 25 semi-structured interviews have been conducted between 2008 and 2017 (see Table 1). A major concern was the reconstruction of the planning processes guiding the subsequent transformations of the village. Due to the lack of

Table 1

List of interviewees.

Interviewee	Interview date
Former chief government official from urban regeneration office in the Futian District in Shenzhen	March 09, 2016; February 02, 2015
Principal planner in Shenzhen Planning and Land Resource Development Research Center	March 21, 2017; March 11, 2016
Researcher and Planner in Shenzhen Planning and Land Resource Development Research Center	February 5, 2015
Planner specialized in and well-known for urban regeneration from Planning and Research Institute in Shenzhen	March 23, 2017; March 4, 2016; February 3, 2015
Chief Planner from Planning and Research Institute in Shenzhen	March 10, 2016; January 30, 2015
Planner from Planning and Research Institute in Shenzhen	March 08, 2016
Project manager responsible for central square renovation and construction	March 14, 2008
Villager	March 16, 2010
Village head	March 20, 2009
Principal planner of regeneration planning from China Academy of Urban Planning and Design	March 07, 2016; January 28, 2015; March 17, 2010
Lawyer specialized in urban regeneration in Jingwei Law Company in Shenzhen	March 22, 2017; March 16, 2010
Anthropologist and artist that shows public concern in demolition of urban village	March 09, 2016
Experienced researcher from China Development Institute	March 10, 2016
Planner working as manager of urban regeneration department in real estate company	February 5, 2015
Government official from Planning and Land Resource Committee in Shenzhen	March 17, 2010
Associate Professor in Graduate School of Peking University	January 29, 2015
Official of Three Old office of Baiyun District in Guangzhou	February 25, 2011

scholarly literature and newspaper articles about Xiasha, much of the information was gained from interviews and an exchange with the villagers about archival material. Additionally, urban planning offices provided frequent updates of planning documents and allowed for participation in meetings. Besides, the interviews dealt with the stakeholders' rationalities, the background they built their argumentation strategies upon, their major points of intervention into the planning processes and their interactions in decision-making.

4.1. Construction of a central park as cultural square

Xiasha was originally composed of six natural villages,¹ and the villagers made their living by fishing, raising oysters, and farming before the 1980s. A majority of the villagers belongs to the Huang clan. Before the reform and opening-up policy was issued, Xiasha consisted of one- or two-floored traditional farmhouses, ponds, ancestral temples, and farmland around the main residential area. In the 1980s, with the development of the Sanlaiyibu company in the area, factories were built within and around the village. Villagers began to erect tenement buildings and rented them out to migrant workers. Due to the rapid urbanization, farmland around the village was gradually expropriated by the government. Over time, the typical urban village with numerous hand-shaking houses emerged. Until 1992, the only open space in the village was a playground that included a basketball court and two small sports fields. In 1992, the government of Shenzhen issued the "Interim Regulation of Urbanization of Villages in Shenzhen Special Economic Zone" (Shenzhen Municipal Government, 1992). It subsequently led to an integration of villages into the city by transforming the local village committee into a JSC, awarding the villagers citizenship of Shenzhen, reforming the land rights. Six natural villages were combined into one united administrative village called Xiasha.

In 1992, Xiasha Village hired a planning and design company from England to formulate a plan² (see Fig. 1) offering the idea of a central park in the village for the first time. To implement it, the JSC convinced hundreds of villagers to relocate, and 876 old residential buildings were

torn down within one month. The construction of the central park was conducted by Xiasha JSC, transforming a land parcel of 25,000 m² into a central square³ (see Fig. 2). The latter was composed of a sports facility and public open space with two renovated temples as historical buildings. One temple with an 800-year history, called Yanghuang Temple, is a very important historical building in Xiasha renovated in 1992. Since 1994, the JSC constructed roads and sewage pipes. One villager who worked in JSC said that,

as you know, there are actually infrastructures and municipal constructions, it is very difficult for our joint stock company to take up all the tasks. Therefore, we really need the support from the government, either on the planning or technology. ...The government at that time didn't have relevant policies to provide financial subsidies to the rural area. We have constructed 16 roads, and we have done it all by ourselves. Over so many years, those infrastructures, municipal constructions, and supporting facilities have cost us hundreds of millions. (Interview on March 20, 2009)

