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Sturzaker, J. and Verdini, G.

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Opposition and resistance: Governance challenges around urban growth in China and the UK☆

John Sturzaker[a,*], Giulio Verdini[b]

[a] Department of Geography & Planning, School of Environmental Sciences, University of Liverpool, Roxby Building, Chatham Street, Liverpool L69 7ZT, UK
[b] University of Westminster, Faculty of Architecture & Built Environment, 35 Marylebone Road, London NW1 5LS, UK

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ABSTRACT

This paper proposes that, different though they are, the processes of urban development in China and the UK can be analytically compared by looking at the commonly occurring opposition and resistance to that development. Such opposition and resistance can delay and limit the development of land in and immediately surrounding cities. The paper firstly reviews literature on opposition and resistance to development in both the UK and China, before going on to suggest that this opposition and resistance can in part be explained by a common cause – resentment at opaque and top-down/centralised planning processes. Consequently, the paper concludes that a common solution may applicable in both contexts – increasing participation and building institutional/civic capital amongst communities – and considers the likelihood of implementing this solution, particularly in China.

1. Introduction

It was widely reported in 2012 that the proportion of the Chinese population living in urban areas surpassed 50%, a rapid increase since the 1970 s which shows no sign of slowing. In contrast, outside of London, urban populations in the UK are in general slowly declining through counterurbanisation. This is just one difference between China and the UK that may suggest that attempts to compare planning and development processes between the two are futile, and that any thoughts of mutual learning from that comparison are even more so. One thing which unites the two countries, however, is the process of urban growth, either continuing conversion of undeveloped, often agricultural, land into housing and other 'urban' uses or inner-city redevelopment, and consequent opposition and resistance to that development – this opposition and resistance is the focus of this paper.

The overall goal and the nature of debate around the topic of urban containment strategies and the compact city in the UK (and other western countries) and in China can also be considered, at least partially, different. While the former seeks to address the failure of the market in the allocation of land around the edge of cities, and aims at formulating policies to cope with the social and environmental costs of sprawl, especially in terms of loss of open space, traffic congestion, etc.; the latter tends to emphasize the government's role in fuelling sprawl and also, at the same time, the attempts in recent years to reverse the main trend in the direction of preserving cultivated land and guaranteeing food security (Zhang, 2000).

The literature in western counties is undoubtedly richer and has explored different methods and approaches for managing the non-urban space surrounding the city at different scales (Maruani & Amit-Cohen, 2007). It has also outlined the contradictions of

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* Corresponding author.
E-mail addresses: john.sturzaker@liv.ac.uk (J. Sturzaker), g.verdini@westminster.ac.uk (G. Verdini).

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those forms of land-use control applied by either central or local government (Pendall, 1999). In China, attention has focussed on the role played by decentralisation in local government finance. Whilst this decentralisation has been acknowledged as one of the main engines of economic development in China, it has also been identified as the cause of vertical and horizontal governance conflicts in relation to the current strongly land-consuming model. For example, the issue of local public finance mainly being generated by revenue from urbanization and not sufficiently supported by central government (Yanyun Man, 2011); and the related strong competition among local jurisdictions in complex metropolitan areas that can potentially thwart containment policies set at the upper level (Zhao, Lu, & De Roo, 2010).

However, returning to our opening argument, by focussing not on the systems or processes of planning, nor necessarily on the (desired) outcomes thereof, but rather on the unwanted negative consequences which emerge from those systems, processes and outcomes, we can find a common analytical lens with which to understand the complex and dynamic interrelationships which characterise urban development everywhere. Moreover, a comparative approach and consequent mutual learning can provide an analytical platform for better understanding about the optimum level of decision-making process in the two countries and under which conditions it is possible to minimize potential social conflicts.

As we will discuss below, in both the UK and China urban growth is a source of contention, leading to varyingly expressed levels of opposition and resistance. We follow the thread of writing (see for example Smith & Marquez 2000; Bell, Gray, & Haggett, 2005; Wolsink, 2000) which argues that at least some of this opposition and resistance stems from a sense of powerlessness on the part of those affected, due in no small part to decision making procedures perceived as being opaque, top-down and clientelist. These arguments are well established in Western contexts, but as we will discuss below, are increasingly occurring in China as well. For example, a recent paper by Zhao identified mayor 'institutional barriers to capacity-building in urban planning in the transformation era' (2015, 280), one of which was a problematic relationship between planning and public participation.

This suggests, therefore, that despite the radically different contexts within which planning and urban development takes place in the UK and China, there is a common problem with a lack of participation in planning leading to opposition to development, and thus it may be that common principles (if not their detailed operation) can be identified to help open up decision making to those who currently feel disenfranchised.

The rest of this paper comprises five sections – the next considers some explanatory theories in relation to governance, followed by two brief analyses of opposition and resistance to urban growth in the UK and China respectively, before a comparative discussion and some concluding thoughts. It is worthwhile at this point to include an explanatory notes.

It is necessary to clarify what we mean by opposition and resistance, and how the two terms differ. The Oxford English Dictionary suggests that the terms oppose and resist, whilst not synonymous, have similar meanings:

> *Oppose:* To contend, fight, or argue against; to be antagonistic or hostile to; to resist or obstruct (a thing, person, action, etc.).
> *Resist*: To strive against, fight or act in opposition to, oppose; to contrive not to yield to; to withstand, be unaffected by the action or influence of.

