The Changing Role of Small Towns in China’s Urban Regionalisation: Exploring Diving factors of The Transitions of Small Towns in the Yangtze Delta Region

Keywords: small town, town-region relations, regional structure, interplay between global and local factors

Urbanism Department / Spatial planning and Strategy

Area of Research: Regional structure and regional planning

Research Summary: Since the 1980s, there has been an upsurge of discussion in China about respective roles of small towns and big cities in Chinese urbanisation. This discussion continues in today’s regionalisation and globalisation context. I assume that the structure of regional space matters for our understanding of the whole regional development and transformation process, and the roles of small towns in the region. Therefore, I stress the interplay between internal and external factors in the delineation of regional development process, and explore the transformation trajectory of small towns in the Yangtze Delta across time. It aims to better understand roles and performance of small towns in current regional development, and to explain the transformation process of small towns and underlying factors. This study fits into the long-standing discussion about roles of small towns in Chinese urbanisation. This also contributes to the theory of path-dependent trajectories of urban development in studies of large city-regions in general. Both points provide an input for future regional planning and strategies. This independent research is funded by NFP PhD Fellowship 2010-2014.

Research Methodology: I use related town-region theories from economic and political perspectives as conceptual tools to explore the balance among these regional patterns for the organization of regional structures across time, and how this balance changes under the interplay between external and internal factors. I apply methods including mappings, literature review and interviews to explore this long-term development process of small towns and regional transformation.