Planning in 1992 was initiated and implemented by the village independently and proactively. Local efforts in the construction of the open space, which served to satisfy the villagers' and residents' daily leisure and recreation demands, was quite a rare phenomenon at that time, as most urban villages were still dominated by the illegal building boom of the 1990s.

In 1980, overseas descendants of the Huang clan had founded the World Association of Huang Clan. In 1984, the Huang clan from Xiasha had joined the association, and Xiasha became an active organizer for the association. In 1994, under the Xiasha JSC leader Huang Yingchao's advocacy, Xiasha resumed a series of traditional cultural activities, like an ancestral worship ceremony in springtime (see Fig. 3), a Chinese calendar lantern festival, Cantonese opera, Big Basin Dish festival, and more. In particular, Big Basin Dish is one of the most important festivals in Xiasha (see Fig. 4), as a 500-year-old traditional festival of food sharing which began with the Huang clan. Knowledge about the traditional ceremony is unwritten and implicit. In the 1990s, the village leader looked for the few old villagers who were still alive and knew about the traditions. Later, the authorities tried to note the specifics of these traditions based on interviews with the old villagers. Since 1978, ancestral worship had become popular again when most of the ancestral temples in many villages in Shenzhen were reconstructed or renovated, and ancestral memorial activities revived in the 1980s.

¹ Natural village refers to the traditional rural settlement and communities before the Mao era. The concept of "natural village" in Chinese discourse is used as opposed to "administrative village", which mainly refers to the administrative unit through integration of neighboring natural villages based on the socialist "production brigades" since the early Mao era.

² In 2002, Shenzhen started to set up a statutory plan. The statutory plan of Xiasha area is based on the plan of 1992. <http://www.szpl.gov.cn/szupb/fdtz/ft/2005112906117.shtml> accessed on November 26, 2017.

³ <http://www.szftlib.com.cn/article/view/id-904.html> accessed on October 12, 2015.



Fig. 1. Plan of Xiasha in 1992.

Source: Xiasha JSC



Fig. 2. Construction of central square in the 1990s.

Source: Xiasha JSC



Fig. 3. Traditional ancestral worship ceremony.

Source: Xiasha JSC



Fig. 4. Xiasha's Big Basin Dish festival.

Source: Xiasha Village⁴

Meanwhile, a reconstruction of the genealogy of the local clan was also commenced. In 1999, a statue of an oyster and a rice farmer (see Fig. 5) was erected in the west of the square, as per leader Huang Yingchao's proposal, and their statue was intended to refer to the former identity and livelihood of the local villagers. Moreover, a museum of Xiasha (see Fig. 6), which documents and exhibits its history and local development free for all visitors, was built and completed in 2005. Space embellishment and design were influenced by Fengshui and local worship traditions, erecting statues of traditional Chinese gods on a fake mountain and a pond (see Fig. 7) with a small bridge over it in the north of the square.

Local tourism in Xiasha village became well known in Shenzhen, and it also became an important marketing strategy that helped promote the local economy. According to the village leader,

⁴ <http://www.szftlib.com.cn/article/view/id-915.html> accessed on November 19, 2018.



