

Towards a Common Understanding of Socially Integrative Cities in Europe and China

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1. Introduction

Segregation in cities, whether voluntary or forced, is a universal phenomenon, and it is as old as the city itself (Häußermann and Siebel 2001, p. 70). Consequently, integration also has a long history, at least since cities started to open broader opportunities for the population to participate in economic and social activities, deal with challenges of the concentration of social and economic challenges as well as other structural problems in certain districts or neighbourhoods, and promote social cohesion and inclusion.

The term “social integration” has been widely used in academia and practice, especially in the discussion about social segregation and ways to diminish its negative consequences in cities. Moreover, it has often been used in policy documents and related debates for decades. Nevertheless, there is a lack of clarity regarding its meaning and the ways to measure and operationalise it (Jeannotte 2008).

According to the United Nations (1994), there are at least three different ways of understanding social integration. First, integration is understood as inclusion, implying equal opportunities and rights for all humans. In this vision, more integration offers more opportunities for all. Second, with a negative connotation, integration is seen as synonymous with assimilation, conjuring up the image of an unwanted imposition of uniformity. This notion suggests that integration means to give up one’s own identity, and to totally immerse in the mainstream of societal conditions at a given place. Third, without any moral connotation, integration is perceived as a way to describe the established patterns of human relations in a society.

Accordingly, the term’s antonyms, i.e., social segregation and exclusion, may be conceptualised as the insufficiency of (a) the political and legal systems to guarantee civic integration, (b) the labour market to promote economic opportunities for all, (c) the welfare system to ensure public health for all, and (d) the family and community system to stimulate interpersonal relations and social capital (Berger-Schmitt 2000). Consequently, social integration attempts to counteract with regard to these deficits.

However, after the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, the concept of social integration widely fell out of use (Ferguson 2008) due to the dominance of its negative association, i.e., assimilation. Instead, it has become common to use the term “inclusion” referring to the first notion described above. Nowadays,

this term is commonly used in international and national documents oriented towards sustainability, e.g., the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations 2015) and the New Urban Agenda (United Nations 2017).

In this article, social integration is understood in a comprehensive way. Emphasis is given to the first of the above listed notions within a wider framework of different trends of urban development. It is seen as an approach oriented towards inclusion in order to make societies more equitable.¹

On this background, the objectives of this article are to explore how the “socially integrative city” is understood in Europe and China, to analyse whether and to what extent this supports a common understanding of the term, and to elaborate a proposal for a joint concept. The results are based on a broad analysis of international literature and practice examples, especially from Europe and China. They were intensively discussed within an expert group with representatives from renowned European and Chinese institutions.² Among them were several European and Chinese top universities and research institutes dealing with urban issues. Moreover, experts came from related Chinese academies, such as the China Academy of Urban Planning and Design (CAUPD), China’s national institution that oversees all urban development in the country, the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS), and the Chinese Academy of Science and Technology for Development (CASTED). Finally, results were also discussed with representatives from the network of major European cities (EUROCITIES) and the China Center for Urban Development (CCUD) which is directly answering to China’s top macroeconomic planning institution, the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).

The article is structured in five parts. After this introduction, the concept of social integration and approaches promoting the inclusive city in Europe are discussed in the second chapter. This is followed by an analysis of the role of social integration in China’s urbanisation process. On the background of the analyses presented in Sections 2 and 3, a common European–Chinese approach towards understanding and defining characteristics of a socially integrative city is developed. Concluding, consequences of the concept’s implementation and its challenges are discussed.

¹ The authors acknowledge the existence of a conceptual difference between integration (something is wrong that must be fixed in order to fit) and inclusion (all children are different and can learn) in the area of social education.

² All related institutions and experts were members of the TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA project, funded by the European Union and supported by the Government of the People’s Republic of China.

2. Conceptualizing the Socially Integrative City in Europe

2.1. *The Call of International Organisations for Inclusive Cities*

For many decades, the international community has acknowledged the need to ensure that people can reap the benefits of urbanisation worldwide. Already, the Vancouver Declaration on Human Settlements, agreed upon during the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat I) in 1976, advocated “the improvement of the quality of life ... of all people”, especially the most disadvantaged ones, and a more equitable distribution of development benefits (United Nations 1976, p. 4). Inclusive cities were seen as cities “in which all citizens are incorporated in decisions and policies; none in particular, the poorest and most vulnerable, are left out. All may both consider themselves and, be considered by others, to be full and first class citizens” (Stren 2001, p. 6).

In the UN-Habitat’s Global Campaign on Urban Governance in 2001, the United Nations promoted a vision of the inclusive city as a place where all can participate and benefit from the opportunities that urban areas offer. “An Inclusive City promotes growth with equity. It is a place where everyone, regardless of their economic means, gender, race, ethnicity or religion, is enabled and empowered to fully participate in the social, economic and political opportunities that cities have to offer” (UN-Habitat 2001).

At the heart of the campaign, there were three principles: respect for human rights, good urban governance, and equitable growth. In accordance with the program, urban social inclusiveness is advantageous for economic growth and central for sustainable development. It reduces inequalities and social tension, it incorporates the knowledge, productivity, and the social and physical capital of the poor and disadvantaged in city development, and it increases local ownership of development processes and programs (UN-Habitat 2001).

Accordingly, six areas were identified where local governments can have an impact on promoting social inclusion and economic growth (UN-Habitat 2001):

- Access to land and land planning regulations;
- Access to infrastructure and basic services;
- Local economic success which determines the resources available for improving access to land, infrastructure, and services;
- Promotion of labour-intensive work methods and support for small-scale industries and the informal sector;
- Access of the poor to justice and the enforcement of laws affecting the vulnerable population;

- Promotion of the ability of the urban poor to influence local decision making which determines local strategic planning, priority setting, and capital investment.