For this paper we interpret *opposition* to be the less direct of the two, focusing on political/discursive avenues of expression – opposition to development might, for example, involve arguing against development proposals in various forums, from consultations carried out by local government to, ultimately, legal battles in court. *Resistance* to us suggests direct action of some kind, whether protests in relation to potential development sites or, in particularly newsworthy examples from China, refusing to leave one's home in the face of redevelopment of the surrounding neighbourhood. There is clearly no solid demarcation between the two terms and some of the cases we discuss in the rest of the paper feature both discursive opposition and active resistance to urban development – in others, though, opposition can be facilitated through a political process which appears to encourage open dialogue with a mature or incipient civil society, but which, in the final analysis, cannot necessarily limit urban development – resulting in physical resistance.

2. Definitions and theoretical approaches to governance

We follow Jones and Evans in defining 'governance' as it relates to 'government' – the latter, if defined as a verb, meaning 'what the state seeks to achieve', with its corresponding implication that 'the state is a singular, monolithic entity speaking with one voice' (2008, 30–31). Governance, conversely, is 'the process of delivering the aims of the state', with increasing involvement of 'non-state actors' to deliver those aims (ibid.). This proliferation of other actors and agencies in the process of delivering the aims of the state generates, perhaps inevitably, a great deal of complexity and creates new relationships and ways of conceptualising those relationships. Many books have been written on this subject, so we clearly cannot hope to present a comprehensive review, but we wish to highlight a small number of contributions which are particularly useful to us, and which we draw upon in the sections which follow.

A key concept in the context of our focus on top-down planning, and consequently a need for a potential alternative, is that of the capacity of communities and other groups to get involved in planning – something which is often referred to as *institutional capacity*. de Megalhaes, Claudio, Healey & Madanipour (2002, 53) define institutional capacity as 'the capacity of urban governance to make a difference in sustaining and transforming the qualities of cities' and they particularly focus on building this 'in ways which expand stakeholder involvement and have sufficient power to affect the driving forces affecting life chances, economic opportunities and environmental qualities'. Others refer to this as *institutional capital,* which itself can be conceptualised as comprising four forms of capital:

a) 'intellectual capital – knowledge resources that are socially constructed and flow among the actors;
b) social capital – relational resources and the nature of relations between the actors;
c) material capital – financial and other tangible resources that are made available to the actors and the group; and
d) political capital – power relations and the capacity to mobilise resources and take action'.

Davoudi and Evans (2005, 499).

Social capital is of key interest to us, because 'individuals or communities with access to social capital… are better able to mitigate local land-use conflicts and better able to manage local change and development' (Libby & Sharp, 2003, 1194). As Davoudi and Evans noted, the concept of social capital can be linked to terms such as 'civic society', 'civic virtues', or 'civic culture'. The latter was devised by Almond and Verba (1963, 178), who defined it as 'a set of beliefs, attitudes, norms, perceptions and the like, that support participation'. Similarly, the former two were coined by Putnam (1993, 15), who defined civic virtues as being defined 'by an active, public-spirited citizenry, by egalitarian political relations, by a social fabric of trust and co-operation'.

Docherty, Goodlad, and Paddison (2001, 2229) tried to pinpoint the difference between civic culture and social capital:

> 'Social capital is usually conceptualised as inhering generally in the relations between citizens, demonstrated in trust, and arising as a consequence of social interaction, whereas civic culture is a particular form of *political* culture that is seen as pre-existing, as well as probably resulting from political experiences and behaviour… Social capital can be seen therefore as a generalised outcome of culture (including political culture), of social conditions (including political institutions) and of social behaviour that foster trust in institutions of all types'.

Of course, these various concepts interact with each other:

> 'culture affects polity, society and economy; and economy, society and polity affect culture. If a culture supportive of active participation exists in particular places — a modernised "civic culture"—then it will be easier, we hypothesise, to establish there the new institutions and practices that foster participation' (ibid, 2228).

Even where such a civic culture' exists, it is not always easy for those outside the main loci of power to influence governance processes, especially if the state (at whatever level) seeks to 'frame' the ways in which such processes operate. Bob Jessop (2003; 2008) described this framing as *metagovernance*, or 'governance of governance' (2008, 8). Metagovernance theory emerges as a consequence of governance theory itself in democratic countries – as states lose some of the direct control over outputs which they used to enjoy, given the wider range of organisations involved in delivering those outputs, they look for new ways to control what transpires without 'reverting to traditional statist styles of government in terms of bureaucratic rule making and imperative command' (Torfing, Peters, Pierre & Sørensen, 2012, 122). In planning, metagovernance tactics could be used to ensure that lower order plans meet certain higher order objectives – for example if a regional plan needed to comply with certain policies set at the national level. Many would argue this is necessary for states to govern effectively, but metagovernance can have negative effects in that 'at different levels, actions are constrained by broader framing actions. Ambition at the lowest levels may be frustrated, leaving individuals and communities feeling powerless, and in the shadow of different bureaucratic structures' (Gallent and Robinson, 2012, 193). Others have described, in a study of governance practices in a particular location, 'the insidious way that powerful interests outside and inside a locality can impose their agendas unless there are countervailing grassroots forces to challenge and limit their operations' (de Magalhaes et al., 2003, 86).

We will return to these issues in Section 5. In the following two sections we discuss first the UK then China, and opposition to urban development in those two contexts. In the next section we occasionally interchange references to the UK and England. The detailed operation of planning systems vary between England and the devolved nations (Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) of the UK, but the underlying principles of those systems are the same, so whilst much of the literature we cite refers to England, the same points, broadly speaking, apply across the UK.