Fig. 5. Statue of oyster and rice farmers.
Source: Author (2015)



Fig. 6. Xiasha museum.
Source: Author (2015)



Fig. 7. Statues in the artificial pond.
Source: Author (2015)

the government has shown great support to us in this aspect. The tourism departments of the district and the city have come here to do investigations and research a few times. Of course, we would like the government to support us on this. The government also intends to put the tourism of our village on the lists of travel agents...we have cultural relics in the village. And we want to promote our food culture to the whole city. We want to prove to the villagers that promoting the culture of Xiasha can also lead to economic profits. There are also many special desserts like Shoufen, Chaguo, and Zongzi. Tourists help enhance the local business of the village by their consumption, beside the money they spend in hotels. The ancestral temple can also attract tourists. (Interview on March 20, 2009)

Consequently, the utilization of local knowledge to renovate the local temple and to revitalize the Big Basin Dish festival has increased the attractiveness of Xiasha village, and it furthers the interest of the local government in marketing the local culture. The local government has therefore assisted in the promotion and marketing of Xiasha as a tourist destination with traditional culture in Shenzhen.

Since the 1990s, increasing reports of fire incidents and criminal issues in urban villages have contributed to the framing of urban villages as a problem or “cancer”. The high population density caused by the hand-shaking buildings is mainly attributed to urban management failures by the government. Despite the official image of urban villages causing environmental, fire, and criminal problems, villagers are very cautious about such storylines concerning their own property, as they might lose tenants or even be punished by the JSC due to criminal activities. For example, an official from the government said

I was very surprised at how strong the property awareness of the villagers was during the time of SARS. Normally, we would have considered urban villages the place with the highest risk for SARS, however, it is totally opposite, the villagers are so careful and paid much attention to the hygiene, and it turned out the urban village has been a safe place that survived in SARS. As they will lose everything if their own building is found to have the problem of SARS, that is the main reason. (Interview on February 2, 2015).

In order to improve the environment and fire prevention, the local government promoted an environmental renovation project. In 2007, the village was promoted as a prime example of an ecological community by the government. The implementation of the project was carried out with the support of the villagers, as they benefitted from increased rental income (Fig. 8). A villager working in the JSC pointed out that

the villagers earn more rent after the improvement of the environment. Therefore they are willing to trust us. As for Shangsha village (the village adjacent to Xiasha village), the problems there are complicated. For example, the social security and environment there are not so good. And most of the villagers do not have confidence in their JSC. For example, the government has ordered the removal of the illegal sheds for public safety. Our villagers are willing to follow the order, but their villagers are not so obedient in comparison. (Interview on March 20, 2009)

4.2. The upgrading of the central square

In 2007, Shenzhen government promoted a transformation to enhance the property. In this context, Xiasha village started a second planning project called the Special Planning of Xiasha Community



Fig. 8. View of Xiasha in 2007.
Source: Photo by Gong Zhiyuan



Fig. 9. Plan of Xiasha in 2007.
Source: Special Planning of Xiasha Community Redevelopment in Futian District, 2007

Redevelopment in Futian District, and the Chinese Academy of Urban Planning and Design was responsible for the plan (see Fig. 9). The project trustee was the district urban redevelopment office. The plan and its implementation were all paid for by the government. The old central square was to be upgraded by constructing an underground garage and relocating the swimming pool and the playground. The temple would be renovated again in 2008. For this purpose, the village hired locals who still had knowledge on how to repair it. Water and electricity supply and the sewage system were improved. A beautification project called “Dressing and Capping” was carried out in order to improve the urban image. It mainly focused on existing buildings in the central square and along the main road. Gabled roofs were added to the tops of buildings, and all of the facades around the main square were given the same tiles in order to produce a unified look with a Mediterranean style (see Fig. 10). Concerning the design of the central square, the village hired a Fengshui⁵ expert to offer suggestions on the design of the square, such as where to best locate the pool. The

⁵ Fengshui (also called Kanyu, 堪輿 in Chinese) indicates the concern for a harmonious relationship between buildings and surrounding environment. For example, villagers pay much attention to Fengshui, which is also part of the local culture and local knowledge. The temple, the most important thing villagers care about, is viewed by them to be closely related to Fengshui. Although Fengshui is often considered as superstitious belief without enough sufficient scientific support of codified knowledge, it is still widely applied in daily life especially in villages.



