

Community, real estate pressure and the spatial reorganization: the case study of the “village in the city” of Lijiao in Guangzhou

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# INCLUSIVE / EXCLUSIVE CITIES

Ognen Marina  
Alessandro Armando  
(Eds.)





## **SINERGI Project**

# **Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies**

The SINERGI Project (Social Integration through Urban Growth Strategies) is a network of twinned cities that provides exchange of knowledge, experience and good practices of partner cities, Universities, civic organizations and social groups enabling better social integration through joint development of urban growth strategies. The project has enriched the sense of identity and mutual understanding between European citizens by bringing upfront problems and issues of urban life that are shared among them, but also by sharing common values, history and culture in an open dialog.

The network organized two seminars as a platform for creative and open debate between local authorities, academics, experts, civil activists and citizens from local communities about the problem of social integration in ever-growing cities. The SINERGI Book One: "The Projects for an Inclusive City" is the result of these two seminars. The purpose of this book is to provoke decision-makers and citizens to challenge their perception of the city and, through critical understanding of mutual interests and shared values, to create a sustainable and lasting network of cities and active citizens.



CITTA' DI TORINO



LISBOA  
CÂMARA MUNICIPAL

# Inclusive Exclusive Cities

Edited by  
Ognen Marina  
Alessandro Armando

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Edoardo Bruno

# Community, real estate pressure and the spatial reorganization: the case study of the “village in the city” of Lijiao in Guangzhou

## ABSTRACT:

The paper wants to explore the relationship between the Lijiao village in the city community, located in Haizhu District of Guangzhou, and the promoters of its redevelopment. The literature around the topic of the “villages in the city” has strongly emerged in the last 10 years, due to many case studies of relocations inside the Pearl River Delta Metropolis urban expansion. A combination of field of interests like social inequalities, rural urban migrations, urban planning in a transforming spatial economy and strong administrative bureaucracy, find their combination in a specific site with a long history of land settlement and social practices.

The case study of Lijiao village it's crucial in order to understand the equilibriums between the local community administration system and the top-down and rhetorical visions of the urban planning. In fact the strong volunteer promote by the Local Government to continue the North-South axis of the Central Business District of Guangzhou, will effect in the future this location suspended between the peri-urban interface and an expanding central core. Because the transformation is not yet occurred, the research wants to map these spatial struggles between the parties now disposed around an unstable negotiations, rhetorical participation processes and media consensus.

**KEYWORDS:** *village in the cities, participation, urban expansion, resettlement compensation, rural migrations.*

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The extraordinary economic and subsequently urban growth of China has brought the debate around its cities at a crucial level in the Western countries. Phenomena yet occurred over the last two centuries around the topics of rural urban migrations and urban transition inside the European and North American industrial areas, have emerged in China under an unusual pace. They have reached the goal of combining both the necessities for becoming a strategic country inside the globalization game, both the challenge of restricting the time and space upgrade of its cities at an unsustainable rhythm for the rest of the world.

The Chinese urban space transformation is definitely the most astonishing aspect capable of shocking the collective imaginary thanks to the contraposition of the growing machine and its resilience territory. It has to be analysed through its institutions, local policies, informal networks, in order to find which are the instruments and processes behind the fast changes. A researcher coming from the West, immersed in a post-industrial environment, couldn't avoid the necessity to underline that China is the favoured location to map the inner conflicts of the transformation that of course produces spatial effects but, above all, derived from deep institutional struggles. Reporting the land-use improvements basically confronting who guide them and who suffer the transformation, could lose the multiple implications of the multi layered Chinese institutions and regulations.

Observing the Chinese urban space transition, it is undeniable to recognise the formalized elements deriving from the planning instruments opposing the persistence of informal settlements that don't permit any specific comparison, escaping homogeneity and generating a chaotic environment. Urban studies have understood, by the passage of time, and call them "villages in the cities" (*chengzhongcun*). The definition connotes not only a specific urban landscape, but also the former rural institution of the Chinese village that, after the big expansion of the cities, has been absorbed into the urban sphere. In this process the "villages in the cities" (hereinafter called VICs), have lost their rural character, passing from managing the countryside to a more and more involving role into urban affairs, becoming renters, entrepreneurs for commercial and small industrial activities. In the last 30 years, VIC-events were marked by forced expropriations, demolitions and cadres corruptions, becoming crucial not only for the scientific research but also for daily news. The debate around VICs has so emerged into Chinese society, to identify a separation between who try to protect their integrity versus urban growing and others that brand them as an obstacle to the dream of modernity, caused by their corruption (Ai, 2014).

In this sense the image of a "nail building" (Figure1) opposing itself to a huge demolition, creates both the discourse among which build the consensus for individual rights, but at the same shifts the debate from an institutional and processes study focusing only to social diseases and inequalities. Scientific literature has underlined the topic of VICs from various

points of views that, despite the complex debate around them, has often created only little narratives. Obviously the sociological perspective is the most diffuse, striving to reveal the migrants' bad living conditions (Liu et al., 2012), the informal networks of the inhabitants or the capabilities in creating bottom-up processes (Lin et al., 2011).