During the 2016 Habitat III Conference in Quito, UN-Habitat recognised that, unfortunately, inequality and exclusion persist in urban areas, and that two types of drivers are needed to combat urban exclusion and put cities on a better path: “The first is political commitment to inclusive urban development at multiple levels, in the face of many forces and stakeholders incentivizing uneven and unequal development. The second is a range of mechanisms and institutions to facilitate inclusion, including participatory policy making, accountability, universal access to services, spatial planning and a strong recognition of the complementary roles of national and local governments in achieving inclusive growth” (UN-Habitat 2015, p. 1).

Similar to the United Nations, the World Bank’s twin goals, i.e., ending extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity, place the topic of inclusion in front, as “no country has transited beyond middle-income status while maintaining high level of inequality” (World Bank, p. 23). The concept of inclusive cities proposed by this organisation involves a complex web of multiple spatial, social, and economic factors. The spatial dimension deals with geographic segregation, the social dimension with discrimination,³ and the economic one with the lack of access to opportunities. It is acknowledged that these three dimensions of inclusiveness are intertwined. According to lessons learnt from different policies and programs, acting on one dimension while ignoring another is not advisable. Thus, the World Bank approach argues for an integrated multi-dimensional perspective where different interventions aim at inclusion in each dimension.

Concrete urban actions for promoting inclusion embrace the recognition of collective and individual rights, e.g., to the city, to housing, and to sanitation, ensuring participation in decision making, and enhancing safety and security. Concerning the operationalisation, the World Bank proposes three actions (Shah et al. 2015): (a) supporting, prioritising, and scaling up investment for inclusive cities, (b) looking for potential entry points for investments aimed at inclusion, and (c) building partnerships, i.e., between urban and rural areas, and between international organisations.

Similar to the World Bank, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) proposes an “Integrated Approach to Inclusive Urban Development”: “An inclusive city creates

³ Discrimination can take place on the basis of socio-economic status, gender, age, caste, and/or ethnicity, facing difficulties in gaining and securing access, rights, and opportunities in urban areas. For instance, in China, rural immigrants settling in cities may be denied the ability to access public services, while also sharing many of the necessities as the urban poor such as lack of housing and economic opportunities, poor living conditions, and social marginalization (Shah et al. 2015).

a safe, liable environment with affordable and equitable access to urban services, social services, and livelihood opportunities for all the city residents and other city users to promote optimal development of its human capital and ensure the respect of human dignity and equality” (Asian Development Bank 2017, p. 4). It encompasses sustainable, resilient, accessible, and affordable solutions by enhancing access to services and infrastructure through targeted investments.

From the perspective of the Bank, sustainability is seen as the capacity of an entity, e.g., a city, to operate, maintain, renew, and/or expand its housing and service delivery system and pro-poor infrastructure in the long run. Resilience is understood as the awareness of institutions regarding the context in which investments are made. For example, the affordability of a provided solution, the vulnerability due to climate change, and the planning and project development mechanisms may play a role here. Accessibility is understood in the sense of opening up opportunities for safe, secure housing and reliable basic services for all individuals and communities. Finally, affordability includes the possibility of families to benefit from offered services and of local and national governments to benefit from and have the capacity to support the systematic delivery of shelter, services, and transport to communities (Asian Development Bank 2017, pp. 4–5).

2.2. Promotion of Social Integration and Cohesion in Europe

Similar to the international discussion, the social dimension of integration, especially in urban areas, is an old topic in Europe (Threlfall 2003). Already, Article 2 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community in 1957 stated that it shall be “the aim ... to promote throughout the Community a harmonious development of economic activities, a continuous and balanced expansion, an increased stability”, and “an accelerated raising of the standard of living”.⁴ According to Article 3 of the Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union, the Union shall “work for the sustainable development of Europe”, “combat social exclusion and discrimination”, and “promote economic, social and territorial cohesion”.⁵

The European cohesion policy further specifies and implements these stipulations through a number of funds promoting an increased balance between regions and fostering social integration and inclusion at the local level. Since the Single European Act in 1986, it has become one of the important elements of the overall

⁴ Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (Rome, 25 March 1957). Available online: https://www.cvce.eu/obj/treaty_establishing_the_european_economic_community_rome_25_march_1957-en-cca6ba28-0bf3-4ce6-8a76-6b0b3252696e.html (accessed on 7 August 2020).

⁵ Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union. Official Journal of the European Union. C 326/13. 26.10.2012. Available online: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:2bf140bf-a3f8-4ab2-b506-fd71826e6da6.0023.02/DOC_1&format=PDF (accessed on 7 August 2020).

European policies architecture. Similar to preceding periods, the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) fostered various integration and inclusion-oriented measures during the 2014–2020 funding period.⁶ Among them were measures to support the elaboration of community-led local development strategies, and the physical and socio-economic regeneration of deprived communities in urban and rural areas.

A milestone in European urban development support, especially regarding the socially integrative city, was the creation of the first URBAN Community Initiative Programme in 1994, after conducting 33 pilot projects in several cities in the years before since 1989. It was based on the insight that many cities contained “blackspots with high rates of unemployment, crime, poverty and dereliction” facing “problems of economic and social integration”. The URBAN Community Initiative was geared towards assisting “urban areas in crisis, particularly in terms of its three main axes of spending: physical and environmental regeneration; social inclusion; entrepreneurship and employment” (CEC 2002, pp. 3–4). URBAN I supported physical and environmental regeneration, innovative ways of promoting entrepreneurship and employment, and measures to promote social inclusion in general and especially of young people (CEC 2002, p. 8).