Fig. 10. Upgrading of the central square after 2007.
Source: Photo by Gong Zhiyuan



Fig. 11. Plan of northern part of the manufacturing area in 2007.
Source: Special Planning of Xiasha Community Redevelopment in Futian District, 2007

responsible planner mentioned that it “was not what we had planned. Those Fengshui masters hired by the village proposed its location. As long as their suggestions were reasonable, we accepted” (Interview on March 10, 2009).

After 2007, the kitchen used for the Big Basin Dish festival was rebuilt at the original site next to the ancestral temple, the external wall of which is designed as an exhibition of Xiasha's history. The village insisted that no trees be planted on the central square, as they need the entire space of the square to hold the Big Basin Dish festival (see Fig. 4). The planner said, “actually, we think the square quality is bad as it is so empty and all the trees are cut off. However, the village does not want to have any tree on it, because it is not good enough for them to set up tables for Big Basin Dish festival” (Interview on January 28, 2015). Moreover, he mentioned that “the company thought the temple



Fig. 12. View of Xiasha in 2015.
Source: Photo by Gong Zhiyuan



Fig. 13. Protest posters in temple of Xiasha village.
Source: Author (2015)

was too small to contain a large number of villagers. They want to enlarge the temple to twice the current size. But the ancestral temple is strictly preserved as a historical building and no big change can be done to it" (Interview on March 10, 2009). The central square upgrading in Xiasha proved that planning can be proactively implemented independently and supported by the local urban village community in accordance with top-down urban planning schemes while maintaining the village's autonomy at the same time.

4.3. The redevelopment of the manufacturing area and a controversial top-down redevelopment planning proposal

According to the 2007 plan, the northern part of the manufacturing area would be converted to include high-rise buildings that contain a shopping mall, hotel, and residential buildings (see Figs. 11 and 12). The redevelopment strategy of villagers seeking cooperation with real estate companies is very common in Shenzhen, as the village owns land and the real estate company possesses capital and expertise in building construction. Xiasha had already collaborated with Vanke real estate company, constructing a high-rise building complex called Jinyulanwan in the southern part of the village in the early 2000s.

During the redevelopment of the manufacturing site, the villagers started to question the allocation of the profits generated by the project. They accused the village chief of misappropriating a large amount of income from collective land and property transactions, as the villagers

argued that their individual dividends as shareholders of the JSC had not increased for about 10 years. The villagers tried to hang posters in the temple (see Fig. 13) to gain attention from others and also visitors, like journalists and citizens. Distrust concerning the corruption of village chiefs is common in the redevelopment of urban villages in the Pearl River Delta, and similar strategies can be found in other redevelopment projects (Bandurski, 2016).

For the villagers' dividends, the redevelopment seemed crucial. The village chief that heads the JSC played an important role in localized place-making, as he was able to mobilize local knowledge over time. Nevertheless, the protest sheds light on the limits of his strategy, as the utilization of local knowledge by very few powerful villagers may exclude ordinary villagers from decision-making processes.

Up to the point of the redevelopment of the manufacturing area, urban regeneration in Xiasha was a rather positive example of a community-led upgrading strategy that differs from the demolition and renewal strategies of other urban villages in Shenzhen (Zacharias & Tang, 2010: 226). However, with the promotion of a plan for the urban regeneration of the Jinsha district, which is composed of the four urban villages of Xiasha, Shangsha, Shazhui, and Shawei, the district government initiated a strategic shift from community-led upgrading to comprehensive redevelopment in 2011. According to this new plan, the central park is to be maintained, while the residential buildings shall be replaced by high-rise buildings. This controversial plan was promoted unsuccessfully so far:

This version of the plan is very ridiculous and has been rejected. It is only the idea of the district government, as they want to demolish all of the urban villages in that area. They once invited us to make the plan for them, we rejected them as such large-scale demolition is a very horrible idea for us. And their proposal was rejected by the municipal government. That is only some idea from the developers. (Interview with the respective planner on March 7, 2016)

When the ample profits emanating from the redevelopment become more tempting and driven by the local government and developers, the incremental upgrading strategy through localized place-making faces the risk of being replaced by demolition and property-led redevelopment, although Xiasha has been acknowledged as a good example of bottom-up upgrading with successful local identity shaping. The future of Xiasha remains unclear for the time being, as the district government will have to adequately consider the rationalities of the other relevant stakeholders.

