

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

A critical reappraisal of resident participation in China and France: ‘authoritarian deliberation’ goes global?

Giulia C. Romano

Institute of East Asian Studies (IN-EAST), University of Duisburg-Essen
Corresponding author: E-mail: giulia.romano@uni-due.de

Abstract

This paper, the first step of a project aiming at analysing the establishment of practices of resident participation and consultation in urban renewal in China, proposes a reflection upon these practices through a comparison with similar experiences in France. Identifying some convergences between the practices adopted in the two countries, the paper proposes to reflect upon such puzzling outcomes, provocatively questioning the classic distinction between authoritarian and democratic regimes. It suggests that our analyses and interpretations shall get rid of classical binary categorisations between regime types to embrace a comparative analysis of the policies and practices introduced in various local contexts, and reflect upon their underlying logics. In so doing, the paper engages with He and Warren’s concept of ‘authoritarian deliberation’ as well as with the critiques expressed by a number of French scholars on concepts such as ‘participative democracy’ and ‘good governance’. Such a focus on the underlying logics rather than on regime types will show that the concept of ‘authoritarian deliberation’ does not only apply to authoritarian contexts. Rather, it represents a fruitful starting point to analyse and reflect upon instances of participation and deliberation in both democratic and authoritarian countries.

Key words: Resident participation; urban renewal; authoritarian deliberation; China; France

1. Introduction

‘Participation has often been reduced to informing residents’. This sentence could have been extracted from my fieldwork conducted in China, in the city of Yangzhou, between 2013 and 2015. The research evaluated the effects of an initiative of international cooperation in which ‘Careful Urban Renewal’ – an approach to urban renewal sensible to residents’ wishes and based on resident participation – was promoted in this city of Jiangsu province.¹ Eventually, this approach was adopted by the local administration, marking a break with the past practices of city redevelopment, where residents were at best informed, but often also this passage was forgotten. However, those words belong to another country in another continent; to be precise to a French urban sociologist who has analysed recent experiences of urban renewal in France. In her portrayal, the author points at the weakness of participation, noticing that this practice is often limited to information meetings where residents are invited to listen but not to express their opinion (Deboulet, 2014).²

The treatment of relevant literature focusing on French experiences of urban renewal points at observations about participatory instruments and practices that show remarkable similarities with those in

¹This research was based on a qualitative study based on 48 semi-structured interviews (and several repeated interviews with core informants) run mostly in Yangzhou and in Berlin, as well as on the consultation of policy documents issued by Yangzhou administration and of reports prepared by the German cooperation agency GTZ. The enquiry aimed at recording the process of international cooperation as well as the local process of adaptation of the new approach of urban renewal.

²Deboulet (2014) describes these practices as ‘semblance of deliberation’, noticing that resident consultation ‘is rarely employed as a means to improve the project’, or even as a way ‘to simply attenuate resentment or incomprehension’. *Author’s translation from French.*

China. The question that subsequently emerges from these observations is then how to understand and explain this puzzling presence of similarities in the two countries. On one side, it could be acknowledged that in the experiences observed in China, the approach to urban renewal has been slowly changing towards the consideration of residents' wishes and included some forms of participation, albeit very controlled and limited. On the other side, it could be observed that the experiences of resident participation in urban renewal in France shared many similarities with the experiences observed in China, notwithstanding the distinct political regimes of the two countries. As such, how shall the novelties introduced in Yangzhou be interpreted? And what reflections can be drawn from the French experience, which seems to show that resident participation is often just a symbolic gesture?

This paper does not aspire to provide an immediate answer to these questions; rather it introduces a research agenda that links this contribution to already existing scholarly debates, focusing on the evolution of the Chinese political regime, or on the introduction of spaces of participation with the diffusion of paradigms of 'good governance' and 'participatory democracy', as developed in France. This contribution thus constitutes the first step of a more ambitious research project that aims at analysing the introduction and outcomes of practices of resident participation in urban planning/renewal in Chinese cities. The main working hypothesis classifies these varying forms of participation in the folder of the operational tools of China's 'authoritarian resilience' (Nathan, 2003), or 'authoritarian consolidation' (Camau, 2005)³; hence as instruments of the Chinese regime to consolidate its power through the use of more sophisticated tools that respond to the demands of a more complex and heterogeneous society. In so doing, the paper engages with the concept of 'authoritarian deliberation' as formulated by He and Warren (2011). This concept takes into account the seemingly paradoxical introduction of deliberative practices in China, practices that, for the two authors, serve important functions in the country's political development. Namely, their introduction opens to two possible trajectories or evolutions of the Chinese political regime. One recognises the possibility of a potential democratisation of the regime, emerging from the evolution of these practices of deliberation. The other points rather at its opposite, to the strengthening of authoritarian rule.

The reflections offered by this paper tend to give credit to this second hypothesis, which not only appears very plausible when confronted to the current political developments in China – Xi Jinping's explicit rejection of Western liberal democracy and the demise of intra-party democracy (Zhao, 2016) – but, perhaps surprisingly, it also appears plausible when compared with the observations made by various scholars about the use of participatory democracy in Western democratic regimes. In particular, a French literature of a decade ago, dedicated to the introduction of participatory democracy in democratic contexts, pointed at the 'authoritarian character', and even 'totalitarian temptation' of these developments in liberal Western democracies (Hermet, 2004; Insel, 2005; Geisser *et al.*, 2008). These authors hypothesised the presence of a partial kinship between the practices of democratic governance – and its declination in the form of participatory democracy – and the concept of liberal authoritarianism or limited pluralism as developed by Juan Linz (1964, cited in Geisser *et al.*, 2008). Geisser *et al.* (2008: 8) in particular developed a research agenda that aims at putting into question "the dividing line between 'authoritarian regimes' and 'democratic regimes'" by focusing on the presence of "recurring and particularly acute 'convergences' and 'interdependencies'" between these two types of regimes.⁴ Inspired by these reflections, this paper provocatively suggests that the concept of 'authoritarian deliberation' could be used to analyse deliberation practices in both democratic and authoritarian regimes.

To develop this reflection, the paper is structured as follows. In the first part, authoritarian deliberation and French scholars' reflections are introduced, together with some methodological elements underpinning this analysis. Then, in the second part, the paper will introduce the French case, based

³Michel Camau (2005) preferred the concept of 'authoritarian consolidation' to resilient authoritarianism, in that it departs from the implicit sense of transition to democracy present in certain studies on authoritarianism, to focus on the pure logics and the plural operational modalities of authoritarian regimes.