3. Opposition to urban growth in the UK

Opposition to development in the UK can occur in urban, suburban, peri-urban and rural areas. However, for a number of reasons, this opposition can be at its most intense in areas outside, but in close proximity to, urban centres. One reason for this is highlighted in the work of Murdoch, Lowe, Ward, and Marsden (2003), in their differentiation of 'types' of countryside, with a key explanatory factor being the presence of middle class in-migrants, potentially brought into conflict with other groups. For our purposes, the first two types of countryside Murdoch et al. identify – the *preserved* and *contested* countrysides – are most relevant, being the closest to urban centres. Table 1 illustrates the differences between these types of countryside.

This sort of differentiation does, of course, reflect largely subjective analyses of the demographic and associated governance characteristics of areas, but it does suggest that in areas of the countryside nearer to urban centres we are more likely to see (a) proposals for urban extensions, new settlements, or indeed any other form of substantial urban-type development; and (b) more conflict around such proposals.

A second reason for higher levels of resistance/opposition to development in these types of area is that it has been argued that the middle class in-migrants bring with them a substantial amount of the social capital that our discussion above highlights as being important for participation. Evidence from elsewhere suggests a correlation between affluence and the ability to mobilise opposition to both unwanted development and the closure of local services (Bondi, 1988; Livingstone, Bailey & Kearns, 2008; Devine-Wright, 2009; Hastings & Matthews, 2015).

Table 1
The preserved and contested countrysides in England.

	Location	Dominant group(s)	Dominant attitude(s)
The preserved countryside	'much of the lowlands of southern England, as well as in attractive and more accessible upland areas'	'middle-class social groups living in the countryside, employed primarily in the service sector, and often working in nearby urban centres'	'pastoral and preservationist'
The contested countryside	'areas that lie outside the main commuter zones'	'local agricultural, commercial and development interests' vs. '"incomers" who may be middle-class workers or retirees attracted to the area because of its residential environment'	'development for local needs' vs. pastoral and preservationist

(adapted from, and quotes from, Murdoch et al. 2003, 12–13).

So, in essence, the presence of more affluent incomers in the urban fringe in the UK increases both the likelihood of conflict to development and the chances that opposition/resistance will be successful (Sturzaker, 2010).

Given these factors, it is unsurprising that there is a long history of resistance to urban encroachment into the UK countryside, with Clifford and Warren (2005) noting opposition to canals and railways in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. Clifford and Warren considered reactions to three development proposals around St Andrews, Scotland, one of which was a housing development. 68.8% of their survey respondents were opposed to the proposed housing development and 79.4% of respondents supported the proposal for a green belt around the town. Opposition to the housing development, and support for the green belt, was expressed principally on environmental grounds.

This support for a green belt is mirrored across the country, given the popular awareness of and support for this method of limiting urban growth in the UK. Green belts, areas of protected land surrounding the major cities in the UK, are one of the primary means of effecting urban containment, and on balance are generally agreed to have done so – 'urban containment through the green belt can create a much more tightly regulated landscape, thereby reinforcing the division between town and country' (Gallent, Bianconi, & Andersson, 2006, 464). At the same time, however, green belts have been blamed for 'fuelling recent housing shortages… [because] they prevent sensible and vital extensions to existing settlements, leading to unsustainable development further away from existing built-up areas, and causing an elevation of property prices' (Gallent & Shaw 2007, 618). Despite these criticisms, green belts have attained a somewhat mythical status, and their ongoing protection appears to be considered by all mainstream political parties as something of a "sacred cow" (HM Government, 2010; The Labour Party, 2010).

Urban containment has been a feature of the British planning system since its conception in 1947 (Hall, Gracey, Drewitt & Thomas, 1973; Sturzaker, 2010; Cloke, 1979), with many commentators since noting the particular status afforded to the countryside in the UK, and consequent opposition to development therein (Woods, 2005). It has been suggested that this opposition to urban growth stems from what has been called the '"fetishization" of the rural' (Gallent & Andersson, 2007, 16), and the construction/representation of the countryside as a pastoral idyll, 'a "refuge" from modernity' (Murdoch et al., 2003, 152).

Current planning policy in England maintains, even outside the green belts, a strong emphasis on protecting rural areas because of 'the intrinsic character and beauty of the countryside' (DCLG, 2012a, 5). This protectionism has been seen as a representation of the exercise of discursive power on the part of a wealthy, land and property owning middle class (Sturzaker & Shucksmith, 2011), who set out to exclude 'otherness' (Hubbard, 2005).

Linked to these ideas about the perception of the countryside is opposition derived from the (perceived or actual) top-down nature of the planning process, and the consequent tendency for those opposing development to portray the conflict in terms of that development being 'imposed' on those at the local level. So, 'the fringe is often viewed as the battle-line between town and country, where the urban encroaches on the rural and where global (economic) pressures come into conflict with local development concerns' (Gallent & Andersson, 2007, 19).

This is not a peculiarly English phenomenon – Woods (2003, 309) notes that, in various countries in the developed world, there is an increasing politicisation of the rural, and 'In each case a central motivating force is either the defence of the "rural".... against external threat, or conflict over the meaning, use and regulation of rural space'.