URBAN I was followed by the even more comprehensive URBAN II Community Initiative during the years 2001 to 2006. It included the following priorities: (a) mixed-use and environmentally friendly brownfield redevelopment designed to create employment, integrate local communities, improve security, and generally improve social life, (b) the support for entrepreneurship and employment, (c) the integration of excluded persons and affordable access to public services, (d) the promotion of environmentally friendly and integrated public transportation systems, (e) waste minimisation and treatment, noise reduction, and more efficient energy use, and (f) developing the potential created by information society technologies in the economic, social, and environmental sectors. URBAN programs had “to demonstrate a commitment to organisation change, participatory governance, empowerment and capacity building transferable into mainstream practice” (CEC 2002, p. 9). The decision making regarding the selection of sites was decentralised to the member states following a quota set by the Commission and applying a transparent selection mode based on objective criteria (CEC 2002, p. 11). In fact, inner city areas as well as

⁶ European Regional Development Fund (ERDF). Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/policy/themes/social-inclusion/ (accessed on 7 August 2020). Draft thematic guidance fiche for desk officers thematic objective 9: Social inclusion version 2–27/01/2014. ERDF Regulation (1301/2013) on Social inclusion. Available online: https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/sources/docgener/informat/2014/guidance_social_inclusion.pdf (accessed on 7 August 2020).

peripheral and suburban areas of larger cities formed the vast majority of sites chosen, whereas small cities accounted for only about 10 per cent (CEC 2002, pp. 13–14).

In 2002, URBAN II led to the establishment of the URBACT programme upon an initiative by the French Ministry of Urban Policy in agreement with other member states. It was created with the intention “to develop transnational exchange of experience between actors, . . . and to capitalise on . . . projects, drawing lessons from the results, successes and weaknesses noted.” URBACT was and still is supposed to “contribute to improved relevance and effectiveness of actions tackling the concentration of economic and social problems in small, medium-sized and large European cities, each with their own specific characteristics” (European Commission 2002). Until 2020, three programs, i.e., URBACT I, II, and III, have been implemented in order to “promote sustainable integrated urban development and contribute to the delivery of the European 2020 strategy” (URBACT 2018).

In 2007, the Treaty of Lisbon (Union 2007) supported further progress in consolidating the social dimension of integration, including full employment and solidarity between generations (Article 3). The document recognises the right of workers to information and consultation as well as collective bargaining, fair working conditions, social security, and social assistance (Article 6).

In parallel, the Leipzig Charta (Council of Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning and Urban 2007) stressed that European cities register significant and increasing differences in economic, social, and environmental opportunities between neighbourhoods and groups. Thus, it was proposed to make greater use of integrated urban development policy approaches and to focus on deprived neighbourhoods within the context of the city as a whole (Table 1).⁷ The ample discussion process in preparing an update of the Leipzig Agenda in the second half of 2020, during the German EU Presidency, addressed a number of new challenges for European cities and their sustainable development. For example, new issues which dominated the urban development debate until recently and were prominent in the Europe-wide dialogue in preparation of the New Leipzig Charter include “‘Fridays for Future’ demonstrations, heatwaves, dealing with refugees, inner-city driving bans, exploding rents and land prices”, but also the rise of populism (Council of Ministers Responsible for Spatial Planning and Urban 2007). More recently, the COVID-19 issue “has shed even more light on key urban issues—for example urban density, and city resilience” (URBACT 2020a). The New Leipzig Agenda will promote just, green, and productive city strategies.

⁷ Areas suffering from an interlocking mix of social, economic, and environmental structural problems, exacerbated by a low community and institutional capacity that discourages investment and encourages exclusion.

Table 1. Recommendations of the Leipzig Charter on Sustainable European Cities, 2007.

- I. Making greater use of integrated urban development policy approaches:
- Creating and ensuring high-quality public spaces;
 - Modernizing infrastructure networks and improving energy efficiency;
 - Proactive innovation and educational policies.
- II. Paying special attention to deprived neighbourhoods within the context of the city as a whole:
- Pursuing strategies for upgrading the physical environment;
 - Strengthening the local economy and local labour market policy;
 - Proactive education and training policies for children and young people;
 - Promotion of efficient and affordable urban transport.

In another document marking a cornerstone of European policies and strategies, the Europe 2020 Strategy, cities are seen as key to achieving the goal of “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” (European Commission 2010). Urban areas are considered motors for regional growth because they offer a multitude of opportunities for upward social mobility and stimulate empowerment and participation. Consequently, the current EU cohesion policy (2014–2020) puts the urban dimension in a prominent place as at least 50% of the ERDF is invested in urban areas.⁸ Additionally, in each member state, a minimum of 5% of the ERDF is oriented to integrated sustainable development.

Finally, the Urban Agenda and the European Green Deal put emphasis on sustainable urban development and its social dimension. The Urban Agenda for the EU (Pact of Amsterdam), agreed at the Informal Meeting of EU Ministers Responsible for Urban Matters in 2016 (EU Ministers Responsible for Urban Matters 2016), has identified 12 priority themes for urban development which are highly relevant for guaranteeing improved living conditions and a better quality of life. Many of them make reference to or are relevant for social inclusion and integration. With the European Green Deal, the “urban dimension of cohesion policy will be strengthened”, and enhanced initiatives “will provide assistance to cities to help them make best use of opportunities to develop sustainable urban development strategies” (European Commission 2019, p. 23). The European Green Deal also promotes the idea to establish “a Just Transition Mechanism, including a Just Transition Fund, to leave no one behind” (European Commission 2019, p. 16).

All in all, the description above demonstrates that social integration and inclusion have a long history in Europe, a continent which, due to the growth of cities and new developments in peri-urban areas, turned to become predominantly urban already early during the last century, with all its facets of social exclusion and segregation.

⁸ This instrument is behind projects all over Europe that receive funding from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the European Social Fund (ESF), and the Cohesion Fund.

Moreover, the decay of many inner-urban areas contributed to put social integration and inclusion high on the agenda. Specific funding mechanisms and a myriad of model projects have allowed building up solid, long-standing experience regarding socially integrated urban development (URBACT 2020b).

