

# Community Building through Public Engagement: Variety in Europe and China

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## 1. Introduction

Community building and public participation are closely intertwined, to the extent that community building arguably cannot exist without public engagement and participation. However, the types of participation, the degree to which it happens, and—importantly—which actors are involved vary considerably. Community building is a key part of the socially integrative city. One of its characteristics is precisely to foster “social capital and engagement of local stakeholders” (see Table 6, Chapter 2, this volume). This chapter takes a closer look at public engagement across cultural contexts in Europe and China. Thereby, we seek to highlight that participation and “the public” are not unilateral, pre-given categories that can be understood uniformly around the world. Indeed, relying on “specific pre-given meanings, forms, and qualities of participation” may cause confusion and hamper participation by overly simplifying the multiple varieties of contemporary public engagement that exist (Chilvers and Kearnes 2019, p. 3).

In a relational and co-productionist perspective, as employed here, publics are thought of as being actively mediated and occurring through the performance of participatory practices (Chilvers and Kearnes 2019). Thus, instead of viewing the public as a predefined mass considered to be an aggregate of autonomous individuals, we here take publics to occur through local processes different in each case, leading us to define multiple forms of publics, forms of engagement, and types of communities in Europe and China. In this chapter, engagement is understood as an enabler of successful participation, while participation is the act of taking part in, shaping, and/or leaving an imprint on society, in this case, a community, in one way or another. To analyze different forms of participation, we apply a modified framework of the classical participation ladder developed by Arnstein (1969), with a dimension added based on Chilvers et al. (2018), including initiatives that are not necessarily formally recognized by authorities.

We briefly go through a variety of understandings of community building, engagement, and participation, and then review three cases from Europe and three cases from China to show differences and similarities in participation strategies. While we have chosen cases from China and Europe, it is important to note that we are not comparing community building in China and Europe in general. Instead, our contribution is an attempt at starting to think about community building across organizational, political, and cultural contexts. By doing so, we seek to contribute

with a perspective addressing the essential question: how do people participate in and build communities in different ways in different cultural entities across large geographical distances? There are various ways in which we can think of participation in contemporary democratic systems in Europe. This variation is even greater when expanding our gaze across continents to state-led and centralized countries such as China.

In this endeavor, we pursue the following research questions:

- How can the relation between community building and public engagement be understood in selected cases from China and Europe?
- To what extent and in which ways are residents engaged in community building? Which strategies are applied, and how does this differ between the geographical areas?

## **2. Materials and Methods**

In this chapter, we apply a case study approach to public participation in community building. In the process of choosing cases, it is often advisable to work on cases that are both practical and appropriate, and our cases are a mixture of these two considerations. For example, there is a bias in the case selection towards cities we are ourselves located in and/or familiar with. There is also a bias in the case selection towards more affluent regions of both China and Europe, namely, coastal China and North/Western Europe. Therefore, it is important to note that these cases are not meant to be representative of China and Europa as a whole. Despite these limitations, we have still attempted to select cases that display great variety in public participation strategies, both within and across Europe and China. Thus, there is diversity of actors, strategies, size, types of places, and outcomes. We have selected cases where public participation strategies can be argued to empower residents and cases where this outcome appears more questionable. In order to display this degree of variety, we have chosen a relatively large number of cases, with six in total. This number will limit the degree to which we can discuss the cases in depth. However, the variety it provides sheds light on the diversity of challenges and emphasizes community building's highly localized nature, as well as shedding light on the fact that public engagement is not a straightforward or easy process.

Cases that deviate from what is commonly held or challenge our interpretation of a phenomenon are often referred to as disconfirming cases. By contrast, typical case sampling illustrates what is considered somehow the normal or average (Hay 2008, pp. 70–72). In this chapter, the cases can be understood as both typical and deviant (Hay 2008; Moses and Knutsen 2012). Given that the chapter aims to show diversity, we have not systematically or statistically verified the extent to which the cases are typical of deviant. To gather information on the cases, we have relied on

secondary sources such as reports, news articles, and government websites, as well as academic literature, in addition to our first-hand knowledge of the places.

### **3. Understandings of Community Building**

Communities can be understood in a variety of ways, relating, for instance, to people, geography, social ties, and a sense of belonging (see, e.g., Chen et al. (2019) for a comparison between China and Europe in this regard). Communities are not merely neighborhoods, as neighborhoods are defined by their geographical boundaries. In this chapter, we think of communities as social ties (Wellman 2018), and community building is, therefore, the facilitation or enabling of such ties. We here also recognize that such facilitation or enabling is strongly shaped by the material surroundings in which social ties exist and the interaction between them. In community building, the material and the social are closely interwoven and interdependent. As argued by Manzo and Perkins (2006), an emotional attachment to a place can motivate cooperation to improve a place-specific community. This, in turn, reflects the concept of the socially integrative city, which encompasses both social and material relations.