The case of Ireland interesting in this context – whilst Ireland is clearly a different context from the UK, one with a different planning system and where 'traditionally, within rural areas the planning system has been facilitative of new development' (Scott, 2012, 94), it has also been argued that the attitudes of planners in the UK have a strong influence on their Irish counterparts (Scott, 2012). Scott, Russell, and Redmond (2007) explored attitudes to development around Dublin, the capital city of Ireland, where very rapid urban growth in recent years makes it particularly comparable to much of the UK. This rapidity of growth led to some degree of conflict, much of which emerged due to frustration on the part of communities at their inability to influence 'the planning policy and development plan for the local area' (Scott, Russell, and Redmond, 2007, 183). In another Irish case, Mahon, Fahy, Cinnéide and Gallagher, (2009, 65) found that 'negative experiences of more formal levels of governance – such as outcomes of dealing with the planning process – may result in local communities and individuals feeling disillusioned and increasingly disconnected from these institutional frameworks'.

Sturzaker looked at opposition to small-scale housing developments in English villages, finding a substantial degree of resistance to such developments. Some of this opposition was expressed in very strong terms, and in some cases led to the abandonment of the proposed new homes. The reasons for opposition varied – some was labelled as 'NIMBYism', or opposition due to self-interest, but Sturzaker found that some resistance, at least, was due to resentment at top-down planning, with 'distrust of the local authority'

(2011, 564) cited as a recurring issue. Others making similar findings, in the UK and elsewhere, include Bell et al. (2005) in relation to wind energy developments and Devine-Wright (2009) who argued that 'place attachment' led to opposition to external proposals for change.

Such resentment can trigger a move from political opposition to active resistance to development of different forms – witness the protests in the 1980s and 1990s against various road projects in the UK (Barry, 1999), campaigns against 'eco-towns', the proposed programme of new, energy efficient communities in England in the mid-2000s (Peterkin and Hope, 2008), and more recent opposition to the closure of libraries (Goulding, 2013). Similar protests have been seen in many other countries, for example in Italy with the No TAV movement against the high speed rail link between Turin and the French city of Lyon (Roland, 2006).

It is in this context that the UK Government introduced its *Localism Act 2011*, which aimed to re-shape the planning process in England. The claim was that the Act started to 'reverse more than 100 years of centralisation, returning power back to citizens, communities and local groups to manage their own affairs' (DCLG, 2012b). A key aspect of the Act was to re-focus the English planning system by abolishing the regional-level tier and introducing a new community-level tier to the hierarchy of development plans (neighbourhood plans), on the basis that 'Regional Strategies built nothing but resentment - we want to build houses. So instead we will introduce powerful new incentives for local people so they support the construction of new homes in the right places and receive direct rewards from the proceeds of growth to improve their local area' (DCLG, 2010).

Early commentary on the new planning system in England raised concerns that the extent to which communities were genuinely being given responsibility for planning was limited. Gallent and Robinson used Bob Jessop's concept of 'metagovernance' (see Section 2) to critique both the practices of the previous system, and the legislation governing the new one. They concurred with others (Haughton, Allmendinger, Counsell & Vigar, 2010) that the previous English planning system, including a strong regional planning tier, could be characterized as a form of metagovernance, but fear that the 2011-onwards system still seeks to achieve metagovernance through 'legal compliance between neighbourhood development plans and local plans, with the latter taking precedence' (2012, 195). Other concerns about the new system included the potential lack of democratic legitimacy of the process (Davoudi & Cowie, 2013) and the scope for wealthier/more powerful groups to dominate that process (Hastings and Matthews, 2015; Matthews et al., 2015).

We look at the early evidence regarding the outcomes of these reforms in Section 5, but these criticisms suggest that they do not necessarily provide a glittering example of best practice that could be immediately adopted elsewhere. They do, though, represent a stark difference to the planning system and processes in China, where planning urban growth is characterized by an almost complete lack of community participation.

4. Opposition to urban growth in China

The scale and rapidity of the Chinese urbanisation process, since the opening of the country to the market in the late 1970s, has been without precedent in history. This had the merit to leverage millions of people out of poverty in a short timespan ensuring, at the same time, a relatively orderly expansion of cities (World Bank and DRCSCC, 2014). Urban growth, however, has implied high costs, especially concerning rising environmental externalities (being pollution the main outcome) and increasing social inequalities. Urban planning has been often inadequate to tackle these problems, due to the rapid transition from a centrally planned system to a market system. As a matter of fact, this is case of the City Planning Act of 1989, which has de facto ignored the role of public participation in planning and has over emphasised land development (Zhao, 2015). Chinese cities have in fact largely favoured urban expansion to adhere to the national diktat of economic growth, and this has been made possible by local decentralisation and fiscal responsibility. The formation of local growth coalition between local authorities and private developers has been the main engine of urban development, resulting in a pervert land-driven fiscal regime (Wu, 2015). It is the (fair) compensation to peri-urban farmers, expropriated from their land and relocated in urban areas, that has become during the 1990s and 2000s one of the main source of tension between affected stakeholders and government.

In addition, this urban growth regime has often resulted in conflict with attempts by central government to implement urban containment strategies and preserve farmlands at the urban fringe through limiting city size, encouraging intensive land development and designing and implementing green belts in some of the mayor cities of the country such as Beijing (Zhao, 2011).

Due to the relative immaturity of the current land use planning system in China, the urban-rural fringe has become a typical arena of increasing conflicts, being exacerbated by differences in land ownership of urban and rural land and a diverse status of citizenship (Verdini, Wang, & Zhang, 2016).

The Land Management Act of 1986 introduced land use plans in order to regulate the conversion of agricultural land into non-agricultural. Later the National Land Use Plan (1997–2010) set a long-term quota for new development on agricultural land (CPGPRC, 1997) and the Amendment to the law in 1998 clearly stated the strategic national role of the protection of farmland through the introduction of a system of monitoring and control of the conversion process and the so-called 'dynamic equilibrium in the total amount of cultivated land' (CPGPRC, 1999).