⁴Author's translation from French.

on recent analyses of experiences of urban renewal and resident participation by French sociologists and political scientists. These observations are then put in perspective with my observations of the practices of resident participation in Yangzhou (China) based on my fieldwork there. These are presented in the third part of the paper. Finally, the fourth part proposes to reflect upon the observation of the French and Chinese (Yangzhou) cases to highlight some useful elements for the establishment of a new research agenda.

2. Authoritarian deliberation and the limits of participatory democracy

The concept of authoritarian deliberation represents a fruitful tool to understand and analyse the political and administrative transformations that took place in China in the post-reform era with the introduction of various forms of citizen participation. Established by He (2004) on the basis of the concept of democratic deliberation, its formulation was further elaborated by He and Warren in a seminal article issued in 2011. In this article, the two authors challenge the classical association between deliberative institutions and democratic regimes, arguing that also in authoritarian regimes it is possible to find instances of deliberation. In particular, similar to democratic regimes, these deliberative forums are functionally driven, which means that they are used by governments as tools to obtain support and consensus in case of complex governance problems. Moreover, citizen forums are also used to collect advice and opinion to improve policy formulation while enhancing implementation capacity. The numbers, forms and names given to these venues of deliberation are various (public hearings, deliberative polling, participatory budgeting and so on), but they share two common characteristics, namely an agenda pre-defined by the government, and strong control of the government over the outcomes. Hence, as explained by the two authors, deliberation has been employed 'as a means to form preferences and policies' but it does not include an 'institutionalised distribution of democratic powers to those affected' (He and Warren, 2011: 272). Indeed, it is always party officials that decide about the introduction of deliberative meetings and as such they also try to avoid that deliberations touch upon non-approved topics, limiting the scope of deliberations only to pre-approved questions (He and Warren, 2011: 279).

The reasons for the introduction of these forms of participation are different, but they respond above all to a search for new sources of legitimation of the Chinese regime after the reforms introduced by Deng Xiaoping and his successors. These reforms brought economic growth and increasing wealth to the Chinese population, as well as spaces for personal affirmation, for individual development and for opinion formation (Davis *et al.*, 1995). At the same time, these transformations were also accompanied by increasing social inequality and instability, challenging the rule of the Chinese one-party regime. To answer to these mounting challenges, the Chinese government introduced various 'input institutions' (Nathan, 2003) that provided some limited spaces of participation. Therefore, the establishment of deliberative venues serves the stabilisation of the one-party rule. As demonstration of this aspect, we notice their top-down character as well as their limitation in scope and agenda, which prevents their expansions to other issues while also insulating them 'from political movements and independent political organisations' (He and Warren, 2011: 282). The establishment of deliberative venues can be thus seen as a measure of administrative reform that increases the capacities of local governments to deliver results, increases their legitimacy 'policy by policy', but does not put into question the political regime and the centrality of the party in agenda setting.

The speculations of He and Warren (2011), however, do not halt at the simple logic of reproduction and consolidation of authoritarian rule. Rather, they do not exclude that these practices could lead to a potential democratisation of the Chinese regime. In this respect, they also add that this trajectory 'would be unique' as this far there are no examples of regime democratisation that derive from 'progressively institutionalised deliberation' (He and Warren, 2011: 283). They hypothesise that if the ruling elites need to continuously rely on deliberation to legitimise their decisions, this would lead to an incremental growth of democratic empowerments, as legitimacy through deliberation can only emerge if there is sufficient 'space and inclusiveness to generate influence' (He and Warren, 2011). The

provision of such space and inclusiveness would in turn require the continuous improvement of institutions ‘for the purpose of enhancing their effectiveness, while also transforming their character in democratic directions’ (He and Warren, 2011). As a result, the evolution of deliberative practices might represent ‘a leading edge of democratisation’.

Given the recent developments in the Chinese regime, which led scholars to have increasing doubts about its potential democratisation (cf. Zhao, 2016; Fewsmith, 2018), this hypothesis does not sound very plausible. And it appears even less plausible when it is confronted with some scholarly debates that emerged in France in the last decade and that focused on experiences of citizen participation in both democratic and authoritarian regimes. In particular, the joint work by Geisser *et al.* (2008) about ‘democratic authoritarianisms’ and ‘authoritarian democracies’ in the twenty-first century is a good starting point for reflection. Prefacing their work with Ralf Dahrendorf’s prophecy that the twenty-first century may well reveal the century of authoritarianism (1997), these authors establish an interesting research agenda that questions the classical demarcation between authoritarian and democratic regimes. To this aim, they look at the practices, logics and mechanisms operating within them. Such an inductive approach, rather than relying upon definitions of authoritarian and democratic regimes on the basis of pre-established criteria, enables these authors to detect and unmask the presence of authoritarian elements in a number of procedures of ‘democratic consultation’, and question their significance within the context of Western democracies. In particular, they notice the presence of ‘odd similarities’ between the practices adopted in both authoritarian and democratic regimes, and they try to make sense of these observations by means of comparisons. They suggest interpreting these similarities as the results of global trends, inviting researchers to engage in an in-depth reflection that stops reading authoritarianism and democracy as two irreducible identities and to embrace a more nuanced interpretation of both. For these authors, such an approach will help to achieve a better understanding of a fundamental aspect of the political logic that characterises every political regime: the inexorable impulse to restrict political competition.

What are the practical and methodological implications of this reasoning for the analysis of our case study? As pointed out by these authors, researchers shall adopt a sociological perspective and focus on the practices, mechanisms and logics underlying similar political developments in regimes that do not necessarily share similar characteristics. This procedure makes way for a better understanding of the contemporary political phenomena that characterise both authoritarian and democratic countries, moving beyond the classical binary thinking that characterises researches on political regimes and allowing for a richer interpretation of these phenomena. To this aim, this paper takes inspiration from Glynos and Howarth’s (2007) ‘logics of critical explanation’ approach. A particular feature of this approach is the use of comparisons in conjunction with the analysis of case studies as a means to render phenomena ‘more intelligible’ (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 204–205). This approach encourages researchers to produce comparisons on a problem-driven basis and focus on the logics behind certain observed practices in a diversity of instances. As such ‘the practice of comparison is always relative to the specific problems addressed and tackled’ (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 206), and it can be useful to explain, for instance, why different systems that operate according to analogous underlying logics produce similar effects, or why seemingly similar systems that operate according to different logics produce different outcomes (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 207).