One of the key challenges to building stronger relations among people in Europe in recent years is social divisions (Andersen and Kempen 2003). Both in China and Europe, increasing economic differences will inevitably harm community building and social integration in cities. According to scholars such as Sassen (2000), increasing social inequality and building down of the welfare state have led to increased segregation in cities. The concept of the dual city (see, for example, (Mollenkopf and Castells 1991)) can be used to describe the division of cities into areas of included and excluded people (Andersen and Kempen 2003). Further, migration (rural–urban and international) brings about new divisions between people, both within and beyond existing hierarchies. Such divisions do not only bring new challenges to social integration but also to participation. Achieving socially integrative cities requires us to ensure increased “Social and ethnic integration, improving neighbourly community life” (see Table 4, Chapter 2, this volume). When discussing community building and public engagement, the questions of who influences the future of their city and neighborhood in which they live become central. Another pressing issue is whether it is possible to overcome power differences when conducting community building and which tools are appropriate for taking differences into account, an issue we will return to. Before moving on to the cases, we will look at how we can understand participation in a European and a Chinese context.

## 4. Multiple Forms of Participation

### 4.1. Europe

Until a few decades ago, apart from regular deliberative democratic processes such as voting in local or national elections, planning at the neighborhood level has largely been reduced to compliance or opposition to government plans. In most cases, residents were therefore not included in decision-making processes. The means of participation would be silent compliance or protest (Teernstra and Pinkster 2016). Today, bottom-up, participatory, and inclusive decision-making processes are very much buzzwords in urban planning to such an extent that participatory planning is seen as the way of doing governance (Teernstra and Pinkster 2016; Stelzle and Noennig 2019). It has been common for governments to release plans on the topic (see, for example, Regjeringen 2014). Tools such as questionnaires, focus groups, dialogue meetings, workshops, planning forums, and different outreach forms through social media have become popular.

While there might be a strong willingness to include citizens, a range of practical obstacles can make it difficult. Finding methods and tools that engage people is often challenging. What level people should be involved at is also an important issue. Should residents be involved from the very beginning or later in the process by having more of a consulting role?

It is also important to be aware of the adverse consequences that more superficial forms of participation can have. In recent years, scholars have pointed out that participation strategies sometimes can function as legitimization for public plans, rather than being rooted in a community. This form of participation can cover over pre-determined, vested interests (MacLeod 2011). Simply put, if a shopping mall is planned in your local park, and you are given a choice between nine and ten stories, are you participating or legitimizing the process? Therefore, one must be mindful to avoid that participation strategies become a way of legitimizing undemocratic types of planning and decision making (Rosol 2010). This type of “checklist participation” is particularly a risk if participation strategies lack critical engagement with structural inequalities in a place (Hilbrandt 2017).

The challenges of achieving participation have already been discussed by Arnstein (1969) in her classification of participation methods. This framework, developed in an American context, is among others modified by Stelzle and Noennig (2019) based on data from Germany. As participation varies significantly, this framework is wide enough to be applicable across many European countries and, arguably, China. We here refer to the modified framework, as it is updated to newer empirical findings. Their ladder of participation ranges from “information” to “empowerment”, depending on the degree of influence from the public. The usefulness of this ladder framework is that although all of these forms can be called

“participation”, the framework clearly shows how the various forms of participation differ in how seriously they are taking public engagement.

In all of the steps mentioned in Table 1, except “empowerment”, the responsibility of the final decision is in the hands of the authorities and not the public. Further, in all the steps, the initiative assumes some degree of government involvement to render participation legitimate, which may be regarded as a weakness of the framework. As we will see in the examples below, this is not always the case, as initiatives can also be bottom-up and stem from grassroots organizations.

**Table 1.** Ladder of participation. Source: Data based on Stelzle and Noennig (2019).

<b>Information</b>	Provide information to the public about the issue at hand
<b>Consultation</b>	Adjust already existing plans according to feedback from the public
<b>Involvement</b>	Include the public in all of the planning processes to make sure that the concerns of the public are taken into consideration
<b>Collaboration</b>	Working together with the public on all aspects of the project and allow the public to weigh in on overall prioritizations
<b>Empowerment</b>	The public has the first and final say in the decision

When discussing who participates in community building, we must also touch upon the different groups of actors. Wolfram (2016), for example, points to NGOs, households, and neighborhood associations. Further, private developers are also increasingly having a say (Hilbrandt 2017). Further, in parts of Europe, membership-based housing developers are important actors. As we will see from the examples, various organizations such as sports teams, art networks, and grassroots organizations can be involved as well.