Other outlooks are based on describing the particular land-use and property rights measures (Lai et al., 2014), or concentrating to urban transformations (Lin & De Meulder, 2012), crossing the local government policies and new city visions. On the contrary, the possibility to understand the economic outputs of the VICs appears difficult and rare, and eludes the official statistical measurements, the mechanisms of resettlement and compensation during their transformation. There are various methods and a progressive improvement in the local policies to manage this complex situation, and not support the capability of constructing a homogenous description between different case studies, even if located in the same city. In this sense the city of Guangzhou, political and administrative centre for Guangdong Province and first test-area for the market reforms in 1978, identified itself with the issue promoting in 2002 the principle of "one village – one policy", dealing with the VICs transformation in a more win-win perspective.

The literature could appear so conflicting to don't permit a clear interpretation of which are, at the present conditions, the procedures that could be classified as "top-down" (the local government? the Urban or District Planning Bureau? the real estate developers?) or simply "bottom-up (the cadres of the village? The inhabitants? the evolving web media channels?) in the debate.



*Figure 1. A "nail building" in VIC in the middle of a demolition process.  
Source: Ai, S. A. (2014). Villages in the City. A Guide to South China's Informal Settlements. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.*

This specific condition suggests rewriting the relationship inside the decision-making process, considering the multilevel aspect of institutions

more or less formalized. They represent the fundamental basis for carrying on processes that otherwise could turn non convenient in terms of political and economical aspects. The objective of this paper is to put at the core of the debate around VICs, which are the institutions, the rules and the communication methodologies that manage the process of transformation. The key point of the current discussion concerns more the compensation money claimed by the villagers than their social conditions or when the poor urban environment is used as an excuse to pursue a discourse that modern housing apparel is the “only way” to escape exclusion.

VICs have their own institutions to manage their governance practices. They always depend on the City and District level apparatus, but effectively they have a certain level of independency in managing education, welfare, security and finance of the collective property sharing. The three main figures inside VICs, the Chief of the Village, the Party Secretary and the Collective Ownership Company Chief, not always separated by a different person, have the responsibility to manage the collective land ownership nature of the village. The perspective that the land belongs to the villagers, and not to the State, is crucial to understanding their position inside the game of transformation. Their financial weakness to support a land conversion is compensated by land ownership, affecting the entire debate in terms of money compensation, in opposition to the city desire to recover these urban areas. In this way, VICs institutions have to find a balance between the villagers' requests, often derived from the biggest clan's struggles, and the city planning activities. The cooperation with a real-estate developer, sometimes selected by a public auction, is the key point to promoting transformation and finding an institutional bridge between the different levels. They can provide financial investments, expert skills and connection with the local government. On the other side the village institutions take care of the local affairs, managing the process and sharing the opportunities with the entire community. At the end money compensation is still the crucial node around which the debate is carried on.

The paper has selected to explore the case study of Lijaio village, located in the District of Haizhu in the city of Guangzhou, because of its capability to put into perspective its strategic position in the city with the local government's urban visions. In the same way, its position inside the Pearl River Delta Economic Region, core of the thirty-year market reforms, its long history along the river and its continuous urban regeneration and expansion, could reveal to urban studies a multi-level perspective inside the Chinese cityscape. Since 2011, Lijiao village has yet not found the necessary support of the 80% of villagers to start its transformation: money compensation is still the main issue; meanwhile the land value is increasing, making the real estate company investor check whether its investment is still favourable.

## **2 WHAT IS THE MEANING OF BEING A “VIC” IN GUANGZHOU CITY**

### **2.1 Guangzhou and its role inside Pearl River Delta growth**

The market reforms promoted by former Chinese President Deng Xiaoping since 1978, in order to open the country to a process of modernization and international trade thanks to its cheap land and labour cost to attract foreign capitals, have selected the Provinces of Guangdong and Fujian as testing area to create what was called “capitalism with Chinese nature” (Vogel, 1995). Guangzhou is recognized over the centuries as the “South Gate of China” through which many important trading flows were stabilized. Its historical commercial aim, consequently based on a “petit-bourgeois” social composition, was overturned during the first period of the 1949 Revolution: the earliest fifth-year plans have always supported the industrialization into inner and remote areas of the country, far from the possibility of foreigners’ attacks and close to the indispensable collaboration with Soviet Union (Lin, 1997).