This is the way in which the comparison proposed by this paper has to be understood. While the core focus of this research is an interpretation of the use of resident participation in a Chinese context (the city of Yangzhou), to make the phenomena studied more intelligible the paper establishes a comparative perspective with the experiences of resident participation in urban renewal in France. Hence the comparison proposed here does not aim at producing a theory-driven, classical comparison between different political regimes and institutional structures to seize the characteristics of participation in two very different (and hardly comparable) contexts. Rather, it starts from an intriguing intimation – the presence of similarities between the practices of resident participation in urban renewal in France and in China – and it tries to understand whether behind these similarities it is possible to find comparable logics. This procedure in turn allows us to link with Geisser *et al.*’s (2008) research agenda

and aims, while exploring new applications of He and Warren's (2011) concept of 'authoritarian deliberation'.

3. Urban renewal and resident participation in France: democratic practices for a democratic country?

In the early 2000s, the French government launched an ambitious program of urban renewal, the National Urban Renewal Program (*Programme National de Rénovation Urbaine* – PNRU), which aimed at increasing the social mix of the big residential complexes at the periphery of many French cities and at transforming their urban and land structure (Epstein, 2013). This program was developed in response to the perceived failures of an earlier national program, the *Politique de la ville* (literally 'urban policy') program, that employed a different approach to target these quarters, namely dedicated policies and small interventions on the built space (Epstein, 2013). The French government concluded that the results of the *Politique de la ville* program had been poor, and it formulated the PNRU, assuming that intervening in the built environment could have had also beneficial impacts on the problems of these difficult areas. Therefore, according to this credo, the new program attempted at providing answers to the problems of these residential areas by means of heavy interventions of urban renewal (Epstein, 2013).

However, despite the proclaimed objectives – increasing the social mix and avoiding the concentration of poor residents and ethnic segregation – French scholars raised doubts about the real intentions of the program, and about its same very recipients and beneficiaries. For instance, some scholars observed that issues of social mix and segregation identified by the government were not relevant to the residents living in the targeted quarters; instead residents were concerned about their economic difficulties and the presence of discriminations (Deboulet and Lélévrier, 2014: 17). These problems did not figure in the PNRU. Residents also perceived that the projects undertaken in the name of social mix were not decided together with them and also did not really target them (Deboulet and Lélévrier, 2014). Actually, the unspoken goal of the PNRU was to transform these undesirable neighbourhoods into spaces that would attract more affluent publics, while ignoring the territorial anchoring or attachment of original residents (Deboulet and Lélévrier, 2014).

Researchers also observed that one of the main imperatives of this program was the introduction of spaces for resident participation. This objective had already been established in the previous program, the *Politique de la ville*. The French government preserved this objective with the aim of improving it, as decision-makers had noticed a deficit of participation in the implementation of the old program (Carrel, 2008). However, despite the recognition of this problem, the answers provided by the PNRU were not really satisfying. Rather, they were marked by a continuity of the deficit. For instance, in her study of resident participation in the program *Politique de la ville*, Carrel (2008) observed that local government officials and technical teams lamented several difficulties in the dialogue with inhabitants. Officials argued that deliberating with residents was impossible because they showed 'apathy' or employed 'violent and sporadic modes of expression of their discontents' (Carrel, 2008: 357),⁵ which impeded effective participation. These opinions concerning residents' capacities to participate were also observable in the case of the PNRU. For instance, officials argued that residents are incapable of taking care of the problems of their environment and to propose solutions, hence decisions about renovation need to be conferred to specialists (Overney, 2014: 133).

Regarding the earlier program, Carrel also observed (2008: 359) that according to the authorities responsible for urban renewal, giving residents influence over the definition and implementation of projects was undesirable, as it conflicted with their objectives of efficiency, effectiveness and rapidity. Therefore, rather than talking about real deliberation about the contents of the policies applied in the quarter, resident participation took place through seemingly consultative methods and communication operations where information was delivered in a top-down fashion (Carrel, 2008). In a similar

⁵ Author's translation from French.

way, the procedures of consultation established by the *PNRU* have framed participation in a way that imposed a specific direction on urban renewal, while at the same time they staged a ‘friendly participation’ and proposed individualised follow-up for residents (Melo and Simoes, 2014: 116). The establishment of this frame within which ‘participation’ had to take place was fundamental in destabilising the resistances and reducing potential conflicts that might have arisen when informing residents about the decisions taken elsewhere (Melo and Simoes, 2014: 117). Thus, to expedite the project’s implementation, residents were asked to engage in a process that corralled them to agree to an unfavourable project without having any chance to bring in substantial modifications (Melo and Simoes, 2014: 123).

These observations clearly indicate that despite official discourses affirming the importance of resident participation, the main renewal decisions had been taken elsewhere and imposed on the inhabitants (Bacqué, 2014: 98). And although the authorities effectively developed a whole set of information tools and institutions to support people in the process of relocation, the main objectives of the projects – demolition, redevelopment and relocation – were not negotiable (Bacqué, 2014). This was further confirmed by the fact that the task of negotiating was attributed to mediators who did not really represent the main decision-makers. These operations were usually conducted at the individual level, resulting in a segmentation of the spaces of interaction and negotiation that made it hard for residents to mobilise and resist the project (Bacqué, 2014). Furthermore, despite the establishment of these ‘participative institutions’ that purported to offer a space to residents to effect decision-making, the exchanges within these forums were mostly between representatives of housing companies, of the national authority for urban renewal, and of the town hall, together with the project owner (Deboulet, 2014: 107). Hence, even in this disguised form of ‘participation’, residents were not really taken into account.

These analyses led researchers to suggest that participation was mostly employed as a means to inform residents about renewal projects that were decided elsewhere, in particular by the central government. Indeed, the remit of municipalities was only the execution of urban renewal projects; participation in this respect was mostly aimed at obtaining residents’ consensus to ensure their smooth implementation (Donzelot and Epstein, 2006; Deboulet, 2014). Researchers also observed that the tight project deadlines increased the propensity of local officials and technical teams to bypass real participatory processes, which would require a ‘collective maturation of very complex issues’, and to content themselves with information meetings (Deboulet, 2014: 103). Participation was reduced to operations that aimed at increasing the acceptability of urban interventions, while real spaces of discussion were not provided (Bacqué, 2014: 98).