It has been argued that the combination of the quota system, controlled by the upper administrative levels (provincial and national), and the fact that the amount of cultivated land allocated for other uses has to be reclaimed from unused land to ensure the total amount of cultivated land is not reduced, has created difficulties in implementation. This attempts to control growth, within a system which has tolerated a certain *laissez-faire* at local level, have been very controversial. The governance of farmland conversion in China, especially if compared with other western countries, has been largely characterized by unclear procedures, very often resulting in significant levels of illegal farmland conversion (Tan, Beckmann, Berg & Qu, 2009). This has primarily generated a sharp increase in protests, especially in the countryside (Zweig, 2000). The main motive behind the resentment has been normally

associated with the perception of undercompensated land requisition, emphasised by the use, in some cases, of coercive methods (Guo, 2001). Loss of land and livelihood, imposed by passive urbanisation, has determined social unrest in China, normally taking place around the larger cities and emerging in the form of unorganised or spontaneous protests or collective resistance (Wang, 2012).

The process through which China has witnessed increasing tension between central and local levels concerning urban issues has been framed as China's 'neoliberal urbanism', resulting in high level of social resistance as the main externality of development (He & Wu, 2009). It has mostly affected the urban-rural fringe, as already mentioned and, lately, many inner-city redevelopment areas. In particular, the latter have become an interesting observatory by which observing not only social tensions but also insurgent and more structured opposing voices against projects perceived as unwanted as in the case of the downtown urban regeneration of Nanjing, Shanghai and Suzhou (Verdini, 2015)

Recalling the theoretical framework we have introduced, the type of protest expressed by peri-urban farmers can be addressed 'as 'resistance', with the peculiarity of never challenging the political system as such but rather invoking rules or policies perceived as being violated by local officials (Bernstein, 2004). It is instead from the experience of more mature urban systems that is possible to observe the constituency of forms of oppositions, in some cases successful.

Nevertheless, a step has been taken to ensure a more effective legal protection for collective land ownership and individual land use rights in rural areas, and to limit the discretional rural-urban conversion, providing a fairer compensation for the loss of agricultural land (CPGPRC, 2007). While this reform can surely be acknowledged as a step forward in achieving more social stability, other different but related issues cannot be underestimated in understanding how urban growth features in China. We refer to the emergence of illegal behaviours and 'opportunistic' attitudes where growth is limited by upper planning levels.

In this respect it is worth mentioning some important attempts made to implement shape-related tools for planning urban containment, such as green belts. While the overall fortune of green belts in Asia has been quite limited, if compared to the UK, some cities like Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chongqing and Shenyang have introduce a green belt in their local planning tools. Yang and Jinxing (2007), have studied the development of the Beijing one describing its pros and cons. Since its conception in 1983, the Beijing green belt has gone through different phases of implementation, encountering several problems. The mechanism of implementation was based on a monetary compensation for the relocation of farmers, plus an annual payment if the farmers choose to maintain the land as undeveloped. They are allowed to sell their land to a developer who can allocate only one-third of the land for real estate development, with the rest to be preserved as green space. The farmer can eventually get a house from the new development. A survey of land use in 1998 revealed 'the land use in the green belt was dominated by the built-up area at 49.1%, followed by agricultural land at 25.6%. Greenspace only accounted for 15.8% of the total area' (Yang & Jinxing, 2007, 290). 'Not surprisingly, even though only one-third of the land could be legally developed into real estate, farmers and developers often collaborated to develop more than that quote' while the government 'turned a blind eye to the illegal development in the greenbelt' getting benefits from the taxes generated (ibid, 294). Pragmatically, the Beijing municipal government, in order to give a strong input to the conclusion of the green belt programme, launched a vocal campaign for the production of a new green space, scaled down the size of the first belt, and adding a second belt.

The evidence from Beijing suggests that part of the problem results from the fact that the rural villages had no say in the decision making process. Local farmers (almost 880,000!) were excluded from any form of involvement, ultimately taking the 'opportunistic' advantage of making the most from the deprivation of their land. 'Illegal' behaviour, i.e. the change in use of land, and/or development on land which is not in accordance with official rules and regulations, is embedded in one of the most controversial and long-term problems of modern China – namely the issue of the ownership of land and the acknowledgment of property rights in rural areas (Ho, 2001). We argue that it is partly due to lack of 'civic culture', limiting the possibility of building institutional capacity and eventually making participation work.

On the other hand, in recent years and particularly around urban growth tensions located in inner city areas, an incipient civil society has attempted to systematically oppose local government appetites for growth (Verdini, 2015). Due to the historical value of some areas, grassroots movements and groups of local elites have jointly expressed purposive actions to change the status quo, advocating for pro-conservation strategies. These have arisen in response to top-down impositions and developed from the bottom. It has not been always effective, with the risk of emerging illegal behaviours like in the case of the south part of the historic city centre of Nanjing (Zhang, 2012), drawing an interesting parallel with what is happening at the fringe, but it has meant a significant progress in local governance functioning.

In general terms the governance structure for urban growth management in China is gradually becoming more comprehensive and mature, both in terms of planning instruments employed and of the protection of land rights, but nevertheless the Chinese model is still considered strongly land consuming, mainly based on command-control planning instruments and conflictive in its nature (Pieke, 2002; Feizhou & Bourguignon, 2009).