2.3. The Socially Integrative City—A German Program to Combat Social and Spatial Marginalisation

There is one more prominent approach towards social integration in cities in Europe which is relevant in the context of developing a common understanding of socially integrative cities. In Germany, the debate about socially integrative cities started already in the late 1970s. Social integration was starting to be seen as a way to cope with profound structural economic changes associated with a drastic reduction in employment, primarily in industry, affecting citizens, governments, and especially urban areas. Nevertheless, it took until the late 1990s for concrete measures to efficiently counteract decay in urban areas to be shaped. In 1999, the joint federal-state program “Districts with Special Development Needs—The Socially Integrative City” (SIC) was launched (Table 2). “Socially Integrative City” was the English translation of the German term “Soziale Stadt”. In more recent publications, it has also been translated as “Social City” (BBSR 2017; FES 2016).

Table 2. Socially integrative city: objectives and principles, based on the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2003).

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Social and ethnic integration, improving neighbourly community life;• Employment and education for local residents, placement on the primary labour market;• Economic revitalisation, support for local economy;• Redevelopment and modernisation measures, improving the residential environment; linking investment measures in urban renewal with non-investment social and employment measures;• Improving social and cultural infrastructure, integrating facilities such as schools, youth, and senior citizen facilities into district work, the promotion of children, young people, and families;• Improving (residential) security in the neighbourhood;• Public relations, image development. |
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In early 2000, all 16 German regions at the state level (Länder) selected an urban area as a model district and commissioned a group of experts to conduct research. Selection took place in consultation with the respective municipality and the respective land. The program called for area-related integrated solutions, and for a change in attitudes of municipal and federal authorities, as well as of the behavior of other stakeholders, including businesses and citizens, in order to combat adverse social conditions at the local level. According to Löhner, SIC is the recognition that “urban development is more than building streets and squares. It concerns the people

who live there and their specific situation” (Löhr 2003, p. 3). An integrated action plan was drafted and developed jointly by local government, residents, business, and other actors (Table 3).

Consequently, the program is rather comprehensive. The program consists of five dimensions: (a) improving living conditions by upgrading the built environment, (b) improving the living conditions by better facilities in the social infrastructure, (c) improving the conditions for individual socialisation with the help of positive role models and social learning, (d) improving the image of a neighbourhood to avoid stigmatisation and discrimination, and (e) strengthening the role of a neighbourhood by improving local governance structures (BBSR 2017, p. 17).

Table 3. Socially integrative city: local stakeholders, based on Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (2003).

- Individual residents and existing resident grouping;
- Citizens action groups;
- Interest groups;
- Cultural, religious, and other associations (especially sports clubs) and networks;
- Urban renewal advisory board, tenant advisory committees and associations, youth committees;
- Crime prevention committees, city marketing bodies;
- Sponsors and sponsoring organisations active in the district, churches, and schools;
- Local business people, local retailers’ associations representatives of the housing industry;
- Representatives of political parties in city and district councils.

The SIC program includes federal financial aid to urban areas assuming their responsibility for self-renewal. In order to draw financial support, ARGEBAU, the workshop of the ministers and senators responsible for urban planning and construction of the different Länder, play an important role. An interregional mediation, information, and advice agency, the German Institute of Urban Affairs (Difu), was given the task to boost implementation in involved municipalities and to accompany the whole implementation process of the program. Until 2018, about 1000 measures received funding in more than 500 cities and towns in Germany (Bundesministerium des Innern 2019).

All in all, the SIC program has been evaluated positively in all of its five dimensions. As the evaluators write, the program has made an important contribution in disadvantaged neighbourhoods “when it comes to creating prerequisites for community building and to stimulate actors” (BBSR 2017). Building activities, integrated development concepts, neighbourhood management, and the availability of respective funds were important for its success. Nevertheless, the evaluation also demonstrated that achievements do neither come for free nor automatically. Complex programs, such as the SIC, need sufficient time and intensive care to succeed.

3. Social Integration in China's Urbanisation Process

3.1. New Directions in China's Urbanisation Policy

In China, the starting points regarding a special attention to urban development and social integration in cities differ from the ones in Europe. Although the country has an ancient tradition of city building and, at some points in its history, has been home to the world's largest and wealthiest cities, modern urbanisation is a rather young phenomenon. It takes place with very high speed and dynamics. In the past decades, Chinese cities have grown in an unprecedented way. Rapid urbanisation has been closely linked with fast economic growth and the relaxation of rural–urban migration regulations in order to meet employment demands in major cities (Müller et al. 2019).

While the urbanisation level was less than 20% in 1978, the urban population exceeded the 50% threshold only after 2010 (Figure 1), and it is expected to reach around 70% by 2030 and more than 75% in 2050 (United Nations 2018). The year 2011 marked a major milestone in Chinese history, like a symbol for the fact that the country entered a new stage of development. Achieving urbanisation on such a scale and in a comparatively short period of time has never been experienced before worldwide.

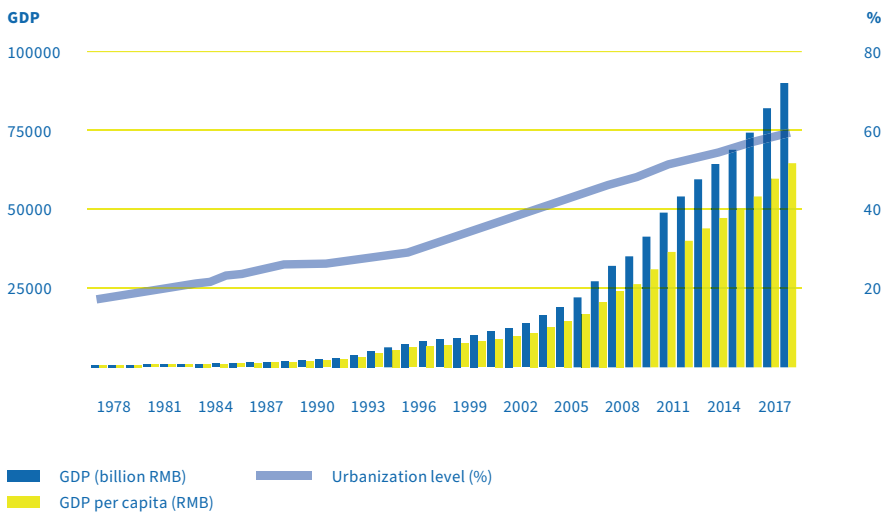


Figure 1. Growth of China's GDP and urbanisation level from 1978 to 2018, according to China National Bureau of Statistics. Source: Data from Müller et al. (2019), used with permission.