These critiques are not singular to the French experience, but can be found in the observations of scholars who have focused on other European countries. For instance, as for the UK, although resident participation was a recurrent element in the planning discourse of the *New Deal for Communities* established by Blair government in the early 2000s, the way in which it has been practiced has been doubtful (Abram, 2014). In the description of one particular case, Simone Abram (Abram, 2014: 89) observed that the renovation program required the formation of a ‘local forum’ to promote residents’ representation throughout the process of renovation. However, the local association of tenants and residents, active for many years in the quarter, was not involved in this process. The author also noticed that even if the forum made proposals in the process in the subsequent phases of the project, these proposals were largely ignored because of commercial imperatives dictated by private investors (Abram, 2014). Finally, Abram observed that, referring to time pressure, the contribution of residents was disallowed by the team in charge of project implementation, while the promises made to residents were not kept because of a lack of formal agreement with project developers (Abram, 2014).

Once more, these observations tend to underline the presence of significant practical limits to resident participation. With the exception of only a few cases, the situations investigated by French scholars indicate that residents have not been involved in the definition and implementation of renewal projects (Deboulet and Lelévrier, 2014: 22). This leads us to question the usefulness and definition of ‘participation’, as well as the design of participatory instruments (cf. Fishkin 2018). Furthermore, they urge us to reflect upon the hidden logics behind their uses. French scholars’ observations indeed hint at remarkable similarities between participation practices in France and ‘authoritarian

deliberation' in China. He and Warren's description of authoritarian deliberation as 'limited in scope and focused on particular problems of governance', and 'controlled deliberation' that exclusively elicited 'people's support for local projects' (He and Warren, 2011) is an accurate depiction of scholars' observations of citizen participation in France. Moreover, the agenda and 'the extent to which the people's opinion will be taken into account' was firmly established by the authorities (He and Warren, 2011). As we will see in the next part, these descriptions are also not so distant from the practices adopted in Yangzhou, in China.

4. Resident participation in urban renewal in Yangzhou

At the beginning of the 2000s, when Yangzhou was selected to be part of Chinese–German collaboration on a project of international cooperation called 'Eco-city Planning and Management', its residents did not know what participation in planning meant. When the government decided for the realisation of a new project of urban renewal, the plans were set rapidly by a restricted group of officials. Affected residents were informed a little earlier – if they were informed – and were not really given the opportunity to have a say in the project. Rather, they were asked to move elsewhere, in theory after payment of a compensation or the provision of alternative housing. If they refused, they were threatened, sometimes beaten, and forced to move. This practice of government-led urban renewal, which meant razing entire old neighbourhoods and changing significantly the aspect of cities, is not exclusive to Yangzhou, but applies to China as a whole (cf. Weinstein and Ren, 2009; Niu and Wagenaar, this issue).

Opposed to these practices, the German cooperation agency GTZ (*Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*), in charge of executing the bilateral cooperation project, proposed Yangzhou government a radically different approach to urban renewal. This approach was mindful of the existing built spaces and of the social composition of neighbourhoods, it was environment-friendly, and it promoted mixed uses of spaces and attention to the human scale. In this approach, developed in Berlin in the 1970s–1980s with the name of 'careful urban renewal' (*behutsame Stadterneuerung*), the participation of residents in planning and renewal decisions was essential (Bernt, 2003). GTZ eventually got the green light from Yangzhou government to apply these ideas in three small pilot projects. One of these projects, the renewal of a historical alley called Wenhua Lane, is of particular relevance.

In this project, GTZ introduced the method of 'Community Action Planning' (CAP), inviting residents to participate in the planning process to decide together with the government and other stakeholders the priorities for action. The method also foresaw the engagement of residents in the implementation and financing of renewal, making residents collaborate with the municipal government in the improvement of the neighbourhood. This experience was eventually adopted by Yangzhou administration as a model to develop new relevant policies for urban renewal based on resident participation. In fact, this approach became a *leitmotif* of the planning and policy documents issued by the local government in the early 2010s (Romano, 2017). For instance, the dedicated 'Yangzhou Historical and Cultural Famous City Protection Plan' (*Yangzhou lishi wenhua mingcheng baohu guihua*), issued in 2013, stipulated that in the establishment of a complete set of laws and regulations for the protection and management of the Old City, the government shall perfect the mechanisms of public participation, encouraging resident participation and the support of NGOs (Yangzhou City Government, 2013). Resident participation was also set as a main principle for the protection of the Old City in the newly issued master plan, for which 'residents' enthusiasm shall be mobilised in order to make the protection of the traditional style of the Old City a conscious action of every inhabitant' (Yangzhou City Government, 2012).⁶

These interesting developments suggested dedicating a part of the enquiry to the aspect of resident participation, focusing in particular on the motivations of the local administration and the meanings given to 'participation'. Actually, in the implementation of urban renewal, one of the main concerns of Yangzhou administration was the constraints on public resources to support the upgrading of the Old

⁶Author's translation from Chinese.

City. This issue was related to resident participation. As pointed out in an internal document of the administration, resident participation responded to the need of the government to solicit multiple funding sources that could have supported the ‘conservation and sustainable development of the Old City’ (Yangzhou Old City Office, 2010: 4).⁷ Interviewed city officials explained that with the exclusion of infrastructural improvements and the provision of limited subsidies for housing renovation, the government does not have the possibility to continue funding urban renewal and it needs the support of the private sector.⁸ Therefore, from these first elements, it is clear that participation meant co-participating in the expenses of urban renewal.

This imperative was made clear in a new pilot project conducted by the city of Yangzhou alone, which concerned the renewal of a street of the Old City. Officials indicated that the project replicated the method of Wenhua Lane, involving residents in relevant planning decisions and in the implementation process. However, the opinion of a local expert who had participated in the pilot project of Wenhua Lane contradicted the officials’ answer. The expert indicated that in the early project residents were effectively involved in the planning process; they could establish a series of priorities for the renewal of the neighbourhood which were then incorporated in the project plan and discussed once more with the residents.⁹ As for the new project, the expert argued that the government did not follow this method; rather it applied an ‘old-style campaign for public mobilisation’ in which residents were simply informed about the plans of the government and were asked to participate in their implementation. The expert also pointed out that meetings were organised on large scale, involving all the residents of the street, rather than in smaller workshops as it happened for the first project.