Chilvers et al. (2018) pointed out that participation can be identified through a wide variety of bottom-up and top-down initiatives. The more centralized, dominant types of participation are, for instance, public opinion surveys and behavioral change, and the more decentralized and emergent types of participation include speculative design or cycling action groups. In between these two groups, Chilvers et al. (2018) identified more “diverse participation”, encompassing artistic engagement, co-design, community groups, or activism. In the UK, the more centralized methods are considered more legitimate, which can discourage other forms of participation. If we compare these types of participation with the modified “ladder of participation” presented above, we could say that the more centralized forms—i.e., the government-recognized ones—of participation are covered in the ladder, whilst the diverse and decentralized participations add another dimension to our understanding of participation. The reason this dimension needs to be added is that such initiatives in our understanding represent forms of participation, although

central authorities do not formally acknowledge them. These forms of participation typically come into play when formalized processes fail or are inexistent—but they are equally important to analyze. Although there surely may be more, the multiple forms of participation identified in this section imply that participation can be understood as a broader phenomenon. That has strong bearings at a local community level, also relevant in a Chinese context.

#### 4.2. *China*

In China, in the field of planning, according to the state law of urban–rural planning (Urban and Rural Planning Law of the People’s Republic of China 2008), information, discussion meetings, and public hearings are required before a plan is submitted for approval. However, in practice, the details of participation, including who, when, and how, are not clearly identified or mandatorily required in regulations. The public is often ignored in planning processes, left as passive receivers of plans rather than active participants (Enserink and Koppenjan 2007; Zhou et al. 2019; Hensengerth and Lu 2019; Chen et al. 2020). For example, notices are more like “notifications” than “negotiations”. Public hearings, questionnaire surveys, and interviews may have issues such as insufficient representation and inadequate discussion, which are led by governments or elite planners.

With the rapid development of urbanization, more and more cities have entered the period of urban regeneration, and the awareness and desire for public participation have gradually increased. In the report of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) in 2012, the idea of “social governance” was first raised, replacing the former “social management”, emphasizing the negotiation process, reaching consensus and joint action between a diverse range of actors. The report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC in 2017 further emphasized the need to deepen social governance through institutional improvement, including the mode of party committee-led government taking responsibility, social cooperation, public participation, and legal system guarantees, in order to realize co-creation, co-governance, and co-sharing.

Since the 2010s, community planning and community governance have emerged in some metropolises such as Beijing, Shanghai, and Chengdu. Compared with the traditional “Danwei Courtyard” and residential areas as the passive objects of the government’s top-down socio-economic management and developers’ spatial design, these new activities emphasize more the participation of multiple community actors in planning and construction, as well as the formation of the sense of community belonging and identity. Liu and Wang (2019) identified four different models of recent community planning cases in China according to the key promoting drivers, including government leadership, design intervention, participation from scholars, and social organizations’ support. It shows that, though most cases of

community planning and community building in China nowadays are state-led, or at least under the administration and supervision of the government, more and more social forces have taken part in community planning and community building processes, including social organizations, real estate developers, community planners, scholars and students, and residents inside and outside the community (Liu and Shen 2020). In reality, there have been multiple forms of public participation in community building. Examples include community consultation meetings, Open Space Technology conferences, multi-actor joint meetings, public hearings, participatory design workshops, participatory community garden building, online voting, and participatory budgeting, among similar examples (for more examples, see, e.g., Bonino et al. 2020).

## 5. Examples of Participation

### 5.1. *Three Examples from Europe*

A summary of the three cases selected from Europe can be found in Table 2. As noted in the Methods section, the cases are selected based mainly on the researchers' knowledge and meant to reflect a variety of participation types. However, they should not be understood as representative of Europe as a whole.

#### 5.1.1. Tøyen, Oslo, Norway

Following the decision to move one of the most important art galleries in Oslo, the Munch Museum, the city government decided to allocate funding of about 14 million euros to the area where the museum used to be. The program went under the name *Tøyenløftet* (2012–2017). It was defined as “a method in which physical and social measures should contribute to comprehensive, lasting and locally anchored development work”<sup>1</sup> (Oslo Municipality 2020). The decision to implement the project resulted from a political compromise, as there was substantial opposition to the relocation of the museum in the first instance. At the same time, there was a need for political action, as the demographic and socio-economic development was becoming increasingly polarized, and marginalized groups were living side by side with young, highly educated residents (Brattbakk et al. 2015). The money was to be spent on different measures that would increase the quality of life for local inhabitants, including renovation of the local library. Several of the measures were also aimed at environmental measures, such as encouraging walking and biking as a means of transport (Linstad 2018).

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<sup>1</sup> Translated by the author.