Despite this marginalisation, the city has hosted in 1957, and several times further on, the China Import and Export Fair, demonstrating its ability to be the showcase for foreign markets. Deng’s economic policies have been able to answer if these peculiar territorial aspects could really questioning the former system, knowing that was crucial to leverage the Party leadership skills (Vogel, 2013). The totality of Foreign Direct Investment, the introduction of the Household Production Responsibility System at the beginning of the Eighties in order to transfer the using of the land, and a continuous decentralization of the power from the Central State to Local Governments concerning fiscal matters, were the grounds for boosting the entire regional economy. The “open-door policies” have generated over the last 30 years a growing process where the accumulation of capital generated by the manufacturing sector, was able to fund the transformation of the urban areas, emerging into the international attention as the “factory of the world”.

Guangzhou is one of the node of what is called the “9+2 System” of the Pearl River Economic Zone, that resembled nine “cities” (two of them are Special Economic Zones - SEZs), Jiangmen, Zhongshan, Foshan, Zhaoqing, Guangzhou, Dongguan, Huizhou, Zhuhai and Shenzhen, plus the two Special Administrative Regions of Hong Kong and Macao. Nevertheless the localization of the two Special Economic Zones in the cities of Shenzhen and Zhuhai has undermined over the time its political leadership. Even though this is not explicitly stated in the statistical sources, it’s possible to define how the issue of inter competitiveness between different local administrations is essential. The reflection on their capability of establishing long-term growth visions is a valid key to understand the pressures of territorial transformation (Xu & Yeh, 2005).

For these reasons Guangzhou is the first city in entire China that has promoted in 2000, inviting five planning design institutes, the “Guangzhou

Urban Strategic Development Plan", thus promoting spatial restructuring in a territorial view, in order to create a more efficient and business oriented landscape for foreign investments (Wu, 2007). The most successful operations of this long term visions was the possibility to enlarge its municipality, absorbing the Districts of Panyu in 2000, and Nansha in 2012: low developed areas capable to intercept new trading possibilities due to their position in the Delta. In 2012 Nansha New Town was approved as "state-level key project", strengthening the competition with the other coastal cities. Understanding the strategic visions of Guangzhou means to recognize how the political and economical games have been mostly played on the spatial reorganization, in order to assure a continuous growth with very relevant urban consequences.

In this large-scale background, VICs have played a crucial role: being involved in the urban expansion, seeing the loss of large amount of rural areas, taking advantages from the illegal migrations to the cities, reorganizing themselves as real urban stakeholders. VICs have become, inside the rigid demographic control of the "hukou system" (Yusuf, 2008), ones of the most efficient low-income housing suppliers. Through a process of space densification, due to illegal building practices, they have changed their substantial paradigm from rural keepers to managers of a secondary housing market in the city. In this way we can affirm that the creation of VICs is the product of the last three decades of China's rapid urbanization (Song & Zenou, 2012), never forgetting their institutional position that formally segregated them out from the primary urban services.

## **2.2 VIC and informal settlements: informal perspectives versus institutional paradigm**

Looking at the formal features of VICs, it is possible to record similarities with many of the informal settlements in the developing countries. The relatively low quality of the materials used in construction, the high density, the lack of the basic public infrastructure, the lower income social classes of the population, make them highly suitable areas to perform all the main conflicting aspects of the urban transition. At the same time is necessary determining an important distinction that, if it's not fully declared, risks producing an improper point of view. First of all VICs differ from other typologies of peri-urban settlements for their significant historical pattern, built on precise family lineages and collective building for traditional rituals, that has created the basic social structure. Chinese villages were, over the centuries, milestones of the rural society, where continuous migration and land reclamation processes have deeply transformed the territory (Marks, 1997). The new role of VICs, in the middle of the migrant flows and the real estate speculations, has to be seen as creation of new spaces of agglomeration into a weak, but fully formalized institutional framework. For this reason it's not correct describe them only as places in which are condensed marginalization phenomena, but rather as a consuming space (He, 2015), based on its inner renting market, little-scale commercial

activities or small manufacturer entrepreneurship built on social interactions.

In this way, VICs show themselves not only as poor areas generated by individual informal practices, but rather by weak autonomous institutions compared to the big urban stakeholders. Their weakness is financial, but at the same time still able to manage the decision-making processes in security, planning and welfare. In majority of cases, VIC institutions are composed by three authorities controlled by specific and nominal cadres. The Party Secretary of the Village, nominated by the local government, is instructed to exercise control on the respect of local policies; the Chief of the Village is responsible for the administrative affairs and the relationships with the different clans; the Collective Ownership Company Chief has to manage and control the shared productive activities of the village. Despite this rigid division, this is the really common situation where they are not headed by different people. In different locations, especially in the remote areas of the peri-urban interface, there are officials controlling more than one position, increasing the danger of corruption and avoiding transparency in the collective affairs.

Starting from the distinction between Party Secretary and Chief of the Village, it's important noting that two figures in the same place, interpreting the vocation of systems that have very different historical reasons. On one side, there is a title searching legitimacy from family relationships, and on the other, there is a government cadre generated from the local bureaucracy managing the negotiations among various political levels. However, as reported above, it is erroneous to consider them as two opposing figures, since they are rather interconnected into village's affairs. In order to survive the real estate pressures, VICs need to intersect the ability of constructing social relationships and attracting the attention of the local government in resolving issues in a more comprehensive framework.