On the occasion of the Central Urbanisation Work Conference (CUWC),⁹ held in Beijing in 2013, Chinese leaders emphasised their commitment to urbanisation, calling it “the road China must take in its modernisation drive” (Tiezzi 2013). At the same time, they stressed that urbanisation and related policies would have to be “people-centred” (*yi ren wei ben*).

Emphasizing the human dimension of urbanisation was a reaction to widespread former approaches, which had been oriented towards economic growth driven by the GDP mania and land development driven by getting more off-budget resources with little consideration regarding limits of urban population growth. The policy shift was an attempt of the Chinese government to avoid negative consequences of uncontrolled urban expansion or sprawl that could affect and slow down urban development, such as a real-estate bubble, increasing local government debts, and economic imbalances between urban and rural regions (Tiezzi 2013).

Only one year later, in 2014, China’s National Development and Reform Commission, together with 12 major government ministries, put forward the National New-type Urbanisation Plan (2014–2020). The plan addressed the following “contradictions and problems” that were seen to require solutions (Griffiths and Schiavone 2016, p. 8).

- Approximately 234 million rural migrant workers and their families had difficulties in getting urban residence. As a consequence, they were residents without legal access to some essential urban rights (Wang et al. 2015), such as equitable education, public employment, preferential health care, locally specified pensions, and bank loans for purchasing socially affordable housing.
- The rate of urban land was growing faster than the urban population. From 2000 to 2011, the urban area increased by 76.4%, far exceeding the 50.5% growth rate of the urban population. Even the strict basic farming land protection policy did not avoid the fast growth of urban built-up land (Chen and Lu 2015). Additionally, land use and construction patterns were extensive and inefficient, leading to urban areas failing to reach the required population density. “Ghost cities/communities” were growing here and there, as a result of excessive housing supply and infrastructure outpacing the actual needs, along with business speculation on property demand (Chen and Lu 2015).
- The spatial distribution and the structure of the urbanised area were perceived as irrational. People moved to eastern areas while resources in the middle and western regions were not properly utilised. Moreover, in small and medium-

⁹ The CUWC is the platform where the Chinese Central Government lays out its guiding plan for the development of cities. The 2013 assembly was the first since the reform and opening-up policy initiated in 1978.

sized cities, the agglomeration of industry and the concentration of people had not been fully exploited.

- Urban management operations were inefficient, producing what was called “urban diseases”, such as traffic congestion as well as air, water, and soil pollution. Local governments were seen to focus on economic growth, infrastructure construction, and residential building while neglecting environmental concerns and improvement.
- Natural and cultural heritages were not adequately protected, and urban and rural areas were losing their specific identities. Natural environments had been destroyed or irrationally modified due to the creation of new development zones (Chen and Lu 2015).
- Institutional mechanisms, including household registration, land use management, and social security, as well as fiscal, financial, and administrative systems, seen as deficient, perpetuating urban–rural imbalances, restricting migration, and hindering the integrated development of rural and urban areas.

Although the New-Type Urbanisation Plan marked the beginning of a new era of urbanisation and urban development in China, little attention was paid to implementation, as a new start. On the one hand, it was not possible to turn around the steering wheel of urban development overnight given the huge inertia in path dependency, especially due to the strong shared authority by provincial and local levels (Kroeber 2016). On the other hand, it became increasingly clear that steps towards the so-called “*shiminhua*” (citizenisation) of peasants, the alteration of urban-biased policies, and increased participation will take a rather long time (Chen et al. 2016).

Against this backdrop, social integration, understood as the process where disadvantaged or vulnerable groups, for example, rural migrants or economically fragile persons, are incorporated into mainstream society (Berry 2011; Penninx and Garcés-Mascareñas 2016), becomes a crucial element in the Chinese transition towards more sustainable urban areas.

3.2. *Challenges for Social Integration in China’s Cities*

People-centred urbanisation and social integration in urban areas have become prominent topics in China. Moreover, there are several existing traditional provisions focusing on social life in neighbourhoods, such as those implemented through party-based civic organisations. Nevertheless, there are a number of challenges which especially need to be addressed.

Like in most cities worldwide, urbanisation has led and is leading to socio-economic segregation and a spatial differentiation between areas where poorer parts of the population live and areas with a certain concentration of more affluent

people. In the past, economic growth provided many opportunities for urban citizens to climb up the socio-economic ladder and to considerably improve their socio-economic and living conditions. Therefore, social integration in this sense, e.g., with regard to levelling or balancing differences, may have found hitherto only limited attention. When and whether this may change are difficult to predict.

However, urbanisation is also taking place in China throughout two interrelated people and place phenomena: the influx of rural migrants and the in situ urbanisation related with the reclassification of rural to urban land (Chen et al. 2017). Problems associated with the social integration of rural migrants in cities and urban villages¹⁰ have been discussed intensively in the literature (Li 2006; Wang and Fan 2012; Yue et al. 2016; Tian et al. 2019). They have to be taken into consideration in developing a common understanding of social integration. They can be summarised as described in the following subsections.