5. Simultaneous utilization of multiple knowledge in place-making processes

While one would expect the use of technical and institutional knowledge in any professional planning exercise, the use of local knowledge seems to be neglected very often especially in urban village regeneration in China. Therefore we put an emphasis on showing how it has been contributing to place-making in Xiasha. Subsequently, we discuss why the use of institutional and technical knowledge can make a difference, too. This is particularly the case when they also refer to the application of local knowledge. Hence, we take a particular look at how the different types of knowledge are used simultaneously to allow for the production of richer planning solutions in urban regeneration.

5.1. Local knowledge

Local knowledge is normally implicit and tacit. Its utilization can be observed in the revitalization of local culture, such as ancestral worship ceremonies or traditional festivals. When Xiasha joined the Huang clan membership association, the fame of Xiasha as a traditional Huang clan center was established. Local knowledge is also utilized in the Big Basin Dish festival. It strengthens the network of the Huang clan in China and overseas. The festival forms part of the intangible heritage of Shenzhen.

Emphasizing the historic significance of the place, it is able to mobilize resources from visitors. It is held in the central square, adding symbolic meaning to the place that already draws its significance from the temples, the statue of the oyster and rice farmer, the pond, and the museum with its exhibition about the history, development, and culture of Xiasha village. Thus, the regeneration process built on local knowledge made it explicit and translated it into the built environment. It also had an impact on the relocation of the swimming pool according to the local knowledge of Fengshui.

Local knowledge in urban villages is closely embedded in local culture and traditions, building on a combination of Buddhism, Taoism, and even certain indigenous religions in Xiasha. In urban villages, local culture is often also related to clan and surname worship. With the help of the existing social network, local knowledge, beliefs, rules, and values are shared and transferred. The temple as the space for traditional cultural festivals and the square as venue for important cultural events maintain the villagers' network or even strengthen it.

As there is also a large floating population in Xiasha, the local culture of Xiasha has also transcended beyond the culture of the local villagers. As an official from the Land and Planning Commission of Shenzhen puts it,

concerning the floating population, original villagers don't reject or exclude them. It is a kind of integration to let the floating population be part of the community. The village also holds sports games or special games annually. For example, there is a village bicycle team in which half of the members are floating population and the other half are local villagers. The community provides the equipment for them. This team is quite famous in the city. I think that's great. The village also organizes ceremonies every year. We could say that Xiasha is a village that has developed relatively well because its industries have been developed, but its community culture also has been fostered. We would call this a good combination of local and other culture. But honestly, such a community is rare. Most villages distinguish their villagers and the population very clearly and treat them very differently, which is what Westerners call "Social Segregation" (Interview on 9 November 2010).

To sum up, local knowledge was utilized both to facilitate planning processes and as a resource for integrative and innovative planning solutions. Knowledge about local networks was applied by developers and the government to persuade villagers of the plan. The village leader with his favorable status in the governance arrangement was able to feed local knowledge into negotiations. However, one of the crucial aspects in the regeneration of Xiasha village is that the knowledge about local traditions could both be mobilized for the layout of the central square and for its application in promoting the village as tourist destination. Thus, local knowledge was successfully embedded into the spatial transformation of the place.