In fact, the Chinese system, despite some efficacious action taken at central level, has created and still creates opposition and resistance to urban growth. The source of contention and the consequent sense of powerlessness can be ascribed to both the perception of an unfair compensation for land expropriation, and the feeling of abuse of power and corruption exerted by local cadres. Very often the two tend to overlap, making it hard to distinguish between them and legitimating illegality as a form of 'self-compensation'. The result is that the attribution of responsibility is difficult to determine, lying in the so called 'deliberate institutional ambiguity' of the ownership of land, where several intermediate actors can potentially take economic advantage of land being transformed (Ho, 2001).

In particular, the second issue, (perception of) corruption, has to do with the particular form of the decision-making process, especially at the local level, and current practices or local habits, perceived as featuring collusion with city officials.

However, recent studies shows that the fiscal reform of the early 2000 s has reduced local government appetite for growth, recentralising fiscal authority to the county level. This fact, together with the previous introduction of village-level elections, has unintentionally generated new alliances between local cadres and citizens, creating a new generation of village leaders, disenfranchised from previous privileges and more willing to represent the voice of their people (Wang, 2012). This is the case of a recent case of local participation in the Jiangsu Province, where civic engagement tools have been tested with the support of local officials, in order to gain the maximum consensus over a development proposal for a rural village (Verdini et al., 2016).

Summing up, in China the main reason for opposition derives from the thwarted aspirations of the main stakeholders involved, namely the displaced farmers relocated to new urban development in comparison to the discretional benefits of the few. It might be argued that the compensation, either monetary or in the form of housing, can improve their overall living condition, but very often the sense of deprivation of land, capabilities and rights that will impact on this group is underestimated, especially for some selected and more passive categories (Wu, Webster, He & Liu, 2010). Moreover the widespread mistrust of the state and local officials, deeply embedded in Chinese culture, can produce opportunistic attitudes among individuals that might limit the success of whatever process of involvement in the decision making process. On the other hand, Chinese cities are also witnessing the consolidation of an incipient civil society, which goes hand by hand with the growth of the middle class and the expansion of wealth (The Economist, 2016). These sectors of the societies are more inclined to counterbalance the system of power by raising their voice and claiming for their rights. It is hard to say whether this can effectively nurture the 'civic virtues', so precious in the functioning of institutions and eventually produce an effective change of the status quo. However, this emerging trend in China can be observed with the lens of Western experiences, to see whether some of those could be applicable in China in the near future and under which conditions.

5. A comparative discussion and analysis

The preceding analysis has shown that, despite the many and obvious differences between their contexts in terms of population, rate of development, governance structures, etc., the UK and China share a common feature of (sometimes intense) opposition and resistance to urban development. We have suggested to take into account primarily the UK experience in relation to urban growth, where resistance and opposition tend to overlap; and to distinguish between rural resistance and urban opposition in China, although even here distinctions between the two tend to disappear. This is in large part due to the greater levels of social and cultural capital in, respectively, the UK urban fringe and Chinese inner cities (though, particularly in China, this is a developing area which requires further research). Bearing this in mind, does opposition and resistance in the two countries share a common cause?

The planning system in the UK, and indeed other ostensibly 'developed' countries has been criticised for adopting a 'decide-announce-defend' method, with decision-makers consulting affected communities and individuals on effectively a *fait accompli* – this in itself has been blamed for the levels of opposition often seen to new housing developments (Bell et al., 2005). The Chinese situation cannot be certainly described as being any more democratic than the English – in fact, we might say the Chinese planning system could be described more as a 'decide-announce-ignore' approach. This coercive attitude of the government, however, faces an increasingly structured organisation of protest, sometimes led by popular leaders able to mobilize people through their social networks. This can produce effective and active *resistance*, any repression of which can be highly costly in both financial and social terms (Li & O'Brien, 2008).

China has undergone a strong decentralisation process in recent decades that has made possible the revitalisation of the urban economy, fuelled by a vivid dynamism at local level. The central government has encouraged urbanisation, generating local governance conflicts which require resolution in what are often unclear planning procedures. At the same time local government fails to consider the conflict inherent in decision making at the local level – namely those which have to passively accept top-down decisions.

In the attempt to reverse this trend, the need for improving the Chinese system of participation has been quietly acknowledged in official documents (MLRPRC, 2005) and some emerging participatory practices have arisen.

This brief discussion regarding UK and China suggests that top-down, or centralised, planning is a major contributor to resistance and opposition. So what tools might be available to support a move towards bottom-up planning, particularly in the challenging Chinese context? To answer this question a comparative table between UK and Chinese participatory practices is here introduced. The intention is to highlight whether there is scope in China to experiment with some of the most common practices of participation already tested in the UK and at which stage of development they are (see Table 2). The second column of this table refers to the International Association for Public Participation (IAP2), which has developed a "Public Participation Spectrum" (IAP2, 2014), developing the work of Arnstein (1969) and others. This spectrum places participation activity on this scale: *Inform-Consult-Involve-Collaborate-Empower*, and is helpful in capturing the extent to which (in our opinion or the opinion of others) participation in decision-making has a meaningful impact on the decision eventually reached.