3.2.1. Institutional Restrictions

Since the 1950s, urban and rural citizens in China are clearly separated through a residential permit and registration system. In 1958, the Chinese household registration system, “*hukou*”, was introduced. It divided the population into agricultural and non-agricultural. According to the system, all citizens were obliged to register in one and only one place of permanent residence, which prevented free rural-to-urban migration and controlled labour transfer between cities (Chan 1994). The *hukou* system differentiates strictly between urban citizens, urban residents, and rural residents, with purposes of resource distribution, migration control, and the monitoring of targeted groups of people (Cheng and Selden 1994). Designation depends on where an individual’s parents or grandparents were registered, and it is not connected with the actual places of residence or even the place of birth (Boffy-Ramirez and Moon 2017).

Generally, rural residents can become urban citizens either through active im-migration, e.g., studying at vocational schools or colleges or marriage with urban residents, or through being granted an urban registration during urban extension processes (Wang et al. 2015). However, an urban *hukou* is difficult to acquire and is commonly understood as a barrier to upward economic mobility. The system provokes widespread criticism as not being “people-oriented” and as enlarging the urban–rural dichotomy (Wang et al. 2015; Griffiths and Schiavone 2016).

Since the release of the 12th Five Year Plan in 2011, a *hukou* reform was taking place in a number of cities as a possible tool to promote labour mobility and create a

¹⁰ An urban village is defined as a transitional neighbourhood characterised by tenuous land rights and a mixture of rural and urban populations. Once the agricultural land is expropriated, rural residents are entitled to the same benefits as urban citizens; however, the assignation of permits is far behind land conversion (Chen et al. 2017).

more stable urban society. Recently, in 2019, in line with the government efforts to alleviate overcrowded cities, the National Development and Reform Commission announced plans to cancel the *hukou* policy for cities with populations of up to 3 million inhabitants (Shumei and Keyue 2019). Gradually, most administrative obstacles to migrants settling in towns as well as small and medium-sized cities have been removed. However, provincial capitals and other large cities have maintained selective barriers to migrants' formal settlement. Additionally, the policy orientation remained talent-centred, benefiting only a small group of well-qualified migrants (Wang 2020).

Thus, the traditional institutional barriers are geared towards promoting segregation among the population in urban areas, i.e., between those who are full citizens and the rural migrants who may live in the same neighbourhood or district. This makes social integration in neighbourhoods, districts, and cities as a whole rather complicated and complex. In this case, social integration means to bring residents, who have differing rights and unequal access to urban infrastructure and services, together with fair basic rights.

3.2.2. Economic and Service Marginalisation

For decades, and as a result of subsidies oriented to promote rapid urban industrialisation, sharp differences exist between the living standards of urban and rural residents. Individuals holding urban *hukous* are entitled to work in state-owned enterprises, civil administration, public services, and business (Boffy-Ramirez and Moon 2017). Additionally, they have access to pension benefits, subsidised housing, and medical insurance, while low-income rural migrants have little or no access to such services (Griffiths and Schiavone 2016). Even more, a child without an urban status may not be able to enrol in local public schools (Boffy-Ramirez and Moon 2017). These conditions are disproportionate to migrants' impressive contribution to urban economic development.

Moreover, there are sharp per capita annual income disparities. As an average, they were 2.4 times higher in urban than in rural areas (Yusuf and Saich 2008). Additionally, the vastly greater job opportunities in cities make it highly attractive for rural people to migrate to urban areas. To economically integrate in cities, migrants usually accept so-called "3 D jobs", i.e., jobs which are dirty, dangerous, and demanding (Meng 2012). Keung Wong et al. (2006) described rural migrant workers as young males holding jobs in factories and in the service industries, working long hours as restaurant employees, factory workers, construction workers, or housemaids during the slack agricultural season. Since the majority of rural migrants are less educated and do not have special skills (Boffy-Ramirez and Moon 2017), job mobility among migrant workers is very low and limited.

The marginalisation of rural to urban migrants in cities poses enormous difficulties to social integration. Unlike in the case of European cities where international migration may be seen as an asset for neighbourhoods and districts to become more culturally diverse and more specialised, e.g., by offering a variety of specific services as well as diverse cultural environments, rural migrants in China do not offer as many opportunities for neighbourhoods and districts to become distinctive if this is at all wanted and accepted.

3.2.3. Narrow Social Networks, Isolation, and Discrimination

As a result of decades of continuous rural migration to urban areas, social integration of migrants has become an important challenge for local governments. In general, migrants consider urban areas as places to work and not to live. To save their earnings, they prefer to live in affordable small places, e.g., in urban villages, places that have transformed into functional but unregulated migrant enclaves (Li and Wu 2014). Urban villages' residents often rent their property as a source of income, "thus providing additional housing options for migrants but not creating stable or sustainable communities" (Chen et al. 2017, p. 3).

Besides working inequalities and welfare limitations, rural migrants face social isolation and discrimination (Wang et al. 2017). On the one hand, migrants' networks are networks of migrants that over time hinder their further integration (Yue et al. 2016). On the other hand, urban citizens and the media perceive migrants negatively, condemning them for overloading infrastructure, crime, and the violation of birth control regulations (Wissink et al. 2013).

Under these circumstances, social integration becomes a demanding task. It has to incorporate strategies to change the very different mindsets on both sides, with the urban citizens and the media, on the one hand, and the migrants, on the other hand. This requires persuasion, moderation, and mediation at all levels as well as, probably, a large general educational campaign at the national level oriented towards bridging differences between urban citizens and the rural population.

3.2.4. Limited Civic Engagement

Civic engagement differs significantly in China and the West. In China, civic engagement means involvement in activities of Urban Residents Committees (URC) and engaging in community participation confined to the development of urban neighbourhoods (Palmer et al. 2011). The URC form the lowest level of the administrative hierarchy, playing an important part in the political system. According to article 3 of the law on URC, their tasks include the dissemination of information about the Constitution, as well as the laws and regulations; handling public affairs and public welfare services of residents; mediating disputes; assisting residents in public health, family planning, social relief, juvenile education, etc.; and conveying

the residents' opinions and demands and making suggestions to the local people's government or its agencies.