**Table 2.** Overview of European cases.

Place	Organizer	Participants	Objective	Platform	Type of Participation
<b>Tøyen, Oslo, Norway</b>	Municipality, city government	Local inhabitants, municipality, police	Reduce gentrification, increase house ownership	Tøyenløftet	Consultation
<b>Tempelhofer Feld, Berlin, Germany</b>	First city government, then local grassroots	Municipality, local inhabitants	Keep the park as public space	100% Tempelhofer Feld	Information/consultation, then it moved to diverse/decentralized participation
<b>Svartlamon, Trondheim, Norway</b>	Grassroots, local initiative	Local inhabitants, well-known artists, writers, and musicians	Alternative form of organizing housing	Svartlamon Experimental Zone	Diverse/decentralized participation, which enabled collaborative participation

A central part of the plan was that the most marginalized groups should be encouraged to participate in the planning process. In order to reach that goal, in 2016, a local council (*Tøyenrådet*) was established. The council consisted of residents and representatives from local organizations. However, they struggled with a lack of attendance, and at times there were not enough members present to constitute a quorum. Therefore, an alternative body (*Lokalstyret for Tøyen*) was established to make the necessary decisions, with representatives from the public, the police, and the national education bureau. However, central planning documents still remained untouched (Linstad 2018). Public hearings were also held but later criticized for not reaching out to disadvantaged groups. These issues were highlighted in a report commissioned by the municipality: children and disadvantaged groups, such as people living in communal housing, had not been adequately consulted (Kommunerevisjonen 2018). Thus, while the program was initially meant as a prestigious project for local politicians, in retrospect, it has been heavily criticized.

As a part of the project, some residents were forced to either purchase the apartment they were renting for 80% of the market value or move. While this was meant as a social policy, several families could not afford this and were forced to move (Vestreng 2018). The project had allocated substantial funding to activities, the library, language learning, education assistance, parks, and recreational facilities, but residents' actual participation was limited. The problem of gentrification was very real.

This example shows how good intentions to include the public in decision processes are not always enough to achieve participation. The lack of participation should hardly be attributed to low interest from the local community in the future of the area. Instead, one may question how and by whom the ground rules for

participation are laid out and to what extent this fits the local residents. When the ground rules are already in place without a negotiation process, the motivation for participation may be low, showing the weakness of the “consultation” approach in the participation ladder framework. In the next example, we see how the ground rules for participation may be rejected altogether.

### 5.1.2. Tempelhofer Feld, Berlin, Germany

In 2008, air traffic ceased in Tempelhofer Feld Airport in Berlin (Liebeck et al. 2016). From 2010, the 300 hectares of open land was free to use as a gigantic park, and a popular spot for recreational and organized activities. However, city authorities had not planned for it to stay that way and had planned for office spaces, commercial areas, housing, and a large public library, as well as both affordable and more expensive apartments. Even though the plan was to build on only 25 percent of the land, the proposition met much local resistance, and a heated public debate arose (Fahey 2015). The resistance was also partly driven by disbelief that no more of the land would be used for development and distrust that a fair share of the housing would be affordable (Hilbrandt 2017).

From before the fall of the wall, Berlin has a history of community activism in city planning. Due to this history, public participation needed to be prioritized on the political agenda when deciding the area’s future. Residents were invited to take part in the planning process through randomized surveys and visits, and online dialogue meetings. Neighbors were also invited to workshops to discuss the park’s design and the need for leisure activities. These participation strategies, therefore, resemble the “consultation” stage of the participation ladder.

However, the planning strategies turned out to be controversial among civic groups (Hilbrandt 2017). One of the primary reasons was that much of the premise of the plans was already set before the public got their say. In other words, the major lines were drawn, and the public only had a small bit of wiggle room. In retrospect, planners also acknowledged that participation was suspended at critical periods of time to hamper a broader public debate. Therefore, in this case, Hilbrandt (2017) argued that participation was not designed to inform planning but rather to give the processes legitimacy, ending up depoliticizing the planning processes. In other words, the planning processes were thereby more of a “consultation” (Stelzle and Noennig 2019).

The processes took a somewhat unexpected turn, as residents did not accept the range of choices. A local initiative, called “100% Tempelhofer Feld”, gathered enough signatures to hold a referendum to decide what to do with the area, and 65 percent wanted to keep the whole area as a recreational facility without any housing development (Hilbrandt 2017; Fahey 2015). By that time, the area was already well-established and a popular destination for barbeques, kite flying, exercise, and

gardening. Further, as an area with a history of war, the area had turned into a symbol of freedom, which made it hard to redevelop it into a housing district (Fahey 2015). In this way, Berliners took the planning process in their own hands and moved it up the participation ladder—so to speak.