As this information required further clarification, I returned to the city officials and asked them for the reasons for the limited participation. They answered that the city government did not have sufficient capacity (instruments and personnel) to apply the method of Wenhua Lane. They also considered it too time-consuming.¹⁰ They added that it would have been preferable to engage NGOs or dedicated organisations specialised in social planning to carry out the task of resident consultation. However, very interestingly, during another interview an official revealed that there were limited possibilities for these organisations to have a real weight in decisions, as in case of the diverging interests it is always the government that makes the final decision.¹¹ This was illustrated with a concrete example. In a recently constructed ‘low-carbon community’, where residents were encouraged to participate with the help of an international NGO, the final decision was made by the government on the pretext that the residents’ requests were ‘unrealistic’.¹² Residents asked to transform an ex-factory site into a public, green area, but this request was rejected by the planning authorities on the basis that historically in that part of the city there were no public parks.¹³

Puzzled by this answer, I replied to the official that historically there were also no factories, so old land uses had already been changed in the previous decades. I also added that the stated objectives of the government were the improvement of residents’ life conditions, the provision of more open space, of infrastructures and the modernisation of the Old City to make it suitable to residents’ needs (cf. Yangzhou City Government, 2013). The reply of the official was that this particular request was simply unacceptable, because in the historical layout of the Old City there were no parks and residents could reach a near park at 100 m distance. Once more I replied that since most of inhabitants are aged people and their grandchildren, the realisation of a small park nearby would have improved significantly the facilities of the neighbourhood. I also added that in the past the Old City did not have parking spaces, as I knew that the government wished to realise several parking spaces in nearby areas. The

⁷ Author’s translation from Chinese.

⁸ Interviews, autumn 2014.

⁹ Interview, autumn 2014.

¹⁰ Interviews, autumn 2014.

¹¹ Interview, autumn 2014.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

official replied that in this case parking spaces are fundamental to revitalise the Old City, because commercial premises need parking spaces and visitors need to find a place where to park their car.

These answers were moot points and suggested that a 'city rational strategy', as described by Hsing (2010), was perhaps at work, giving the priority to highly rentable urban projects rather than social ones.¹⁴ In the project of the low-carbon community in Yangzhou, the government (and the NGO) decided to realise a new site where various green technologic solutions would have been tested and for which the government wished to obtain an international certification. Although at the time of the enquiry the site was still inhabited, it was possible to observe that the buildings realised were a mixture of high-end residential and office premises, not really affordable for the average resident of the Old City. This aspect, together with other small transformations that were occurring in the same area, suggested the presence of a planning approach that conceptualised urban renewal as a means to make profit of the assets of the old city. The needs of the residents thus were not very central in the consideration of planners. This approach also explained why, in another project, the spontaneous participation and proposals of the residents were not taken into account by the government, but were rejected. I should add that in this project the situation is somewhat more complicated, as beyond the city rational strategy there was also another logic at play, revealing the presence of fragmentation in the planning process and of different opinions among residents.

As a matter of fact, when opening the black box of Yangzhou city government, and more broadly when looking at the question of urban renewal and old city conservation, it is possible to observe that the visions and interpretations of urban renewal and conservation are various and competing. Different departments and agencies operating in the field of urban renewal do not share the same objectives and approaches for old city protection. Rather, they promote very different uses of its spaces, consequently leading to fragmentation in the management of conservation and renewal (Romano, 2017). Moreover, residents often have different opinions concerning old city areas, and in particular concerning housing renewal. Many agree with the idea of negotiating with the local government for demolition and relocation, as in the recent decade land value in the old city has been increasing. Others, on the contrary, would like to keep their buildings, either because of business opportunities, or because of their attachment to the neighbourhood and their reliance on neighbourhood networks for their well-being.

In the cited project, the situation was very complicated because of this complex structure of interests and opinions. Among the government 'agencies' having an important say in this project we can surely find the Mayor, whose plans were very different from those of the planning authority. The Mayor proposed to redevelop the entire area following the standard approach of large-scale area demolition, which would have replaced the existing buildings with new commercial premises, thereby displacing the original residents. Realizing that their neighbourhood was selected as a renewal area, a group of residents addressed a letter to the planning department, requesting to reconsider the project and to be involved in the planning process. Although these residents represented a minority, as a large part of the affected households welcomed urban renewal (albeit with different degrees), this minority was very vocal. They asked the planning authorities whether it was possible to preserve their properties and proceed with their renovation following the model applied elsewhere.

However, at the time of the enquiry this request was denied, although the project of the Mayor was also met with strong opposition, as its realisation would have provoked protests and would have generated new debt because of its excessive costs. Therefore, other important city decision-makers vetoed it. As for residents' requests, officials argued that they were not acceptable, as a large part of the buildings had been constructed illegally and did not have any architectural value, therefore conservation was not worth the effort. As such, since these buildings had been built without authorisation, they had to be demolished. The rational strategy was that of conserving only the buildings with

¹⁴A city rational strategy aims at using land in a way that 'enhances its exchange value in the market', which means that land having high rent potential should be allocated to uses 'that generate the highest market value' (Hsing 2010). Therefore, inner city areas shall be attributed to 'rent-generating projects', like luxury hotels or high-end commercial housing, while non-profit institutions like schools and hospitals shall be placed elsewhere.

architectural value, while negotiating the process of demolition and relocation with residents. Formally this is a valid argument. Illegal constructions do affect many cities in China and are a reason of great concern about safety and hygienic conditions, not to mention liveability. However, when confronted with the reality of urban construction in the country and with the opinions of other officials, it revealed once again the presence of a city rational strategy.

As a matter of fact, the practice of constructing without authorisation and licences is diffused everywhere in China, and concerns also big developers (Lin, 2009; Hsing, 2010), so if this argument is retained valid, a large amount of built areas in Chinese cities should be demolished. Moreover, given the characteristics of the neighbourhood and the socio-economic status of the residents – often small ‘shop-house’ owners making a living by using their buildings – refurbishing these buildings and offering residents subsidies for renovation was not totally unreasonable. On the contrary, it was rather advisable, as pointed by other officials and experts. Hence, residents’ requests could have been admitted by the government, making space for the experimentation of new policies that could have targeted the problem of illegal housing and the socio-economic conditions of their owners. However, this idea did not match with the logic of the planning authority. Eventually, the project was aborted because of the strong opposition of the vocal minority. No official dared to stir up troubles to realise the project of the Mayor. But the result of such decision was that also the majority of residents who agreed with renewal was not satisfied, hence the situation in the neighbourhood remained unchanged.