These reflexions show that exists an institutional paradigm, fundamental in the daily political affairs of the village, that has to perform in adherence with a series of flexible practices that strengthen collective cohesion. The resettlement situation is the most critical, because of its completely redesigning of the future consistency of the whole village. The lack of certain regulations (Yanjing & Webster, 2011) and structured powerful hierarchies put in damage the transparency of the procedures: in this way corruptions circumstances that distort any participation or bottom-up perspective are incited, supporting the media in visioning the VICs as the "cancer of the cities" (Ai, 2015).

### **2.3 Guangzhou and its attempts in VICs regulations**

Considering the big territorial city of Guangzhou, having a great deal of low-cost land in its peri-urban areas for housing and industrial conversion, it is possible to delineate why there have not been yet an integrated plan for the redevelopment of VICs. Since 2002 Guangzhou has approved two important policies to convey the transformation of its VICs. The first was the

introduction the principle "one village, one policy", useful to outline case-by-case which type of intervention has to be selected in order to avoid strong local conflicts. Meanwhile the second rule was obtaining at least 80% of residents positive voting for the transformation plan in order to become effective. Due to the inherent difficulties in developing specific policies in accordance with the local government and the hard achievement of a so compact share, since 2009 Guangzhou has guided the policy called "three olds redevelopment". In 2008, Wang Yang, the Provincial Party Secretary of Guangdong promoted this policy after his visit in the near city of Foshan: he noted that all the city environment has to be improved in order to create a more business-oriented scape. The Provincial Government, thanks to the support of the Ministry of Land and Resources, supported an experimental document underlining that the transformation has to start by redesigning the old urban patterns. The "three olds" policy refers to the historical city centre, the former brownfields and the old villages. What could be regarded as a new common vision on the redevelopment of VICs proved the secondary objective: convert critical areas into land for the growing the real estate market searching new cheap lands areas. Forced demolitions, which have found support from the new rule, caused controversy especially in the central areas, underlining at the same time a negative impact on labour migrants.

For this reason the discourse beyond transformation has recently passed to search new ways for dealing with the issue, creating instruments like the "integrated regeneration" or "beautiful villages", in order to refer to new large scale programs of urban regeneration. In 2015 the local Government is testing a new system of practices and rules for a program called 3+1, searching a link between the village redevelopment and the whole city vision. Thus the draft condition of the rule, it was adopted by Lijiao Village for its transformation as a test field: the main idea was to illustrate how good practices adopted at the local scales could be useful to promote the entire urban upgrading, connecting the real estate pressures with the local community desires.

The City Local Government is still continuing in compiling lists of villages in which it could invest by redevelopment projects. Despite these operations there has not yet been any declaration to follow the formal procedure, thus creating differences and autonomous decision-making processes without the possibility to create a unique framework.

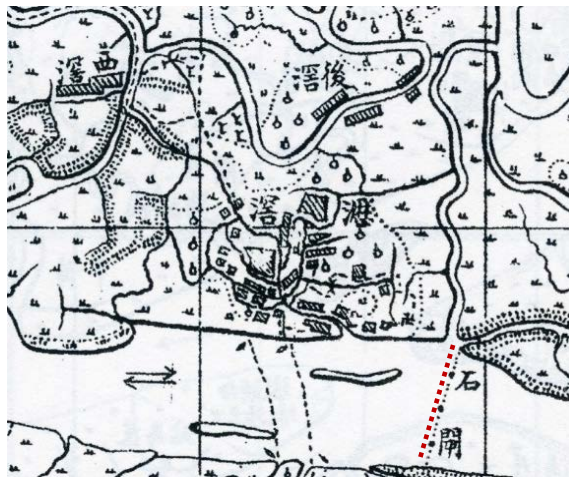
### **3 THE CASE STUDY OF LIJIAO VILLAGE IN HAIZHU DISTRICT, GUANGZHOU**

#### **3.1 Historical background: morphology and lineages**

Lijiao village has a long history of settlement along one of the branch of Pearl River Delta, dating back at least 900 years ago. The geographical localization, between land reclamation areas and the close relationship with the river, has declined the same naming of the village where "li" means "water to drain " and "jiao" signify "branch of the river". The morphological