This interest-driven participation system has important implications for understanding political participation in China (Guan and Cai 2015). City governments have made efforts to incorporate rural migrants into the activities organised by institutions such as the URC to improve their wellbeing and public acceptance. However, different studies show the lack of motivation of rural migrants to participate in any of their places of reference, neither in their own rural villages which they have left for work and which they visit only occasionally, nor in the urban communities where they work and live (Palmer et al. 2011; Wu et al. 2019).

Under these conditions and the related cultural imprint, it is unrealistic to expect a broader participation in urban matters other than neighbourhood-related ones, e.g., on strategic issues of overall city development, urban growth directions, new urban expansion and regeneration projects, or the protection of the environment in urban growth processes. City governments usually amply inform citizens about their plans and prospects, e.g., in their Urban Planning Exhibition Centres. However, they do not expect to critically discuss projects or to motivate residents to actively engage in urban issues. Moreover, in places where rural migrants live, it is even difficult to facilitate their social integration through the established institutional provisions.

4. A Shared European–Chinese Understanding of the Socially Integrative City¹¹

The above-described necessities and approaches in Europe and China regarding social integration and inclusion differ considerably. In Europe, social integration is highly focused on blackspots of urban decay, the inclusion of international migrants, the mediation between the haves and the have-nots as well as among the poorer parts of the population, and the mitigation of negative repercussions of socio-spatial segregation. In contrast, in China, strong and continuous economic growth has provided abundant opportunities for individuals to improve their socio-economic status and living conditions. Thus, on the one hand, barriers to climb up the socio-economic ladder have been by far less severe. On the other hand, rural migrants have largely contributed to China's economic success. However, they are neither integrated in the urban society nor do they enjoy the same rights and opportunities as urban citizens. In both cases, Europe and China, there is an urgent need to counteract. However, it is not surprising that policies, approaches, and strategies differ.

¹¹ This section is based on the contents of deliverable D6.6 of the EU-funded TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA project, i.e., the "Workshop Report on theoretical aspects of transition towards urban sustainability and the role of socially integrative cities", published online in March 2019 (Müller et al. 2019).

On this background, one may ask whether there is a basis for a shared understanding of the socially integrative city. In order to clarify this question, a European–Chinese expert group was formed. It consisted of 15 members of the TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA project consortium. Each of the 14 project partner institutions was represented. The authors of this article jointly presided over the group. The expert group analysed and discussed the preconditions and requirements of social integration in European and Chinese cities, and it developed a common understanding of the socially integrative city which is applicable in Europe and China. They expressed their opinion that a joint holistic and comprehensive concept of the socially integrative city should go beyond the challenges of internal and international migration. The shared normative foundation is described below.

A socially integrative city is understood as a socially mixed, cohesive, liveable, and vibrant urban area. Compactness, functional mix, and intra-urban connectivity as well as equal rights regarding the access to municipal services play an important role. Environmental quality, the quality of public spaces, and the quality of life contribute to the well-being of the population. Strengthening a sense of community and fostering a sense of place as well as preserving cultural heritage shape the city's inward- and outward-bound image. Investments into neighbourhood improvement, service delivery, infrastructure, and the quality of housing are important supportive measures. Empowerment and participation of the population, as well as social capital, are indispensable (Müller et al. 2019). Inclusiveness is an important feature; however, the joint understanding is wider and more comprehensive.

All in all, the socially integrative city has twelve characteristics grouped into five dimensions (Table 4): collaborative urban planning and design; urban environment and living conditions; local economy and labour market; socio-cultural development and social capital; and institutional development and urban finance.

Urban planning and design: Spatial planning and land management for promoting the socially integrative city hold particular potential in countries and cities where urbanisation is happening rapidly. Urban population growth offers the possibility of promoting new spatial forms, new approaches to the provision of services, and the creation of new opportunities for urbanizing populations. At the same time, the conversion and further development of older areas offer the possibility to carefully look at the existing structures and deficits, and to design counteractive measures in order to improve living and working conditions. Following the experiences in European countries, urban planning and design can be used to reduce urban sprawl and to promote a well-balanced land conversion from “rural” to “urban” and appropriate access to urban land. The (re-)design of existing neighbourhoods can be conducted in a way which makes public spaces attractive for citizens and enhances the qualities of the place. Such place making can also be applied in urban expansion areas. In order to achieve a sustainable growth, regeneration, and

redevelopment of cities, it is wise to involve all concerned stakeholders, including individual residents and users. Thus, collaborative and participative planning and design at the different politico-administrative levels are decisive instruments to guarantee consent, confidence, and well-being.

Table 4. Characteristics of the socially integrative city, based on Müller et al. (2019).

(a) Collaborative urban planning and design
1. Reducing urban sprawl and promoting well-balanced land conversion from “rural” to “urban” and appropriate access to urban land; 2. Involving the different stakeholders in collaborative and participative planning and design processes at the different politico-administrative levels.
(b) Urban environment and living conditions
3. Improving the environment and living conditions in urban areas for all; 4. Upgrading the physical environment in distressed areas; 5. Promoting efficient and affordable urban transport; 6. Assuring equal access to municipal services.
(c) Local economy and labour market
7. Strengthening the local economy and labour market; 8. Strengthening (technical and social) innovation in cities and neighbourhoods, opening up new possibilities for the local population.
(d) Socio-cultural development and social capital
9. Fostering proactive education and training policies for children and young people in disadvantaged neighbourhoods; 10. Preserving cultural heritage and fostering the identity of neighbourhoods and their inhabitants; 11. Fostering social capital and engagement of local stakeholders.
(e) Institutional development and urban finance
12. Supporting adequate institutional and financial conditions and mechanisms.