5. Interpreting citizen participation in the context of urban renewal in Yangzhou and France

I concluded my fieldwork in Yangzhou in July 2015. I had collected sufficient material to write about the adaptation of careful urban renewal, but not enough to provide a comprehensive empirical analysis of practices of resident participation. Residents were still involved in some projects, albeit with new modalities that hinted at the presence of forms of public–private ‘entrepreneurial micro-alliances’ (between the local street office and single residents) to revitalise old neighbourhoods. Dubbed ‘resident participation’ by local officials, the policies and practices adopted in the various ongoing projects represent a subject in their own that shall be further investigated. As a starting point, and in order to interpret the cases analysed, I address the following questions: *Is participation in Yangzhou ‘real’ participation? How can we interpret these innovations? Why is participation in some projects not allowed? What do these cases say about the evolution of China’s state–society relationships?* Tentative answers can be formulated through confronting the cases with He and Warren’s (2011) concept of authoritarian deliberation.

Undoubtedly, Yangzhou government introduced new deliberative elements. For instance, already in 2006 the city government introduced the ‘Temporary Measures for Public Participation in City Planning and Management’ (*Yangzhou shi gongzhong canyu chengshi guihua guanli de zanxing banfa*), which stipulate the adoption of two main approaches for public participation in planning, namely the diffusion of information through the media and Internet, and participation in information meetings and public hearings. These measures have been implemented through various means, for instance by soliciting opinions on the realisation of new projects through official online platforms, as also observed elsewhere (cf. Duckett and Wang, 2013). The presence of debates among different administrators and between the administration, the Mayor and the city Party Secretary about the requests advanced by residents and about the importance of avoiding large-scale evictions are also important indicators of the fact that the authorities try to make decisions while paying attention to the issues of resident interests and consensus (Romano, 2017). These developments are undeniable and very meaningful if confronted with the methods used by the local government in the previous decades, when residents were not involved at all in urban renewal processes. In particular, in few cases, it has been possible to observe that participatory instruments had been designed in a way that really allowed residents to be involved in the planning and renewal of the neighbourhood, further demonstrating that deliberative spaces for participation are also possible in an authoritarian country like China.

However, as stated earlier, in order to render these phenomena ‘more intelligible’ and ‘connect the unfamiliar to what is familiar’ (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 205), a better understanding of Yangzhou’s experiences can benefit from comparisons with other contexts. Such analysis can be built through comparing Yangzhou’s practices with the mechanisms of resident participation in democratic contexts, where, in the ostensibly more open and equal environment of liberal electoral democracy, we can expect to find more advanced and collaborative forms of participation (cf. Arnstein, 1969). Nevertheless, as we saw, these assumptions are refuted when confronted with the reality of urban renewal as practiced in France and in other European countries. Similarly to many observations made in China, resident participation just meant informing residents of decisions taken elsewhere. French studies indeed showed that decisions about urban renewal were centralised in the hands of a small number of decision-makers (public and private) while leaving limited spaces of discussion to residents. Moreover, the spaces for participation offered by decision-makers were deliberately designed to limit resident participation, allowing residents to discuss about minor details if not just to be informed of an ongoing project, but not to put into question the fundamental objectives of renewal interventions. Similarly, in Yangzhou spaces for participation have been made available by the government, while residents’ autonomous initiatives or requests going beyond the initial plans of the government have been rejected. Moreover, residents were not allowed to modify the plans. Rather they were informed of these plans and were allowed to make decisions on the modalities of implementation, choosing among a set of options pre-established by the planning authorities. From French studies we can also observe that when spaces for participation were conceded, their agenda was pre-determined by decision-makers so that requests that went outside predetermined paths were not allowed. In Yangzhou, the situation was not dissimilar.

Studies on European experiences also showed that resident participation in renewal served the purposes of state restructuring and progressive withdrawal from welfare provision (Bernt, 2003; Epstein, 2013), which supported the privatisation of social services and the development of a political discourse encouraging citizens’ self-support (Abram, 2014). These elements are also present in Yangzhou policy documents and in the discourses of local officials. Facing decreasing public budgets, local authorities started considering resident participation as a new instrument to pursue urban renewal, and started exploring various configurations (public–private partnerships) to encourage societal forces to participate to the difficult and expensive effort of old city conservation and careful renewal. Fieldwork observations in particular suggested that resident participation as practiced in Yangzhou serves multiple purposes and is motivated by different reasons. Among these reasons, officials underlined that it is no longer possible to seize property rights and proceed with large-scale demolitions without negotiating with residents, both because the economic costs of such operations have become unbearable and because they shall avoid protests not to incur into negative performance evaluations by their superiors. They also underlined that it has become impossible to conduct projects without residents’ consensus, as the limited resources available shall be spent on projects that gather popular support. Hence, recent budgetary and accountability concerns also encouraged the introduction of spaces for participation.¹⁵

If we continue with a detailed analysis of the scholarly contributions mentioned, and with their comparison with the observations made in Yangzhou, we will observe the presence of further similarities between France and China. For instance, in both countries, decision-makers expressed similar sceptic opinions about residents’ capacities to express their opinions ‘orderly’ and to participate. As such, these commonalities surely stimulate a number of interesting questions and useful reflections. A first question would be how to explain these similarities in two completely different regimes like China and France. Does He and Warren’s (2011) ‘authoritarian deliberation’ capture the nature of these practices of participation in both types of regime, deliberation being, first of all, conceded to

¹⁵In recent years, the central government in China has stressed a number of criteria to evaluate local officials’ performances, among which social stability – which means, among others, avoiding citizens’ protests – and public satisfaction. Budgetary ‘self-discipline’, preventing the realisation of useless, wasteful ‘vanity’ projects has also been stressed as an important criterion for evaluation (cf. Xinhua 2013).

citizens on the base of specific governance issues that do not allow for spill-overs and, secondly, being conceded only to a number of selected ‘good citizens’ that abide by the rules of the game? Moreover, if there are similarities and if in many cases the practices of resident participation has been hollowed out and/or orchestrated by main decision-makers under pretext of efficiency and effectiveness, how can we explain the presence of convergences? What are the underlying logics of these convergences, and in particular of reducing resident participation to informing and placating rather than involving residents in genuine partnership? And, on a broader level, can these outcomes be interpreted as signs of ‘an announced marriage between democratic globalisation and authoritarian consolidation’ (Geisser *et al.*, 2008: 8) and of authoritarianism going global (Diamond *et al.*, 2016)?