5.2. Institutional knowledge

For a long time, urban and rural institutions and development were clearly distinct (Shen, Feng, & Wong, 2006). Urban villages are quite a new phenomenon, especially when it comes to the transition from their rural to urban institutions. This includes the Hukou system, land ownership, and urban management. Institutional innovations in the urbanization of urban villages have been promoted and implemented by the government since 1992. In addition, there are regulations on the size of land parcels that need to be regenerated. When the local government noticed that small-sized land plots needed to be regenerated, the typical project size was reduced. This example shows how practical experience is transformed into policies. Rural areas have been characterized by collective property, and production brigades and communes still exist in urban villages. Clan and kinship relations mentioned above also shape informal institutions. Villages were often built by a dominant clan with a certain surname lineage and have specific

ancestral temples. The ancestral temple lineage system is very important for the villagers even after the institutional transition of urban villages, as it is the most important symbol of strength in their collective identity as villagers who share blood ties in a family name. In other words, the clan is actually one of the most important local institutions. For example, in the case of Gangxia village redevelopment, they "divided the villagers into 11 teams according to their family relationship. You know people always prefer to believe their relatives or friends that they trust rather than others. This way is more harmonious rather than forcing them with regulations" (Interview with an official from the urban regeneration office on October 12, 2007).

Institutional knowledge is both implicit and widely used by the local government, developers, and the urban village. It is embedded in the context of the specific space and social situation. Institutional knowledge involves aspects such as regeneration partnership building, the implementation of compensation and relocation schemes, public participation, and administrative procedures. For example, the reconstruction of the manufacturing site in Xiasha built on a partnership between the developer and the village:

The head of the JSC in Xiasha village is very strong. He thinks he can promote the restructuring of the whole village. Besides, he is quite intelligent. He doesn't merely depend on his own strength; on the contrary, he introduced developers and established strategic partnerships with them. The real estate company called Jingji has been involved in the restructuring of Xiasha village through this kind of strategic partnership. With the agreement of property owners and the support of developers' funds, the restructuring of Xiasha is easy to promote.... Actually, the village is in touch with many developers and has rich resources. So the village selected several developers to apply for a partnership and has reached a good partnership with Jingji Real Estate Company in 2007. (Interview with the responsible planner on March 13, 2010)

Institutional knowledge is also closely related to the urban regeneration strategy and power structures. Xiasha proved powerful in the decision-making processes (Schoon, 2012). The development coalition formed by the village and the local government was based on institutional knowledge, indicating an understanding of shared profits and interest. The village leader, who is also a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, strengthened the coalition due to his planning knowledge and practical experience. He thus successfully combined the common interests of the local village and the interests of the local government.

5.3. Technical knowledge

Technical knowledge utilized in the regeneration of the Xiasha village can be seen in the planning of the central square and the construction and redevelopment of the northern (manufacturing) part. The village leader's decision to hire an experienced British design company to implement a community-based plan for the central square and the museum in an early stage effectively improved the quality of public spaces and infrastructure in Xiasha village compared to other urban villages. It can be seen as a milestone in making use of technical knowledge for the purpose of place-making in an era when other urban villages were not even thinking of improvements to their rapidly densifying urban fabric yet. The project was supported by the local government as it met the political goals of the latter to improve the image of urban areas. The upgrading plan for the old industrial area more than a decade later reflected the will of the village to cooperate with an external developer. It was utilized for mobilization and negotiation, and contrary to the Jinsha plan it played a critical role in facilitating consensus on regeneration strategies, plans, and implementation practices. A crucial aspect in this respect is that the use of technical knowledge was commissioned and controlled by the village itself.