The next example differs as the original initiative does not stem from local authorities but rather the local residents themselves.

### 5.1.3. Svartlamon, Trondheim, Norway

This example from Svartlamon in Trondheim, Norway (TRANS-URBAN-EU-CHINA 2018), fits best under the so-called “diverse participation” category defined by Chilvers et al. (2018) since it is neither emergent nor dominant. Through the lens of the participation ladder, it can be understood as a case of “empowerment”, but only after a protracted local lobbying process aimed at getting the municipality on board. Svartlamon is a small and experimental community with a diversity of participation initiatives that are not mainstream. According to their official webpage, Svartlamon is “Norway’s first urban ecological area, prioritizing environmental sustainability with a flat organizational structure, a transparent economy, low standards, and cheap rents”. Most of the buildings were built at the end of the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century.

Svartlamon is a result of many years of political struggle. It culminated in 2001 when the city government decided to rehabilitate and not demolish the existing buildings and develop the area as an experimental arena with a more flexible regulation plan. Before this, in 1996 and 1997, the preservation of the neighborhood engaged a large number of people in Trondheim, amongst them several artists, writers, and musicians. This engagement likely contributed to turn the decision not to demolish the area. A landmark building, which for some time served as Norway’s tallest wooden building, completed in 2005, was built there as the first new construction after this reorganization (Svartlamon.org 2020). Svartlamon is (legally) administered through two trusts (one for commercial properties and one for housing) where the inhabitants and the city parliament both elect members of the steering committees. Amongst the many local initiatives, there are shared gardens, an annual festival called “Eat the Rich”, a local free/exchange shop, a pub, a stage and concert area, and several smaller spaces for exhibitions.

Internally, the area is structured with a housing association where all inhabitants are members. There is a monthly “district meeting” where decisions pertaining to the area are made, following the consensus principle. In addition, the area is divided into five neighborhoods with their own “local democracies” where decisions concerning the specific neighborhoods are made, and representatives for the different internal groups and committees are chosen. The development of the area itself is “dugnad”-driven, meaning that people volunteer to help each other out. Long-term

municipal ownership of the district has been an important framework condition for allowing the type of local culture that has been established there (Østerli 2017). The inhabitants of Svartlamon have “played an important part in the housing management where the prevailing value of life quality instead of money” (Østerli 2017, p. 65), and the inhabitants have been crucial in preserving and maintaining local community heritage protection (Østerli 2017). In this sense, it is a community that was reinforced and built its identity through public engagement.

5.2. Three Examples from China

In Table 3, three frontier community building cases in recent urban China are selected, with different organizational structures and participant compositions according to their specific background. The organizers act as the main leaders to provide major resource support and include local governments, professionals, NGOs, and developers, while participants include planners, designers, social organizations, real estate management companies, local residents and enterprises, and so on. Da-Shi-Lar, Chuangzhi, and Qinghe can be arranged accordingly, with the former having a more top-down structure with government and elites taking the lead, and the latter have broader forms of public participation. The cases are selected from Beijing and Shanghai because of the complexity and diversity of the cases in these two metropolises, and also because they include highly government-controlled projects and bottom-up engagement. However, what unites them is the municipal government’s strong determination to promote social governance and community development. Another considerable reason is the authors’ long-term attention to these cases, even as the main personnel involved in them, allowing first-hand data collection and deep knowledge of the cases.

Table 3. List of community building cases in China.

Place	Organizer	Participants	Objective	Platform	Type of Participation
Da-Shi-Lar, Beijing	District government	Planners and designers, social organizations, residents	Historic area preservation and revival	“Dashilar Platform”, Beijing International Design Week	Information, consultation, involvement
Chuangzhi, Shanghai	Developer, NGO	Social organizations, residents	Environment improvement	Community garden	Information, involvement, collaboration
Qinghe, Beijing	Jiedao Office, professionals	Residents, real estate management companies, local enterprises	Social governance innovation	“New Qinghe Experiment”	Information, consultation, involvement, collaboration, empowerment

Sorted by the authors based on relevant data.

### 5.2.1. Da-Shi-Lar, Beijing

The Da-Shi-Lar area, located at the center of the Old Beijing City, has been one of the most prosperous commercial areas since the Ming Dynasty. It is famous for maintaining the historic urban fabric and traditional lifestyles in hutongs for hundreds of years. In recent decades, it has gradually declined with severe physical and social problems. Both the population and facilities have been aging, in addition to narrow roads, poor living conditions, and the concentration of disadvantaged groups.