These questions open the path for a comparative research agenda that focuses on the actual practices of participation and on the identification of the more general logics behind these phenomena. As already pointed out by some scholars who, on the basis of empirical observations, have adopted a critical stance towards the experiences of participatory democracy and spaces of deliberation in European countries, deliberation and authoritarianism can better be understood as complementary, rather than two opposed, exclusionary realities (Pellizzoni, 2013: 97). This critical literature observes that when practiced in the reality – and not through *in vitro* experiments – deliberation mostly addresses ‘interest groups representing the middle class and the elite’, while in the case of weaker groups it rather appears as ‘a way to manage potential conflicts and produce consent through the fiction of an equal sharing of decision-making power’ (Pellizzoni, 2013: 98).¹⁶ Said differently, participatory democracy is not seen as a means to increase the spaces of deliberation and empower citizens. Rather, it is read as a ‘mechanism for the monopolisation’ of the sites for decision-making by a number of ‘co-opted minorities’ that do not stand in the way of the pursuit of effectiveness and the planned objectives (Hermet, 2004: 172–175). Hence, ‘deliberative forums became fashionable and successful in a wide variety of governmental contexts not in spite of their inclination to create exclusion and incapacitation, but precisely because of it’ (Pellizzoni, 2013: 99).

These observations have not been made in authoritarian countries, but instead are based on experiences in European countries. They suggest an unexpected continuity of the concept of ‘authoritarian deliberation’ as developed by He and Warren (2011) between authoritarian and democratic contexts. Moreover, this critical literature also highlights the relation between the emergence of participatory and deliberative practices and the diffusion of neo-liberal strategies and technologies of governance that can be observed in both types of regime (Bacqué *et al.*, 2005; Pellizzoni, 2013). Given these potential paths of interpretation, based on the exploration of the logics behind the emergence (and perhaps diffusion) of similar political configurations in very different political settings, it is really advisable to conduct further research on these concrete political phenomena, rather than on regime types and institutions, to better identify the underlying logics. Hence, we suggest paying close attention to citizen participation and deliberation as practiced in both democratic and authoritarian countries without prior distinction between regime types. Analyses should focus in particular at how participation is framed, interpreted and mobilised, digging into the important question of the design of participatory instruments, as suggested by Fishkin (2018).

Questions shall target the reasons why spaces for the autonomous initiative of residents are not made available or why residents have very limited influence, while the government imposes pre-set agendas. Questions shall also focus on the intentions of local governments and administrations, what they aim at achieving via the instrument of resident participation (Bherer, 2011), and the materialities of participation – what it is concretely used in participatory venues, from the power points to the methods of deliberation (Barrault-Stella, 2012). Given the often unspoken objectives of urban renewal projects – that of extracting the higher exchange value through land redevelopment – it is important to be aware of this underlying logic when analysing the practices of resident participation that accompany some projects. Such a perspective can shed light upon the ‘neoliberal’ transformations occurring both in democratic and authoritarian regimes, such as the transformation of the (local) state

¹⁶ Author’s translation from French.

and of state–society relationship under the influences of domestic and international competition, the introduction of entrepreneurial logics in city governments, the state’s withdrawal in the provision of welfare or affordable housing, etc. (Pellizzoni, 2013).

While not losing sight of significant differences between authoritarian and democratic regimes, such a set of questions urges researchers not to essentialise these concepts and to investigate the converging practices of citizen participation and governance in both authoritarian and democratic regimes and the reasons for these same convergences. It also urges researchers to enquire into the meanings and purposes attached to citizen participation. As quickly underlined in this article, in Yangzhou resident participation serves multiple purposes, it is motivated by different reasons and it is encouraged by officials on the basis of different understandings. These aspects cannot be neglected and shall encourage researchers to make more nuanced and insightful analyses of single cases and of their significance.

In general terms, if the critical stances expressed by the scholars cited in this article prove to be confirmed in both types of regime, the introduction of spaces of participation can be understood as a form of reorganisation and reassertion of state power, as demonstrated by the vertical, top-down character of participatory venues, rather than as forms of citizens’ empowerment, as suggested by the concept of ‘authoritarian deliberation’. As such, no matter the regime (authoritarian or democratic), spaces for participation can be interpreted as instruments to achieve certain bureaucratic objectives that are significantly distant from the idea of democratising decision-making processes. Nevertheless, the analysis of single cases and contexts also revealed that different meanings and functions can be attached to citizen participation, including democratic decision-making, empowerment and transparency. Future analysis shall be thus careful to unravel the multiple logics of participation, looking into the design of participatory instruments and, by this token, into the points of view and intentions of the administrators involved in the process, as well as into their conflicts. Such procedure would probably reveal the presence of different, competing or even contradicting rationalities behind the use of participatory instruments. This aspect makes it very difficult to express a clear-cut evaluation of the contribution of deliberative spaces to the evolution of political regimes, or of the impact of political regimes on deliberative instruments.

Acknowledgements. I would like to thank He Baogang, Hendrik Wagenaar and the anonymous reviewers for their precious suggestions.