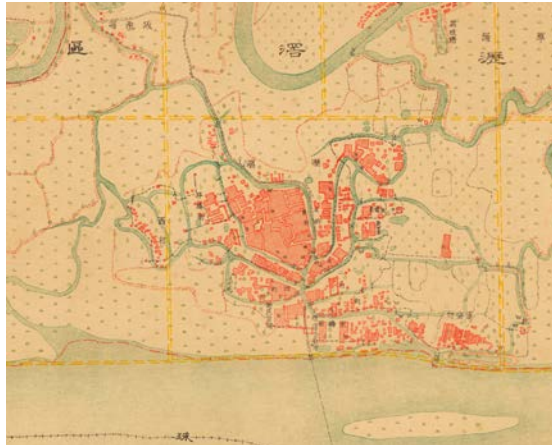


construction of Lijiao had a double value, based both on the consolidation of precise clans relationship and the strategic control of the river trades. By the passing of the time the village has built its legitimation level thanks to two import clans, respectively named “Wei” and “Luoshi”, able to share the control of the rural lands, create temples to sea polytheistic gods and ancestor halls. The Pearl River Delta, with its large amount of navigable waterways useful also for overseas trades, was stopped by many strategic check points: one of them was exactly located in Lijiao village, that controlled the Southern gate of the branch that lead directly to Guangzhou. The position was so crucial that during the Opium wars it was used as military defence creating stone dams in the middle of the river, remained on the waterway until 1955 (Figure2).



*Figure 2. Stone military defence in front of Lijiao village.  
Source: "Panyu County Local Records" (1931)*

The village built its structural morphology starting from few key local elements as the localization of the different clan, taking in mind that the marriage between people meant a sensible transfer from one to another place, the position of the temples and the network composed by the many canals. A cadastral map drawn in 1929 by the native Republic of China, which had in Guangzhou one of the most important administrative power centre, shows the village as independent settlement in the middle of the countryside fully based on the control and disposition of its water resources (Figure 3).



*Figure 2. The settlement of Lijiao village in the military cadastral map of the 1929*  
*Source: Guangdong Province Library*

The industrial upgrade promoted by the Popular Republic of China since 1949 has pushed Lijiao village to host many shipbuilding factories, due to its geographical position on a branch of the Pearl River. The post-reform period, the housing booming and demographical migration to the cities, shifted the village from the rural sphere into the urban one. Heritage elements like the temples has survived, as expression of the local traditions, but caged into residential densification, waterways and canals for agriculture has been substituted by the coverage of little roads, and the existing ones go through bad hygienic conditions.

The image of the village has changed from the traditional pattern, due to integrate in itself the effects of the growing surrounding city, through densification and commercialization of its spaces. In this view the only heritage elements are constituted by the localization of the many ancient building for the traditional rituals and the morphological settlement disposition, while the rest housing property are extremely poor, and densely built for informal business, not by segregation. Since 2007 Lijiao village, according to a local government strategy that wanted to resolve the issue of many informal settlement in the south and east part of the city, has been channelled into a redevelopment process that until now has not achieved appreciable effect, but that has moved and questioned the institutional apparatus in facing the transformation.

### **3.2 The new axis of Guangzhou: from event-led to urban reconsolidation**

In the last fifteen years the city of Guangzhou has built its new modern image strengthen the urban environment planning efficiency, upgrading its infrastructures, creating a financial centre in order to advocate international standards for becoming a global city. The planning of the modern Tianhe District, located in the East part of the city, was seen by the planners as the natural expansion area, where testing a new scale of urban organization and

built huge residential units along new important traffic boulevards. A first concept was conceived in 1959 in the 10<sup>th</sup> masterplan of the city, the imagined a strategical infrastructural hub, commercial and leisure activities: during the Nineties under the new possibilities of the new urban growing market, the plan was reinforced and fully carried on after 2000 (Lin, 2013). The coexistence of overturning the congestion problems weakening the city at the beginning of the new millennium and the necessity to carry victoriously the hosting of the 2010 Asian Games, key point in financing the city transformation, has allowed the local government to promote the realization of a new modern axis, fully built in the middle of the countryside and rhetorically opposing the old one in the city centre date back of the Republic period. What known is internationally known as Zhujiang New Town, is a planned axis that collects around its 5 kilometres the most important administrative, commercial and financial activities of the city. It was inaugurated just before the opening of the 2010 Asian Games and by now is one of the most important landmark of the city, iconic symbol for promoting modernization. The urban vision desires to extend its line towards the Southern area of the city crossing the island of Haizhu District where, after having overcome a complex urban composition of industrial buildings, villages, wetlands and residential areas, will arrive to a second river branch. Just at the end of this huge urban project, is located Lijiao village, material obstacle to the land transformation (Figure3).



*Figure 3. Aerial view of Lijiao village in 2015. The red dotted line represent the future Southern path of the axis. Source: Google Earth – 21/10/2015*

Actually the planning for these southern modifications consists of a rough land-use plan approved by the Guangzhou local authorities and some specific studies, even if the rendering images of the extension are public domain.

The first planning explorations intends to subdivide the southern axes crossing Haizhu District into 4 distinctive functional areas that, starting from the North, are:

- City Tourism District: museum and leisure hub of the future city
- Administrative Culture: cultural and commercial activities centre
- Wetland and forestation: green areas designated to become the Guangzhou biggest natural asset
- Waterfront: commercial and residential area that take advantage of the river proximity, in order to promote an “ecological” way of living.