In later stages of the regeneration, it is interesting to note that one of

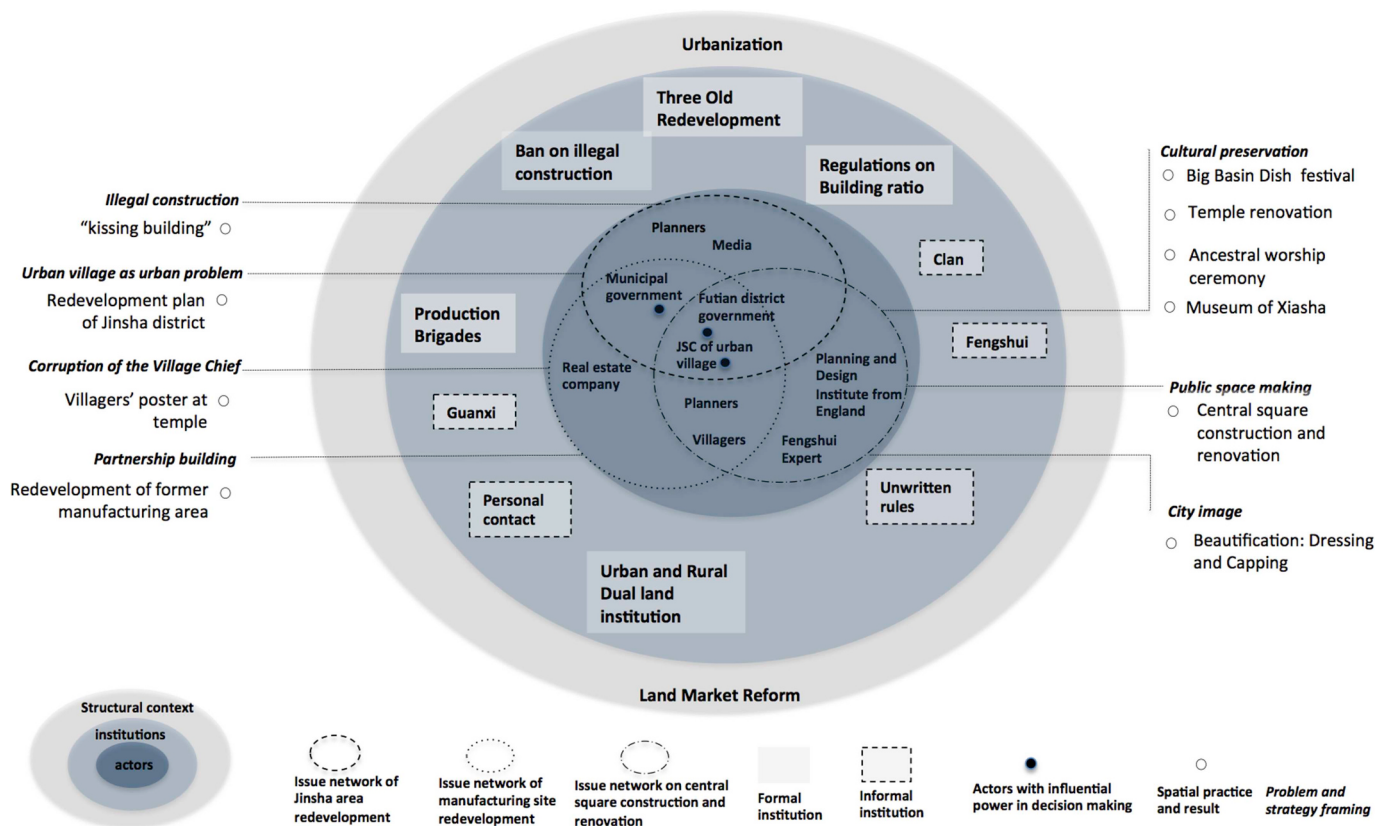


Fig. 14. Knowledge utilization and place-making in regeneration of Xiasha village.
Source: authors

the major concerns in urban regeneration, the floor area ratio, most closely related to profits in the reconstruction project, was considered both by the village head and the developers. According to the planner,

the height of one building in the plan was to be raised. They found policies supporting creative industries, and therefore they promoted the construction of a school for creative fashion design in order to raise the ratio. Whenever some new policy is prepared, village and developer have their information channels and they are most sensitive as it concerns their own economic interest. (Interview on January 28, 2015)

During the regeneration of the northern manufacturing sites, ideas about height, creative industries, and both affordable and commodity housing could be integrated into the plan. Despite its clear commercial character, the project used technical knowledge to produce a rather complex place assuring a high density on the one hand and incorporating a variety of key functions attractive for future users on the other.