Urban environment and living conditions: Urban development programs in Europe and China have proven that interventions to upgrade the physical environment, especially in distressed areas, are an important element to support social integration in cities. Quality public spaces play a special role here. Interventions are supposed to improve the environment and living conditions in urban areas for all. In Europe, interventions in the physical structure of neighbourhoods usually happen in a rather careful way. Methods of “urban acupuncture” (Lerner 2014) and “urban dentistry” are applied in order to protect the urban ensemble while “curing” or renewing only a limited number of areas or buildings. Special attention is given to those areas and buildings which need interventions in order to generate a positive impact on the whole project area. House owners and renters are closely integrated as they are expected to share upgrading efforts on their own. In contrast, approaches in China have more frequently followed a more radical approach, i.e., to completely redevelop an area after relocating and compensating the population living there, while only eventually preserving buildings with historical value. Wherever such

developments take place, in inner-urban neighbourhoods or at the edge of cities, it is important to promote efficient and affordable urban transport in order to raise the attractiveness of an area and to promote environmental improvements by reducing emissions. Moreover, renewed and upgraded areas only become attractive and promote social integration if they guarantee equal access to municipal services.

Local economy and labour market: Examples in Europe and China demonstrate that neighbourhoods only become vibrant when there is a strong local economic base. In Europe, the employment situation and especially unemployment have regularly been addressed in programs. They have proved to be a key element for social integration in cities. Moreover, programs in Europe and China are often combined with efforts to strengthen the technical and social innovation capacities in cities and neighbourhoods in order to open up new possibilities for the local population. This can be done by attracting new companies to locate themselves in areas which are under transformation, but it can also be achieved through new forms of local services provision, the provision of local markets and small-scale shopping facilities, and local restaurants, as well as joint production models and the economic interchange among the population.

Socio-cultural development and social capital: Social capital is “the glue that holds societies together and without which there can be no economic growth or human well-being”, as Ismail Serageldin, the then World Bank Vice President, wrote in his foreword to Grootaert (Grootaert 1998). Although the term was used by a number of scholars since the early 1900s, it only became popular upon Robert Putnam’s seminal publications in the 1990s and especially in 2000 (Putnam 1995, 2020; Putnam et al. 1992). In the context of a neighbourhood or a city, social capital can be described as intense interpersonal relations, shared values and trust, and a shared sense of identity as well as preparedness to cooperate among the inhabitants. It is almost self-explanatory that social capital is a decisive prerequisite of the socially integrative city. Successful programs in Europe have demonstrated the key role of measures to raise the social capital in neighbourhoods, e.g., through respective neighbourhood or community management approaches. Thus, programs which address the socially integrative city should try to foster social capital and the engagement of stakeholders in an urban area. Moreover, other related socio-cultural issues play an important role. Therefore, the preservation of cultural heritage and other culture-related measures help to raise the sense of identity and belonging of residents. Finally, proactive education and training policies, especially for children and young people, help to raise perspectives of younger generations and a sense for valuing the place they belong to.

Institutional development and urban finance: Any support programs for promoting the socially integrative city are dependent on adequate institutional settings. These have to be open, supportive, and flexible if they shall bring about

success: open in the sense to be prepared to take up new ideas and developments; supportive in a way that they are regarded by the population as being useful and encouraging initiatives; and flexible in the sense that they are open for change as transformation processes, especially in distressed areas, are hardly predictable, and have higher uncertainties. Moreover, financial conditions and mechanisms should be appropriate to bring about achievements for the population. European experience has shown that projects are especially successful when different stakeholders join hands in their efforts to achieve social integration in neighbourhoods and cities, i.e., governments at the different levels, the private sector, and the population. Their shares have to be individually negotiated and decided.

The five described dimensions of socially integrative cities are closely interrelated. They are suitable as being both a concept for assessing cities and neighbourhoods with regard to the level of social integration they represent, and a conceptual tool for promoting socially integrative cities in Europe and in China.

5. Conclusions

There is a great variety of experiences in Europe and China with regard to social integration in cities and neighbourhoods. The analysis has shown that the preconditions as well as respective policies widely differ from each other.

- While Europe has been a predominantly urban continent for decades, the urban population in China reached the 50% milestone only one decade ago.
- While in Europe, the socially integrative city has been oriented towards multi-faceted challenges, such as urban decay, unemployment, poverty, and negative repercussions of international migration, China is facing a massive challenge regarding rural to urban migration.
- While in Europe, national governments and the European Commission have been engaged in urban issues and the creation of socially integrative cities with a broad range of programs and instruments since the second half of the 19th century, and especially the 1990s, China has embarked on its people-centred urban development strategy only since 2014 with its National New-type Urbanisation Plan.

Despite these differences, it has been possible to reach to a common understanding of the socially integrative city in Europe and China. A respective definition has been developed. Social integration is understood in a comprehensive way as an inclusionary goal, oriented to make urban societies more equitable. In order to support the spatial operationalisation of the concept, the related notion, elaborated by a group of experts from various universities of excellence, academies, and other influential research institutions in Europe and China, emphasises five dimensions of the socially integrative city with, all in all, 12 features. They encompass collaborative

urban planning and design, urban environment and living conditions, local economy and labour market, socio-cultural development and social capital, and institutional development and urban finance.

The term “socially integrative city” can be understood as an analytical concept as well as a guideline for shaping policies promoting socially integrative cities. It is apt to analyse social integration in cities and neighbourhoods, and to develop programs and measures for promoting it. Forerunner cities in Europe and China in terms of sustainable urbanisation can provide vast experience on how to best deal with the characteristics and challenges to build socially integrative cities in the future. This may be helpful for shaping the city of the future in Europe and for coping with urban challenges and directing urban development in China, where each year millions of people will continue to migrate from rural areas to cities.

The concept of the “socially integrative city” goes beyond the notion of the “inclusive city” as developed in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially in Goal No. 11, i.e., to make cities inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable, and the New Urban Agenda. The five dimensions and twelve characteristics of the concept have a global reach. They can be applied anywhere, and they have the potential to complement the respective targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

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