The planning operations for the second portion of the axis thus become the possibility to reorganize the complexity of the existing urban patterns, resulted from the older less planned urbanization practices and subsidiary easy allocation to speculative real estate developers. The objectives are to locate different key project along the axis line that, despite the deep urban pattern substitution, want to promote the vision of a new type of city, “eco-friendly”, “low-carbon”, “efficiently connected” that takes care of the “leisure advantages”.

Lijiao village is one of these key project that appeared before 2012 under the signature of “Town Redevelopment Area” and “Comprehensive development area” in its latest version promoting the Haizhu Eco-City. The meaning changing depends on the different political framework thought which carry on the transformation. What emerged from the documentation is the desire of promoting the new southern gate of the axis, as the occasion to use the powerful imaginary of the riverfront as the link between the upgrading of the living condition and the preservation of the natural resources (Figure4). But the presence of the village, the biggest in Haizhu District, is not ordinary and had to be “supported” by the local political stakeholders in order to obtain a complete redesign.



Figure 4. Rendering perspective of the proposal for the redevelopment of Lijiao village at the end of the axis. Source: Lijiao Village, poster from a public wall.

### **3.3 Voting and visiting: the discourse in participation**

The “Lijaio Village Redevelopment Project Work Team”, supported by the ZhuGuang Group Real Estate, created in December 2014 a promotional page, through the messaging social application WeChat (the most popular in China), in order to promote the village transformation activities. The aim was to speed up the transformation process. In fact, although it has been identified since 2007 as a strategic operation to develop Haizhu District, it has been interrupted several times due to agreement issues about habitat-substitution compensation. The promotion is strongly rhetoric and aimed to obtain more consensuses and instil confidence in the involved institutions, removing prejudices and stereotypes thanks to open communication. The selected tool does not allow active participation, with comments and debates about pertaining issues, and the communicated message is aimed at promoting an integral transformation and reaching what is called the “Lijiao dream”. At the same time, the will to obtain the target, by broadcasting information to everyone who will be directly involved, considering the delicate context of village transformation, is important.

The promotional page has also a recordable target: reaching 80% of favourable voting for the planned transformation, that otherwise would remain in the District lists and could be forced to use coercive instruments to reach the city vision. In one year of published contents, there are a series of actions suggesting which ways can be useful to consolidate favourable opinions.

- Regulations update: the page itemizes in a detailed way the rules applicable to the village transformation. So, the passing of the “policy of 3 olds” is widely debated, often criticized for its compulsory intervention, up to the “3+1”, where questioning of the entire image of the city has been conceived, where declared actions are strategic at large scale, and a wrongdoing of the speculative willingness for a single territorial purpose.

- Meetings: all public interventions involving village cadres, local politicians, media or the land developer debating the transformation have been fully publicized. The projects presentation, the upgrades and the new actions that in their opinion are strongly promoted. It is necessary to underline that the meetings are never anticipating public interests, suggesting their technical and restricted nature.

- Q&A: the most influential doubts on the voting process, on money compensation or village reconstruction are collected and fully explored. It is interesting to note the controversial repetition that without a large positive voting, many of the positive effects of the political support will disappear, endangering the entire community.

- Street promotion: door to door updating by the promotion team, where people are asked to compile surveys or express their vote. One noticeable element is the coupling of many activities with the most heartfelt public festivals of the village, involving even those who, like the children, are not entitled to vote.

- Organized tours: the village community between the months of July and August of 2015 was invited to participate to guided tours to the Wuhan village where the real estate company has recently completed a transformation project. The detailed accounts of the study visits have enhanced the substantial differences of the existing resources, always putting in perspective the poorly built environment of Lijiao.

- Village dangers: they are often denounced due to the presence in the village of many illegal construction and infrastructure. Frequent fires, difficulties in water supply, and electrical overloads, are used to demonstrate the potential of a project that will provide a modern and rational planning, seen as a social and security benefit for its inhabitants.

- Comparisons: one of the most used and abused for propaganda. A series of case studies successfully completed in Guangzhou are the starting point for understanding what the most fruitful path to be pursued is. Contrary to the complicated case of Xiancun, another VIC in Guangzhou fully immersed in the new CBD and resisting since 2008 an intense urban transformation and forced strong demolitions, is described as a situation which should be avoided. The resulting isolation is showed more as an onerous resistance, rather than a showcase for real positive effects.

All these elements bring out a discourse that conceives the reorganization of the space, the adherence to whole city strategies, as the most economical convenient way for the villagers. The promoting team concentrated all ideological efforts on achieving quality, and recombining traditional rituals with modern life. On 13 September 2015 2360 voters have expressed their opinion in favour of the transformation reaching the 60%. There is no limitation on the number of voting time; there is no regulation over this issue: the event could be organized at the required time in order to take the quota. The success of the operation has been posted on all the streets of the village, inviting all those who had participated in the voting process to show up to receive a “moon cake” as a gift. The rules of participation seem far from being completely autonomous or bottom-up driven.