5.4. Simultaneous utilization of three types of knowledge

The transformation of Xiasha village shows how an Urban Village may take advantage of its favorable location factors by gradually and relatively carefully upgrading its built environment. The local JSC headed by a respected village leader took a key role in defining, negotiating and balancing the needs and potential functions of a prominent public space that is able to act as a bridge between rural traditional past and urban future in an area that has undergone rapid and substantial changes in the last twenty years. Technical, institutional and local knowledge were utilized simultaneously and strategically by various actors. Fig. 14 summarizes the major results of this paper concerning the utilization of knowledge in urban regeneration and

place-making. Technical knowledge was crucial for the development of the central square and the redevelopment of the manufacturing areas; institutional knowledge enabled the implementation; and local knowledge contributed to the local identity by making strong use of local tradition and cultural values when designing the layout and the furniture of the central square and its surroundings. The village leader proactively utilized technical knowledge by Western planners to upgrade and improve the quality of public space in the community. Institutional knowledge both about the communes and production brigades established in the Mao period and about clan and local networks was utilized by the JSC to get villagers involved in the regeneration process and compensation negotiations. Local knowledge on ancestral worship, temple renovation, clan history, and village history, shared and embedded in local networks, was effectively utilized and integrated into the planning and implementation of the central square, and traditional local culture and festivals experienced a renaissance. This is mainly due to the local JSC having “niche authority” (Schoon, 2012) to make decisions in the village. The utilization of knowledge is enabled by the support of certain power structures. Urban villages with strong local leaders who enjoy the trust of the villagers witness a higher possibility of successful redevelopment than those with weaker leadership (Schoon, 2014a; 2014b). In the Xiasha case, the village head's dual identity as villager and politician enabled him to feed local knowledge into the regeneration process.

6. Conclusion

The process of shaping, reorganizing and improving Xiasha can be understood as an important and paradigmatic place-making effort in its factual meaning and maybe even as a role model for the high-speed urbanization it is related to, no matter how simplistic some of its results may seem for a western observer at first glance. The regeneration of

Xiasha square reflects how planners and stakeholders at all levels can, despite their differing attitudes towards urban regeneration, contribute to an upgrading of public open spaces that meets multiple demands. It can be used for daily outdoor activities, enhances the relationships between the different elements of the community, integrates various cultural elements and promotes the image of Xiasha. In the case of Xiasha village, the upgrading strategy that did not include large-scale demolition has been touted by the government as a prime example, and this kind of strategy was also promoted as one of the three urban regeneration patterns in the “Methods of Urban Regeneration in Shenzhen” (Shenzhen Municipal Government, 2009). With an increasing awareness of the value of urban villages as living spaces for a large number of migrant workers in Shenzhen, it requires a more careful and gradual approach towards upgrading urban villages notwithstanding the low quality and serious urban problems that are evident in them. Xiasha square shows that there may be an appropriate alternative strategy that makes use of local knowledge, neither representing romantic western attempts to preserve sub-standard physical structures nor following developer-led socially exclusive models of renewal. As the residential areas in urban villages cannot be eliminated at short notice without affecting the livelihoods of the low-income population significantly, the improvement of easily accessible public spaces can be seen as an important step towards a more socially integrative urban development. This begins by taking the needs of low-income urban residents into account and tries to satisfy their demand for public space. The paper has shown that in this context of place-making, the complexity of the planning result crucially depends on a simultaneous utilization of local, institutional and technical knowledge by influential stakeholders. This is by no means the norm in Chinese regeneration projects and may be seen as one reason for their relatively standardized outcomes. A crucial point was that the profit-orientation of redevelopment does not necessarily contradict references to local identity and socially integrative qualities of public space completely. In summary, a strategic use of multiple types of knowledge may serve as a resource in complex governance arrangements that are typical for numerous cases of urban regeneration in China and may contribute to place-making in the face of rapid urban transformations.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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