Since 2010, the Xicheng District government initiated a series of urban regeneration projects in the Da-Shi-Lar area. In contrast to the former approach of large-scale demolition and redevelopment, most projects involve renovation at smaller scales of courtyards and hutongs, making the renovation more flexible, operable, and beneficial to retain the texture of the old city. One important method to facilitate public participation in regeneration is the establishment of the “Da-Shi-Lar Platform” by the Xicheng District government. It has functioned as an open cooperation platform, attracting a large number of diverse social groups and resources into the whole process, including planners and designers, social organizations, local residents, and businesses who bring their ideas, workshops, and projects into this area, thus achieving both old city protection and socio-economic revitalization (Jia 2016).

The regeneration of the Da-Shi-Lar area can be divided into three phases. In the first phase, called “pilot practice”, much attention was paid to improving people’s living conditions and solving relocation and compensation for residents who voluntarily moved to release development space. At the same time, the improvement of the infrastructure was initiated, the “Da-Shi-Lar Platform” was established, and several key issues were explored through small-scale trials. Such trials included finding solutions to how the old buildings could be renovated, what kind of business could enter, and in what ways. In the second phase, “community participation”, the goal of community building and the new way of multi-party cooperation were proposed. The work of community building was carried out in a flexible way based on residents’ and entrepreneurs’ diverse characteristics and needs. In the third phase of “integrated development”, the government retreated to roles such as the supervision of public service and management, formulating the rules for urban planning and industry operations to facilitate local participation and leave space for the community to prosper.

For example, in the façade repair work of Yangmeizhu Xiejie, the renovation proposal was consulted with each household, and the agreement was signed separately. In this way, diverse building property rights and features and the households’ willingness were respected and maintained to the greatest extent, ensuring a smooth implementation of the renovation plan. In order to secure the non-material cultural heritage and revitalization of the local handicraft art, different activities were started, such as introducing design groups, locating local talent, organizing workshops, and different

forms of community activities. For instance, some senior neighbors took the initiative to contribute with old photographs that documented decades of community history, which later inspired more residents to participate.

This case would fall under the categories of “information”, “consultation”, and “involvement” in the participation ladder framework, i.e., the public is included and has the opportunity to weigh in on overall prioritizations.

### 5.2.2. Chuangzhi, Shanghai

The Chuangzhi Community Garden is located in Chuangzhi Tiandi Park in Yangpu District, Shanghai. The Chuangzhi Tiandi is a public activity center and an innovative service center where universities, a science and technology park, and neighborhood communities join together and interact with each other. The garden was a typical vacant space left open after rapid urban development because of a municipal pipeline passing through underground. Since 2016, the developers of this area, such as the Yangpu Science and Technology Innovation (Group) Co. Ltd. and the Hong Kong SHUI ON LAND Group, cooperated with a non-profit organization named “Siyecaotang” and renovated the land into the first community garden in Shanghai, with the main idea of permaculture with wide community engagement. After renovation, the Chuangzhi Community Garden became a community public space integrating leisure services, public activities, community agriculture, and landscape, promoting nature education, neighborhood communication, and community resource sharing.

There are four main types of actors in the process of the renovation and operation of the Chuangzhi Community Garden: the local government, enterprises, social organizations, and residents. At the government level, the Wujiaochang Jiedao Office, as the territorial administrator, helped establish the community self-governance mechanism with a “self-governance office” as the leading operator. The local government also promoted public participation in community development through multiple channels, for instance, by purchasing social services from social organizations. In addition, the Chuangzhifang community residents’ committee has offered information and support and organized residents’ participation from the beginning of the project, which have played an essential role in community integration and interaction. As the most important impeller, the Chuangzhi Tiandi of SHUI ON LAND Group has provided the main funding to the building and maintenance of the garden. “Siyecaotang” conducts the technical guidance, daily maintenance, and activity organization work, functioning as a bridge between the government, enterprises, and residents. As for the residents, they participate in the use, management, and maintenance of the Chuangzhi Community Garden in different ways. After several years of operation, some community organizations have emerged and matured, playing an increasingly active role in the garden maintenance

and organization of activities, for example, the Huayou Club consisting mainly of seniors, the Little Volunteers consisting mainly of children, and the Fashion Horticulture with mostly young people. There are many sub-topic areas, with beautiful and characteristic sceneries, which are co-designed and claimed by different groups, including the community organizations, nearby institutions, and households. Further, the “nature classroom” in the community garden is now open to the public, with special priority given to community residents’ self-organizing activities.

Since the community garden project is evident in participatory construction and maintenance by local inhabitants under professional organizations’ guidance, it fits best under the categories of “information”, “involvement”, and “collaboration” in the participation ladder framework.

### 5.2.3. Qinghe, Beijing

Qinghe Jiedao is located in the Haidian District, northwest of the central urban area of Beijing. With the rapid urbanization process, today’s Qinghe has changed from the original rural town into a sub-district (“Jiedao”) on the periphery of Beijing’s central urban area.