## **4 COMPENSATIONS: THE REINVENTION OF THE SPACE**

In September 2015, on the walls and in every public spaces of Lijiao, series of posters promoted by the “Lijaio Village Redevelopment Project Work Team” appeared that, in addition to inviting the vote for transformation, summarized some examples of surface compensation for each household (Figure6). Their observation can bring out a set of guiding principles that are followed in the compensation calculations, recounting all the contradictions of the actors involved.

On one side, there is the local government that wants to pursue its project of urban regeneration, by healing the large amount of illegal constructions, and on the other side, there are the villagers who know their resistance power and seek to maximize all of their surface rights. The

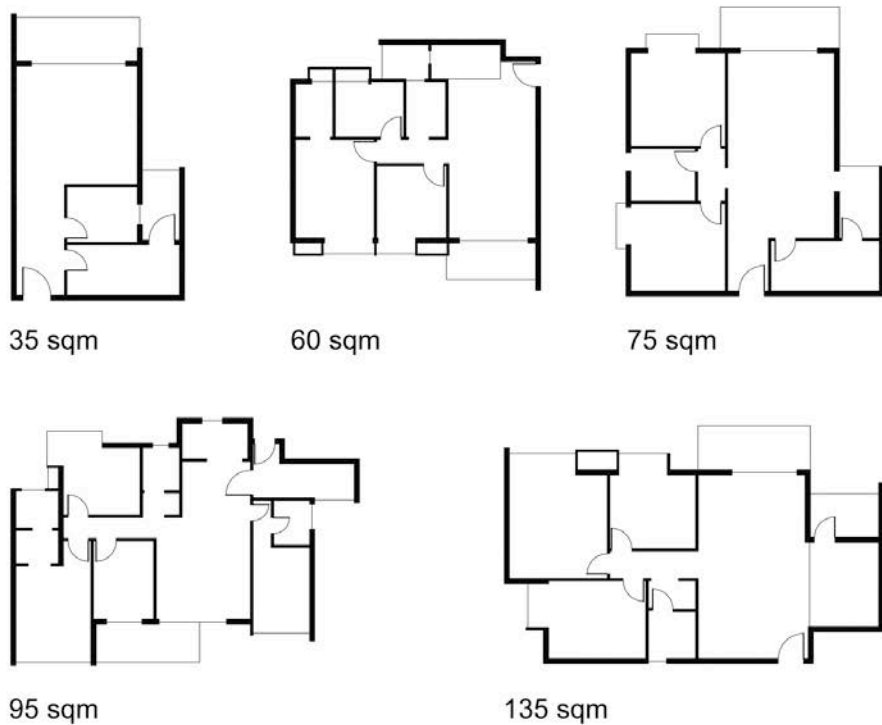


posters showed only few examples but they are exemplary in underlying the concepts beyond the transformation. The compensation is primarily based on measurements made and recorded by the local government in 2009 and not by the in hand declarative documentation owned by the villagers. The position is clear: the government intends to carry out the transformation based on the spatial consistency and not on historical statements. This means both strict control to highlight where illegal buildings are concentrated (in case the documentation shows a property lower than it is in reality), and seeking illegal documentation trying to enforce a bigger compensation (the statement possessed shows higher values than the actual building). A survey conducted by the local government officials became the main instrument for conducting calculation, leaving an indirect approach that could create considerable room for corruption.



Figure 6. The posters concerning the voting and compensation procedures on the walls of Lijiao village. Source: made by the author

Another key factor is the recognition of the stores to be compensated. The question appears tricky because the village over time has densified itself in order to provide housing for migrants, thus creating illegal construction. The village has grown on itself creating also safety hazards. The posters show the parameter of 4 stores as an average within which the households are rewarded. This means that those who built less of 4 floors will have the opportunity to have priority purchase of the difference in the market after redevelopment. Conversely, those who have built more will receive no more than the surfaces within the limit of 4 stores, also excluding any terrace area. The compensation deals not only with the built up surfaces, but also with the land area occupied by the house, giving it a real economic value. Similarly it's interesting to note that some additional elements, such as balconies, are included in the calculations.



*Figure 7. The different housing typologies proposed by the real estate company to the villagers if they support the transformation (above), compared to the poor habitat condition of the existing village along the last remaining canal (below).*

*Source: Schemes elaborated by the author starting from a poster on wall in Lijiao Village. Photo taken in Lijiao in September 2015*

During the demolition, the villagers have to move to other areas of the city waiting to get the new properties. This means receiving a monetary compensation for renting a new house for the period. The monetary



compensation is made on the basis of the same area calculated for the future resettlement, multiplied by a factor that varies depending on the district in which the village is located. In October 16 the promoting team posted on WeChat the "Guangzhou City, farmers collectively owned land expropriation and compensation pilot scheme", listing all ranges of monetary compensation as per the location within Guangzhou Districts. With an average value of 21.73 RMB/sqm\*month (nearly 3,36 \$/smq\*month) Lijiao ranks itself pretty high with a value of 30 RMB/smq\*month (4,63\$/smq\*month). Higher values are allocated to the Yuexiu District, in the old downtown, and near the Tianhe District where the new CBD ranges up to 40 RMB/sqm\*month. In this way, as compensation for 320 sqm of ownership, a villager will receive back 1482 \$ at a monthly level for the next two years after the beginning of the project.