References

- Abram S** (2014) Rénovation urbaine et participation en angleterre: enseignements et comparaisons. In Deboulet A and Lelévrier C (eds), *Rénovations Urbaines en Europe*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, pp. 85–94.
- Arnstein SR** (1969) A ladder of citizen participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners* 35, 214–224.
- Bacqué M-H, Rey H and Sintomer Y** (2005) Introduction. La démocratie participative, un nouveau paradigme de l’action publique? In *Gestion de proximité et démocratie participative*. Paris: La Découverte, pp. 9–46.
- Bacqué M-H** (2014) Introduction. In Deboulet A and Lelévrier C (eds), *Rénovations urbaines en Europe*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, pp. 97–99.
- Barrault-Stella L** (2012) Participer sous l’aile de la bureaucratie. Les effets de la concertation avec les familles dans la fabrique de la sectorisation scolaire. *Participations* 1, 103–125.
- Bernt M** (2003) *Rübergeklappt. Die ‘Behutsame Stadterneuerung’ im Berlin der 90er Jahre*. Berlin: Schelzky & Jeep.
- Bherer L** (2011) Les relations ambiguës entre participation et politiques publiques. *Participations* 1, 105–133.
- Camau M** (2005) Remarques sur la *consolidation autoritaire* et ses limites. In Camau M and Martinez L (eds), *L’autoritarisme dans le monde arabe*. Soudan, Egypte, CEDEJ, pp. 9–51.
- Carrel M** (2008) Faire participer les habitants dans une perspective comparée. In Guillemard A (ed.), *Où va la protection sociale?* Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, pp. 355–371.
- Dahrendorf R** (1997) Die Globalisierung und ihre sozialen Folgen werden zur nächsten Herausforderung einer Politik der Freiheit. An der Schwelle zum autoritären Jahrhundert. *die Zeit*, 14th November 1997, URL: <http://www.zeit.de/1997/47/thema.txt.19971114.xml> (accessed 19 February 2018).
- Davis D, Naughton B and Perry EJ** (1995) *Urban Spaces in Contemporary China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Diamond L, Plattner MF and Walker C** (2016) *Authoritarianism Goes Global*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Deboulet A** (2014) «On ne nous a pas calculés...» participation et considération dans la rénovation urbaine. In Deboulet A and Lelévrier C (eds), *Rénovations urbaines en Europe*, Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, pp. 101–113.

- Deboulet A and Lelévrier C** (2014) Introduction: la rénovation urbaine sous le regard des chercheurs. In *Rénovations urbaines en Europe*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, pp. 11–28.
- Donzelot J and Epstein R** (2006) Démocratie et participation: l'exemple de la rénovation urbaine. *Esprit (Paris, France)* **326**, 5–34.
- Duckett J and Wang H** (2013) Extending political participation in China: new opportunities for citizens in the policy process. *Journal of Asian Public Policy* **6**, 263–276.
- Epstein R** (2013) *La rénovation urbaine: Démolition-reconstruction de l'Etat*. Paris: Les Presses de Sciences Po.
- Fewsmith J** (2018), The 19th party congress: ringing in Xi Jinping's New Age. *China Leadership Monitor*, Winter 2018, Issue 55.
- Fishkin J** (2018) *Democracy When the People are Thinking. Revitalizing our Politics Through Public Deliberation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Geisser V, Dabène O and Massardier G** (2008) *Autoritarismes démocratiques et démocraties autoritaires au XXIe siècle. Convergences Nord-Sud*. Paris: La Découverte.
- Glynos J and Howarth D** (2007) *Logics of Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory*. London, NY: Routledge.
- He B** (2004) Participatory and deliberative institutions in China. In *Collection of the Essays Presented at the International Conference on Deliberative Democracy and Chinese Practice of Participatory and Deliberative Institutions*. Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshi, pp. 92–108.
- He B and Warren M** (2011) Authoritarian deliberation: the deliberative turn in China's political development. *Perspectives on Politics* **9**, 269–289.
- Hermet G** (2004) Un régime à pluralisme limité? A propos de la gouvernance démocratique, *Révue française de Science Politique* **54**, 159–178.
- Hsing Y-T** (2010) *The Great Urban Transformation: Politics of Land and Property in China*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.
- Insel A** (2005) La postdémocratie. Entre gouvernance et caudillisme. *Revue du MAUSS* **2**, 121–136.
- Lin GCS** (2009) *Developing China: Land, Politics and Social Conditions*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Melo AM and Simoes SS** (2014) Rénover le quartier, refaire les citoyens: une anthropologie de la participation vue de Lille-Sud. In Deboulet A and Lelévrier C (eds), *Rénovations urbaines en Europe*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, pp. 115–124.
- Nathan A** (2003) Authoritarian resilience. *Journal of Democracy* **14**, 6–17.
- Overney L** (2014) L'épreuve des démolitions à la Duchère : tactiques de résistance d'un collectif d'habitants. In Deboulet A and Lelévrier C (eds), *Rénovations urbaines en Europe*. Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, pp. 125–134.
- Pellizzoni L** (2013) Une idée sur le déclin ? Evaluer la nouvelle critique de la délibération publique. *Participations* **2**, 87–118.
- Romano GC** (2017) *From Berlin to Yangzhou: an enquiry into the transfer of Careful Urban Renewal and a Chinese city's capacities to learn sustainability*. Doctoral Thesis in Political Science, Sciences Po-Paris, 24 February 2017.
- Weinstein L and Ren X** (2009) The changing right to the city – urban renewal and housing rights in globalizing Shanghai and Mumbai. *City & Community* **8**, 407–432.
- Xinhua** (2013) GDP not the only benchmark, but still important, China Daily USA [online], 10th December 2013, available at: http://usa.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2013-12/10/content_17165245.htm (accessed 22 September 2016).
- Yangzhou City Government** (2006) *Yangzhou shi gongzhong canyu chengshi guihua guanli de zanxing banfa*. (Temporary Measures for Public Participation in City Planning and Management), Yangzhou.
- Yangzhou City Government** (2012) *Yangzhou shi chengshi zongti guihua (2012–2020)*. (Yangzhou Statutory City Comprehensive Plan), Yangzhou City Urban Planning Bureau and Yangzhou City Urban Planning and Design Institute, Yangzhou.
- Yangzhou City Government** (2013) *Yangzhou lishi wenhua mingcheng baohu guihua* (Yangzhou Historical and Cultural Famous City Protection Plan), Yangzhou.
- Yangzhou Old City Office** (2010) *Jia da gucheng baohu lidu chongfen diaodong jumin canyu gucheng baohu de jijixing – guanyu tuijin gongzhong canyu lao chenggu guihua he chuantong minju xiushan de diaoyan baogao*. (Strengthen the level of protection of the old city by fully mobilising residents' participation initiative in old city protection – Survey report concerning the promotion of public participation in planning for the old city and repairing traditional housing), Yangzhou, October 2010.
- Zhao S** (2016) The ideological campaign in Xi's China. Rebuilding regime legitimacy. *Asian Survey* **56**, 1168–1193.

Giulia C. Romano is a postdoctoral research fellow at the Institute of East Asian Studies, University of Duisburg-Essen, and research associate at Sciences Po-Paris, CERI. Her researches focus on policy transfers, policy diffusion and the circulation of models of urban governance in China. Currently, she is conducting a research project on the introduction of spaces for resident participation in urban planning and urban renewal in Chinese cities.