Since 2014, a group of scholars and students from different departments of Tsinghua University, including sociology, urban planning, architecture, landscape and, fine arts, have conducted a series of work combining community governance with participatory community planning, with close collaboration with the Qinghe Jiedao Office. This project, called the “New Qinghe Experiment”, concentrates on inspiring the vitality of the community, promoting public participation, and exploring how governmental management and social self-organization positively interact. Central goals have been to restructure a more open and active grassroots governance platform, establishing consultation and coordination mechanisms at the community level, as well as carrying out a series of participatory design projects with a full collaboration of community leaders, residents, social organizations, real estate management companies, and local government (Liu and Deng 2016; Liu et al. 2017).

Since 2018, an innovative community planning system has been established, consisting of a group of community planners from different disciplines working together with the communities and the Tsinghua group. The planning system has contributed to bridging the top-down processes, resource support, and supervising the local government. It has also included bottom-up, participatory planning processes allowing for issues to be raised and an implementation process for an overall sustainable development of the local community. For example, the consultation system has been established in pilot communities, which is planned to cover all communities in 2021. The consultation system is meant for the community resident committees to raise major community issues and initiate consultation with the relevant government departments, property management institutions, residents, social

organizations, community planners, etc. Community capabilities of organization and mobilization have been improved through targeted training and workshops. Through “micro incentive funds”, community talents and organizations have been mobilized to discover community weaknesses, propose solutions, and promote implementation, such as façade upgrading of residential buildings, bench renovation, and community gardens. Moreover, the committee of property management institutions or residents’ self-organization has been encouraged to be established to better manage and maintain the renovated public space (Liu et al. 2020).

Due to its grassroots nature and attention to public engagement, this case includes the “information”, “consultation”, “involvement”, and “collaboration” categories and even steps, to some extent, into “empowerment” in the participation ladder framework.

## 6. Cross-Cutting Discussion of the Cases

There is no one-size-fits-all in public participation in community building, which these cases serve to highlight. Forms of participation in community building can further be as varied *within* China and Europe as *between*. The design of our study does not allow for a strict comparison between China and Europe as such. Instead, our focus is on the varieties in which community building can take place and how participation and engagement are mobilized differently. In this section, we revisit our research questions posited at the very beginning of the chapter.

First, the relation between community building and public engagement can be understood from the unique historical, social, organizational, and political circumstances in each country. For example, conflicts over demolishing versus preserving hutongs and other historical districts are highly specific to certain Chinese cities. Therefore, this backdrop is central in understanding how the approaches to Da-shi-Lar represent an alternative to urban planning in a Chinese context. The protection of historical districts allows Chinese residents and local governments to carry out community participation rather than large-scale redevelopment. In a similar vein, the emergence of the protest movement around Tempelhofer Feld in Germany can hardly be understood independently of the war history and Tempelhof’s contemporary symbolism related to freedom and peace and the importance of countercultures in Berlin. These specific contexts also have an important impact on how the public is engaged in community building—or sometimes rather how they become engaged due to a lack of inclusion in participatory processes—as the cases of Svartlamon and Tempelhofer Feld in Europe show. On this point, it is notable that the Qinghe case in Beijing has public engagement as a focus and starting point of the processes with an emphasis on community empowerment and then inspiring the vitality of the community.

Country-specific, as well as city-specific, differences in community building can both be related to socio-cultural factors, on the one hand, and the legal, political, and administrative, on the other. For instance, the overturning of the city-led participation process in Berlin should not be understood independently of socio-cultural aspects such as distrust in private developers, protest movements, and the park as an important social hub. Neither can the emergence of Svartlamon be understood without the existence of particular subcultures in Trondheim. Further, in more state-led forms of participation, such as Tøyen and Da-shi-Lar, how the local community engages in these projects is interrelated with issues such as experience and trust in decision-making processes. In both the Svartlamon and the Berlin case, worries from local inhabitants that the area would become more expensive and driven by business and profit interest triggered engagement. Interestingly, in the Chuangzhi, Shanghai, case, it was developers that took the initiative and used an abandoned (government-owned) plot to develop a community-oriented urban gardening project.