We must add the case where some owners do not live in their own houses, which are intended only for renting. A special poster shows that the revenues derived from the current rental market within the village, will never reach the rate that would instead be received with the compensation of 30 RMB/sqm\*month for the whole duration of the construction. Similarly, if in the future one puts its new properties into the new real estate market, one would receive back even more, the campaign says. The implied message for those landlords, who do not live in the village, but use their properties only as an investment, is to come and vote positively for the transformations, since their proceeds would be very fruitful in any case. The compensation rules displayed on the streets promote receiving big economic benefits, and at the same time declare that any increase in compensation caused by the illegal stock over the four stores will not be tolerated. The strategy is to economically reassure pursuing the goal of reaching 80% of favourable opinions, thus assuring a future where despite the loss of the collective ownership of land, the new social positioning and quality of life is exhibited as the most convenient solution.

## **5 CONCLUSIONS: SOCIAL SATISFACTION AND THE CONTROL OF THE URBAN FORM**

An interesting image derived from a street poster, shows the interior distribution of the new apartments that villagers could obtain after the transformation process (Figure7). Divided by size, in order to find the satisfaction of heterogeneous households, they show a modern distribution, with large spaces, many toilets and even the ability to have walk-in closets.

Comparing these housing solutions with those present in the whole village, it is possible to realize how the prospectus shows an immeasurable upgrade in the quality of the buildings space for living. But what is missing in the discussion, and in the urban studies, has to put back in the centre of its debates, it is the lack of urban spatial correlation between the old town and its redesign. The values in compensation are numerically advantageous for the inhabitants and, noting the widespread volumetric illegal buildings, are likewise able to monitor the extent to which this is lawful. Unfortunately, the

result that comes out is a value that abstracts the environment since it is simply numerical. The image of the "small house" used in the promotion corresponds in reality to the relocation of high towers with 30 to 35 stores, relocating people in a completely new typology. It expresses the desire of modernity, but also homogenisation in the urban context, enabling to re-establish the "human scale" connections typical of VICs.

If in the disorderly and unsafe streets of the village, a person can move along the streets and still get in contact with the micro activities, this is no longer possible in the new gated neighbourhood: the possession of the machine and the stabilization of new type of businesses become the new background in which human relations have to be still tested (Liu et al., 2010). For this reason, the inclusion or exclusion of VICs has to be verified within the process of the voting that would eventually express the desire or not for a new spatial model, completely different from daily life (Figure8). The villagers will lose collective ownership for entering in a 70-year real estate housing ownership and becoming urban residents (with all the fiscal consequences). In addition, the city will perform its new urban visions upgrading its settlements, and despite putting all the efforts to save its heritage asset, it will destroy its historical urban stratifications. For example the morphology of the canal disposition of Lijiao village, with its typical "tree" shape, is a unique exemplar in the Pearl River Delta. A process based on erasing, rather than connecting, will strongly affect the future image of the city. The proposed model is the replacement of the historic boundaries of the village with those of a gated community (He, 2013), which certainly affords security to the private citizens, but interposes a completely new spatial order.

By the way, the participation process made up in Lijiao by the real estate company is an important element for reconsideration of the top-down perspective, often occurring in the debates around VICs. The possibility to create a bottom-up approach in which the community is informed about the procedures, the regulations, and the future development of their land, is an instrument both to create consensus both to readdress the role of the community as an important player in the transformation process. The upgrading of the city passes by also from these approaches, crossing business opportunities to a reconsolidation at local level to support them. Of course the rhetoric instrument is strongly used beyond the debate, but villagers' requirements are becoming even stronger due to the consciousness of their ownership power inside the urban transformation game.

Participation created by those who promote the transformation has placed at the centre of the debate the spatial quality as discourse within which consensus is built, but there are other aspects that should be considered. First of all, the fate of migrant workers, real absents and silent protagonists of the conflict, who are intended to move elsewhere. In this sense the problem of floating population is not resolved at all, generating a progressive gentrification of the central areas of the city. In addition, the focus of the debate has moved more and more to a sensibility for avoiding all costs of any direct clash with the local community, promoting activities to

encourage the process of transformation. There is symptom of desire to create a broader consensus on the new image of the city, where heritage assets are preserved in the same way, but all the rest has to be transformed in a more efficient machine.



Figure 8. People putting renting advertises on the rendering of the new Lijiao village. Source: Lijiao village, made by the author

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