The table illustrates that there are certain prerequisites, or conditions, for participation activities to be successful. These may be institutional, such as what Docherty et al. (2001: 2245) called 'opportunity structures', or Healey (2006) called 'hard infrastructure'. But they may equally be cultural – the same paper noted the need for a "civic culture". Can China possibly be said to embody such a culture? Perhaps not, as Docherty et al. (2001) identify that 'A civic culture and high levels of trust are associated with features of advanced economies and their populations such as high levels of education and of associational activity' (2229). However, we need not necessarily despair, because Docherty et al. looked found that 'a possibility that citizen participation may be fostered as much by the creation of opportunity structures that build confidence in the efficacy of participation as by the intrinsic levels of civic culture' (ibid, 2246) – so providing the opportunity to participate can help support the development of the culture needed to do so.

So, in contexts where civic culture is lacking, it may still be possible to build structures and processes which facilitate bottom-up

Table 2
Participatory practices in the UK/China.

Reference/ example of participation activity	Position on IAP2 spectrum	Key features	Institutional/ cultural prerequisites for success	Scope for (AND EXTENT OF) use in China
Docherty et al., 2001 – Participation in Scottish communities	Involve/ Collaborate/ Empower	Area committees, devolution of responsibility to local people, involvement of voluntary sector in local agencies.	'opportunity structures for participation' (Docherty et al., 2001, 2245) to help build civic culture.	There are several attempts across China, in rural areas but mainly in urban areas, following a new legislation which favour participation since 2005. However, there are lack of systematic studies in this field. RELATIVELY MATURE STAGE (requires further research to explore in depth).
"English" localism	Empower (though some have questioned this fitting de facto a neo-liberal agenda where powerful groups are more likely to lead the process)	Neighbourhood plans produced by communities (not planners) have statutory weight in decision-making and are endorsed by a vote in a referendum.	Civic capacity – 'sufficient numbers of middle class people and/or existing community organizations to lead on the plan' (Wills, 2016, 49)	Elite groups (artists and business men) in Shanghai have successfully proposed to protect the neighbourhood of Tianzifan in the 2000s. it is still one of the few examples in China of effective bottom-up move for local change (Yung, Chan and Xu, 2014) INITIAL STAGE
Healey, 2006 **(and others) – Collaborative planning theory**	Collaborate	Inclusionary argumentation – a process through which participants 'come together, build understanding and trust among themselves, and develop ownership of the strategy' (Healey, 2006, 249).	Hard infrastructure (political, administrative and legal systems) should recognise diversity; acknowledge non-state agencies and spread power to them; offer opportunities for informal/local initiative; foster the inclusion of all; be accountable.Soft infrastructure (plan-making processes) should be more inclusive.	Despite attempts to implement participatory processes, the development of inclusionary argumentation is still difficult to achieve. This is due from one side to the widespread individualism of the Chinese society (Ren, 2013; Chang, 2009). On the other hand, this is also determined by the conflictive relationship between local residents and migrants holding a different Hukou and therefore having limited rights of citizenships. This has been witnessed, for example, in both the rural and urban areas of Jiangsu Province (Verdini, 2015; Verdini et al., 2016).INITIAL STAGE
Wainwright, 2009 – **Participatory democracy in Porto Alegre, Brazil and Manchester, UK**	Empower	Radical decentralisation of power, Government to 'not get in the way of communities generating their own agenda for change' (Wainwright, 2009, 4).	Non-state sources of public power; social and plural understandings of power; 'well-0rganized urban movements, strong democratic traditions and a history of left-of-centre governments' (Wainwright, 2009, 122)	A experiment of deliberate democracy has been attempted in the Zheijian Province (Fishkin, He, Luskin & Siu, 2009).INITIAL STAGE

governance. Within the planning arena, one way of doing this could be to move towards what has been described as 'collaborative planning', a process through which participants 'come together, build understanding and trust among themselves, and develop ownership of the strategy' (Healey, 2006, 249).

However, scholars have in recent years pointed to a trend in China of 'individualization of collective problems' (Ren, 2013, 135), in part because self-organised collectives such as trade unions are illegal in the country – Ren argues that 'the official unions are de facto government agencies and do not really represent workers' interests' (ibid.). This individualisation makes resolving labour conflicts difficult, and similarly could mitigate against collaborative planning-type arrangements. In part this is because individualism is perceived as a reaction against the old social order and a form of emancipation in the new contemporary China, as has been discussed in relation to female factory workers in Guandong province (Chang, 2009).

Even in countries with ostensibly a longer history of collective action, collaborative planning has been criticised for its 'idealism and utopianism' (Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger, 1998, 1988) and a study of devolution in planning inspired by collaborative planning found that 'these initiatives have not achieved any substantial change in the attitude of vested interests including public authorities' (Åström et al., 2011, 575). The 2011-onwards reforms to the planning system in England under the label of 'localism' have, according to their progenitors (The Conservative Party, 2010), some connections with the principles of collaborative planning – if nothing else, they are designed to be 'bottom-up', not 'top-down' in nature. Studies of the new neighbourhood plans in England are as yet relatively few, but the published work that has emerged has identified both positive and negative aspects. Some work (Wills, 2016) has suggested that neighbourhood plans have emancipatory potential, changing the balance of power between municipalities and communities. Others have identified the potential for different models of development, perhaps smaller-scale and better meeting community needs, to be promoted by neighbourhood planning groups (Bradley and Sparling, 2016). Conversely, others have noted that there is evidence of Jessop's 'metagovernance', through the framing of community action by 'higher-tier' authorities which consequently limits what neighbourhoods can do (Sturzaker & Shaw, 2015; Parker, Lynn, & Wargent 2015). So it seems fair to say that the type of approach advocated by Healey and others is far from fully implemented in the English context, and is some distance away in contemporary China.