Second, the rationale or objective behind different forms of urban renewal projects is central to understanding how people are engaged and, ultimately, participate. People need to be engaged for them to be willing to participate. In Da-shi-Lar and Tøyen, the motivation for the projects was closely linked to the upgrading of housing without forcing inhabitants out of the area. Further, the goal was to make sure the process happened on the premise of local people. However, the government was still the key agent in these cases. In other words, the original initiative is derived from outside the local community, and parts of the premises are already set. As can be seen through Tables 2 and 3, we argue that participation was happening at the collaboration, involvement, or consultation level of the participation ladder in these cases. Svartlamon was also partly driven by a motivation to secure affordable housing and not leave buildings empty due to developers' housing speculation. The rationale of securing affordable housing and upgrading existing housing is crucial for Da-shi-Lar, Tøyen, and Svartlamoen. In Berlin, the 100% Tempelhofer Feld initiative was partly driven by disbelief in private developers' ability to secure affordable housing. Therefore, while issues related to housing are vital in many of these cases, how these objectives are mediated through the actors has important ramifications for the participation process. It appears evident that in the cases of Tøyen, Svartlamon, and Tempelhof, public engagement was considerably underestimated in the early project stages. In Svartlamon and Tempelhof, other forms of diverse and decentralized participation occurred due to this neglect. However, in Tøyen, the stakes appeared not to be high enough to trigger local engagement—i.e., participation process attempts failed.

Third, at which stage of the process residents are included influences their participation. This aspect can be related to the second point above regarding the projects' rationale; if residents are included early in the process, they might also

have the ability to shape the goals. However, since goals might not be negotiable, the stage at which residents are included should thus be considered as a separate aspect of our analysis. The participation ladder can be used as an indicator in this regard. According to this framework, to achieve collaboration, for example, the public must be involved in all aspects of the project. When residents are not included early, the process may appear alienating for some groups, as seen in the case from Tøyen in Norway. In such cases, lack of participation may be ascribed to a lack of interest, while it might instead be a deficiency in the process itself. Depending on the project, participation will be possible at different stages. However, the goals should remain that residents should be included as early as possible. However, there is a conundrum here: Participatory processes cannot be participatory—for all who are included throughout—from their inception since the initiators will have to set some initial frames for the participation to begin. Some actors might thus reject the process if they disagree with these initial frames. For example, the activities in a public library may be a relevant issue for a participatory process. However, it might be trickier to decide upon the types of participation (neighborhood meetings, school visits, polls) in a participatory manner. While this issue has to be solved on a case-to-case basis, aspects such as building trust, having a transparent process, and being able to adapt participation strategies will often be key.

While it is difficult to pinpoint the reason for this disinterest, lack of local anchorage of objectives could play a role. In other words, finding appropriate channels of participation is vital. Those initiatives that arise from the grassroots appear to be more strongly anchored in the local population and thus may achieve higher degrees of participation. However, on the other hand, those initiatives that arise mainly from a government's initiative should focus strongly on engagement, as the cases in China show, before participation can be expected.

## **7. Conclusions**

This chapter showed that although there are differences in conceptualizations such as democracy and understandings of engagement and participation in Europe and China (Chen et al. 2019), there are many ways in which people can participate and ultimately build communities. Such processes will always be mediated through political contexts through compliance or resistance, and they can hardly be understood outside of their particular socio-cultural contexts. The examples from Europe and China illustrate the diversity in which community building can happen and the actors that can be included, such as university students, NGOs, developers, and, of course, residents. The examples also show the variety in the ways that community building can happen, as well as the outcome.

What unites the cases is the objective to enhance an area, in one way or another, and bring the public into the process. As the chapter highlights, this is not a

straightforward process. Sometimes, residents may not agree with the methods and premises of participation, which ironically can lead to stronger engagement, as Svartlamon's and Tempelhof's cases showed. These types of resistance highlight the need for deep-rooted participation strategies that sometimes need to go beyond consultation and bring people into the process of formulating the objective. In this manner, one may avoid participation being reduced to a depoliticizing machine where participation is a mere checklist for proceeding with developments. In such cases where, for instance, the local population is assumed not to care, local property developers could say that they "attempted" to engage in participatory processes but received no feedback. Lack of local anchorage or superficial ways of participation can sideline residents, implying that the focus should be on "how to engage" rather than ticking off participatory boxes. In this context, thinking about participation in terms of where it is located on the participation ladder or diverse and decentralized initiatives (Chilvers et al. 2018) can help understand the level of engagement and ultimately lead to successful community building.

Further, while the three European cases present different types of participation, the Chinese cases of community building are conducted within and in line with national strategies of local inclusion in decision-making processes and regulations. The three cases from China also show the variety of participation models within one country. They point out that an explicit focus on engaging people can be a way forwards to ensure participation, in turn underlining the idea that community building can arise from grassroots organizations, but also more formal, state-led initiatives. In this sense, public engagement processes are necessary components of community building—i.e., shaping the social and material ties that build a local community. While who the initiator is may inevitably have an impact on who is participating, projects with a more top-down approach may also involve a great variety of actors, as shown in the Da-Shi-Lar case. Going forward, finding models of community building and participation that are aligned with the best interests of a local population could have positive impacts on socially integrative cities globally.

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