

WS28 – Inhabitants

Session 1

The European questions addressed to Chinese

- Collectivity Role :Does it play an active role in the mediation between recipients in expulsions and forced removals ? Is it encouraging property accessibility ? How do you see the balance between home owners and tenants ?
- Is there a relation between the remodelation/demolition process in Beijing and the next Olympic Games ?
- Would you be shocked if I tell that PRC is abandonning socialist solutions for free market ones that proved their inefficiency in Europe, notably in France?
- New development can be used to drive provision of low cost housing & site provision for mobile populations. By attaching planning conditions to new house provision it is possible to mitigate social exclusion to a small degree. Has that been considered ?
- Is housing a right or a commodity in China ? What do you think of the current situation ?

Session 2

The European vision

- housing is a sacred and inalienable right that cannot only be taken for a good, only accessible to the ones who can pay.
- Inhabitants are not only town users, but also city and housing builders.
- Towns are melting pots, which richness comes from race, origins, faith, gender and ages differences.
- Current housing production is not adapted : firstly because, there are millions of empty houses (two million in France in 2005, three million in Spain); secondly, because there are millions of badly housed and homeless people. This contradiction clearly shows that the links between market and state cannot bring a house for everyone.
- Privatization and selling off the rental stock are disastrous for their occupiers and their quality of life. Few adapted solutions have been found so far. This disaster can be found in countries such as Russia, going through an accelerated transition towards capitalism, but also in european countries claiming to adhere to « welfare state » principle.
- Inhabitants' participation is a compulsory step to a urbanity, housing and urban rights.
- The participated housing production does not confine to some habitabel square meters. It is first and foremost a construction, active solidarity, and conviviality process. These housings are related to their urbanity level (such as the Rome cooperative that is downtown). Despite the lack of conformity to regulations these housings allow access to both town and urbanity.

Session 3

The convergences between the European and Chinese society

- Forced evictions, population removals in the name of modern urbanization show the prevalence of profit and markets and are the clearest, most sensitive and most serious indications of the tension between market and inhabitants' interests. Particularly with the poorest ones.
- Enjoy a safe and decent house (not only property access) is a fundamental human right. This right can take the form of property or rental access and settles the right to live in town. Access to lodging is an essential step, but is only the first one in urbanity construction, full expression of the right to live in town.
- The market does not provide adapted solutions for all the sections of the population. This gives a truly active role to civil service and strengthens the inhabitant's one.

The divergences between the European and Chinese society

- The concept of social rights has simply recently been talked about in the public and press. Even in the Chinese academic circle, it is still a new field that calls for further exploration. Chinese government has not yet officially recognised that citizens have the right to housing. Because social services (which related to the realisation of social rights) were mainly provided by work units through the State. People never thought about that is something points to RIGHT, but only life necessities arranged by the governments. While in Europe, "social/housing rights" is widely recognised and mentioned in laws, in some countries, even highlighted in Constitutions. People take it for granted that citizens are born to have social rights.
- The concept of "housing right" start to gain public concern in recent years in China because after the housing reform : (a) Housing is privatised which generates the emergence of housing ownership and housing wealth. People begin to realise that that's something we have to be concerned about as we own it and (b) Socially disadvantaged groups (low income urban family and rural-urban workers) are suffering unfavourable housing conditions as they couldn't afford to buy housing in the market.

- In China, it is more about: (a) whether people have housing right? And (b) How to provide affordable housing to specific groups? In Europe, it is more about: (a) During the Europeanisation, how to deal with the housing problems for migrant? Because previously, social rights are based in nationalities; while Europeanisation destroys its foundation and (b) How to fight for housing rights which are mentioned in laws, as to let governments do better jobs.
- The concept of housing in China is mainly narrowed as “housing purchase”, not including renting. Housing is mainly explored from an economic dimension. In other words, how to provide affordable housing. In Europe, the concept has both social and economic and even gender dimensions.

Session 4

Acting together on common challenge

- Clear will that both Chinese and Europeans wish to continue, reinforce and broaden their dialogue. Several tools have to be conceived and set up. One of which must be an bilingual internet page.
- UN AGFE - the UN-Advisory Group on Forced Evictions is a unique channel that promotes an active dialogue on forced evictions and the way to fight against them.
- International Inhabitant's Alliance, uniting various social movements, grassroot organizations, communities and inhabitants throughout the world, is a very useful network in order to promote exchange between inhabitants that develop actively practical actions to defend housing rights, and access to decent housing.
- The participants engage themselves to meet again at Nanjing's World Urban Forum, in order to promote dialogue and to broaden it. A planification workshop in a neighbourhood threatened by eviction during the preceding weeks of World Forum in China, could be a good way to promote dialogue in action and allow a better understanding of chinese realities.
- Several thematic workshops have been identified and show the way for a beginning of a dialogue. Among the most importants are : inhabitant's autodetermination ways; relations between housing rights and judicial dispositions; question of the balance between market, State and Inhabitants; Housing rights and Acces to the city : what are the links and what should they be ? Solidarity is also international .