In fact a review of some community participation experiences across China reveals how economic rights are still prioritised over social and human rights and how the institutional environment, labelled as quasi-democratic, appears either unfamiliar with participatory procedures, or in some cases imposes or manipulates them with the aim of achieving greater legitimation (Plummer & Taylor, 2004). Conversely there have been some tentative experiments with deliberative democracy in China (Fishkin et al., 2009), but it seems that wider political reforms would be needed for such practices to become more widespread. Nevertheless, evidence that some are using these sorts of approaches, although perhaps just at an initial stage (see Table 2), can only be a positive for those of us who seek to democratise the planning process.

6. Conclusions

In this paper we have presented evidence of resistance and opposition to urban growth in England and China. We have noted that in England political/discursive opposition is common – indeed, is facilitated by the structure of the planning system in that country. Active resistance to development is rarer, but tends to occur when opponents to development feel they have exhausted such non-direct interventions. In contrast, in China, physical resistance is more common, in large part due to the radically different political and social context wherein discursive opposition to 'the state' is strongly discouraged or literally unviable due to social fragmentation. Notwithstanding this different context we have used the occurrence of opposition/resistance to development as a case study to illustrate a common flaw in the planning systems in both countries, and proposed that a move away from top-down planning to a more participatory form of governance may help ameliorate this resistance. We have noted that there another commonality between the UK and China is that much opposition/resistance occurs in locations where civic capital is stronger – in areas of the countryside immediately surrounding cities in the UK, home to many middle-class in-migrants; and in inner-city areas in China, where there has been a longer recent history of an active civil society. It might be argued therefore that in other parts of both countries there is insufficient social or civic capital to facilitate a move to more participatory planning. We have discussed the potential for new structures of governance to be developed even without the existence of such capital, which can in turn help to build that capital. As a matter of fact, the introduction of village-level elections accompanied by fiscal reform in China sheds a light on how trust and cooperation (alliances) can rise in place of hostility. In this concluding section we finally discuss possible challenges to greater democratisation in planning.

A common objection to introducing bottom-up planning might be that such an approach cannot guarantee that the state can meet its strategic objectives. This may be a risk, but it is also the case that 'proposals which genuinely derive from a community-based plan or a broad based community drive for development appear to stand more chance of receiving the support of that community' (Sturzaker, 2011, 567; and to a certain extent: Yung, Chan & Xu, 2014), so unless the aims of the state are such that community support appears unfeasible, more community involvement may actually help deliver those aims and reduce the need for top-down enforcement. Or, as Libby and Sharp (2003, 1198) put it, 'landowner participation in a well-designed planning process may help avoid reliance on mandatory measures to control land use' – that, in the case of China, might mean relying on costly repressive methods against illegality, given the large scale of the phenomenon.

Following analysis by Wainwright (2009) of examples of different degrees of bottom-up governance in the West, certain key themes emerge as warnings, or perhaps lessons, for the development of new or amended governance structures.

The first is that whilst moving the responsibility for planning from the (central) state to non-state actors such as neighbourhoods, as the Localism Act 2011 has done in England, potentially increases their representativeness, to ensure that community-run services

are not subject to nepotism, etc., 'It is not enough to democratize the state but social institutions outside the state must also democratize themselves' (Wainwright, 2009, 144). This implies a great degree of responsibility on these institutions to police themselves. It is too early to say whether this responsibility will be met by the new neighbourhood planning agencies, but the discussion in the preceding section implies the need for the cultivation of something akin to civic capital if this is to be the case – and of course a willingness on the part of individuals to act together as part of a 'community'.

Secondly, it might be that local agencies are 'committed to community leadership, but centrally held government purse strings decree "outcome" targets which are insensitive to the messy, chaotic phases that democratic processes often go through' (Wainwright, 2009, 242). This quote related to Manchester in England, but this dissonance between central targets and local aspirations is not uncommon. A related example can be found in China, where the decentralisation of finance to local authorities has led to them seeking to expand their urban areas, in conflict with urban containment strategies.

Thirdly, beyond that kind of dissonance is the more profound problem of limits to local power. Wainwright saw, in that same case study of Manchester, 'residents grasping for themselves some power… Sometimes, though, they come up against national or city-wide constraints over which they are powerless – as if participation should know its "local" place' (2009, 250). This is perhaps a universal problem for such activities, with England's Minister for Planning recently stating that 'Localism does not mean local authorities doing what the hell they like' (Marrs & Millar, 2012). A number of authors (for example Haughton et al. 2010 in relation to the UK) have questioned whether the decentralisation rhetoric adopted by governments across the world has been matched by action, with a tendency for politicians to be unwilling to cede power when they attain it. It is a warning to avoid the naïve belief that more formal participation in China could be necessarily beneficial, just assuming the West as the horizon for action.

Of course, powerful interests seeking to limit bottom-up democracy exist even outside of the public sphere. This is because 'powerful interests outside and inside a locality can impose their agendas unless there are countervailing grassroots forces to challenge and limit their operations', as pointed out by de Magalhaes et al. in discussing an initiative of 'deliberative governance' in Newcastle (2003, 86). This quote illustrates the obvious point that well-meaning outsiders cannot create situations in which participatory democracy can flourish – citizens themselves must demand the right to run their own affairs. But conversely it appears to be the case that, as discussed above (Docherty et al., 2001), more effective structures of participation in themselves encourage more citizen involvement. This may be the area in which academics and other 'outsiders' can best involve themselves, whether in the Chinese context or elsewhere – to disseminate best practice, and perhaps challenge existing power structures to consider whether they could do things differently.

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